



Improving American Indian Student Outcomes in Nevada

Briefly

- Nevada's American Indian students face persistent gaps in attendance and graduation rates and are inaccurately represented in state data and recordkeeping.
- The Western Educational Equity Assistance Center (WEEAC) at WestEd provided sustained technical assistance to Nevada's Office of Indian Education to develop a comprehensive 5-year improvement plan, engaging tribal leaders, district superintendents, and community members to ground the plan in both data and constituent voices.
- The WEEAC's approach combined data analysis, broad community engagement, and ongoing thought partnership to build Nevada's capacity to own and lead the work.
- **The result is a published *Plan to Improve Outcomes for American Indian Students in Nevada 2025–2030*, recently launched at the state's American Indian Education Summit.**

This impact story is based on data collected as part of a multiyear evaluation by the Utah Education Policy Center at the University of Utah focused on the technical assistance and capacity-building services of the Western Educational Equity Assistance Center (WEEAC). This impact story draws from information and evidence gathered through interviews with the WEEAC project lead and a close project partner at the Office of Indian Education in the Nevada Department of Education (NDE) as well as from a review of project documents. The story outlines the development of the *Plan to Improve Outcomes for American Indian Students in Nevada 2025–2030* and the ways in which the WEEAC and NDE collaborated to gather input from a range of interest holders to build a plan that is both actionable and reflects meaningful priorities to improve student outcomes.

Project background

The WEEAC is a federally funded technical assistance center operated by WestEd, designed to support state and local education agencies in advancing equity for students from underrepresented communities across states and territories in the western United States. The WEEAC provides technical assistance across a continuum, from broadly available professional learning sessions to sustained, intensive partnerships with individual agencies working to address complex and persistent challenges. The WEEAC has supported the NDE over the last 3 years in an intensive partnership to develop a plan for improving outcomes for American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) students.

Nevada's AI/AN students face persistent and measurable disparities across key educational outcomes. For example, in the 2023–24 school year, 41 percent of AI/AN students were chronically absent, compared to 29 percent of all Nevada students. Also in that year, the 4-year high school graduation rate for AI/AN students stood at 65 percent, compared to 81 percent for all students.¹ Academic proficiency gaps are similarly concerning: AI/AN students trail state averages in English language arts (ELA), math, and science across all grade levels. A structural data problem compounds these outcome gaps, as Nevada includes in this population only students who self-identify solely as AI/AN. This means that the recorded AI/AN student population may significantly undercount the true number of Native students in the state.

For years, Nevada's Office of Indian Education pursued the development of a formal plan to guide the state's work on behalf of AI/AN students. The conditions to develop such a plan emerged in part through a long-standing relationship between Nevada's Indian Education staff and WestEd, built through the Indian Education Directors Community of Practice. The Community of Practice is ongoing and comprises a network of directors across the western region, co-supported by the WEEAC, the Region 15 Comprehensive Center, and the Bureau of Indian Education Comprehensive Center. When the WEEAC was established, the NDE approached the center to discuss possibilities for collaboration. As one NDE staff member described in an interview for this story,

I just talked about not having anything that was focused on Indian education in terms of a plan. So I initiated that conversation ... really it was just a thought and then led to discussion, and then it led to, let's do this.

The WEEAC quickly supported the work with a team and resources, collaborating with the NDE to facilitate the development of a formal plan.

The WEEAC's approach

The WEEAC's work began with an analysis of publicly available student outcome data for AI/AN students in Nevada, including chronic absenteeism rates, graduation rates, and student identification data. The team synthesized findings and shared them with interest holders to inform conversations about the goals and structure of the plan. As the WEEAC project lead described,

Before you can give your opinion about something, it's a good idea to make an informed opinion. So it was data collection, interpretation, synthesis, sharing it with different constituents, and then eliciting their feedback about priorities.

In spring 2024, more than 100 participants—including tribal leaders, district superintendents, educators, and community members—joined Nevada's American Indian Education Summit to review the data and identify priority areas for the plan. The WEEAC supported the summit by facilitating discussions and compiling feedback for review.

To gather additional insights from educational leaders across the state, the WEEAC team scheduled interviews with five superintendents whose districts serve the largest numbers of AI/AN students. This strategy provided qualitative data that were shared back with participants, NDE leadership, and all Nevada district superintendents.

Throughout, the WEEAC provided thought partnership and process facilitation, maintained regular biweekly contact with Nevada's team, and kept departmental leadership informed through concise one-page infographics, ensuring transparency and keeping leadership engaged in directing the work at each step.

1 Student outcome data reported in this impact story are drawn directly from the [Plan to Improve Outcomes for American Indian Students in Nevada 2025–2030](#), published by the NDE (2025).

As the WEEAC project lead explained,

It was keeping people informed along the way ... a quick one-pager, a snapshot of where we are in the process, what we're learning ... all in partnership with [the NDE].

Plan to Improve Outcomes for American Indian Students in Nevada 2025–2030

The three priorities that emerged from this process of data analysis and community engagement form the core of the *Plan to Improve Outcomes for American Indian Students in Nevada 2025–2030*. Each priority includes measurable targets to guide implementation through 2030:

Increase student attendance and engagement. The plan targets a reduction in AI/AN chronic absenteeism from 41 percent in 2023–24 to 23 percent by 2030, aligned with Attendance Works' 50 percent Chronic Absence Challenge—a national campaign that Nevada and 16 other states have joined.

Increase high school graduation rates. The plan targets a 15-percentage-point increase in 4-year graduation rates for AI/AN students, to 80 percent by 2030.

Ensure accurate AI/AN student identification. Nevada currently counts only students who self-identify solely as AI/AN, a practice that may undercount the number of Native students in the state's schools. Without accurate identification, outcome data are incomplete, and students who may need support may go unrecognized.

The plan strengthens shared accountability, reinforcing the abilities of the state education agency, tribal governments, and school districts to assess measurable progress in student and family outcomes. The plan's priorities are aligned with Nevada's statewide commitments.

American Indian Education Summit

The *Plan to Improve Outcomes for American Indian Students in Nevada 2025–2030* was formally launched at the state's American Indian Education Summit in March 2026. The launch represented a culmination of more than 3 years of data collection, community engagement, and collaborative planning. The WEEAC supported both the planning and facilitation of the 2026 summit—the second summit it has supported in collaboration with the NDE.

The 2026 summit included a Tribal Leaders Day attended by Nevada's new state superintendent of public instruction, signifying growing attention to AI/AN student outcomes at the state's highest level of education leadership. The summit also featured workshops and panel discussions in which districts with promising practices around student attendance and engagement shared what is working in their settings. As the WEEAC project lead described,

At these statewide gatherings, we help facilitate so people who are impacted the most by educational policy have a voice in shaping change. They tell the story of what is working so that the rest of us can learn from them and adapt these approaches to our own settings.

"I think it holds us accountable. It holds us at the state, it holds our LEAs, it holds our tribes, it holds our students and our parents and everybody that's going to be working towards this. It's something that's very attainable in time."

—NDE Representative

Impact and sustainability

NDE staff described the publication of Nevada's 5-year plan as a direct outcome of the WEEAC's technical assistance. The WEEAC's data analysis, facilitation of community engagement, and synthesis and communication of findings all contributed to the development of the plan's priorities and the engagement of state leaders. Beyond providing support for the plan itself, the WEEAC's engagement has also contributed to broader shifts in how the NDE attends to AI/AN student outcomes. According to the WEEAC project lead, the NDE has broken down silos and expanded cross-departmental collaboration compared to when the work began. These shifts position the Office of Indian Education to implement the plan with greater coordination within the NDE and more broadly across local education agencies and tribal governments.

“They continuously say, ‘This is your work.... It’s Nevada’s. It’s not ours.’... I feel more confident in that work this year.”

—NDE Representative

The WEEAC's approach to the plan's development emphasized capacity-building and Nevada's ownership of the work. The WEEAC team consistently returned decisions and direction to Nevada's staff while breaking implementation targets into manageable steps and helping the office build on existing work. When WEEAC services were temporarily paused in 2025 due to federal funding disruptions, Nevada's Office of Indian Education continued the work independently, maintaining progress and working toward the 2026 summit. As an NDE staff member explained,

They allow me to think outside the box instead of just doing something that I've been doing forever.

Nevada's Office of Indian Education has also grown during this period, from one staff member when the work began to three, including a newly hired tribal consultation coordinator whose role directly supports plan implementation. With a published plan, an expanding team, and support from tribal governments, school districts, and community partners, Nevada is well positioned to lead sustained implementation of the plan in the years ahead.

Note: Information provided in this impact story is based on data collected as part of the evaluation of the WEEAC technical assistance and capacity-building services conducted by the Utah Education Policy Center (UEPC) at the University of Utah. The UEPC is conducting a 5-year evaluation study of WEEAC support to state, regional, and local educational systems focused on the implementation of services and the resulting impact over time.

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