

2026 NORTH DAKOTA INDIAN EDUCATION SUMMIT

Tuesday, July 28, 2026 - Keynote Address Overview

Session Topic: ***Fireside Chat with Martin Sensmeier***

Presenter: **Martin Sensmeier, Actor/Producer/Advocate**

Room: Brynhild Haugland

Time: Thursday, 9:00am

Session Description: Assistant Director Sashay Schettler will guide Sensmeier through a reflection on his formative years as a JOM and Title VI student. They will explore how his identity, community, and early educational experiences shaped the values he carries into his work today.

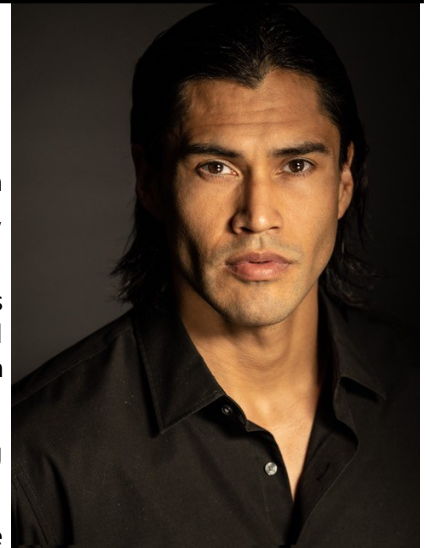
This session will uplift stories of the mentors, elders, educators, and loved ones who nurtured his confidence, affirmed his cultural grounding, and opened doors of possibility. Participants will gain insight into how these relationships influenced Sensmeier's journey from a small Alaska Native community to a successful career in film, advocacy, and Indigenous representation.

Attendees will leave with a renewed sense of purpose and practical inspiration for strengthening the supports, programs, and human connections that help our students thrive!

Presenter Bio: Martin Sensmeier is an actor and producer from Yakutat, Alaska and from the Native Alaskan Tribes, Tlingit and Koyukon-Athabascan.

He is known for his portrayal of the character "Red Harvest" in the "Magnificent Seven" with Denzel Washington and Chris Pratt, HBO's Westworld, and Yellowstone. His lead roles include Netflix's "The Liberator" and "The Last Manhunt" produced by Jason Momoa. Look for Martin soon alongside Pratt in Terminal List streaming on Prime. Next season he will be a regular cast member on the very popular Dark Winds (AMC). He also plays the lead role in the upcoming sequel to the hit movie Wind River called "Wind River Rising" alongside Jason Clark and Scott Eastwood.

Martin is a national spokesperson and ambassador for the Native Services of the Boys & Girls Clubs of America who makes time to regularly speak to young people about a variety of issues including mental and physical health and wellness.



Wednesday, July 29, 2026 - Keynote Address Overview



Session Topic: ***Educating American Indian Students: Communicating, Caring, Connecting***

Presenter: **Nadine Groenig, SunClan Consulting, LLC**

Room: Brynhild Haugland

Time: Wednesday, 9:00am

Session Description: Ms. Groenig will share her professional experiences working to increase Native student retention which include creating a positive school environment; implementing culturally responsive curriculum, instruction, and assessment; providing social-emotional supports; and parent involvement. She will also share personal stories from her own education during which she experienced communication, caring, and connection from teachers who were very impactful in her young life.

Presenter Bio: Nadine Groenig is a member of the Pueblo of Laguna in New Mexico and former Director of Indian Education at the Arizona Department of Education (ADE). She graduated summa cum laude from Arizona State University in 2001 with a degree in English. She began working in the Operations Unit at ADE in February 2002 and became a Title I Specialist in 2006 working with forty school districts on or bordering Indian reservations. In 2015, she became Director of Indian Education. After more than 23 years in K-12 education and 11 years in the non-profit business sector, Nadine started SunClan Consulting in 2020. An expert in federal funding benefitting Indigenous students, their parents, and their educators, she has developed an outstanding team of professionals to lead new concepts and develop programs in Indigenous education.



2026 NORTH DAKOTA INDIAN EDUCATION SUMMIT

Tuesday, July 28, 2026 - General Session Overview

Session Topic: ***Human-Shaped Learning and Indigenous Wisdom: Remembering How Humans Learn***

Presenter: **Dr. Scott Simpson, Sharla Steever - Compass, Partners in Learning**

Room: Brynhild Haugland

Time: Tuesday, 10:15am

Session Description: What if the future of education lies in remembering something Indigenous communities have known for generations?

Across Indigenous cultures, learning has long been rooted in story, relationship, observation, and community. Knowledge is passed through elders, land, and lived experience—reminding us that education has always been deeply human.

In this interactive keynote, Dr. Scott Simpson and Sharla Steever explore the powerful intersection between Indigenous ways of learning and the Human-Shaped Learning framework. Drawing on years of partnership with Indigenous elders, educators, and communities, they share stories that reveal how trust, belonging, and cultural wisdom create the conditions where real learning flourishes.

Through storytelling, reflection, and dialogue with the audience, participants will explore how schools can move beyond systems driven by efficiency and performance toward learning environments rooted in relationship, cultural respect, and human connection. This session invites educators, leaders, and community members to reflect not only on what we teach—but on how we show up with students, families, and communities.

Participants will leave inspired and equipped with ideas for building classrooms and schools where Indigenous knowledge and human connection shape the future of learning.

Presenter Bio: Dr. Scott Simpson and Sharla Steever are educators, authors, and facilitators whose shared work centers on relational trust, intercultural growth, and human-centered learning. With more than five decades of combined experience across K–12 education, higher education, leadership development, and community engagement, Scott and Sharla partner with schools, districts, nonprofits, tribal communities, and organizations seeking meaningful cultural transformation. Their work blends research-based practice with storytelling, reflection, and practical tools that help people navigate difference with humility and courage.

As co-developers and co-directors of the Teachings of Our Elders Project they have collaborated with Indigenous elders across North and South Dakota to document and preserve cultural wisdom while supporting the integration of Indigenous Essential Understandings into schools. Their long-standing relationships with tribal communities are rooted in trust, protocol, and shared learning.

Scott brings a background in English education, creative writing, music, and university teaching. Sharla brings experience as a National Board Certified teacher, U.S. Department of Education Teaching Ambassador Fellow, and longtime elementary educator. Together, they integrate scholarship, creativity, and relational presence into every space they enter.

Their presentations are known for blending depth and accessibility—inviting participants to slow down, listen deeply, and rediscover the power of story to build bridges across difference.

Tuesday, July 28, 2026 - Cultural Presentation

Session Topic: ***The American Indian's Voice in America's Semiquincentennial***

Presenter: **Darren Thompson - Native American Musician, Artist, Journalist**

Room: Memorial Hall

Time: Tuesday, 11:45am

Session Description: Guest Darren Thompson utilizes modern and historical Native American flutes to discuss the use of a musical instrument throughout history. Listeners will hear of more than 3,000 years of history through music, historical documents, and storytelling of North American Indigenous peoples, learning of historical cultures, music styles, and Indigenous knowledge.

Presenter Bio: Darren Thompson (Ojibwe/Tohono O'odham) is a Native American flute player, traditional quill artist and multi-media journalist from the Lac du Flambeau Ojibwe Reservation in Northern Wisconsin, where he grew up. His journalism on American Indian issues as well as his reviews of his music have been included in the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Chicago Tribune, National Public Radio, ProPublica, the Associated Press, and numerous media throughout the world. He has contributed to Buffalo's Fire, Native Sun News Today, Unicorn Riot, Indian Country Today and many other publications. He has performed at America's most prestigious American Indian cultural organizations and institutions including the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian, the Heard Museum, the Santa Fe Indian Market, the National Music Museum, the Crazy Horse Monument, the Berklee College of Music, and Atelier Jolie—the Manhattan based art gallery owned by Angelina Jolie.



2026 NORTH DAKOTA INDIAN EDUCATION SUMMIT

Wednesday, July 29, 2026 - General Session Overview

Session Topic: ***Infinite Campus Updates***

Presenter: **Steve Snow - NDDPI**

Room: Brynhild Haugland

Time: Wednesday, 10:15am

Session Description: The BRIDGE team will provide updates to the Infinite Campus cut-over project, the current status of system integrations and data submissions to the state.

Presenter Bio: Steve is a seasoned professional with a rich history in both the public and private sectors. With over 21 years of service in the US Air Force, he honed his skills working on deployable communications systems. Upon retiring from the Air Force, Steve transitioned to the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI), where he served as the Director of the Management Information System unit for 8 years. His journey then took him to the private sector, where he spent 4 years as a software manager, before returning to NDDPI as the System Integration Specialist.

Steve holds a bachelor's degree in computer science and a master's degree in information management. His passion for the practical application of technology has been a driving force throughout his career, inspiring him to stay at the forefront of technological advancements. Whether in the Air Force, NDDPI, or the private sector, Steve has continually sought innovative solutions to complex problems. His dedication to the field and his breadth of experience makes him a respected leader in the industry.

Wednesday, July 29, 2026 - Youth Speaker Overview

Session Topic:

Presenter: - **Youth Speaker**

Room: Memorial Hall

Time: Wednesday, 11:45am

Session Description:

Presenter Bio:

Breakout Session Overviews with Presenter Bios

Session Topic: **INSTEM**

Presenter: Dr. Jamie Wirth

Room: Fort Totten (Tues)

Time: Tuesday, 1:00pm

Session Description: INSTEM is a week-long summer STEM academy at Valley City State University for ND Native American students in grades 7-12. INSTEM's mission is to increase awareness and interest in STEM careers among ND Native American students, while also providing them with the opportunity to live and study on a college campus to increase self-efficacy in STEM academic content and future higher education enrollment. This session will provide an overview of INSTEM, including highlights from previous years and information on how future students can apply to attend. See more at www.vcsu.edu/instem.

Presenter Bio: Jamie Wirth, Ph.D. is the Director of the Great Plains STEM Education Center (GPSEC) at Valley City State University and Director of GPSEC's primary project, INSTEM. Wirth also serves as a professor and department chair for VCSU's Department of Mathematics.

Session Topic: ***Collaborating for Student Success: Tribal Child Welfare Supports and Connections***

Presenter: Anthony Esquibel, Janakate Walker

Room: Fort Union

Time: Tuesday, 1:00pm

Session Description: This session provides an overview of the roles and responsibilities of the HHS Children and Family Services, Child Welfare Tribal Liaison and partnering staff within the K–12 school system. Participants will learn how our positions support students, families, and school teams through coordinated communication, cultural understanding, and resource navigation. The presentation will highlight key support available to youth and caregivers, including Family First Services, Kinship ND, Children's Treatment Services Level [KB2.1][AE2.2] of Care assessment process and contracted services offered by the ICWA Family Preservation Program, Chafee Transition Program, Native, Inc., and training contracts through NATI and CFSTC, as well as additional community-based programs. We will also share available data, referral pathways, and contact information to strengthen collaboration and ensure students and families receive the services they need.

Presenter Bio: Anthony Esquibel is an experienced educator with over two decades of teaching and administrative service. He has led elementary schools, supported instructional staff, and advanced student success across North Dakota. He also served as a grant manager for 14 tribal nations through the Solar for All initiative. In October 2025, he became the Child Welfare Tribal Liaison, overseeing contracts and funding for ND Tribal Nations.

Janakate Walker serves as the Child Welfare Tribal Liaison for North Dakota Health and Human Services. She brings over 18 years of experience in child welfare, behavioral health, education, and tribal systems coordination. Her work focuses on strengthening collaboration among tribal, state, and federal partners supporting children and families. Janakate is recognized for advancing culturally grounded, trauma informed practices and promoting equitable outcomes. She also serves on multiple state and regional advisory councils dedicated to tribal health, early intervention, and systems coordination.

Session Topic: ***Teaching Tribal Sovereignty as Civics: Native Books and Primary Sources in the Classroom***

Presenter: Helen Thomas, Nakina Mills

Room: Peace Garden

Time: Tuesday, 1:00pm

Session Description: This session will introduce developmentally appropriate ways to teach tribal sovereignty using Native-authored texts and primary sources. The session begins with a brief grounding in the political status of Native Nations and the government-to-government relationship between Tribal Nations and the United States, a topic area that is often underrepresented in traditional civics instruction. This session draws on NIEA's ongoing work supporting educators in teaching tribal sovereignty as a core civics concept.

The session then shares a practical framework for building background knowledge of tribal sovereignty across grade bands, from PK to high school. This framework includes foundational ideas about community, belonging, and Native Nations, civics concepts such as governance, treaties, and nationhood, and deeper exploration of sovereignty, federal Indian law, and contemporary civic realities.

Participants will look at examples from Indigenous children's and young adult literature alongside complementary primary sources such as treaties, tribal constitutions, and contemporary civic texts. Together, we will explore how themes of sovereignty show up across texts and how educators can help students engage with these ideas in age-appropriate ways.

Participants will:

- Explore entry points for teaching Tribal sovereignty across grade levels
- Learn how to pair Indigenous- authored books with primary and civic sources
- Consider how sovereignty connects to existing civics standards
- Leave with practical strategies and guidance for classroom use

Throughout the session, reflective and collaborative activities will allow participants to deeply engage and identify how these ideas might show up in their own teaching contexts.

Presenter Bio: Helen Thomas is a Hunkpapa Lakota educator, writer, and citizen of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe originally from North Dakota. She serves as the professional learning manager for the National Indian Education Association where she oversees training and technical assistance.

Nakina Mills, a proud member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe from Pine Ridge, S.D., carries the Lakota name Tate' Cik'ala Win (Little Wind Woman). In her role at NIEA, Nakina works with Tribal Nations and state education agencies to build capacity and advance education sovereignty.

Breakout Session Overviews with Presenter Bios

Session Topic: ***A Pathway to Success Through Teaching and Mentoring***

Presenter: Sarah Zacher

Room: Lewis & Clark

Time: Tuesday, 1:00pm

Session Description: Discover how a federally-funded Native Youth Community project grant is making a difference for Minnewaukan High School students over the past 4 years. This session will highlight key activities supported by the grant, which is a collaborative effort between Minnewaukan Public Schools, the University of Jamestown, the Northeast Education Services Cooperative, and the Spirit Lake Tribe. Together, these partners are working to support Native youth in becoming college and career ready, exploring future pathways, and considering teaching as a profession. The perspectives of both high school and university students will be shared.

Presenter Bio: Sarah Zacher is a 9-12 social studies teacher at Minnewaukan Public School. She teaches all social studies courses and makes historical content relevant to students to aid in engagement, persistence, and self-achievement. She is also a PhD student at UND, focusing on culturally responsive practices and their impact on Native American education.

Session Topic: ***Rules, Requirements, and Reminders... Oh, My!***

Presenter: Michelle Siegfried, Jen Withers

Room: Sakakawea

Time: Tuesday, 1:00pm

Session Description: NDDPI staff will provide guidance on annual recordkeeping requirements all districts must keep according to civil law regarding foster care and homeless students. Policies and procedures must be in place even if no foster care or homeless students are currently enrolled.

Presenter Bio: Michelle Siegfried is the Foster Care and Schoolwide Title I program administrator in the Office of Educational Improvement and Support for the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI). She ensures educational stability for youth in foster care and the implementation of federal and state regulations regarding Schoolwide Title I and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in North Dakota schools/districts. With a bachelor's degree in education (Valley City State University) and 25+ years of experience teaching and leadership roles in the public school system, Michelle currently enjoys empowering and educating administrators and teachers to provide inspiring opportunities for all students to achieve academic success and life readiness.

Jen Withers serves as Assistant Director in the Office of Educational Improvement & Support for the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction. Portfolios include the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, Title I, Part D, and Human Trafficking, working closely with Title I, Part A and Foster Care. Before joining NDDPI, Jen spent 20 years in higher education, working in various student affairs roles, assisting and advocating for at-risk students. Her favorite role was Dean of Students which oversaw TRIO Student Support Services. Jen holds bachelor's degrees in education and psychology (Eastern Kentucky University), and a master's degree in Education Administration (Mississippi State University). She is pursuing a doctorate in Educational Leadership. Her free time is spent reading, running, watching college football, and chauffeuring her 4th and 6th graders to anything soccer and cross-country related.

Session Topic: ***Building Stronger Federal Programs***

Presenter: Angie Richter, Kate Waechter, Shannon Sorenson

Room: Red River

Time: Tuesday, 1:00pm

Session Description: Assistant directors of Federal Title Programs at the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction will present an engaging and practical session focused on strengthening the implementation of Title I, Title II, Title IV A, and Title V programs in schools and districts. This session will highlight how federal funds can be strategically braided, aligned, and leveraged to support academic achievement, student well-being, culturally responsive practices, and equitable access to high quality instruction for students of all backgrounds and diverse backgrounds.

Participants will gain clarity on federal program expectations, common compliance challenges, and best practices emerging from the field. The session will also explore opportunities for collaboration between districts, education partners, and communities to enhance outcomes for students across North Dakota. Attendees will leave with tools, guidance, and a renewed understanding of how strong, well designed federal programs can positively impact schools statewide.

Presenter Bio: Angie Richter – Assistant Director of Educational Improvement and Support - Title I Part A and state ombudsman

Kate Waechter – Assistant Director of Academic Support - Title II and V

Shannon Sorenson - Assistant Director of Educational Improvement and Support - Title IV Part A and Title IV Part B

Breakout Session Overviews with Presenter Bios

Session Topic: *Building Partnerships, Strengthening PreK-2nd grade Learning, Transforming Outcomes*

Presenter: Becky Eberhardt

Room: Fort Totten

Time: Tuesday, 2:00pm

Session Description: Join us for an engaging breakout session where we delve into the transformative power of partnerships in early childhood education. This session will explore how collaborative efforts can significantly enhance PreK-2nd grade learning outcomes. We will highlight Waterford.org's innovative approach, grounded in the science of reading, which forms the foundation of our curriculum. Our evidence-based strategies are designed to foster literacy, math and science development in young learners, ensuring they build strong foundational skills. Participants will gain insights into our collaboration and partnership mindset, which is central to our mission. By working together with educators, families, and communities, we aim to create a supportive and enriching learning environment for every child. Key takeaways: Understanding the science of reading and its application in early education. Strategies for building effective partnerships to support young learners. Insights into Waterford.org's goals and mission to transform educational outcomes. The importance of family engagement in reinforcing learning at home and creating a cohesive support system for children. Join us to learn how we can collectively make a lasting impact on the future of our youngest learners!

Presenter Bio: Becky Eberhardt brings over 20 years of experience working in early education in ND. Through her work she is dedicated to ensuring that all children and families have equal access to early high quality education opportunities. She is a mother to a 12-year-old daughter and 9-year-old son who keep her and her husband busy and on their toes. Becky holds a Bachelors of Science degree in children and family studies from NDSU.

Session Topic: *The Behavior Big Leagues: Mastering Tier 3 Supports*

Presenter: Michelle Woodcock, Kayla Stastny

Room: Fort Union

Time: Tuesday, 2:00pm & Wednesday, 3:00pm

Session Description: This is a fast-paced, one hour training where we huddle up to tackle effective Tier 3 behavior supports within a tiered playbook. This session breaks down how to run winning strategies aligned with IDEA, ADA, and federal guidance, helping teams draft strong FBAs, execute high-impact BIPs, and keep every student in the game with equitable access and support. Participants will leave with a clearer game plan for collaborating, analyzing data, tracking fidelity and calling the right plays to support students with the most intensive behavioral needs.

Presenter Bio: Michelle Woodcock is the assistant director in the Office of Specially Designed Services. She has worked for NDDPI for 8 years. She holds the portfolios of Emotional Disturbance, Behavioral Health, School Discipline, Graduation/Dropout, and Related Services. Prior to NDDPI, she worked as a special education teacher primarily working with students with social-emotional-behavioral disabilities.

Session Topic: *Teaching Native Content Through Place: A Native Education for All Framework*

Presenter: Helen Thomas, Nakina Mills

Room: Peace Garden

Time: Tuesday, 2:00pm

Session Description: This session introduces a place-based framework for teaching Native content grounded in NIEA's Native Educator for All (NEFA) principles. Participants will explore how to design learning experiences that are rooted in local Native histories, lands, and contemporary realities. The session is grounded in a NEFA framework that centers learning from Native advocacy, Native peoples, Native places, and Native Nations. The framework is designed to be adaptable across regions and grounded in local and regional Native contexts.

Participants will engage with:

- A practical framework for designing place-based Native content instruction
- Examples of how educators have implemented NEFA principles in classrooms and professional learning spaces
- Strategies for learning from and with local Native Nations and communities
- Reflection prompts to consider how place shapes teaching and learning

The session will also address common challenges educators face in this process, including navigating local context, building relationships respectfully, and moving beyond generalized or pan-Indian approaches to teaching Native content. Participants will leave with a clearer understanding of how to ground instruction about Native content in place and a digital collection of free, accessible curricular resources that can be adapted to their classroom and community context.

Presenter Bio: Helen Thomas is a Hunkpapa Lakota educator, writer, and citizen of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe originally from North Dakota. She serves as the Professional Learning Manager for the National Indian Education Association where she oversees training and technical assistance.

Nakina Mills, a proud member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe from Pine Ridge, S.D., carries the Lakota name Tate' Cik'ala Win (Little Wind Woman). In her role at NIEA, Nakina works with Tribal Nations and state education agencies to build capacity and advance education sovereignty.

Breakout Session Overviews with Presenter Bios

Session Topic: ***From Student Voice to Sustainable Impact: Building Strategic Partnerships***

Presenter: The Bismarck Public Schools Indigenous Education Department - Tomi Cimarosti, Donovan Lambert, AnnMarie DeCoteau, Chadwick Kramer, Suzie Golus

Room: Lewis & Clark

Time: Tuesday, 2:00pm & Wednesday, 2:00pm

Session Description: Hosted by the Bismarck Public Schools Indigenous Education Department, this interactive circle-format session will explore how authentic relationships, student voice, cultural connectedness, and community partnerships can create sustainable systems of support for Indigenous students and families in urban education spaces. Participants will engage in meaningful dialogue centered on the power of collaboration and collective responsibility in advancing Indigenous education across North Dakota.

This session will highlight impactful partnerships and collaborative efforts with organizations and institutions including Youthworks, University of North Dakota, North Dakota Department of Public Instruction and the Teachings of Our Elders initiative, United Tribes Technical College, Wozu, Tribal Nations, community leaders, Elder Mentors, Knowledge Keepers, students, and families. Through shared experiences and storytelling, participants will learn how these partnerships have strengthened student belonging, increased cultural visibility, expanded leadership opportunities, and created pathways for healing-centered and culturally responsive education.

The session will also highlight:

- The integration of Elder Mentors and Knowledge Keepers within schools and student programming
- Building opportunities for ceremony, cultural teachings, and Indigenous identity affirmation within urban educational settings
- Collaborative approaches to supporting academic success while honoring cultural responsibilities and community engagement
- Student-led leadership initiatives and the importance of elevating youth voice in systems change
- Strategies for sustaining partnerships beyond one-time events and moving toward long-term relational accountability

Participants will take part in an interactive circle activity titled "Voices That Carry Forward." During this experience, attendees will reflect on a student voice, teaching, or relationship that transformed their understanding of Indigenous education and identify one actionable commitment they can carry back into their schools, districts, or communities. The activity is designed to foster connection, reflection, and shared responsibility while modeling culturally grounded engagement practices that can be replicated within educational spaces.

This session is intended for educators, administrators, Tribal education representatives, school counselors, community organizations, higher education partners, and anyone committed to strengthening Indigenous student success through authentic collaboration, relationship-building, and culturally sustaining practices.

Presenter Bio: Tomi Cimarosti - Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, BPS Indigenous Education Director

Donovan Lambert - Spirit Lake Oyate, Cultural Responsive Coordinator

Chadwick Kramer - Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, Cultural Responsive Coordinator

Susan Golus - Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Descendent of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, Cultural Responsive Coordinator

AnnMarie Decoteau - Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, Curriculum and Instruction Specialist

Session Topic: ***Educational Stability for At-Risk Students***

Presenter: Jen Withers, Michelle Siegfried

Room: Tuesday, Sakakawea & Wednesday, Fort Union

Time: Tuesday, 2:00pm & Wednesday, 1:00pm

Session Description: NDDPI staff will provide an overview of at-risk programs, requirements, record-keeping, and funding opportunities. These areas include Homeless and Foster Care education programs.

Presenter Bio: Jen Withers serves as assistant director in the Office of Educational Improvement & Support for the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction. Portfolios include the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, Title I, Part D, and Human Trafficking, working closely with Title I, Part A and Foster Care. Before joining NDDPI, Jen spent 20 years in higher education, working in various student affairs roles, assisting and advocating for at-risk students. Her favorite role was Dean of Students which oversaw TRIO Student Support Services. Jen holds bachelor's degrees in education and psychology (Eastern Kentucky University), and a master's degree in Education Administration (Mississippi State University). She is pursuing a doctorate in Educational Leadership. Her free time is spent reading, running, watching college football, and chauffeuring her 4th and 6th graders to anything soccer and cross-country related.

Michelle Siegfried is the Foster Care and Schoolwide Title I program administrator in the Office of Educational Improvement and Support for the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI). She ensures educational stability for youth in foster care and the implementation of federal and state regulations regarding Schoolwide Title I and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in North Dakota schools/districts. With a bachelor's degree in education (Valley City State University) and 25+ years of experience teaching and leadership roles in the public school system, Michelle currently enjoys empowering and educating administrators and teachers to provide inspiring opportunities for all students to achieve academic success and life readiness.

Breakout Session Overviews with Presenter Bios

Session Topic: *Wowachinyanka (Listening with Respect): Using Compass to Elevate Staff and Student Voices*

Presenter: Dr. Shawn Oban, Nichole Sala

Room: Tuesday, Red River & Wednesday, Sakakawea

Time: Tuesday, 2:00pm & Wednesday, 2:00pm

Session Description: At Horizon Middle School, we encounter microaggressions, moments of cultural misunderstanding, and the ongoing work of honoring the diverse identities of our students, families, and staff. We don't present ourselves as experts, but as learners who have found the Compass framework to be a meaningful guide for building a more culturally responsive and relational school community. In this session, we will share how elevating family, student, and staff voices has shifted our practices and contributed to measurable improvements reflected in our ND A+ results. Participants will hear stories from the people doing the work and leave with practical strategies for transforming everyday conflict into opportunities for connection, belonging, and growth.

Presenter Bio: Dr. Shawn Oban is a student-centered K-12 leader with more than 25 years of experience across classroom, building, and district roles, and he currently serves as principal of Horizon Middle School in Bismarck Public Schools. His leadership has strengthened culture, safety, instructional alignment, equity, and community trust through work as a multi-site elementary principal, District Fine Arts Coordinator, and champion of MTSS, HRS, AVID, PLC, and standards aligned practices. He also brings civic leadership experience as a former Bismarck City Commissioner, contributing to strategic planning and public service efforts that support community well-being.

Nichole Sala, the library media specialist at Horizon Middle School in Bismarck, North Dakota, has spent over 20 years learning from and working alongside students and educators. Guided by the belief that every person deserves to feel they belong, she partners with Compass to explore how culturally relevant education and authentic listening can illuminate the diverse stories within school communities. For Nichole, innovation is less about new tools and more about building meaningful relationships that help every learner feel seen and heard.

Session Topic: *Embedding Community and Culture within Your Classroom Through Connection*

Presenter: Dr. Bethany Klemetsrud, Alexa Azure, Dr. Julie Robinson

Room: Fort Totten

Time: Tuesday, 3:00pm

Session Description: Participants in the session will explore strategies for connecting to community partners to provide meaningful and relevant educational and career pathways for students as part of their science and engineering learning across all grade levels. This session will introduce participants to a Culturally and Community Relevant Engineering Design Framework (the CRED) that supports teachers and students in identifying and describing real-world challenges within their local contexts and developing authentic solutions. In addition, participants will learn about ways to invite community partners into their classrooms. Participants will also have the opportunity to brainstorm and workshop potential community connections for their existing lessons, curriculum, and programming, so they are invited to bring an activity or lesson to the session that they feel would be enhanced by community partnership.

Topics to be discussed will include:

- What is Community? How do we define Community?
- How do you engage the community?
- How can we embed community within our lessons?
- How can we connect real problems impacting our community into our lessons/standards?

Participants will receive resources and handouts to support their on-going implementation of community-connected instruction and lesson design.

Presenter Bio: Dr. Bethany Klemetsrud is an assistant professor of chemical engineering at the University of North Dakota. Her research specializes in sustainability, renewable research, and community relevant engineering education. Beth grew up in the White Earth Nation and is Brotherton and Oneida.

Alexa Azure is the engineering chair/instructor at United Tribes Technical College (UTTC) and a doctoral student at UND in the Environmental Engineering program. She is a member of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and an alumni of both UTTC and UND. Her research interests span materials, PFAS, and research that is of interest to the communities she serves.

Dr. Julie Robinson is an assistant research professor at UND and director of their Center for Engineering Education (CEER). She specializes in culturally and community relevant STEM education and teacher professional learning. She is a former elementary teacher, instructional coach, and curriculum director.

Session Topic: *Advancing Student Success through Targeted Support*

Presenter: Michelle Woodcock, Natalie Couture

Room: Fort Union

Time: Tuesday, 3:00pm

Session Description: Advancing Student Success through Targeted Support, offers educators a clear overview of the following key evidence-based practices: EWIMS, Opportunities to Respond, Behavior-Specific Praise, the Good Behavior Game, and Check-In/Check-Out. Participants will learn how each practice supports early intervention, increases engagement, and strengthens positive behavior. These practices are supported by NDDPI's GRAD701 grant and B-HERO.

Presenter Bio: Michelle Woodcock is the assistant director in the Office of Specially Designed Services for NDDPI.

Natalie Couture is the partnership & program specialist for B-HERO.

Breakout Session Overviews with Presenter Bios

Session Topic: ***NIEA Sponsored Professional Development: Solutions for Changing Workplace Environments***

Presenter: Dr. Carmelita Lamb, Helen Thomas

Room: Peace Garden

Time: Tuesday, 3:00pm

Session Description: This discussion focuses on the NIEA Sponsored Professional Development (PD) suite of online courses available to education professionals via the partnership of the University of Phoenix and NIEA. Graduate completers of the Office of Indian Education Professional Development grant were recruited to complete the PD courses in fulfillment of their induction programming. The three courses selected were: Community Based Education, Community-Based Education Instructional Approaches, and Foundations of Native Education. Co-Presenters represent a sample of the OIE completers who engaged in this programming and will offer telling feedback on the quality and usefulness of the NIEA professional development opportunity designed to meet the needs of busy educators and administrators within Indian education.

Presenter Bio: Dr. Lamb oversees four awards (10.62 million) under the Office of Indian Education and Department of Education. Dr. Lamb has been a PI the OIE professional development program since 2011; she is passionate about building capacity in Indian Country and strives to find resources for Native scholarship at the bachelors, masters and doctorate level.

Helen Thomas is a Hunkpapa Lakota educator, writer, and citizen of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe originally from North Dakota. She serves as the Professional Learning Manager for the National Indian Education Association where she oversees training and technical assistance. about new tools and more about building meaningful relationships that help every learner feel seen and heard.

Session Topic: ***Strengthening Tribal Community and Family Ties with Early Childhood Education***

Presenter: Dr. Kathy Froelich, Chanda DeCoteau, Dr. Mari Rasumssen

Room: Lewis & Clark

Time: Tuesday, 3:00pm

Session Description: Early childhood education provides a foundation for children and sets them on the right track for their later school years. Success in English language arts, math, and the content areas is built on the basic skills and concepts taught in early schooling. Traditionally, in an indigenous community, young children were educated by family and community members. Can young children be supported in today's schools to develop the essential skills and knowledge for later success within a traditional indigenous framework? Yes.

Presenters will share strategies and methods that provide young learners with appropriate foundational skills for success, working in a culturally responsive manner with parents and community members. Participants will have an opportunity to discuss and share their ideas, as well as learn new strategies.

Presenter Bio: Kathy Froelich is an enrolled member of the Mandan Hidatsa and Arikara Nation. Dr. Froelich is currently the culture coordinator with the Central Regional Education Association. She is a lifelong educator who has taught elementary school on the Standing Rock Reservation, taught at Sitting Bull College, and holds a PhD in Teaching and Learning from the University of North Dakota.

Chanda DeCouteau is an enrolled member of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. She graduated from Sitting Bull College in 2021 with her bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education. She taught kindergarten for 4 years at Cannonball Elementary School before becoming the pre-k teacher at Standing Rock Elementary School's new FACE program.

Mari B. Rasmussen currently teaches at Dickinson State University and Valley City State University. She is a lifelong educator who has taught in various places, including Izmir, Turkey; Bismarck Public Schools; McKenzie County Public Schools; and Standing Rock Community Schools, and holds a PhD in Teaching and Learning from the University of North Dakota.

Session Topic: ***ND COUNTS: Updates***

Presenter: Kate Waechter

Room: Tuesday, Sakakawea & Wednesday, Fort Totten

Time: Tuesday, 3:00pm & Wednesday, 3:00pm

Session Description: An overview of current updates regarding ND COUNTS Math legislation and requirements for districts. Time will be reserved at the end for Q&A.

Presenter Bio: Kate Waechter is an assistant director in the office of Academic Support at NDDPI. Prior to her role in the department, she taught middle school math for 11 years. Her primary responsibilities at the department are ND COUNTS implementation, Title V/REAP coordinator, professional development/Title II, and computer science/AI.

Session Topic: ***It Takes a Community: Leveraging Legendary Learners to Support School Readiness***

Presenter: Taylor Olsen, Carolyn Kueber

Room: Tuesday, Red River & Wednesday, Peace Garden

Time: Tuesday, 3:00pm & Wednesday, 2:00pm

Session Description: In this session, educators and school leaders will be introduced to the North Dakota Legendary Learners Family Guide: Building Literacy Skills and its companion resource, School Readiness for Legendary Learners. Representatives from DPI and DHHS will walk participants through practical ways to use these tools to strengthen early literacy and support smooth transitions into school.

Presenter Bio: Taylor Olsen is an education program administrator with the Department of Public Instruction where she works with schools on supporting literacy programming through the CLSD grant. Prior to joining NDDPI, Taylor was a high school English teacher.

Carolyn Kueber holds a bachelor's degree in Child Development and Family Science from North Dakota State University and brings 24 years of experience in the early childhood field. Her professional background includes 17 years with Head Start, as well as extensive work in childcare licensing. She is dedicated to advancing high-quality early learning and supporting systems that strengthen outcomes for young children and their families.

Breakout Session Overviews with Presenter Bios

Session Topic: *Understanding the CHINS Unit: Referral Pathways and Youth Eligibility*

Presenter: Jessica Villegas, Suzy Anderson, Dr. Sheeresa Begay

Room: Fort Totten

Time: Wednesday, 1:00pm

Session Description: This session will provide a clear overview of North Dakota's Children in Need of Services (CHINS) Unit, including its purpose and the behaviors that qualify a youth for services. Presenters will walk through the referral process step by step, outlining who can make a referral and what information is needed. Participants will learn how referrals are reviewed and assessed to determine the appropriate level of service intensity for each youth. The session will equip attendees with practical knowledge to identify when a CHINS referral is appropriate and how to connect families to timely support.

Presenter Bio: The Children in Need of Services (CHINS) Unit is a statewide group of Human Service Zone professionals dedicated to supporting children, youth, and families. They assist young people experiencing challenges such as truancy, running away, tobacco use, or ungovernable behavior at home, offering help before court involvement is needed. By partnering with families, schools, and community providers, the team connects youth to early, community-based services that promote stability and well-being. Their work focuses on reducing barriers, strengthening family relationships, and ensuring every child receives timely, appropriate support. Together, the CHINS Unit advances North Dakota's commitment to prevention, compassion, and positive outcomes for youth.

Session Topic: *ND Special Education Dispute Resolution Options and State Complaint Review*

Presenter: Lea Kugel

Room: Peace Garden

Time: Wednesday, 1:00pm

Session Description: This presentation will provide an overview of the four dispute resolution options available to public entities and parents. It will also offer a concise review of recent special education state complaint findings from the past few years. Participants will gain practical insight into common compliance concerns, procedural errors, and opportunities to strengthen district practices.

Learning Objectives:

- 1) Identify the dispute resolution options available in ND for students with disabilities.
- 2) Analyze common themes and findings from recent state complaints.
- 3) Explain the regulatory requirements and procedural safeguards implicated in these state complaints.
- 4) Apply lessons learned from this review to strengthen compliance and improve educational outcomes for students with disabilities.

Presenter Bio: Lea Kugel has worked in special education for over the past 31 years. Over the past 10 years, she has worked in the Office of Specially Designed Services at NDDPI in various roles. Over the last 2 and a half years, she has worked as the dispute resolution coordinator and has worked with many parents, school districts, and special education units interested in or involved in dispute resolution in ND.

Session Topic: *Building Strong Teachers Through Mentoring and Meaningful Support*

Presenter: Erin Jacobson, Dr. Marijke Leibel

Room: Lewis & Clark

Time: Wednesday, 1:00pm

Session Description: Strong mentoring systems help new teachers feel supported, confident, and connected to their school communities, especially in their first years, when the risk of leaving the profession is highest. Since 2009, ND RISE has supported more than 5,000 educators across over 160 districts in North Dakota through structured mentoring, relationship-building, and collaboration with school leaders.

In this session, participants will learn how clear expectations, consistent communication, and shared responsibility between mentors, administrators, and new teachers create stability for schools and better outcomes for students. We will share practical strategies for selecting and supporting mentors, building strong partnerships, and using data to demonstrate the impact of mentoring on teacher retention.

Participants will leave with concrete ideas they can apply in their own schools and communities to strengthen support for new educators and build a sustainable mentoring culture.

Presenter Bio: Erin Jacobson is the coordinator of ND RISE, North Dakota's statewide mentoring program for new teachers, serving more than 5,000 educators across over 160 districts. She works with school leaders across the state to strengthen mentoring systems that improve teacher confidence, retention, and student success. Erin is passionate about building leadership capacity in educators and ensuring every new teacher has the support they need to stay and thrive in the profession.

Dr. Marijke Leibel is the assistant coordinator of ND RISE, where she leads program design, research, and continuous improvement efforts to strengthen educator support across North Dakota. She has conducted extensive research on teacher retention and mentoring systems, helping districts use data to make informed decisions about supporting new teachers. Dr. Leibel is committed to advancing mentoring as a powerful strategy for retaining effective educators and building strong schools.

Breakout Session Overviews with Presenter Bios

Session Topic: *Native American Needs Assessment Stakeholder Listening Session*

Presenter: Dr. Ellie Shockley, Dr. Gregory Carlson

Room: Sakakawea

Time: Wednesday, 1:00pm

Session Description: The Native American Needs Assessment helps the state identify areas of need and key priorities for school support in service of educating Native American students. Moving forward, the Native American Needs Assessment will incorporate information from a variety of sources, including insights gathered through stakeholder listening sessions. This breakout represents one such listening session. Please join us to share your thoughts on meeting the needs of Native American students and the schools and educators who serve them.

Presenter Bio: Dr. Shockley completed her Ph.D. at the University of Chicago, a post-doctoral fellowship at the University of Nebraska Public Policy Center, and three years of service to Bismarck State College before joining North Dakota University System Institutional Research (NDUS-IR) in 2018.

Dr. Carlson has a Ph.D. from NDSU, Project Management Professional (PMP) certification, and more than 13 years of IR experience. In this role since 2017, responsibilities include project management, facilitating reporting initiatives, and supporting data governance activities.

Session Topic: *Three Sisters Culture Camp*

Presenter: Della No Heart, Jane Szczur, Dr. Kathy Froelich

Room: Red River

Time: Wednesday, 1:00pm

Session Description: This presentation will provide examples of a one-week culture camp provided for 3rd-8th grade students at the St. Bernards Mission School. Examples of hands-on lessons will be provided; presenters will provide challenges and successes while planning and finding resources for supplies and materials.

Presenter Bio: All three retired educators have years of experience working in the Standing Rock schools. Their passion is on promoting the traditional Native American cultural knowledge and teachings.

Session Topic: *Beyond Problem Solving: Co-Creating Solutions with Families*

Presenter: Dr. Sheeresa Begay

Room: Fort Totten

Time: Wednesday, 2:00pm

Session Description: Educators are navigating increasingly complex conversations with parents and caregivers, often without the communication tools needed to manage emotion, reduce defensiveness, and build genuine collaboration. This session introduces a practical coaching-based framework that helps educators shift from driving the solution to co-creating it with families. Participants will learn how to ask powerful questions, validate parent concerns without overpromising, and guide families toward shared, realistic goals for their child. Through real examples, interactive practice, and ready to use scripts, attendees will leave with simple strategies they can apply immediately in conferences, phone calls, and everyday interactions.

Presenter Bio: Dr. Sheeresa Begay has spent over 20 years supporting children and families across early childhood and public education. Her work has always centered on helping young people and families expand their potential and navigate transitions with confidence. Through this journey, she discovered that youth coaching opened a powerful pathway for strengthening confidence and self-direction. This insight inspired her to translate her experience into parent coaching services that empower families to grow together. Today, she partners with individuals and groups through coaching, learning, and innovative program design to support clarity, confidence, and the skills to navigate what comes next.

Session Topic: *Building Safer Communities: Supporting Students Through Human Trafficking Prevention Education*

Presenter: Stacy Schaffer, Allison Wiedrich

Room: Fort Union

Time: Wednesday, 2:00pm

Session Description: In 2025, North Dakota became one of the first states in the nation to mandate human trafficking prevention education, reaching more than 26,000 students across 300+ schools. Led by 31:8 Project, this statewide effort has created new opportunities for educators to play a critical role in prevention, awareness, and student support.

This session will explore the realities of human trafficking affecting Native communities, including historical and contemporary factors that can increase vulnerability while highlighting the cultural strengths and protective factors that support resilience.

Participants will learn what to expect when human trafficking prevention education is delivered in schools, how trauma-informed and culturally responsive approaches can support student engagement, and how educators can respond to student concerns or disclosures in a safe and supportive manner.

Presenter Bio: Stacy is the founder & executive director of 31:8 Project and has spent more than a decade advancing anti-trafficking efforts through prevention, education, and partnerships. A respected national leader in the field, she frequently presents on trafficking, exploitation, and prevention.

Allison serves as the education and outreach coordinator at 31:8 Project, leading statewide training, prevention, and outreach efforts focused on trafficking. Through her work, she equips students, professionals, and communities with the knowledge and tools to recognize and prevent exploitation.

Breakout Session Overviews with Presenter Bios

Session Topic: ***Making Math Meaningful Through Community-Based Learning***

Presenter: Kirsten Miller

Room: Red River

Time: Wednesday, 2:00pm

Session Description: How can elementary mathematics become more meaningful, engaging, and relevant for students? Educators from the Standing Rock Reservation, Sitting Bull College, and REL Central are partnering to answer this question through the development of project-based mathematics modules for grades 3–5. These modules connect state math standards to students' lived experiences, community knowledge, and local traditions through projects focused on topics such as local foods, star quilts, art, architecture, and pattern design.

In this session, participants will learn how educators collaborated to design and refine project-based learning experiences that incorporate evidence-based mathematics practices while honoring local culture and community contexts. The session will share lessons learned from piloting the modules in classrooms, using continuous improvement strategies to gather educator and student feedback, and building professional learning supports to sustain implementation over time.

Participants will leave with practical examples of project-based mathematics instruction, insights into collaborative curriculum design with Tribal communities, and strategies for using project-based learning to increase student engagement, relevance, and mathematical understanding.

Presenter Bio: Kirsten Miller has over 20 years of experience leading communications for major education research initiatives, including Regional Educational Laboratories and Comprehensive Centers. As REL Central dissemination lead, she ensures research reaches educators and communities through clear, accessible, and relevant products. She holds an MA in Professional Communication and is committed to making research meaningful for varied audiences.

Session Topic: ***Using Education Data Resources for School Improvement***

Presenter: Dr. Gregory D. Carlson

Room: Peace Garden

Time: Wednesday, 3:00pm

Session Description: As part of NDDPI's strategy to provide innovative resources to North Dakota's K-12 public schools, this presentation demonstrates data tools for fostering improvement in school performance outcomes. Key Performance Indicator (KPI) pages highlight details in each section. Users can also easily view and export reports, see performance trends, access student rosters, and perform their own analysis. These resources include data for ESSA accountability, special education, and financial transparency measures.

Presenter Bio: Dr. Carlson has a Ph.D. from NDSU, Project Management Professional (PMP) certification, and more than 13 years of IR experience. In this role since 2017, responsibilities include project management, facilitating reporting initiatives, and supporting data governance activities.

THANK YOU

to each of the gifted presenters
who have truly made the
**2026 ND Indian
Education Summit**
a valuable educational event!
