Supporting Students and Communities. As many schools struggled to adjust and continue to provide educational and wellness-based services for their students, Anadarko Public Schools (APS), located in central Oklahoma, was busy providing services for its Native American students. APS, in collaboration with the Communities in Schools of Mid-America, Wichita and Affiliated Tribes of Oklahoma, and the National Indian Education Association (NIEA), has adapted and responded to the ever-changing educational landscape during the COVID pandemic to build, strengthen, and maintain relationships with Native American students and families within APS.

Under the leadership of Donna Richey (Kiowa), Tribal Services Director at CIS-MA, and with the collaboration of David Sullivan, APS-Special Programs Director, and through the assistance of four school site coordinators, the program initiatives were able to assist in the COVID pandemic response, which directly supported students, communities, families, and parents/guardians.

The CIS-MA Site Coordinators were able to provide some innovative direct services at their schools sites which included: the creation of a school store which provides a space to redeem earned incentives, afterschool cultural activities, cultural activities that focus on relationship building, collaboration with Project Venture to provide culturally-based development for positive behaviors and healthy lifestyles, and “Flex Fridays” where teachers can recognize students who have displayed “improvement, promise, growth, acts of kindness, or other positive behaviors.”

Not only was the impact of their programming felt in the schools, but it was also felt and realized in the communities within APS. Some of the contributions include: $60,000 worth of new clothing to students in need, food provided by drive through giveaways, over 4000 masks distributed to school sites, and clothing to neighborhood clothing closets.

A Collaborative Approach. In the face of adversity, many schools and tribal communities faced unprecedented obstacles during the last year. Yet, the APS, with the support of CIS-MA and NIEA, Wichita and Affiliated Tribes of Oklahoma, as well as other community collaborators, continues to provide impactful services within the educational learning environment to holistically advocate and support their students.

This work is possible through an Office of Indian Education Grant, “Native Youth Community Projects”, which is a Tribal Communities in Schools project which aims to improve outcomes for Native Students by implementing a community-wide Integrated Student Support system which provides academic, social-emotional, and various other holistic supports which are meant to ensure college and career readiness, and lifelong success for Native American students. This grant is managed by the National Indian Education Association.

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