

Nakia Academy Launches First Indigenous Educator Cohort in Partnership with the Office of Native Education

Dear Office of Native Education (ONE) Community & Affiliates,

On Saturday, October 25, from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., something remarkable happened. Nakia Academy launched its first-ever Indigenous Educator Cohort — a vibrant, intentional space for Indigenous educators to gather in community, mentorship, and leadership.

This new cohort represents a historic step in Nakia's journey, fulfilling the spirit and purpose of [RCW 28A.300.105](#), which directs the Office of Native Education to strengthen recruitment, retention, and professional development for American Indian and Alaska Native educators. By centering Indigenous knowledge and mentoring, this cohort advances culturally responsive education and honors sovereignty, language, and community.

About Nakia Academy

Nakia Academy is a coaching, mentoring, and leadership academy that prepares mentors and coaches who support beginning educators. It is a professional learning community by and for educators of color, created in partnership with the Washington Education Association (WEA), the Beginning Educator Support Team (BEST) at OSPI, the Washington School Counselor Association (WSCA), and now the Office of Native Education (ONE) at OSPI.

Since 2020, Nakia has supported over a thousand educators across Washington through five unique cohorts — three BIPOC educator cohorts, one for school counselors, and now one for Indigenous educators. Participants engage in the equivalent of BEST Mentor Academy 101 and 201 content, earn 24 equity clock hours, receive a \$500 honorarium upon completion, and remain connected through ongoing learning opportunities with BEST, WEA, WSCA, and ONE.

This new Indigenous Educator cohort with ONE is especially meaningful because of Annette Woolley's leadership as a Nakia alum, Indigenous educator, and scholar in the UW Tacoma–Muckleshoot Doctoral Cohort. Annette (Yakama and Swinomish) curated the Nakia curriculum specifically for Indigenous educators, centering Indigenous Ways of Knowing — weaving in story, reflection, and pedagogy that honor the lived experiences of Native educators, past and present, while holding space for those yet to come. Her vision, leadership, and heart ensured the launch was grounded, authentic, and community-driven.



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Community and Gratitude

Heartfelt thanks to **Dr. Denise Bill, Madrienne White, Patrick Eagle, and Justice Bill** of **Muckleshoot Tribal College** for their hospitality, preparation, and care in hosting us. From the moment we reached out, Dr. Bill and Madrienne welcomed us with open arms. Upon our arrival, the warmth and enthusiasm of their welcome — supported by Patrick and Justice — made the entire experience flow with ease. Dr. Bill's opening remarks and way of being, offered on behalf of herself, Madrienne, the college, and the Muckleshoot people, reflected proper protocols and gifted us a model of leadership and generosity to learn and grow from. We are deeply thankful.

We also extend deep appreciation to **Will Bill, Sr. and Justice Bill**, both Muckleshoot Tribal Members, Knowledge Bearers, Singers, and Drum Carriers, who opened our cohort in a good way with a song. They accepted our ask and shared their time and presence with us on a Saturday — grounding our gathering in respect, relationship, and good medicine.

Deep gratitude as well to our partners and teammates — WEA, BEST, and WSCA — for their unwavering collaboration and support. Special thanks to **Torian Hodges-Finch (WEA), Ting-Ju Tai (BEST), and Lauren Mendez (WSCA)** for being steadfast thought partners and co-creators in this work.

Last, but certainly not least, thank you to all past and present Nakia cohorts, with special acknowledgment to the original content creators and all Nakia Academy facilitators. You laid the foundation that continues to strengthen and inspire every new season. Your work, creativity, and care ripple forward.

It is imperative to recognize the labor involved in community-based practice. Thank you to each of you — and to the caretakers who surround and support Nakia Academy. Together, as a true display of community, we grow and widen the circle with those who are here to learn, transform practice that aligns with social and educational justice, and share responsibility in ways that ripple across generations — rooted in community, belonging, and joy.

With appreciation,

Bawaajígekwe Boulley