BRIEF

Maximizing
Access &
Success
for Special
Populations

Supporting Tribal Learners
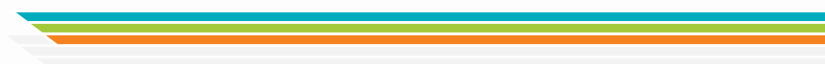## in Career Technical Education

Career Technical Education (CTE) policies and programs have increasingly focused on supporting the needs of historically marginalized learners and closing access and performance gaps among learner groups. Perkins V, the latest iteration of federal CTE legislation known as the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, is part of this trend. The law defines nine learner groups as special populations and includes a number of provisions that address expanding access to and supporting success within CTE programs for special populations. This brief will describe strategies for supporting another learner group that, while not named as a special population in the legislation, may benefit from strategies to close gaps: Tribal learners.

SPECIAL POPULATIONS IN PERKINS V

**LEARNER GROUPS DEFINED AS
SPECIAL POPULATIONS IN PERKINS V:**

- Out-of-workforce individuals
- English learners
- Individuals experiencing homelessness
- Individuals with disabilities
- Single parents, including single pregnant women
- Youth who are in/have aged out of the foster care system
- Individuals preparing for careers that are non-traditional for their gender
- Youth with a parent who is a member of the armed forces and is on active duty
- Individuals from economically disadvantaged families, ex. low-income youth and adults

*CTE educators are developing strategies to support learner groups who, while not special populations under the law, may need additional supports, including **migrant and undocumented, LGBTQ+, justice-involved and Tribal learners.***

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DEFINING TRIBAL LEARNERS

The Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act defines "Indian Tribe" as any Indian tribe; band; nation; organized group; or community, such as pueblos, rancherias and colonies. It also encompasses Alaska Native Villages and regional or village corporations defined or established under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. These communities are recognized as eligible for special programs and services from the United States due to their Indian status.[1]

Perkins V authorized appropriations to two CTE programs relevant to Tribal communities/agencies, including the Native American Career and Technical Education Program (NACTEP) and the Tribally Controlled Postsecondary Career and Technical Institutions Program. Both programs award discretionary grants to provide rigorous CTE programs and educational services to Indian tribes, Tribal organizations, Alaska Native entities, and tribally controlled postsecondary career and technical institutions that do not receive assistance from the Bureau of Indian Affairs or under the Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities Assistance Act or the Navajo Community College Assistance Act.[2] In addition, NACTEP funds may be used to provide stipends to learners with acute economic need, and Tribes may use NACTEP funding to contract with secondary schools to support local CTE programs.

When referring to individual learners, CTE leaders should consider using the preferred language of the learners' community. When referring to individual learners in the population in this brief, the preferred and culturally appropriate language is Native learners and/or Indigenous learners. When referring to their communities, these individuals may not refer to themselves as a Tribe but rather as a nation or community. However, this brief uses language included in Perkins V and other federal grant programs to remain consistent with legislation. It focuses on serving learners who are living and/or learning as part of a Tribal community.

STRATEGIES FOR TRIBAL LEARNERS

States and local CTE leaders can leverage a number of potential strategies to support learners in Tribal communities:

Cultural connectedness 🏛 📍

State and local leaders can foster connections between institutions and communities to better support Tribal learners through cultural connectedness — the extent to which an individual identifies and is integrated with their culture.[3] Research demonstrates that cultural connectedness significantly benefits the overall mental health and well-being of Tribal learners.[4] Partnering with local organizations and/or the local Tribal community to co-create cultural programs, activities and resources being offered within communities can boost academic outcomes and social-emotional learning.[5] These activities can include the development of resource centers, after-school activities and clubs centered on Tribal stories, crafts, language, dance, or traditions. Offering opportunities for learners to engage in Tribal language and cultural programs supports a positive sense of identity and attitudes toward schools.

Support services 🏛 📍

Implementing community-wide structures, such as Integrated Student Support (ISS) or Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), can bolster academic, social, attendance and other performance outcomes to ensure career or college readiness.[6] ISS/MTSS is a tiered monitoring approach to addressing Tribal learners' needs by actively engaging families and strengthening collaboration among schools and Tribal communities.[7] Additional wraparound support structures may include financial aid, transportation and child care assistance to remove barriers to program participation. These holistic support strategies can be funded through several state and federal funding streams, including Perkins.

Youth mentorship 🏛 📍

In many Tribal communities, youth mentoring is vital for community strength, leadership development, and preservation of Tribal languages and culture.[8] State and local leaders can establish, support or engage with mentorship programs in partnership with community leaders to grow interpersonal strengths, increase social and professional networks, and improve program outcomes among Tribal learners.[9] Career Technical Student Organizations can be leveraged as a medium to facilitate youth or peer mentoring that focuses on community building within institutions and/or programs.

Proactive communication 🏛 📍

Creating mechanisms for families to communicate their feedback and experiences promotes their involvement in schools. State and local leaders can offer diverse communication channels — in person, electronic or print — to help ensure equitable access to and participation in school or college activities. Creating comprehensive graphics/visualizations of program offerings and/or transcript translation reflective of the local language allows convenient access to information for Tribal communities. Having a designated advocate or liaison at the institution for Tribal learners can help them access services and resources during enrollment. [10]

Cultural competency 📍

Cultural competency and responsiveness training for program staff and institutions serving Tribal learners can help inform strategies and approaches to their local Tribal communities. Trusted community organizations such as the Native Wellness Institute can facilitate staff training, among other resources. [11] Connecting with leaders from Tribal communities to assess their values, their needs, and the terms on which they would like to engage with CTE can inform cultural responsiveness to local Tribal communities and, in turn, address learner needs.

Relational trust 🏛 📍

Because of the intergenerational and enduring trauma that Tribal communities face, building relational trust over time allows families to trust and accept the resources and support services offered. If instructors and administrators are outside of Tribal communities, in addition to cultural competency training, staff can connect with someone within the Tribal community to act as a liaison with Tribal learners and families, and CTE programs can help further relational trust by signaling safe CTE participation.

Providing examples of Tribal learner success 🏛 📍

Maintaining an alumni network of Tribal learners demonstrating positive career success from CTE can demonstrate the value of CTE programs for Tribal learners. Acknowledging that learners may not have family or friends who have participated in a CTE program, creating opportunities for career exploration with Tribal role models to guide them can provide security for learners when navigating pathway options. Similarly, teachers who represent the identities of Tribal learners can model potential career pathways that learners can emulate.
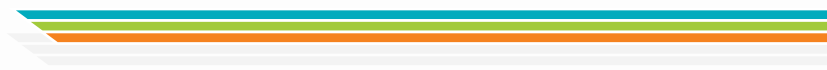
Learner voice as leadership 🏛 📍

Incorporating Tribal learner voice through one-on-one or group discussions, surveying and other feedback platforms can help inform practice and decision-making. To take this a step further, incorporating Tribal learners as leaders of their own educational experience and inviting them to co-plan, co-execute, and have shared responsibility for program outcomes helps create a collaborative relationship among staff and learners.[12] This relationship not only advances opportunities to address learner needs but also builds trust among learners that assists in a larger healing journey for these communities that have been continuously left out of decision-making on their own behalf.

Career exploration and work-based learning 📍

Facilitating intentional career exploration and work-based learning opportunities for Tribal learners that align with local/regional high-skill, high-wage, and in-demand occupations can provide access to well-rounded CTE opportunities. Because most Tribal communities are located in rural areas, access to work-based learning or varied career exploration may be challenging. Local CTE practitioners can coordinate with local/regional employers and postsecondary institutions to seek work-based learning and/or career exploration experiences for Tribal learners.

Collaborative data collection 🏛 📍

Collecting data regarding Tribal learners can ensure that CTE systems and processes are responsive to all learner needs. However, respecting Tribal data sovereignty and the right of a community to own and govern how its data is collected and used should remain a priority when considering data and research on local Tribal communities. Using data in collaboration with Tribal communities to uncover and address barriers to CTE participation can create a mechanism for iterative partnership among local CTE leaders and a Tribal community.[13]

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REFLECTION QUESTIONS

The strategies described in the previous section are not mutually exclusive, and not all will be appropriate based on the needs of your Tribal learner population. Before enacting new strategies, assess the current state of Tribal learners in your CTE programs and dig into root causes of barriers and challenges:

- What do Tribal learners tell you about their needs, challenges and successes?

- Are you collecting data on Tribal learners? If so, what does your data show about the CTE participation and concentration of Tribal learners? If not, are there other sources of information that could be used to inform your approach to supporting this population?

- What does your data show about how well CTE programs perform for Tribal learners?

- Which agencies or community organizations could you connect with to support Tribal learners?

- What support services are available for Tribal learners? How are they made aware of these services?

- What are the top educational and workforce priorities of the Tribal communities you survey? Do existing CTE programs reflect those priorities?

- What does cultural safety look like in your school or college setting?

- How are Tribal communities involved in current efforts to build educator knowledge of Tribal culture, history, language, etc.?

- How have past or current Tribal consultation efforts with local education agencies affected current program offerings?

- How have you engaged Tribal alumni, community leaders and other community members to mentor and support Tribal learners in CTE?

For additional resources, visit Advance CTE's Perkins V Section, the Maximizing Access and Success for Special Populations in Career Technical Education series page in the Learning that Works Resource Center and ACTE's Perkins Implementation page.

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CASE STUDY

Angoon Community Association, a federally recognized Tribe on Alaska's southwest coast, faces challenges of population loss and economic scarcity in Angoon and Gustavus. The Stay North initiative, a collaborative effort between Chatham School District and the Tribe, aims to address these challenges by offering targeted CTE programs to around 60 learners annually. This initiative directly aligns with the Tribe's economic development priorities, preparing learners for local careers in welding; building; entrepreneurship; and science, technology, engineering and math fields such as coding and robotics.

By introducing career development coursework in middle school, Stay North supports learners in discovering potential careers that improve their quality of life and offer viable livelihoodsSome project goals include equipping learners to pursue local opportunities and contribute to community well-being; capitalizing on the enduring partnership between the Angoon Community Association and Chatham School District for lasting, systems-based change; and providing access to after-school enrichment activities to further career-aligned skills and opportunities.

RESOURCES TO SUPPORT TRIBAL LEARNERS

- **Mentoring for American Indian and Alaska Native Youth** (National Mentoring Resource Center)
- **Shared Strategies to Support American Indian Students Through ESSER III Funding** (Montana Office of Public Instruction)
- **The Tribal Educational Framework** (U.S. Department of Education)
- **Tribal Communities in Schools (TCIS)** (National Indian Education Association)
- **With Learners, Not for Learners: A Toolkit for Elevating Learner Voice in CTE** (Advance CTE and Association for Career and Technical Education)
- **Working Respectfully With Indigenous Communities Around Data, Research, and Evidence** (Regional Educational Laboratory at WestEd)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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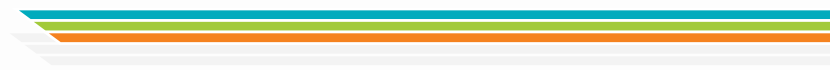
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[2] Native American Career and Technical Education Program. (2020). Tribal consultation notes. https://s3.amazonaws.com/PCRN/docs/NACTEP_Tribal_Consultation_Notes_4-27-20.pdf

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[5] Ibid.

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