

Oklahoma State Tribal Education Partnership (OK STEP) Project

ISSUE #4
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NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

Hello!

This month, we honored Native American Heritage Month, a time to recognize the rich histories, cultures, and contributions of Indigenous peoples. It's an opportunity for us all to learn, listen, and celebrate the communities whose stories are foundational to our nation.

We also observed Veterans Day, a moment to express our heartfelt appreciation for the bravery and sacrifice of those who have served in the armed forces. Their dedication ensures the freedoms we enjoy every day, and we are proud to acknowledge the veterans within our own community.

And of course, with the holidays just around the corner, we look forward to the spirit of connection, giving, and celebration that this season brings.

Happy Holidays!

OK STEP Team

Featured In This Issue...

- OK STEP Team Updates
- Native American Month Importance and Key Tribal Figures
- Native American Month Photos & In Remembrance of Spike Bighorn
- Resources & AI Use in Workplace and Classroom

Thank You

We encourage you to share this newsletter and stay connected with the OK STEP team about exciting opportunities and important happenings. Thank you for taking the time to read our newsletter.

Please feel free to reach out with any questions and also check out our Facebook page!

Email at okstep@tedna.org

<https://www.facebook.com/p/OK-State-Tribal-Education-Partnership-OK-STEP-61575531153519/>

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OK STEP Team Updates

ASHLEY BROKESHOULDER **OK STEP PROJECT DIRECTOR**



Ashley Brokeshoulder is an enrolled member of the Absentee Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma. Ashley graduated from Texas Tech University in 2014 with a Bachelor of Science in Nutrition. She serves as the Project Director for OK STEP grant, where she oversees the implementation and management of the grant to ensure its success and sustainability.

Ashley continued to strengthen Tribal-school collaboration and support Native education. During Native American Heritage Month, she helped facilitate culturally centered events that elevated Tribal voices. She also contributed to completing and submitting the second-year OK STEP Annual Performance Report (APR), meeting federal requirements and highlighting progress in self-determination, academic achievement, and interagency collaboration. With the second-year report successfully submitted, we now move confidently into the third year of our five-year grant, building on our momentum and advancing the project's goals.

BRELEIGH UPCHURCH **ABSENTEE SHAWNEE TRIBE COORDINATOR**



Breleigh Upchurch is from Norman, Oklahoma and is a member of the Chickasaw Nation. In May 2024, Breleigh graduated with her Bachelor of Arts in Art History from the University of Oklahoma. Breleigh's schools are Tecumseh Public Schools and Little Axe Public Schools.

Breleigh has been working closely with both Little Axe and Tecumseh schools throughout the semester, strengthening relationships and supporting culturally responsive initiatives. She looks forward to collaborating with Tecumseh Title VI in the spring as they organize their upcoming Tribal Resource Night.

In addition, Breleigh is actively supporting Little Axe Title VI as they prepare for their winter Cultural Assembly. She is excited to contribute to the planning and coordination of an event that highlights tribal traditions, celebrates student identity, and fosters deeper cultural understanding across the school community.

Breleigh remains committed to uplifting Native students and helping both districts create meaningful, culturally rich experiences throughout the year.

MAH MILLER **KIOWA TRIBE COORDINATOR**



Miah Miller is a 2018 graduate from Carnegie High School and a citizen of the Kiowa Tribe.

Miah graduated Southwestern Oklahoma State University in 2023 with a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Engineering and Technology with a Minor in World Languages. Miah's schools are Anadarko Public Schools, Boone-Apache Public Schools, and Carnegie Public Schools.

Miah's work spanned a wide range of activities—from supporting Orange Shirt Day by coordinating resources and shirts for eligible students, to representing OK STEP at national platforms including NIEA, TEDNA's annual meeting, and the STEP Panel at NIEA. Miah actively strengthened local partnerships by engaging in youth-centered cultural events such as UNITY's Healing Circle workshop, GONA with Kiowa Youth Development, and multiple Kiowa Tribe community gatherings. She also collaborated across Tribal and school programs to plan major initiatives, including Rock Your Mocs with Carnegie JOM, KEA, Kiowa programs, and the Comanche Nation; AISES club coordination; and KEA's College & Career Fair. Her contributions extended to creating a Higher Education concurrent application, supporting hiring processes, and preparing presentations for NJOMA.

TONIA PICKETT **SAC AND FOX NATION COORDINATOR**



Tonia Pickett is an enrolled member of the Kickapoo Tribe of Oklahoma. Tonia has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Organizational Leadership from the University of Oklahoma and plans to continue her graduate studies in the near future. Tonia's schools are Prague Public Schools, Cushing Public Schools, and Stroud Public Schools.

Since the start of the fall semester, Tonia helped produce the Native American Heritage Month "Activities & Facts" guide, supporting educators in bringing culturally relevant Indigenous content into their classrooms. She represented OK STEP at key events—including the National JOM Conference, Prague's Title VI Native Student Education Night, and the Iowa Tribe of Oklahoma College Fair—building connections with students, families, counselors, and tribal education staff. Tonia helped Prague Public Schools expand their Choctaw cultural presentations and by sharing Title VI and 506 Form information at the Citizen Potawatomi Nation Tribal Scholarship Forum. Following winter break, she will continue partnering with Title VI programs to create monthly cultural activities, support planning for next year's language bowl, and assist the Sac and Fox Education Department with spring events such as the Senior Banquet.



Importance of Native American Month

Native American Heritage Month is a time to remember the footsteps that came before us and the strength that carried our nations through centuries of change. It honors the perseverance woven into our histories—stories of endurance, resistance, and deep-rooted connection to the land. This month celebrates the songs, languages, and traditions that survived against all odds and continue to rise in the voices of our people today. It is a reminder that Native nations are not echoes of a distant past but vibrant, living communities whose stories, leadership, and spirit still shape this land. We are still here—creating, teaching, healing, and carrying our cultures forward—part of yesterday, vital to today, and essential to tomorrow.

Notable Tribal Figures



TECUMSEH
ABSENTEE SHAWNEE CHIEF

Tecumseh (c. 1768–1813) was a remarkable Shawnee leader known for his courage, diplomacy, and powerful vision for unity. Growing up during a time of intense conflict, he rose to become one of the most influential Indigenous figures in early American history. Tecumseh believed that all Native nations shared the same land and destiny, and he worked tirelessly to build a large intertribal confederacy to protect their homelands from further loss.

A gifted speaker and respected warrior, Tecumseh inspired countless people with his commitment to justice, sovereignty, and unity. During the War of 1812, he allied with the British in hopes of creating a secure Indigenous homeland. He was killed in battle in 1813, but his legacy endures. Today, Tecumseh is honored as a symbol of Indigenous resistance, leadership, and nation-to-nation solidarity.

<https://www.history.com/articles/tecumseh>



BLACK HAWK
SAC AND FOX CHIEF

Black Hawk (c. 1767–1838) was a distinguished Sauk leader whose steadfast commitment to his people made him a central figure in the history of Native resistance in the 19th century. Born in the important Sauk village of Saukenuk, he rose to prominence as a respected warrior and community leader. Black Hawk is most widely recognized for guiding a band of Sauk, Meskwaki (Fox), and Kickapoo people during the 1832 Black Hawk War—an ultimately tragic conflict rooted in contested land cessions and the defense of ancestral homelands along the Mississippi River.

His dictated autobiography, published in 1833, remains one of the earliest and most significant Native American memoirs, offering invaluable insight into the experiences, worldview, and history of the Sauk people.

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Black-Hawk-Sauk-and-Fox-leader>



SATANTA
KIOWA CHIEF

Satanta (c. 1820–1878), known as the “Orator of the Plains,” was one of the most influential leaders of the Kiowa Nation. Renowned for his powerful voice, diplomatic skill, and commanding presence, Satanta became a key representative for his people during a time of immense pressure as the U.S. government pushed tribes onto reservations.

A respected chief and warrior, Satanta participated in negotiations across the Southern Plains. His speeches captured the struggles of his people and their determination to protect their freedom, culture, and homeland. Though he fought in defense of Kiowa territory, he also sought peaceful solutions and advocated boldly for his nation’s rights.

Today, he is remembered for his eloquence, bravery, and unwavering commitment to his people—an enduring voice for Kiowa sovereignty and strength.

<https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry?entry=SA024>



Native American Month Events



Boone-Apache: Native American Club

Riverside Indian School: Handgame

**Prague: Choctaw Stickball and Social
Dance Demonstration**

In Remembrance of Spike Bighorn



Spike Bighorn's life has been a steady light for his people. Born and raised on the Fort Peck Reservation, he devoted himself to lifting Native youth, strengthening tribal sovereignty, and ensuring that tribal voices were heard at the highest levels of government.

Through his work at the BIE and BIA, Spike fought for opportunity for Native families all across Indian Country. His leadership was guided not by titles, but by heart. He believed in the power of education, in the resilience of his people, and honoring the traditions that shaped him.

His impact lives on in the classrooms he supported, the programs he strengthened, and the generations of Native youth who will walk farther because he walked before them.

He will be missed.

Resources & AI Use In The Workplace and Classroom



QUICK RESOURCE LINKS FOR NATIVE STUDENTS

Scholarships & resources for Native American students enrolled in a federally recognized tribe.

COLLEGE & VOCATIONAL TECHNICAL TRAINING TRIBAL & COMMUNITY RESOURCES

- ✓ Events, Webinars & Internships
- ✓ Tuition Assistance for College & Vocational Technical Training
- ✓ Resource Organizations, Workshops, & Oklahoma Tribal Resources.

SCAN HERE TO DOWNLOAD OR VIEW ON MOBILE DEVICE



CHECK OUT SECTION I FOR EVENT UPDATES & TEDNA College Guide & AI in Tribal Education Webinar Series

okstep@tedna.org

<https://quick-resource-links-for-nastudents.my.canva.site/>

Using AI Effectively: Practical Skills, Prompts, and Playbooks

[Using AI Effectively](#)

Kaid'dub Pavel

AI in Education: Evidence-Based Practices & Integration

[AI in Education](#)

Kaid'dub Pavel



TEDNA AI sovereignty

Webinar **AI IS THE NEW HORSE:**
Harnessing Innovation for Tribal Education



Feather LaRoche
Founder
Relentless Feather

Monday, December 1
11:00 AM - 12:00 PM CST

[REGISTER NOW](#)



JOIN US



TEDNA AI sovereignty

Webinar **HOW AI COULD SAVE (NOT DESTROY) EDUCATION:**
Reimagining What's Possible for Teachers and Students



Danielle Sullivan
Senior Regional Manager,
Northeast District Partnerships
Khan Academy

Thursday, December 11
11:00 AM - 12:00 PM CST

[REGISTER NOW](#)





OK STEP: Progress at a Glance

Promoting Tribal Self-Determination: Through expanded training, strengthened communication systems, and deeper Tribal-school collaboration, OK STEP made significant progress in elevating Tribal voice and authority in educational decision-making.

- Confidence among Tribal Education Agencies (TEAs) in accurately identifying Native students for Title VI programs significantly increased, rising to 17%—well above annual expectations—due to strengthened training, standardized procedures, and improved interagency coordination.
- Community-driven cultural events, such as the Pinch Pot Demonstration at Little Axe Public Schools, demonstrated OK STEP's commitment to honoring Tribal preferences by asking families what they wanted rather than prescribing activities. These events engaged students, families, and educators in cultural learning and storytelling, reinforcing Tribal identity in school spaces.
- Participants reported noticeable improvements in communication, transparency, and resource access—showing strong foundations for increased future engagement. Elders played a pivotal role by offering cultural insight that shaped approaches to family engagement and student support.

Improving Academic Achievement: Culturally grounded academic supports expanded substantially, integrating Tribal knowledge with modern learning pathways and embedding evidence-based strategies into schools and educator development.

- Cultural and academic programs—including Camp Nikoti, a Shawnee-led immersion experience—provided hands-on learning in language, history, and cultural practices.
- Newsletters continue to feature multiple culturally responsive and evidence-based practices per issue. Highlights included tribal-led professional development, cultural events, and resources such as the Quick Resource Links for Native American Students, a digital hub used across districts and Tribal partners.

Fostering Coordination and Collaboration: Partnerships between TEAs, LEAs, and the SEA continued to expand in both depth and frequency, strengthening the infrastructure needed for sustainable Native education.

- Four major capacity-building activities were offered by TEAs (e.g., educator recruitment training, cultural camps, and a College & Career Fair) and four additional capacity-building activities were offered by SEA and LEAs (e.g., culturally responsive instruction, Title VI implementation, tribal consultation training).
- New cross-agency efforts—such as professional development for new Indian Education Coordinator and the establishment of an Indian Parent Committee—demonstrated sustained commitment to collaborative governance and local capacity-building.
- Partners cited clearer consultation processes, improved data-sharing, and more transparent communication as major strengths.
- Collaborative gatherings—including the Kiowa College & Career Fair and the Kiowa Family Engagement Night featuring traditional storytelling—deepened intergenerational learning and strengthened trust between Tribes and school communities.