



## Founded in

2006

## Number of Schools, Location(s)

One in Albuquerque, NM

## Number of Students

455

## Number of Teachers / Teacher Retention

39 teachers

94% teacher retention

## Per-Pupil Funding

\$7,300

## Sector

Charter

## Grades Served

K through 3rd  
6th through 12th

## Student Demographics

94% Native American  
6% Hispanic  
1% White

24% students with disabilities  
14% English language learners  
85% students eligible for free or reduced lunch

## Teacher Demographics

65% Native American  
5% Black  
12% Hispanic  
17% White  
1% Asian

## Anchoring to Established Cognitive Developmental & Educational Theories

### Critical Pedagogy <sup>1</sup>

**Researcher:** Paulo Freire

**Theory's Key Tenets:** Education cannot be divorced from politics. It either serves:

- A. As a mechanism for assimilation into the present mainstream culture, logic, and systems for the purpose of conformity, or
- B. To facilitate awareness of, and liberation from, such mechanisms, as well as awareness of one's sociocultural identity, both within and separate from, the mainstream context historically through present times.

The role of education should be the latter, according to this theory.

### Social Learning Theory / Social Cognitive Theory <sup>2</sup>

**Researcher:** Albert Bandura

**Theory's Key Tenets:** Children learn and develop new knowledge and skills through observation and modeling. Individual, Proximal, and Collective Agency serve as mechanisms for shaping children's overall growth and life outcome.

### Sociocultural Theory <sup>3,4</sup>

**Researcher:** Lev Vygotsky

**Theory's Key Tenets:** Children learn through hands-on experiences. Everyone in the child's environment and the overall culture and society are responsible for developing higher order cognitive functions. Learning is inherently a social act. Adults facilitate children's knowledge development through scaffolding and the Zone of Proximal Development — the space between a child's prior background knowledge and what they can do on their own, and the new knowledge, understandings, or skills that they need support mastering.

### Ecological Systems Theory <sup>5</sup>

**Researcher:** Urie Bronfenbrenner

**Theory's Key Tenets:** Children learn through both internal and external factors by engaging in several environmental or ecological systems:

- Microsystem (e.g. family, caregivers, school)
- Mesosystem (refers to relationships between those within the child's microsystem, such as parent-school partnerships)
- Exosystem (refers to larger social systems that impact the child's development, such as community-based resources or parent workplace environments that may cause stress on parents that lead to stress for children)
- Macrosystem (refers to cultural values, customs and laws)
- Chronosystem (refers to dimensions of time and the interplay between time and a child's external life changes and circumstances as well as the child's internal development and identity)

## Introduction

"By 2005, Kara Bobroff, who is Navajo/Lakota, was a seasoned educator in her hometown of Albuquerque, New Mexico. Bobroff had previously led schools in the San Francisco Bay Area. In that more well-resourced environment, she saw students educated with a focus on autonomy, creativity, rigor, and positive youth development. She wanted those things for Native students like her in Albuquerque.

Upon returning to her hometown, Bobroff came face-to-face with troubling statistics: Native students in New Mexico with consistently lower proficiency rates and college matriculation/completion rates than their peers; a tragically high suicide rate among Native American students and a string of suicides across Albuquerque's Native communities. Bobroff was reminded of her own challenges in educational settings, which she ascribed to her childhood separation from Native culture and identity. She reflected, "My mom wasn't able to raise my siblings and me. I lacked connection to Native culture, and that had a negative impact on my ability to thrive in an educational setting. I almost dropped out of college at one point."

Faced with these complex challenges, Bobroff acted. She engaged the Albuquerque community with an idea: a school for Native American students. Bobroff joined Indigenous women's

<sup>[1]</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1970).

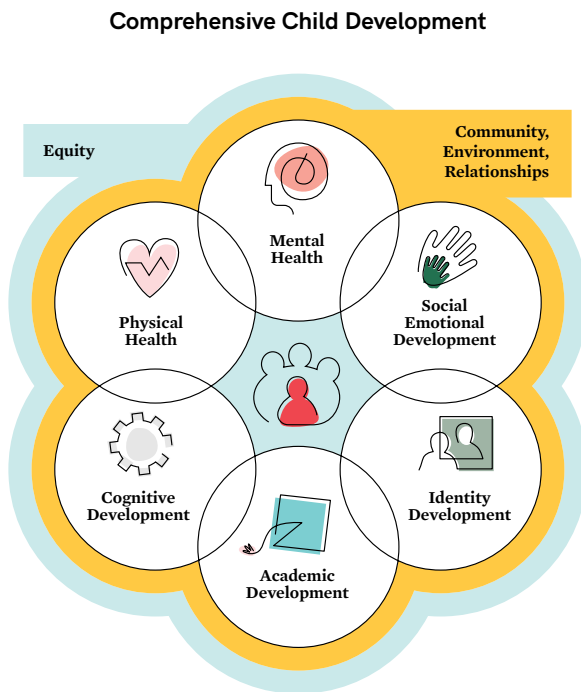
<sup>[2]</sup> Albert Bandura, "Social Cognitive Theory in Cultural Context," *Applied Psychology: An International Review* 51, no. 2 (2002): 269.

<sup>[3]</sup> Lev Vygotsky, "The Development of Higher Psychological Functions," *Russian Social Science Review* 18, no. 3 (1977): 38.

<sup>[4]</sup> James P. Lantolf and Aneta Pavlenko, "Sociocultural Theory and Second Language Acquisition," *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 15 (1995): 108-124. doi:10.1017/S0267190500002646.

<sup>[5]</sup> Urie Bronfenbrenner, "Ecological Systems Theory," in Ross Vasta, ed., *Six Theories of Child Development: Revised Formulations and Current Issues* (London, England: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1992), 187-249.

groups, interviewed college alumni, convened families, and eventually synthesized three common themes that community members wanted to see in education: development of a strong sense of identity, access to college, and holistic wellness.



Bobroff's work with the community led to an inspirational vision for the school: "a thriving and dynamic community where students, educators, families, and Native community leaders come together, creating a place for students to grow, become leaders, and prepare to excel in both college and life in general. The NACA community and experience will help students incorporate wellness and healthy life practices, community service, and an appreciation of cultural diversity into their lives."

Today, NACA maintains an intensive focus on the holistic development of Native students according to Native philosophies. This is particularly important to the NACA community given the ineffective or detrimental impact many other schools have had on Native students' success and wellness. Anpao Duta Flying Earth, a Standing Rock Lakota, White Earth Ojibwe, and Akimel O'odham who grew up in South Dakota and is now NACA head of school, said, "The concept of schooling in Indigenous communities was introduced by boarding school. It was a very abrupt dissemination. You'd almost have to cleanse yourself when you came back from boarding school. My uncle would call it 'to be human again.' Now we're in a special place where we have decades of experience and iteration of what schooling should look like. The overarching pull is Indigenous education contextualized by Indigenous philosophy and the inclusion of whole-child, high-quality academics, and relevant curriculum."

NACA has grown to serve approximately 455 elementary, middle, and high school students annually, and will serve the full K-12 continuum in fall 2020. Students represent over 60 tribes. Bobroff has since launched the NACA-Inspired Schools Network (NISN) to bring culturally relevant schools and Indigenous education to more communities throughout the country. Leaders believe that the NACA model for education of the whole child in ways that honor and reflect students' cultures is especially important for students (like Native students at NACA) from historically marginalized communities who often enter postsecondary spaces where their identities are not valued or represented. However, as one NACA leader also asserted, "Certain educators have a vantage point that this is good for Native kids, but it's good for all kids."

## Defining and Measuring Success

**Definition of student success.** NACA has big goals for students; it envisions "students who are academically prepared, secure in their identity, and healthy." One indicator of success, based in NACA's founding vision, is not only getting accepted to college but persevering through it to get a degree. NACA leaders believe that goal requires attention to the whole child, as one reflected: "Native American students persevere and thrive through college in large part because they know where they come from and know who they are culturally. In many cases, their culture has also equipped them with the tools needed for emotional outlets and healing."

**Current and desired ways of measuring success across domains.** A holistic definition of success can be hard to measure. However, the voices of students indicate that NACA is having a powerful impact. Anecdotally, NACA leaders point to alumni who are founders of organizations and Native American student clubs at their colleges; who are active participants in college discussions on Native issues and panels on Native American studies; who come back to NACA and/or to their community to work; and who have improved health (e.g., students managing diabetes diagnoses).

**Academic success.** NACA can also point to data that indicate its model has positive near-term impact on students' academic development:

- NACA students matriculate in postsecondary programs at four to five times the national average for first-generation college students.
- While NACA students come from over 40 elementary schools and come two to four years behind grade level (on average), NACA has demonstrated an ability to ameliorate these gaps. By junior year, students' scores as proficient or advanced on PARCC ELA tests have increased by 50%.

## How NACA Facilitates Comprehensive Student Development

NACA demonstrates integration across multiple domains of Comprehensive Student Development (CSD). In the sections that follow, we explain what NACA’s model looks like. We also clarify how the model fuels CSD.

The following aspects of NACA’s model are critical to its success in facilitating student development:

1. Academic development through culturally relevant pedagogy
2. Focus on multiple facets of student identity
3. Facilitation of strong relationships — within school and beyond.<sup>6</sup>

### 1. Culturally relevant pedagogy in the classroom

<b>Cognitive</b>	<b>Physical</b>	<b>Academic</b>
<b>Mental</b>	<b>Social Emotional</b>	<b>Identity</b>

■ Primary Domain   ■ Secondary Domain

NACA’s innovative approach integrates college-preparatory education with Indigenous philosophies, traditions, and content. As students experience culturally responsive curriculum and instruction, they see their cultures honored and celebrated in the classroom. This approach to what students learn and how they learn it fosters integrated academic, social-emotional, and identity development as well as physical and mental health.

NACA elevates Indigenous curricula and materials. It offers courses with explicit focus on Native content, such as Native literature, Navajo language, Indigenous studies, and Indigenous arts. Common courses such as science integrate Native traditions and beliefs. For example, students learn about plant life while being taught the cultural significance of various plants in Native cultures. Bringing an Indigenous perspective to content inspires teachers to develop cross-curricular lessons and projects that facilitate holistic ways of understanding the world.



NACA is also intentional about instructional practice. Its focus on hands-on learning, service learning, and community events and partnerships ensures that students’ education is engaging and relevant. Its promotion of kinesthetic learning and connection to the land enable healthy minds and bodies.

This results in integrated development across domains. Students’ **academic development** is active, engaging, and cross-curricular. Students enjoy a unique academic focus on Native cultures, beliefs, and histories. Student **identity development** is enabled by culturally responsive pedagogy. Through access to Indigenous education, students can build connection to their Native identities. Student **social-emotional development** is fostered by this approach to education; class content and instructional methods illustrate the relevance of school and facilitate a student’s sense of belonging. **Mental and physical health** are secondary areas of focus in this pedagogical approach; teaching from an Indigenous perspective requires consistent attention to broad-reaching Indigenous definitions of health and wellness. The examples below illustrate how NACA’s culturally responsive pedagogy addresses CSD domains:

- NACA asserts that “to preserve one’s language is to preserve one’s culture.” A variety of Native language classes have been essential components of a rigorous academic experience since the school’s founding. Students at NACA can choose among six languages, representing the diversity of Native communities at the school. While some languages (e.g., Navajo) have a codified set of instructional methods and materials, other languages (e.g., Zuni) are rarely offered as school courses and thus do not often have supporting resources — or even speakers who are trained to teach the language. NACA invests in these classes as a way to build students’ cultural identity and

<sup>[6]</sup> Bronfenbrenner, “Ecological Systems Theory,” in *Six Theories of Child Development: Revised Formulations and Current Issues*.

The NACA model is in alignment with Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory, which posits that children develop and learn within the context of a complex, interconnected set of mechanisms and environmental systems, including the child’s individual identity and sense of self, family, community, and society at large.



pride. It recruits and trains teachers from the community — even if teachers do not have backgrounds as educators; it collaborates with tribal leaders to ensure the class content and instruction is authentic and respectful of cultural norms; it even develops homegrown curricula to support effective language learning. As a result, NACA is able to offer a suite of languages, including some that have never been taught outside of a pueblo or tribe’s boundaries.

- Emphasis on identity via curriculum and instruction extends beyond language classrooms. As one history teacher noted: “Our histories are always taught from a Western perspective. Here, I’m able to write curriculum.” Teachers elevate topics and learning experiences that promote Native identity, and they utilize classroom protocols that reflect Native cultures.
- Across classes and content areas, teachers collaborate to connect learning. Teachers recently had students read about the cultural and agricultural histories of various New Mexico communities, learn about the biology of gardening and the risks of genetically modified foods, and learn about the Native cultural significance of water and corn. Uniting these threads, students applied their learnings across curricula to create, plant, and care for a garden on school grounds. The learning increased in personal significance as students cultivated the garden as a contribution to the NACA school community, ultimately passing along a corn seed to the next class as a sign of that class’s responsibility to steward the community garden.
- NACA’s Native literature courses elevate Native authors. As leaders describe: “Students learn to analyze and question the text they read, build vocabulary knowledge, apply tools for effective paragraph structure, and build test-taking strategies, all while learning about culture and identity.”

- NACA has developed a personal wellness class that focuses on physical, emotional, intellectual, and community wellness. In a recent class, students began with a workout (as is the typical start to the session). They learned about the health benefits of various plants and herbs that hold cultural significance in Native communities. Students walked to the nearby NACA garden, where they identified and picked rosemary. Back in the classroom, students practiced preparing a traditional herbal medicine with the rosemary.
- Out-of-school experiences supplement classroom learning, such as the annual eighth-grade Emerging Leaders Development Trip to Washington, D.C. During the trip, students learn more about the government, the history of government relations (across federal, tribal, and state bodies), and the role of citizens. Students engage in conversations about the role they can play in government processes as young Native leaders.

## 2. Focus on multiple facets of student identity

Cognitive	<b>Physical</b>	<b>Academic</b>
<b>Mental</b>	<b>Social Emotional</b>	<b>Identity</b>

■ Primary Domain   ■ Secondary Domain

Indigenous education at NACA facilitates development of students’ Native identities. NACA does not portray Native identities as static or monolithic, however. Instead, NACA facilitates self-exploration for students. This process of exploring and defining one’s identity fuels identity development and social-emotional development. The various methods NACA employs to support the process also enable physical and mental health as well as cognitive and academic development.

Beyond the classroom, the broader NACA culture actively builds Native identity. Walking through the hallways at NACA, students see leaders and teachers who look like them and who share a cultural background. Students can engage in school traditions and extracurricular activities that expose them to aspects of Native cultures.

This celebration and facilitation of Native identity is starkly contrasted with the experiences of too many Native students. As NACA leaders reflected, formal schooling for Native populations was introduced via the boarding school, through which students were removed from their communities, told that their traditions were bad or wrong, and forced to adopt European-American cultural practices. NACA counteracts the destructive practices of assimilation by actively promoting Native identities and cultures.



Importantly, NACA’s environment is distinct from surface-level attempts at honoring Native culture. As one NACA student shared: “I came from a public elementary started by an Indigenous lady. Each year, we had a day to celebrate Native identity. There was a Native club, but only a few people joined.” Though likely well-intentioned, these efforts fell flat. The former school’s approach relied upon sporadic and superficial nods to Native identity. Native identity at NACA has a more significant focus, backed by the investments of time and money required to create the classes and experiences described above.

Native identity, however, is treated as dynamic and multi-faceted. NACA students are taught to identify and respect diversity within their community. As one student said: “At the reservation schools, there’s only one ideology. Here, there are different people coming together from so many tribes. When you converse with each other, you get to think about school and life differently.”

**Identity development** builds students’ cultural identity, or “the sense of belonging to a cultural community that reaffirms self or personhood for the individual and is created by: the people, their interactions, and the context in which they relate.”<sup>71</sup> The process of building Native identity also facilitates **social-emotional development**. Students experience a sense of belonging, they develop attachment with each other and the school, and they recognize the school community as a rich source of resources and supports. NACA’s focus on Native identity also has a secondary impact on **physical and mental health** as well as **academic development**. NACA’s approach to building Native identity includes traditions that promote student physical and mental health. It also emphasizes learning Native history, language, and art as well as other academic content. The examples below show how students’ Native identities are shaped and honored:

- School traditions reflect Native cultures. A powerful example includes annual visits to the on-campus sweat lodge, where students are invited to engage with the community-oriented spiritual tradition. One alumna said, “The sweat lodge is a great example of the spiritual community element for students and family.”
- NACA Feast Day is described as a “celebration of excellence in Indigenous education, Native languages, traditions and ways of knowing, as well as song, dance, food and other cultural activities.” In support of the school’s focus on physical health, the celebration starts with a community 5K run.
- NACA has organized a “Cultural Service Learning Program” designed to help students learn more about their communities and cultures. In this program, students engage in a range of activities: horno (oven) building and

repair, sheep shearing, wool preparation, weaving, drum making, pow wow instruction, and traditional clothing and regalia creation.

- Students attend field trips to culturally significant locations. Recent trips have included visits to the Gathering of Nations Pow Wow, the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center, and local camping and hiking spots.
- Indigenous Art club in combination with the Hiyupo Alliance creates a space where students learn Indigenous forms of drumming, songs, singing, beading, and dancing.
- NACA has formal partnerships with each of New Mexico’s tribes and pueblos to ensure that its approach to Indigenous education and culture-building is respectful and relevant. For example, when NACA received multiple requests from families interested in learning the Tiwa language, school leaders consulted with the Isleta Department of Education. Leaders arranged for Tiwa to be taught at NACA by teachers from Isleta Pueblo’s existing language program.
- Students, families, staff, and community members may visit the Eagle Room when they experience trauma or stress. This space, described as a “peaceful, culturally-based meditation space,” is offered as a place for “self-reflection, meditation, and prayer honoring Native traditions.”
- One alumna shared the importance of Native culture in her time at college; she now teaches other NACA students to connect to Native culture via art. She said, “NACA set us up to have secure identities. I went to school in Iowa. It was a huge culture shock. Being secure in my identity allowed me to be successful and graduate. Up there, there was nothing for me to connect to in terms of Native culture. Still, I found ways to do different arts like weaving. Now that I teach here, I want students to be proud of the Indigenous art forms and traditional ways of making art. I want students to connect with art as a generational tradition versus just a craft.”

<b>Cognitive</b>	<b>Physical</b>	<b>Academic</b>
<b>Mental</b>	<b>Social Emotional</b>	<b>Identity</b>

■ Primary Domain   ■ Secondary Domain

While uniting students via a shared Native identity, NACA also helps students learn about the multiple facets of their identi-

<sup>71</sup> Jackson, 1999.

ties. Students are encouraged to explore various aspects of their lives — gender, socioeconomic background, religion, race/ethnicity, values, goals, interests. This adds nuance and complexity to students’ understanding of Native identity. As one school leader reflected: “There is not one notion of being Native American. It’s not simplification or ‘We’re all Native, so we’re all the same.’ There are spectrums. Sometimes these things butt up against each other ... and that makes students develop deeper introspection.” Another added, “It’s about helping students figure out identity for themselves.”

This focus promotes students’ **identity development** by helping them to define a personal identity, or “One’s explicit or implicit response to the question ‘who are you?’”<sup>8</sup> It also helps students develop **social-emotional skills** like self-awareness, agency, and self-direction. NACA’s methods for facilitating this identity exploration have benefits on additional CSD domains. For example, the wellness wheel, a self-reflection tool, supports **cognitive development** (among other domains) as students practice executive functions like planning, problem-solving, and goal-setting. Another vehicle for identity exploration, NACA’s gender-specific clubs, proactively address **physical and mental health** (while also attending to other domains). In the classroom, self-directed classroom projects that enable students to explore their interests also fuel **academic development**. The examples below show how NACA supports students to explore the richness and nuance of their identities:

- Via NACA’s tool, the wellness wheel, students self-identify a personal mission statement. They then reflect on and plan for development across each area of the wheel: intellectual/academic, physical, social-emotional, and community/relationships. With this tool, students (and teachers) craft highly personalized, meaningful goals across a range of domains. Students engage with the wellness wheel quarterly to define their own measures of success and to reflect on progress.
- NACA equips students to use the wellness wheel beyond their time at the school. NACA works with junior and senior students to develop a wellness transition plan, aligned to the wellness wheel, designed to support them through their first years in college.
- Out of the classroom, NACA hosts a boys’ club and a girls’ club. Students can join the club that aligns with their gender identity. Within the clubs, students participate in traditional Indigenous activities (e.g., drumming, jingle dress dancing); they also are prompted to explore and define their values, talents, and interests.
- One teacher reflected on the power of NACA’s approach to valuing the many facets of identity in her own life: “Growing up, my identity was ‘Black.’ NACA helped me

understand more about my identity. After seeing the pow wow, I wanted to understand the specifics of my Native heritage.”

- In classes, assignments and prompts are intentionally crafted to be open-ended enough so that students can align learning to their passions. In a recent history class, two students with the same prompt demonstrated a standard in ways that reflected their interests: One student wrote a paper on Lincoln’s role in 19th-century massacres; another student wrote about the evolution of Aztec dancing.

The result is students who feel secure in and proud of their identities. One alum said, “NACA helped me be confident in my own identity, and identity is a complex thing.” One leader reflected, “We’ve gotten feedback from employers who hired NACA alumni. They have a sense of pride that’s internalized and that’s very balanced. There’s a strong sense of respect, humility, and honor.”

### 3. Facilitation of strong relationships — within school and beyond

Cognitive	Physical	Academic
Mental	Social Emotional	Identity

■ Primary Domain   ■ Secondary Domain

NACA identifies relationships as central to Indigenous education. Students are supported to build strong relationships with other students, teachers, families, and the wider community. Bobroff emphasizes the focus of family relationships: “We don’t want to disconnect our students from their families. We actually focus on serving the entire family.” She also describes the importance of relationships with the broader community. She added that there’s a real push for “students to have a commitment to community in any given profession or role or family as they continue on after NACA.”

This focus on relationships promotes students’ **social-emotional development** by facilitating attachment and sense of belonging, both within school and in students’ communities. Students also build social awareness and relationship skills via this focus. Student **identity development** is fostered by relationship-building. As students develop bonds with each other, their families, their pueblo or tribal communities, and Native peoples elsewhere, they develop a broader sense of their identities. Relationships also have an impact on students’ **academic development, cognitive development, and mental health** by creating conditions ripe for students to grow in these areas. The vignettes below illustrate the depth and breadth of relationship-building at NACA:

<sup>8</sup> Vignoles et al., 2011.

- Students build strong relationships among one another — whether it be in a classroom through a group project or via participation in a club together. One student noted the way that students assume leadership and mentorship roles for each other: “The older and younger kids are engaged, and older students help the younger students develop their identity and culture.”
- One student pointed out how her relationships with teachers enabled identity development. She said, “The teachers and administrators are so supportive. They go above and beyond to make relationships with us. I feel that some staff are like family. Indigenous-perspective teaching has a lot to do with that. We touch base with where we come from and who we are.” Another added, “Teachers learn about YOU. They help you fulfill your dreams about college — or whatever else you want to pursue.” Of NACA staff members, 70% identify as Native American, and one student shared the powerful impact of this representativeness: “You have access to an Indigenous role model.<sup>9</sup> You get a distinct look at why they’re doing what they’re doing.” An alumna noted: “NACA is family. Our language and culture bring us closer. I call one teacher ‘lekši,’ which means uncle.”
- Strong student-teacher relationships enable personalized attention to students’ needs. One teacher shared a story of a first-grader new to NACA. The student had an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for challenges with self-regulation. The teacher noted how “NACA created a space for him to engage with his emotions in a totally different way. The student knows that one of the school leaders sings and has drums. The little guy is really drawn to the drums. The leader now sings with him to bring the student’s emotions down.”
- Students credit the focus on cultural identity at NACA with strengthening their community relationships. As one student said: “I came from a school where we didn’t learn [Native culture and language] or were told this isn’t good for you. When you get here, you choose a language. Before I got here, I just knew English. I now can understand people back at home. They are mentors. They helped me find who I am as a Native person.”<sup>10,11</sup>
- Many students and alumni spoke of the power of NACA’s work to bring together students and their families. One shared, “We hold a lot of family nights for younger grades, especially around holidays. All the families come.” Another added, “NACA Feast is a huge big community event where we all have a feast together. We also host concerts like NACA Rock.” Still another said, “My mom really fell in love with the school. She said if she had a school like NACA, she probably would have graduated. She feels comfortable with the staff here. My mom was really excited about me getting here.”
- NACA also facilitates students’ relationships with the broader community. A recent class project required students to study historical policies impacting Native communities and to make connections to present-day conflicts over water rights at Standing Rock, South Dakota. As students studied the policy context and environmental issues at play, they proactively brought personal connections to Standing Rock (via family and friends) as data to the conversation. Teachers channeled student engagement in the topic into a powerful experience in which students prepared traditional medicine for the water protectors at Standing Rock, who sent messages back thanking the students and describing their personal experiences of participating in the fight to protect sacred and sovereign lands.
- Other NACA students may choose to attend the school’s summer trip to a school in New Zealand focused on that region’s Indigenous populations. One student said, “When we went to New Zealand, we got to see similarities between them and us.”
- Closer to home, NACA students are encouraged to explore leadership opportunities in the community via youth organizing — as in the case of a recent cohort of students who have become student-leaders in New Mexico’s stakeholder engagement process around ESSA implementation.
- An alumna said, “NACA focuses on community engagement, not just with students but also with community partners. We met University of New Mexico staff members and got out into the community through our extracurriculars. They really get students to think about contributing to the community like your tribe, New Mexico, or the larger Native community.”

## Conclusions

The Native American Community Academy (NACA) provides a comprehensive whole-child centered approach to learning that is theoretically grounded in critical pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching, with identity development and relationships among children and all community members serving as cohesive threads throughout the model. All learning takes place through projects and/or via anchoring in authentic real world contexts, and children are immersed in learning environments that support the development of native languages and cultural customs, and infuse a sense of collective work, identity and responsibility to self and others.

<sup>[9]</sup> Sherri McGinnis González, “Natural Mentors Help Mold Lives of Teens, Study Says,” Institute for Health Research and Policy, March 1, 2005.

<sup>[10]</sup> Rebecca Covarrubias and Stephanie Fryberg, “The Impact of Self-Relevant Representations on School Belonging for Native American Students,” *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 21, no. 1 (2015): 10–18.

<sup>[11]</sup> Carissa Romero, “What We Know About Belonging from Scientific Research,” Mindset Scholars Network, July 2015.



## What enables this success?

The section that follows summarizes aspects of the NACA school model that enable its success in Comprehensive Student Development. This section is intended to demonstrate the intentionality and comprehensiveness of the school's approach.

### The "What": Mission, Vision, and Definition of Student Success

#### Mission/Vision

- NACA's mission and vision promote a comprehensive definition of success: "Strong leaders who are academically prepared, secure in their identity and healthy."

### The "How": Curriculum and Educational Approach

#### Culturally Responsive Pedagogical Approaches

- Staff and students are consistently engaged in learning experiences that are relevant to their identities and cultures.
- Students are taught to think critically about their history, culture, and identity within the context of broader everyday learning experiences.

#### Community engagement

- Executive Director Kara Bobroff engaged New Mexico Indigenous communities upon founding NACA. The school reflects the communities' identities and values and continues to have constant integration of community members in the school's work.
- Community leaders shape programmatic decisions. This makes learning more authentic and relevant. For example, tribes give permission before a language is taught at NACA.
- Service learning opportunities embed students within Albuquerque and within area Native communities. Via NACA's Cultural Service Learning Program, students engage in various Indigenous activities to extend academic learning, engage in service, build civic engagement, and strengthen communities.

#### Instructional methods

- NACA emphasizes hands-on, experiential, and service learning experiences that make school engaging and relevant. For example, a student making traditional herbal medicines in a wellness class learns about biological properties and cultural significance of plants.

#### Curriculum and materials

- Core content curricula are developed from an Indigenous perspective, often by NACA teachers. Students thus see themselves represented in core classes. A science class studying the plant cycle might take a trip to the NACA garden where they also learn about historical and current Native traditions related to plants and gardening.
- NACA offers specialized classes on Indigenous topics (e.g., Native literature, Native languages, Indigenous history). This allows students to see themselves in their classes; it also gives them tools (e.g., language skills) to engage in their home communities.

#### Student Culture

- NACA culture is family-like; students report strong bonds with each other and with staff. Some students call teachers "Auntie" and "Uncle" (per some Native traditions).
- Shared traditions bring together the school community and enable students to participate in Native cultural practices (Visiting an on-campus sweat lodge; practicing culturally based meditations; hosting the annual NACA Feast).
- NACA invests significant time in its advisory system, in which students build strong relationships with peers and faculty.
- Extracurricular activities deepen students' connection to the school and to Native culture, including Rock'n Nation (a Northern drum group), Eagles Path Mentoring Program (a program that pairs students with adult mentors from First Nations Community Health Source), and Sweet Nations (a student-led girls' group).

#### Assessments and measures

- In addition to academic measures, NACA uses the Wellness Wheel to facilitate goal-setting and self-reflection across multiple domains.

#### Interventions

- NACA attends to students' and families' social-emotional and mental health needs via culturally sensitive, school-based services (e.g., case management, crisis intervention, individual and family counseling, group therapy, and community outreach).

### The “How”: Operational Systems

#### Use of physical space

- NACA has built a culturally based meditation space, The Eagle Room, that is open to students, staff, and other community members.

### The “Who”: Talent

#### Leadership

- NACA is founded and led by Native American leaders who share an identity with the communities and students they serve.
- Leaders have a laser focus on Indigenous education, informed by deep community relationships and partnerships.
- NACA has established a fellowship for future leaders of NACA-inspired schools.

#### Staff

- NACA prioritizes hiring staff who share students’ Native identities; this includes teachers from nontraditional backgrounds (e.g., hiring a member of a local pueblo to teach an Indigenous language, even if he/she is not a traditionally certified teacher).
- Teachers receive significant professional development to learn how to craft rigorous, hands-on activities using the Understanding by Design framework, which includes a backwards planning process. They also have time set aside weekly to collaboratively plan cross-curricular lessons.

Learn more at [chanzuckerberg.com/whole-child](https://chan Zuckerberg.com/whole-child)