



A Teacher's Guide to Community Engagement*

Several lessons in the Lessons of Our California Land curriculum encourage the teacher to invite an elder or a tribal resource person to present in the classroom. A key to identifying resource people who have valuable cultural or historical information in American Indian communities is to build relationships with students and families. To build these relationships, teachers should gather and act on information that provides insight into the thoughts and experiences of students and community members.

Organize frequent parent-teacher conferences and schedule them so that there are several opportunities for each parent to attend. Provide clear information on the choices that parents and students can make regarding their education. Talk with parents about opportunities for them to participate in the classroom. Help parents, community leaders, tribal employees, and organizations shape the school curriculum so that it reflects the cultural and educational strengths of their communities. Ask about their experiences and their views of schools (e.g., “What changed between the time you were a child and the time your children went to school?”).

Regularly send notices, memos, newsletters or other forms of communication to native parents. Use these communications tools to recruit classroom volunteers (ask, “Do you have expertise in the area of _____ that you could share with my students?”). If there is a systematic and reoccurring mode of communication between the school, tribal community, and parents, find out how you can effectively use this communication system to provide information about your classroom program. Print announcements in tribal newsletters and make announcements at meetings with tribes and with parent committees. Use local agencies and organizations to disseminate information and post notices at local businesses.

Get to know community members and build mutual trust by attending and participating in tribal events. Keep in mind that among many tribes it is usual and expected to bring gifts to elders. As you identify persons who could contribute to your classroom instruction remember, too, that not everyone who is elderly possesses knowledge of traditional culture and history, nor can every elder who has such knowledge articulate it clearly for students. Also, do not limit your contacts to only the elderly; some people have acquired important cultural or historical

information at a younger age. Churches, community health centers, tribal employees, linguists, historians, parents, and other organizations and individuals that provide for student and family needs can be excellent sources of contacts with elders and other community members.

* These suggestions are compiled and adapted from the following sources:

1. Campbell, Linda, Keith Egawa, and Geneva Wortman, "Increasing the Achievement of Native American Youth at Early College High Schools," http://www.marthalakecov.org/~building/strategies/multicultural/campbell_egawa_wortman.htm.
2. Center for the Education and Study of Diverse Populations at New Mexico Highlands University, "Family and Community Involvement" ([Microsoft Word Document](#)) .
3. Hale, Duane Kendall. 1991. *Researching and Writing Tribal Histories*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Michigan Indian Press.