

For This Place, for These People: An Exploration of Best Practices Among  
Charter Schools Serving Native Students

Eve L. Ewing and Meaghan E. Ferrick

Harvard University Graduate School of Education

Author Note

We wish to thank Dawn Mackety and the National Indian Education Association for inviting us to undertake this project. We also owe tremendous thanks to Adrienne Keene, Dennis Norman for their support, and to our colleagues in the Nation Building course at the Harvard University Native American Program for their feedback and valuable insight. In particular, we are grateful to Sydney Ahearn and Rose Eason for their extensive comments and advice. Thanks also to Kay Merseeth, Jacob Fay, Emily Weinstein, Karen Mapp, Priti Sanghani, Mikaela Crank-Thinn, and Kevin Kumashiro for their assistance and advice.

Above all, we are grateful to the students, faculty, staff, and friends of Klamath River Early College of the Redwoods, Pemayetv Emahakv “Our Way” Charter School, and Waadookodaading Ojibwe Language Immersion School for the enthusiasm and care with which they welcomed us into their communities. Thank you.

### Abstract

Native American students have historically been underserved by our nation's public schools, but research shows that the incorporation of cultural content into the curriculum can have a promising impact on student academic success. As charter schools have proliferated in recent years, educators and community advocates across the country have founded schools designed with the express purpose of educating Native students with curricula that incorporate traditional realms of knowledge, indigenous language, and a focus on indigenous issues. However, collaboration among these schools has been limited, as has research on the schools themselves. In this report, prepared for the National Indian Education Association, we present case studies exploring the attributes and practices of three charter schools serving Native youth. Our hope is that this initial research foray will provide a helpful foundation for additional research and advocacy in the area of Native education.

This Place, These People: An Exploration of Best Practices Among  
Charter Schools Serving Native Students

## **Background**

### **Project Request and Objectives**

In the fall of 2011, Dawn Mackety, NIEA's Director of Research, Data, and Policy, proposed a research project to be undertaken by graduate students under the auspices of the Harvard University Native American Program (HUNAP) and the Native American Nation Building course<sup>i</sup>. Citing reports which quantify the discontinuity between Native American culture and non-Native school culture (Mead, Grigg, Moran, and Kuhng, 2010), and positing that attending systematically to such discontinuities can positively influence educational outcomes (Powers, 2006), Mackety and colleagues noted that the rising establishment of charter schools founded specifically to meet the educational needs of Native students represents a potentially crucial point of intervention. Such charter schools are often designed around principles of culturally-responsive<sup>ii</sup> education, which Kana'iaupuni, Ledward, and Jensen (2010) have shown may improve academic outcomes for indigenous students.

In listing what NIEA researchers and advocates have observed to be common features of this wave of charter schools, Mackety also suggested that more research is needed to understand their mechanisms: "Ascertaining the best practices of the most successful charter schools serving Native students is important, but little research is currently available. Therefore, NIEA requests a Nation Building II course project to provide case study descriptions of some of the best practices used in Native charter schools to determine the qualities that help them successful" (D.M. Mackety, personal communication, November 1, 2011). At the time of the request, NIEA had

begun inquiry into this question through the provision of a conference workshop specifically focused on charter school best practices, but Mackety saw the need for further research to enable informed recommendations.

Faced with an opportunity to meet with passionate students, teachers, and parents, engage with community members about educational issues of import to them, and contribute to a broader understanding of Native issues in the field of education, we were excited to undertake this project. Given that our research represents an initial foray into an understudied topic, as well as the urgent constraints of working within a course schedule, we agreed on the following preliminary research question (D.M. Mackety, personal communication, February 6, 2012): what are the qualities and practices of charter schools that have a demonstrated track record of successfully educating Native students? Given latitude on the definition of *success*, we chose to focus on four key components, based on NIEA interest and our own understanding of what constitutes holistic student success: *academic* success, meaningful integration of Native *cultural content* into the curriculum, student *self-concept*, and in-depth *community engagement*. Initially, Mackety requested 6-12 case studies; however, it soon became apparent to us that as remote reporting and research would not allow adequate information gathering, we decided to limit this initial report to three schools (the number we could feasibly visit in our allotted time). As we will detail later, this initially arbitrary limit ultimately coincided with our substantive findings (see Method).

### **Client Information**

The National Indian Education Association (NIEA), founded in 1970 as a coalition of Native educators, is the oldest national organization committed to promoting the educational opportunities and success of Native students across the U.S (NIEA, 2012). With a great majority

of Native youth attending schools beyond the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), the NIEA spearheads efforts to ensure quality education attuned to the unique academic and cultural needs of all indigenous students. Their mission is to preserve and integrate traditional culture, language, and values into curriculum, provide valuable resources and networks for educators and schools serving Native populations, and advocate for the reassertion of tribal control over their children's education (NIEA, 2012). Ultimately, this mission supports the notion that all students should be educated to become self-determined, active members of their communities.

The aims and actions of the NIEA are trifold: advocacy, research, and capacity-building (NIEA, 2012). On a federal level, the NIEA enters the political arena to advocate for resources, legislation, and research to advance culturally-responsive and equitable educational opportunities for American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students and hold the U.S. government accountable to their trust responsibilities to indigenous communities (NIEA, 2012). In collaboration with researchers, institutions, and federal agencies, the NIEA seeks to provide relevant and innovative data for educators to use towards shaping their curriculum, pedagogy, and practice to best serve their Native students' achievement (NIEA, 2012). Lastly, the organization serves to build the capacity of Native families to secure an excellent education for their children, strengthen educators' skills and craft to reach their students, and empower local communities and tribal governments to repossess control over their youth's education and incorporate their cultural and language traditions as a buttress for their self-determination and sovereignty (NIEA, 2012).

As outlined by the *2012 State of Native Education*, the NIEA has five priority objectives for the current year that reiterate their mission and declared action-steps. These include the

development of focused-strategies for asserting tribal control over education, greater investigation and attention to the specialized needs of urban Native youth, backing cultural and language revitalization efforts, training and supporting Native teachers and educational leaders, and augmenting federal aid and support of Native education initiatives (NIEA, 2012). The scope and focus of the current preliminary study falls within the parameters of each of these renewed goals and support the NIEA's defining vision of empowering Native youth and Native communities.

### **Research Context**

Charter schools provide promising opportunities for reforming American Indian education to meet the needs of Native students. Through the establishment of charters, communities are able to create schools that meet their unique needs and are accountable to *local* standards (Belgarde, Lore, & Meyer, 2009). Additionally, the charter model potentially addresses "four areas critical to American Indian Education:" they enable the assertion of *tribal control* over their students' education, provide *focus and priority* to the specific needs of Native students and communities, allow for the integration of *culture and language* into curriculum, and create opportunities for *research* that seeks an understanding of successful educational practices for Native students (Bieleberg, 2000). Charter networks may also facilitate positive relationships between Native and non-Native communities, crucial for future programmatic success (Buly & Ohana, 2004). The flexibility in hiring practices inherent to the charter model further allows the recruitment of skilled and responsive teachers prepared to address the needs of Native students in the classroom (Buly, 2004). Ultimately, charters permit the "total school reform" Native students need by giving space for the complete culturally-responsive reorganization and restructuring of the traditional systems currently failing indigenous youth (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008).

Despite the advantages charter schools promise, there are also considerable challenges and potential disadvantages to using charter models for educating Native students. The high-stakes accountability of charters may conflict with cultural norms of indigenous communities. A narrow focus on standardized testing turns attentions away from the most critical elements of culturally-responsive education (Cockrell, 1992). Furthermore, testing highlights the weaknesses of Native students without fully capturing their true strengths (Commission on Civil Rights, 2003). Recruiting indigenous teachers and administrators for indigenous charter schools may also be impeded by a relatively small population of Native college graduates qualified to serve as teachers (Demmert & Towner, 2003). Further contributing to hiring challenges may be the difficulty of recruiting non-Native teachers with a culturally-responsive orientation (DeVoe & Darling-Churchill, 2008).

The current state of Native education reflects school systems' failure to promote Native student academic success. Currently, the vast majority of Native students are attending public schools, with only 7% attending Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools (Executive order 13592, 2011), but evidence suggests that public schools are not meeting the needs of Native students. As a result, American Indian students have the highest absentee rate (66%) and 2nd-highest suspension rate (7.7%), and 2nd-highest dropout rate (15%) (Henson, 2008). Many students also experience difficulty relating to teachers, feelings of isolation, racism, and intercultural misunderstanding (Jacobs et al, 2003). Parents' negative school experiences may also contribute to this alienation. One study reports that parents may have had negative school experiences, or may experience racism or miscommunication that might also contribute to students' dissonance in school (Lara, NIEA, & NEA, 2011). Native students must also cope with

an under-representation of Native perspectives, which are frequently only discussed through the lens of history or ignored altogether (Mackety & Linder-VanBerschoot, 2008).

In 2004, a Presidential Executive Order commissioned comprehensive data on culturally-consistent methods for raising academic achievement (Mason & Ernst-Slavits, 2010). A 2011 Executive Order reaffirmed that promoting success for Native students means “helping to ensure [their] unique cultural, educational, and languages...are met” (McCarty, 2009). Indigenous language instruction and its effects on improving student engagement, motivation, and academic success are well-established and support the promotion of culturally-responsive and language-inclusive curriculum. Encouraging bilingualism, in turn, promotes biculturalism and enables students to code-switch between their indigenous home culture and the mainstream, western culture at school (Noley, 1991). Language programs can also foster community cohesion and intergenerational relationships for indigenous communities (Reyhner & Tennant, 1995).

There are multiple theories that establish a supportive foundation for the use of culturally-responsive education to promote American Indian students success. The *compatibility theory* suggests that school is effective when cultural norms and expectations are matched (Tippeconnic, 2000). The *cognitive theory* argues that school is most effective when prior knowledge is activated (Tippeconnic, 2003). The *cultural-historical-activity theory* (CHAT) asserts that students develop meaning through culturally-endowed interactions with the world (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). True incorporation of Native American epistemology into school frameworks would support a holistic view of student and community needs (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008).

A plethora of studies suggest the potential effectiveness of culturally-responsive education. Documented outcomes of culturally-responsive classrooms include enhanced self-

esteem, identity formation, intergenerational respect, community involvement, and academic achievement (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). However, there remains very little *experimental* evidence supporting culturally-responsive education; challenges to experimental research include sample sizes, funding, and fidelity of implementation (Buly & Ohana, 2004). One widely-cited experimental initiative, the Kamehameha Early Education Program, had indeterminate results. The study observed that culturally-responsive language arts and math instruction led to higher reading and math achievement among Native Hawaiian students, but was not successfully replicated in a Navajo setting (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008), emphasizing the need for research on how curricula can be truly responsive to specific cultural needs.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Our selection of the three schools that would eventually be the focus of our case studies began with an examination of a cursory list of charter schools serving Native students (Mid-Continent Comprehensive Center, 2012). We reviewed this list state-by-state; within each state we compared school-level performance data disaggregated by ethnicity, focusing on the American Indian/Alaska Native student subgroup, with the corresponding performance data for the district or state where the school was located<sup>iii</sup>. Initially, we searched for schools wherein this self-reported subgroup performed as well or better than the same state- or district-wide subgroup in both reading (or English language arts) and math; however, we ultimately included schools that scored above the local average in one subject area, even if they did not fare as well in the other.

After narrowing our list of schools to a smaller subset based on cursory academic measures, we explored websites, news articles, and other publicly available information

regarding our new subset of schools. In this phase, our focus was the *cultural content* of each school. Did the school explicitly mention Native culture as part of its mission or vision statement? Did the school include indigenous language instruction as part of the curriculum, or incorporate indigenous culture into the school day in other substantive ways? Applying these additional criteria led us to narrow the list to five schools. One school of the five was under probationary investigation at the time of our inquiry, in response to reports of testing irregularities. Another school, the Kualapu'u Elementary New Century Public Conversion Charter School in Kualapu'u, Hawai'i, met our focus criteria, but was an inaccessible option for this preliminary project due to logistical constraints. Of the remaining three schools, one school did not respond to phone or email contact, leading us to focus instead on a school with a similar cultural and regional profile which initially brought to our attention by Mackety.

Thus, the findings we report here result from visits to three schools:

- Klamath River Early College of the Redwoods (KRECR); Klamath, California (Yurok)
- Pemayetv Emahakv Charter School; Okeechobee, Florida (Seminole)
- Waadookodaading Ojibwe Language Immersion School; Hayward, Wisconsin (Lac Courte Oreilles; Ojibwe)

Detailed profiles of each school are included in the case studies below (see Findings). However, these schools share some notable features: each school is physically located on a reservation and has a specific tribal affiliation; although several well-known urban pan-tribal charter schools<sup>iv</sup> have been founded in the last decade, none were included in our study. The schools we visited represented a span of grade levels (grades 6 through 12, kindergarten through 8, and preschool through 5, respectively), a fortuitous coincidence.

## **Procedure**

We visited each school in March 2012. Each of us visited a school, individually, for one day (KRECR and Waadookodaading), and we visited one school (Pemayetv Emahakv) for two days as a pair. At each school, we conducted semi-structured interviews of school leaders, teachers, students, and parents. We made digital recordings and took photographs (see Appendix A) during each visit, and where possible, we interviewed additional members of the school community, such as organizational affiliates or tribal representatives (see Appendix B for interview protocol). In addition, we toured each school, and observed classroom proceedings and general aspects of the school environment. Following our visits, we sent a follow-up questionnaire to school leaders, requesting additional quantitative information and supporting documents (Appendix C). In total, we conducted 28 interviews.

Given the specific purview of our request from NIEA, our aim in these school visits was not to evaluate the quality or efficacy of each school, per se. Rather, we entered with the assumption that each school offered something valuable to our understanding of the Native charter landscape, and that each school featured practices and attributes from which we might learn. In our explicit focus on schools' best practices, we do not mean to imply that the schools included in this report are without flaw, or does not have areas which could be targeted for improvement. Rather, our aim was to conduct our analysis within a construct which Tuck (2009) terms a desire-based framework: an interpretive lens which is "concerned with understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives" (Tuck, 2009, p. 416).

## **Limitations**

Our method in compiling these case studies has several important limitations. As there is

currently no cohesive collective entity representing Native charter schools across the country, it is likely that some schools which may have met our focus criteria may have escaped our attention in our initial search. We relied on the most comprehensive list we could obtain, supplemented by examinations of state databases of charter schools, but do not claim to have conducted an exhaustive search.

In the beginning stages of our project, we engaged in a lively and conflicted debate about the utility of using standardized test scores as a proxy for academic success. Although the “accountability” era of education policy— an era in which charter schools have played a prominent role— has increased public reliance on such test scores as an indicator of school quality, standardized test results represent a very limited reflection of a student’s academic ability (cf. Koretz, 2008; Booher-Jennings, 2005; Jacob, 2005). Thus, although test scores served as a selection criterion in our initial phases, the case studies we present here represent our attempts to understand each school as a holistic entity— one in which test scores play a significant role as a facet of the accountability landscape, but in which they are not an all-encompassing representation of the school community.

The validity of our test score analysis features another important limitation, regarding the state-by-state mandated reporting of disaggregated population subgroup statistics. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires all states to produce annual “report cards” with standardized test performance data, including data disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, disability status, migrant status, English proficiency, and status as economically disadvantaged,” except in cases where the number of students in a given category is too small to draw statistically significant conclusions, or so small that such reporting would make it possible to identify individual students (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: State Plans, 2002). The quality of publicly-

accessible reporting systems through which states disseminate this information varies widely from state to state, and in some cases was misleading or difficult to interpret. The fact that some students who self-identify as Native may self-report under another racial category added an additional complication, as did the fact that the number of Native students in some schools and districts was low enough to exempt them from reporting, in compliance with the above-mentioned clause in the reporting mandate. These limits to statistical availability may have led to the omission of schools which would have been valuable contributors to our report.

Because of the preliminary nature of this study, our visits to each school were brief—though, thanks to the welcoming and supportive environment of each school, we were able to gather a tremendous amount of information in a short time. Our hope is to lay the groundwork for more in-depth study, but the brevity of our visits is a notable limitation of this initial work.

As we have chosen the case study method for this research, and our data has been obtained through qualitative means, our own identities and subjectivity as researchers have necessarily played a role in our analysis. The perceptions, observations, and analyses presented in this report are, by its very design, influenced by our own experiences and personal perspectives. However, as a research partnership with divergent but complementary knowledge, we used these perspectives as an asset to our analysis, and habitually challenged one another's presuppositions and conclusions. We also frequently consulted our colleagues—educators, researchers, Native advocates, and others—for their insight and as a counterbalance to our own subjectivities.

**Findings**

**Case Study 1: Klamath River Early College of the Redwoods**

**School overview.** Klamath River Early College of the Redwoods (KRECR) is a very small school serving grades 6 through 12, located in the town of Klamath in Del Norte County, California. The school opened in 2005, and is attended by 42 students. KRECR has six faculty members, of whom two are enrolled tribal members. KRECR recently obtained approval to expand to a second site in nearby Crescent City, serving students from kindergarten through secondary school (Klamath River Early College of the Redwoods, 2012).

*Table 1: School Data Overview*

| <b>Klamath River Early College of the Redwoods</b><br>Enrollment: 42, Grades 6-12 | <b>American Indian Student in Local District</b> |
|---|--|
| 2010 CAHSEE pass rate, ELA: 86% ( <i>n</i> = 7)                                   | 77%  |
| 2010 CAHSEE pass rate, Math: 67% ( <i>n</i> = 9)                                  | 71%  |
| Graduation rate: 100%   | CA: 52%  |
| <i>Eligible students receiving college credit:</i> 41%                            |  |

**Mission and vision.** KRECR aims to provide “[t]ransformational education grounded in culture, place, and community, serving 6-12th grade.” The school’s stated mission is to “create healthy, sustainable communities through transformational education,” and KRECR’s stated vision is “to increase the number of high school and college graduates who are grounded in culture, place, and community” (KRECR, 2012d). As Danielle Carmesin describes it, this means that the school is trying to provide “education based on the *people* that are here, the *culture* that is here, and the local *stories* that are here.” (D. Carmesin, interview, March 5, 2012.)

**Tribe and community background.** The Yurok Tribe is the largest tribe in the state of California, with over 5000 enrolled members and 200 employees (Yurok Tribe, 2006). The Yurok Nation abuts the enormous Klamath River in the far northern corner of the state, alongside the Pacific Ocean, then continues southeast in a long, narrow strip of land spanning Del Norte County and Humboldt County (Yurok Tribe Geographic Information System, 2007). In traditional Yurok society, sustenance was drawn from these abundant water resources; fishing and related activities continue as a part of contemporary Yurok culture and the tribe lists natural resources protection, sustainable economic development enterprises and land acquisition among its current prioritized initiatives (Yurok Tribe, 2006). The annual Salmon Festival is a major local event, celebrating the salmon yield with music, family activities, and competition (Yurok Tribe, 2012b).

Since 1996, the Yurok Tribe has been engaged in language revitalization efforts, and a recent survey found that there are currently 11 fluent Yurok speakers, 37 advanced speakers, 60 intermediate speakers and 311 basic speakers. The Tribe currently offers community language classes in three locations, and intends to amplify the use of courses, technological resources, and community initiatives to try to increase the number of fluent speakers going forward (Yurok Tribe, 2006).

The Yurok Tribal Council is comprised of nine members, and the tribal government includes 14 departments (Yurok Tribe, 2012a). The Klamath office of the Tribe is located next to KRECR, on the main road which passes through the incorporated town of Klamath. The town of Klamath had 779 residents in the 2010 Census, of whom 325 identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, and 66 identified as multiracial (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). (See Table 2 for additional demographic information.)

Table 2: Del Norte County Community Profile

| Factor                   | American Indian | County Average |
|--------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Unemployment             | 1%              | 7.7%           |
| Median Household Income  | \$30,144        | \$38,078       |
| Average Household Income | \$45,086        | \$51,409       |
| Living in Poverty        | 7.3%            | 17.3%          |

(2009 Decennial Census, Del Norte County)

**Charter establishment.** Geneva Wiki was the founder and first executive director of KRECR. The school’s original design was inspired by Alaska’s Re-inventing Schools Coalition (RISC), and funded through the Center for Native Education’s Early College High School Initiative. In determining the founding principles that would define KRECR, community members, parents, students, and educators used questions from the RISC framework, such as:

- What do we want students to know and be able to do when they graduate?
- What are the values of our society we want to last forever?
- What changes, if any, need to happen in the current system so more students can be successful? (KRECR, 2012a)

“This is the front line of our civil rights movement,” said Wiki in a 2007 interview. “Past generations struggled first over rights to fish and hunt, and then to govern ourselves. Now we need to work on reclaiming ourselves through education” (Ellison, 2007). Wiki, a passionate and experienced advocate for Native education, had formerly served as the deputy executive director for the Yurok Tribal Council, and holds degrees in planning, policy, and management from the University of Oregon. She developed the idea for KRECR while in graduate school, and upon returning to Klamath realized that others shared the dream of a school rooted in local culture. She initiated community conversations that would lead to KRECR’s founding principles and

eventual beginning, with the support of the Yurok Tribe. Wiki has since become the executive director of the nearby Wild Rivers Community Foundation, a resident-driven community development organization; she was succeeded by teacher Danielle Carmesin as Director of Academics and Operations. The Wild Rivers Community Foundation has been a funder of KRECR, and Wiki remains in the community and maintains a relationship with KRECR.

**School structure.** KRECR is designed to offer a highly individualized experience to each student, and to prepare its students in the domain of cultural literacy at the same time as it prepares them in the domain of college readiness. To that end, the school uses a *performance-based* model adapted from RISC, which features a transparent curriculum, flexibility, student ownership, and high standards (Re-Inventing Schools Coalition, 2012). When a student enrolls at KRECR, he or she is presented with a set of performance standards, which are agglomerated from state, district, University of California, and community standards (collectively developed in the two years prior to KRECR's opening). Standards fall under the following domains:

- Reading
- Writing
- Math
- Science
- Social Science
- Career Development
- Personal/Social/Health
- Service Learning
- Technology
- Cultural Awareness and Expression

- Yurok Language
- Physical Education

With the assistance of parents and teachers, each student develops an Individual Learning Plan and addresses the various standards at his or her own pace, guided by a cohort advisor. At the end of each term, students participate in an exhibition where they share their work products with the community and receive feedback (KRECR, 2011); one student described these end-of-term performances as his favorite time in the year (Paul, interview, May 5, 2012).

As each student is pursuing work at different rate, students at KRECR have a great deal of latitude in determining their daily schedule. For instance, one 13-year-old had already completed eighth-grade English standards, and spent his English period doing extra work on math (Paul, interview, March 5, 2012). The high staff-to-student ratio permits them to receive attention, assistance, and instruction as needed, but much of their work is completed autonomously.

“A student can come in, take an assessment, and show what they know, and essentially test out of the standards that they already have an understanding of.... On the other hand, a student who is struggling on a particular subject, that’s maybe not their strength, can take as long as they need to complete that, and there’s no sense of failure or penalties. We don’t give out Ds or Fs, we don’t even give out Cs on report cards. And so the identity of the student in terms of what it means to be successful is not an all or nothing. It’s a developmental process that we all have some challenges and we’re growing.” (B. Johnson, interview, March 5, 2012.)<sup>v</sup>

Rather than being promoted from grade level to grade level based on age, KRECR students are grouped into cohorts based roughly on age— termed “Pathways,” “Gateways,” and

“Graduators.” Each cohort is advised by a teacher who is also responsible for teaching a subject area. Cohort advisors are intended to be a consistent source of guidance as students navigate their way through the performance standards, and assist in assessing students on non-academic domains such as Cultural Awareness or Service Learning.

The role of the cohort advisor can be especially critical in making new students feel welcome at KRECR. “We have students who didn’t really know what our school was like... for example, if another school didn’t work out for them. And they come here, and it takes a long time for them to learn how our school is different, and what they’re supposed to do to be successful. But once they get it— and we spend a lot of time with them on that— once they get it, they can go faster than they would in a traditional school because they can do work at any level, cross-subject projects, and just go as fast as they want to.” (G. Peck, interview, March 5, 2012)

As college preparedness is a key component of KRECR’s mission, students are offered the opportunity to enroll in community college courses at no cost, and may earn an associate’s degree or college credit at the time they complete their secondary degree.

KRECR’s unique structure is founded on a willingness “to turn the belief upside-down that adults have all the answers, and adults know how to do everything the right way, and realize that not only do students have great ideas, and they can solve their own problems, and they can be leaders, but also that if we expect those things of them, they’re going to do a better amount of working and learning and growing, which is ultimately what our school is for. If we can get out of our own way and allow opportunities for students to take the lead as much as possible— even though that might require a little bit more time upfront, in the long run that’s how this kind of program is going to grow. We want some of our students to go away, go to college, and come back and teach at this school. That’s the ultimate goal. And we have a few right now who are in

college who would love to do that. Giving adults the chance to step back, and giving students the chance to step up and step forward is really essential to doing something really different.” (B. Johnson, March 5, 2012)

**Cultural components.** KRECR offers Yurok language instruction, taught by community member James Gensaw. The curriculum focuses on conversational vocabulary, which Gensaw teaches through interactive games and spoken challenges. Gensaw’s language instruction also incorporates comments and contextual information about Yurok culture. Of course, efforts to teach the indigenous language can have an impact beyond the skills of the students themselves. Juli, a 13-year-old student, described her efforts to teach Yurok language to her grandfather: “I would tell him, ‘Tee'neeshow wee’,’ and he’s all, ‘what’s that mean?’ and I was like, ‘it means, what’s that!’...He’s happy for me... and my mom’s proud of me too.”

The school’s disciplinary system is intended to mirror the justice processes of the tribe. Students resolve conflicts using a process they call “settle-up,” in which a student with a complaint or accusation records it in a log, then presents it directly to the person with whom they have a dispute. This confrontation occurs in the presence of the rest of the school community, during a morning meeting, and is facilitated by a student representative. The person making a complaint can request an apology or other recompense, and after the settle-up is complete, it may no longer be discussed (KRECR, 2011). More serious infractions are more likely to be handled with discussion and community intervention before suspension or expulsion, explained Johnson: “We use a restorative justice process at our school, and that is really different than a traditional punitive system.... It can be some of the most painful and time-consuming work, but some of the best.” (B. Johnson, interview, March 5, 2012.) The restorative justice process allows parents to be involved as active participants in dealing with a dispute, and encourages students to take

personal responsibility for their actions and the resulting consequences. For example, “if a kid is under the influence of marijuana, they aren’t suspended for five days. We call their parents, we call the police, and we figure out a solution. But it’s not necessarily ‘you committed *this* crime, and we’re going to punish you.’ [Instead], you made this choice, now you’re going to restore it” (D. Carmesin, interview, March 5, 2012). Carmesin also notes the idea of detention for infractions like tardiness or using profanity as an example of an external disciplinary system that does not fit KRECR’s model.

Because the school is located in such close proximity to the Tribal Office, students are also afforded an opportunity to personally experience governmental processes. KRECR students take periodic trips to observe Tribal Council in action and take part in ceremonies and events.

The cultural values of the local community also play a key role in the promotional trajectory of each KRECR student. As detailed above, community standards have been incorporated into promotion requirements at KRECR. For instance, in order to progress past level 8 of the Cultural Awareness standard, students must visit a Yurok village site and reflect on Yurok traditions, and must complete service as a volunteer or with an elder (KRECR internal document, accessed March 5, 2012). KRECR students also complete community action projects, which may include a cultural theme: past projects have included involvement with Tribal fisheries, language preservation initiatives, and the gathering of oral histories (KRECR, 2012c).

Students are expected to make individual choices about their interests at KRECR, and for many students, this is a means of incorporating cultural content into their learning. English Language Arts teacher Gretchen Peck described one example:

“I had a student do a research paper all about the Tolowa tribe. And there were no sources, so she did field research and put together a 6-page paper about the cultural

practices and the government. She went to her mom, and friends and family and elders, and figured it out. I'll put it in the library and other kids can use it as a source." (G. Peck, interview, March 5, 2012)

Part of the school's mission is to attend specifically to a sense of place, and to learn from the environment of Klamath itself. "We bring as much as we can of [local culture] into the school and classroom," said Bernadette Johnson. "That might look like basket-making activities or eeling trips, serving elders, storytelling, drums... there's lots and lots that we try to infuse into the school year." (B. Johnson, interview, March 5, 2012.) Parents play a special role in creating meaningful cultural activities, and will often assist with organizing or chaperoning events, demonstrations, and trips (G. Peck, interview, March 5, 2012).

***"Building relationships is the foundation of everything we do.  
That is the number one priority."  
—Bernadette Johnson***

**School climate and culture.** Because students at KRECR move through tasks at their own pace, the school climate is markedly less competitive than that at many schools serving students of the same age; students have a sense that they are completing their own best work for their own sake, rather than to compare themselves with others. The school's very small size also contributes to a feeling of camaraderie, a family-like atmosphere, and a climate of peace. During the Yurok language class observed for this study, students with greater language proficiency assisted those who were novices, without any apparent condescension: as students newer to the language struggled to remember the proper gendered conjugation of a verb as Gensaw asked them questions, their classmates coached them: "*he* is asking *you*, so...." When one student chastised another for forgetting, a third chimed in: "It's her first week!" Gensaw permitted these

collaborative assistive conversations without interruption (digital recording, March 5, 2012).

Language arts teacher Gretchen Peck said she often invites students with particular strengths to assist others, and encourages mentorship and tutoring between cohorts. “And they *love* that—they love helping each other.” (G. Peck, interview, March 5, 2012)

Several members of the school community described it as being similar to a family. “At the end of the day, students who don’t feel safe and love can’t learn,” said Director of Advocacy and Outreach Bernadette Johnson. Danielle Carmesin described the point-of-view with which she approaches parent and student conversations this way: “I *see* you, I *love* you, I care about you. How do I meet you where you’re at?” (D. Carmesin, interview, March 5, 2012.)

School staff use the Love and Logic model. As Johnson describes, “it’s a way of engaging with students where we avoid power struggles, we work to solve problems together, [and] adults are partners, and not necessarily seen as in charge as everything.” She also cites the school’s cohort-based model as a tremendous influence on its culture, stating that when they implemented the system it “effectively eliminated discipline issues at school,” because it ensured that each student had a close bond with one consistent teacher who was primarily responsible for his or her well-being. “For students that are already stressed because of home environments or community situations, school cannot be a stressful place if they’re going to be able to function. Having that strong and supportive relationship with at least one caring and healthy adult at school is the key. And again, that’s something that could be adopted in any school environment.”

For the adults at KRECR, it is key to strike a balance between promoting students’ independence and still providing them with age-appropriate guidance. On the day of our visit, Carmesin confiscated a student’s cellular phone, and had to tell students they could not work on a bulletin board in the hallway because they were disrupting a college class. “And none of them

argued, because they knew that they had been given ample opportunity to self-correct....” (D. Carmesin, interview, March 5, 2012).

Principles of communication and fairness also underlie communication among school staff. Carmesin discussed a time when she had to confront a teacher whom she felt was being unfair to a student. They held a mediated conversation to address the issue, and though it was difficult, Carmesin felt that she learned a lot about the teacher and about herself through the experience.

The school’s small size is instrumental in establishing the climate of independence. However, Johnson contends that KRECR’s underlying principles could be equally effective in larger school contexts. “Once you realize that discipline and punishment are not effective strategies, adopting a restorative justice process is something that could be done at any size of school.” Still, as KRECR is set to expand, school leaders are challenged with determining how it might be possible to retain the close-knit feeling that makes the school what it is, while also trying to serve a greater number of students— perhaps through the creation of smaller cohorts within a larger school structure. Carmesin said that grant-based support is needed to keep the school fiscally sustainable, and that the per-pupil funding KRECR receives is not enough to maintain its small class sizes— but that even with limited funding, the idea of increasing class sizes is not an option (D. Carmesin, interview, March 5, 2012).

**School governance.** KRECR has a governance council comprised of community members, a designated appointee from the nearby College of the Redwoods (which provides KRECR students with their college accreditation opportunities), a Yurok Tribal Council appointee, a teacher representative, a grandparent representative, and student representatives from each cohort. The council meets monthly, and its convenings are open to the public

(KRECR 2012b).

**Community relationships.** KRECR has strong organizational and individual ties in the community. In addition to the community representatives who serve on the governance council, and the involvement of the community in the process of developing the school's performance standards, the school also hosts "foster grandparents" who forge intergenerational relationships with students. During our visit, one such grandparent was present in a math class, spending quiet time with a student at the back of the room. "It's huge for the kids to see the elders," described parent Tatia Lara. "Just to see them, and they listen to them." Student engagement in experiential learning is facilitated through partnerships with Redwood National and State Parks, and educational resources are furnished through relationships with the Center for Native Education and the Re-inventing Schools Coalition. (See KRECR, 2012e, for more information on strategic partnerships and funding relationships).

Bernadette Johnson described how proximity to the Tribal office enhances the student experience at KRECR:

"When a new Tribal Council member, for instance, is instated, our whole school can go and watch that process. We definitely want our students to understand that tribal communities are sovereign nations, and really understand that when they go to watch someone get sworn in as a Council person, that's like watching the President or a Congressman... and it's really amazing that they get to see that and be a part of that process." (B. Johnson, interview, March 5, 2012)

Danielle Carmesin also stressed the importance of helping students understand sovereignty. "We attend tribal council meetings... [and] we have council members come and put on presentations at the school. We've talked about sovereignty, and tribal rights, and how tribal government is the

supreme law in this land.”

Partnerships with community members has also enhanced a broader sense of mutual support and accountability in the area, according to Carmesin. “I believe the children hold the adults accountable. They might say, ‘okay, you work with us at our school... really? You’re going to drink [alcohol] at the basketball court?’”

***“Throw the discipline handbook out the window.”***

***—Danielle Carmesin***

**Leadership.** Continuous, cohesive leadership has been a hallmark of KRECR’s history thus far. While the departure of a founding principal can be disruptive for schools (cf. Weinstein et al, 2009), Wiki spent time preparing her successor for the transition before leaving KRECR, and Danielle Carmesin, the current Director of Academics and Operations, stated during our visit that she felt she could call on Wiki for insight or assistance at any time (D. Carmesin, interview, March 5, 2012). “She’s like an auntie,” said Johnson with a smile.

Carmesin originally came to KRECR as the social sciences teacher, recruited by Wiki. “Geneva is a charismatic woman, and I knew that I could learn a lot from her,” she explained. “And this school would allow me the academic freedom to teach students that were *people* first, and my personal values were aligned with the school’s mission and vision.... I’m very aware that a one-size-fits-all model doesn’t work, and that I am constantly trying to meet students on an individual basis.” She described a recent experience with a student who was struggling and considering leaving KRECR for a home-schooling option. “He was with as an eighth grader, went to juvenile hall, all different these court-mandated schools... and now he’s back here. I was able to... tailor my conversations to his needs, and his experiences, versus saying, ‘You did *this*, this is what’s going to happen. You go in *this* box.’” For Carmesin, the implicit understanding

that the adults and youth at KRECR can trust each other and rely on each other to be fair and candid— what she termed “the relationship bank” is the underpinning of the school experience.

“I want this place to be a home. I want this to be a family. I want students to be able to make mistakes, take responsibility for those mistakes, and for them to experience forgiveness and grace. And for them to realize that they have hope, and when they dream about their future they don’t see... somebody telling them what to do. That they really see themselves being creative and critical.” (D. Carmesin, interview, March 5, 2012)

Carmesin shares leadership with Bernadette Johnson, the Director of Advocacy and Outreach, who was in her third year at KRECR at the time of the visit. Johnson, a native of the region, has a background in counseling, and was recruited by Wiki to increase KRECR’s capabilities in dealing with students’ holistic needs— as well as the social and emotional needs of teachers and parents. Johnson’s presence is particularly important because the community surrounding KRECR has limited options for families to access professional social services. “We involve families every step of the way,” explained Johnson. “That requires building trust, and that takes time— especially in a community that has historically felt that the education system was the enemy.” (B. Johnson, interview, March 5, 2012.)

The two administrators have complementary backgrounds— Carmesin as a former teacher, and Johnson as a marriage and family counselor— that enable them to learn from each other. “Bernadette... didn’t have an education background, so she wasn’t bound by the constraints of... ‘in schools, you have a handbook that talks about *x*, *y*, and *z*!’ And I am *entrenched* in that. So she said, ‘now, wait a minute! We’re different! I understand we need a handbook, but maybe the handbook could say something like, ‘we treat every kid on an individual basis.’ Okay, let’s try it.”

**Teachers.** Because interpersonal relationships are considered the centerpiece of the environment at KRECR, teachers are often recruited via required service projects which they undergo during teacher preparation programs; visiting KRECR for several weeks to complete a service project allows other staff to observe their interactions with students, parents, and community members at length. Gretchen Peck, the language arts teacher, came to KRECR via this route.

“When I came up here, it just blew me away, it was so different,” she said during our visit. “There was a smaller class size, which allows the kids to have more attention, and allows you to go deeper with the subjects, and go further with the goals that you give them. You get to know them better, and you build relationships better. And I just also noticed that the kids were really creative, and really mature—that they handled problems in a different way because of the responsibilities they were given.”

The highly individualized nature of the school experience at KRECR means that teachers (who are also cohort advisors) have a unique set of challenges and responsibilities. Peck described her experience with her cohort of eight students: “I think traditional teachers spend more time doing lesson plans, like, what am I going to teach tomorrow? Or next week? And I do think about the big picture, like what I want my students to know by the end of the year. But since they’re not all doing the same thing, and they’re working at their own pace and dictating what they want to get accomplished... for me it’s more about mentoring and guiding. Like, helping them create a project proposal, figuring out the steps that it’s going to take for them to complete it, helping them with steps, and keeping them motivated.... I don’t spend my time on lesson plans, hardly ever, or curriculum planning. I spend most of my time on building relationships, and individual plans, based on individual needs. I would say that each day is really

emotionally and mentally draining, but when I go home I don't have to spend hours at home grading papers or planning lessons that I'm going to deliver direct instruction the next day.

That's not the priority.”

Instructional strategies are stratified by cohort as well as individually, with each cohort receiving guidance deemed appropriate for students' level of independence. Peck, for example, leads students through the literary analysis with different levels of scaffolding: Pathway students write essays together in guided exercises based on a shared book, Gateway students have small book groups which they choose, and Gradulators work independently on an analogous project. Peck uses progress charts and incentives to maintain a sense of cohesion in her cohort, despite the fact that students are working on different standards. For example, she might say that the group will have a party if everyone completes three standards by a certain time. “And then it doesn't matter which three things you do— you can choose— but you're coming to the party if you have three.”

Carmesin (who has retained her position as KRECR's social sciences teacher, in addition to her administrative role) said that a teacher is a good fit for the school if “they *see* a goal, and they figure out how to get there, and they inspire other people to come along with them.... They are forgiving, they are empathetic, they are relationship-based, they focus on the positive, they admit their challenges and their weaknesses and reflect on ways to improve.”

**Student experiences.** Students at KRECR expressed a strong sense of personal ownership when describing their school. During the visit, two students led the visiting researcher unaccompanied on a tour of the Tribal office. Paul<sup>vi</sup>, a student of thirteen, said he likes KRECR for its “cultural activities... and there's more one-on-one time with teachers, so you learn more.... I like Yurok language, and we just got done making drums and stuff” (Paul, interview, March 5,

2012). Later, when asked how KRECR students get involved with Tribal government, Paul responded quickly that KRECR students can shadow a Council member, and said he planned on speaking with his cohort advisor so that he might take this opportunity.

Some students described negative experiences at other schools as a catalyst for their decision to attend KRECR. Mackenzie said she didn't like her previous school because "there was a lot of bullying," and she was the only Yurok student there. "[Here], it's different because we can walk by and say, 'Aiy-yu-kwee!'" and they [other students] know what we're talking about." (Mackenzie, interview, March 5, 2012.) Paul said that his previous school had "a lot" of Yurok students, but they did not discuss or learn about indigenous culture "except in sixth grade" (Paul, interview, March 5, 2012). He also stated that he did not feel there was anyone he could trust at his previous school. "There was a lot of people at the other [school], and during class there was a lot of people talking. At this school there's only limited people, so you learn a lot more.... At other schools, there's people that are like, 'oh, you can't hang out with us.' But at this school you just hang out with everybody."

KRECR has had what Johnson describes as "great success" in retaining students who have had challenges in other school settings, including students who have faced repeated suspensions or expulsions. Being at KRECR "doesn't mean that their challenges go away. They're still the same person with the same challenges. But our ability to respond to them has some flexibility, which often creates an opportunity for them to learn how to change some of their behavior." (B. Johnson, interview, March 5, 2012).

Juli, age 13, describes how she arrived at KRECR:

"Well, to tell you the truth, I used to go to [a nearby school], and I rode the bus. And I got

a lot of tickets. Like, for saying something wrong, or the driver would think I distracted him or something. So I got kicked off until three days later, and my grandpa couldn't take me up to Crescent City (because I was kicked off the bus, but not to school). So he just said to come down here. And when I came down here, I liked it a lot. It was a nice school, and great community.... When school starts, we have community meeting. And I would say that's probably the best time of the school day.... I like it here because you get to know a lot of things, and it's easier when you pay attention more.... Up at [my old school], they would talk, and talk, and talk. To me, it seemed kind of boring. Just saying, you know.... It seems like they don't really care about how I don't really understand.”

Juli described having deaf parents and living with her grandfather, who works full-time, as leading her to have trouble understanding instruction at her former school. “I would ask, can you repeat the question, but in a different way? ...And they would just say, ‘oh, I don't know what to say.’ I like this school better because they explain it more” (Juli, interview, March 5, 2012).

Students' relationships with KRECR are rendered more complex by the fact that some are relying on the school for basic necessities. Several students are driven to and from school each day by staff members, and for many, the free breakfast and lunch they receive at school constitute their major source of food. Parent Tatia Lara prepares food for the students each day, but “when we have a three-day weekend, they don't eat, and they're mad at us for not being open. So that Tuesday is always a bad day. They're upset... they're not happy to not be at school.”

***“Parents feel like school is their advocate, not their enemy.”***

***—Danielle Carmesin***

**Parent experiences.** Tatia Lara, who has two daughters at KRECR and daughter who attends the county high school so she can participate in sports, cheerleading, and other extensive

activities, observes the differences between the two schools. Alexis, who does not attend KRECR, has “miles and miles of homework” each day. “The difference here, is... everyone *knows* what they’re supposed to be doing, and if it’s in your head today... ‘these are the four things I am going to accomplish today,’ whether it’s ten pages of math, or whatever, they can set those goals here and meet them. Alexis can’t do that. She has an hour-ten in each class, and all she can do is that classwork. Sydney [an older daughter who attends KRECR and is also enrolled in college courses] has about thirty hours of week with the load she’s carrying, but she can still come home and mow the lawn and feed the dog. She’s able to let school go for a little while, and get things done.”

“The school plays a huge role in just teaching the kids manners— how to behave in public, how to treat others, and how to treat the elders. Our year one, we had a lot more... what they call bad kids. But once those kids got out of their anger... it changed a lot, and it changed *them*.... I’ve seen some older boys that went here, and they say, ‘those were the best years of my school!’ And you would have never thought that when they were here. But when you are in a broken home or you don’t even have a home, you don’t know how to treat people, and you don’t know how to open up to the teachers, either.... It took a while... but now, they want to come back, and visit, and most of the time we can’t get the kids to go home at the end of the day.

Transportation is a challenge in the Klamath River region in general, and Lara cited transportation issues as a major impediment to parental involvement at KRECR. “Probably half the parents don’t have vehicles. Most of them don’t work, many of the kids live with their grandparents, and the grandparents usually have several kids at home that they’re taking care of, so they can’t devote more attention to one kid than the others.” There is limited bus service in the area, and many guardians hitchhike as their major means of transport.

Like other community members, Lara emphasized the importance of relationship building as a cornerstone of KRECR. When asked what she feels is most special about the school, she answered, “it’s got to be the relationships.... You have relationships with your teachers in these smaller classes. Right now at the [county] high school, it’s 33 or 35 kids to 40 kids in a classroom, to one teacher! So if you’re not already good in school, who’s going to fall back and help those ones back there? Here it’s such a team effort, where everybody helps with everything.” Lara described that because her daughter Alexis is self-motivated in school, she receives no particular attention or assistance from her teachers. “I just got her progress report, and only one teacher wrote a comment. He just said, ‘pleasure to have in class.’”

Johnson says that developing a sense of empowerment among parents is a way she hopes KRECR is reshaping the community— she wants parents to feel they can have high expectations of their children’s educational experiences. “This is a completely different way of doing it, but many parents have felt totally disenfranchised from the educational system, and through asking them to be active participants, we’re building the capacity of people to advocate for themselves.... If nothing else, parents feel like they have a say and a responsibility in their kids’ education in a totally different way, and view school as something they need to partner with for their child’s success, rather than be an enemy of, or be in conflict with.”

“Yeah,” chimed in Carmesin, “or that it’s this big place out of town!”

## **Case Study 2: Pemayetv Emahakv “Our Way” Charter School**

**School overview.** Pemayetv Emahakv “Our Way” Charter School (PECS) is a small tribally-controlled elementary and middle school located on the Seminole Brighton Reservation in Glades County, Florida. The school serves kindergarten through eighth grade with a current enrollment of 261 students. While enrollment is based on an open lottery system, priority is given to students who are Seminole tribal members, tribal descendants, and children of faculty. Designed as a “partial language immersion” program, PECS aims to provide a rich Creek language program and Seminole culture, history and art program, as well as prepare children in traditional academic core-content subjects taught in English. In addition to strong academic performance (tabled below), a 97% attendance rate is a strong indication of the school’s success in motivating and engaging their students through this innovative bi-cultural program. The school is sponsored largely by the Seminole tribe, with 67% of its funding contributed directly by the Seminole Tribal Council, and the remaining third received from state grants. This division of funding emphasizes the powerful local and tribal control over school design and operation, as well as enables creative integration of technology and innovative curricular programming in the classroom and the provision of modern facilities.

*Table 3: 2010-2011 Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) Results*

| <b>Pemayetv Emahakv</b><br><i>Enrollment: 261, K-8</i> | <b>American Indian Students in Local District</b> | <b>American Indian Students in Florida</b> |
|--|---|--|
| Reading: 70%   | 61%   | 61%  |
| Writing: 100%  | 95%   | 96%  |
| Math: 81%  | 75%   | 68%  |

**Tribe and community background.** PECS is rooted in a strongly connected and well-resourced reservation community with very low rates of poverty and no unemployment among

the American Indian population. One of six Seminole reservations, the Brighton community boasts being home to the most college-educated tribal members, which contributes to community members’ prioritization of quality education (M. Thomas, Interview, March 14, 2012).

Throughout the state of Florida, the Seminole tribe is recognized and respected as a powerful economic and political force with strong leadership and well-developed capacity for advocacy for their people. The stable political context within tribal government and the cooperative relationship with Florida state government are important assets that enabled the school’s original establishment and support its continued expansion and growth.

*Table 4: Brighton Community Profile*

| Factor                   | American Indian | County Average |
|--------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Unemployment             | 0%              | 7.9%           |
| Median Household Income  | \$37, 866       | \$39,265       |
| Average Household Income | \$59,183        | \$47,128       |
| Living in Poverty        | 6.6%            | 17.6%          |

*Data from 2010 Decennial Census*

***“We didn’t build a school because we felt our children were not getting a good education in the public system, we built a school so that language could be a daily part of the curriculum.”***  
***—Michele Thomas***

**Charter establishment.** PECS officially opened in August of 2007 with the Seminole Tribal Council listed as the founding executive board. However, the school was the culmination of a long-term parent-directed initiative. As Michele Thomas (interview, March 14, 2012), a PECS administrator and parent, states, the school was “parent-driven but an easy sell, tribal council agreed with it.” Language preservation was the cornerstone for this initiative; one parent

resolutely explained, “it’s all about the language” (Celia, interview, March 14, 2012). Culture, tribal history, and traditional crafts, natural extensions of language studies and anchors for language acquisition, would also be integrated into students’ daily curriculum in support of language development. The initial approach to preserve Creek, the majority language for the Brighton Seminole, began with the establishment of a pull-out cultural program in the local Okeechobee district schools. Concerned this was mostly ineffective, parents and community elders advocated for a weekly language and cultural program for Seminole students, nicknamed “Indian School.” Every Friday, students would attend a full-day class taught by tribal elders on the reservation. With full support from the state, district, and tribal council, this strategy was successful for 5 years. The positive outcomes and enthusiasm for this program pushed parents to work in collaboration with the tribe’s Education Director, Louise Gopher, to propose the wider goal of establishing a charter school to provide a specialized education attuned to the unique academic and cultural needs of Seminole students. The school was the result of a parent and community objective given space and support by local intergovernmental agencies to grow organically into a full school. Overwhelmingly, teachers and parents agreed that without the support of Tribal Council and the local Okeechobee district, opening the charter school would have been impossible. Reflecting on the alignment of tribal, county, and state support for PECS, Michele (interview, March 14, 2012) comments that “the doors just never closed.”

**Mission and vision.** The mission of PECS is to “provide parents, students and the community of Brighton with a school that meets high standards of student academic achievement by providing a rigorous student oriented curriculum, infused with the Seminole language and culture, in an environment that is safe, nurturing, conducive to learning and designed to preserve Seminole traditions” (Pemayetv Emahakv Our Way Charter School, 2012).

The mission of PECS is centered on an uncompromising demand for a high-quality education that incorporates both rigorous, standards-based academics and traditional Seminole language and culture. This vision, which sets assessment-driven state-determined content and cultural and language preservation as equal priorities, is a testament to the unique cultural match PECS has with the community's contemporary culture. PECS is established on an objective that matches the living values and culture of the community, which is not necessarily the same as traditional practices and beliefs, but is unquestionably determined by the modern tribal community. For the Seminole, who are entrepreneurs, business leaders, and important political chairs, academic success in the "culture of power" is deemed equally important to the preservation of language and cultural traditions (Delpit, 1988). Fluency in both cultures is accepted as the necessary path for success (Cleary & Peacock, 2008). Particularly for the Brighton Seminole community, western education has additionally become woven into their local history and identity. When the state mandated Seminole youth to attend local district schools, Brighton Seminoles embraced the "white education" as a tool to acquire the knowledge and skills to defend their sovereignty and people (M. Thomas, Interview, March 14, 2012). Their education, and college attainment, became a recognized and celebrated characteristic of their reservation and maintaining that high standard is now as much a match to community norms and values as learning their traditional language and culture. Recognizing that this education came with a "significant sacrifice," parents seek to re-incorporate tradition, culture, Seminole history, and language in their students' lives. Michele explained the necessity for regaining this balance:

"We turned our back on our way to go and learn the other way. So, now with this school we have to look back this way now. We have the education down, we have lots of college education in this community, but our language has suffered, our young people are not

fluent speakers...because we become so mainstream in white society” (M. Thomas, Interview, March 14, 2012)

However, this commitment to language revitalization does not preclude a devotion to excellent education. In fact, the choice to become a charter school was a direct product of the desire to have students held to specifically to *state-standards* as opposed to the Bureau of Indian Education so that colleges and employers would never question the quality of their achievement in comparison to their local peers. Lorene Gopher, a tribal elder and culture teacher, reiterated this tribal approval for a state-determined standard of education:

“We wanted the best school that we could get, so we did not want a BIE school. We wanted a charter school so that way their [the students’] standards are up to what the state wants and our teachers were the best that we could get. We didn’t want them [our children] to miss out on learning everything else, but we wanted them to learn our side too” (L. Gopher, Interview, March 14, 2012).

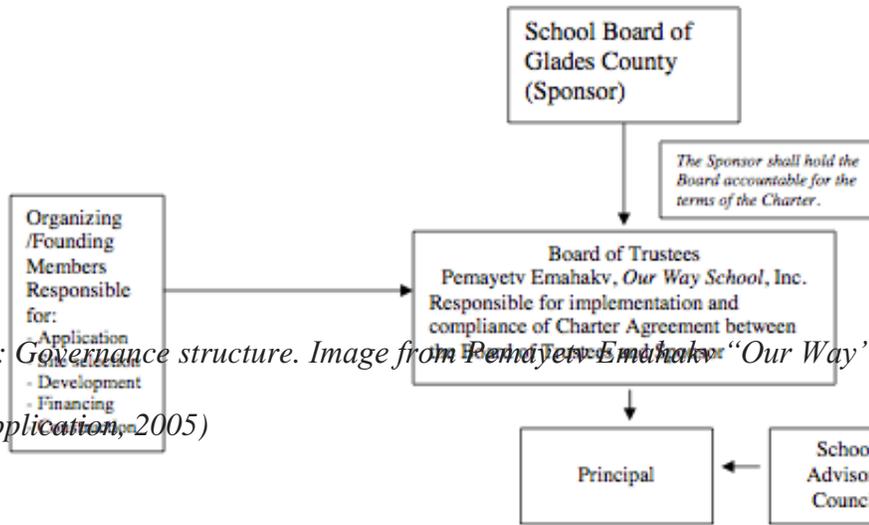
The design and objectives of PECS are necessarily closely aligned to the contemporary cultural values and beliefs held by the community. The spirit of a community devoted to their identity as self-determined, modern Seminole people rooted in their traditions, language, and culture and fluent in the world of modern economic and political negotiations is authentically captured in PECS’ forceful school motto which stresses education as a tool of self-determination and identity: “Successful learners today, unconquered leaders tomorrow” (PECS, internal document, accessed: March 13, 2012).

**School leadership.** The successful longevity of the PECS mission has been supported by consistent strong leadership, a product of the careful attention given to the development and succession of school administration. Since its inception, PECS has had only a single leadership

transition during which the founding principal hand-selected his predecessor, with whom he already had a professional relationship, and strategically trained him to continue to move the school forward in the same direction. This intentional development extends beyond school leadership as well. The school staff is defined by an ethic of collaboration and capacity-building, a tone set by the principal. Teachers and staff members are supported and encouraged to be innovative and resourceful in an effort to instill a commitment to and ownership over the school, the classroom, and the overarching mission. This focus on teacher, student, and staff leadership further supports the continuity and success of the school vision through staff and student turnover and expansion.

**School governance.** The school board is composed of the elected Seminole Tribal Council. This crucial link affirms local control over the school and adherence to community needs and cultural responsive design. Seminole Tribal Council is composed of elected representatives from across the 6 reservations, a feature that ensures a level of impartiality of the school board. As a charter school required for district sponsorship, the school board is held accountable by the local Glades County school board. (See Figure 1, illustrating the school governance structure.)

**Climate and school culture.** The school is a brand new facility that visibly incorporates Seminole culture, history, tradition, and language into the physical structure and space, creating a tangible continuity with the tribal community. Pictures of community members who graduated



(Figure 1: Governance structure. Image from Pemayetv Emahakv “Our Way” Charter School Application, 2005)

from the original Brighton Indian School are hung on the wall, symbols and animals representing family clans are integrated into the playground and library tables, and traditional artwork is displayed in classrooms, administrative offices, and the school reception, all of which give a feeling of welcome and immersion in the community. A traditional Seminole *chickee* cooking hut, built from palm tree wood and leaves, is located on campus for use during cultural events. In reflection of the school mission dedicated to both cultural traditions and rigorous academics, an “Education Wall of Fame” celebrates Brighton college graduates. School-wide routines further support this culturally inclusive school culture, such as students’ morning recitation of the Seminole pledge in English and Creek before classes start.

The school culture is also molded by its presence on the reservation. Multiple interviews, across roles and ages, emphasized the paramount importance of having a school at “home.” Students and parents stressed that having a school directly on the reservation provided logistical incentives for greater attendance and easier access for parent involvement. Furthermore, this sense of place nurtured a stronger sense of community, specifically among students who were able to establish deep, consistent friendships, connect with family members, build strong

relationships with adults, a stark contrast to the loneliness, dispersion, and isolation they felt from their tribal community and Native peers at the Okeechobee schools.

**School structure.** Instructionally, academic subjects and cultural curricular content are entirely separate. The core-content subjects, including math, science, social studies, writing, reading, and technology, are taught according to Florida state-standards with an emphasis on regular formal and informal assessment and data-driven practice to promote academic rigor. Literacy is a primary focus across grade-levels and subjects, with every classroom expected to develop word walls with disciplinary vocabulary and closely monitor students' independent reading. As many of the teachers and the principal have a strong background on research-based literacy practices, and appreciate its importance in advancing interdisciplinary skills, this is a focal point for professional growth and classroom improvement.

**Intimate Class Size.** PECS is committed to small class sizes capped at 15 students to ensure close attention to students' individual learning. Each class is further supported by a paraprofessional, promising greater support of differentiated learning and closer monitoring of students' strengths and challenges.

**Technology.** The financial support of the tribe enables the school to integrate advanced technology into their curriculum and pedagogy. Every classroom is equipped with a SmartBoard, which the teachers are trained to implement seamlessly into their lessons. Additionally, each classroom is supplied with a Mac laptop for every student. These laptops are used frequently to supplement reading and math lessons with on-line centers and differentiated learning plans. Similarly, the library is also supported with a digital media center to support student learning during their library instructional time.

*Additional Resources.* The school is also staffed with a professional behavior specialist that allows PECS to directly assess and address the socio-emotional needs of each student. Close partnerships with the health and dental clinic, social and family services, the Boys and Girls Club after-school program establish PECS as a “full service” school, a nexus of community resources, able to meet the myriad of student needs in house (Warren, 2005).

**Cultural components.** Culture is taught both experientially through the incorporation of traditions and values into the wider school culture and directly through designated instruction time. Students learn the large and small details of their culture by living and interacting in culturally authentic ways, enacted by the administration and staff. For example, if there is a death in the tribe, traditionally there are certain activities that tribal members are taught to refrain from. At PECS, students learn about their traditions, “our way,” through daily living and interaction with community elders, who serve as cultural teachers, educators, and administrators.

Instruction pertaining to Seminole history, culture, and language is carried out by a distinct culture department, where students spend 90 minutes each day taking classes with tribal elders and community members who are employed directly by the tribe. Creek language is taught every day in support of the “partial immersion program,” while tribal history and traditional art and crafts are each taught twice a week. Students articulate knowledge about their tribal history and express interest at a social studies curriculum relevant to their lives: “now we get to know what really happened to our people...in Okeechobee we have to learn about the Revolutionary War and stuff like that. But here, we get to learn about the Seminole wars and our people” (Student, Interview, March 14, 2012). Students also care for a school garden and learn how to plant and raise traditional crops.

The creation of a cultural curriculum is divisive among families and different clans. Tribal Council, acting at the school board, played an instrumental role in supporting the authenticity and legitimacy of the PECS culture, history, and language curriculum and ameliorating the differences in opinions in the community.

Students also learn about their government through hands-on participation in a student council that emulates tribal council. Prior to elections, the chairman of the council speaks to students about the significance and duties of tribal government positions. Elected student council members are “sworn into office” by the chairman and are brought annually to a tribal council meeting, which rotate throughout the six reservations, so students can grasp a deep knowledge of their tribal civic identity and issues of sovereignty.

**Teachers.** The academic teachers and cultural teachers compose entirely separate departments. The content teachers are under the leadership of the principal, while the cultural and language teachers are employees directly under the tribe.

The academic teachers are highly-educated, veteran teachers intentionally recruited for their success with students across the state and incentivized with attractive salaries and benefits, as well as the desirable school facilities and class size. The average career experience is above 10 years. Notable teachers include a literacy specialist for Florida state and a former middle school principal. Teachers are also expected to individually and collectively engage in ongoing professional development, regularly integrating new research-based reading and math strategies into their curriculum and pedagogy.

None of the teachers are enrolled tribal members; however, cultural sensitivity and support of the school mission are critical components of the position. To account for the potential cultural barrier, new teachers are given a “crash course” in Seminole culture, history, and tribal

government. The cultural department also serves as an invaluable resource for teachers to inquire about cultural appropriateness. Each classroom is also supported with a full-time paraprofessional.

Importantly, teachers are exceptionally fluent in the each individual student's academic strengths and needs and have an intimate knowledge of their home lives. This is an expectation set by the school leadership as Principal Greseth comments, "Our teachers and our staff know our kids and our families, that's a huge thing. The staff needs to have an understanding of the students and where they come from" (B. Greseth, Interview, March 13, 2012). The effect this prioritization of interpersonal relationships with students, parents, and extended families as evident in parent comments such as, "everyone just cares so much around here" (Celia, interview, March 14, 2012). Many of the teachers devote time after school to support students with additional tutoring, opportunities to further build these relationships and show vested interest in students.

The lack of tribal members as teachers is not by choice. The school hopes to inspire future Native educators and community members comment on an increased interest in the field of education as a career since the founding of the school.

**Parent and community involvement.** The culture department is woven into the community. The teachers themselves, employees of the tribe and not the school, are mostly tribal elders themselves committed to the hope of passing down their culture and language to younger generations. Community knowledge is regularly used to inform the classroom, as the Michele describes, "the classroom is all over this community and we pull in whatever resource we have out there"(M. Thomas, Interview, March 14, 2012). Community members are incorporated into cultural lessons through a speaker series that brings students into the community to visit different

families and elders and learn about their history and way of life. Middle school students work with the local medicine man to identify herbs and plants used for traditional medicines and take field trips into the community to experience where and how these medicines grow.

Parents are encouraged to participate in the Parent, Teacher, and Student Organization (PTSO), which develops fundraisers, community-service activities, and family events throughout the year. They are also encouraged to take part in culture and language lessons to increase their own knowledge. The school website is supported with an online language tool that posts the weekly language lessons and an online dictionary to support parent and student learning. Regular whole-school cultural events, such as the “traditional cultural dinner” cooked by the middle school girls in the school’s chickee hut during our visit, encourage parents to participate in the school as well.

Administrators also have an open-door policy for parents to comfortably issue concerns, needs, or praise. Hoover-Dempsey defines parent involvement as a result of parent invitation and motivation (Hoover-Dempsey et al, 2005). The intimate climate of the school and strong interpersonal relationships with the teachers facilitates parents’ incorporation into the school community, even if it is just walking through. As tribal council serves as the school board, the regular tribal community meeting is also a designated platform for parents to voice concerns and recognize parents and teachers for their successes.

*“This campus has brought a comfort level to a lot of students...[before], they were one or two Indian children in a predominantly non-Indian class. They are very comfortable here, this is home, there’s the ownership. –Michele Thomas*

personal relationships with teachers, staff, and peers. Learning about their culture, history, and language has instilled a pride in their tribe and reservation. Furthermore, the intimate community

due to small class-size with many peers from the same family and background has created a comfortable, safe, home-like environment that nurtures student growth and success. Students interviewed emphasized how knowing and trusting everyone makes it easier to take risks, and harder to misbehave because “we all act how we’re supposed to do our best and a lot of [the people in the office] are our aunts and parents” or are adults that have a real relationship with their parents (Student, Interview, March 14, 2012). One 7th grader notices a distinct difference between student behavior in the district public school and PECS: “Now a lot less kids get sent to the office, everybody’s making better grades than they normally did...there’s a lot less students so you get more attention and if you need help there’s more teachers to help you” (Student, Interview, March 14, 2012). One tribal member and administrator states that student academic success and self-confidence is a product of the school’s integration and continuity with the community, its members, and its values. She reminds students that as PECS students, “you’re not just representing yourself, but your school, community, and tribe” (M. Thomas, Interview, March 14, 2012).

**Community impact.** Community members and parents report that the school has encouraged many families living off reservation to participate in larger, non-school affiliated community and cultural events. As such, the school has sparked a wider cultural revitalization. Students used to be bused from the reservation into Okeechobee every day and now Seminole parents living in Okeechobee are busing their children into Brighton every day for school, encouraging many families to come back home to the reservation. “This school has been positive on so many levels for our community,” said Celia, a parent. It is one of the most positive things that has happened in this community because it affects so many levels, bringing more people in

and bringing parents that are involved and [inspiring] pride in the school” (interview, March 14, 2012).

**Challenges.** Naturally, there were several challenges expressed by school staff, parents, and administrators. For culture teachers, the need for knowledgeable and effective culture and language teachers is a great concern, especially as fluent speakers age towards retirement. Administrators and parent leaders also cited a difficulty encouraging parent involvement in the school, parent organizations, and at events. Despite a requirement of 10 hours of parent volunteering written in the parent handbook, getting parents to take an active role in the school continues to be a challenge. Lastly, the balance between remaining steadfast to both aspects of the two-pronged mission is a constant trial that requires flexibility and negotiation from both departments.

### **Case Study 3: Waadookodaading Ojibwe Language Immersion School**

**School overview.** Located on the Lac Courte Oreilles (LCO) reservation in northwestern Wisconsin, the Waadookodaading Ojibwe Language Immersion School is a *full*-language immersion elementary program serving pre-kindergarten through fifth grade students. All content instruction is taught in Ojibwe with the exception of English Language Arts, which is taught as a second language by a non-Native teacher in English. The school itself is hosted within the LCO Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) pre-school to 12th grade school facility, using one traditional classroom and 2 semi-permanent modular classrooms. LCO parents have multiple choices in selecting a school for their children between the BIE school and Waadookodaading on-reservation, as well as the off-reservation Hayward public schools. As such,

Waadookodaading draws in a very specific self-selected group of parents and students who are dedicated to Ojibwe language acquisition and culturally-responsive learning.

Waadookodaading students have excelled at reading and writing, scoring perfectly on state-standardized testing, results teachers credit the deep conceptual knowledge of language and grammar nurtured by learning two languages. Students’ math scores are less exemplary compared with district averages disaggregated for Native American students. However, teachers have targeted math skills as an area for focused development and continue to invest energy into researching and implementing language-centered development of math skills.

Funding for Waadookodaading comes mostly from private foundations (15%) and competitive grants (67%), with minimal support from the sponsoring Hayward district (6%), state (9%), and donations (1%). The LCO tribe allocates no direct resources to the school, however, Waadookodaading has received competitive grants from the tribe in support of its mission. Furthermore, reducing state grants has been an intentional strategy to assert greater local control over the school’s unique design and operation (Waadookodaading, 2007). A large portion of the competitive grants are specifically for indigenous language revitalization programs and are sponsored by the Administration for Native Americans (ANA), a result of the Native American Language Act of 1992 (Waadookodaading, 2007).

**Tribe and community background.** Waadookodaading was established with the aim to revitalize the Ojibwe language in the larger LCO community. At the time of its founding, the LCO reservation had only 10 fluent Ojibwe speakers out of a community of 3,000 Anishinabe people (Waadookodaading, 2007). As such, students come from homes where Ojibwe is not the

*Table 5: Results of 2011-2012 Wisconsin Concepts and Knowledge Examination*

| <b>Waadookodaading</b><br>Enrollment: 39, PK-5 | <b>American Indian Students in<br/>                     Local District</b> | <b>American Indian Students<br/>                     in WI State</b> |
|--|--|--|
|--|--|--|

|                                      | Proficient to Advanced | Proficient to Advanced |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| 3rd, 4th, 5th Grade Reading:<br>100% | 63%                    | 72%                    |
| 3rd, 4th, 5th Grade Math:<br>50%     | 60%                    | 65%                    |

first language and have little exposure to the language before attending the school.

The community also faces challenges with high rates of unemployment and poverty, a reality affecting many of the students in the community. However, the tribe has devoted funds to numerous service agencies providing a wide range of support including counseling, family assistance, economic assistance, housing, vocational rehabilitation, and child care. Educational services for community members include solid programs that span Head Start to LCO Community College in an effort to ensure the success of all tribal members.

*Table 6: Sawyer County Community Profile.*

| Factor                   | American Indian | County   |
|--------------------------|-----------------|----------|
| Unemployment             | 20.2%           | 8.7%     |
| Median Household Income  | \$27,384        | \$36,979 |
| Average Household Income | \$34,471        | \$51,580 |
| Living in Poverty        | 45.2%           | 18.8%    |

*Demographics 2010 Decennial Sawyer County, WI Census*

**Mission and vision.** The mission of Waadookodaading is to “create proficient speakers of the Ojibwe language who are able to meet the challenges of our rapidly changing world. The

school will be a community center for language revitalization, local environmental understanding and intergenerational relationships. We expect that students will be grounded in local language, culture and traditions, while gaining an awareness of global concerns. Our aim is to foster a love of learning while teaching the skills that will enable students to create solutions for our community and our planet” (Waadookodaading Ojibwe Language Immersion School, 2007).

Waadookodaading, meaning “The Place Where We Help Each Other,” aims to transform the LCO community by providing a forum for Ojibwe language development that most directly serves the youngest Ojibwe members, but also invites, anticipates, and engages all tribal community members’ participation in language learning. While the school’s greatest priority is language acquisition, the language becomes a vehicle for cultural, spiritual, social, historical and scientific learning, reasoning, and application. Through language immersion, the school aims to nurture an organic learning process whereby students begin by learning the Ojibwe language but come to experience deep conceptual knowledge of Ojibwe values, beliefs, and ways of understanding and interacting firsthand. Furthermore, the school holds the belief that the process of learning language must be a community endeavor. Children cannot gain fluency if the school is siloed. Parents, families, and community elders all need to be involved in a shared, reciprocal process, supporting the school’s vision of a wider-community transformation. Because the school is a LCO community-determined solution to a community-diagnosed problem, Waadookodaading is authentically and beneficially matched to the cultural values of the contemporary tribal community.

**Charter establishment.** Waadookodaading was founded in 2001 by a small, impassioned cohort of teachers, elders, and parents resolved to preserve the Ojibwe language in

the community and provide their children the opportunity to return to the Anishinaabe way of life. One of the founding teachers, Keller Paap, explains the ownership the teachers parents in particular felt in initiating the founding when he states, “it wasn’t a top down development, it was bottom up; it was us who got together and said we need this, we have to do it” (K. Paap, Interview, March 15, 2012). Furthermore, the clarity of this vision and the unwavering commitment of those involved are paramount factors to the school’s founding, success, and continued growth.

The school began as a one year pilot kindergarten program housed in the LCO elementary school. Its success garnered the support of the LCO Tribal Governing Board and the Hayward School District to advocate for the development of the program into a state charter school the following year. The development of a state charter school required an intergovernmental alignment of state, county, and tribe that empowerment parents and community members to “take symbolic and practical ownership of the school as well as the larger movement towards indigenous language preservation” (Waadookodaading, 2007). Despite its quick inception, the school is grounded on years of careful research and investigation of best practices in language revitalization and stabilization that laid the foundation for the school mission and model. To inform the development of their own language strategy, Keller and his colleagues explored the Maori, Hawaiian, and Quebec French language immersion programs, including campus visits to facilitate a deep understand each program’s success and draw lessons from the established practice. The importance of place to the language was a critical factor in building the immersion school on the reservation, as Paap articulates: “We don’t have a Germany or France to go back to [to learn our language]; it’s right here, this is where our language has been for a really long time. It made all the sense to start here with what we have to

work with our future generations” (K. Paap, Interview, March 15, 2012). Language is intimately tied to place, the two shape one another. As such, the organic placement of the school on the reservation, in the indigenous community, serves as a meaningful frame for community regeneration through language revitalization.

**Leadership.** The formal school leadership is an executive director that combines the role of principal, grant writer, and business manager and reports directly to the 6-person school board (Waadookodaading, 2007). However, in practice, the small school staff, composed of 6 teachers, an office assistant, and the executive director, functions as a cooperative and collective team with no hierarchy or chain of supervision. Experience and knowledge determines the point-person on specific projects. Additionally, the bonds between teachers, administrators, and staff are personal, as well as professional, as most have grown up together, gone through cultural ceremonies together, and share family. These relationships create a tight-knit leadership team that frames the climate and culture of the school as a community. Additionally, this cooperative leadership style effectively maintains the cohesion and consistency of the vision and function of the school across staff changes because there is never a single person making all the decisions. Furthermore, the school practices the leadership norms of the tribe providing an important cultural match and embodies the collaborative and inclusive spirit of the school mission.

**School governance.** Waadookodaading is directed by a school board comprised of two parent representatives, two educator representatives, two community representatives, and three non-voting members (B. Ammann, Personal Communication, April 18, 2012). The non-voting members include a liaison from the Hayward Community School District (the charter authorizer), a representative from the Lac Courte Oreilles Tribal Governing Board, and the Waadookodaading school director. Each of the voting members serve a three-year term, with

staggered terms to maintain stability and institutional memory. Parent representatives are nominated and elected by current parents during general elections to ensure authentic parent inclusion. Community representatives are nominated and elected by the current school board and Waadookodaading staff and parents during general elections. The teacher representatives are nominated and elected by the school staff; if none are nominated, the school board, parents, and staff nominate and vote during the general elections. This structure promises an authentic platform for parents and community members to voice their opinions, engage in the school decision-making, and forge a genuine collaborative partnership with school leaders and teachers.

***We are in it.***

***—Keller Paap***

**Teachers.** Teachers at Waadookodaading take on a diverse range of roles including, but not limited to, curriculum writer, linguist, researcher, community instructor, and educator. As such, the school operates as a “testing lab of innovation” where teachers research new techniques and strategies, implement them in the classroom, evaluate their effect student learning, and continue to hone their practice (B. Ammann, Interview, March 15, 2012). They approach their task as both *language activists* and *passionate educators*, succinctly put by one teacher who says: “we love to teach, we love the kids, we love what we are working towards” (K. Paap, Interview, March 15, 2012). They are all Ojibwe tribal members or descendants (including various local Ojibwe tribes), with the exception of the English Language Arts teacher who is non-Native. The non-Native teacher is a long-time community member with strong family ties to the LCO tribe and therefore comfortably familiar with the culture and students’ families. All teachers (and administrators) are highly educated, the majority with Bachelor’s and Masters’ degrees specializing in teaching, Ojibwe-specific of Native American studies, and language revitalization.

Many are in the process of continuing their education to further hone their skills as language immersion educators.

As Ojibwe second language learners, Waadookodaading teachers are also students of community tribal elders, especially those that are Ojibwe first language speakers. The school has two designated tribal members that closely monitor teachers' practice to ensure language accuracy and cultural authenticity. Outside the school, teachers record and transcribe elders' spoken language and dialogue (in Ojibwe) with them to uncover the bigger concepts locked within the language, which "serve as the impetus for coming up with the curriculum framework about understanding some of the cultural, spiritual, and specific language forms" (K. Paap, Interview, March 15, 2012).

Professional development and ongoing research into best practices for language acquisition, language-focused teaching strategies, and content instruction through language immersion are self-directed expectations of teachers that work to actively inform and improve pedagogy and practice. The University of Minnesota, alma mater of many of the current teachers, provides accessible resources and support through the Center for Advanced Research and Language Acquisition that teachers regularly utilize. Much of this development is collaborative between teachers who serve as coaches and support systems for one another. Furthermore, Waadookodaading is part of intertribal and international networks of language immersion schools, which include the Maori and Hawaiian immersion schools, which provide value sharing of resources and support.

**Climate and school culture.** Waadookodaading is a small, intimate school in spirit and space. As a school within an Ojibwe BIE school, the facilities are decorated with Ojibwe artwork

and murals and all signage is in the indigenous language, which support students' cultural and language immersion. Ojibwe language is even more visible in each of the classrooms, carefully replacing the English on printed curricular materials so that written English is virtually non-existent in the classes. Student work, also in Ojibwe, is exhibited prominently, reiterating that this is a collaborative project towards which the students are genuinely contributing. The classes themselves are intergenerational with multiple grade-level students and the teacher, teaching aide, and first language tribal elder together representing a diverse community of learners of varying ages and abilities each engaged individually and collectively to practice and improve their own fluency. This environment creates a climate of mutual learning.

*Culturally Responsive Academic Content.* Pre-Kindergarten students begin Waadookodaading with little to no knowledge or exposure to Ojibwe. By speaking only Ojibwe to students in and out of the classroom, they rapidly begin to understand and built the confidence and ability to answer back in Ojibwe. The profuse exposure to the language is an essential part of the immersion model and the contributing factor for language growth, among students and staff members.

The curricular design of instruction at Waadookodaading grows organically from the language. As explained earlier, all academic content is taught in Ojibwe and primarily through interdisciplinary instruction, incorporating the holistic ways of thinking and understanding determined by the natural form of the language. Language is not just meaning from words, but also form. As such, because students' first language is English, learning the material in Ojibwe fosters a deeper conceptual mastery of subjects as they are able to know and articulate the material in two ways. While covering the standardized state curriculum, the teachers guide an

exploration attuned to cultural and language development while coming to mastery topics of science, history, and math.

Expeditionary and experiential learning is employed regularly as a natural outgrowth of the immersion model, which touts a philosophy of learning language through experience. Students participate in seasonal cultural activities such as Maple Sugar Bush Camp, Wild Rice Camp, Winter Camp, and Summer Camp. During these field trips students go out into the community and learn to how to tap maple sugar trees harvest wild rice in traditional ways and experience how Ojibwe people lived during different seasons. These lessons also become forums for interdisciplinary learning, incorporating science, math, cultural studies, and social studies. More subtly, teachers and elders recognize that there are “all these other bigger, social, independence things, collaborative groups things that are being driven home” whereby students learn through absorption and interaction with older tribal members and one another traditional ways of interacting, processing, and thinking.

Although English Language Arts is taught in English, the teacher consciously weaves culturally relevant literature and writing prompts that connect the course to the rest of the students’ day. This implementation of culturally relevant literacy experience by incorporating students’ culture and life experiences in students’ English vocabulary, reading, and writing development, is consistent with research-based practices for indigenous students (Cleary, 2008). Cultural activities, such as Maple Sugar Bush, are also incorporated into students’ English instruction to assure continuity between the different school domains.

*“I am a strong believer in our language and the power that our language has not only to strengthen their identity but how they know themselves...I see [our language] as one of our most highly treasured and valued intellectual gifts. It allows us to expand our understanding of our history, traditions, of our knowledge. When we explore these things and we experience them through our language first and foremost not something that’s translated or*

*Class size.* Each classroom is intentionally kept at an extremely small size with a low teacher-student ratio. For the 39 students enrolled, there are 6 leader teachers and 2 teaching aides, as well as 2 first language tribal resource specialists that float between the classrooms. Pre-kindergarten and kindergarten are taught as individual grades, while first and second and then third through fifth grade are taught in combined classes. For example, in the third-to-fifth grade class there are only 6 students met with two instructors. This unique set up enables extremely individualized attention and differentiated learning plans to precisely target students' needs to ensure their growth. Close interpersonal relationships between teacher and students also enables careful attention to the socio-emotional development and needs of each child.

**Parent and community involvement.** As a school established to preserve and revitalize the Ojibwe language, embedded in the school mission is an overarching purpose to actively engage with LCO families and community and serve as a resource for all community members. One teacher explains that the school's language program is "an intergenerational approach that doesn't just isolate the school but strives to include the community so that it's a community-wide center for language revitalization." To encourage this idea of a school woven into the fabric of the community, Waadookodaading and its teachers host a community language night every Thursday where parents and tribal members can come to study Ojibwe themselves. Child-care

and dinner are provided to support parent and community member attendance. The lessons are taught by Waadookodaading teachers and parents who have proficiency or fluency with the language. The community also serves as a resource for the school. Besides the cultural and language development support from tribal elders, community members have donated use of land for cultural trips (such as Sugar Bush) and regularly volunteer in the classroom. Many students come from large extended families, which draws more community members that are aunts, uncles, grandmas, and great-grandmas into the school's events and daily happenings.

Parents at Waadookodaading are involved in formal and informal ways. Beyond the important role parents' hold in the school's governance, a Parent Committee is an established part of that school that assists with fundraising for various student needs throughout the year, such as field trips, holiday gifts, and language learning materials for the family library (Waadookodaading, 2007). Parents also frequently visit the classroom, support and chaperone cultural field trips to Maple Sugar Bush Camp, Wild Rice Camp, Winter Camp, and Summer Camp, and volunteer and participate in seasonal community feasts.

Like Waadookodaading teachers, parents are invested in the case and mission of the school; some parents returned to the reservation expressly for the school, others carefully investigated different school language programs for effectiveness. One long-term teacher described, "If you care enough to send your kids to Waadookodaading, there is a special recognition of how important it is for the kids to have their cultural background." This commitment reflects the organic cooperative quality to the school, a characteristic that engenders and mobilizes a tight-knit community of parents connected by a common goal. This is further augmented by the fact that teachers and administrators are also parents, a dynamic that

powerfully sets parents and teachers as equal partners and sends a real invitation to take an active part in the school (Hoover-Dempsey et al, 2005).

**Student perspectives.** Waadookodaading has successfully developed students as Ojibwe language speakers, naturally using and understanding their language on a daily basis with their teachers, peers, families, and elders. Language acquisition has fostered a deep understanding of grammar, vocabulary, and conceptual knowledge in both English and Ojibwe. As a result, students have done remarkably well on reading, writing, and language arts tests, exceeding their Native peers in other schools. Learning through a curriculum infused with the Ojibwe culture and perspective has also developed a deeper appreciation and understanding of diversity of perspective. Particularly in the realm of social studies, students have learned the importance of approaching issues from multiple angles and perspectives.

On a deeper level, Waadookodaading students express pride and confidence in their tribal identity. “There’s just this increasing feeling of being proud of who you are and what your roots are” as a product of engaging daily with a curriculum that validates and affirms the strength, resilience, and beauty of their tribal culture and history (C. Stamper, Interview, March 14, 2012). One morning, a fifth grade boy led students, teachers, and community volunteers in opening prayer in Ojibwe. The maturity and confidence was a product of his fluency not only in his language, but in the cultural practices and values of his community. A second-grade boy, with great enthusiasm, spoke of how knowing his language made him feel like he knew “the old times” and that they weren’t lost. As products of the school, these students are rooted in a sense not only of their language, but in their community, its history, and their personal connection to both.

**Community impact.** Both the cultural focus of the mission and the celebrated success of the school have reinvigorated the community. Paap explains that the school has “empowered the

community in a number of ways, but also provided hope and assurance that there's a world class school in their backyard" (K. Paap, Interview, March 15, 2012). Perhaps most within the school's vision, tribal elders note with great pride that more tribal members are trying to speak the language on a regular basis, incorporating it into casual conversation. Additionally, the success of the school and the resources that it has provided the LCO community have drawn back community members. One father relocated his family from Minnesota so that his children had an opportunity to learn who they are through their language. Now he, too, feels that he is sharing that journey with them as he uses the school's community language night, cultural activities, and open-door policy to learn the language and use it with his children, their teachers, and fellow parents.

**Challenges.** Administrators and teachers both cited a few challenges they continue to face in their practice, most of them technical problems. Developing new teachers is a difficult prospect because of the limited number of fluent speakers in the community. Current Waadookodaading teachers are second language speakers who have devoted a great amount of time and energy studying and apprenticing with fluent Ojibwe teachers to prepare themselves as language immersion teachers. As educators committed to the long term vision and purpose of the school, expansion requires finding new teachers similarly impassioned and committed. Additionally, development of curricular materials is exhaustive and taxing on teachers already stretched with differentiated lesson planning for multiple grades, professional development, and community instruction. Furthermore, as consumers of research-based pedagogy and curriculum, the dearth of specific effective indigenous and language immersion practices make informed practice difficult. Lastly, funding, largely dependent on securing competitive grants, is a constant concern requiring much time and resources dedicated to seeking financial support.

## Analysis and Discussion

### Community Organizing Model: Transformative Change

These three schools, despite their geographic, demographic, and pedagogic diversity, all share a broader vision of transformative community change. The establishment of a school serves as a means for mobilizing and empowering the local communities to assess their own needs and determine their own solutions. By doing so, community members not only improve educational outcomes for their children—they are also making a profound expression of self-determination and tribal sovereignty. As such, we chose to analyze the schools' shared attributes through Warren and Mapp's community organizing framework (Warren and Mapp, 2011). Warren and Mapp assert that "organizing groups pursue education reform as part of a broader process where parents, young people and other residents of low-income communities develop the power to influence the social and political processes that determine their fate" (A Match on Dry Grass, 2012). They employ a metaphor of a tree to articulate how strong forms of community organizing develop and grow. In this framework, strong organizations begin with deep *roots* in "shared histories, identities, and organizing traditions" that set the organization's goals and direction (Warren & Mapp, 2011, p. 14). These growing organizations are then responsive to their specific environment or *climate*, the "opportunities and constraints" imparted by their particular context (Warren & Mapp, 2011, p. 14). Out of these local conditions, all organizations share the same "core processes" in the *trunk*, which are centered on building relationships and power in the community (Warren & Mapp, 2011, p. 15). Ultimately, the "core processes" of the organizing group work to "transform communities, individuals, and institutions" (Warren & Mapp, 2011, p. 15)—the *leaves* of progressive, sustainable change.

Pemayetv Emahakv, Klamath River Early College of the Redwoods, and Waadookodaading Ojibwe Language Immersion School each spring from the unique roots of their distinct, tribe and community-specific culture, history, identity, traditions, and collective values. In their founding, these schools engaged with the existing assets, interests, and desires of the community to produce a culturally-matched and authentic mission and vision. The development of the school from this vision was shaped by the opportunities and challenges particular to the community context, including: the availability and parameters of the local state charter law, political stability within tribal government, existence of alliances with the local school district, financial independence of the tribe, and dynamic experiences of community members. As a result, each of these schools grew very different “trees” responsive to the local climate.

However, the schools survive, grow, and thrive through the same core processes. Each of these schools focuses on building new relationships between the school and community, teachers and students, administrators and tribal leaders, tribal government and local district; these relationships expand people’s identities and sense of power, giving them ownership over a process of long-term change. For indigenous communities, these schools build power as an expression of self-determination and sovereignty. As Castagano and Brayboy (2008) state, “parent and community ownership over schooling is an important aspect of actively engaging tribal sovereignty and realizing the goals of self-determination.”

The results— as evident at PECS, KRECR, and Waadookodaading— are transformed individuals, institutions, and communities. As part of the community, these schools invite parents, community members, students, and families to take responsibility for the change they wish to see in their community and become “meaningful actors in the process of educational change”

(Warren & Mapp, 2011 p. 30). By indigenizing school design, mission, pedagogy, and curriculum to match the culture, values, and aspirations of the contemporary community, schools as institutions have been transformed— from places haunted by the ghosts of oppressive boarding schools, cultural decimation, and forced assimilation, to community centers of cultural and language preservation and revitalization.

Beyond this overarching framework that illuminates the shared *process* underlying the development and growth of these distinct schools and appreciates the *holistic similarity* between their models, it is also important to dissect the common attributes of each to define a register of best practices.

**Small schools and small classrooms.** Each of the three schools we visited has small overall enrollment, and commits to extremely small class sizes. Low enrollment establishes a close, intimate environment and enables authentic interpersonal relationships. Small class sizes also allow teachers to provide custom learning communities for students, permitting them to recognize each student’s individual needs. In all three schools, deliberately small class sizes are deemed essential.

**Strong, visionary leaders.** All three schools also had strong leaders or leadership teams, and paid careful attention to leadership development and succession to ensure the stability and consistency of the school mission and vision across transitions. At both PECS and KRECR, the transition between school principals was buttressed by careful selection and grooming of a closely affiliated, candidate already aligned with the school vision, and successors maintain close relationships with their predecessors. At Waadookodaading the unique style of collaborative leadership, where the executive director is one facet of a team of leaders otherwise made up of teachers, similarly provides stability and continuity between shifts.

School leaders we met possessed a “whatever it takes” attitude— a commitment to doing everything possible to fulfill students’ needs as outlined by the mission and vision of the school. This determinedly positive outlook and prerogative sets the tone for the school, inspiring a “victor’s attitude” that holds steadfast to the vision of what the community can do and create as opposed to allowing a “victim’s attitude” that resorts to blame and defeat (Begay et al, 2007). This visible and resolute commitment to students and the community-centered vision is also an important factor in creating an inviting school climate to support parental and community involvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al, 2005).

Lastly, all three leaders embraced a notion of “distributed leadership” (Elmore, 2000). Elmore defines the job of administrators as one “primarily about enhancing the skills and knowledge of people in the organization, creating a common culture of expectations around the use of those skills and knowledge, holding the various pieces of the organization together in a productive relationship with each other, and holding individuals accountable for their contributions to the collective result” (Elmore, 2000, p. 15). In each of these schools, the principal sought to build the capacities of his teachers and staff as leaders in the school community by creating a culture of “collegial support” and professional development connected to the overarching school mission. At PECS, Greseth emphasized that encouraging this kind of teacher leadership, providing room for self-direction, innovation, and team collaboration, cultivated “ownership” over solutions to curricular, classroom, and school issues that would ensure their implementation whether he was there or not. The collective design of leadership at Waadookodaading, where teachers actively share in the school decision-making and work collaboratively to improve classroom skills, develop curriculum and lesson plans fosters the climate of “productive relationship” and “common culture of expectations” that moves the

school forward within its vision (Elmore, 2000). At KRECR, Johnson and Carmesin relied on one another for mutual, ongoing support and professional development, and emphasized flexibility and a commitment to growth and shared leadership as crucial teacher attributes.

**Cultural match.** All three schools are also designed with a strategic cultural match to contemporary community norms, values, beliefs, traditions, history, and experiences. This “cultural resonance” is not locked solely in historicized indigenous culture, but recognizes the dynamism and evolution of culture as a product of circumstance (Hicks, 2007). Much of this strategic cultural match is effective because these schools are products of parent and community member initiatives, “indigenously-generated solutions” that seek to respond to a community-diagnosed concern (Hicks, 2007): the vision for all three schools grew from the voiced desires of community members.

**Political access.** Establishing a charter school requires the alignment of multiple levels of government: on the state level, where charter law is granted, on the local district level, where sponsorship of charter schools is enlisted, and on the tribal level, where the school will be built and whose students will be taught. Michele Thomas, an administrator from PECS, stressed that a large piece of their success in founding the school was the open entry to inter-governmental agreement: “the doors just never closed” to their requests. She also noted that such an alignment of goals can be rare: “I go to these meetings where other tribes are trying to do charter schools and they have so many obstacles” (M. Thomas, interview, March 14, 2012). Relationships between Native and non-Native communities are critically important to developing new policies or programs to serve indigenous youth (NEA & NIEA, 2011).

Of particular importance to all three schools was the stability of the tribal government. Development on reservations is fostered by government stability whereby there are fair and

legitimate institutions capably established to exercise sovereignty (Begay et al, 2007). It is the tribal government that serves as the first point of leverage to advocate for the community's vision. Furthermore, a stable government also has the potential to fund its own activities or to organize a collaboration with other governmental agencies to support programs, instead of relying on federal funds that may undermine tribal control (Begay et al, 2007).

Financially, the schools all have some component of funding received from their tribal government (through direct sponsorship, or competitive grants). Financial support from the tribal government allows the tribe and community to exact greater control over education, and specifically, over the security and success of the charter school itself. PECS is a solid example of a school design made possible by the financial resources of a stable and established tribal government.

**Alliances and relationships.** Relationships with entities beyond the walls of the school were vital at all three sites. As Warren and Mapp (2012) emphasize, schools envisioning community transformation fundamentally require deep, authentic relationships that forge connection between and among school and community members to amass and mobilize resources and assets (Warren & Mapp, 2012). All three schools established a norm of formal and informal collaboration with parents, community members, organizations, and elders. Formally, schools carved out intentional space to encourage an active parent and community role. At KRECR and Waadookodaading, parents and community members were directly included in the decision-making process and leadership positions of the school through primary representation on the school board (Waadookodaading) and participation in the annual community construction of content standards and learning goals (KRECR). At PECS, the creation of a tribally-operated Culture Department reserves a concrete and formal place for community inclusion during the

highly-structured school day. All schools build these relationships through the incorporation of “homefunds of knowledge,” the cultural and practical knowledge of students’ parents and community, into the school culture, curriculum, pedagogy, and epistemology (Moll, 1992).

**Professional learning communities.** Each school had a team of highly educated, passionate staff committed to the overarching purpose and vision of the school, but also dedicated to advancing and honing their teaching craft through ongoing education and professional development in research-supported practices. At PECS, Greseth intentionally recruits veteran and celebrated educators from the local county and across Florida, including a former literacy curriculum specialist that now serves as a second-grade teacher. Additionally, all schools connected to networks and alliances with other like-minded schools. At Waadookodaading, the small cohort of teachers are committed to ongoing research into best practices within language immersion and utilize professional networks with other immersion schools, notably the Maori and Hawaiian, to seek out new strategies and skills to inform their own craft. Administrators at KRECR tapped into state-based charter school networks for ideas and resources, and have developed school-wide policies based on the Re-Inventing Schools Coalition.

### **Challenges to Replication**

While the shared attributes between these successful schools can inform advocates for indigenous education and shape future research, we do not intend to present the practices described in this report as a facile path to replication. As emphasized earlier, each of these schools is specific to its community context in terms of design and resources.

**Political context.** The political context across states, tribes, and local school districts varies tremendously, and is not a factor over which educators have a great deal of control. Many

states that have significant Native populations, such as Washington, Montana, South Dakota, North Dakota, and New Mexico, have not yet passed charter law— although, as we will discuss, reliance on charter law obscures a larger issue of sovereignty and self-determination.

Legislation enabling the establishment of charter schools is currently solely under state jurisdiction, and tribes have not secured control over the authorization of charter law. This constraint is further complicated by the fact that charter schools must be sponsored by a public school district— even if they are located on a reservation. This adds an additional layer of bureaucracy to the process of founding a school, and ultimately impedes tribal communities from establishing indigenous schools without having to coordinate with an external government agency. Working relationships with states and counties can complement a tribal government’s relationship with the federal government by increasing external recognition of a tribe’s legitimacy as an operating government (Hicks, 2007). However, it is problematic when these inter-governmental relationships hamper tribal governments’ abilities to meet the needs of their people— such as the need for a high-quality education. For this reason, we do not believe that advocating for expanded charter authorization law at the state level is a wise long-term strategy in the name of sovereignty.

**Teacher recruitment.** These schools require teachers with cultural knowledge and language fluency, which makes training and grooming new teachers additionally challenging. Waadookodaading depends entirely on teachers capable of speaking Ojibwe fluently or willing to commit a great deal of time to learning through immersion. The lack of certified fluent Creek language is a challenge to PECS culture department teachers as well. At KRECR, teachers are expected to provide an exceptionally high level of individualized instruction, and to be involved with the community beyond school hours.

**Lack of a cohesive network.** School leaders expressed a desire to connect with other Native charter schools with similar aims of community revitalization and empowerment. With no formal network or platform for sharing resources and engaging in collaboration, these schools lack the opportunity to benefit from the creativity and success of their peers. Despite building relationships with schools with similar goals or qualities, these schools seek a more established connection to other indigenous charter schools aimed at community transformation.

### **Conclusion**

For indigenous communities, education has been the site of a long and arduous battle for self-determination. For generations, the federal government used education as an intentional and merciless tool for cultural decimation, forced assimilation, and exerting control over tribal nations. Within this context, indigenous communities have long desired a tribally-controlled education that would deliver “not just empowerment as individuals but empowerment as bands, as tribes, as nations, and as a people” (Castagano & Brayboy, 2008, p. 949). In many ways, it is this kind of transformational education that the charter schools we visited are accomplishing. Klamath River Early College of the Redwoods, Pemayetv Emahakv Our Way Charter School, and Waadookodaading Ojibwe Language Immersion School are remarkable examples of schools enacting an assertion of local control over the mission, design, and influence of the education of their communities. Their work embodies a vision that aims not just for culturally authentic and quality education for their students, but also seeks to spark and cultivate a transformation of the community. Local control allows the community to assess its own needs and develop its own solutions, a freedom that shifts reform strategies from the one-dimensional damage-based perspective seeking to *evaluate* and *measure* to the desire-based framework that recognizes the community strengths and resiliency.

But the charter school model is limited in its ability to permit this freedom. Within their local contexts, these three schools have unquestionably initiated a momentum for social change. However, their localized success cannot, on its own, catalyze a system-wide solution. These charter schools face the same constraints as charters nationwide: they represent a concentration of resources on a small number of students, while the rights and needs of others are left unattended by an inequitable system. Payne (2009) notes the dubious mixture of “promise” and “peril” in the use of charters to address systemic educational change for under-served communities: “When the stars are in alignment, charter schools give us a means to do an end-run around inflexible and incompetent bureaucracies to give some children a better education than they would otherwise have access to. But this doesn’t mean charters are a panacea” (Payne, 2009, p. 232). Theoretically, charters permit tribes to do what they long to do: assert control over education in their own communities; given the diversity of tribal nations, it is important to appreciate that these localized, community-driven initiatives may be the most effective means of indigenizing Indian education.

However, we must scrutinize the current process for establishing charter schools on tribal land. Although they provide a certain freedom for innovative instructional design, the very notion of the charter school reinforces the necessity of external validation from the state: the establishment of charters remains contingent on *state* law, and this exertion of state government control over tribal jurisdiction threatens tribal sovereignty. Castagno and Brayboy (2008) highlight the concern over the growing pattern of state interference in tribal education: “The devolution of the trust relationship of the federal government to tribal government is a growing concern, given the growing presence of State governments in the education of Native students in tribal jurisdictions, as well as state involvement in determining the context for BIA funded

education including both Tribal and federal operated schools” (p. 494).

As mentioned earlier, many states with large Native populations have not passed legislation for charter law, posing a significant challenge to the argument that charter schools represent a compelling route for the transformation and empowerment of indigenous communities.

Additionally, once established, these schools remain inextricably tied to the local county district and held to the accountability standards determined by the state. Certainly it is important to note that this is preferred by some communities, particularly those that have strong relationships with local non-Native communities. Embedded in the community-developed mission of PECS is an explicit desire to continue the use of state curricular standards as an intentional method of ensuring rigorous academics. Lorene Gopher, a tribal elder and cultural teacher, reiterated this:

We wanted a charter school so that way their [the students’] standards are up to what the state wants and our teachers were the best that we could get. We didn’t want [our children] to miss out on learning everything else, but we wanted them to learn our side too” (L. Gopher, Interview, March 14, 2012).

However, for other schools, state-mandated accountability requirements can jeopardize community-centered control over the design and purpose of education. This point of contention was eloquently described by Bernadette Johnson, Director of Advocacy and Outreach at KRECR:

“That tension [between accountability standards and holistic education] should not prevent us from making good decisions and doing the right thing for students. And that means... doing what we know is right from a relational standpoint and a cultural standpoint, but also understanding that our students are going to go to college, and we need to make sure that we are meeting all the requirements to enable them to be

successful in that endeavor, as well. And we have to be able to talk to the outside world. It's a continual process of improvement, of how we can leverage the information and data about our students, and navigate both worlds, *and* maintain the integrity of what we know is right." (B. Johnson, Interview, March 5, 2012).

### **Recommendations and Next Steps:**

Our purpose in this this preliminary report was to showcase some of the remarkable cases of successful charter schools serving Native populations, as well as highlight some of the shared attributes that may contribute to their achievement. Our hope is that these portraits of their work— the effort, the risks, the challenges, and the successes— will be useful to educators and advocates seeking transformative change in their own communities. To conclude, we offer brief recommendations for possible next steps, drawing from the desires expressed by school leaders and teachers themselves. We recommend: 1) creating a *forum* for schools to share ideas and collaborate, 2) conducting more *research* into effective practices, 3) providing *access* to research resources, and 4) advocating for *tribal control* over charter law. Although a discussion of charter schools was the explicit purview of this report and we believe we have presented some of the potential strengths of the charter model, we also hope to prompt conversation about what steps can truly lead to deep, lasting change— in the education world, in Indian Country, and in the places where they intersect.

## References

- Begay, M.A., Jr, Cornell, S., Jorgensen, M., & Kalt, J. (2007). Development, Governance, Culture: What Are They and What Do They Have to Do with Rebuilding Native Nations? In M. Jorgensen (Ed.), *Rebuilding Native Nations* (34-54). Tuscon: University of Arizona Press.
- Begay, M.A., Jr, Cornell, S., Jorgensen, M., & Pryor, N. (2007). Rebuilding Native Nations: What Do Leaders Do? In M. Jorgensen (Ed.), *Rebuilding Native Nations* (275-295). Tuscon: University of Arizona Press.
- Belgarde, M. J., Lore, R. K., & Meyer, R. (2009). American Indian adolescent literacy. In L. Christenbury, R. Bommer & P. Smagorinsky (Eds.), *Handbook of adolescent literacy research* (pp. 415) The Guilford Press.
- Bielenberg, B. (2000). Charter schools for American Indians. In J. Reyhner, J. Martin, L. Lockard & W. S. Gilbert (Eds.), *Learn in beauty: Indigenous education for a new century* (pp. 132) Northern Arizona University.
- Booher-Jennings, J. (2005). Below the bubble: Educational triage and the Texas accountability system. *American Educational Research Journal*, 42 (2), 231-269.
- Brayboy, B.M.J. & Castagno, A.E. (2009). Self-determination through self-education: Culturally responsive schooling for Indigenous students in the USA, *Teaching Education*, 20 (1), 31-53.
- Buly, M. R., & Ohana, C. (2004). Back to heritage: A different kind of school for American Indian adolescents. *Multicultural Education*, 12(1), 30-32.
- Bush, G. W. (2004). Executive order 13336--American Indian and Alaska Native

- education. *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, 40(18), 713-715.
- Castagno, A. & Brayboy, B.M.J. (2008). Culturally Responsive Schooling for Indigenous Youth: A Review of the Literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 78(4), 941-993.
- Cleary, L. (2008). The imperative of literacy motivation when Native children are being left behind. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 47(1), 96–117.
- Cleary, L. & Peacock, T. (1998). *Collected Wisdom: American Indian Education*. Needham \ Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Cornell, S. & Kalt, J. (2007). Two Approaches to the Development of Native Nations: One Works, the Other Doesn't. In M. Jorgensen (Ed.), *Rebuilding Native Nations* (3-33). Tuscon: University of Arizona Press.
- Cockrell, K. S. (1992). Voices of Native America: A Native American community's perception of home/school communication.
- Commission on Civil Rights. (2003). A quiet crisis: Federal funding and unmet needs in Indian country.
- Delpit, L. (1988). The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People's Children. *Harvard Educational Review*, 58(3), 280-298.
- Demmert, W. G., Jr., Towner, J. C., & Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (2003). A review of the research literature on the influences of culturally based education on the academic performance of Native American students.
- DeVoe, J. F., Darling-Churchill, K., & National Center for Education Statistics (2008). Status and trends in the education of American Indians and Alaska Natives: 2008. NCEs 2008-084.
- Ellison, K. (2007, October). Making the grade. *Smithsonian Magazine*. Retrieved from

<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/specialsections/innovators/wiki.html>

Elmore, R. (2000). Building a New Structure For School Leadership. The Albert Shanker Institute.

Executive order 13592--improving American Indian and Alaska Native educational opportunities and strengthening tribal colleges and universities.(2011). Daily Compilation of Presidential Documents, 1-6.

Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(2), 106-116.

Grigg, W., Moran, R., and Kuang, M. (2010). *National Indian Education Study - Part I: Performance of American Indian and Alaska Native Students at Grades 4 and 8 on NAEP 2009 Reading and Mathematics Assessments* (NCES 2010-462). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C.

Harvard University Native American Program (2012). *Our mission*. Retrieved from <http://hunap.harvard.edu>.

Hicks, S. (2007). Intergovernmental Relationships: Expressions of Tribal Sovereignty. In M. Jorgensen (Ed.), *Rebuilding Native Nations* (246-274). Tuscon: University of Arizona Press.

Henson, E. C. (2008). *The State of the Native Nations : Conditions under U.S. policies of self-determination : The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hoover-Dempsey, K. et al. (2005). Why do parents become involved? Research findings and implications. *The Elementary School Journal*, 106(2), 105-130.

- Imberman, S., Kugler, A.D., & Sacerdote, B. (2009). Katrina's children: evidence on the structure of peer effects from hurricane evacuees (Working Paper No. 15291). Retrieved from National Bureau of Economic Research website:  
<http://www.nber.org/papers/w15291>
- Jacob, B. A. (2005). Accountability, incentives and behavior: The impact of high-stakes testing in the Chicago public schools. *Journal of Public Economics*, 89, 761-796.
- Jacobs, D. T. (2003). How schools can help heal American Indian and Alaska Native communities. ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.
- Kana'iaupuni, S., Ledward, B., & Jensen, 'U. Kamehameha Schools, Research & Evaluation, (2010). *Culture-based education and its relationship to student outcomes*. Retrieved from website: [http://www.ksbe.edu/spi/PDFS/CBE\\_relationship\\_to\\_student\\_outcomes.pdf](http://www.ksbe.edu/spi/PDFS/CBE_relationship_to_student_outcomes.pdf)
- Klamath River Early College of the Redwoods. (2011). *KRECR student and family handbook*. Retrieved from [http://kreocr.org/pdf/student\\_handbook.pdf](http://kreocr.org/pdf/student_handbook.pdf)
- Klamath River Early College of the Redwoods. (2012a). *Founding and history*. Retrieved from <http://www.kreocr.org/About>
- Klamath River Early College of the Redwoods. (2012b). *Governance council*. Retrieved from <http://www.kreocr.org/governance>
- Klamath River Early College of the Redwoods. (2012c). *Learning by doing*. Retrieved from [http://www.kreocr.org/learn\\_by\\_doing](http://www.kreocr.org/learn_by_doing)
- Klamath River Early College of the Redwoods. (2012d). *Our mission and vision*. Retrieved from [http://www.kreocr.org/Our\\_Mission\\_and\\_Vision](http://www.kreocr.org/Our_Mission_and_Vision)
- Klamath River Early College of the Redwoods. (2012e). *Partners and funders*. Retrieved from <http://www.kreocr.org/partners>

- Koretz, D. M. (2008). *Measuring up: What educational testing really tells us*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Lara, J., National Indian Education Association, National, Education Association. (2011). *Voices of Native educators: Strategies that support success of Native high school students*.
- Mackety, D. & Linder-VanBerschoot, J. (2008). *Examining American Indian perspectives in the Central Region on parent involvement in children's education*. Regional Educational Laboratory at MidContinent Research for Education and Learning.
- Mason, M. R., & Ernst-Slavit, G. (2010). Representations of Native Americans in elementary school social studies: A critical look at instructional language. *Multicultural Education*, 18(1), 10-17.
- McCarty, T. L. (2009). The impact of high-stakes accountability policies on Native American learners: Evidence from research. *Teaching Education*, 20(1), 7-29.
- Mid-Continent Comprehensive Center (2012). *Knowledge Bases: Charter School Listing*. Retrieved from <http://www.mc3edsupport.org/community/knowledgebases/charter-schools-listing-1725.html>
- Moll, L., Amanti, C., Neffi, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect home and classrooms. *Theory Into Practice*, 31(2), 132-141.
- No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 20 U.S.C. § 6311 (2002).
- Noley, G. (1991). *Native and non-Native teachers and administrators for elementary and secondary schools serving American Indian and Alaska Native students*.
- Paap, K. (2010, January 8). *Gathering Of Native Americans Conference 2009*. [Video File] Retrieved from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SoBc8EFKxW8>

Payne, C. & Knowles, T. (2009). Promise and peril: Charter schools, urban school reform, and the Obama administration. *Harvard Educational Review*, 79(2), 227-239.

Pemayetv Emahakv, *Our Way School*, Charter School Application Submitted to the School 32 Board of Glades County, Florida. September 2005

Powers, K. M. (2006). An exploratory study of cultural identity and culture-based educational programs for urban American Indian students. *Urban Education*, 41(1), 20-49. doi: 10.1177/0042085905282249

Re-inventing Schools Coalition (2012). *RISC Approach to Schooling*.

Retrieved from <http://www.reinventingschools.org/resources/the-risc-approach-to-schooling/>.

Reyhner, J., & Tennant, E. (1995). Maintaining and renewing Native languages. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 19(2), 279-304.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2012). *2010 Demographic Profile*. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/popfinder/?fl=06:0638702>.

Tippeconnic, John W. (2000). Reflecting on the past: Some important aspects of Indian education to consider as we look toward the future. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 39(2), 39-48.

Tippeconnic, John W. (2003). The use of academic achievement tests and measurements with American Indian and Alaska Native students. ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.

Tuck, E. (2009). Suspending damage: A letter to communities. *Harvard Educational Review*, 79(3), 409-427.

Weinstein, M., Schwartz, A.E., Jacobowitz, R., Ely, T., and Landon, K. (2009). New schools,

- new leaders: A study of principal turnover and academic achievement at new high schools in New York City (Working Paper No. 2011-09). Retrieved from Social Science Research Network website: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1875901> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1875901>
- Yurok Tribe. (2006). *The Yurok Tribe welcomes you*. Retrieved from <http://www.yuroktribe.org>.
- Yurok Tribe Geographic Information System (2007). *Welcome to geographic information system*. Retrieved from <http://www.yuroktribe.org/departments/infoservices/GIS/gis.htm>.
- Yurok Tribe (2012a). *Yurok Tribal Council*. Retrieved from <http://www.yuroktribe.org/government/councilmembers/councilmembers.htm>.
- Yurok Tribe (2012b). *The Yurok Tribe's Klamath Salmon Festival*. Retrieved from <http://www.yuroktribe.org/salmonfestival.htm>.
- Waadookodaading. (2007a) *Our Place In History*. Retrieved from: <http://www.waadookodaading.org>
- Waadookodaading. (2007b) *Our Our Role In Communities*. Retrieved from: <http://www.waadookodaading.org>
- Waadookodaading. (2007c) *Our Structure*. Retrieved from: <http://www.waadookodaading.org>
- Waadookodaading. (2007d) *Our Supporters*. Retrieved from: <http://www.waadookodaading.org>
- Waadookodaading. (2007e) *Our Students*. Retrieved from: <http://www.waadookodaading.org>
- Waadookodaading. (2007f) *Our Staff*. Retrieved from: <http://www.waadookodaading.org>
- Warren, M. (2005). Communities and schools: A new view of urban education reform. *Harvard Educational Review*, 75(2), 133-173
- Warren, M. & Mapp, K. (2011). *A match on dry grass: Community organizing as a catalyst for school reform*. New York: Oxford University Press

---

<sup>i</sup> HUNAP is an on-campus organization that aims to bring together Native American, Native Hawaiian, and Alaska Native students, as well as their allies, from across the Harvard University for the “purpose of advancing the well-being of indigenous peoples through self-determination, academic achievement, and community service” (Harvard University Native American Program, 2012). HUNAP sponsors an annual graduate course, Native American Nation Building, wherein students serve as consultants for a project requested by tribal communities, agencies, or organizations.

<sup>ii</sup> Throughout this paper, we use the term “culturally responsive” education in the manner described by Gay (2002): “using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. It is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly.” Though other similar terms (i.e. “culturally-based education,” “culturally relevant pedagogy,” “cultural congruence”) are in common use, and in some cases may be synonymous, “culturally responsive” is the phrase we feel best describes the mode of education we observed in our site visits, and we feel the term incorporates the sense of dynamism and flexibility that can allow Native schools to truly serve and transform the communities in which they are situated.

<sup>iii</sup> While NCLB mandates public access to each school's state-standardized test data as a method of accountability, the accessibility of this information varies by state. Furthermore, the standards and test measures are determined by the state, allowing for considerable inconsistency across state and an imperfect process of comparison.

<sup>iv</sup> Examples of pan-tribal urban charter schools include the American Indian Public Charter School in Oakland, California and the Pan-Indian Charter School in Phoenix, Arizona.

<sup>v</sup> [This presents a challenge for school administrators at times, as the lack of a system based on “seat time” makes it difficult to assign students equivalent credits if they leave KRECR. Administrators have developed an equivalency system that describes standards as equal to a certain number of high school credits— including, at times, a fraction of a credit— but it is up to staff at the student’s new school to decide how to interpret this information.]

<sup>vi</sup> All student names used in this report are pseudonyms.