



Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

Tribal School Opioid Education Pilot Project 2025

Authorizing Legislation: SB 5950, Sec. 522(4)(v)

Henry Strom

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Education**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), through the Office of Native Education (ONE), successfully administered the Tribal School Opioid Education Pilot Project created by SB 5950, Sec. 522(4)(v). This one-year pilot project distributed grant funding ranging from \$90,000–\$107,500 to five State Tribal Education Compact schools (STECs) and conducted comprehensive research into tribally-centered opioid and fentanyl prevention curricula.

The pilot demonstrated that culturally-grounded prevention education, particularly the *Healing of the Canoe* curriculum, offers powerful approaches to substance use prevention that strengthen cultural identity while building resilience. All five participating schools (Chief Kitsap Academy, Muckleshoot Tribal School, Quileute Tribal School, Paschal Sherman Indian School, and Chief Leschi School) engaged in culturally-responsive prevention programming during the 2024–25 school year, with varying levels of implementation based on timing, capacity, and individual school contexts.

Key findings support the expansion of tribally-developed curricula across Washington State schools. The pilot establishes a foundation for sustained investment in Indigenous-led prevention strategies that address root causes of substance use through cultural connection and traditional knowledge systems.

Primary Recommendation: While there is no new funding in the current budget, we recommend continuing the investment through a two-year extension (2027–2029) to expand to all eight STECs, developing comprehensive evaluation protocols, and creating sustainable implementation frameworks for broader application across Washington State schools.

INTRODUCTION

In April 2024, the Office of Native Education received legislative direction to support Tribal leadership advocacy regarding opioid and fentanyl education and prevention in schools across Washington State. This mandate recognized that Tribal schools have been leading innovative prevention initiatives through culturally-specific approaches that honor the languages, cultures, and traditional knowledge systems of the lands and communities they serve.

The implementation was initially led by Mona Halcomb, ONE Native Student Success Program Supervisor, working alongside ONE Interim Executive Director Bernie Thomas and the Student Engagement and Support division within OSPI. During this period, ONE actively participated in inter-agency coordination meetings with the Department of Health (DOH), Health Care Authority (HCA), Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF), Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), and other state agencies addressing the opioid and fentanyl crisis across Washington State.

Following leadership transition in May 2024, Henry Strom joined ONE as Executive Director and Rebecca Purser, ONE Native Educator Cultivation Program Supervisor, assumed the implementation lead role.

LEGISLATIVE BACKGROUND AND REQUIREMENTS

Washington State Opioid Response Context

The Lummi Nation pioneered emergency response efforts to the opioid epidemic impacting their tribal community in 2022, advocating for comprehensive supports and accessible recovery pathways. Their leadership inspired statewide action, leading Governor Jay Inslee and the Washington State legislature to establish the Washington State Tribal Opioid and Fentanyl Taskforce, which meets monthly and includes representatives from all 29 federally recognized Tribes in Washington State.

This Tribal-state partnership expands existing opioid and behavioral health campaigns specifically for tribal communities. The collaborative workgroup, hosted by the Office of Indian Policy at DSHS and co-chaired by representatives from the Snoqualmie Tribe, HCA, and DOH, coordinates comprehensive response strategies across tribal and state jurisdictions.

HB 1956 Opioid Abuse Prevention Education Mandate

Opioid abuse prevention education was a priority of the 2024 Legislature, with SB 5950, Sec. 522(4)(v) being just one of multiple legislative initiatives passed that year to address the State's opioid crisis. At the K–12 level, much of the conversation centered around 2024 HB 1956, which directed collaborative efforts between OSPI, the DOH, HCA, Educational Service Districts, and other state agencies that included a statewide opioid abuse prevention campaign and the creation of opioid abuse prevention education materials for K–12 schools. HB 1956 did not specifically call out tribes or STECs; however, knowing that native students are at particularly high risk and tribal communities suffer disproportionately under the opioid crisis, OSPI made sure that the pilot project created by SB 5950, Sec. 522(4)(v) was closely connected to the larger initiatives and overall implementation of HB 1956.

SB 5950, Sec. 522(4)(v) Opioid Abuse Prevention Education STEC Pilot

The supplemental operating budget proviso SB 5950, Sec. 522(4)(v) was directed specifically at native students and STECs, directing the Office of Native Education to collaborate with State Tribal Education Compact schools and tribal before and after school programs to implement a one-year pilot project with two primary objectives:

1. **Grant Administration:** Distribute funding to volunteer STECs to support opioid and fentanyl abuse prevention programming
2. **Curriculum Research:** Develop, review, and select culturally-appropriate prevention materials and resources for implementation and potential statewide application.

The proviso specifically required that initial results and experiences from participating schools provide recommendations for employing materials and resources statewide, with or without modifications to improve effectiveness and implementation.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE AND PROCESS

Grant Development and Launch

Following establishment of EGMS (Electronic Grant Management System) access and completion of required training protocols, the grant opportunity was launched on November 24, 2024. The application period required rapid mobilization due to the fiscal year timeline, presenting both challenges and opportunities for participating schools.

Stakeholder Engagement

Washington State has eight STECs, representing diverse tribal communities and educational approaches. Initial outreach identified varying capacity levels among eligible schools. Several schools expressed strong interest but identified resource and timing constraints that informed our understanding of implementation requirements for future program expansion.

Selection and Award Process

Five STECs volunteered to participate and successfully met application requirements:

- Chief Kitsap Academy
- Muckleshoot Tribal School
- Quileute Tribal School
- Paschal Sherman Indian School
- Chief Leschi School

Each participating school received funding ranging from \$90,000–\$107,500 to support culturally-appropriate prevention programming implementation during the 2024–25 school year.

Grant Administration and Participating Schools

Chief Kitsap Academy

Chief Kitsap Academy, serving the Suquamish Tribal community, exemplifies culturally-grounded prevention education through comprehensive integration of traditional knowledge systems. The school implemented the *Healing of the Canoe* curriculum, originally developed by the Suquamish Tribe in partnership with the University of Washington, which uses the canoe journey as a metaphor for navigating life's challenges and building resilience.

The academy's approach demonstrates how cultural affirmation serves as the foundation for prevention programming. From Lushootseed greetings echoing through hallways to student-led projects grounded in Suquamish teachings, the learning environment prioritizes identity strengthening alongside academic achievement. Students explore personal and community wellness through cultural

teachings that connect traditional wisdom with contemporary life skills, goal setting, and resistance to peer pressure.

Quileute Tribal School

Quileute Tribal School embodies the principle of "Preserving the Past, Living it in the Present, and Perpetuating it for the Future." The school's approach to prevention education integrates seamlessly with cultural education and community engagement. Their implementation demonstrated the power of ceremony and tradition as prevention strategies.

The school's annual *Welcoming of the Whale* ceremony exemplifies how cultural practices serve as natural prevention programming. During this significant community event, all students and staff participate in traditions upheld since time immemorial, reinforcing cultural identity and community connection. Student involvement spans from youngest to oldest participants, with integral roles in traditional dances, storytelling, and ceremony preparation, demonstrating deep respect for heritage and commitment to cultural preservation.

Muckleshoot Tribal School

Muckleshoot Tribal School integrated prevention education within their comprehensive cultural programming, emphasizing the connection between traditional knowledge and contemporary wellness strategies. The school's approach recognizes that cultural disconnection contributes to vulnerability, while cultural strength provides protection and resilience.

Their implementation focused on adapting prevention curricula to reflect Muckleshoot traditions and language, ensuring relevance and cultural authenticity. The school demonstrated innovative approaches to engaging families and community members in prevention conversations, recognizing that effective prevention extends beyond classroom instruction to encompass entire community support systems.

Paschal Sherman Indian School

Paschal Sherman Indian School, serving multiple tribal communities in the Columbia River region, developed prevention programming that honors the diverse cultural backgrounds of their student population. Their approach emphasized universal principles of cultural connection while respecting specific tribal traditions and knowledge systems.

The school's implementation demonstrated effective strategies for multi-tribal environments, creating inclusive programming that strengthens individual cultural identities while building inter-tribal connections and shared commitment to prevention. Their model provides valuable insights for other schools serving diverse Native student populations.

Chief Leschi School

Chief Leschi School integrated prevention education within their place-based learning model, emphasizing the connection between land, culture, and wellness. Their approach demonstrated how environmental education and cultural knowledge combine to create comprehensive prevention strategies.

The school's programming highlighted traditional relationships with natural resources and traditional foods as foundations for health and wellness education. Students learned how traditional lifeways provide models for healthy living and decision-making, creating natural connections between cultural practice and prevention education.

CURRICULUM RESEARCH AND SITE VISIT FINDINGS

Research Methodology

The curriculum research component focused on identifying, evaluating, and documenting tribally-centered prevention approaches that demonstrate effectiveness in native educational settings. Research included literature review, consultation with tribal education leaders, site visits to participating schools, and documentation of implementation practices.

Site Visit Observations

Site visits to participating schools revealed consistent themes emphasizing cultural strength as the foundation for prevention programming. Across all settings, the most effective approaches shared common characteristics:

- **Cultural Integration:** Prevention education seamlessly integrated with existing cultural programming rather than operating as separate, add-on curricula. Schools demonstrated that prevention is most effective when embedded within comprehensive cultural education approaches.
- **Community Engagement:** Successful implementation involved entire communities, not just classroom instruction. Families, elders, and community leaders participated actively in prevention education, reinforcing messages through multiple relationships and settings.
- **Identity Strengthening:** All effective approaches prioritized cultural identity development as a prevention strategy. Schools recognized that students with strong cultural connections demonstrate greater resilience and make healthier decisions.
- **Traditional Knowledge Application:** Schools successfully connected traditional knowledge systems with contemporary prevention concepts, demonstrating relevance and applicability of ancestral wisdom to current challenges.

Key Findings from Implementation

The pilot revealed that culturally-grounded prevention education addresses root causes of substance use vulnerability through identity strengthening and community connection. Students engaged more deeply with prevention messages when delivered through cultural frameworks that honor their heritage and strengthen their sense of belonging.

Student Engagement: Observations consistently showed higher levels of student engagement when prevention education connected to cultural identity and traditional knowledge. Students demonstrated greater retention and application of prevention concepts when presented through culturally-relevant frameworks.

Educator Effectiveness: Teachers and staff reported increased confidence and effectiveness when implementing culturally-grounded curricula compared to generic prevention programming. Cultural relevance enhanced educator ability to connect with students and deliver meaningful prevention education.

Community Support: Prevention programming that honored cultural values received stronger community support and reinforcement, creating more comprehensive prevention environments extending beyond school settings.

TRIBALLY-CENTERED PREVENTION APPROACHES

Healing of the Canoe Curriculum

The *Healing of the Canoe* curriculum emerged as the most comprehensive and effective tribally-developed prevention approach observed during the pilot. Originally developed by the Suquamish Tribe in partnership with the University of Washington, this culturally-grounded life skills curriculum uses the canoe journey as a metaphor for navigating life's challenges.

The curriculum's effectiveness stems from its deep integration of cultural knowledge with evidence-based prevention strategies. Students learn traditional values and practices while developing practical skills for decision-making, goal-setting, and resistance to negative peer pressure. The canoe journey metaphor provides a powerful framework for understanding personal growth, community responsibility, and healthy choices.

Additional Tribal-Specific Curriculum Recommendations

Beyond *Healing of the Canoe*, this pilot reinforced the importance of developing tribal-specific curricula that address mental health support and substance use prevention within individual community contexts. Tribal communities across Washington State possess unique cultural resources, traditional healing practices, ceremonial knowledge, and community-based support systems that provide foundations for effective prevention programming.

Each tribal community brings distinct cultural knowledge systems that can inform prevention education tailored to their specific contexts and student populations. The diversity of tribal communities across Washington State requires multiple curriculum options that honor distinct cultural traditions while addressing common prevention goals. Supporting the development and implementation of various tribal-specific approaches will ensure that all Native students have access to prevention education that reflects their particular cultural heritage and community values.

Cultural Identity as Prevention

Across all participating schools, cultural identity development served as the primary prevention strategy. This approach recognizes that students with strong cultural connections demonstrate greater resilience against substance use and other risk behaviors. Cultural identity development includes language learning, traditional knowledge acquisition, ceremony participation, and community engagement.

Traditional Knowledge Integration

Participating schools demonstrated various approaches to integrating traditional knowledge with contemporary prevention education. These approaches honored ancestral wisdom while addressing current substance use challenges, creating relevant and meaningful prevention education that resonates with Native students and families.

Community-Based Prevention Models

The pilot documented effective community-based prevention models that extend beyond classroom instruction to encompass entire community support systems. These models engage families, elders, and community leaders as active participants in prevention education, creating comprehensive prevention environments.

KEY INSIGHTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Implementation Insights

Cultural Adaptation Requirements: Generic prevention curricula require significant cultural adaptation to achieve effectiveness in tribal school settings. Schools need adequate time and resources to customize materials, train staff, and engage communities in adaptation processes.

Community Partnership Essential: Effective prevention education requires authentic community partnership extending beyond school personnel. Elders, cultural leaders, and families must participate actively in program development and implementation.

Professional Development Needs: Educators implementing culturally-grounded prevention curricula benefit from specialized professional development that builds cultural knowledge alongside prevention education skills.

Resource Requirements: Culturally-grounded prevention programming requires sustained investment in curriculum development, staff training, community engagement, and ongoing support systems.

Scaling Considerations

Tribal Sovereignty Recognition: Statewide implementation must respect tribal sovereignty and avoid one-size-fits-all approaches. Each tribal community requires autonomy to adapt prevention programming to their specific cultural context and needs.

Cultural Authenticity Standards: Scaling tribally-developed curricula requires careful attention to cultural authenticity and appropriate attribution to originating tribal communities.

Capacity Building Needs: Broader implementation requires significant capacity building to ensure educators and schools have necessary cultural knowledge and skills to implement programming effectively.

Sustainability Planning: Long-term success requires sustainable funding mechanisms and institutional support systems that extend beyond pilot project timelines.

Policy Recommendations

Support *Healing of the Canoe* Curriculum Expansion

Recommendation: Provide sustained funding and technical support to expand the *Healing of the Canoe* curriculum across Washington State schools, with priority support for high-population tribal-serving schools.

Rationale: The curriculum demonstrates effectiveness in promoting mental health, reducing substance use risk, and strengthening cultural identity. Implementation at multiple pilot schools showed consistent positive outcomes and strong community support.

Implementation: Establish dedicated funding stream for curriculum licensing, educator training, and implementation support. Develop partnership agreements with originating tribal communities to ensure culturally-appropriate expansion.

Recognize Culturally-Grounded Curricula as Core Prevention Infrastructure

Recommendation: Prevention funding streams should explicitly include culturally-specific programs as eligible and prioritized interventions, recognizing these programs as central to addressing root causes of trauma and disconnection.

Rationale: Culturally-grounded prevention education addresses fundamental causes of substance use vulnerability through identity strengthening and community connection, providing more comprehensive prevention than generic programming.

Implementation: Revise state prevention funding guidelines to prioritize culturally-responsive programming. Establish evaluation criteria that recognize cultural relevance and community engagement as evidence of effectiveness.

Support Tribal-Led Evaluation and Knowledge Sharing

Recommendation: Invest in tribally-led research and evaluation of culturally-grounded curricula to document outcomes, share best practices, and inform statewide prevention policy.

Rationale: Indigenous knowledge systems require evaluation approaches that respect community standards and cultural values. Tribal-led evaluation ensures appropriate assessment and authentic documentation of program effectiveness.

Implementation: Establish grants for tribal communities to conduct culturally-responsive evaluation research. Create knowledge-sharing platforms that honor intellectual property while facilitating learning across tribal education settings.

Expand Support to All State Tribal Education Compact Schools

Recommendation: Extend prevention education support to all eight STECs in Washington State, recognizing these schools as laboratories for innovative, culturally-grounded prevention approaches.

Rationale: STECs serve as models for culturally-responsive education and demonstrate effective integration of traditional knowledge with contemporary academic programming. Supporting all STECs maximizes learning opportunities and ensures equitable access to prevention resources.

Implementation: Allocate dedicated funding for prevention programming at all STECs. Provide technical assistance and professional development support. Facilitate peer learning and collaboration among STECs implementing prevention programming.

Integrate Tribal Language Immersion and Instruction

Recommendation: Support the integration of Tribal language partners, curriculum, and opportunities for immersive language experiences within prevention education programming.

Rationale: Research demonstrates a correlation between strong language immersion and instruction, student self-efficacy, and positive outcomes. Native language fluency strengthens cultural identity and provides protective factors against substance use and other risk behaviors. Language immersion creates deeper connections to cultural values and traditional knowledge systems that support healthy decision-making.

Implementation: Establish partnerships with tribal language programs and fluent speakers. Develop prevention curricula that integrate native language instruction. Provide funding for language immersion components within prevention programming. Support professional development for educators implementing bilingual prevention education.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTINUED INVESTMENT (2027–2029)

Extending the Pilot

The 2024–25 pilot project successfully demonstrated the potential of culturally-grounded prevention education and established foundation partnerships with tribal education communities. However, the one-year timeline was insufficient for comprehensive evaluation and full program development. An extended two-year investment (2027–2029) would enable:

- **Comprehensive Evaluation:** Longitudinal assessment of program effectiveness, cultural appropriateness, and student outcomes across multiple academic years.
- **Full STECs Participation:** Expansion to all eight STECs in Washington State, ensuring comprehensive documentation of culturally-grounded prevention approaches across diverse tribal communities.
- **Curriculum Development:** Completion of cultural adaptation toolkits, professional development materials, and implementation guides for broader application. Additional time will enable the development of prevention resources specifically designed for central and eastern Washington tribal communities, ensuring geographic and cultural diversity in available programming options.
- **Sustainability Planning:** Development of sustainable funding mechanisms and institutional support systems for long-term program continuation.

Expected Outcomes

Year One (2027–28):

- All eight STECs implementing culturally-grounded prevention programming
- Baseline evaluation protocols established
- Cultural adaptation toolkit development initiated
- Professional development framework created

Year Two (2028–29):

- Comprehensive evaluation data collected and analyzed
- Cultural adaptation toolkit completed and tested
- Professional development certification program established
- Sustainability and scaling recommendations developed

Legislative Benefits

This project has laid a foundation to make future investments by the legislature more efficient and effective. The continued investment will provide the Washington State Legislature with comprehensive

data and proven models for supporting culturally-grounded prevention education statewide. The extended pilot will generate evidence-based recommendations for policy development, funding allocation, and program implementation that respect tribal sovereignty while maximizing prevention effectiveness.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Heartfelt gratitude extends to each tribal, legislative, and state leader who has dedicated time and energy to supporting initiatives promoting the health and well-being of all Washingtonians. Your collaborative efforts have created meaningful impact in our communities.

Special recognition goes to Representative Debra Lekanoff for exceptional leadership and unwavering support of Tribal leaders and community advocacy. Your vision and determination have been instrumental in driving positive change and fostering healthier futures for all Washington residents.

To the Tribal leaders who shared wisdom, guidance, and steadfast support throughout this pilot project, your contributions have enriched our understanding and ensured authentic, culturally-grounded approaches to prevention education. Your deep connection to land and culture provides the foundation for our collective efforts and continues to inspire meaningful progress.

Recognition extends to state agency leaders whose expertise and dedication proved crucial in implementing policies and programs enhancing community health and well-being. Your coordination with Tribal and legislative leaders created effective approaches to addressing critical prevention education needs.

Appreciation goes to the educators, students, and families at Chief Kitsap Academy, Quileute Tribal School, Muckleshoot Tribal School, Paschal Sherman Indian School, and Chief Leschi School who welcomed our team and shared their innovative approaches to culturally-grounded prevention education. Your dedication to student success and cultural preservation provides models for effective prevention programming.

Finally, gratitude extends to the Office of Native Education team, including Executive Director Henry Strom, whose leadership and support made this pilot project possible. Your commitment to educational excellence and cultural responsiveness continues to advance opportunities for Native students across Washington State.

Together, we are building stronger, healthier communities through collaborative efforts that honor cultural wisdom while addressing contemporary challenges. Your collective contributions create lasting positive impact for current and future generations.

REFERENCES

Healing of the Canoe Curriculum: <https://healingofthecanoe.org/curriculum/>

WA Friends for Life: <https://wafriendsforlife.com/>

Native Lifeline: <https://nativelifeline.org/>

For Native Lives: <https://www.fornativelives.org/>

Get the Facts Rx: <https://www.getthefactsrx.com/>

Native Hub: <https://nativehub.org/>

Volunteers of America Western Washington Tribal Services: <https://www.voaww.org/tribalservices>

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