Forming a New American Indian Parent Advisory Committee

Congratulations! Your school district or charter school has reported having ten or more American Indian students. This is the opportunity for you to form an American Indian Parent Advisory Committee (AIPAC). This document will assist you with planning your AIPAC engagement goals, parent engagement strategies, and the timeline to help guide your work. The Office of Indian Education is ready to provide over the phone or in-person assistance at any time. Please reach out if you have questions.

Engagement Goals for your New AIPAC

A solid engagement plan starts with meaningful goals and a defined method in which to evaluate those goals for success. While you do not yet have a formal committee in place, there are likely American Indian parents in your district who have shown an interest in the education of American Indian learners. Reach out to those parents and invite them to partner with school staff to create goals for successful American Indian parent and student engagement. You will then be able to envision how AIPAC collaboration will support American Indian student success, and the impact that will naturally occur to support all students in your district or school. You should define a structured method for evaluating and measuring the outcomes of outreach and engagement.

The definition of success is contextual to you and your district or school. Success in your endeavors may be as simple as having three to five American Indian parents come together to discuss next steps, or success may be defined as having a full parent committee conducting a formal meeting. The end goal is to have a parent committee. The thoughtful formation of an AIPAC may not come easy, but if you keep the end goal in sight, it will happen!

District and charter schools should identify a school department that most closely aligns with this work. Within that department, designate a staff member to lead and champion the AIPAC goals and initiatives. This person should have the time and ability to lead this work, and will be capable off establishing a budget for how the staff, the department, and the district will support the AIPAC. A timeline that is reasonable for creating and supporting the committee is recommended, and will assist in identifying action items and important dates to keep the formation of the AIPAC moving. The AIPAC lead staff and other staff should be aware of their responsibilities and timelines for these responsibilities.

Listening sessions or surveys that take American Indian perspectives into account are a helpful way to get the information you need. A survey might include best times to meet, where to meet, and if families need daycare or transportation. Throughout hundreds of years of history, there has been and may continue to be a distrust of educational systems. Building relationships is the first step in dismantling some of those historical barriers.

Providing a meal is always a good way to begin meetings. It helps to view this process as an exciting opportunity to learn and grow in partnership with American Indian students, families and community members. With thoughtful and intentional outreach and collaboration, American Indian students will flourish within your district, and when American Indian students do better, we all do better.

American Indian Parent Outreach Strategies

The strategies listed in this section will assist you in creating your school district or charter school's AIPAC outreach strategies. The intent of the outreach is to create an AIPAC comprised of parents and guardians of American Indian students, American Indian community members, American Indian secondary students, American Indian School staff, and family members of American Indian students. The parent committee should be comprised primarily of parents of American Indian students in your district.

A two-step outreach process is recommended. The first step is to organize outreach in order to gather input. The second step is to reach out to promote the first AIPAC meeting information.

In the first phase, reach out to gather information about interest in participating on the AIPAC. There are many possibilities for how this can be accomplished. This can be done by paper or online survey, or by having a booth at any function that draws families to the district or school. It is also important to assess parent and secondary students' availability to meet, and any barriers to participation. Barriers may include transportation, childcare availability, or mistrust of the broad system of education. Sometimes parents may prefer to meet at a community space such as a library or a cultural center in your area. Your willingness to meet with parents at a space of their choosing is a first step in building a trusting relationship. Do not take hesitancy on the part of American Indians personally. You have the opportunity to overcome many years of storied history by building a bridge to better relations. With the information you have gathered, your school district or charter school will be ready to collaborate with American Indian parents on your first AIPAC meeting.

Outreach for the first AIPAC meeting should focus on the "who, what, when, where, and why" of the meeting. The outreach possibilities listed below will cast the widest net possible for the first AIPAC meeting. Families and staff members should be informed about the first AIPAC meeting multiple times and in a variety of ways. Extending personal invitations by phone to the individuals who provided feedback during the input gathering process will help build positive and personal relationships.

Social Media/Internet

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- Snapchat
- School District website
- Email
- Seesaw or other parent communication apps

During School Time or School Functions

- Inform all students, staff, and faculty during morning announcements
- Add to school newsletters
- Share with American Indian Families during conferences
- Create flyers for school events to all families
- Send letters home with American Indian students
- Invite American Indian staff personally
- Robocall all American Indian families in your district
- Call American Indian families
- Mail a letter to all American Indian families
- Invite all secondary American Indian students to participate

In the Community

- Distribute AIPAC meeting flyers at events where the school has a table or booth
- Partner with other schools to learn about their AIPAC engagement and success
- Advertise in the local newspaper
- Access your relationships with local television and radio stations
- Cross-collaborate with your community partners
- Partner with local American Indian college student groups, American Indian educational programs, American Indian community-based organizations and non-profits, and colleges in the district to collaborate on AIPAC engagement efforts

AIPAC Outreach Log

It will help to keep a log of outreach efforts. This will assist you in identifying effective communication. The log will also help the Office of Indian Education provide guidance based on previous efforts. Utilize the outreach log provided, or create your own to personalize it to your context. Tracking outreach will help you see which types of outreach activities are successful. Maintain brief descriptions of the activities and outcomes. It is important to keep files of the documents used during the outreach.

Date	Activities Performed	Outcomes	Comments

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Sample Outreach Letter

Dear Parent(s) or Guardian(s),

At our District, we are committed to ensuring our educational programs and services are meeting the needs of our American Indian students. In order to do this, we need your help in advising the district about the experiences and cultural needs of your students. We are asking for your help with our new American Indian Parent Advisory Committee (AIPAC). The parent committee is comprised of parents of American Indian students in the district, and helps drive the cultural and educational offerings for American Indian students in our district. We want to give parents, guardians, secondary students, and family and community members further opportunity to involve yourselves in your students' education. This committee will advise the school district and the school board on family engagement and educational support for American Indian students.

We hope to find a meeting time that works well for you. Secondary students are encouraged to participate, and all family members are welcome to attend the meeting. If you need transportation, please ask in advance and we will make arrangements. We are also able to work with you to participate remotely. If the meeting occurs after normal business hours, we will provide a meal for all AIPAC meeting attendees.

We look forward to collaborating with you, and we are very excited to embark on this journey together! This partnership is a great opportunity to share ideas and build relationships. We will be calling all parents and guardians of American Indian students to discuss AIPAC involvement and the first meeting date, time, and location. In the meantime, please feel free to reach out!

Signed

District Representative

Contact Information

First Meeting Best Practices

For your first meeting, it is important that your participants have the information they need to move forward. It should be understood that AIPACs drive the cultural and educational offerings for American Indian students within their district.

AIPACs must be comprised primarily of parents of American Indian students within the district. American Indian secondary students and American Indian district staff are also eligible to serve on the committee, as are American Indian community members. While non-Native district staff may participate in the AIPAC meetings, they are not permitted to be committee members, and should not be included on the AIPAC roster. District staff should not outnumber committee members at meeting.

The feedback provided during the input outreach will assist you in setting a meeting time and place that allows for maximum attendance. Work to break down the identified barriers to meeting, and offer food for attendees and their families. Provide childcare or allow all family members to attend. When possible, provide school transportation options if needed. Offer call-in or video meeting options for interested individuals who cannot attend in person.

Listen to AIPAC Concerns

Parent committee members frequently attend an AIPAC meeting because they have a story to tell. Provide the opportunity for committee members (including students) to share their stories. The American education structure has systematically left American Indian people out of decision-making. Even worse, boarding schools inflicted widespread trauma to American Indian communities. Many American Indian students are descendants of boarding school survivors. It is important to listen to each individual and meet them where they are.

The following are helpful first meeting suggestions. These suggestions will create stronger partnerships and promote consistent AIPAC attendance.

1. Introduce yourself, and let the AIPAC know why you are here. For example, “I am here because I feel all students deserve a positive educational experience, and I want American Indian students to feel valued and respected in our district”.
2. Find common ground. After you explain your contributions to the American Indian student experience, ask why others are in attendance.
3. Allow all AIPAC members to speak. This may take the majority of the first meeting, but it is crucial. Some of the attendees are there because of traumatic educational experiences they have endured or their students currently face.
4. Listen to their requests. If someone asks for information that you’re unsure about, answer honestly, and then follow up with the requested information the next time you meet, or via group communication in between meetings.

These recommendations will set you up for positive relationships with the AIPAC, and they are the foundation of open and honest communication. This foundation will bring better results for the long term, and will benefit your district or school as a whole.

Establish Standards for AIPAC Communication

It is important to establish communication methods that parents are comfortable with. During initial AIPAC meetings discuss and establish which types of communication work well for participants. This may include one or more of the following: emails, phone calls, robocalls, calendar invites, sharing AIPAC documents on platforms such as Google, letters, postcards, or any form of communication the group agrees upon. Avoid long gaps between communications. Some AIPACs may have multiple months without a meeting, but you should continue to check in according to the agreed-upon methods of communication. This will grow relationships and promote more consistent committee attendance.

There is further information you will want to share as you are ready. The AIPAC is a partner in writing the Indian Education Program Plan. There are statutes that you will need to be aware of, including Minnesota Statute, section 124D.74 American Indian Education Programs and a statute that drives the annual compliance process under Minnesota Statute, section 124D.78. These processes may be new to you and your district, and the Office of Indian Education is able to help you navigate the processes as needed. In order to make informed decisions, the district must afford the AIPAC the information and data needed to make sound recommendations. This information includes, but is not limited to, testing data, attendance data, graduation rates, and student count information. These processes are briefly outlined in the Indian Education Annual Timeline.

AIPAC Frequently Asked Questions

This section answers several common questions submitted to the Office of Indian Education each year. The purpose of the FAQ is to assist district and charter schools with the formation of an AIPAC and to meet the AIPAC requirements cited in Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.78 Parent and Community Participation.

Q1: How does the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) determine a school district or charter school's need for an AIPAC?

> **A1**: Each fall, districts submit racial and demographic student data to MDE via their elected reporting platform. The Office of Indian Education (OIE) uses this data to identify which districts have ten or more American Indian students. Due to reporting deadlines, the OIE uses the previous year's student counts for determining eligibility for the subsequent school year. For example, October 1, 2019 American Indian student counts determine which districts need an AIPAC for the 2020-21 school year.
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> Identified districts will receive an email annually in April. This email will provide the American Indian student count for the upcoming school year.

Q2: Is the district required to have an AIPAC or is it optional?

> **A2**: All school districts, charters, and tribal schools with ten or more American Indian students are required to form an AIPAC. Each school district and charter school's AIPAC is required to vote annually on the vote of concurrence and meet with the school board. These requirements are found in Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.78.

Q3: What role does the AIPAC play in the district?

> **A3:** The AIPAC should be involved with the creation American Indian Education program to meet the criteria in Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.74, subdivision 1. This can include but is not limited to focusing on grade-appropriate education material, providing a process and content for cultural relevance, and reviewing American Indian content and state standards alignment. The Indian Education Self-Assessment Rubric is useful to help guide programs.
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> American Indian parents should be involved in all aspects of the school community. Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.78, subdivision 1 states that, "This committee must afford parents the necessary information and the opportunity effectively to express their views concerning all aspects of American Indian education and the educational needs of the American Indian children enrolled in the school or program."

Q4: What is an American Indian Parent Advisory Committee (AIPAC)?

> **A4**: An AIPAC is a committee comprised of parents/guardians of American Indian students, American Indian students, and interested American Indian community members who meet regularly to support Indian Education programs at districts or charter schools. AIPACs provide valuable input regarding Indian Education and may make use of resources such as the Indian Education Self-Assessment Rubric. AIPACs should be involved in all aspects of Indian Education.

Q5: Who can participate on the AIPAC?

A5: AIPACs must be comprised primarily of parents of American Indian students within the district. American Indian secondary students and American Indian district staff are also eligible to serve on the committee, as are American Indian community members. If an aunt, uncle, grandparent, or guardian is serving on the AIPAC, they would be considered the parent. While non-Native district staff may participate in the AIPAC meetings, they are not permitted to be committee members, and should not be included on the AIPAC roster. District staff should not outnumber committee members at meetings.

Q6: What role do district staff members play on the American Indian Parent Advisory Committee?

A6: District staff who are *not* American Indian are not eligible to serve on the committee; however they are a valuable resource for AIPAC members and they can and should participate in the AIPAC meetings to the extent that the committee members would like. Staff serving as liaisons between the district and the AIPAC and are key to the collaborative process. There are often one or more dedicated staff members who work with the AIPAC to help the committee achieve its goals. District staff should not outnumber committee members at meetings.

Q7: We have sent a letter to our American Indian parents and received no response. Does this meet the requirement of the statute?

A7: Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.78 indicates all schools with ten or more American Indian students are required to form an AIPAC. The information in this document will help you in forming a new AIPAC, along with outreach strategies and ideas. Every effort should be made to do so, and the Office of Indian Education may ask for documentation (such as the outreach log) of your efforts.

Q8: What can the district or charter school do to maximize attendance at AIPAC meetings?

A8: Districts and charters achieve higher attendance when every effort is made to remove potential barriers for participants. Common barriers include reliable transportation, childcare, and work schedules. Districts should:

- Schedule meetings on days and times that work best for the families. This may mean meeting on weekends or evenings.
- Provide transportation for families who do not have a reliable method of getting to the meeting location.
- Provide childcare during meetings and/or allow children to be present at meetings.
- Provide meals if meetings fall near a meal hour and light refreshments at other times.
- Let families choose the location of the meeting. This could be the school but may be a local coffee shop, library or other community location.

Q9: Where should our AIPAC meetings occur?

A9: AIPAC meetings should take place at a time and location that is convenient for a majority of the participants to attend. This can include meeting after normal business hours or on weekends. Meetings

can take place either on or off school property. If parents of American Indian students feel more comfortable in a community setting, be amenable to off-site locations.

Q10: Can we provide food at AIPAC meetings?

A10: Meals are a wonderful opportunity for community-school relationship building. If possible, you should provide a shared meal with your participants. If you receive American Indian Education Aid, those dollars can be used to pay for food at meetings or AIPAC events.

Q11: Does the school district need to incorporate the AIPAC's input into the Indian Education Aid application?

A11: Schools need to collaborate (receive input and provide feedback) with the AIPAC. The Parents should receive data on the American Indian student population in order to inform data-driven decisions. The AIPAC should help create Indian Education Program Plan (IEPP) goals, develop IEPP strategies, and form the budget. This is especially important for those districts with 20 or more American Indian students who are eligible for this aid.

Q12: Can we share data with our AIPAC?

A12: Your parent committee will need information about your district in order to make sound decisions regarding programs for American Indian students. Participants will have questions that the district should provide information on. AIPACs should also receive non-identifiable requested data which includes but is not limited to student achievement data, student discipline data, student attendance data, curriculum and standards information, staff surveys, student surveys, and graduation information.

Q13: What is annual concurrence?

A13: The annual concurrence process is an opportunity to strengthen the relationship and partnership between the school board and American Indian parents and students. The AIPAC should be informed about school programs and how they affect American Indian students. Each year, the AIPAC makes a determination on whether or not they believe the school is serving the American Indian students well. This determination is either that the AIPAC agrees that the district or school is serving the students well (a vote of concurrence), or that the AIPAC feels that the district or school needs to address the programs for American Indian students in a better or more defined way (a vote of nonconcurrence.)

The school supports the conversation by providing the necessary data. If the AIPAC votes nonconcurrent, they must submit and present to the school board their written recommendations for improvement. The school board then has 60 days to respond to the AIPAC recommendations and to send the response to the Office of Indian Education.

This process is addressed in Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.78, subdivision 2: "Prior to March 1, the school board or American Indian school must submit to the department a copy of a resolution adopted by the American Indian education parent advisory committee."

Q14: If we haven't filled out annual compliance, are we still eligible to receive Indian Education Aid?

A14: During the first year of aid eligibility (with 20 or more students), the Office of Indian Education will accept applications from school districts and charters if annual compliance was not received the previous school year. This exception is only for first year aid eligible applicants. For districts and charters that have already received aid, annual compliance must be received in order for the school district or charter school to receive funding for the upcoming year. See Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.81 American Indian Education Aid: "The commissioner shall prescribe the form and manner of application for aids, and no aid shall be made for a program not complying with the requirements of sections 124D.71 to 124D.82."

Q15: Can school board members attend AIPAC meetings?

A15: It is possible the AIPAC may invite school board members to attend their meetings to build relationships and share information. Occasionally, school board members attend only part of AIPAC meetings. Some AIPACs have specified a school board liaison who attends meetings.

Q16: Does the AIPAC need bylaws?

A16: The Office of Indian Education (OIE) recommends developing bylaws. They are not statutorily mandated but are considered a best practice as they serve to guide the work and organization of the AIPAC. Contact OIE for support during bylaw creation.

Q17: What happens if our AIPAC disagrees on the next steps they want to take?

A17: This is why bylaws are important. If AIPACs have a common agreement on how to conduct AIPAC business, that should guide their process. The Office of Indian Education is available to provide in-person AIPAC meeting guidance if the school and AIPAC would like.

The Office of Indian Education hopes that this guidance is helpful in forming an American Indian Parent Advisory Committee in your district or at your school. The engagement goals, parent engagement outreach strategies, outreach log, and sample outreach letter are designed to jumpstart your outreach efforts to form an AIPAC. The timeline, first meeting best practices, and frequently asked questions are intended to help guide your work as you start to meet with your participants. If you are still having difficulties forming your parent committee, please reach out; we are here to help. The Office of Indian Education is ready to provide over the phone or in-person assistance at any time. Please reach out if you have questions.

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