

Denfeld Indigenous Cohort

Cohort Team

OUR MISSION

Every student, every day will be empowered with learning opportunities for growth, creativity and curiosity, in preparation for their future in a global community.

OUR VISION

Duluth Public Schools provides an academically engaging, safe and inclusive environment with high expectations and responsible use of resources.

OUR CORE VALUES

Learning



Developing a love of learning through life-long inquiry.

Excellence



Having high standards for all through accountability, integrity and authenticity.

Equity



Creating conditions of justice, fairness and inclusion so all students have access to the opportunities to learn and develop to their fullest potential.

Collaboration



Working in partnership with staff, families, students and community.

Belonging



Providing a welcoming and accessible environment where everyone feels safe, seen and heard.

How it began.... March 2024

- Teachers and administrators noticed a group of Indigenous students that were not engaging in school in general, and Ojibwe language classes.
- Counselors, teachers, and administrators gathered to discuss options to increase student engagement and achievement of Indigenous students.
- Denfeld administration was in support of a new educational model to increase Indigenous student engagement and graduation rates - School within a School Model with an Indigenous focus.
- Staff and space was allocated by Mr. Tusken and American Indian Education to start the cohort.



Staff and Roles

- **Content Teachers**
 - **Brian Jungman-English**
 - **Ryan Jacobi-Social Studies**
 - **Alison Wood-Science**
 - **Pamela Nelson-Math**
- **Classroom**
 - **Amanda Horton - SEL Teacher/Ojibwemowin Teacher Classroom Support**
 - **Jamie de la Cruz - Classroom support, parent contact, coordinate activities, student needs, provide teacher resources**
- **Administration**
 - **Tom Tusken-Principal**
 - **Geri Saari - Counselor**
 - **Aakawe'aashiik-Coordinator**
- **Ancillary Support**
 - **Sheila White - American Indian Education Coordinator**
 - **Memegwesiikwe-Teacher**
- **Community Support**
 - **Center for American Indian Health**
 - **Dr. Mary Owen**
 - **Mengan Golden**
 - **Check and Connect**
 - **The DEN and PAWS and DASH**
 - **AICHO**
 - **Seek to Learn - FDLTCC**

Daily Model

1st hour

SEL/Career/Foundations Class; Credit bearing and culturally relevant
Students do not have to be in full cohort to attend

2nd hour

9/10 Grade English

3rd hour

Social Studies: 9/10 grade credit

4th hour

Science: 9th grade credit

5th hour

Math: 9/10 grade credit

Students attend as much of the cohort classes as are appropriate for their graduation plan. 10th graders who passed grade 9 science & intermediate algebra went to an SWS class that hour. Students still have access to support and cohort activities if they have transitioned to other classes.

Goals

The goal is graduating on time, the focus is on:

- To create an engaging learning environment for our American Indian academic struggling students.
- To work in partnership with core content teachers to create an integrated curriculum with an Indigenous focus.
- To help credit deficient students to earn credits and graduate.
- To create an alternative pathway to credit.
- To connect students to post-secondary education options and help create pathways for success in college/career choices. (Higher learning plan)



Progress and Trends



- Most Freshman were not ready to be in the cohort; need to transition to high school first - most transitioned out of the program.
- Greatest gains for Sophomores - most are doing better & made significant increases in credits completed for graduation. Attendance is still an issue.
- Students that transition out of the cohort are still offered support and interventions
- Students have a better relationship with school adults and are more open to receiving support from the counselors.
- Need to continue support for 2025 - 2026 Juniors.

Challenges

- Most 9th grade students did not continue in the cohort - three have continued and are currently doing well.
- Program could not adequately support students with learning disabilities - no funding for special education licensed instructors.
- Attendance...chronically absent students have not shown significant improvement in attendance. If students do not come to class, the cohort cannot support them.
- Curriculum support for teachers to create more culturally relevant materials.
- Overall coordination of program is fragmented.

Moving Forward - 2025 & Beyond

- Program will focus on 10th and 11th grade students.
- 9th grade students will be considered second semester for the morning Social-Emotional Learning period.
- The program cannot adequately support students with significant learning disabilities.
- Scheduling is in place to continue to consolidate courses, and steer students toward PSEO courses with support in 11th and 12th grade.
- Program will be explained in detail in meeting prior to enrollment into the Cohort with the focus on adding students that want to participate in the program.
- Entrance and exit guidelines for the program are being revised to provide for the best chances for success for the students and the program.
- Time and resources need to be allocated to support curriculum development with cohort teachers.
- A Coordinator has been assigned.
- A full-time paraprofessional will be present in the classroom throughout the day.



Questions?

- Any questions?
- Comments?
- Concerns?
- Feedback?