

NATIVE EDUCATION

Bringing Tribal History, Culture, and Contemporary Contributions into the Classroom

Partner South Umpqua School District

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The South Umpqua School District is adjacent to the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians (CCBUTI) community, one of the nine federally recognized Tribes in Oregon. Senate Bill 13, also known as Tribal History/Shared History and enacted in 2017, directed the Oregon Department of Education to create Native American curricula for K–12 students and professional development for educators. The law also funded each of the nine Tribes to develop individual place-based, Tribally specific curricula.

In 2017, Education Northwest partnered with CCBUTI to develop a Tribal curriculum that could be shared with regional schools and teachers. However, the South Umpqua School District found that teachers in its district might benefit from additional training to gain more confidence and experience in teaching the material. District leaders wanted to ensure the culture and heritage of students who are Tribal members were recognized in their education and that all other students in the schools could learn about their Tribal neighbors. The district partnered again with Education Northwest to give teachers more background information to help them implement the materials and to ensure all South Umpqua students learn about the Tribe's history and contemporary contributions.

Training to share Tribal knowledge

Native education specialists at Education Northwest worked with the district on two projects—an hour-long video and a series of five training sessions. The video was designed to help teachers get oriented to the district and the Native community in the area and included some CCBUTI history and other relevant material, related by Tribal members themselves.

South Umpqua teachers chose the topics for the training series. The units addressed cultural responsiveness, trauma-informed practices, and teaching math in a way that incorporates Native culture, among other topics. The trainings were included among the many options from which district teachers can choose for professional development. A cohort of teachers became invested in the opportunity to learn about the local Native culture, attending every session. They felt particularly motivated to learn this material and to share it with students in the classroom.

Moving forward with professional development in Native education

Both the orientation video and the training series were recorded so South Umpqua educators can continue to use them in the future—new teachers in the district will be able to watch the orientation video and will have the Cow Creek trainings available to them for professional development. The cohort of teachers who have completed the trainings so far intend to incorporate the rich material from those sessions into everything they teach over the course of the year. In this way, both students and educators in South Umpqua will learn about the Tribe, its history, its culture, and its continuing importance in the local community.