



Washington Office of Superintendent of  
**PUBLIC INSTRUCTION**

*OSPI Native Literacy  
Guidance*

# OSPI NATIVE LITERACY GUIDANCE

Niimíyay ikksmamiyay—for our little ones

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# INTRODUCTION

An invitation from the governing body of the state of Washington, being the elected members of the legislature, was extended through the Office of Native Education (ONE) to our Indigenous people to offer guidance to all state educators on how to best support American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) learners as they acquire strong literacy skills. The legislature worried that when looking at measures of state and national reading proficiency scores, specific groups of children had very low scores.

The reading proficiency of all Washington students is troublesome using these indicators, yet the concern for Native learners was heightened. This invitation came as a proviso to Bill #5950. This proviso supports the state's obligation to represent Washington's federally recognized tribes and federally recognized tribes with reserved treaty rights in Washington. The Native Literacy Workgroup, whose members are listed in this report, accepted this invitation.

Quil Ceda Tulalip elementary teachers educate the children of their community through Huyadadčəł (hoy-yah-dah-chuth), Lushootseed meaning "our way," centering Indigenous Knowledge in literacy work. These ways of teaching, learning, and knowing must be at the center of how we support literacy among AI/AN learners.

We express gratitude to those who extended this invitation. We began our work by defining what Native literacy means within our communities, followed by identifying the principles that shape how we teach our children. These principles reflect our commitment to providing a strong, culturally rooted foundation—one that equips AI/AN students to demonstrate deep, multi-faceted literacy proficiency. We have described what this foundation looks like in practice and are offering ideas and resources to help bring huyadadcal into daily instruction. Every child needs such a foundation for learning success, and we have stated what that looks like with our AI/AN students. We offer ideas and resources to get started putting huyadadcal into practice.

There are diverse ways to engage with this report. Some of you may skip to the principles and indicators, some to the resources. We ask that however you choose; you do these things. First, call forth íkksma (eek-ks-ma). In the Ichiiskin language this is a word referring to "little ones." With this in mind, think of a little one that you hold dear in your life. How can we better construct these little ones' literacy journeys by centering each child's cultural identity, language, and ways of knowing? Hold in your heart a child you love and consider how these principles and indicators might guide and strengthen their journey in literacy and learning. Second, listen to our voices in such a way that you are fully present. Lastly, consider what we hold true: Good medicine for our AI/AN children is good medicine for our Washington State children.

This is our offering.

# OUR DECLARATION

Our American Indian/Alaska Native children embody a deep and rich heritage that has withstood centuries of struggle and resilience. Nurturing the capabilities and genius of these learners requires we teach literacy in ways that embrace the values, traditions, and worldviews of our Indigenous Washington State communities. Our heritage is not an abstract concept to be relegated to the past; it is a living, breathing part of who we are, influencing how our children see the world and learn.

Our journey toward literacy success within an equitable education for all calls upon us to recognize and honor the diverse histories, cultures, and identities that shape the experiences of our students. The key to learning success, for any of Washington's students, is being educated in partnership with communities and by educators deeply committed to knowing each student, their lives, realities and how to create meaningful learning experiences for them.

Effective literacy instruction for our AI/AN children cannot detach from our unique cultural context. Our classrooms and learning environments must respect and incorporate the wisdom of our Indigenous Knowledge Systems, the strengths of our tribal and Native communities, and the values that bind us together. These are values of respect, interconnectedness, and stewardship of both people and the land. This is more than an academic pursuit; it is a legal, ethical, and social responsibility to ensure that our AI/AN children are seen, heard, and honored in all aspects of their education.

It is imperative that our approach to literacy instruction is not solely mastering skills in isolation. It is about creating opportunities for our children to see themselves in the texts they read, the stories they write, the discussions they engage in, and the lessons they carry forward. To neglect our shared responsibility for this cultural integration is to perpetuate the erasure of AI/AN identities. Literacy is a bridge, and in this case, it must be a bridge built with respect for our past, understanding of the present, and a vision for our futures that celebrate AI/AN voices, stories, and ways of knowing.

By upholding and protecting AI/AN legacies, community, and values, we create education that is both relevant and transformative. It is one that nurtures academic success as well as physical,

***Huyadadčəl (hoy-yah-dah-chuth) is our most fundamental teaching. Within this one idea lies a calling to maintain our ancestral lifeways as the foundation, the throughline, and future we aim to help build in our family and communities. Huyadadčəl carries with it the ancestral calling to resist assimilation and dream Indigenous dreams. There is a need to think, learn, act, grow, communicate in ways through education. Huyadadčəl holds the power of a community of ancestors' who protected our lifeways and now call us to strengthen and teach our future generations. Our ancestral ways of teaching, learning, and knowing must be the center of all we do. Our ancestral ways of life are already within us and are waiting to be accessed and enacted. (Unsettling Settler-Colonial Education, Pewewardy, Lees, Zape-Th-Hol-Ah Minthron 2022 Teachers College Press, NY)***

emotional, and spiritual growth. For all students, this kind of educational care results in personal and cultural empowerment. It is through this lens that we shape our guiding principles for Native literacy instruction: one that values Native American children as complete individuals, whose intellect and spirit are nurtured in every word they read, every story they write and speak, every song that is sung, and within every community they engage.

## Our Native Literacy Definition

***Literacy is more than reading and writing, it is a cultural practice and an act of survivance. We recognize the importance of strengthening individual skillfulness in reading, writing, speaking, and listening, while also honoring that literacy is most powerful when rooted in community, culture, oral tradition, Indigenous language and storytelling, land-based learning, symbolic systems, and identity. Literacy success includes academic growth, and also supports the physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of every learner.***

### Key Aspects of Indigenous Knowledge in Literacy:

- Oral Tradition & Storytelling: Knowledge is passed down orally through stories, songs, chants, and ceremonies and the stories serve as history, law, moral lessons, and spiritual teachings.
- Symbolic & Visual Literacy: Traditional petroglyphs, wampum belts, quipu (Incan knots), and pictographs serve as historical records and forms of literacy.
- Land-Based & Experiential Literacy: Literacy is deeply connected to the land—knowing how to read the environment (e.g., understanding seasons, reading the stars) and literacy learning happens through experience, observation, and participation in addition to texts.
- Indigenous Languages & Linguistic Literacy: Many Indigenous languages are polysynthetic and carry complex meanings in a single word. Revitalization efforts focus on language immersion, oral history projects, and bilingual education.
- Relational & Community-Based Literacy: Literacy is learned collaboratively within families, clans, and communities and learning occurs with elders, through ceremonies and shared experiences.
- Cultural & Spiritual Literacy: Many Indigenous traditions include sacred texts, songs, and oral prayers, and knowledge is often protected and passed down in rituals and ceremonies.

# OUR PRINCIPLES FOR SUCCESSFUL NATIVE LITERACY INSTRUCTION

We bring a set of understandings and appreciations to these principles and indicators that merit stating. These understandings are the foundation for the Washington State Literacy Framework and are essential for guiding inclusive, culturally responsive instruction.

## Six Key Understandings:

### 1. **Students' experiences matter**

Literacy learning is shaped by students' lived experiences. Reading, writing, speaking, and listening are filtered through their personal, community, and social realities.

### 2. **Language is social**

Language is inherently relational, used to build connections, convey ideas, and create meaning within a community.

### 3. **Language domains are interdependent and integrated**

Reading, writing, speaking, and listening develop together and should be taught as interconnected processes.

### 4. **Literacy is more than the sum of skills and subskills**

Literacy is not just about mastering individual skills; it involves using these skills for meaningful, purposeful communication.

### 5. **All texts and multimodal**

Literacy instruction must recognize that texts not only include written words, but also images, sounds, and other forms of expression.

### 6. **Literacy skills are relevant to students' realities and futures**

Students need adaptable literacy skills that serve them in their current lives and prepare them for futures not yet known.

The [Washington State Literacy Framework K–6](#) apply to every student in the state of Washington, including our AI/AN learners. In Washington State, literacy is a civil right, and in many tribal treaties, it is also a tribal right and a state responsibility.

These principles and indicators support many of the core beliefs in both the state literacy framework and the standards. They are designed to help educators blend high-quality literacy instruction with the strengths of Native teaching practices. Several of the principles and indicators reflect research showing that a strong sense of belonging in the classroom is essential to literacy development.

This framework provides specific actions that illustrate how to:

- Foster belonging through Indigenous Knowledge Systems
- Cultivate critical consciousness in AI/AN learners

- Support educators in becoming “warm demanders,” using asset-based approaches to know students and co-plan their literacy journeys

These principles are not only intended to improve reading outcomes. They also support social emotional development and the strengthening of cultural identity. When implemented, students demonstrate increased confidence, emotional resilience, and readiness to engage in their learning. To fully support this, educators may need to supplement district adopted curricula with resources that better reflect the strengths and needs of Native learners.

When put into practice, these principles help build strong, inclusive school communities supporting teachers, uplifting students, engaging families, and deepening connections with tribal nations and the broader community.

## **A Living Approach to Literacy**

Native Literacy is not static. It evolves alongside our people, our languages, and our tools. Indigenous Knowledge Systems are living and adaptive, grounded in ancestral wisdom and responsive to present day innovations. When used intentionally and in relationship, technology can serve as a powerful extension of our stories, languages, and literacies. Tools like assistive technology can increase access and inclusion, and when thoughtfully applied, help counter bias and support all learners in meaningful ways.

# OUR PRINCIPLES AND INDICATORS FOR NATIVE LITERACY SUCCESS

## 1. Foster trust and belonging through relationships and community

Belonging is foundational to learning. Trust and safety must be present in the classroom and school environment for students to fully participate, take risks, and grow. For AI/AN learners, trust is built when identity, family, community, and collective values are reflected in daily instruction and relationships. This principle invites educators to create spaces where Native students feel seen, safe, and honored for who they are and where they come from.

### **Indicators:**

- a) *Schools and educators build strong, reciprocal relationships with the Native communities they serve, learning from and with families and tribal partners.*
- b) *Educators model and teach emotional literacy by helping students name, regulate, and express emotions through culturally grounded practices such as storytelling, reflection, and community dialogue.*
- c) *Educators understand that community is a core value, that it embraces inclusiveness and interdependence and involves generational roles and responsibilities. Educators affirm students as the future leaders of their language, culture, and land and nurture this sense of responsibility and pride.*
- d) *Schools focus learning on the 6Rs<sup>1</sup>: Respect, Relationship, Responsibility, Reciprocity, Relevance, and Representation—often used as a framework for Native Education. This fosters not only academic success, but emotional safety and connectedness—students are more likely to engage, express themselves confidently, and experience reduced anxiety when their identities and relationships are honored in the classroom.*
- e) *School staff understand the intergenerational impacts of boarding school trauma on Native families. Healing-informed and trauma-informed practices are used to support student wellness.*
- f) *Non-Native educators examine how ongoing colonial practices—such as cultural erasure or deficit-based assumptions—can conflict with the values and experiences of Native students. They commit to unlearning and relearning in partnership with communities.*

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<sup>1</sup> The 6Rs are guiding principles that reflect Indigenous ways of knowing and being: Respect, Relationship, Responsibility, Reciprocity, Relevance, and Representation. They emphasize honoring Indigenous knowledge, centering community voices, and ensuring learning is accountable, meaningful, and inclusive. Reference: Tribal College Journal. (2019). *The six Rs of Indigenous research*. Tribal College Journal of American Indian Higher Education. <https://tribalcollegejournal.org/the-six-rs-of-indigenous-research/>

## 2. Use a strength-based approach to assessing and instructing AI/AN learners

Identify the assets students bring to the classroom from their family and community, along with the unique talents and needs of each learner.

### **Indicators:**

- a) *Every student is known by name, strength, and need. Fully understanding the students served requires a whole child approach that honors cognitive and academic strengths, spiritual and emotional growth, and physical well-being.*
- b) *Families and community members are an essential source of information about the child.*
- c) *Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, and the ancestors. Learning promotes student confidence, agency, and a positive self-image when their strengths are affirmed and reflected.*
- d) *Educators understand that in many AI/AN communities, community success is as vital as individual success. They balance both and view themselves in kinship with their students.*
- e) *A multifaceted approach to ongoing assessment is used with each student, including both qualitative and quantitative data. Teachers understand that numerical scores and percentiles are only an initial and incomplete indicator of learning progress. They use observations, student surveys, family input, work samples, and other forms of data to understand the full context of each learner's experience. They engage in data conversations in ways that humanize the information and lead to personalized teaching and learning plans.*

## 3. Center identity development as a pillar of literacy development

Effective literacy instruction for AI/AN learners requires intentional attention to the unique and complex dimensions of identity.

### **Indicators:**

- a) *Identity includes not only the self, but also family, community, land, and ancestors. Educators create space for all students to feel emotionally*

### **“The Community should decide when a child is literate.”**

(stxcin Shayna Palmanteer)

What If...

- We could show another way to assess literacy where a learner was more than a number, a score a percentile, an age, or a grade?
- Third grade literacy assessment was a progress ceremony?
- Each 3rd grader presented their literacy portfolio, which includes reading progress, based on ALL parts of literacy skills?
- The literacy ceremony was both individual and collective progress?
- Each student pledged to use their literacy strengths to help younger students and community elders?
- Each 3rd grader could ask for specific help in their literacy journey and receive a pledge of support from peers, teacher, family, elders?
- We created space for students to:
  - “Show what they know”
  - Ask for help to continue to grow

What if....

*safe, validated, and empowered to express who they are.*

- b) *Educators recognize the importance of naming in AI/AN communities, including the cultural traditions around receiving, growing into, and being known by Native names. They honor these traditions through respectful classroom practices and inclusive materials.*

- c) *Educators affirm Native identities by including texts, authors, perspectives that reflect the diversity and richness of Indigenous cultures. They provide opportunities for students to explore their own local and tribal histories, languages, and traditions as integral to the learning process.*

EVERY STUDENT IS KNOWN BY  
NAME, STRENGTH, AND NEED  
AND GRADUATES PREPARED  
FOR THE FUTURE THEY CHOOSE.

HIGHLINE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

#### **4. Develop oral language and storytelling as foundations for literacy**

Oral language and storytelling are essential pillars of literacy development. For AI/AN learners, these practices are not only cultural teachings but also powerful precursors to reading and writing.

##### **Indicators:**

- a) *Storytelling supports students in processing emotions, building empathy, and deepening self-understanding.*
- b) *Educators understand that oral language development, elevating both tribal language enrichment and English, is a core component of literacy, and they emphasize this during instruction.*
- c) *American Indian and Alaska Native students, like all learners, benefit from explicit instruction in how language works. Educators teach language structures such as morphology as part of oral and written storytelling, recognizing its importance for strong literacy development.*
- d) *Educators support foundational literacy skill development through Native perspectives and culturally meaningful content. They intentionally include language enrichment that strengthens students' connection to their own tribal languages and communities.*

#### **5. Ground curricular and instructional choices in the concept of Indigenous excellence**

Reading and writing instruction should reflect the brilliance, knowledge, and lived realities of AI/AN learners. Indigenous knowledge is integrated through texts, oral storytelling, and the inclusion of Elders and tribal language teachers as educators and cultural guides.

##### **Indicators:**

- a) *Core reading instruction is grounded in structured literacy principles and reinforced by district adopted curricula aligned with the science of reading.*
- b) *Educators recognize that many commercial curricula and skill based instructional programs are designed for mainstream contexts. These programs may need to be adapted and augmented to fully support the success of AI/AN learners.*

- c) *Teachers are committed to knowing each student beyond test scores.*
- d) *They use a variety of assessment practices, including observation, conversation, student reflection, and family input, to identify knowledge strengths and needs that standardized assessments do not reveal.*
- e) *Storytelling is honored as a traditional and ongoing form of knowledge transfer, particularly of our shared oral histories as Indigenous peoples, and is placed at the center of literacy instruction.*
- f) *Educators select texts that include a range of fiction and nonfiction genres such as short stories, novels, poetry, anthologies, memoirs, treaties, myths, and news articles.*
- g) *Instruction integrates practices from Indigenous Knowledge Systems, including land- and place-based teaching, seasonal knowledge cycles, and community rooted inquiry.*
- h) *Writing instruction is taught alongside and in connection with reading, allowing students to develop their voices as storytellers, thinkers, and knowledge holders.*
- i) *Teachers design lessons that reflect students' cultural realities while also equipping them with skills to analyze and question the world around them. They recognize that literacy must be relevant to students' current lives and must also prepare them for futures that are still unfolding.*
- j) *School staff understand that some knowledge held within AI/AN communities is sacred and is only shared with permission or under specific cultural protocols. Educators demonstrate cultural humility and take time to understand the community each child belongs to.*

**6. Engage with students in deliberate, multifaceted, and culturally respectful ways**

Culturally grounded instruction is intentional. Educators plan, teach, and reflect in ways that are inclusive, affirming, and designed to activate the voice, brilliance, and participation of Native learners.

**Indicators:**

- a) *Educators and schools embrace research showing that students are more successful when they see themselves reflected in the curriculum and instructional practices, and when their identities are affirmed (see Principle 3).*
- b) *Teachers facilitate discussions that elevate student voice, encourage questioning, and support collaborative meaning-making. Through conversation, clarification, and curiosity, students deepen comprehension and develop confidence as thinkers and speakers.*
- c) *Teachers select texts and plan instruction that is intellectually energizing and rooted in student identity. As described in Dr. Ghody Muhammad's *Cultivating Genius* (2020), literacy development includes access to "mentor texts" that inspire and model writing. These texts support students in discovering and cultivating their own genius.*

## **7. Integrate criticality into reading, writing, and community engagement**

Criticality invites students to examine power, history, and lived experience through literacy. It is both a learning pursuit and a core element of Native literacy development. Educators help students understand and question how knowledge is constructed, and how language can be used for justice, connection, and truth telling.

### ***Indicators:***

- a) Teachers and students use reading, writing, speaking, and listening to understand ideologies, cultural perspectives, and how different communities experience the world. Criticality supports all students—including those from non-Indigenous or border communities—in examining diverse viewpoints with empathy and depth.*
- b) Instruction includes opportunities for students to distinguish between facts and truths. Facts are historical or data-based reference points; truths are the lived experiences and meanings carried by those facts.*
- c) Teachers know that criticality is a learning pursuit, not a one-time activity. It is an ongoing practice. They embed it into instructional routines and design literacy projects that spark both understanding of how history and power operate in different communities and actions students can take. Literacy projects connect students to community, historical understanding, and opportunities for action.*

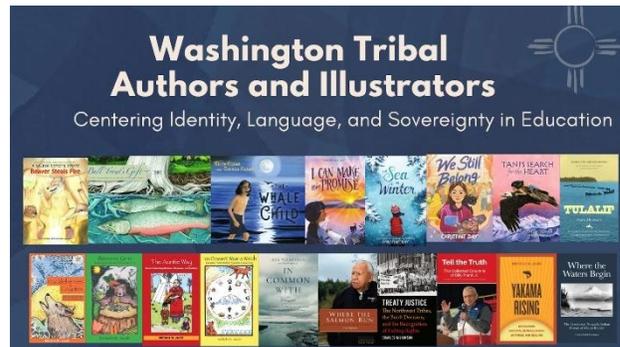
# OUR RESOURCES SUPPORTING AI/AN NATIVE LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

Supporting literacy through Indigenous knowledge means centering the voices of AI/AN authors, educators, and community leaders. The Office of Native Education offers a growing list of resources, including many specific to Washington State designed to support this work.

We invite you to explore these materials and integrate them into your classrooms, schools, and communities. These resources are not static, they are living documents, updated regularly as we learn and grow together.

## Washington State Specific

We call out two key resources. The first is a collection of books created by Washington State Tribal authors and artists. The second is a growing repository of literacy resources developed by tribal communities across the state. Both resources are intended to be “live” resources, continually updated and curated by the Office of Native Education.



1. [Washington Tribal-specific book list with visuals](#)
2. [Live edits Washington Tribal literacy resources](#)

Several of the principles and indicators in this document call on educators, district leaders, and community partners to deepen their understanding of key aspects of Native Education in order to better support AI/AN learners and their literacy development. These Washington State resources can also be found on the OSPI/ONE website and are listed below:

- **[John McCoy \(luliláš\) Since Time Immemorial Curriculum:](#)  
Washington state’s tribally developed curriculum focused on tribal sovereignty, history, and contemporary issues.**
- **[Native Student Success:](#)  
Explore ONE’s Native Student Success resources, OSPI partners, and partner organizations.**
- **[Tribal Language and Tribal Language Teachers:](#)  
Explore ONE’s guidance on supporting tribal language teachers and language revitalization efforts.**
- **[Cedar Box Teachings and Cedar Box Experiences:](#)  
Developed by the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe, this toolkit teaches about the cultural and ecological knowledge connected to traditional foods of Salish Country. It includes interdisciplinary lesson plans across science, social studies, health, and storytelling. (<https://www.cedarboxexperience.com/cedar-box>)**

- **Comprehensive Center Network—Region 16:**  
Elevating the Voices of Education Leaders and Culturally Sustaining Practices

## National and Regional Resources

- **Native Ways of Knowing: Resource Folder—Curated by Dr. Staci Block**  
Includes book lists, family and community engagement tools, educator self-assessments, and example literacy activities.
  - (<https://nwokbookguides.com>)
    - Literacy Resource Folder (<https://bit.ly/ONE-NativeLit-Shared>)
    - Password: NWOK-read
- **San Diego County Office of Education: American Indian Education:**  
Includes virtual book club models, micro-course development tools, and professional development resources.
- **Culturally-Based Curriculum—National Indian Education Association:**  
Digital Resources for Schools, Teachers, Parents, and Students
- **New Mexico Indigenous Instructional Scope 2.0—New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED):**  
New Mexico Indigenous Instructional Scope

## Alaska State Resources

- **Alaska Native Language Literacy Guidebook:**  
A culturally grounded framework for reading instruction in Native languages. Much like this document, the guidebook emphasizes the urgent need to create and promote linguistically and culturally accurate teaching strategies, curricula, scopes, and sequences developed specifically for Alaska Native languages—not adapted from English models but rooted in the strengths and structures of Native languages themselves. It is a call to honor Indigenous knowledge, strengthen cultural identity, and ensure the survival and flourishing of Alaska Native languages for future generations.
- **Alaska Native Language Arts K–3 Reading Standards (2024):**  
Developed by Indigenous educators, these early literacy standards promote language revitalization and align with Alaska’s statewide reading goals.

# OUR BEGINNING: ACTIONS OF SUPPORT

As we support literacy through Indigenous Knowledge Systems, we are also nurturing the social and emotional well-being of our learners. Native Literacy is identity affirming, culturally grounded, and emotionally sustaining. These principles ensure students are not only learning to read and write, but also learning to thrive—emotionally, spiritually, and relationally.

While reports often end with a conclusion, the Native Literacy Workgroup offers this guidance not as an ending but as a beginning. This document marks the start of a deeper commitment to practices and actions that support Native Literacy success for all our children. It is not a rigid framework, but a living resource meant to spark dialogue, reflection, and adaptation in service of the unique strengths and needs of each Indigenous community.

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction has taken steps to integrate this work across the agency and into the [Washington State Literacy Framework K–6](#). The principles and indicators in this document will inform both Title III and Title VI guidance. Training in evidence-based literacy instruction is being offered to teachers who serve AI/AN learners, alongside continued professional learning around the John McCoy (*lulilash*) *Since Time Immemorial* Curriculum.

The Office of Native Education (ONE) is honored to carry forward the implementation of this guidance. During the upcoming academic year, ONE will:

- Design and launch a statewide communication strategy to ensure statewide awareness of this document, including outreach to professional education associations, education service districts, tribal councils, tribal leaders, teacher preparation programs, and key community organizations. When possible, ONE staff and members of the Native Literacy Workgroup will present at state and regional gatherings.
- Expand the ONE website to ensure that educators can easily access Native Literacy resources and tools.
- Embed this guidance into tribal consultation supports and trainings offered by ONE.
- Engage the Native Literacy Workgroup in implementing the recommendations and sharing stories, successes, and strategies statewide.
- Launch virtual training for teachers and principals of AI/AN students, modeled after California and Alaska programs.
- Invite schools, particularly Partnership Schools (RAD) and STEC schools, to serve as demonstration sites for Native Literacy implementation and reflection.
- Align these efforts with existing commitments outlined in the Centennial Accord and Washington State’s broader vision for educational equity and sovereignty.

## Technology and Adaptability

As we carry this work forward, we reaffirm that Native Literacy is not static; it grows alongside our

communities, languages, and tools. Assistive technology and digital platforms can serve as meaningful extensions of story, language, and access. When used in relationship and with intention, these tools help us remove barriers, expand belonging, and support all learners. Our commitment is to continually adapt our approaches to reflect both ancestral wisdom and future innovation.

### **Reflection Statement for Educators**

***When students feel safe to be seen and heard, learning happens. How do our literacy practices nurture emotional safety, joy, and belonging for our Native students?***

### **Living Document Statement**

The Native Literacy Principles and Indicators is a living document. The Office of Native Education will annually review and update the principles, indicators, and resources as both the body of research and the wisdom of our teachers, students, families, and communities continue to grow.

This work is rooted in relationship and responsibility, and as our knowledge deepens, so too will our commitment to ensuring every Native learner is seen, heard, and supported through literacy that reflects who they are and who they are becoming.

# NATIVE LITERACY GUIDANCE GLOSSARY

## Tribal and Cultural Terms

### **Ancestors**

In Indigenous communities, ancestors refer to those who came before and continue to guide and influence the living through teachings, traditions, and spiritual presence. Learning and identity development are understood to connect not only to self, family, and community, but also to ancestral wisdom and responsibility to future generations.

### **Family**

In many Indigenous communities, family extends beyond the nuclear family to include extended relatives, clan members, adopted relatives, and community members who share responsibility for children's well-being and education. This expansive understanding of kinship recognizes that multiple adults may serve as educators, guides, and advocates for a child.

### **Good Medicine**

A Native American concept referring to healing, beneficial practices, or positive approaches that support well-being and growth. In the context of this document, it means that educational practices that benefit AI/AN children will benefit all children.

### **Huyadadčəł (Lushootseed Language)**

Meaning "our way"—refers to centering Indigenous Knowledge in educational practices, particularly in literacy instruction.

### **Íkksma (Ichishkin/Sahaptin Language)**

Meaning "little ones"—term of endearment referring to children, emphasizing the care and responsibility communities have for their youngest members.

### **6Rs of Indigenous Research and Education**

The 6Rs are guiding principles that reflect Indigenous ways of knowing and being: *Respect, Relationship, Responsibility, Reciprocity, Relevance, and Representation*. They emphasize honoring Indigenous knowledge, centering community voices, and ensuring learning is accountable, meaningful, and inclusive.

### **Indigenous Knowledge Systems**

Traditional knowledge, practices, and beliefs of Indigenous peoples that encompass ways of knowing, learning, and understanding the world, including oral traditions, land-based knowledge, and community-centered approaches.

### **Indigenous Excellence**

The brilliance, innovation, and resilience present within Indigenous communities, cultures, and learners. It affirms that Indigenous knowledge systems, languages, and educational practices are strengths to celebrate rather than deficits to overcome.

### **Turtle Island**

A name used by many Indigenous Nations to describe North America. Rooted in Creation stories

where the turtle carried the land on its back, Turtle Island reflects Indigenous understandings of the earth as a living teacher and relative, guiding respectful and reciprocal relationships with all of creation.

### **Warm Demanders**

Educators who combine high expectations with high support, demonstrating care while maintaining rigorous academic standards for students.

## **Advocacy Terms for Native Parents and Communities**

### **504 Plan**

A legal document that outlines accommodations and modifications for students with disabilities to ensure equal access to education. Native families can request cultural accommodations through this process.

### **Academic Accommodations**

Changes in how students learn or are tested that don't lower standards but provide equal access. Examples include extended time, alternative testing formats, or culturally relevant materials.

### **Data-Driven Decision Making**

Using multiple forms of information (test scores, observations, family input) to guide educational choices. Native families can advocate for inclusion of cultural knowledge and community perspectives in this data.

### **Differentiated Instruction**

Teaching methods that adjust content, process, or product based on individual student needs, interests, and learning styles—can include culturally responsive approaches.

### **Equity vs. Equality**

Equality means giving everyone the same resources; equity means giving each person what they need to succeed, which may be different based on their background and circumstances.

### **FAPE (Free Appropriate Public Education)**

The legal right of all students to receive education suited to their needs at no cost. "Appropriate" should include culturally responsive education for Native students.

### **IEP (Individualized Education Program)**

A legal document for students with disabilities that can include cultural goals and community-based learning approaches.

### **Inclusive Education**

Educational practices that welcome and support all students, including incorporating diverse cultural perspectives and knowledge systems.

### **Learning Standards/Benchmarks**

Specific goals that outline what students should know and be able to do at each grade level. Families can advocate for culturally relevant examples and applications.

**Parent/Family Engagement**

Schools' efforts to involve families as partners in education. Native families can request that this include recognition of extended family/community structures and Indigenous knowledge.

**RTI (Response to Intervention)**

A multi-tiered approach to help struggling students. Native families can advocate for culturally responsive interventions that build on students' cultural strengths.

**Student Support Team (SST)**

A collaborative team that develops strategies to help students succeed. Native families can request inclusion of community members and cultural considerations.

**Wraparound Services**

Comprehensive support that addresses students' academic, social, emotional, and sometimes physical needs through coordination between school, family, and community resources.

## Formal Literacy Terms

**Asset-Based Approach**

An educational philosophy that focuses on students' strengths, cultural knowledge, and community resources rather than perceived deficits or gaps.

**Criticality**

A literacy practice that involves examining power, history, and lived experience through reading, writing, and discussion. It helps students understand how knowledge is constructed and how language can be used for justice and truth-telling.

**Cultural Humility**

An ongoing process of self-reflection and learning that involves recognizing one's limitations in understanding other cultures and being open to learning from community members.

**Culturally Responsive Instruction**

Teaching methods that recognize, respect, and use students' cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and learning styles to make learning more relevant and effective.

**Healing-Informed Practices**

Educational approaches that acknowledge and address the impacts of historical and intergenerational trauma while promoting healing and resilience.

**Language Domains**

The four interconnected areas of language development: reading, writing, speaking, and listening, which should be taught as integrated processes.

**Morphology**

The study of word structure and formation, including how words are built from smaller meaningful units (morphemes).

**Multimodal Texts**

Materials that combine different modes of communication such as written words, images, sounds, and other forms of expression.

**Oral Language Development**

The foundation of literacy that includes speaking and listening skills, vocabulary development, and understanding of language structures.

**Polysynthetic Languages**

Languages (common among many Indigenous languages) that can express complex meanings within a single word by combining multiple meaningful elements.

**Structured Literacy**

An evidence-based approach to literacy instruction that is systematic, explicit, and multisensory, teaching the structure of language from phonemes to discourse.

**Science of Reading**

Research-based evidence about how children learn to read, emphasizing systematic phonics instruction, vocabulary development, fluency, and comprehension strategies.

**Trauma-Informed Practices**

Educational approaches that recognize the widespread impact of trauma and integrate knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices to promote healing and prevent re-traumatization.

## Historical and Legal Terms

**Boarding School Trauma**

The intergenerational effects of forced assimilation policies that removed Native children from their families and communities, often resulting in cultural disconnection and psychological harm.

**Centennial Accord**

A 1989 agreement between Washington State and tribal governments establishing government-to-government relationships and cooperation in various areas including education.

**Treaty Rights**

Legal obligations established through treaties between tribal nations and the federal government, including educational provisions.

**Tribal Sovereignty**

The inherent right of tribal nations to govern themselves and make decisions about their communities, culture, and education.

## Educational Framework Terms

**Indigenous Knowledge in Literacy**

Six key aspects: Oral Tradition & Storytelling, Symbolic & Visual Literacy, Land-Based & Experiential Literacy, Indigenous Languages & Linguistic Literacy, Relational & Community-Based Literacy, and

Cultural & Spiritual Literacy.

**STEC Schools**

State-Tribal Education Compact Schools—public schools operated under agreements between Washington State and tribal governments.

**Title III and Title VI**

Federal education programs—Title III supports English language learners, while Title VI provides funding for programs serving Native American students.

# NATIVE LITERACY ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# GRATITUDE

With deep respect, we offer our gratitude to the Tribal Nations of Washington whose presence, knowledge, and guidance are at the heart of this work. We also recognize and honor the rich tribal communities in our state that extend beyond the 29 federally recognized tribes. Our workgroup reflect diverse representation from across Turtle Island, and it is through this shared wisdom that we are able to ensure all Native children in our schools are seen, acknowledged, and supported.

The 6Rs of Native Education guide Native Student Success at the Office of Native Education: respect, relationship, responsibility, reciprocity, relevance, and representation. Each of these values has been lived out in the process of shaping this document. Together, they remind us that gratitude is more than acknowledgment. It is an active practice of relationship. To be in relationship means we are accountable to one another, called to care for, contribute to, and uplift each other in ways that honor our shared responsibilities.

We also humbly acknowledge that we are not the first to do this work. We walk in the footsteps of many who came before us, elders, educators, advocates, and community leaders, who carried this vision and laid the groundwork for what we continue today. This document stands as part of that larger continuum, built upon the commitments and sacrifices of those who dedicated themselves to Native education long before us.

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At our core, at our heart, are the little ones, past, present, and future. It is for them that we join together in this work. Education has always been and continues to be a value among Native people, families, communities, and tribes. This document is one step toward creating learning environments where Native students' identities, knowledge systems, and contributions are valued as integral to the educational experience.

This guidance seeks to uplift Native literacy, and its spirit extends far beyond reading, writing, speaking, and listening. It is about nurturing belonging, honoring identity, and transforming schools into places where every child can thrive. We know that when our Native children are supported to be their fullest selves, all children benefit. We know our children are successful when they are happy and they love themselves.

FOR THE CHILDREN, WE OFFER THIS WORK IN GRATITUDE,  
IN RELATIONSHIP, AND IN HOPE.  
WITH RESPECT FOR ALL WHO WALK THIS PATH.  
WITH RELATIONSHIP THAT CONNECTS US IN KINSHIP.  
WITH RESPONSIBILITY TO OUR PROMISES.  
WITH RECIPROCITY THAT STRENGTHENS OUR CIRCLE.  
WITH RELEVANCE THAT KEEPS THIS WORK ALIVE.  
WITH REPRESENTATION THAT ENSURES EVERY CHILD IS SEEN.  
THESE ARE THE TEACHINGS OF THE 6RS,  
AND THEY ARE THE HEART OF THIS OFFERING.  
—*BAWAAJIGEKWE BOULLEY*

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