

Alyce Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children

December 3, 2020

Virtual Panel by Webinar: The Potential of Tribal Colleges and Universities to Support Native Children's Success

Recording:

<https://hhs.webex.com/recordingservice/sites/hhs/recording/playback/62afaca2127349ad8bf8c82e66cdd9c0>

Password: 3Cxyt6t

Commissioners Present:

Gloria O'Neill, Chair; Dr. Tami DeCoteau, Vice-Chair; Elizabeth Morris, Melody Staebner, Anita Fineday, Don Gray, Dr. Leander R. McDonald, Carlyle Begay, Dr. Dolores Subia BigFoot, and Jesse Delmar.

Detailees, Staff, and Contractors:

Moushumi Beltangady, Department of Health and Human Services
Ronald Lessard, Department of Education
Regina Gilbert, Department of the Interior
Joshua Franks, Cook Inlet Tribal Council
Dr. Miriam Jorgensen, Native Nations Institute of the University of Arizona
Dr. Danielle Hiraldo, Native Nations Institute of the University of Arizona
Mary Beth Jager, Native Nations Institute of the University of Arizona

Witnesses:

Carrie Billy, American Indian Higher Education Consortium
Dr. Sandra Boham, Salish Kootenai College
Kayla Dix, Student at Salish Kootenai College
Dr. Charles "Monty" Roessel, Diné College
Dr. Cynthia Lindquist, Cankdeska Cikana Community College

I. Introductions and Welcome

Chair Gloria O'Neill opened the virtual hearing at 1:00 p.m. ET, 11:00 a.m. AKT. The WebEx chat log can be viewed at Appendix A.

[Transcript]

Chair O'Neill	First off, I would like to welcome everyone. Before we get started, I will have the Commissioners introduce themselves and I will also have our special guests quickly introduce themselves as well by name. Before I do that, I would like to ask Dr. McDonald, would you be willing to begin us this morning by saying a prayer?
Commissioner McDonald	You bet, and thank you for asking. [Prayer in Native language.] We're coming for you and thanksgiving for this day and thanksgiving for the many blessings. We thank you for bringing us together and we thank you for, thank you for having this

important discussion and have our visitors here. We're grateful to have our visit with the tribal colleges and universities. We pray that you put a blessing on each one of them, that you put protection on all of us as we experience this pandemic time, that you help us to be safe, that you help us to be role models for being safe, and that you help us to look out for one another. And that we pray that you bless us in our path, and that you put everything in our way to help us to have a successful project with regard to the Commission on Native Children that we might have good documentation to bring together all the resources that are available to our community to help us to make things better and to protect our children. Thank you for always being there and for this time to, to share and to pray with you. [In Native language] and all my relatives.

Commissioner
Gray

Amen.

Chair O'Neill

And thank you, Dr McDonald. Again, I would like to ask all of you who are not speaking, please have your mics on mute, so that we can manage the background noise, and what I'd like to do now is ask Commissioners who are online, could you please quickly introduce yourself.

Commissioner
Morris

I'm Elizabeth Morris, the Chair of the Christian Alliance for Indian Child Welfare.

Commissioner
Staebner

I'm Melody Staebner, I'm the Indian Education Coordinator for Fargo and West Fargo schools.

Commissioner
Fineday

Hi, Anita Fineday, I'm from the White Earth Tribal Nation in northwest Minnesota. I'm with the Indian Child Welfare team at Casey Family Programs.

Commissioner
Gray

My name is Don Gray and I'm with Ukpeagvik Inupiat Corporation out of Barrow, Alaska.

Commissioner
McDonald

I'm Russ MacDonald, I'm President of the United Tribes Technical College and I'm an enrolled member of the Spirit Lake Nation and a proud descendant of the [Native language] people. I want to just welcome our tribal college representatives for being with us today. And thank you.

Commissioner
Begay

Welcome, good morning. This is Carlyle Begay, member of Navajo Nation from Arizona.

Chair O'Neill

Dr. Bigfoot, are you online as well?

Commissioner
BigFoot

All right, I think I've clicked all the buttons that I can. Good morning, this is Dee BigFoot I'm from the Caddo Nation of Oklahoma. And I'm also affiliated with the Northern Cheyenne Tribe of Montana where my children are enrolled. I am at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center. I run the Indian Country Child Trauma Center, as well as the Suicide Prevention Resource Center. I appreciate

everyone being here and the testimonies of those that we will be hearing, and look forward to more collaboration. Thank you.

Chair O'Neill Any other Commissioners? Hearing none, good morning again, everyone. My name is Gloria O'Neill and I have the privilege of serving as Chair of the Commission. I am of Yupik and Sámi descent, and I've spent most of my life's work, working on behalf of serving our Native community here in Alaska. So, it's great to be with you this morning.

II. Overview of Commission and Goals of Meeting

Chair O'Neill welcomed the three experts and asked for correction to the names.

Chair O'Neill I just want to, there are a lot of people who are online, and I think probably in the interest of time, since it's already 10 after the hour, what I'll do is I'll go ahead and get started with our overview of the Commission and then the goals of today's meeting. And I just want to thank our support that we have in place that represents some of the different agencies and departments within the federal government. We have four plus detailees that are online with us this morning. And we have representation from Department of the Interior, Department of Education, Health and Human Services, and Department of Justice, along with our technical advisors and other guests. So just in the interest of time, I don't mean any disrespect, but I'm going to jump into this. And I want to thank all of you, and especially Mo with the Department of Health and Human Services, who helped organize this today working with Dr. McDonald's committee. The overview of the Commission that, as most of you know, the Alyce Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children, is we've been charged with conducting a comprehensive study on the programs, grants, and supports available for Native children both at government agencies, and really locally on the ground in Native communities. The goal is developing a sustainable system that delivers wraparound services to Native children. We are an 11-member Commission, and our Commission members, as you heard during the introduction, we have expertise in the areas of juvenile justice, social work, education, mental health, physical health, and much more. So, this Commission presents a vital opportunity to identify new strategies for lasting solutions and will provide the much needed expertise, guidance, and cultural wisdom on how best to address the needs of Native children moving forward. And we just want to thank you for joining us today who will be presenting. It, it's the Commission's charge to go out and identify best practices and see what's working locally in our communities, but you truly are the experts that we're working in deep partnership to ensure that we can do our work and do it well.

And so, the goals of today's meeting, there are, there will be two panels. Part one of this session we will hear from Carrie Billy, who's the President and CEO of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, welcome Carrie. We will also hear from Sandra Boham, the President of Salish Kootenai College, and Kayla Dix, a student of Salish Kootenai, right, College, about the contributions of TCUs to the health and well-being of their students and Native children, in general. Part two, I'm going to turn the chair over to Dr. McDonald, who will moderate a panel with three

TCU Presidents. He will ask each of the panelists three questions, giving them about two minutes to respond to each question, and this will be followed by an open opportunity for Commissioners, for all of us, to engage in open questions with each of you. So, during part one, starting with Ms. Billy, what we will do is we will give 10 minutes for presentations, and then five minutes for questions. And I want to be really respectful of our time as the Commissioners, of all of you, so please forgive me in advance of making sure that, that I will keep time and give you a one minute marker so that you can wrap up your comments. Now, if you don't have enough time during your presentation, please know that you can send your written comments to the Commission, and we will review them and include them in our report back to Congress and the Executive Branch. So, with that, I would like to open the floor up to Ms. Carrie Billy. In addition to just being thoughtful of time, we do have full Bios that were sent ahead to Commissioners, so what I would like the speakers to do is introduce yourselves a little bit more deeply about your work, and whatever you'd like us to know. But all the Commissioners have, you know, the full bios in hand. So, Ms. Billy.

III. Carrie Billy, President and CEO, American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC)

Carrie Billy [Introduction in the Navajo language.] I am Carrie Billy, the President and CEO of AIHEC, which is the American Indian Higher Education Consortium for the 37 tribal colleges. Thank you for allowing me to be here today. We like to just start every time we talk by acknowledging the first people of this land, the indigenous people of this land. I think it's so important to think about that and to honor them, and I hope that everything we do this afternoon will honor their lives, their legacy, and their future. I wanted to frame my talk about the tribal colleges around a statement by Chief Wilma Mankiller, "Whoever controls the education of our children controls our future." There are many ways to express the importance of education to our people. But I think, Wilma Mankiller's words really sum it up for us. There is only one group of institutions of higher education controlled by our people: Tribal Colleges and Universities. Tribal colleges are chartered and controlled and created by the people they serve, our tribal nations. No other institutions of higher education have that honor, or that responsibility. Tribal colleges are place-based institutions, born from the land, air, water, by our people in ceremony, prayer, and community. And the ceremonies and prayers that gave them birth is the unbreakable cord that binds them to our people today. We now have 37 institutions operating 75 sites throughout 16 states serving Indian Country. And our students come from 30 different states and we have new tribal colleges emerging all the time, but we're all working together toward this same common vision, strong sovereign nations through excellence in tribal higher education. Tribal colleges do everything they can to achieve that vision, serving tribal colleges in every, every way they can from Native language programs, to water quality, food sustainability programs, helping to develop comprehensive education systems, teaching from an indigenous worldview, and teaching health programs from an indigenous worldview, preparing a future workforce, nurses, teachers, environmental scientists, anything you need to run a nation, tribal colleges are doing. They're also, in addition to preparing a workforce, we have a really exciting initiative on job creation, because if we don't create jobs, we'll never bring our people out of the

generational poverty that we're in now. So that's a really important initiative that we have now underway. Tribal colleges do all of this one student at a time, serving their needs in actually those wraparound services that Gloria mentioned earlier. 35 of our tribal colleges offer associate degrees and certificates, 18 offer baccalaureate degrees, five have master's degree programs. About half of the students at tribal colleges are first generation, females outweigh males, which is typical of Community College place-based institutions, and like our communities, many of our students are financially poor, about 78% of our students receive maximum Pell benefits.

Our students face a lot of challenges, challenges that you've probably heard of previously, so I won't go into depth about them but you know there's just a lack of academic preparation. The needs of our students, the lack of fiscal resources is a serious issue. Chronic long-term generational underfunding of our institutions put stresses on everything our institutions do. And I think someone mentioned that the purpose of the Commission is to develop new strategies, but I'd say, particularly with respect to this, we need equitable strategies before we can even get to new strategies, so looking at equitable funding across the board. Another challenge we face is geography, as you know, very isolated institutions, and then our faculty and administrators are under, particularly right now, a lot of stress, doing multiple tasks much more than other institutions of higher education. Tribal colleges were doing all that in February before COVID, and then when COVID hit, it just exacerbated all the challenges tribal colleges are facing. We know that tribal colleges going into the pandemic had the slowest internet speed, internet access of any institutions of higher education in this country at the highest cost. And they had very old equipment, the average age of equipment, IT equipment at tribal colleges was over eight years; the average for other institutions of higher education, 3.5 years. So, these systemic inequities existed that tribal colleges were trying to deal with and are continuing to try to deal with as we work through the pandemic. And they have risen to the occasion in just really remarkable ways. We, as you know have tremendous loss in our communities, but still tribal colleges are doing everything they can to serve their students, going from almost zero online to 100% online and continuing to serve K-12 students, which they did through a lot of innovative programs this summer, online programs which is pretty exciting. Salish Kootenai College will talk about some of the ways they're working with their K-12 students through their STEM Academy, tutoring centers, child care centers, doing everything they can to provide services, even now to their students and their families. I think this is really significant, tribal colleges like I said going from almost zero to 100% online. In July, Navajo Technical University in New Mexico was ranked the fourth top online college in the entire state. Pretty exciting, that college graduates in the top five degree granting institution for Native students in the entire United States, that's pretty exciting. This year, for this academic year, Bay Mills Community College will celebrate its first entirely online Baccalaureate graduates, and they are an early childhood education, because like I said, tribal colleges are place based institutions, so they serve the needs of their communities. So, this is an exciting, an exciting initiative. Related to that, Head Start, or the Early Childhood Initiative, we just reestablished this year, the Department of Health and Human Services Tribal College-Head Start Partnerships Program, which is funded up \$4 million dollars,

they were able to make six awards. But if we're ever going to build the kind of workforce we need for Head Start, that program needs to be doubled or tripled at least. Several tribal colleges offer immersive child care programs in languages. And then we also have a Native language revitalization initiative underway at tribal colleges, their teaching degrees, which I think President Boham will talk about, but also together collectively, tribal colleges have a reclaiming, we call it "reclaiming the words of our people" collaborative initiative. We're all working on an action plan to develop the best ways and share the best way to teach Native languages, not just at our tribal colleges, but within our K-12 schools as well. One of the major findings, as I mentioned earlier, is the need for sustainable adequate funding and centers where people can go so we don't have to keep reinventing the wheel – strong communities of practice and research. If we're going to do immersion in Native language programs in our K-12 schools, much less our colleges, we have to have the linguists, the Native linguists we need, and the curriculum that goes beyond kindergarten and third grade for our students. That's going to require research, and place-based research is the best. Tribal colleges are also 1994 Land Grant Institutions, which I think is really important from the extension angle because the extension is where they do a lot of the outreach to students in their communities. And, but again, severely underfunded you can see there tribal colleges, 35 get \$8 million compared to what other institutions, state institutions, \$315 to the \$8 million that tribal colleges get. We also have some exciting Student Success Initiatives going on, we're developing a student success framework to kind of identify the best practices that all institutions should have. And one of those is an Indigenous Problem-Based Learning Initiative that tribal colleges developed, where we're taking problem-based learning, which is extremely effective, but teaching it from a way that's relevant to our students and our communities. This is something that could be easily translated to the K-12 schools that I'm really excited about. Tribal colleges have all kinds of equitable practices in addressing the needs of their students, which our presidents will talk about in detail. We're also looking at an accreditation initiative that's focused on culture and language and spirituality because that's really the thing that sets tribal colleges apart, their focus on the student identity and tribal scholarship. One student I think sums it up really well by saying, "Tribal colleges start every week with a pipe and end every week with a drum. That's something you won't get anywhere else." We have a lot of recommendations which hopefully we can talk about over the next hour and a half or so but, again, as I said, funding equity across throughout all of Indian education is critical to, to achieve anything, any kind of success. Addressing infrastructure, Native language programs that are sustainable. If we if we want Native languages to be the core of our institutions and our schools, then it should not be funded by soft money on grants, these have to be mandatory long-term sustainable programs. And we have many other initiatives again just all aimed at achieving that goal of strong sovereign Nations through excellence in tribal higher education.

Chair O'Neill

That was a wonderful presentation, and you're right on time, so thank you. What I'd like to do is open it up to our Commission members. Commission members do you have questions for Ms. Billy? Yes, Commissioner Fineday.

Commissioner Fineday Yes, thank you, Ms. Billy for that presentation. Can you tell me, you, you talk about equitable funding. Can you tell me where your funding comes from? Is it just one place within the federal government? Is that the place that you're asking for the increase to take place?

Carrie Billy Thank you for that question. Yes, because of treaty obligations and trust responsibility, the operating funding for tribal colleges comes primarily from the federal government, from the Department of Interior, and on average, tribal colleges are funded at about \$7,350 per Indian student, \$7,350 per Indian student. They don't get funding for about 15% which are non-Indian. But that's contrasted with Howard University, which is the only other minority serving institution that gets its operating funding from the federal government. Howard University gets its operating funding from the federal government through the Department of Education, because it is on what was formerly federal trust land. Howard is funded, and you know, Indian tribal colleges are still on federal trust land. But, Howard is funded at 30 about \$30,000 per student, undergraduate student, \$30,000 per undergraduate student. Most, the vast majority of tribal colleges get about \$7,350 per Indian student, so that's the kind of inequity, and you know we're not saying Howard doesn't deserve that, we think Howard's funded at that level because they're funded through the Department of Education who knows how much it costs to deliver education.

Commissioner Fineday Thank you for that.

Chair O'Neill Follow up question, Commissioner Gray.

Commissioner Gray Ms. Billy, first let me say how incredibly impressed I am with you and thank you so very much for your testimony today. I'm convinced that if we're going to turn the statistics around, our statistics around, it's going to be based on engagement, education, and economic development, and your presentation really hit all three of those points, so I can't tell you how excited I am at seeing that and how appreciative I am of your presentation. Can you also make sure that the Commission actually gets a copy of your presentation? And, on your, just a small question you, on one of your slides, you talked about leadership, and you, there is a acronym in there for "JAG" leadership, can you explain what that is?

Carrie Billy Yeah. You all ask such great questions! Thank you. Yes, JAG [Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grants Program], I don't actually know what JAG stands for, I was going to look that up but I, President Boham might because the Montana tribal colleges are involved. But, you know, we work with students, our students who come to the colleges, often are not prepared for higher education, so tribal colleges spend a lot of time trying to prepare them. And we think if we start earlier and work on building leadership skills, professional skills, but also the kind of skills you need to succeed in education, early on that, that they'll be, they can perform better and do even more, move more quickly through higher education and get into the workforce. So JAG is a program that is generally operated by states, it's a bipartisan program that's in several states that focuses on building leadership skills within

students, and it's been proven to be, it's operated for about five or six years, we can actually send you information on it, not five or six years, it's operated much longer than that. But it has a tremendously high success rate for high school completion, and you know most of our students drop out in 11th and 12th grade. So if we can keep them in school and get them to graduate, it could really be a game changer. So, they have a 90 or 95% success rate in high school completion. So we think that, you know, even if we could just get the BIE schools, high schools to be involved in that, it could really help. So we've been trying for a while to introduce them to people to take a look at that, and they just haven't been able to make any progress. So, I can send you some brochures and flyers and things, but we're not really involved in it it's just a program that might help high school students and at this point, you know, we need to do everything we can.

Commissioner Gray Thank you so much.

Chair O'Neill We have time for one more question, and Ms. Billy, I do believe you have, we have all the information regarding your presentation?

Carrie Billy It's too big to email but I'll send a link to Moushumi.

Chair O'Neill Thank you very much. Okay, Dr. BigFoot.

Commissioner BigFoot Thank you very much. Again, Ms. Billy, I just really concur with others of us who said that, thank you for your presentation, it's been very helpful. I'm very concerned about the transition from high school into, into college. So, thank you for that information. What about from tribal controlled colleges to other universities for advanced degrees, how is that transition going? And, you know, how do you see students getting support, and what kind of support do they need? Also, if you want to talk a little bit more about how culture and tradition is infused in classrooms, I would be very interested in that. I am an individual who took 14 years to get my undergraduate degree, and understand very much coming from a very small school, what it's like to get into a university or college setting and not know how to study, not know how to manage time, not know how to even dress for class to be, to be seen as a professional. Today, I'm at the University of Oklahoma. I, as I said, I run the Indian Country Child Trauma Center, the National Training Technical Assistance Center. I also run the, or direct the SAMHSA funded Suicide Prevention Resource Center. And so, I'm very much desirous of students and the mentoring, and the establishment of programs, the sustainability that's there for them. Because, if it wasn't for people that were mentoring me and helping me, I wouldn't be here doing the work that I'm doing. So, if you could, you know, help. I would love to see how we can move this along.

Carrie Billy Yeah. Oh, I think all of us could talk for hours on your questions more than in two minute. But, and I think in many ways the Presidents could better respond or at least respond, better respond than me, to your question, so hopefully they'll touch on your question in their remarks. But I will say, for when they transition from tribal college to other tribal colleges other four-year tribal colleges, or to there you know

their regional institutions. Most students do to transfer to either another tribal college or regional or tribal college or a regional institutions, and the colleges work really hard. You know, on one of my slides I had addressing students one, one student at a time. And it really is. It's very labor intensive. Because individuals at tribal colleges often have to work even with the regional institutions to make sure all the student credits will transfer. It's a one-on-one thing. So, providing that kind of hands on support to help transition is really important. We know working in cohort is especially successful. And, and providing that peer mentoring, that you mentioned, but I think that our Presidents can talk more about what strategies they have, and we have some examples of things that have worked in the past. The infusing in the classroom, I think President Boham speaks really well on this. It's, it's you know, it's starting from a worldview that is the student's worldview. And when you have that worldview, your curriculum is naturally designed from that worldview. And so, it's meaningful to them. I'd be happy to send you some examples, specific examples of Tohono O'odham Community College in Arizona, how they completely transformed their science and math courses, their calculus class, their calculus class is all taught from a metaphor of the 'Man in the Maze.' And that fits there, it fits with calculus. And it has been so successful when they switch to that way of teaching, you know, the percentage of students graduate, of completing that that calculus class I think tripled, and it's really amazing, but it really starts with worldview.

Chair O'Neill Thank you Ms. Billy. And I think that is a really nice transition into hearing from President Boham. And before we turn the floor over to you, President Boham, what I would really, I'd like to do is acknowledge two of the Commissioners, that I see have joined the call. And we have Dr. DeCoteau online, and also Commissioner Delmar. Do you want to take a minute to introduce yourselves?

Vice Chair
DeCoteau Hi, this is Dr. DeCoteau. I am from the Mandan Hidatsa Arikara Nation and also a dependent descendant of the Turtle Mountain Chippewa people. I am a licensed clinical psychologist in the state of North Dakota, specializing in treatment of complex trauma and historical trauma. And I do quite a bit of consulting for teaching agencies, community school systems, trauma informed strategies. It's very nice to meet you all and to hear from you today, thank you from your presentation, for your presentations.

Chair O'Neill Thank you, Dr. DeCoteau, Commissioner Delmar.

Commissioner
Delmar Oh yes. Thank you Chair, I am Jesse Delmar, I am member of the Navajo Nation, talking to you from Window Rock Arizona at the moment, and longtime member of many, let me just say, law enforcement. I've been involved with criminal justice, with Indian country for a long time, and I just want to say that in short. Good morning. Thank you.

IV. Sandra Boham, President, Salish Kootenai College

Chair O'Neill President Boham, I'll turn the floor over to you.

Dr. Sandra
Boham

Thank you. I'm really happy to be here with you all today. [Native language.] I'm here in the beautiful homeland of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, Flathead Indian Reservation. I won't go through a whole lot of the demographic data that Carrie Billy shared with you in her presentation. But I want to let you know that Salish Kootenai College, like many of the other tribal colleges, came about in in something of an activist way. It was a, it was an attempt to address our educational needs from our worldview to meet our needs in this, in our communities. In 40 years, we have managed to make a huge impact in this community. When I was a young person going to high school here, I'm an enrolled member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, there virtually were no tribal members managing our forests, and in our health departments, and in our education systems. They were all people from everywhere else. Today, that is not the case, almost all of our positions are operated by people who have degrees from mostly Salish Kootenai College. We are a four-year degree granting institution and so we do want to keep our students through their baccalaureate degree. And we have really focused on the transition points to higher education at the masters and doctoral levels. And we've been participating in a number of initiatives to change academia to be better suited to meet our students. And so, we've had a lot of partnership work with graduate schools and graduate departments to change and open their minds to the ways that our students are going to be more successful in those programs. So just a few things that you need to know about us, we have always had the perspective that because we are place-based, we serve the needs of our community, we also have a lot of students here from all over the country because we do have residential housing. But we've known since day one that we needed to bridge that K-12 system to our college. When we first started, it was through GED, and then as we grew, we reached out into early childhood education and then into the high schools so that we didn't reach students at the point where they were trying to do GED and then join college, we wanted to make sure that we could impact their entire path.

So, we have an Early Learning Center, we've had it since we were founded it is in the STARS, rated STAR system. We have a STEM Academy, which we've had for about three years now. And what we did there was, we reached out to the high schools, and recruited students who would do their core classes during the day at their high school and then transition to the college to take STEM classes on our campus in the afternoons. And in large part, it was because students would come to the college with this complete and utter belief that they were incapable of doing math and science. And we knew that they were far more capable than they believed. And so, we thought if we can get them during high school and show them that math and science can be exciting, and they're more than capable of doing it, that we would have a better opportunity to educate those students, and it has been very successful. We have a full slate of education programs here: we do P-3, elementary and secondary teaching certificates. We are part of that Head Start partnership, so we are doing work with our Head Start programs here, and then we have partnered with another tribal college to deliver programming to them. We have the only four-year accredited social work program of all the tribal colleges. And two new things that we've brought in is what we call SLED, which is our Salish Language Teacher Education Program. So, it's in a in a partnership with our culture

committee. So students get, they become essentially apprentices in the language and they get their certification in the language. And we get them the teaching certifications, so that they're more successful going into the K-12 system. Because one of the big arguments in the K-12 system with our language teachers was, they may know the language but they're not educators and they don't have lesson planning and classroom management and assessment and those kinds of things, so now they do.

And then the other program that we started was the Salish [Native language] Cultural Leadership Program, which is intended to bolster and build and create more knowledge and cultural barriers in our community, because we are at a critical point of meeting them, and they are essentially going to be apprenticed into our songs and our ceremonies. But then there will be another level of it, which will be open to everyone, to learn about our history and culture and some of our less guarded cultural information. This is really important because, as Carrie said earlier, if you come to Salish Kootenai College to get a degree in natural resources, forestry, for example, you're not just going to get a degree in how to manage timber and how to thin out the grounds and manage it for the economic resource. We manage our timber, we manage our water, and our wildlife for the cultural resource as well. And so, when students leave here in those programs, it's not just understanding the resource, it's understanding the greater fit that those particular things have in our community, and why they're so important. And that goes along with everything that we do. Some of the, so I do have some experience in K-12 as well, and one of the things that is recently being researched, because what we came up against all the time was, where's the research to prove what you're saying is going to be beneficial, because we would say, you know, having a strong cultural identity, being grounded in your traditions, impacts in a very positive way that student's identity, their persistence, their well-being emotionally and physically, and that it has a direct impact on how successful they will be in achieving the goals that they set for themselves. But that tended to not be a very welcomed position in K-12 schools or in, even at the university level. But what we know, and there is now research to show that the stronger identity that our students have, and the more they know about who they are, the stronger they are to accomplish their goals, the more resilient they are to meet the challenges that come before them. And so, we know that, we've implemented that program with our tribal probation and parole office, where we went from a 90% recidivism rate to a 30% recidivism rate, just by connecting people with their culture and language and identity. We have challenges with infrastructure, we desperately need to continue to build the pool of Native faculty. It's a huge request to get someone to go on to a four-year degree or a doctoral degree, spend the money that it costs to get that, knowing when you come home to work in tribal education at the colleges, you're not going to make big money. This is a mission of passion, it is not a mission of getting rich. And so, creating those faculty, getting them through high school, getting them through college, getting them through graduate school and recruiting them back home, has been one of our primary initiatives. And we still have a lot of work to do in that area. I think one of the best practices that we have had over this past couple of years has been with our culture committees. Because through our culture committees, we have been able to really strengthen our language and cultural

studies, which has given us a lot more access to information, a lot more access to the elders, and by integrating this into the teaching that we're giving new teachers, they are getting better reception in our K-12 school districts.

If there was anything that I could add to what Carrie added about what the Commission could do to help us with our work, I would say if there is any way to create space for indigenous education models in our K-12 system where people could come to understand that assessments not a straight line when it comes to Native education. And I am not saying that we do not have high standards, we do. And we have a lot of students that go straight from SKC, to masters and doctoral programs and even to medical school. So, we have a high standard. But we also know that those supports, helping students when they're sick right now with COVID, getting them support, we have tripled our mental health services, we know that's critical. We have created tutoring centers for staff and faculty who are now trying to parent their children, and be homeschoolers, and teach. And so we've we've set up opportunities. for that. We've partnered with the Boys and Girls Club to make additional space available, we've lengthened or tried to lengthen the day of our childcare center, so that students can get that for in the evening when maybe that's the only time that they have it because our students are also trying to be students, and parents, and homeschool teachers. So, there are so many good things happening and tribal education in our tribal colleges. And not too long ago, someone one time said to me, you know, SKC is the best kept secret in Montana. And that can be said for many of our tribal colleges, and that is not our goal. But we're so busy with the work that sometimes we don't let people know very well, the amazing things that are happening [inaudible] at the tribal colleges. So, thank you for your time this morning. And if you have any questions, I'll be happy to answer.

Chair O'Neill Thank you so much, President Boham. I'd like to open it up for a few minutes of questions from Commissioners.

Commissioner
Morris This is Elizabeth Morris, I have a few questions.

Chair O'Neill Yes, Commissioner Morris.

Commissioner
Morris Thank you. For the graduation rate from Salish Kootenai College, I was wondering what your graduation rates are. And if there's a difference in the graduation rates from students that are enrolled members of the college, and students that are not, I mean, enrolled members of the tribe, and students that are not enrolled members of the tribes, because I know that there's several non-tribal persons going to the college as well. So, I wonder if you have a breakdown on that. The other thing I wanted to know was, where your high school students primarily come from, if they come from the public schools or from the tribal schools, and if they are prepared when they come? What percentages need remedial English and math? And then also, I was wondering what's your crime rate statistic, whether the county rates agree with that statistic or whether you could send us some proof of the drop in crime rate? Thank you. Those are the important questions I'd like answered.

Dr. Sandra Boham Okay, so we get our students, our high school students, there are seven school districts on the reservation and one BIE contract school, and we get students from all of them. We, the BIE school sits right on our northern boundary, and we have been partners with them from the day they, we wrote the grant that got their school built. So, we have had a very, very long relationship with them and their students take classes, dual enrollment, concurrent enrollment, kind of a loop line back and forth. We also have pathways in most of our, well in all of our school districts, public school districts on the reservation. Our graduation rates between our tribal students and our non-tribal students, I believe the last that I saw were not, our tribal students did better actually, than most of our non-tribal students. A lot of our non-tribal students are in our community, they live here, they've gone to the same high schools, they've had the same preparation. As far as students coming to our college prepared from their high schools, that's always an issue. And we always end up doing remediation with math and English, I think, although we have switched models to, it's a, it's a partnership that we got into as part of a program called Project Success and we are doing Carnegie Path Math, Math Pathways, and our students are doing much better and avoiding the multiple remedial courses in there, and they're put into the degree program a lot faster. So, there's always remediation, particularly when you get students that move between schools, if they miss particular things at the time they move, but we have always said that we would meet students where they are, and that's what we do. Because we are open admission, and if students need to get up to college level math and English, we're going to provide that. Our crime statistics, I did not look at the [inaudible] report before we visited, so I am not sure what you're speaking about there, but I will tell you that we kind of have a bubble on campus that is different from the rest of the community. So, our students came to us and we don't, we want zero tolerance for alcohol, drugs, and domestic violence. And so, we have for the past few years, implemented that. And we have a lot of resources lined up to help students who encounter problems with alcohol drinking, but, but we really are cognizant that a lot of our students in our housing community and in our student community are, you know, they're trying to change their life. And so when things happen it affects everyone, that community trauma, and so I think if, you know, if our crime statistics are smaller than our county, I would say that, probably because we have 24-7 security, we have a lot of supports available to help our students choose healthy lifestyles, and then we will not have those kinds of things on, on our campuses, it's just not going to happen.

Commissioner Morris Okay, thank you. And what was the graduation rate there at the college?

Dr. Sandra Boham Yeah, I just looked at that yesterday. And it's really interesting, because the Department of Ed just went through a new way of calculating how they're doing graduation rates, and I haven't really had a good chance to figure out what the big change is. But I will tell you last year, we were at about 68%, and this year after they recalculated using data, we're at 44.

Commissioner
Morris

Okay, thank you.

Chair O’Neill

Thank you, President Boham. And I would really love your written information so that we could share it with the Commissioners as well. I wish we had an entire hour where we, we could listen to each one of our panelists and ask questions. But in the interest of time, we're going to have to move to our next presenter. We will have some time after round two of our panelists this morning, about 25 minutes. So, I hope that you can stay online and continue to join the conversation. But thank you for all that you're doing working with our young people. I just have a really quick yes or no question before we move to our next presenter. And that is, do Native colleges have the same level of Title IX requirements as other public universities?

Dr. Sandra
Boham

Yes.

Chair O’Neill

Okay. Great. Thank you.

V. Student, Kayla Dix of Salish Kootenai College

Chair O’Neill

Now, I would like to reintroduce our student from Salish Kootenai, Ms. Kayla Dix. Kayla.

Kayla Dix

[Introduction in Native language.] Good morning, everybody. I am a Bitterroot Salish and I attend SKC and I'm in my bachelor's year in the preschool through third grade education program. I was, immediately when I got the email asking if I could testify on behalf of SKC, I said yes, because SKC has done so much personally for me and my family. My mother and my stepfather, they worked at SKC for a really long time. And unfortunately, when I went there, they, they didn't work there anymore. But, I guess, I started out in the nursing program. And while I was in the first year of my nursing program, I was also taking a Salish class, basic one and at the time the teacher was talking about language revitalization and what it what it does for our people and why it was so important. And it was actually at that point that I left SKC to join a Salish language apprentice program through the cultural committee. And it was there that I found my passion for our language, and our cultural, and our culture, and what it does and can do for the education of our young people. And so, after I finished my apprentice program, I started working at a Head Start on our tribe, and it was our first attempt at immersion, Salish immersion, it was called [spoken in Native language.]. And, it's like “growing words”. So, through the Head Start program, they allowed me to keep taking classes at the college. And, and that's when I was approached by Amy Burland, about a program, the American Indian Fellowship Women's Leadership Program with American Indian College Funds. And so, I immediately said yes, and this program is now, Kathie Maiers is my mentor in the program, she is faculty at SKC in the education department. And so through this program, it's set up from Native women, and it teaches you leadership roles, it teaches you how to apply for bigger universities and the graduate programs. Last November, I had the opportunity to go to Harvard for the Alumni of Color Conference. And it just really opened my eyes to the impact that I can make

on my community by getting my education. There was also lots of Diné that had gone to Harvard and had spoke of what they're doing in their communities, and it was very inspirational. But other scholarships, they have this Sweet Grass Stipend, and that is a monthly stipend that we get in, that in, when we graduate, we have to serve a school with majority population of Native American students. So, we're turning around and we're graduating, and then we're helping out our community. Also what I really like about SKC, it's very cultural based, our teaching practices are, they're, they're very cultural based. But the eight essential understandings of the Native Americans is incorporated into every lesson plan that we do. All the lessons that they teach us in all of our classes. The SKC Education Department has an outstanding faculty, I can't say any more on how great they have been to all of their students in helping us to learn and shape and go out into our communities to help these students. And I guess, kind of going back to learning the language and the culture, it was, I've always had my culture, but I've never had my language. So, having those language classes at SKC helped me in my own identity, on my own personal journey to discovering who I am, how do I fit in this community, how can I contribute back to the community. And also through this fellowship program I'm, is I have to, it's a project that I have to, I was specifically chosen because I'm in early education, and I'm a language learner. And so, my projects are, how do I give back to my community through the language or culture. And so, SKC has been very supportive in holding coyote stories, our traditional oral stories, they have this class where you, you incorporate these stories and then you make animations and we have cultural nights and then everybody gets to come and we can make drums and tell stories or make yaya dolls. And that's right all on campus for everybody's utilization. There's so much to say good about SKC, I feel like I'm just bouncing all over the place. But I'm so excited. And if you have any questions, I will answer them.

Chair O'Neill Thank you so much, Ms. Dix. I would like to open it up to the Commissioners for questions.

Commissioner Gray Madam Chair.

Chair O'Neill Commissioner Gray.

Commissioner Gray Ms. Dix, thank you so very much for your testimony. I am, I am really inspired by being able to hear your, your passion and, and I truly believe that your passion will take you far in life and would just convey that, to never lose that that sense of passion that you currently have. And I just really appreciate your testimony today. So, thank you.

Kayla Dix Thank you, and [spoken in Native language.]

Commissioner Fineday Madam Chair.

Chair O'Neill Yes, Commissioner Fineday.

Commissioner Fineday	Thank you. I just want to echo what Commissioner Gray said. Kayla, I just want to thank you so much for coming forward and providing this testimony. It's so meaningful for us to hear these really positive stories from students in tribal colleges. Sometimes I believe that tribal colleges get a bad rap. And so, your story really is so empowering. And it just shows so much promise. So, thank you so much for coming and talking to us today.
Kayla Dix	Yes, thank you. I think that there's a lot of opportunities at tribal colleges if students themselves are willing to reach out, also.
Chair O'Neill	Other comments or questions for Ms. Dix.
Commissioner Staebner	This is Commissioner Melody Staebner. I just want to say thank you too, for sharing your story. I think those words echo a lot of what I say in trying to advocate for our Native American programs and students within our school district, being a coordinator for Indian education, just hearing again, how important it is to incorporate culture and language, you know, into our daily lessons. And, you know, the kids can see themselves within our curriculum and how it builds confidence and helps them to feel like they can contribute, you know, back to their Native American community and our own communities. So, thank you again just for sharing. It was very encouraging for me to hear that again today.
Chair O'Neill	Other questions or comments? Again, Ms. Dix, thank you so much for your testimony. The, the reason why we're doing the work that we're doing is because of you, and all of our young people. And so, we really appreciate you coming forward. It's really our inspiration. And it shines the light forward. As we look to, as I, I always like to describe it as our tribal elder here in Alaska describes it, as uncovering the moss from the pathway, and what we truly need to focus our time and attention on, so we really appreciate you sharing your story. And before I transition to the next panel, I'd just like to give Dr. McDonald the, the last closing comments here. Dr. McDonald.
Commissioner McDonald	Am I on?
Chair O'Neill	We can hear you.
Commissioner McDonald	I'm having a little bit of technical difficulties on my side. How's that?
Chair O'Neill	Good.
Commissioner McDonald	Yeah. Well, I couldn't hear you. I could hear, I heard all the testimonies. I appreciate that. And I really appreciate Ms. Dix for sharing her insights into Salish Kootenai College, as well as President Boham and the work that's happening there. We just want to, really appreciate you coming and sharing, and giving us the opportunity to hear what's happening there. I think a lot of times, we, you know, we hear our

fellow Presidents share, but that doesn't always, we don't always get to hear that personal insights from those that we serve. So, you being here with us today really, I think this gives us a great picture of what's happening over there. And I've been to your campus, and I think that it's a beautiful campus, and I can see the good work that's happening there. I also want to just mention, CEO Billy, to say Yá'át'ééh and thank you for coming in giving us a good oversight of AIHEC and all the tribal college work and for helping to set the foundation for the testimonies that are being provided today.

Chair O'Neill Thank you, Dr. McDonald. Well with that, why don't we take a five-minute pause. And in five minutes, I will turn it over to you, Dr. McDonald.

Commissioner McDonald Thanks.

[BREAK]

VI. Facilitated Conversation with:

Dr. Sandra Boham, President, Salish Kootenai College

Dr. Charles "Monty" Roessel, President of Diné College

Dr. Cynthia Lindquist, President of Cankdeska Cikana Community College

Commissioner McDonald All right, we'll call everybody back to order. Let's get started here in a second for part two. We want, I want to start off by thanking President Roessel, Lindquist, and, Boham for being with us, and being, for participating in this part of the hearing. Since this is only one of several virtual hearings that we've had, so we're starting together, come together nicely as we continue to experience and move forward with this work. I think it's going well and we really appreciate the detailees for providing that support for us. We've provided a, we have a few questions for you today. And then we'll go ahead and get started. And then, and I see, I see President Lindquist's video was on, so we'll start out with you. And we'll ask one question at a time and we'll ask the same question to all three of you. And then we'll move on to the next question. Just to have some order to this and then we can, and then the Commissioners can engage by question. So, Dr. Lindquist, what's one creative idea you've had to support your students and community that you'd implement if you had the opportunity and resources?

Dr. Cynthia Lindquist Oh, it's a great question. And it's like, oh, show me the money, right. What we all would do if we could win the Powerball, you know, and not have any strings attached. But we all, I think we all realize that money is just not the solution. And yet, that is the essence of, I think, our needs for the tribal colleges and communities, the students we serve, the families we serve. It's about resources and equity in those resources, as Ms. Billy pointed out for us. I'd like to just say, to start off, thank you all very much to the Commissioners. I really am impressed by the body and I'm very, very pleased and happy with your selection to be on the Commission for Native Children. And I don't envy you. But I will do all, and I know all the tribal college presidents and AIHEC, we will do all we can to help you in the charge you have about doing this comprehensive study. And how do we make

things better? How do we improve and fix things? I also want to note that the bio that was sent out for me, I'm not sure where it came from, but it's a very old and dated bio. And the main thing I want to point out is David Yarlott, President of Little Bighorn College, has been the chair of AIHEC for many years, for several years and we actually just reaffirmed his chairmanship of the board for the American Indian Higher Ed Consortium just a couple of months back. So, and I'm sure this bio that you have for me is very old. But I have been President of Cankdeska Cikana Community College since 2003. I was recruited to come home, this was my home community, to be the President. I love my work. It's rewarding work, but it's challenging work. And as Carrie Billy pointed out to you all, we're greatly underfunded. And yet, even though we don't have adequate resources and funding, we're extremely resourceful. And I think that's one of the key characteristics of being Native, being indigenous, and who we are and how we live and how we've survived. And even in the context of historical trauma that, there's, there's just tremendous resiliency of our people, and it is rooted in culture and who we are, and that is what the tribal colleges are about. I submitted written testimony for the three questions. And my response to this initial question about what I would do, my dream, that I've mentioned to a few people is that, I would love to start a prep school for high school juniors and seniors, that includes Cankdeska, we're at the associate level for my college, the first two-years of college. And for me, it would be a preparatory program, very rigid, very elite, you know, with a waiting list. But the key in that, it would be housing. they'd all be required to be on campus and in the housing. They would have to wear uniforms. They would have mentors, tutors, and a regimented curriculum for getting the high school degree, getting into the college and finishing the first two-years of college, that's transferring out for the terminal degree. My college was not one of the original six like Diné college being our first tribal colleges University in this country, but Cankdeska, formerly known as Little Hope Community College, has been around since the inception since the conception of tribal colleges and universities. And that grounding of tribal control is very much here in all the institutions in what we do in them. But my little college aspires to be like SK, to be like Diné, to be like Oglala Lakota College and someday I'm hoping to have a bachelor's program and a master's program. But in the meantime, we do our best to help our students transfer out. I'm really, really privileged and honor to tell you all that President McDonald is a graduate of Cankdeska Cikana Community College. Yay! And our success stories are everywhere in Indian Country and that, in our work is about being family orientated, community orientated in the services we do.

My college runs my tribe's Head Start program. And I hate to say this, but we just lost our director, Charlie Morin. Some of you might know in other capacities as an educator, he is the former director and superintendent for the Wahpeton Indian School, and Charlie was only 61. And he passed away due to COVID. And we're struggling in keeping Head Start open and delivering a service, but how do you do online delivery of child development services to zero to four-year olds? It's not the same as delivery to a college student in that and our communities all have the same issues relative to connectivity, to access, quality of equipment, and that. And so, the issue of money and finances plays into this thing about what we do and how we do and how do we do this work. And so, if we could double our funding, triple our

funding. And then the charge you all have about wraparound services. So how do I better link my Head Start services, the services we do at K-12 school system for preparatory work, the STEM academies, and actually I run a literacy academy for the high school students also, because of that unpreparedness as they come to be college students. And then being a college student. And so, then it's economics, it's child care, it's preparedness. And the bottom line comes down to confidence also. So I wish I could have a health center at my college, and especially now given the pandemic with the stress and anxiety, we need mental health, social workers, mental health psychologists and psychiatrists, and I actually, through some of my CARES Act funding, I just hired a friend and colleague from the University of North Dakota, and the InPsych problem over there, Indians into Psychology. Dr McDonald, Douglas McDonald, who is a licensed psychologist, I've hired him through CARES Act money to make available to my staff, my faculty instructors, and my students and my Head Start families, mental health services, mental health counseling. It's all tele-medicine in that. But my fear as a President is okay, I've got some CARES Act money right now so I've got a little bit of flexibility and leeway so I can do it right now, but what's going to happen after? And when my CARES Act money is gone because I don't have the money, the resources within my institution to sustain that, and to carry it on. So how do we do this better? And it really is about the infusion of resources to do that. I'm going to stop there because I'm not sure if I really answered the question, but my dream is this preparatory program for high school juniors and seniors and to some extent we do some of that. But ideally, if I could do that and have housing to do that, which brings up a whole other realm of issues and questions if you have housing, as my colleagues do have, but I would welcome those challenges and issues because again we have homelessness in this community as a part of our communities, both at the high school level and at the college level, and that. But thank you so much for the opportunity. Good luck in your work, and we will help you in all that we can.

Commissioner McDonald Let's go to President Roessel, next. The question, I'll repeat the question so, "what's one creative idea that you've had to support your students and community that you'd implement if you had the opportunity and resources?"

Dr. Monty Roessel All right. First of all, I'd like to thank the Chair and the Commissioners and the staff as well as my fellow colleagues at tribal colleges. My name is Monty Roessel. I'm the President of Diné College, [Navajo language]. And this is my third year at Diné College. And so, I'll jump right into it because I know it's better to have more questions asked and answered than just one. So, what would I do, I would do, and I would expand what we're doing now. Because of COVID, one of the challenges that every, every community in this country is facing is access. It's either access to broadband, or its access to teachers, or its access to tutors, or its access to the buildings. We need to come together and go beyond saying this is my territory. I have submitted written testimony that goes into more detail, but one of the challenges that we're faced here at Navajo is that everybody is siloed. So, you have public schools are saying this is my school, stay out. We have BIE school saying this is my school, stay out. You have Diné College saying this is my university, my college, you know, stay out. We need to break that down, because what we have seen in COVID-19, is that what has happened is, when we say to a student, you

need to go home, and they live on a mesa, and they live 15 miles away on a dirt road, and how are they then going to continue their education? They may have a school, a BIE, a tribal grant school, a public school just across the street. But if they're not enrolled in that college, if they're not enrolled in that elementary school, if they're not enrolled in it, they can't trespass on that property. And who's hurting? The child is hurting, one, but also the community is hurting and to a larger extent the nation, the tribal nation is hurting. So, what we've done is we've created micro-campuses. And I would expand this. We've created two micro-campuses right now. Our, our college, Diné college, the first tribal college in the country, we have six campuses throughout New Mexico and Arizona, our main campus is in Arizona. We just are in the process of opening up a micro-campus in Utah. We're also opening up another micro-campus in New Mexico, and we signed an MOU with BIE to be in their high schools that they operate. So, what we're trying to do is to say, rather than say, oh, if I had one thing I could do, because that doesn't help anybody. It's, what can you do right now today to fix a problem? And so we're looking at this other way to say, we're creating a micro-campus in that micro-campus the elementary students can come, our students can come, a student that may be going to school at University of North Dakota that is now home, he can go to that site and they all can have access to broadband, they all can have access to classes. And then our students, say in the teacher ed program that we have, can provide tutoring to those K-12 students. We're in the process of starting this right now, we've already entered into MOUs, we created the with our CARES Act funding the broadband that's needed, the renovations that's needed. And so, we're in that process right now so what I would do is to say, if I had a dream, is to expand this. If you add the six campuses we have, and the remaining four micro-campuses we're creating, that's only 10 for a 25,000 square mile reservation. That's not enough. We need to be able to have more. And I think if we were to start building partnerships between schools, the universities. And one of the things that we're doing is that we're actually working with U of A, University of Arizona, to have a joint micro-campus together. So, our students and all students could work together, working with the K-12 system also. So that's what I would try to do is to provide that access, because nobody's really talking about in Indian Country. Prior to my me being in this position, I was the Director of the Bureau of Indian Education, our K-12 students are two to three years behind when they graduate. With this COVID-19, they're adding another year or so to that. How are you going to make up four years? We need to start looking at this in a comprehensive way, and looking at summer school as a way to, then provide linkages with our tribal colleges because we have the students, we have the energy. And I think that is something that I would then try to, you know, scale up. So, I appreciate the opportunity to answer the question.

Commissioner
McDonald

Thank you, sir. President Boham, anything to add.

Dr. Sandra
Boham

Thank you, Dr McDonald. Briefly, I totally agree with everything that my two colleagues have said, I do want to say one thing on our reservation, and every reservation community is unique, you all know this, but in, on the Flathead reservation, we were a checkerboarded reservation. And so, we have, our tribal

members, the Confederate Salish Kootenai Tribal members, are a minority on our own reservation. But we have a lot of other Indian people that live here too. And then we have the non-Native community. And I wish I could tell you that, having been in this situation over the however many, 100 years we've had this, that we would have progressed much farther than we have. And it's a very uncomfortable topic, but I'm going to just tell you that some of what we encounter has to deal with systemic racism on our reservation. And we, through COVID, with our K-12 school districts have really been able to make some progress because the silos are not working for them either. And so, we were able to partner with them to offer, because they were saying the same thing that Dr. Roessel was saying, you can't have access to our broadband because you're not a student. And then if they did allow it, it was so locked down you couldn't do your schoolwork on it. So, we partnered with different communities in our, in our hard to serve areas and internet is expensive. And so what we managed to do was put up hotspots, not ideal, but with, it does allow someone with a laptop to sit in a parking lot in a car or in a nearby house or whatever to capture the internet waves and be able to use them and we have left them open to anyone. And you know, it's been remarkably good because you know you always get the, well what if this and what if that, particularly around dangerous sites but we haven't had a whole lot of that, we do have some controls. But this whole valley that we're in, felt the crunch of COVID because we did not on a 80 mile [inaudible] have the bandwidth to do public school education. All of the healthcare and schools and college and governmental functions online, our systems weren't big enough to do that. And so, there's been a lot of work here in this valley, the tribe has put a lot of money with their COVID money into that infrastructure, which has benefited everyone. We'll see what happens when this is all over. Whether we continue to work together well or whether we revert to our respective corners. But the college has always been very welcoming and always willing to look at how we can build those bridges in our community. That's one of our tasks. So, so we take it seriously. If I could build anything, not quite along the line that Dr. Lindquist said, but I believe that if we are truly going to impact the language and culture that we need to do in our communities and close the gaps in education, I believe that we need to have fully funded, I call them lab schools with language and culture and STEAM: science, technology, engineering and art, and math, so that we could truly create an educational platform and program that meets the needs of our students. I had about eight years where I was a coordinator of Indian education in a K-12 system, and the constant drumming that I heard from teachers and [inaudible] administrators were, these students and their parents just don't care about education, that's why they're not graduating. So, I just aggregated a whole bunch of data and I showed them our students would come back for four-years trying to finish their freshman year of high school, and then they finally finished their freshman year after spending three-years doing that. And then they would be a junior and then they would do the same thing and then they would age out. And I, and I asked them, I said, does this really show that they don't care? I don't believe that's what that shows. I believe that our students care about their education. They see this as a path, out of, or to their dreams. And we are not meeting them very well. And some of the methods that have been implemented to serve Indian students in the K-12 system, but really in tribal colleges, shows that if we can meet

the needs of our students in the way that we know that our students [inaudible], their lives change, their demographic data change. [Inaudible] it changes from this whole, “just because they don't have a degree, doesn't have this, doesn't have that” to the last column. And I think if I can reach out with silver wand, that's what I would do. And that's a fundamental upheaval, I know that, but that's what I would do.

Commissioner McDonald Well you segue it nicely into the next question and I know that we have about, we have, we're down to about seven minutes left. And so, there's a couple of the remaining questions here is that we just want to hear quickly what you've been doing in regard in regard to language and culture with your community programs. But we need to keep it short. President Boham, do you want to start it?

Dr. Sandra Boham I think I'm going to be very short because I just talked at length about it earlier, one is our Salish language teacher education program. The other is our Salish [Native language] language and leadership, I mean cultural leadership program that we put together. And then the ongoing infusion of culture and identity into our curriculum of our, of our courses on campus. And the partnerships that we've built with our cultural community to make those happen.

Commissioner McDonald Thank you, President Lindquist.

Dr. Cynthia Lindquist Likewise, I think maybe all the TCUs we have similar programming relative to culture, language, and the revitalization of our respective culture and languages. My concern at this moment in time is the loss of the elders, and for my community and I'm sure for all our communities, that loss has been significant. And those are the knowledge keepers, those are the fluent speakers. But I, I started this fall semester of 2020 with some younger people who are fluent speakers also and who grasp the technology side of it and kind of similar to what President Roessel had in his testimony, his written testimony, that's what I'm hoping we're going to be doing more of, is providing different opportunities via different methods, relative to the teaching and learning of Dakota. We also, from my community, we've also got a great partnership with four other tribal colleges for the perpetuation of Dakota culture and language, and I'm hoping to get that revitalized also because I'm going to need that relative to teaching my students but also the community in general. And then how do I bring that into the Head Start programming and, and again getting the younger people educated to have those credentials is the key for this and for me and my community at this juncture.

Commissioner McDonald President Roessel.

Dr. Monty Roessel All right. I'll list five things. One is we have a Bachelor of Arts degree in Navajo language, that's one, that it's expanded to actually work in schools. We are in the process of developing an online Navajo language program. So, I have nephews that live in Bethesda, or used to live in Bethesda, they could log on, enter their social their, their census number and have it free for everybody, so it would be something

that everybody would at least be able to not become fluent, but have exposure to their language, no matter where they live. Three, we're in the process of finalizing a BIE language study for all the BIE schools within Navajo. We've gone out and surveyed students and then provide what kind of training they need in terms of specifics. Four, as part of the Yazzie Martinez settlement, kind of, we received a grant that we are training New Mexico teachers in the northwest corner of New Mexico to one, have culturally relevant, I think it's one thing not just to say language that, you need to also provide the cultural aspect to that. And so, giving training for teachers, and really, then I say that and then I pivot now 180 degrees and that is, we have to start looking at that, for our, our tribe Navajo language, not just as intertwined and I know this is blasphemy for a lot of people, that trying to teach language not as culture, but language as language because if we continue just to debate that we're losing people every day that know the language, so we have to do something radical to change the trajectory that we're in right now. And that's what we're trying to do is, is, is, is, you know, what we've been doing hasn't been working, we got to try new ideas.

Commissioner
McDonald

I'm in agreement with you, Monty, and that you know, is that, is that let's just get the language and the other pieces will come with it the cultural piece that comes with embedded within a language, the spirituality piece of that is embedded within a language that that's going to come once you have the language piece of it down. And then as we interact more with our elders that will just build upon that. The other part, I appreciated you sharing was that the and so forth in regard to culture is that is that, especially as educators, is that, though what we know in the research related to that those students who are knowledgeable in their culture are more likely to succeed academically. So these issues of self-identity that we see for our younger people within these school systems is related to that, if we can help bring back the culture and embed that with who we are as a people within our educational systems and our pedagogy, then what happens then is that that helps to address that issue, while at the same time helping people to have the skills, for our students to have the skills in order to survive in today's world, and while at the same time maintaining their cultural knowledge and beliefs and values. So, with that, we had a couple more questions here, but I, but I think what I heard what I heard was what you, what you all are sharing, I think you've answered that already and plus we have some written testimony that you provided. So, I think we're good there. And I want to turn it back over to Madam Chair to take over and take us into the next piece of this, which is our open discussion where our Commissioners will be able to ask you questions. And now, but I just want, I just want to thank you, [Native language] for coming and being a part of this panel as Presidents, we know you're very busy right now. We know that the COVID is running rampant within our reservation communities, and that you're working well to keep your campuses safe, as well as helping your tribal government systems to that end. So, also thank you very much for being here and being a part of this panel and helping us today. Thank you very much, madam Chair O'Neill.

VII. Open Discussion

- Chair O'Neill Thank you, thank you Dr. McDonald. I appreciate your leadership. It was a really interesting set of questions, and really appreciated all your answers and again, like Dr. McDonald said, I really appreciate your leadership and your support of us, and really drilling down and understanding these issues at a deeper level, so thank you. With that, I'd like to open it up to our Commissioners for questions or comments. Questions or comments?
- Commissioner Fineday Madam Chair.
- Chair O'Neill Yes, Commissioner Fineday.
- Commissioner Fineday Thank you for that. First, I just want to say thank you to the presenters. I think that your work is so important. And I want to thank you for your dedication. I think maybe it was on the other panel someone said, you know, the, the people who control education, really control our future. And so, tribal colleges are really the only form of education that Native people have, really have control of. So, what you're doing is so important to the future of Native people and maintaining our culture and our language. We all know how vital that is. One of the topics that I've been working a lot in lately is suicide prevention in Indian Country. We're bracing for an increase in suicide, and it might be already happening in some places as a result of COVID. And the same, the experts in that area, tell me the same thing, language and culture, that's what builds resilience in young people, is language and culture. And, and that is, that's also suicide prevention. So, what you were doing is so important. I thank you so much for your dedication and taking the time to come and speak to this Commission. I would ask you, this is an open question for whoever would like to answer. I'm thinking about funding and sources of funding. And so, I know that you get a large percentage of your funding from the Department of the Interior, and I'm wondering about other sources of funding that you have tapped into and are that, so it's a question, are there other meaningful sources of funding that you have found? I guess. Thank you.
- Dr. Cynthia Lindquist This is Cindy, or President Lindquist, if I may respond. Again, my college is one of the smaller institutions and unfortunately, I do not have infrastructure, or depth of infrastructure so I don't have a grant writer. I don't have a development office or development officer, and so any grants we go after generally ends up with me writing. As much as I try to pull my professional staff and/or my faculty into writing and that. But we do have relationships with funding sources. Bush Foundation, Northwest Area Foundation, and other bigger funding sources and through AIHEC and the American Indian College Fund, so we have access in different ways to some of that funding. The problem becomes, it gets piecemealed out to us individually or maybe a group of colleges will get the funding or the services. And if there could be more robust funding to those sources or something and I, and I believe this is what college funding and AIHEC are both trying to do that for us now, is to get better funding, and so it's not just of the 37 tribal colleges three or four get picked to do our, to do that program or project, that more of us can be involved and engaged or

collectively, and that more equitable funding for us in total and that. But part of my issue becomes against staffing professional staff at the local level, who writes grants and who could go after that money. But my little college, right now I have about 30, maybe 34 grants. Most of them federal, but many of them private money sources that helps sustain the services. And again, those are like stimulated the weekend academies we do for the high school students, or the literacy program we're doing and that's BIA funding that we do for the high school students and for the college students also relative to preparedness.

Dr. Monty
Roessel

Can I just add to that real quick? I think one of the challenges we have in tribal colleges, is that, you know, we all have it as a basic mission, that, you know, language and culture. And yet we, you know, you can't become dependent on a grant. Right? This has to be embedded and yet there is none. So, maybe one thing is to take a page out of the BIE book, which you don't want to take too many pages out of that book, but within their ISEP [Indian School Equalization Program] funding, they have an amount that is specific for Native languages. So, not as, you know, an add on to our current formula that could be utilized just for language and so, like, for BIE schools that amounts to around, you know, \$26 million across 183 school that's, that's an actually quite a bit of money, you know when you're talking about 45,000 students so if they were in that model and change our formula to an add on, then we're not taking, you know, a year to take another dollar, and put it over there, so I think can you know that's one thing that I think that would be helpful. But most of it as Cindy said, you know, we really use grants as, to fix a problem. But the problem with that is, then how do you sustain it, because problems just don't go away, and when the grants gone it rears its head again. So, sustainability is something that we have to think about from the very beginning. Even addressing trying to write a grant.

Commissioner
Gray

Madam Chair.

Chair O'Neill

Yes, Commissioner Gray.

Commissioner
Gray

I would echo Ms. Fineday in total appreciation of all of the testimony today and, and just an immense amount of gratitude for the work that you do and, and you know that gratitude is, is, is really based on, you are controlling the future of our, the survivability of our descendants, and I'm just so appreciative of everything of all the testimony today. This might be a question geared more towards Ms. Carrie, and anybody else on the panel that might have an opinion on it, and I'd welcome that. But in Ms. Carrie's testimony, you talked about the difference in college funding, on what the Department of Education would give a minority college, and what the Indian Health Services provides to education. Was, was that, was there an underlying potential recommendation there, that maybe the funding should come from the Department of Education across the board, or was that more of a recommendation to equalize, the funding from, increase the funding to IHS to be able to equalize the funding across the board?

Carrie Billy Thank you for that question. It actually is an issue that tribal college presidents over the years have debated several times whether, whether we should propose when the Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities Assistance Act comes up for reauthorization, should the tribal colleges, decide to migrate, or request to migrate to Department of Education. And in probably the three or four times it's come up that I can recall, in the end, they've always decided they want to stay with Interior. Not because the trust responsibility and treaty obligation lie only with the Department of Interior because they are, that's those are obligations across the entire federal government, but because we know Interior best. And so that, maybe, I don't want to say fear of the unknown, because we have programs in the Department of Education, but, but just because of that historical partnership, I guess, even if, even if it was a bad partnership, they've decided to stay in Interior. So, really what we would like is first to get to the fully authorized funding level for tribal colleges for operating funding, which we're not at yet, and then to look at that, I think someone made reference to looking at formulas that aren't just students up based, I think it was at this meeting. Or maybe it was on the one, I think it was maybe it was on one I was on just before, where the money is allocated by Congress first, and then this formula is applied to it. And that's how it's divvied up. Has no basis on what the actual need is, so formulas that are need based that first look at need and then that becomes the basis for what your request is to Congress. And then, or what the Administration's request is to Congress and then what Congress funds is a much better way to fund all education programs, regardless of department. Does that make sense?

Commissioner Gray It does, thank you so very much.

Chair O'Neill I, I do know in the Obama Administration, they took a hard look at this of moving Indian education programs and integrating it into the education programs that are currently being run and just, I'm wondering is, and, you know, and I don't know all the reasons why that that that initiative was decided against. And it might be just what you said, Ms. Billy. But I'm wondering, do you think that conversation will come up again in the Biden Administration? Is, and is that something that you all would like to reconsider?

Carrie Billy I don't think I could even begin to answer the second part of your question, because we haven't discussed it at all, the board hasn't discussed it as a, you know the whole group of tribal college presidents haven't discussed it. So, I don't, I don't think we even, you know, we all might have our own opinion but I don't, I don't know if there's an, I don't even know what those are. I didn't even say anything about that. Whether it'll come up or not, it probably will. I think one of the things that they might also be looking at is making sure that, one of the things that could be important is having someone with education expertise particularly American Indian Alaska Native education expertise in the Secretary's office, whether it's Interior or, or Department of Education. You know, having that kind of expertise, and then, you know, respecting the decisions of the educators. We're seeing now sometimes educators might be going down one road but then as things go up the

line at the Departments, decisions are changed to the detriment of children and students, I think. Presidents, would you like to say something?

Dr. Monty
Roessel

Can I just add, because I was part of those conversations early on, and it was Secretary Jewell who said, why are we running schools, and we should give it to the Department of Ed. Secretary Duncan at the time said, we don't run things, we give grants, so they didn't want it either. You know, so, so that's where it happened and then when it went up and we talked to tribal leaders, tribal leaders, I think, exactly what Carrie Billy just said, they feel more comfortable. You know at the time you know, that there's a more solid consultation process, there's a lot of different things that they just feel more comfortable with in Interior, that kind of. You know, one, Ed didn't want it, two tribal leaders didn't want it to be moved, and so it just stayed where it's at. But I, it's not the first time, it comes up almost. It's how loud it comes up, I think every Administration it comes up, and sometimes it floats a little higher than the previous Administration.

Chair O'Neill

Thank you. I have a couple of questions, and President Roessel you brought this point up of the siloed approach, as it relates to the continuum of education, or depending on where you are, as students move between public and private institutions. How, is there a model out there in a state that you can point to that you believe that we should take a look at as a Commission, meaning that, that, that continuum has, has the ability to really support the student regardless of where they are in that continuum, and how they move between kindergarten through college.

Dr. Monty
Roessel

I don't have a model, and I haven't seen a model like that. And I think that's a good thing. I, because you're able to build from scratch really, you're able to say, here are the problems, and then you can build to address that. I think if you, if you put a model into this, I think you end up in looking at taking all that baggage that whatever model has, you know there. I will say this, I have been in conversations with different foundations, and, and, you know, even within the state of Arizona. And this is something that is, you know I think because of COVID, it really allows us an opportunity. But the biggest part of the model that needs to be there, the biggest component is, the tribes need to have a seat at that table. It can't be something that everybody around them does. In other words, it's not like the states and the BIE get together. The tribes really because the schools are on their land. These kids are their kids. And I think if we change that mentality then we look at this from a different perspective than we would normally. And so, I think you know I don't I don't know of any models out there. But I think there are some, you know, in my testimony I talked about Head Start, FACE programs, and then pre-K programs, and they all have different requirements. That's an easy first step to start and say let's create, you know some, some, not competition, but ways that we can work and integrate together, going forward.

Carrie Billy

Can I just add to that? Right now, the BIE with its, right now is preparing a solicitation to be released soon to award grants to establish some early childhood education pilot projects. You know, wouldn't, when there are Head Start centers or Early Head Start centers, and all these other programs. So, they're going to start,

not only are there several things going on now, but they're going to start another one! Which, you know, if I don't know, if the federal government believes that something's working, that Head Start works or something, that maybe we should put our resources there to support, there's something that's working, and I don't know what works best, but I think this point of things being so fragmented and siloed is really, really important.

Chair O'Neill I believe our next hearing is focused on early childhood development, in March. So, Commissioners we have a few minutes left, do you have remaining questions to ask?

Commissioner BigFoot Hi, this is Dee again. I'm just wondering, how do the community college, I mean, how do the tribal colleges recruit students? Do you have a need to recruit, or do you just have a lot of students that are just there and can you accommodate all of them? Are, are there, you know, programs for recruitment, I mean, I'm just wondering how, how students see the tribal colleges, before they have experiences with them?

Dr. Cynthia Lindquist We all recruit locally from our respective communities, so I don't go over to Standing Rock or up to Turtle Mountain reservation to recruit students. My college is here to serve the Spirit Lake Dakota reservation. Yes, we have open enrollment, anybody is welcome to come to my college and all the tribal colleges, we have the same policies relative to that. So, yeah, so we don't go out of our way. But the pandemic and online, who recruit our enrollment, I actually have a couple of students from Belcourt, North Dakota, Williston, North Dakota, Minot, North Dakota, where I've never had students from. They're here and they are, they have most of them happen to be Turtle Mountain Chippewa. So, and again, we don't discourage, we will not turn anybody down and that, but we have a, I guess a quiet agreement among all of us. We were established by our respective tribes, we serve our respective tribal community, and yet there's a couple of anomalies out there also.

Dr. Sandra Boham I'll speak to that a little bit too. Salish Kootenai College is a little bit different. We, in our reservation, our mission is to serve our community, like everyone whose missions say that. But because we are one of the few colleges that offers four-year degrees and there are seven tribal colleges in Montana, we do recruit from their colleges, their four-year programs. So, we, we encourage students after they finish their two-year degree in their home school, to then finish their second two-years with SKC. And then we do recruit wider into others as well. We had kind of stopped doing that because affordable housing here is incredibly difficult to get. And so, you know, if we had housing, students could come here, if we didn't, they couldn't. And for the last number of years, consistently we have turned away about 300 students who, who intended to come to our school, could not find housing, so they could not enroll. That's a horrible position to be in. And some of it has to do with the community, which is why we haven't increased our housing here. But the online switch that happened with COVID is going to make things interesting. And we have applied to our accrediting agency and have been approved to offer online programs, and then we also will be starting our first graduate degree in

interdisciplinary natural resources in the fall. And so, that will change some of how we do recruitment as well.

Chair O'Neill Thank you. Well, I would like to give our detailee, who is our education expert, a few minutes. If he has questions or comments, Mr. Ron Lessard, Ron. I'm not sure if he's still with us.

Moushumi Beltangady I think he may have already left.

Chair O'Neill Oh, he has. Okay.

VIII. Closing Remarks

Chair O'Neill All right, well as we're coming to the close, do any of our panelists or Commissioners have a couple of parting thoughts?

Commissioner Gray Madam Chair.

Chair O'Neill Yes, Commissioner Gray.

Commissioner Gray I would echo the, the sentiments around recruitment and maybe even take it a step further and challenge all of the panelists, and I can speak to my own example, and, in growing up, I was forcibly removed from my biological parents as a child from, by the State of Alaska, and I grew up in a non-Native family. And growing up very lost and, and growing up, I was voted the least likely to survive in elementary school. And, you know, I can, I can speak from a position of when, when people are lost, as a lot of our, our descendants are, they need to be found. Right? So, you can't expect lost individuals to be able to reach out for help. People who are lost, need to be found. And when I got enrolled with my Native village, and when I was enrolled in my Regional Corporation, I met with the HR director at the time, and said, you know you guys are offering to pay for my education, where should I go. And the HR director at the time said well you know the health care is a booming industry right now, you should go get your degree in in health care. And so, I went out and I got a bachelor's degree in health care administration. And I came back to my Regional Corporation and said okay you paid for a four-year degree, you know, where, where is there a position for me within the corporation? And the corporation said, well we don't have any industries in healthcare, you're going to have to go, you're going to have to go look for work elsewhere. And, you know, there is a really significant disconnect between what the corporation had available to employ, and you know, the guidance that it was giving its descendants. And, you know, I'm so impressed with the quality of education and the passion that all of the panelists have shown today. And I just believe that, you know, that that process of recruitment, you know, can be stretched and expanded significantly to be able to help find some of those lost descendants.

Chair O’Neill Thank you, Commissioner Gray, that was beautiful. I really appreciate you sharing.

Commissioner McDonald Madam Chair.

Chair O’Neill Yes, Commissioner McDonald.

Commissioner McDonald I appreciate the, Commissioner Gray’s comments. I think for all of us as TCUs we do our best to connect our educational and training activities, towards the workforce in order to ensure that those that graduate from our colleges, actually, there are actually employment opportunities available to them when they're done. And I see that across the board for, for everybody that we work with. I wanted to share something else though, and we didn't really talk about this, or I didn't really share this in the testimony today. But I appeared in a couple of discussions within the last couple weeks, on the importance of accurate history, and the importance of accurate history or just having that history, accurate history available to all people. We see that many things have occurred, for tribal peoples in regard to assimilation and genocide policies implemented by the federal government. And so, when we, but we don't know a whole lot about that, in our general public curriculum. And so, these things are, I think are important for us, not only for us as tribal educators, but for the society's educational system. And I think that'll be, the other piece of that is that, is that, recognizing that we may view history from different perspectives. So, it might be the same thing that happened. But if you're coming from majority society looking at that incident, you will be viewing it differently than coming from a minority group for that same incident. So, these things are, so, when we talk about accurate history, it’s not just good documentation or accurate documentation of what transpired, but also to make sure that all perspectives are accounted for within that history. And I think if we do that well within our system, then we'll have a better picture of what occurred for our population, and not only tribal populations, but really peoples of color here within the United States. And also for our First Nations relatives to the north of us. Thank you.

Chair O’Neill Thank you for those comments, Dr. McDonald and thank you for your leadership, I really appreciate it. So with that, we are, we've come to a close of our meeting I know we've been online for a little over two-hours and many of us do have this Zoom, or Teams or WebEx fatigue, so I really appreciate those of you who stayed in with us, because it's really important that we continue our work. Even though we're struggling through this COVID pandemic. So, what I heard that we’ll ensure that your comment at a very strategic level are brought forward, and your leadership voice was around the importance of language and culture, the importance of embedding, and stabilizing funding so that funding is, you know, not only stable, but it's also sustainable. The importance of early childhood education and the investment of that, recruitment efforts, some of the comments that Commissioner Gray just focused on. And also, as our Dr. McDonald stated, about history and perspective in the lens in which we, we look at this through. So, thank you all for that, and what we will do is, we are going to work with our technical advisor and our technical advisor will then ensure that we have all these strategic comments and they're reflected in our report. We are really focused as a Commission to put a

piece of work forward to the executive branch and legislative branch that will actually have some teeth and meaning, where we can hopefully change a couple of paradigms and continue to support all of your work, as we invest in our young people's lives. So, thank you so much for all that you do, and I wish each and every one of you a very safe and, holiday season, so stay safe. Thank you very much. Thank you for your leadership and your support and passion about young people.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]

[Transcript completed in-house by R. Gilbert, Department of the Interior]

Appendix A – Chat Log

from Carrie Billy to everyone: 11:56 AM

AIHEC can provide data on on developmental education for entering students at an aggregate level for all TCUs, if that would be helpful.

from Anita Fineday to everyone: 11:59 AM

Thank you I think that would be helpful to have. In addition, please feel free to submit additional information that you might like to add after the questions and discussions.

from Jesse Delmar to everyone: 12:05 PM

Yes thank you Kayla

from Cynthia Lindquist to everyone: 1:12 PM

Commissioner Gray, besides Ilisagvik College, there are a couple of other developing tribal colleges in Alaska and they have reached out to AIHEC for help.

from Anita Fineday to everyone: 1:13 PM

Thanks for your leadership Russ!

from Anita Fineday to everyone: 1:14 PM

Thanks to all of the presenters! I was so impressed with all of your testimony, passion and dedication to our future.

from Sandra Boham to everyone: 1:14 PM

Thank you all for inviting us here today to discuss these important issues

from Don Gray to everyone: 1:14 PM

Thank you Ms. Billy for your passion, testimony and leadership. I greatly appreciated it.

from Monty Roessel to everyone: 1:14 PM

Commissioners, thank you for the opportunity to speak to the great need to help Native children.

from Leander McDonald to everyone: 1:15 PM

Thank you CEO Billy and TCU Presidents for sharing this important information!

from Melody Staebner to everyone: 1:15 PM

Thank you for your presentations! I was very encouraged by what you do!

from Cynthia Lindquist to everyone: 1:15 PM

Thank you for the opportunity!