Prepared (Wzhitawen) Native American Students Soar!
Greetings Friends,

In this edition of the TeachLink, we focus attention on part two of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation (CPN) and their efforts in promoting education through a foundation of rich cultural traditions. Their contributions have laid the foundation for numerous students to successfully transition into postsecondary education, solidifying the positive effects of their outreach efforts in the community.

Engaging in diverse partnerships and collaborating with key stakeholders in the state, the CPN continuously exemplifies how supportive relationships at all levels help to cultivate academic leadership and achievement. Cultural, social and academic supports coupled with the understanding that they can accomplish high levels of success propel students forward toward degree completion.

Sit back and enjoy hearing the testimonials of CPN’s impact in this edition of the TeachLink!

Goldie

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A Division of the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education

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The Oklahoma Teacher Connection, a division of the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, will electronically publish the TeachLINK E-newsletter three times a year.

The purpose of the E-Newsletter is to promote, market, and showcase news stories, creative features, curricular highlights, research data, and technological updates, which impact Oklahoma’s Colleges of Teacher Education, common education, higher education faculty, students and communities.

We welcome all comments, opinions, questions and/or concerns. If you would like to unsubscribe or subscribe to the TeachLink, please email Deena Thomas at dthomas@osrhe.edu.
Making the Connections

2018 - The Year of the Child

From the Editor:

The Oklahoma Teacher Connection (OTC) has deemed 2018 as the Year of the Child.

Within our various roles as educators and advocates, our focused objective is to provide the best quality education for all children.

Our youth are more precious than jewels and more valuable than the pursuit of fame or fortune.

The Citizen Potawatomi Nation (CPN) Wzhitawen Project’s players within the schools, within the communities, and within CPN’s organization are living out their purpose, which is to prepare and move forward their youth toward postsecondary attainment.

I personally would to share a special thank you to CPN’s Education Director, Tesia Zientek; College Advisor, Joshua Bullock; Public Information Director, Jennifer M. Bell; Photographer/Videographer, Garett Fisbeck; and the Aviary staff.

CPN have been fabulous collaborative partners!

The children are our future. Let us teach them well, and let them lead the way!

Making the Connections,  

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The use of eagle feathers are repurposing and restoration processes that echo the work carried out by the Citizen of Potawatomi Nation’s (CPN) Wzhitawen (Prepare) Project.

Both mechanisms maximize the usage of all available resources.

Eagle feathers are personalized, sewn together and adorned with beads and other decorative ornaments typically to create fans. Additionally, eagle feathers are viewed as sacred by Native Americans and play a significantly important role in their religious ceremonies and cultural practices.
The Wzhitawen Project utilizes the resources already in place within the Asher, Macomb, Maud, and Wanette Public School districts and communities, while simultaneously supplementing their assets to leverage and enrich student academic outcomes.

This collaborative partnership has been intentionally and carefully crafted, aimed to impact the post-secondary trajectory within Potawatomie County.

Recapping series one, Wzhitawen / Caring for Eagles constructed the project’s infrastructure. CPN’s foundational core put in place its goals, its objectives, and its culturally relevant Native American guidebook to facilitate the action plan.

Series two and three - Wzhitawen/ Using Eagle Feathers and Constructing a Whole Wing Fan has reshaped the narrative of college and career readiness. CPN has folded in preparation steps, allowing students to explore, learn, apply to enter and succeed in college. Many will become first generation degree completers.

State Regents’ Backing

One catalyst stimulating the active growth mindset among Native American students is the CPN’s tribal Department of Education Wzhitawen Project Preparing Native Students for Life After High School Handbook. Much of the handbook’s content was taken from the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education’s (OSRHE) Oklahoma College Assistance Program (OCAP), more specifically the UcanGo2 initiative.

OSRHE’s Director of Student Preparation, Matt Higdon, a Citizen Potawatomi, stated OSRHE’s student preparation department provided technical training to CPN’s Wzhitawen project through the agency’s fall workshops, retreats and summer conferences. In addition, the State Regents’ Strategic Planning and Analysis office provided baseline data, concerning college going and degree completion rates for native students to the project.

The Wzhitawen staff is actively using OSRHE resources to develop the best practices, designed to create a college going culture among the students they are serving. While there will be statistical measures of the outcome of this project, beyond that, success will be measured in the continued support CPN can provide to develop college readiness among their young people,” Higdon said.

Dismantling Barriers

CPN’s college advisor, Joshua Bullock, conducts classes at Asher and Wanette each Tuesday and Wednesday, facilitating from the handbook, as well as using other instructional tools. His student centered pedagogical approach guides students to connect and to gradually accept the notion and the challenge of attending college. He says he witnessed first-hand how students are evolving and gaining self-confidence and self-efficacy.

Joshua Bullock,
CPN College Advisor

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According to Bullock, students are positioning themselves to become their own driver, jump starting their journey toward postsecondary attainment. However, before the student brought in, Bullock admitted it was his job to gain their trust, which was not an easy task.

“I had to earn their trust. To the students, I was just some white dude in some nice dress shoes and a button up, walking in telling them what to do. One thing I did to earn their respect is that I told them, I am just here to help, so just tell me what you need. ‘I am not here to talk at you.’ It is not all about race, but in some ways it is. We must talk about race to get past the barriers,” Bullock said.

Using the Eagles Feathers

Bullock used a strategy not found in textbooks. His authentic, unbiased service met students where they were, which allowed him to reach them to teach them. Over time, his unwavering commitment earned their trust.

“These kids really enjoy activity based instruction. I am not trying to toot my own horn on this, but I feel I am relatable to the kids. Initially, I would dress professionally. Later, I began to dress a little more relaxed. I am white - that's obvious. Within the class, there are a number of Hispanics, Native Americans, and one or two African American students. Some of the kids would crack jokes, stating you look too rich. It took some trust building and cultivating relationships before the students accepted what I had to offer," Bullock said.

Bullock’s intentions were transparent from the start, according to Asher’s only full-time counselor, Shawna Magby, a lifelong native of the town. Magby said Bullock came in and let it be known that he was accessible, bringing to the table resources, support, and instruction, tailored to meet their needs, a measure that fostered scholarly achievement, as well as the development of life skills. Magby says Bullock has made an insurmountable impact on the Asher community.

The 19-year veteran educator says, “Now, I have more people to collaborate with. Joshua and I share information. Our school has 315 kids here, and I cannot get to all of them. I cannot be in the classrooms. Joshua has a small portion of the kids, who are my neediest kids, the Native American kids. CPN kids are not the only kids touched. Other students are impacted as well. I see an excitement in these kids. Every Tuesday, the kids ask me is Josh going to be here today. They anticipate his visit, and when he does not come, they sigh in disappointment.”
Kirby and Cayle Grissom, Asher Public Schools

“Prior to taking part in the Wzhitawen Project, I really wasn’t sure if I wanted to go to college, but now, I am excited and looking forward to the college experience. Joshua opened my mind up to the possibilities of college - this guy right here. He is getting us prepared. He is talking about college, telling us about how important college is. I am talking about college to my friends, and I am trying harder to make better grades in school,” Grissom chuckles.

Terry Grissom, father of Kirby and Cayle, currently serves as Asher’s superintendent. He is a descendent of a lineage of teachers and administrators. The seasoned leader has served as an educator for the past 28 years and 16 of those years have been at Asher.

Construing a Whole Wing Fan/ Tribal Diversity

Sister and brother, Kirby and Cayle Grissom, are Creek Native Americans.

Kirby Grissom is an eighth grader at Asher. She says she does plan to attend college, stating her career interest is mathematics. Her goal is to attend Ohio State, but she admits that she may change her mind of where she would like to attend college before she graduates from high school.

“When I think of college, I know it is going to take a lot of hard work, and I have to stay with it to make sure I graduate. It’s not going to be easy, but it is well worth it,” she said.

Cayle Grissom is a ninth grader at Asher. He says he plans to attend a D1 school or a junior college, a “Juco.” Grissom said he feels he will grow up into a man when he goes off to college.
We push those kids that we feel like are college material towards that. For those kids who are not interested in college, we push those children towards career tech. Our school gives the ACT every three months here, and that's very important to us. I am also a member of the Governor's Education Advisory Board, and they talk about workforce development, and the importance it has on our state. If you don't have a college education, one should have some type of certification," he said.

Grissom said the Asher staff has high expectations for their children, and they have a board and community that back them up.

“Our strength is that we are here for our kids. I am a little old school, but as a parent and as an educator, sometimes we have to do things differently, if we want to get different results. The Wzhitawen project is doing things in a different way, different than the way things have been done in the past. We have evidence that together we are making improvements,” Grissom said.

Taking Flight

Ianna Wabskie is from the Kickapoo tribe, and Jace Milburn is a Citizen Potawatomi. Both students are ninth graders at Asher.

“Interacting with other people can help prepare you for the future," says Wabskie. “I am on a basketball team, and I’ve learned to communicate with other teammates. It has taught me responsibility. It is my responsibility as a fellow teammate to communicate with other teammates, allowing us to meet our goals. It has also taught me to be a better person.”

Part of CPN’s curriculum includes soft skills. These skills include but are not limited to learning how to communicate effectively with others, honing in on respectful and courteous speech, dressing appropriately for the workplace, and character building techniques, with the objective of service and volunteerism to give back to the less fortunate.

Milburn shared the Wzhitawen Project also gave him insight into the ACT testing process, and what is required to gain entrance into college. He plans to enter Oklahoma State University and major in engineering.

“Attending and helping out at CPN’s college fairs, it has put me more at ease about going to college. When I was younger, I thought being a Native American student meant we just got a lot of free stuff in the summer during the Pow Wows. However, now that I have gotten older and after taking part in the Wzhitawen classes, I realize I have more opportunities to grow, serve, and become what I want to be in life," Milburn said.