

## Voices of Native Youth

Tamara Lunday, EdD, Student Health and Counseling Services Director, South Dakota State University The presenter describes her qualitative research with Native American students who grade their schools and describe what they need to learn and thrive.



# Voices of Native American Youth

# Parent Committees

- ▶ Noted annually in local, state, and federal government education reports:
- ▶ Low level of academic achievement
- ▶ Low level of on time graduation rate
- ▶ Low level of completed graduation rate
- ▶ High level of drop out rate



# South Dakota Department of Education



Table 1

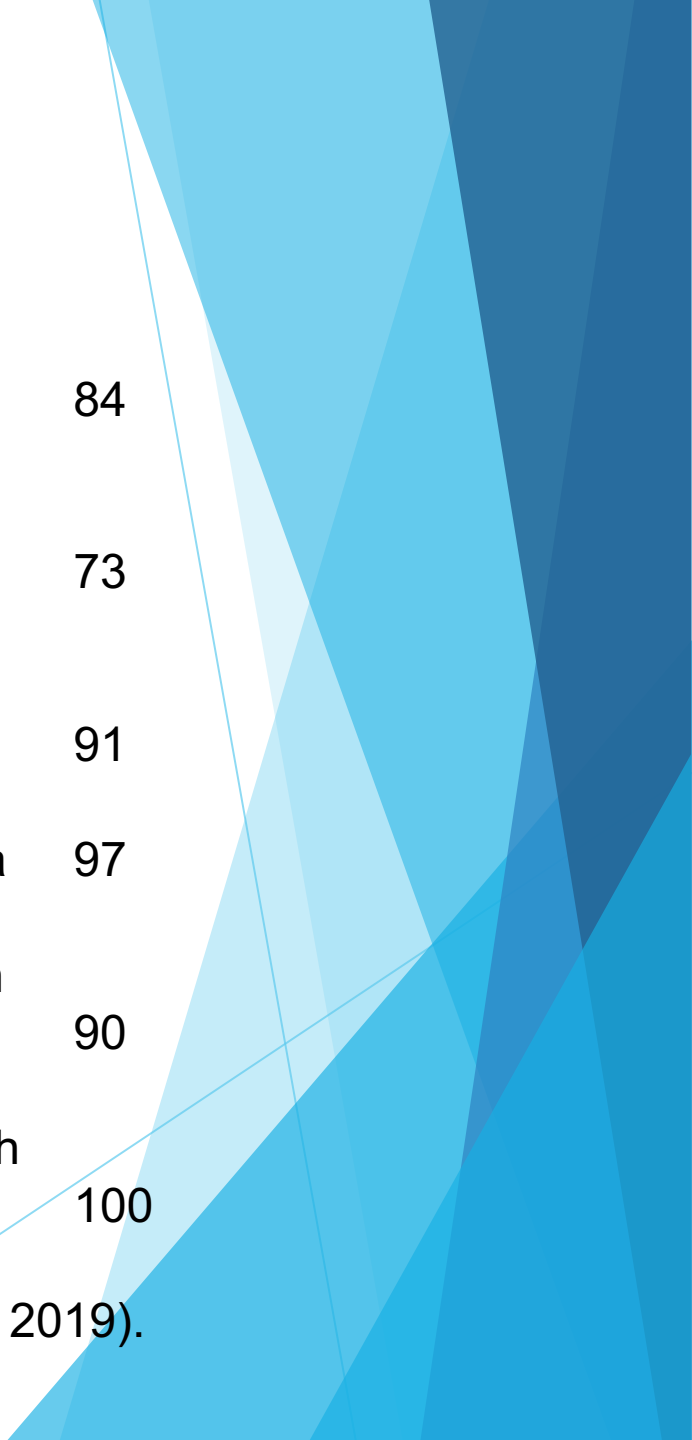
Graduation Statistic for South Dakota 2018-2019 %

On Time Graduation Rate for all students in South Dakota	84
On Time Graduation Rate for Native American students in South Dakota	54
On Time Graduation Rate for Caucasian students in South Dakota	90
High School Completion Rate for all students in the state of South Dakota	90
High School Completion Rate for Native American students in South Dakota	66
High School Completion Rate for Caucasian students in South Dakota	95

(South Dakota Department of Education [SDDOE], 2019).

Table 2

Graduation Statistic for the Subject School in South Dakota 2018-2019 %



On Time Graduation Rate for all students in the subject school in South Dakota	84
On Time Graduation Rate for Native American students in the subject school in South Dakota	73
On Time Graduation Rate for Caucasian students in the subject school in South Dakota	91
High School Completion Rate for all students in the subject school in South Dakota	97
High School Completion Rate for Native American students in the subject school in South Dakota	90
High School Completion Rate for Caucasian students in the subject school in South Dakota	100

(South Dakota Department of Education [SDDOE], 2019).





Listening to Native American Students

Lessons For Public Secondary Schools

A Phenomenological Study

Tamara Lunday

# Purpose of Study

which took place in a rural SD community

- ▶ Get a clear description from Native American students of
  - ▶ Their own lived experiences of their high school attendance
  - ▶ Challenges of their goal of reaching high school graduation
  - ▶ Their consensus agreement on recommendations for resolving challenges



# Methodology

- ▶ Phenomenological qualitative research
- ▶ Critical theory
- ▶ Study describes, analyzes, and uncovers ideas addressing problems of the student related divide—characterized as living in two worlds- through a culturally sensitive group discussion with Native American current and former students
- ▶ Procedures included culturally sensitive processes in carrying out individual interviews and talking circles

# Research Questions

- ▶ How do Native American students define success in secondary education systems
- ▶ What do Native American students perceive as challenges to participating in secondary education
- ▶ What do Native American students recommend for addressing these issues
- ▶ What recommendations do Native American students have for the secondary education system to support Native American students to be successful

# Participants

- ▶ Recruitment
  - ▶ Tribal Indian Ed Director
  - ▶ Public School Title VI Director
  - ▶ Chief School Administrator
- ▶ Participants
  - ▶ Six Students (4 female and 2 male) Sioux Descent, different tribal affiliations

# Individual Interview

- ▶ Described the lived experience while attending the public high school
- ▶ Interview questions were designed to get accurate descriptions for each participant
- ▶ Transcribed interviews verbatim
- ▶ Identified and clustered significant statements to represent themes
- ▶ Validity strategies were implemented
  - ▶ Native American elder's review
  - ▶ Dissertation Committee Chair review

# Talking Circles-Group Meetings

- ▶ First talking circle
  - ▶ Verify accuracy of significant statements and themes
  - ▶ Develop resolutions through consensus decision making
- ▶ Second talking circle
  - ▶ Reviewed accuracy of themes
  - ▶ Reviewed accuracy of resolutions
  - ▶ Reviewed accuracy of writing



# Theme 1, Student Statements, and Student Recommendations

- ▶ Lack of Connections, Relationships, and Fit
- ▶ Student Statements
  - ▶ *I wasn't like close to anybody*
  - ▶ *I didn't feel welcome all of the way*
  - ▶ *We were just acquaintances*
- ▶ Student Recommendations



# Theme 2, Student Statements, and Student Recommendations

- ▶ Challenges of Academic Work
- ▶ Student Statements
  - ▶ *The work isn't that hard, there is just more of it*
  - ▶ *After school, they have hard lives, families with addictions*
  - ▶ *Moms and dads aren't there because they have jobs*
- ▶ Student Recommendations

# Theme 3, Student Statements, and Student Recommendations

- ▶ Incomplete and/or Inaccurate Presentation of History
- ▶ Student Statements
  - ▶ *History is taught different like minority groups get in the way*
  - ▶ *Like Native Americans did help you know*
- ▶ Student Recommendations

# Theme 4, Student Statements, and Student Recommendations

- ▶ Lack of Culture Recognition
- ▶ Student Statements
  - ▶ *It is like two different worlds*
  - ▶ *There were Native kids, but they weren't culturally in touch, more on the assimilated side....acting more like white kids*
  - ▶ *Native students don't have a role model to look up to at the school*
- ▶ Student Recommendations

# Theme 5, Student Statements, and Student Recommendations

- ▶ Peer Conflict and Bullying
- ▶ Student Statements
  - ▶ *There were a couple of girls that tried to fight me, and I was like, I don't even know you*
  - ▶ *There was a lot of discrimination*
  - ▶ *I saw a teacher leaving, saying... Oh, this is your fault that is why I am leaving*
- ▶ Student Recommendations

# Transferred to Local Indian School

- ▶ Students found a potential solution - five out of the six students transferred
- ▶ Transferring improved their chance of making their high school experience positive and graduation achievable
- ▶ Described it as comfortable, inviting with a sense of belonging
- ▶ Had a comprehensive orientation program
- ▶ Found academic work challenging but with more clarity and support from staff
- ▶ History not just out of a textbook...noted culture positives
- ▶ Clear rules for addressing conflict
- ▶ Native American culture is present in the classrooms and throughout daily activities

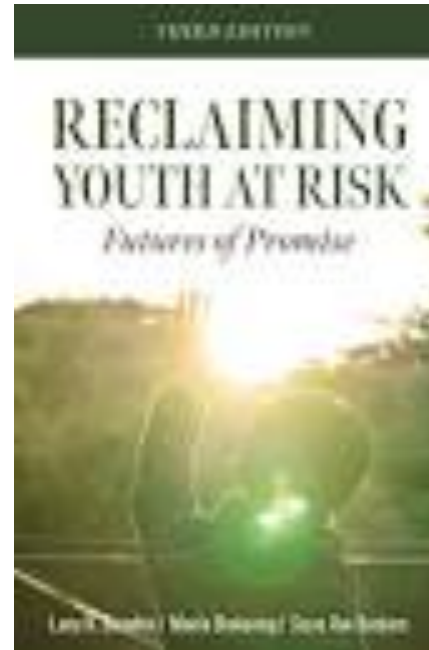
# Conclusions

- ▶ Welcoming and inclusive atmospheres
- ▶ Culturally responsive teaching styles
- ▶ Adaptation to academic school work
- ▶ Authentic historical information in classrooms
- ▶ Descriptions and representations of Native American culture must be included in public schools
- ▶ A safe learning environment which includes a truthful depiction of the history of the American continent
- ▶ Voices of students and other youth, especially within school systems, must be solicited and respected



# Discussion

- ▶ A strong influence in deciding to pursue this project was my familiarity with the Circle of Courage Native based health and wellness model originally described in Reclaiming Youth at Risk
- ▶ The model requires a setting which provides appropriate opportunities for students to recognize and adopt methods, practices, and procedures which assure opportunities to reach and develop the essential senses of Belonging, Mastery, Independence, and Generosity





Circle of Courage® original art created by George Blue Bird, Lakota,  
from *Reclaiming Youth at Risk*, 2002, by Larry Brendtro, Martin Breckenleg,  
and Steve Van Rookem, Bloomington IN: Solution Tree, 2002.

# Recommendations for Practice

- ▶ Reclaiming Youth at Risk - has led to a Native-based practice model which is hereby recommended for implantation as a culturally responsible guide for teachers and others working with children and youth
- ▶ Model is called Circle of Courage(COC) and includes the following gateways
  - ▶ 1. Connect to cultural and spiritual roots
  - 2. Model respect and care
  - 3. Provide for fail-safe relationships
  - 4. Turn problems into opportunities
  - 5. Decode meaning of behavior
  - 6. Enlist youth as colleagues
  - 7. Plant seeds to grow
- ▶ The Model of the COC addresses all of the concerns the students brought up

# Defined School Success

