

From Pedagogy to Practice: Advancing Tribal Language and Native Literacy in Washington State

3rd Annual Tribal Language and Native Literacy Convening

This spring, the Tribal Language and Native Student Success programs within the Office of Native Education, in partnership with Central Washington University, hosted the 3rd Annual Tribal Language and Native Literacy Convening: From Pedagogy to Practice: Living Native Language & Literacy. Across three days, educators, tribal leaders, language keepers, students, district and ESD partners, OSPI colleagues, and community members gathered to center Indigenous language, Native literacy, and culturally sustaining educational practices grounded in relationship and community.

The convening reflected an intentional progression of learning. Day one focused on tribal language revitalization and instruction. Day two bridged tribal language and Native literacy development. Day three centered Native literacy implementation and instructional practice in classroom and system contexts.

We extend deep gratitude to all presenters, attendees, facilitators, and partners who helped make this gathering so meaningful. Special appreciation goes to Dr. Zoë Higheagle Strong and the team at Central Washington University for their hospitality, leadership, and care throughout the event. From the venue and catering to on-site support and the welcoming environment, their partnership helped create one of the most thoughtfully supported and uplifting convenings many participants have experienced.

The Office of Native Education and the Native Student Success Program look forward to continuing this partnership with CWU faculty and leadership to bring effective practices into teacher preparation programs. We will connect this summer to co-plan next steps.

Dr. Anton Treuer

A highlight of the convening was the keynote address from Dr. Anton Treuer, whose reflections on language, identity, truth-telling, and Indigenous self-determination grounded participants in both hope and responsibility.

Watch the Keynote Recording Here: [Dr. Anton Treuer Keynote Recording](#)

At the heart of this work is a shared belief: Native students thrive when their languages, identities, stories, and communities are reflected and honored in educational spaces. This belief is being put into practice across the state as the Native Student Success Program continues statewide professional learning aligned with the newly



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released [OSPI Native Literacy Guidance](#). This guidance provides a culturally grounded framework for strengthening literacy instruction through relationship, belonging, Indigenous knowledge systems, oral language, storytelling, and strength-based practice. It has been created through many partnerships and shared interests as reflected in the statewide workgroup.

Across Washington, districts and tribal education partners are already bringing these principles to life in ways that reflect their communities, strengths, and local contexts:

- At Lummi Nation School, practitioners Kathleen Buford and Tebanimarawa Stanley demonstrated the power of weaving language and literacy through student voice, relationships, and community.
- At Quil Ceda Tulalip Elementary, Dr. Chelsea Craig and Dr. Irene Bare centered Huyadadčəł, meaning “our way,” as a framework for relational trust and culturally grounded educational practice.
- In Toppenish School District, Dr. Lolita Ceja highlighted how strength-based approaches and Indigenous excellence can guide systemic implementation across classrooms and district systems.

Together, this work reflects the collective efforts of educators, tribal communities, state leaders, legislators, regional partners, and Office of Native Education staff—past and present—whose shared vision continues to strengthen pathways for Native students across Washington State.

As this work continues to grow, we remain committed to learning together, strengthening partnerships, and creating educational spaces where Native students feel seen, valued, empowered, and deeply connected to who they are. When this happens consistently and systemically, student engagement and outcomes improve in meaningful and measurable ways.

Looking ahead, the Native Student Success Program intends to expand this work through regional trainings in the upcoming year, ensuring that educators and partners across Washington have access to sustained, place-responsive professional learning grounded in Native literacy principles. In partnership with Central Washington University, we also look forward to strengthening alignment with teacher preparation programs so that future educators enter the field already grounded in culturally sustaining and linguistically affirming practices.

As we move into this next phase, we hold space for continued collaboration, innovation, and shared leadership—listening closely to where emerging practices, community strengths, and local priorities point us. It is within these relationships and commitments that new possibilities will continue to rise for Native students, families, and communities across the state.