



Equitable Assessment at the NACA Inspired Schools Network: The NISN Mission-driven Story Cycle

The Native American Community Academy (NACA) was built from the community up and out, through a deliberate and prolonged community-led design process. Through student, family, and leader engagement four big ideas took root as the conceptual cornerstones of a 6th-12th grade school in 2006, later adding a K-5 grade band: community-led design, identity development, holistic wellness, and academic relevance.

NACA's success led other, Indigenous communities to ask what community-led schooling looks like in their own culture, language, and way of life context. In 2016, the NACA Inspired Schools Network (NISN) was created to support fellows from varying Indigenous communities in the backward design of schools from community-desired results to the academic, operational, and financial structures of a school, and support schools toward authorization as a public charter, Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) tribally controlled School, or private school.

Statement of the Problem

Schools in the United States are subject to narrow interpretations of student success based on limited satellite and map data (i.e., state assessments for proficiency). This problem is exacerbated for community-led, Indigenous education schools like the sister schools of NISN for three reasons: 1) the history of schooling for Indigenous students and communities is one of overt cultural and linguistic genocide where community assets and values were undermined for the sake of assimilation; 2) current satellite and map data are limited to a few disciplines (i.e., reading and mathematics) and do not take into account the unique, community-led outcomes outlined in a

school's mission statement, and 3) on the whole, measures of satellite and map data depict Native communities and students as deficient.

NISN sister schools recognize the limitations of satellite and map data in telling the story of what is right in our students and communities, and how we are making decisions to incrementally improve teaching, learning, and programming in the intimacy of each of our schools. The collection, analysis, and application of street data (observations, artifacts, and deep listening) are the primary methods that our schools use to support one another in mission-driven schooling and Indigenous education.

Equitable Assessment via Street Data at NISN: The Mission-driven Story Cycle

Continuous improvement is integral in the cultural practices of many Indigenous communities. For example, the Diné protocol of Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoo is a time-honored philosophy that encourages individuals, groups, and entire communities to move through a process of Nitsáhákees (Thinking), Nahat'á (Planning), liná (Living) and Sihasin (Assuring/Reflecting). There are three, central programs that drive the Mission-driven Story

Cycle: a summative improvement process, formative, Mission-driven Learning Teams that do the work of mission-driven schooling analysis weekly through the school year, and classroom-level tools to gauge mission through student agency.

Mission-driven Story Cycle. NISN's Mission-driven Story Cycle (Figure 1) anchors a school's continuous improvement within protocols that center on mission-driven street data. The cycle follows the ebbs and flows of a school year.



Figure 1: NISN's Mission-driven Story Cycle

One way of conceptualizing the cycle is to begin in the late spring/early summer of a given school’s calendar where students engage in capstones (see NACA Elementary, Middle, and High School Graduate in Figures 2, 3, and 4, respectively) that are built using the school’s mission, graduate profile, and the four big ideas that bind NISN as sister schools: community-led, academic relevance, identity development, and holistic wellness. Street data collection comes from 1) student capstones as artifacts, 2) observations of students, families, staff, and

community interacting during the building and demonstration of capstones and, 3) deep listening of family, student, staff, and community voice. NISN’s staff and staff from sister schools are responsible for the collection, organization, and dissemination of the street data, used in the weeks following capstones for an annual step back where school students, staff, and families find qualitative themes in the data and develop recommendations for updates to the following school year’s teaching, learning, programming, and adult professional inquiry.

NACA 5th grade Graduate Profile







	Empathetic Leader -respect-	Understands the importance of loving ourselves and talking and listening in order to get along with diverse relatives.
	Communicator -responsibility-	Takes ownership of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and actions.
	Collaborator -community/service-	Serves and cooperates with family, friends, and NACA community.
	Good Relative -culture-	Honors and values my culture and identity, past, present, and future.
	Resilient Achiever -perseverance-	Learns through constant effort despite difficulties to achieve success and asks for help when needed.
	Critical & Flexible Thinker -reflection-	Expresses self awareness of how actions and words affect oneself and others and adapts appropriately.

Figure 2: NACA 5th Grade Graduate Profile

NACA 8th grade Graduate Profile







	Empathetic Leader -respect-	Understands and embraces the importance of loving and honoring ourselves and effectively communicating with diverse communities and relatives.
	Communicator -responsibility-	Models accountability and trustworthiness for your words and actions.
	Collaborator -community/service-	Expands awareness that service to family, friends, the NACA community, and sovereign nations creates a more harmonious world.
	Good Relative -culture-	Analyzes how history and the environment have impacted my culture and identity.
	Resilient Achiever -perseverance-	Overcomes obstacles through persistence and develops autonomous strategies for success while being able to name and use resources needed for support.
	Critical & Flexible Thinker -reflection-	Regulates behavior to encourage personal growth and cognitive flexibility.

Figure 3: NACA 8th Grade Graduate Profile

NACA 12th grade Graduate Profile







	Empathetic Leader -respect-	Realizes and embraces a secure relationship with oneself and develops a harmonious relationship with diverse communities and relatives.
	Communicator -responsibility-	Exemplifies responsibility to our People; past, present and future, as well as our environment and other living things.
	Collaborator -community/service-	Collaborates with family, friends, the NACA community, and sovereign nations to create a more harmonious world.
	Good Relative -culture-	Evaluates the influence of history, environment, culture, and various systems and is mindful on how this impacts the development of identity.
	Resilient Achiever -perseverance-	Honors the endurance of our ancestors by remaining constant to a purpose to actualize and claim our full potential to share the gifts that strengthen our communities.
	Critical & Flexible Thinker -reflection-	Evaluates and analyzes one's own thought processes and multiple perspectives.

Figure 4: NACA 12th Grade Graduate Profile

Mission-driven Learning Teams (MDLT).

Mission creep is a concern in a school's macro, multi-year trajectory and a common issue in the weekly deluge of schooling given its numerous pushes and pulls. Where the summative MDSC supports schools, Mission-driven Learning Teams place the mission and aligned street data in front of a diverse team of staff and teachers (and sometimes students and families) on a weekly or biweekly timeframe. This block of

time ensures regular attentiveness of school-level decision-makers on a mission-oriented dialogue where street data informs incremental adjustments to teaching, learning, and programming via weekly professional inquiry planning and content and grade-level team meetings. Figure 4: Mission-driven Learning Team Agenda Template illustrates the rhythm of Mission-driven Learning Teams and the connection of street data analysis to planning.

**NACA Mission Driven Learning Team
Weekly Agenda [Date]**

NACA Unpacked Mission: To engage students, educators, families, and **community (community-led)** in creating a school that will prepare our students to grow from early childhood to adulthood and begin strengthening communities by developing strong leaders who are **academically prepared (academic relevance)**, **secure in their identity (identity development)**, and **healthy (holistic health)**.

What street data (observations, artifacts, or deep listening) did you gather from students and families this week that directly informs our four mission-driven big ideas?

	Observations	Artifacts	Deep Listening
Community-led			
Academic relevance			
Identity development			
Holistic health			

Professional inquiry implications of the week’s street data dialogue. What needs to be true in this week’s professional inquiry time to more generally understand and address our findings as a whole staff?

Grade-level or Content Team implications of the week’s street data dialogue. What needs to be true in this week’s professional inquiry time to more generally understand and address our findings as content teams or grade-level teams?

Figure 4: Mission-driven Learning Team Agenda Template.

Classroom-level Tools to gauge mission through student agency: The NACA Wellness Wheel. Street data comes in many forms, and the NACA Wellness Wheel is a foundational, learner-facing tool to gather information on the state of the NACA mission as informed by student voice. Wellness wheels are completed by students weekly to gauge

overall balance in wellness and each of the four quadrants of wellness: intellectual, physical, community, and emotional. Students set and track goals for their wellness over each quarter of the school year and use their wellness wheel progression as the primary tool through which they explain their progress to caregivers at NACA’s student-led conferences.

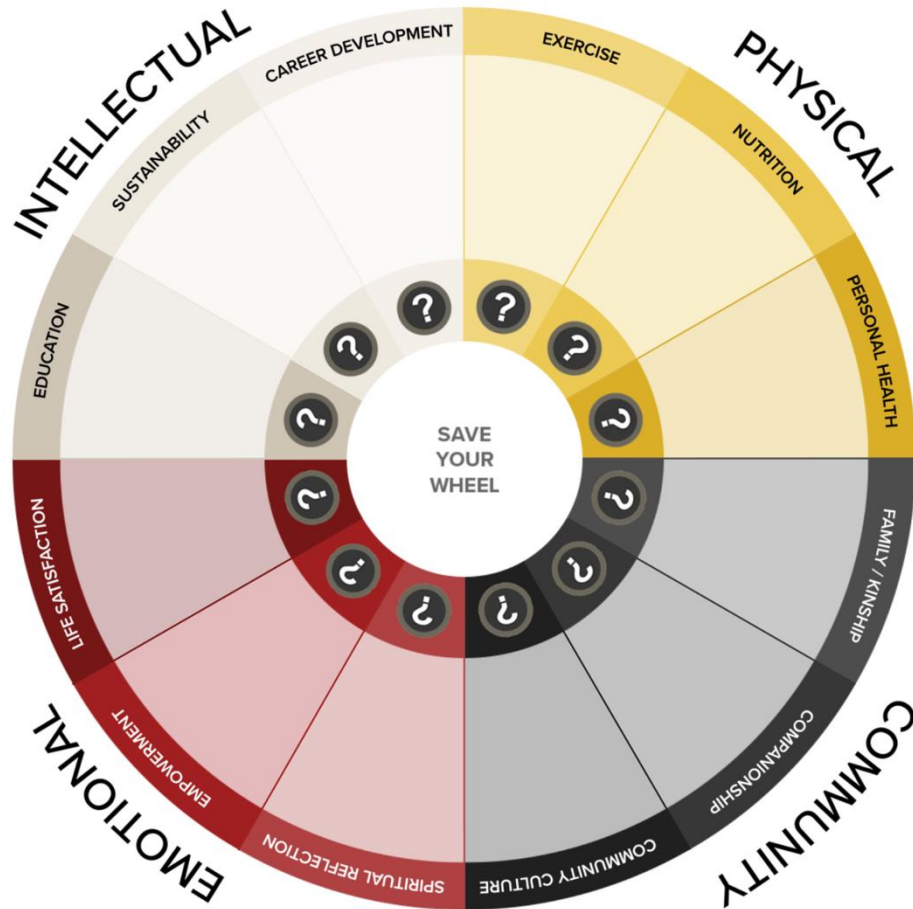


Figure 5: NACA Wellness Wheel

Conclusion

The NISN Mission-driven Story Cycle is both summative, used to make consequential decisions about the direction of the school in teaching, learning, and programming, and formative, used to make weekly decisions about instructional and programmatic pivots with the use of the

wellness wheel, Mission-driven Learning Teams, and systems to promote professional inquiry and team-based decision making to further achieve the unique Indigenous education mission of all NISN schools

Appendix

This appendix is an overview of the federal policies that specifically address Native Language Assessment Waivers, Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority, Accountability Systems, and Native Language Teacher Certification and Licensure Policies. These policies are relevant to Tribal, Bureau of Indian Education, State, and District schools as they seek alternative forms of instruction and assessment.

Native Language Assessment Waivers

Native language assessments are generally designed for students who are learning English and in their first three years in the country. According to [research](#) from the Migration Policy Institute, ESSA "indicates that states must make every effort to develop native language assessments for languages that are present 'to a significant extent' in the statewide student population." Their research further indicates that in each state's ESSA plan, they include languages that are spoken "to a significant extent" by students within each state and which languages the state already offers tests in. See [Every Student Succeeds Act, Public Law 114-95, December 10, 2015, 129 Stat. 1830](#).

For example, Yupik is a language spoken to a significant extent by the statewide student population in Alaska; however there is not an additional Native language alternative assessment offered as of June 2020. Additionally, students in Hawaii speak Ilokano to a significant extent; and students are offered an additional Native language assessment option in Hawaiian. Lastly, South Dakota notes its students speak Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota to a significant extent; however, the state only offers an additional Native language assessment option

in Spanish. See ESSA Consolidated State Plans: [Alaska](#); [Hawaii](#); and [South Dakota](#).

According to [West Ed](#), section 200.6(j) of the Academic Assessment Final Regulations, states are permitted to administer assessments in a Native American language to students enrolled in a state-funded Native American language school or program in any subject in grades 3–8, regardless of whether the students are identified as English learners. These assessments can be administered in lieu of English-language-only assessments. However, states must administer an English-language-only reading/language arts assessment to Native American students at least once in grades 9–12. See [Federal Register, Vol. 81, No. 236](#).

States can administer annual Native American language assessments in any content area, including those for which ESSA requires statewide assessments (reading/language arts, mathematics, and science). Each Native American language assessment must be aligned with state content standards for that content area. [Research](#) indicated that the U.S. Department of Education "granted Hawaii a federal waiver to allow students in its Hawaiian immersion programs to take Hawaiian language arts assessments instead of English language arts for accountability purposes" during the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school years. The U.S.



Department of Education's Office of Elementary and Secondary Education also approved the Hawaii State Department of Education's request to pilot for certain students the Hawaiian State Language Assessments in lieu of the state's grade 5 through 8 reading/language arts and mathematics assessments and grade 8 science assessments. See [Hawaii Waiver Response letter](#).

Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority

The Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority (IADA) may allow up to seven states to create new assessment systems. The U.S. Department of Education can select SEAs to “establish, operate, and evaluate an innovative assessment system, including for use in the statewide accountability system, with the goal of using the innovative assessment system after the demonstration authority ends to meet the academic assessment and statewide accountability system requirements under title I, part A of the ESEA.” The regulations state that the law does not provide separate eligibility for tribes. However, there are consultation requirements and LEAs that serve Native students and individual schools funded by a tribe would be eligible to participate. The regulations only govern the states and not the BIE or by tribes. Title I, Part B provides a set aside for BIE assessments and “nothing in the law prohibits the funds from being distributed to tribes for the development of assessments.” See [ESSA Section 1204, 129 Stat. 1885](#).

Accountability Systems

Section 8007(2) of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) directs the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, in consultation with the Secretary of Department of Education, to use the negotiated rule making committee (NRC) process to develop regulations that define standards, assessments, and an accountability system for BIE-funded schools on a national, regional or tribal basis. See [Every Student Succeeds Act, Public Law 114-95, December 10, 2015, 129 Stat. 2100](#). The regulations must be consistent with Section 1111 of the ESSA, which requires them to be developed in a manner that considers the unique circumstances and needs of the schools and their students, and be implemented no later than the 2017-2018 academic year. See [Every Student Succeeds Act, Public Law 114-95, December 10, 2015, 129 Stat. 2100](#).

Because ESSA preserves the right of the schools and tribes to seek a waiver from being subject to the Interior Department’s accountability system, the Accountability NRC’s regulations will not affect the ability of individual schools and tribes to develop accountability systems that best meet their academic and cultural needs. For example, the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians and the Navajo Nation have successfully developed their own accountability systems. Their approved accountability systems will be exempt from the BIE’s single accountability system. See [Overview of the Bureau of Indian Education's Standards, Assessments, and Accountability System](#).

Native Language Teacher Certification and Licensure Policies

There are 22 states across the country that have a Native language certificate and/or license to teach in public schools. For instance, applicants in Alaska can apply for a [Type M Limited Certificate](#) in the specialty area of Alaska Native language or culture by submitting a resume demonstrating competency in an Alaska Native language or a minimum of four years' experience involving an Alaska Native culture as determined by the school district. According to the [Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council](#), there are approximately 20 distinct Alaska Native languages spoken. According to [research](#) from WestEd, students who receive culturally and linguistically sustaining instruction - the use of Native language and culture in schools - "they are more likely to have enhanced self-esteem, form healthy identities, utilize self-direction and political action, display more respect for Tribal elders, exert positive influence in their tribal communities, exhibit constructive classroom behavior and engagement, and achieve academically at higher rates."

Additionally, New Mexico's policies that support teacher certification for instructors contribute to new equitable systems of assessment whereas it brings teachers with Indigenous knowledge of language and culture to the classroom. Specifically, the state offers a specialized Native American language and culture teaching certificate for tribal members to teach in public schools, but the employment of persons with these certificates varies locally. The Native Language and Culture Certificate, also known as the 520 certificate, authorizes tribal members to teach their native language and culture in public schools in prekindergarten through high school. Each tribe develops the standards and criteria needed for teaching certification in their Native American language and culture. In 2019, there were 131 Native language and culture teachers teaching in 19 New Mexico public school districts and charter schools through agreements with 14 tribal governments. See [Certification in Native American Language and Culture, K-12](#).

