

# *Intentional Partnership: Washington STEM and Office of Native Education*

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Washington STEM has been building relationships with and working in partnership with staff from the Office of Native Education for nearly two years, and we are so grateful. Washington STEM works to address systemic barriers to increase access to education pathways leading to household-sustaining wage jobs, focused on student populations, including Indigenous students. Initially, we aimed to increase collaboration around career connected learning opportunities via Career Connect Washington. However, early on it became clear that we needed to deepen our own learning regarding the history of tribes in Washington, the concepts of sovereignty and government-to-government relations, and the practice of tribal consultation.

With guidance from ONE, we watched videos (e.g., [The Canary Effect](#)), read books (e.g., [All the Real Indians Died Off](#)), listened to podcasts (e.g., [This Land](#)), pored over websites and materials (e.g., [NIEA's resources for schools](#)), and tested our understanding at weekly meetings with ONE. We held ourselves accountable to action; to that end, we realized that many of our peers and partners across the state would benefit from a "primer" on the very same things we were learning. In spring 2022, building on our learning with ONE, we generated an interactive pre-assessment of knowledge of tribal relations, sovereignty, and understanding of the basis of tribal consultation in our state. We pulled together commonly held myths and facts and Washington state-specific knowledge to create an adaptable (one- to three-hour) overview, primarily for non-Native partners. It is an open-source activity, with a replicable Mentimeter interactive quiz, that helps folks assess the knowledge, biases, and harmful tropes they may harbor, and to work on shifting their approach and perspective on tribal relations. We presented it to Washington STEM staff, Career Connect Washington-affiliated partners across the state, and graduate students earning education-related degrees.

We have also ensured that our policy and advocacy efforts work in collaboration with ONE's priorities, to be able to mutually advocate toward our collective goals for Native students, educators, families, and tribes. For example, we provided testimony or sign-ins for bills regarding language preservation programming and Since Time Immemorial curriculum and mandatory training. We are also working on integration into our Early Learning initiatives, starting with tribal relationships and learning about tribal approaches and goals for early learning of Native students.

Finally, we learned that tribal nations have led and advocated for new ways of treating demographic data, "Maximum Representation," which addresses a nationwide gap that has excluded or misidentified students, effectively erasing their Native heritage and identity from



reports and research. In collaboration with ONE and other tribal leaders and experts, we are working to co-author two technical papers on the history of Maximum Representation and on applied use cases in Washington State. We hope that state agencies, researchers, practitioners, education leaders, and data intermediaries will be able to utilize this work as a toolkit, to apply Maximum Representation to use student data in ways that best serve students and communities, that honor tribal sovereignty, and that attend to equity.