

December 13, 2013

Press Release

To: Lewiston Tribune

Introduction: On behalf of the Kamiah School District, I request that you publish the following Press Release concerning significant matters of public concern:

Press Release Text:

As a result of several editorials which have appeared recently in the pages of this newspaper regarding the Kamiah School District's treatment of its Native American Students, the District feels compelled to respond and describe the many programs and opportunities it extends to its Native American Students.

However, some of the general concerns expressed by members of the public regarding the treatment of the District's Native American population can and should be discussed.

As a general matter, the District's Board of Trustees, Administrators and all of the District's staff work hard on behalf of the Kamiah School District and its students to create an inclusive environment that encourages community members to participate in educating both our staff and our students to increase our understanding of and appreciation for people of all ethnic backgrounds.

Because a significant number of students enrolled in Kamiah schools are of Native American descent, sharing their native cultural heritage to the entire school community is of the utmost importance to the Board, the Administration and the District's staff. To this end, numerous school projects, programs and activities are centered on Nez Perce and Native American culture. Any visitor to any one of our schools cannot help but notice the very significant Native American influence. The libraries in every school have impressive displays of Native American items and artifacts.

For example, the High School features several displays which celebrate the Native American culture. A large bulletin board in the library has several large photographs of Kamiah students dressed in traditional Native American attire who had participated in a recent local powwow event. The High School art classes recently created, and the school proudly displayed several excellent, authentic replicas of horse masks traditionally used by the Nez Perce to cover their horse's faces both in battle and for ceremonial purposes. The High School library is also the distribution center for "Ta'c Tito'Oquan," a monthly newspaper published by the Nez Perce Tribe. Indeed, the first thing visitors see when they enter the High School lobby is the traditional Nez Perce flag as well as a tribal ceremonial blanket prominently on display.

The District's Middle School library similarly offers many Native American resources, including a Nez Perce dictionary, and an impressive display of Nez Perce artifacts collected locally, as well as a bulletin board depicting a monthly seasonal theme written in the Nez Perce language.

On a large wall in the District's Elementary School, teachers and students are in the process of creating a replica of the map of the Nez Perce Trail, and the elementary school's librarian maintains and displays several, colorful Native American prints.

Each and every parent of every student enrolled in Kamiah schools is invited and encouraged to meet with their child's teacher(s) before and after school, and are welcomed and encouraged to visit the child's school during the school day on a drop-in basis - after first checking in at the school's main office. In addition, the District's master calendar annually provides two days during the first week of October specifically intended for formal parent-teacher conferences. The parents of every elementary school student are actively contacted by staff to schedule a parent-teacher conference, and the parents of middle school and high school students are invited to drop in or to schedule an appointment with teachers. The conferences run from 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM the first day, and the second day conferences are held from 8:00 AM to 12:00 PM. Parents are encouraged to contact teachers, and all teachers are *required* to participate in these parent/teacher conferences.

Regarding Student Fees; Student Fees can be waived on a case-by-case basis for ALL students (regardless of race, ethnicity, national origin, etc.) where it is shown that the student's family is experiencing financial hardship. It is the responsibility of each school's lead Administrator to determine which students receive hardship waivers, and which students do not qualify. The District treats these requests as sensitive and confidential and does not keep records identifying who has and has not received the fee waivers

Finally, in addition to the multiple displays of Native American Heritage contained in all of the District's schools, multiple opportunities are provided for students and the community to explore Native American history and culture. Following is a non-exhaustive list of such opportunities which have been offered by the District:

Course Offerings: Cultural Arts, Native American History, Pacific Northwest History, Nez Perce Language (NWIC), Nez Perce Language (4th Grade).

Programs: STEP (State Tribal Educational Partnership Project), Students for Success, Lewis and Clark Nez Perce Outdoor Workshop (Musselshell Meadows).

Activities: Spring Powwow, Nez Perce Word-of-the-Day, Nez Perce Language/Basketball, Nez Perce Story-telling, Moccasin Making, Beading, Nez Perce Art, Health Fair sponsored by Nimiipuu Health Clinic, Nez Perce Tribal Police weekly campus visits, Nez Perce Lewis Clark Games (high school track meet), Lightning Creek Drummers (Native American musicians who perform at high school graduation ceremonies and Veteran's Day ceremonies).

Clubs and Committees: Indian Education Parent Committee (meets monthly with teachers and administrators), Indian Club (consisting of middle school and high school students).

Field Trips: Nez Perce Battle Field (White Bird), LCSC Mini Powwow, Nez Perce National Historical Museum, Tribal Fish Hatchery.

The Kamiah School District is dedicated to creating and maintaining an inclusive learning environment which celebrates the cultural diversity of all its students, including its Native American students. We invite members of the public, whether or not you have a student attending one of our schools, to visit and see for yourself the efforts we make to reach out to and include all of our students in our school community.

On behalf of the Kamiah School District, I thank all of you for reading this press release and more importantly, I thank you for your continued support of the District and its employees who work hard every day to provide a quality education for all its students.