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## **Federal Grant to Improve Collaboration Between Tribal Education Leaders and State Education Agencies**

(BOISE) – Tribal Education Leaders from across the state have joined partners at the State Board of Education and the Idaho Department of Education in the first of twenty meetings planned to foster cross-agency coordination to improve access, opportunity and success for American Indian students in Idaho’s public school system.

The expanded collaboration is supported by federal Department of Education funding for the Idaho Tribal Education Agency (TEA) Consortium State Tribal Education Partnership (STEP) Program grant. The grant provides \$2.44 million to create more congruent partnerships among the tribes, the State Board of Education, the Idaho Department of Education and targeted LEAs on tribal homelands of the Coeur d’Alene, Nez Perce and Shoshone Bannock Tribes.

The Nez Perce Tribe was the lead applicant for the grant and was one of four TEA or TEA consortiums awarded in 2023. Nez Perce Education Manager Joyce McFarland worked with direct assistance from Coeur d’Alene Tribe Education Director Dr. Christine Meyer and Shoshone-Bannock Tribe Education Program Manager Jessica James to develop the grant application and plans for implementation.

Meetings started in December and will take place quarterly over the next five years.

“This program gives tribes a more meaningful role in these conversations, especially for tribal children on tribal lands,” said James. James notes that though many tribal schools are ranked low when it comes to performance, tribal leaders have felt that their voices haven’t always been heard in the search for solutions.

“American Indian and Alaskan Native students have unique educational needs,” said McFarland. “This grant is a step towards giving tribes a more significant role in identifying solutions for improving academic achievement of tribal students.”

As the meetings continue, the group will focus on the following:

- Working with education agencies to grow tribal consultation and create a reliable mechanism to track meaningful completion of the requirement.

- Two-way professional development between the State Board of Education, the Idaho Department of Education and tribal education leaders with the goal of building capacity and collaboration.
- Understanding the barriers to the self-identification of American Indian students and exploring new methods of encouraging self-identification. This could include resources and education provided by both state and local leaders as well as tribal leaders on how self-identification is essential to access available services and ensure more accurate data of student progress.
- Ensuring that assessment data collection provides accurate information that is actionable at both the statewide and educator levels.

“It’s exciting coming to the table for this important work,” said McFarland. “I don’t think we’ve ever had the chance to have a conversation like this in all of my years on the Indian Education Committee. I’m eager to see what this collaboration yields for Idaho’s American Indian students.”

The group will meet again in early March.

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