

'It is time to think about who Oregon education is serving, and who it is not'

COMMUNITY FUND
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Community Fund) recognized a critical need for this information," said Kathleen George, Community Fund director.

Spirit Mountain Community Fund is the philanthropic arm of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde.

"With education reform in process, it would be particularly important for the Tribe and state to have baseline data to know how well the Oregon Department of Education is serving Tribal youth," George said. "It is time to think about who Oregon education is serving, and who it is not serving, but it's very difficult for Tribal education directors to get the whole picture."

"I anticipate Tribes will use the information gathered to work with a variety of Oregon educational institutes," said Campbell. "This work may include developing policies and realigning resources to improve Native student outcomes within Oregon's educational systems."

Regarding obstacles to making this project a success, Sue Hildick, president of Chalkboard Project, said, "We don't think a study like this has ever been done before. The data issues are complex."

In addition, she added the difficulties of "building trust between

all the organizations."

Available indicators suggest that only 37 percent of Native students graduate from high school on time and that Native American student performance in math and reading and college entry rates are behind every other ethnic group, yet Tribes have seen little action.

"It's different having high quality information," George said.

In the past, state policymakers have discounted the available information as "anecdotal" and declined to act in the interests of Native students, George added.

The Coquille Indian Tribe has chosen not to participate, but the other eight federally recognized Tribes will provide raw data to the Oregon Department of Education, but the ultimate product will have student names concealed to meet privacy concerns.

Participants in the project also include ECONorthwest and the state Education Department. All have come together to create a baseline of information so that Tribes and the state Education Department have the information needed to see where Indian education falls short and to understand where funding and other input would be best placed.

The data generated will provide detailed information for individual Tribes and also will develop broad geographic information, said

George.

Chalkboard Project, a nonprofit, receives the grant funding and passes it through to the for-profit research firm ECONorthwest, which will do most of the work.

"While ECONorthwest will be doing most of the hard data analysis, Chalkboard is donating some of their oversight and media outreach," said George.

Both are well-positioned to understand and evaluate educational priorities. Chalkboard Project is in the business of "designing and demonstrating improvements in the way school systems prepare, recruit, mentor and retain highly effective educators."

ECONorthwest, with offices in Portland, Eugene and Boise, Idaho, specializes in data-driven decision making.

"The state is poised to transition to a pre-kindergarten-to-university framework, which could significantly alter where and how it invests along the education continuum," the Community Fund application said.

"My hope," said George, "is that this study will see what gaps exist now, and where the critical areas are for Tribal students who need help. The information will help the Tribe use resources more effectively."

If the study finds, as Tribal authorities expect, that there is a high percentage of Tribal high school

dropouts, "then it won't help to talk about college for them," said George.

For Matt Bucknell, Elementary Lead for the Grand Ronde Education Department, "The biggest gift parents can give their kids is to make sure they're in school."

There also have been concerns that Tribal members are not self-identifying themselves as Native Americans. In some cases, it is up to a school records clerk to assign an ethnicity, said John Tapogna, president of ECONorthwest.

In addition, "With the information (from the study) in hand," Tapogna said, "Tribes can get together and compare notes on their education agendas. Each has priorities for their memberships. It's not that they will walk in lockstep, but this study will give them the opportunity to understand better their individual agendas, and then provide them the opportunity, if they wanted to, to create a joint education agenda, things they could agree on - maybe three to five priorities - that they want to advance."

"Tribal children being successful in education is only going to become more important, and if we can understand what the barriers are, we can best design solutions," George said. "We want to help Tribal children go as far as their potential can take them." ■

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- I am for the child understanding how they can best interact with and learn from other cultures

Tribal Council member
Cheryle A. Kennedy

To learn about participation opportunities within CTGR CASA, contact Angela Fasana at 503-879-2303 or angela.fasana@grandronde.org