

NATIVE EDUCATION

Supporting Tribal College Student Success with Data

Partner Stone Child College

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From 2018 to 2021, through the Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest contract, Education Northwest partnered with Stone Child College on the Rocky Boy Indian Reservation in Box Elder, Montana. The two-year Tribal college wanted to better understand the educational and career outcomes its students, many of whom are members of the Chippewa Cree Tribe, experienced after they left the school.

While Stone Child had a staff member who maintained a file on alumni, they found that contact declined over time as phone numbers and addresses changed. College leaders wanted to know whether students were going on to enroll in one of the four-year institutions in the Montana University System (MUS), what fields they chose to study, whether they graduated, and, if so, how long it took them and what degrees they earned. This knowledge would help Stone Child better serve its students and the whole community.

Tracking Tribal college student outcomes

To help Stone Child College understand student outcomes, Education Northwest researchers helped the college and MUS set up a data-sharing agreement for the first time. We developed a data matching process to identify students who transferred from Stone Child to MUS, created a linked dataset that followed Stone Child transfer students to MUS, and analyzed student-level data to calculate key outcomes. Researchers studied the available data to see what high school students came from, their student characteristics, the percentage of students who transferred to a four-year institution in MUS, the number of credits they were able to transfer, their degree attainment rate at a four-year institution in the MUS, and what subject areas those degrees were in.

Then, researchers provided trainings for staff members at Stone Child and other Tribal colleges in Montana, to help them understand how to gather the data to calculate key outcomes for transfer students. The first training focused on how to facilitate a data sharing agreement between a Tribal college and MUS and how to analyze linked data to calculate key outcomes related to the transfer rate, credit mobility, and degree attainment among transfer students. The second training focused on how to use the data to inform practice and policy to support transfer student success.

Honest conversations and redesigned models

Once the data had been collected and combined, college leaders and the school's data governance group were able to learn important lessons that would influence policies and practices going forward. They saw that while about 60 percent of students who entered Stone Child continued to the second semester, only 40 percent stayed for the second year. They also had a better sense of how many students transferred, which credits they were able to take with them to an MUS school, and how likely they were to graduate from an MUS school.

The college changed some of its data collection processes to make it easier in the future to gain this kind of insight into student outcomes. And they had some honest conversations about how they could better prepare and support students to meet their educational goals by adjusting some of their programs or policies. They began redesigning their advising model, and developing partnerships with universities, to help ensure Stone Child students were able to take more credits with them to a four-year institution and continue to the career of their choice.

“You can really start to have honest conversations about what’s happening to your students. The data doesn’t lie. And so if you really want to have an impact, you have to look at it, you have to think about it, you have to share it.”

– *Jessie Demontiney, Human Resources Director*
Stone Child College