April 14th, 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM

School Climate Transformation Efforts in Montana's Public Schools: State Support of Local Visions for the Future

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School Climate Transformation in Montana's Public Schools: State Support of Local Visions for the Future

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In its second year, the School Climate Transformation Grant (SCTG) has utilized social justice processes and a strengths-based approach to creatively work toward project goals in identified Montana school communities.

### What is MBI?

MBI is a framework in which schools can implement culturally responsive practices in education. Schools establish a learning environment that support social, emotional, behavioral, and academic success for all students. Historically, MBI uses attendance, Office Discipline Referral, and suspension/expulsion data to efficiently and effectively allocate school resources and target interventions in a multi-tiered system of support.

### SGTG Project Goals:

- Build capacity for Office of Public Instruction (OPI)
- Enhance Local Education Agency capacity to implement and sustain Montana Behavioral Initiative (MBI)
- Coordinate OPI efforts with appropriate Federal, State, and local resources

### What is School Climate?

School climate is the nature of relationships among the people in a school community - physically, emotionally, and intellectually: How the people within the school community treat one another through their actions, words, tone of voice, and use or abuse of power.

### Local MBI Implementation

- One school developed an intervention based on the Clan system of their cultural heritage to represent positive traits in students.
- Another school practices a morning welcome where all students sing the Pledge of Allegiance in English and Crow languages.
- School staff defined school-wide behavior expectations, taught them to all students, and displayed them in relevant spaces.

### Trends in Montana for the SCTG Project

- Montana has the highest percentage of small rural school districts than any other state in the U.S.
- One out of four schools in Montana serve rural communities.
- One out of three Montana students attend a rural school.
- American Indian youth make up over half of the non-white population of students.

### Challenges

- Nine out of 15 identified SCTG schools are rural and were identified in other states in the U.S.
- Less than 50% of students at SCTG schools have achieved proficient marks on the standardized achievement tests between 2001 - 2013.
- SCTG schools do not have enough personnel to form consistent MBI teams, or send them to required trainings in Billings, Bozeman, Great Falls, or Missoula.
- Five part-time OPI staff - MBI Consultants - serve schools located distances as far apart as 200 miles.

### Moving Forward:

- OPI staff help local school identify key stakeholders in the community
- A cohort of schools and districts in rural American Indian reservation communities share knowledge and skills through teaching and learning from experiences
- OPI staff help local school identify key stakeholders in the community
- MBI provides a framework for school communities to define goals and identify relevant measures for evaluation

### Research-based practices and practice-based research

- Acknowledge underlying cultural bias in Western educational systems that have academic, social, and behavioral impacts on American Indian students.
- School communities adopt evidence-based practices to fit their culture and defined goals
- MBI framework allows for schools to creatively design and implement interventions and progress monitoring systems

### Montana OPI and public education system

- Need is defined by “high poverty,” “low performing,” “persistently low achieving.”
- History of the public school system includes use for assimilation of American Indian children and youth beginning in the 17th century. (Hoxie, 1888)
- Dominant teaching practices, content and methods are culturally irrelevant for many non-dominant communities.
- Rural and isolated characteristics of Montana are “primary elements of influence” for access to “Excellent Educators.” (Piper, J., 2015)

### References