

# Meeting seeks Tribal input on Native Education plan

By Brent Merrill

Smoke Signals staff writer

A wide range of educational all-stars participated in an American Indian/Alaskan Native Education State Plan “kitchen table conversation” held at the Tribal gym on Monday, July 18.

Those invited to Grand Ronde on behalf of the Tribal Education Department, the Oregon Department of Education and Gov. Kate Brown’s Chief Education Office were asked to open a dialogue and discuss strengthening everyone’s understanding of how to improve educational results for Native students.

Among those present were Grand Ronde Tribal Council members Jon A. George, Brenda Tuomi, Denise Harvey and Chris Mercier.

Tribal Education Department Manager Leslie Riggs acted as the host for the evening and Higher Education Manager Bryan Langley, Early Childhood Education Manager Angie Blackwell, Chinuk Language Program Manager Ali Holsclaw, Tribal General Manager Dave Fullerton, Willamina School District Superintendent Carrie Zimbrick and Sheridan School District Superintendent Dr. Steve Sugg also attended.

The state was represented by April Campbell, Grand Ronde Tribal member and current adviser on Indian Education to the State Deputy Superintendent; Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction Salam Noor; Lindsay Capps, Chief Education Office and Policy Adviser to Gov. Kate Brown; Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission Chief of Staff Cheryl Myers; Teachers Standards and Practices Commission Executive Director Dr. Monica Ann Beane; and Early Learning Division Equity Director Lillian Green.

Oregon’s American Indian/Alaskan Native Education State Plan was revitalized in 2015 after Campbell assumed her current position with the state. She put a team

of working Tribal educators and leaders together to form the Department of Education’s AI/AN Advisory Panel and rewrote the plan with input from all nine of Oregon’s federally recognized Tribes.

The plan includes 11 state educational objectives with accompanying strategies and measurable outcomes that have been approved by panel members from all nine Tribes. The plan aligns itself with the state’s education plan, including the goal of raising attendance figures for Native students.

The meeting in Grand Ronde was the third in a series of 10 meetings planned throughout Oregon this year to hold community conversations about the AI/AN plan.

The first two meetings were held in Warm Springs and Umatilla and each of the Tribes in Oregon will be visited. There will be a 10th meeting in the Portland area.

George and Riggs performed a welcome song and George provided an invocation before a meal.

“It’s good to see you all here in Grand Ronde. Welcome,” said Riggs. “I would like to extend a warm welcome to our partners with the state. There has been a lot of really hard work put into this plan and it’s been a really good collaboration.”

Riggs, who sits on the AI/AN Panel, introduced Zimbrick and Sugg.

“I’m so excited to have these representatives from the state here with us today,” said Zimbrick, whose children are Grand Ronde Tribal members. “This has been a passion of mine for so many years. I’m excited to see a formal panel put into place. I’m very thankful.”

Sugg, who has been with the Sheridan district for three years, said he is optimistic about seeing the plan working in the near future.

“I’m glad we are working on a formal plan that will benefit our students,” said Sugg. “I look forward to what is going to happen as we move forward.”

Capps gifted George with salt



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

**Willamina School District Superintendent Carrie Zimbrick, right, talks during a small group conversation of the American Indian/Alaska Native State Plan Convening held in the Tribal gym on Monday, July 18. Also taking part in the conversation is Dr. Salam Noor, Oregon Department of Education’s deputy superintendent of Public Instruction, behind Zimbrick, Tribal Education Department Manager Leslie Riggs, next to Noor, and Melissa Dubois, director of the South Metro–Salem STEM Partnership.**

and coffee for Tribal Council from Gov. Brown.

“It’s really an honor to be here this evening with all of you,” said Capps. “I’m really looking forward to the opportunity to get to know this community, your assets and strengths, and the work that you are doing to support students. We appreciate your hosting us tonight.”

“We are here to listen. I’m here because the Chief Education Office has been tasked with the development of the state plan and to convene those conversations with Native communities. This is your plan and this is our plan to implement together.”

Capps said that the protocol around the meetings and community conversations was based on the government-to-government relationship between the state and Tribes.

“It’s not the first plan, but more importantly it’s the plan we are moving forward with to implement with purpose and deliberate action,” said Capps. “This is important work for us all to be focused on.”

Capps said Education Northwest Senior Adviser Matt Eide is someone who is close to the plan.

Eide explained how the meeting would work and what the objectives were. He said a discussion would take place to outline the Tribe’s strengths, needs and educational priorities.

Eide added that the objective is to create opportunities for state agencies to partner with the Tribal community on important educational issues identified by the Tribe.

“We’re here to engage in a dialogue that ends up in public knowledge,” said Eide. “That’s what we’re going to try to accomplish today. What I hope will happen will be this continued dialogue between the state, the district and the community. One of the potentially powerful things about this model is we get district representatives and community members together to begin having these conversations and to begin to think about how we can work together to make sure our kids have the best chance.”

Eide said the hope would be to

come away with a list of next steps and the support necessary to sustain the community conversations.

Eide’s organization provides support to the Oregon Department of Education and it is hoping to bring all involved stakeholders together in the 10 conversational meetings throughout the state before the plan moves on to the next steps.

“The fact that this plan is making progress is because of the work of April Campbell and the fact that it is supported by the Chief Education Office,” said Eide. “There is high level buy-in and support for the plan.”

Before Eide separated attendees into small groups to continue the discussion, Zimbrick and Sugg said how much they appreciated everyone’s efforts to support the educational plan. Eide said breaking everyone into small groups to further the conversations was intentional because it gave as many opportunities as possible to as many different people to express their thoughts.


“I want the plan to make sure we are supporting our teachers so they can do the best job they can for our students,” said Zimbrick.

Sugg said he supports the plan because it makes everyone better at their jobs.

“One of the main objectives (outlined in the plan) is professional development and helping our staff become culturally responsive,” said Sugg.


Eide said that he believes the plan will be successful because the state is supportive of the work being done by Campbell’s office. He said the key is the way in which the state is showing that support.

“One thing that I really appreciate about the plan and the approach the state is taking really wanting to partner with Tribes to sort out what is the way forward as opposed to coming in and imposing a system on a community because they think they know the best way forward,” said Eide. “I think there is real value in elevating the role of the Tribe in this partnership. Hopefully, these conversations are a step toward helping that happen.” ■



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