

Research Proposal

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Title of the Project

Pathways to Success in School and Beyond for Native American Youth from a Reservation in Montana

Background & Purpose of the Project

As an educator for the past 20 years, I knew Buffalo Hide Academy was a special place within minutes of first visiting several years ago. Since that initial meeting, I have cultivated a solid relationship with the faculty, staff, and students at Buffalo Hide Academy, as well as many community members. One of the culminating experiences of this collaboration was a visit to Montana State University whereby several Buffalo Hide students taught future teachers about the importance of relationships, caring, and stories within the context of teaching and schooling. The power of these students' stories and their abilities to tell them proved transformative for both the MSU and Buffalo Hide students.

At this point--and in consultation and collaboration with Matthew Johnson, Charlier Spiecher, Nicholas Rink and the other faculty, staff, and students at Buffalo Hide, I (along with my colleague, Dr. Christine Stanton) would like to move forward with more formally and systematically understanding the excellent work that is happening at Buffalo Hide.

The purpose of this study is to capture the Buffalo Hide students' experiences of the school. Specifically, we are interested in understanding what features of BHA are helping the succeed both academically and in their lives outside of the school.

Concretely, we would like to administer anonymous surveys to the students two times throughout the school year (at the beginning and end of the year), interview a group of focal students at different times throughout the year, and spend time observing at the school throughout the year. The survey instrument will be created in collaboration with the staff and students at Buffalo Hide, and the interviews will ask students about their experiences at Buffalo Hide, about their decision to attend BHA, and about their experiences in school before they attended BHA. Participation in the study will be completely voluntary and a student would be able to remove themselves from the study at any time. We will compensate participants in the study with stipends.

The data collected would be analyzed with the research team, which includes the aforementioned members of Buffalo Hide. Our plan is to share our findings with the Browning school board and other schools in the district, at the Blackfeet Research Days, and through academic journals and conferences. Our hope is that members of the research will also be part of the presentations and publications.

We have received a small grant to support this work from the Spencer Foundation, and we are actively seeking larger grants to support this research. Our hope is that such support would enable us to help the district and school build infrastructure to do what it is already doing well even better.