

# Indigenous Voices ElevatED



**The State of Indigenous  
Education in Minnesota:  
A Call for Representation,  
Narrative Change, & Justice**

**An Exploratory  
Research Evaluation by  
Jill Greendeer PhD, MA, MS**  
Commissioned by EdAllies  
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# About the Author



## **Jill Greendeer PhD, MA, MS**

As a Hocak hinuk (woman), Nani (mother), sister, and relative, Jill's life purpose resides within the space of Indigenous diversity, equity, and inclusion and is part of the bridge between Indigenous communities, healing and empowerment, data/food sovereignty, cultural wellness, representation in academia and healthcare.

**Read more from the author on [page 34](#)**

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DEFINITIONS

**Indigenous**

Used for connecting important common and topical issues of Indigenous peoples, such as social, cultural, political, spiritual, and identity contexts (Burnette & Figley, 2017; IWGIA, 2023; NIH, 2019).

**Indigenous People**

Commonly refers to the earliest inhabitants of a country.

**Indigenous Populations**

Refers to disadvantaged descendants of peoples that inhabited territories before colonization or the formation of an existing state (Burnette & Figley, 2017; International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs [IWGIA], 2023; NIH, 2019).

**Tribal Affiliation**

Most Indigenous people identify themselves by tribal affiliation and prefer to be referred to by tribal affiliation. In the United States, there are over 574 federally recognized tribes and each tribe has unique cultures, traditions, languages, and affiliations (Bureau of Indian Affairs [BIA], 2023; NIH, 2019). Can also be referred to as a tribe, and if an individual is from the same tribe, they are the same tribal affiliation. People may also have multiple tribal affiliations and may or may not be enrolled due to colonial and systemic injustices still being implemented.

**Tribal Community**

A community where Native/Indigenous people reside. Can be a community of tribal people of the same or different tribe/s, the same or different band/s, reservation tribal communities (land set aside for specific tribes by the government during forced removals and relocations), or non-reservation tribal communities, urban or rural communities, or a combination of all the above. There is diversity within Indigenous/Native people and communities.

**Note on Terminology**

Indigenous, Native American, American Indian, Indian, Alaska Natives, Natives, First Nations, and Aboriginal are used interchangeably (NIH, 2019). These terms are highly political and complex and understanding the contexts of contemporary Indigenous health inequalities and unique terms is imperative to evaluate Indigenous research effectively and adequately (National Institutes of Health [NIH], 2019).

# The State of Indigenous Education in Minnesota:

## A Call for Representation, Narrative Change, & Justice

Exclusion, invisibility, and lack of representation are all forms of discrimination that Native communities encounter in education. These modern discriminatory practices fuel toxic educational environments that disregard and erase Native perspectives, voices, and values. Furthermore, current institutionalized educational practices perpetuate false narratives and have significant adverse impacts on Native students, families, and communities. All students who attend K-12 education in Minnesota are impacted by perpetuating false narratives that can be traumatizing for all communities involved if truth narratives are not incorporated into educational systems. Trauma gets recycled and racism gets perpetuated, doing more harm and hindering healing and safe learning environments for Indigenous students and families.

This stems in part from the lack of representation among educators in school leaders. The number of Indigenous teachers and administrators in Minnesota is alarming and unacceptable. In efforts to at least mirror the student population there is tremendous work to do. If grades were given to the state of Minnesota for Indigenous/Native inclusion and representation they would be failing.

**So why does Indigenous/Native inclusion and representation matter? Ideological society measures progress by objective numbers, to speak to the urgency of action and change, the following statistical information was obtained from the Minnesota Department of Education. >>>**



## What is Minnesota's Report Card on Native/Indigenous Inclusion, Representation, and Visibility?

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### Native Teacher, Administrator, and Student Demographics

Native Teachers make up less than 1% of all licensed teachers in the entire state of Minnesota. According to the Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB) (2023), there are 112,860 teachers in Minnesota, and only 773 are

Native. Administrators that identify as Native across Minnesota are also less than 1%. Meanwhile, students who identify as Native/Indigenous make up approximately 3% of the student population in Minnesota.

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### Native Student Academic Progress, Graduation, and Attrition

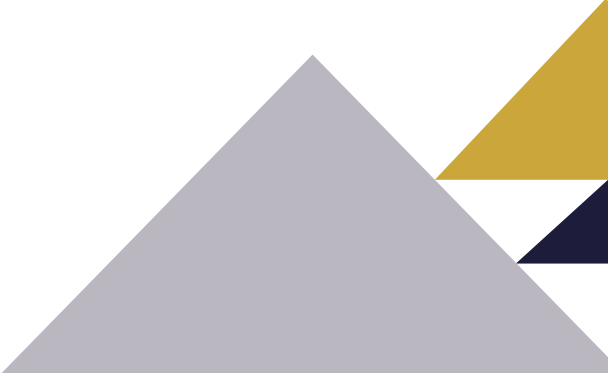
**MATH:** Approximately 24% of Native students across the entire state of Minnesota are meeting or exceeding math proficiency according to current state education assessments. This means Native students are meeting **state standards for math** at approximately **two times less** than the statewide rate across all Minnesota K-12 students and approximately **two and a half times less** than White counterparts.

**READING:** In reading, approximately 32% of Native students across the state of Minnesota are meeting or exceeding proficiency according to current state education assessments. This means Native students are meeting **state standards for reading** at approximately **one and a half times less** than the statewide rate across all Minnesota K-12 students and approximately **two times less** than White counterparts.

**SCIENCE:** In science, approximately 22% of Native students across the entire state of Minnesota are meeting or exceeding proficiency according to current state education assessments. Native students are meeting **state standards for science** at approximately **two times less** than the statewide rate across all Minnesota K-12 students and White counterparts.

**GRADUATION:** The high school graduation rate of Native students in Minnesota is 61%, compared to White counterparts who have an 88% high school graduation rate. Although high school graduation rates have increased from approximately 56% in 2019 to 61% in 2022, it is **still not enough** to promote educational equity for Native students in Minnesota. The attrition rate of Native students in K-12 education in Minnesota is **four times higher** than White counterparts. **Native male students** have the highest attrition rate out of any demographic student population in Minnesota. In 2022, Native male students have an approximate attrition rate of 16% and the **lowest graduation rate** of 58%.

**HIGHER EDUCATION:** In Minnesota only 39% of Native students who graduate high school will attend higher education. In comparison, 63% of Black counterparts, and 70% of White counterparts attend college after graduation.





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## Attendance Rate and Disciplinary Actions on Native Students

Native students have the lowest consistent attendance rate across all groups in K-12 education in Minnesota. In Minnesota's K-12 education system, the student consistent attendance rate is approximately 70%. In comparison, Native students have a 44% consistent attendance rate, Black students

have a 60% consistent attendance rate, and White students have a 74% consistent attendance rate. Out of all disciplinary actions in Minnesota, Native students account for approximately 6% of disciplinary actions, compared to 38% of disciplinary actions in Minnesota for White student counterparts.

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## Minnesota Student Survey—Mental Health

The Minnesota Department of Education Student Survey reports on students' mental health. The following is a brief description of Native students' mental health status throughout 8th to 11th grade.

- + Across Minnesota, 40% of Native students in 8th grade, 44% of Native students in 9th grade, and 47% of Native students in 11th grade shared that they have experienced **long-term mental health, behavioral or emotional challenges**.
- + 37% of Native students in 8th grade, 35% of Native students in 9th grade, and 33% of Native students in 11th grade have expressed **wanting to hurt themselves** without dying, such as self-inflicted cutting, burning, or bruising.

- + 36% of Native students in 8th grade, 39% of Native students in 9th grade, and 44% of Native students in 11th grade in Minnesota expressed seriously **wanting to attempt suicide**.
- + Across Minnesota, 17% of Native students in 8th grade, 20% of Native students in 9th grade and 11th grade **have attempted suicide**.

These numbers reported Native student population demographic combines students who identify as American Indian and 'other' Indigenous peoples on demographic surveys. It should be noted that most demographic forms do not allow for inclusive ethnic identities.

# Native History & Historical Trauma

## Myth

So Native/Indigenous students are falling behind, not attending school, and have long-term mental health challenges; that's not the Minnesota K-12 educational system's problem. There must be something wrong with the community, family, or student. Maybe they just don't want to comply or care to go to school and learn. This sounds like a "Native/Indigenous problem" not a Minnesota Department of Education problem.

## Truth

**It is a systemic injustice and addressing historical and cultural contexts needs to be urgently considered. The following is a brief contextual historical background as to the education injustices that Native/Indigenous communities have endured and continue to be burdened with in the present-day.**

**Historical trauma is cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations and is grounded in genocidal and ethnocidal motives (Braveheart, p. 7, 2003).**

### NATIVE BOARDING SCHOOL BRIEF BACKGROUND

An estimated 85% of Indigenous children were taken from their families.

Native families that refused to send Native children to attend Indian residential boarding schools were considered defiant and treasonous. These families often had dire consequences inflicted on their families and communities.

Young Native children, as young as five years old, were forcefully taken from their families, imprisoned, and sentenced to assimilation at the boarding schools.

Indian residential boarding schools were predominately run by Christian and Catholic churches, priests, and nuns.



Historical trauma adversely impacts physical, mental, spiritual, and community health, well-being and the health and educational disparities are well-documented among Indigenous communities (Conching & Thayer, 2019; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Dunbar-Ortiz & Gilio-Whitaker, 2016; Ringel & Brandell, 2020; Sleeper-Smith et al., 2015; Weaver, 2019).

Native populations in North America, particularly in the United States, were estimated to be more than 60 million, but by the early 20th century, they were estimated to be fewer than 200,000. Native homelands were stolen and sold off to European settlers (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Dunbar-Ortiz & Gilio-Whitaker, 2016; Sleeper-Smith et al., 2015). Communities experienced a significant loss of Indigenous way of life, food systems, culture, language, spirituality, resources, and sovereignty, and Indigenous communities were forced to assimilate (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Dunbar-Ortiz & Gilio-Whitaker, 2016; Sleeper-Smith et al., 2015).

To further genocidal and ethnocidal motives, the United States government and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) forced Native children by federal law to attend Indian residential boarding schools

(Adams, 2020; Child, 2012; National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition, 2020).

The impacts of Indian residential boarding schools further traumatize Native communities and generations. Collective and cumulative trauma experienced by Native people through boarding schools, historical trauma of colonization, intergenerational trauma, adverse childhood experiences trauma, and present-day trauma manifests in present-day Indigenous health and education inequities. Systemic injustices in education repeatedly traumatize Indigenous students, families, and communities and lack Indigenous perspective, visibility, and representation (Child, 2012; Grayshield et al. 2015; McQuaid et al., 2017; Ringel & Brandell, 2020; Weaver, 2019; Warne & Lajimodiere, 2015).

Native people continued to be dehumanized by contributions of historical trauma, boarding school experience trauma, intergenerational trauma, childhood traumas, and present-day traumas experienced by Native people (Ehlers et al., 2013; Evans-Campbell, 2008; Goodkind et al., 2012; Gone, 2013; Prussing, 2014; Menakem, 2017; Ringel &

Consequences of non-attendance included incarceration, withheld food rations that resulted in starvation, brutality, and murder of non-compliant families.

Indian residential boarding schools operated under the philosophy of the genocide of the savage, salvaged by assimilation.



Native children were severely abused physically, mentally, emotionally, sexually, and spiritually, and they were not even taught the basic US White education standards.

An estimated 523 total Indian boarding schools operated in the United States.

Brandell, 2020; Weaver, 2019). Origins of present-day Indigenous health and education are linked to the contributions of colonization, cumulative and collective traumas, and highly complex social determinants of health that are rooted in complex genocidal and ethnocidal political strategies to eliminate Native people (Ringel & Brandell, 2020; Sabzalian, 2019; Stanley et al, 2020; Weaver, 2019). Boarding schools added to an unstable foundation between Native communities and education systems in the United States. Boarding school experiences added substantially to Native communities' lack of trust in U.S. educational systems and further perpetuated the cumulative and collective trauma burden that educational systems continue to impose on Indigenous people.

Academic institutions teach through a U.S. **White-centric** patriarchal lens and place little to no value on Indigenous knowledge, perspective, or education (Sabzalian, 2019). Systemic injustice in academia and education repeatedly traumatizes Indigenous students and scholars because of lack of

Indigenous perspective, visibility, and representation (Yellow Bird, 2021). This includes Minnesota's schools that continue to leave Indigenous voices and representation from the curriculum, and the current way academic success is measured is discriminatory to Indigenous values and knowledge systems. This practice is harmful to Indigenous students and families and has adverse outcomes for Indigenous students' safety, well-being, and education (Sabzalian, 2019).

Understanding the highly political context, collective and cumulative traumas, and historical and cultural contexts of the state of education for Native students, families, and communities in Minnesota is critical to addressing any health or education disparities (Ringel & Brandell, 2020; Sabzalian, 2019; Stanley et al, 2020; Weaver, 2019). The following trauma map should be considered foundational to addressing current systemic educational injustices. Although the list of traumas is not exhaustive, these significant contributing events have a depth of impact on Native trauma burden (see fig. 1).

Boarding schools forbid Native children from practicing their Indigenous way of life, including speaking Native languages, following cultural and spiritual traditions, showing empathy and love to one another, wearing long hair, and receiving support from their families and communities.

In many instances, Native children were tortured, and in many cases their torture led to the death of an unforeseen number of Native children for speaking Native languages.

In Minnesota, there were 24 boarding schools, including at the University of Minnesota-Morris and College of St. Benedict.

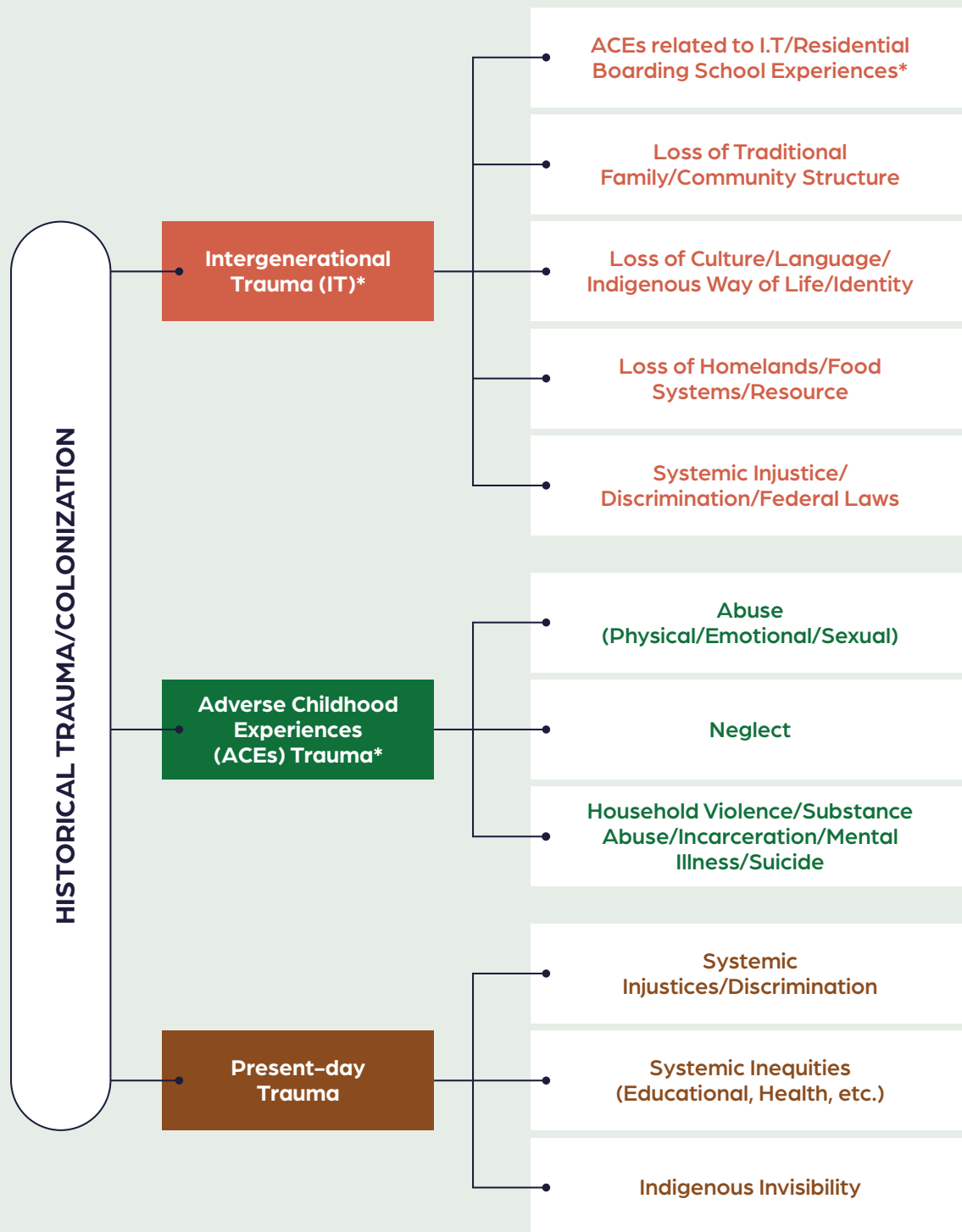


Native children died by the masses. The exact number of deaths is still unknown.

Currently, there are 124 Indian boarding schools still open, the research and numbers are still growing.

FIGURE 1

NATIVE TRAUMA BURDEN FRAMEWORKS



\*Boarding school experiences may be both ACEs and Intergeneration trauma. Reference: Greendeer (2022), trauma map adapted from Brave Heart (2003), Elm et al. (2019), Hamby et al. (2021), Walls & Whitbeck (2011), Walls et al. (2017), Walters et al. (2011)

# Methods



There is a critical need to evaluate and expand research and education on the barriers and challenges that Native students and families encounter in K-12 education in Minnesota. There are barriers and challenges that researchers and educators are not adequately addressing or understanding the depth of complexity, political nature, and vast systemic injustices that Native students and families experience in K-12 education in Minnesota.

**These barriers and challenges continue to have adverse impacts on Native students, families, and communities.** Furthermore, there is a need for new education curriculums and scientific research to improve on addressing systemic injustices that create these barriers and challenges that Native students, families, and communities encounter in K-12 education in Minnesota. This qualitative exploratory evaluation research study was conducted to determine the challenges and barriers that Native/Indigenous students and families experience in K-12 education in Minnesota.

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## Specific Aims

The qualitative exploratory evaluation research study was an appropriate method for the specific aims to explore lived experiences of Native/Indigenous students and families surrounding barriers and challenges experienced in K-12 education in Minnesota.

- + **AIM 1:** To determine the barriers and challenges experienced by Indigenous students and families in K-12 education in Minnesota.
- + **AIM 2:** To determine the frequency of barriers and challenges experienced by Indigenous students and families in K-12 education in Minnesota.
- + **AIM 3:** To inform education system change in policy, curriculum, and Indigenous inclusion in K-12 schools in Minnesota through data collected in qualitative exploratory evaluation.

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## Recruitment and Sample

This was an exploratory evaluation research study and recruitment was done through purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is an effective qualitative recruitment strategy to obtain rich data with limited resources (Palinkas et al., 2015).

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## Participant Eligibility Criteria

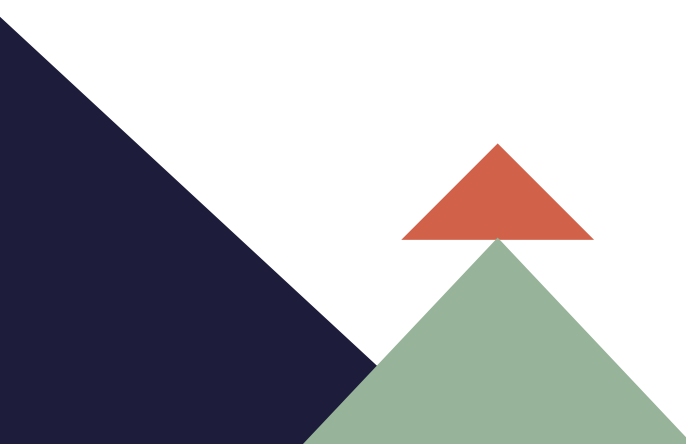
- + Self-identify as Native/Indigenous.
- + Live and attend K-12 education in Minnesota, or recently graduated or attended.
- + Have at least one parent/guardian willing to participate.
- + There is no exclusion based on tribal affiliation or gender.

The sample consisted of a total of 7 participants (3 students, 4 parents) for Stage 1 in-depth semi-structured interviews based on Stage 1 interview guide (see Appendix A). From that sample of 7 participants in Stage 1, Stage 2 participants were recruited for digital campaign, for a total of 3 participants (1 student, 2 parents) for on-camera interviews using condensed interview guide (see Appendix A). There were 7 participants total that participated in both stages combined.

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## Informed Consent and Media Release

Research consent forms and media waivers were signed by participants. Participants read and acknowledged understanding of the risks and benefits of participation and that participation of study was voluntary and they could terminate participation of study at any time. Participants in Stage 1 of the study were ensured to remain de-identified and asked to sign an informed consent form. If the participant was a minor, both parent/guardian and minor signed the consent form. Participants in Stage 2 were additionally asked to sign the media release form. If the participant was a minor, both parent/guardian and minor signed media release form. Due to the nature of an exploratory evaluation study, this study was Institutional Review Board (IRB) exempt.



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## Data Collection

The initial phase (Stage 1) involved in-depth semi-structured interviews exploring the barriers and challenges that Native students and families encounter in K-12 education in Minnesota. All participants identified as Native students and/or families that live in Minnesota, have attended K-12 education in Minnesota, or recently graduated or attended K-12 in Minnesota.

There were six separate interviews conducted and one combined interview with parent and student. The combined interview was requested by the parent and student to meet the participant's level of comfort. The interviews took place either online via Zoom or at a location of participant's choosing. The in-depth interviews were recorded with two voice recording mechanisms to ensure quality and backup for transcription. Transcription service Otter A.I. was utilized to transcribe data and the primary researcher reviewed transcriptions along with voice recording to ensure correctness of the transcription. Stage 1 transcripts were uploaded into Dedoose version 9.0.107 for data analysis.

In Stage 1 participants were interviewed with a semi-structured interview route questioning guide (see Appendix A). Once Stage 1 interviews were completed, the data set was sent through secure pathways and electronically uploaded into Dedoose version 9.0.107 for secure data management and analysis. This procedure was initiated by the primary researcher and guided by Dedoose professional staff to ensure proper security, data management, storage, coding options and analysis interpretation.

**For more details about the methodology of this project see appendices.**

The secondary phase (Stage 2) involved on-camera interviews using a semi-structured condensed interview guide (see Appendix B). The primary researcher interviewed the participants, and the videographer recorded the interviews using a camera and media equipment. Three separate on-camera interviews were collected and all on-camera interviews were given at a local co-op. Video data collected from on-camera interviews were then uploaded into the videographer's editing software to start the digital campaign editing process.

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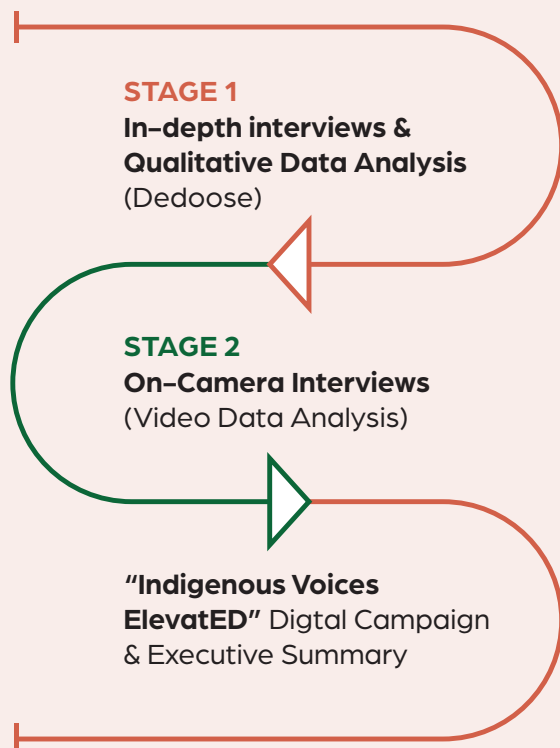
## Time

The initial interviews for Stage 1 took approximately 30-45 minutes. The interviews were voice-recorded digitally on devices that are secure and ensure the privacy of participants. If the participants choose to participate in the digital campaign, they can be video recorded in addition to voice recorded during the interview. In Stage 2, there will be an additional 60-minute session for on-camera interviews.



## Data Analysis

### DATA ANALYSIS ROUTE



In Stage 1 data analysis was guided by the primary researcher and qualitative data were coded using Dedoose version 9.0.107. During Stage 1 the overall strategy of this data analysis project used inductive content analysis to guide coding process and category development (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Saldaña, 2016). Inductive content analysis elevates and preserves participants' voices and aligns with the appropriate method for the aims of this research project (Saldaña, 2016). After completion of the first round of coding, a secondary round was completed identifying themes and sub-themes throughout the data. Preliminary codes were presented to some participants to ensure the validity of data analysis and interpretation.

In Stage 2, data analysis was guided by the primary researcher and co-edited by a videographer, who had expertise in editing software and digital campaign compilation. The EdAllies (2023) digital campaign Indigenous Voices ElevatED was based on Stage 2 condensed questions semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix B). Three video interview snapshots of participants' lived experiences regarding barriers and challenges that they face in K-12 education in Minnesota, along with a research background given by the primary researcher were combined to create digital campaign, Indigenous Voices ElevatED (EdAllies, 2023).

## Reflexivity

It should be noted that the primary researcher identifies as Native, has children attending K-12 education in Minnesota, and has mutually experienced the barriers that participants discussed. This research project was conducted through a Native/Indigenous trauma lens and interpreted through Native voice and perspective.

The primary researcher has a PhD in Nursing. She is aware of her lived experience as an Indigenous woman, matriarch, life partner, daughter, sister, advocate, relative, and scholar. She further identifies as a Hoocak, straight, woman, caregiving mother of four, that has traditional beliefs in the Hoocak Sacred Medicine Lodge Society. She is an enrolled member of the Hoocak Nation of Wisconsin and is aware of the racism, discrimination, and colonizer-settler-patriarchal tactics that contribute to numerous tribal enrollment processes and certification of blood quantum.

It should also be noted that during this entire research project, the primary researcher was extremely triggered by the emotional and spiritual labor of this work. She also shares similar experiences with all participants and is also in a state of healing from cumulative and collective traumas of educational systemic injustices.

# Results



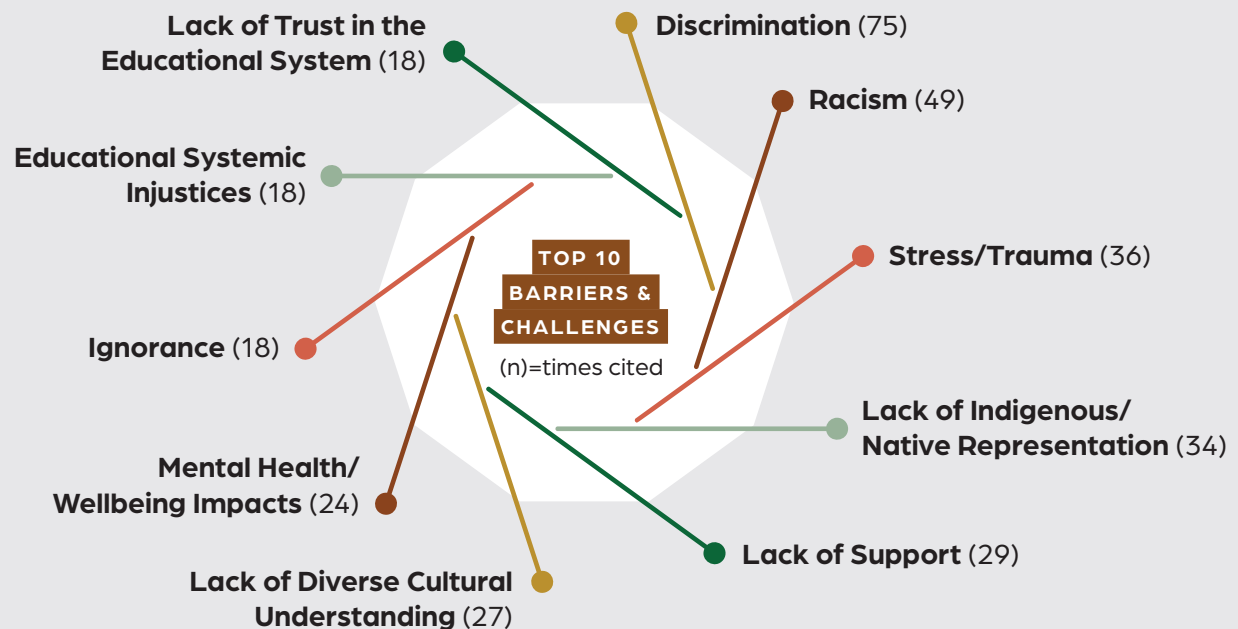
**The results featured in this summary report are the results from Stage 1 in-depth interviews with seven participants who remain de-identified.**

**Stage 2 results from the three participants who chose to be identified for the digital campaign are featured in "Indigenous Voices ElevatED."**

## Barriers & Challenges

The top ten barriers and challenges that Native students and families encounter in K-12 education in Minnesota are discrimination, racism, stress, lack of Indigenous/Native representation, lack of Support, lack of diverse cultural understanding, mental health/wellbeing impacts, ignorance, educational systemic injustices, and lack of trust in the educational system.

The results of the barriers and challenges that Native students and families face in K-12 education in Minnesota are structured by the frequency cited. All participants cited the top 1-7 barriers and challenges frequently and significantly.



**DISCRIMINATION** was the most frequently cited barrier experienced in K-12 education in Minnesota across all participants. Discrimination is defined as unjust, prejudicial treatment of an individual, group, population, and/or community based on certain identities and/or characteristics that may include but are not limited to race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, varied ability, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, etc. Discrimination manifests implicit and explicit prejudicial biases through behavioral attitudes and actions that are harmful and have adverse impacts on inflicted counterparts. The following are some exemplary quotes of the discrimination code derived from these data.

“ I think as a parent, that’s when it affected me the most, knowing that I had a better educational experience than my mother and my grandmother. But when I realized that, not much had changed for my children. That’s when those emotions really reignited starting off again, with having to identify, like, what is

this feeling? Like the mama bear feeling? You know, coming out in me and then again, you know, just going through that whole emotion of, like, I will not put up with this! You know... to advocate again, protest, stand up as an individual but this time as a mother and a parent... it sounds so bad for me to say this but I’ve almost gotten to that point where nothing surprises me anymore.” – Native Parent/MN K-12 Educator

“ Oh, there is this one time, my little sister went to the kindergarten but her old teacher before she moved to her new one (teacher/class) I believe that she was using her bias towards people of color and her bias towards masks to discriminate against my little sister. You know, and she (little sister) didn’t do anything wrong at all. She just was just like, trying to fit in. Her teacher held her down (mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and socially) and basically bullied her along with the rest of the class...that’s unacceptable.” – Native High School Student

**RACISM** was the second most frequently discussed barrier experienced in K-12 education in Minnesota across all participants. Although racism was cited approximately 35% less than discrimination, it should be noted that racism is a form of specific discrimination based on race. Racism is prejudicial discrimination that is socially constructed based on racializing populations of people into racial categories. Racism can be inflicted by an individual, community, institution, society, and/or government and systemically oppresses marginalized individuals, groups, and communities based on race to uphold the power and privilege of the oppressor/oppressive group based on assumed systemic racial superiority. In racialized societies, the race that is in power and privilege is socially constructed as racially superior or normative, and all other racial groups are constructed as racially inferior. These social constructs have adverse impacts on all parties involved, especially marginalized, oppressed populations. The following are some exemplary quotes of the racism code derived from these data.

“Minnesota consistently wants to say that they’re progressive, but has the most, like, covert racism, systemic racism that’s perpetuated, out of any state in the country. So great, it’s ‘Minnesota Nice’ again! So yeah, I don’t know, there’s lots of work to do. And you know, we talk about it (racism) in different ways than we did 50 years ago, but not much has changed. No, it’s just still talking! It is still just talking! There needs to be more action, action, action and less talking, more doing, more putting resources behind the doing! If they really want to make a change, resources would be put in place of those words correct?! Because you know, in this capitalistic White supremacist society, where what they think that showed value and what matters to them, they put money on that!” – Native Parent/MN Higher Education Educator

“One of the first big ones is of course, is me being a young man of color and with my family being of color as well. And with that we’ve had to deal and cope with all these little

microaggressions. Racism gets thrown at us every day... they’ll single the students of color out before, say, the White students. It can also well, like, things like sports, it can affect you as well because, like, sometimes even your teammate doing it to you, so it’s just really hard.”  
– Native High School Student

**STRESS** was the third frequently discussed barrier experienced in K-12 education in Minnesota across all participants. It should be noted that stress was often discussed as the impact of experiencing discrimination and/or racism. Stress is a complex concept that is subjective in terms of individual response experience to a stressful event. The allostatic stress load—or, the cumulative effect of stress over time—can be experienced on a continuum scale that varies in stress response, stress experience, and coping mechanisms activated during stress responses (Richter-Levin & Sandi, 2021). Stress is inclusive of traumatic stress and can be collective and cumulative of acute and chronic traumatic events (Kira, 2022; Richter-Levin & Sandi, 2021). The following are some exemplary quotes of the stress code derived from these data.

“They should make little breathalyzers, that instead of testing for alcohol, test our cortisol levels after we deal with racism. Then we’ll have like proof right and we’ll be like, do you see what you’re doing to me?” – Native Parent/MN Higher Education Educator

“I mean, at that time...what it did is really made me question myself as a parent. Like realizing the impact that it had on (daughter’s name) and, you know, getting her in therapy, which I don’t know how beneficial that’s been either. I mean, it’s been somewhat beneficial, but... she like I dreaded going to school every day... it makes me sad to see her crying and not wanting to go and me having to leave her there. Yeah. So it was daily stressors that were significant.” – Native Parent/MN American Indian Parent Advisory Committee

**TRAUMA** was a frequently discussed barrier experienced by participants in K-12 education in Minnesota across most participants. Although trauma was not as frequently cited as stress, it should be noted that trauma was often discussed as interconnected with stress, discrimination, and racism. Trauma was also discussed regarding the impacts of boarding school experiences. Trauma is a stressful event that invokes strong holistic (emotional, mental, physical and spiritual) responses that influences behavioral changes that has chronic impacts on future interactions and relationships surrounding traumatic and distal experiences (Kira, 2022; Richter-Levin & Sandi, 2021). Stress and trauma are used interchangeably in the following research project due to the traumatic stress experienced by Indigenous people and the interconnected, collective, and cumulative impacts that stress and trauma have on health outcomes (Lewis et al., 2021; Stanley et al, 2020). If trauma was explicitly cited, it was coded as trauma. The following are some exemplary quotes of the trauma code derived from these data.

- “ Well, and even that, you know, they’re tokenized and...you know, that right there is emotional labor and they almost expect adults do it (speak on Indigenous/Native subjects) then you know that expectation puts a kid in a really awkward situation too because it is triggering, it is traumatizing! Like, you know, and it’s something that White educators do over, and over, and over again, and it’s not okay!”  
– Native Parent/MN Higher Education Educator
- “ So I look at our education system and I’m like, it was so traumatizing to me.” – Native Parent/Educator/Healer
- “ ...Speaking on boarding schools...we did mention that he (son) knows his grandmother attended boarding school. But that’s the thing... it just wasn’t good, it was traumatizing... in his class, they showed pictures of boarding schools. I even hit the art teacher up and I was like, show me the pictures. Tell me about the discussion. What was your point? What was the objective?” – Native Parent/MN K-12 Educator

#### **LACK OF INDIGENOUS REPRESENTATION**

was frequently discussed as a barrier experienced in K-12 education in Minnesota across all participants. Lack of Indigenous representation was often discussed by exclusion from curriculum and educational systems being portrayed through predominately White-centered perspectives in education. Lack of Indigenous representation is defined as either minimal or absence of Indigenous curriculum, teachers, faculty, staff, Native/Indigenous perspective and/or voice, Native/Indigenous diversity in students, and visibility. This is not an exhaustive list of all the contributors that may be included in the lack of Indigenous representation, these were frequently cited in current interviews. The following are some exemplary quotes of the lack of Indigenous representation code derived from these data.

- “ I think education quality equals education... and for my children to see themselves within that education system and to be empowered and to be grounded in all of that and to be valued like, not just disregarded.” – Native Parent/MN K-12 Educator
- “ I definitely think that the curriculum is lacking. We teach from the mainstream viewpoint and our perspectives need to be widened to represent our students because they come from multiple backgrounds instead of this melting pot mentality. So, I think it needs to be more of a tossed salad you know, you still can see the tomatoes and you still can identify the carrots and the lettuces, diverse lettuce and not that just some sort of smoothing over.”  
– Native Parent/MN K-12 Educator
- “ But we do talk about it (Indigenous representation/perspective), right?! We talk about it from a weird, very White-centered perspective, right?! And it leaves us (Native/Indigenous people) out. These practices which we know continue to perpetuate stereotypes and the disparate levels of social welfare for Indigenous people...” – Native Parent/MN Higher Education Educator

**LACK OF SUPPORT** was a frequently discussed barrier experienced in K-12 education in Minnesota across all participants. Lack of support was frequently discussed in terms of social support and advocacy surrounding discrimination, racism, and exclusion. Lack of support is defined as the absence of or insufficient amount of assistance, help, guidance, and/or advocacy surrounding areas of social support, educational needs, advocacy and/or allyship, and wellbeing. This list is not an exhaustive list of areas of supportive needs but were frequently mentioned during the interviews of this research project. The following are some exemplary quotes of the lack of support code derived from these data.

“And then the students...because it was like we came back to school right after George Floyd. Tension was really, really, bad. Just because like a lot of the White kids would say the N-word and like there are multiple incidences of that and admin would not do anything...” – Native High School Student (recent graduate)

“I would love for more teachers to be comfortable teaching Indigenous curriculums. And that comes in their training. And if it can't be done in state college requirements, then it needs to be done within the district with training and development. And so because that's the thing, there's not enough American Indian teachers in the world to be in every classroom. So we have to have allies teaching and using the knowledge that they gained but it has to be correct, yes?! We don't want them talking about you know, Christopher Columbus meeting, you know, 'Indians' here in the in the United States because that never existed, that never happened! No, you know, so, but that's the thing is, that's what we grew up with. We grew up thinking that's what happened because that was what we were told in school. And, you know...there's a lot of work lying ahead that needs to get done in order for education to be just inclusive and non-toxic for our children.” – Native Parent/MN K-12 Educator

**LACK OF DIVERSE CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING** was a frequently discussed barrier experienced in K-12 education in Minnesota by most participants. Lack of diverse cultural understanding includes the absence of or insufficient understanding of diverse knowledge, respect, values, education, ways of learning and/or knowing from diverse Indigenous perspectives, values, and cultures and from diverse BIPOC perspectives, values, cultures. The following are some exemplary quotes of the lack of diverse cultural understanding code derived from these data.

“You know, not all of us understand...we know that there's multiple ways of knowing but I sometimes wonder how much do we realize whose education we're getting them (Native students) to go into those spaces (schools)?” – Native High School Student (recent graduate)

“I think you know, even when you say social barriers, my son in the fourth grade had long hair, but he was also called a 'girl man'. And then one of the girls in his classroom, literally cut his hair! And the teacher, you know, didn't do anything, didn't even notify me! It was my son at the dinner table, pointing it out to me, like can you notice this? You know, is this really noticeable? And I was like, wtf! I wanted the details like who, what, when, where, why and yeah, and so that's thing is he ultimately you know, said Mom, please don't make a big deal out of this. You know, like, pleaded with me, so that it wouldn't become an issue. But of course, you know, like I had to speak up about it. He knows he still knows...he can't even mention the child's name in my presence.” – Native Parent/MN K-12 Educator



**MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPACTS**

were discussed frequently across all participants as a barrier in K-12 education in Minnesota. Furthermore, mental health and wellbeing impacts were often discussed as intertwined with discrimination, racism, stress, lack of social support within school, and trauma experienced in school and the current educational system. Mental health and wellbeing impacts encompass the impacts to mental health, wellness and healing that are impacted by educational systems in K-12 education in MN. Mental health includes emotional, psychological, social well-being, and spiritual impacts that Indigenous/ Native students encounter in current k-12 educational systems in MN. The following are some exemplary quotes of the mental health and wellbeing impacts derived from these data.

“The barriers and challenges in K-12 education in Minnesota...are so significant...And that’s the amount of that trauma...it’s amounted to me some mental health problems you know. I try my best to educate the people who actually are willing to listen and to learn. But those are select few and you know, it causes so much stress...it’s multiplied more than, four or five at least each day, just walking through their door (school’s door).” – Native High School Student

“...I mean at some point, I couldn’t even walk in the school without her getting upset. She (the participant’s daughter) couldn’t walk to class by herself. Like it was a whole thing all year... the workaround was the teacher would meet us at the door. But they had hired a new assistant principal. And I was talking with her about our situation and I started crying. We’re at the door and I’m like, like, you know, I’m just like really frustrated. And I don’t know how to help her (daughter). And you know, the communication... like she (the teacher) sets the tone for her classroom, she never welcomed us like saying, Yeah, I’m her (daughter’s) teacher...not introducing herself or anything. Another parent happened to be listening. She’s like, are you talking about this teacher? She’s like, my son doesn’t want to go to school either. So, it wasn’t just a communication issue, it was an issue with the teacher.” – Native Parent/MN American Indian Parent Advisory Committee

“Those little micro-aggressions that there on the daily...it sounds terrible, but we like literally are at that point where we have to brush some of it off...you know that they’re there, but just for your own well-being and your own quality of life..that’s a coping mechanism.” – Native Parent/MN K-12 Educator

**IGNORANCE** was discussed as a frequent barrier experienced in K-12 education in Minnesota by the majority of participants. Ignorance was often discussed as intertwined with discrimination, exclusion, and lack of cultural understanding. Ignorance is defined as lack of or absence of education, knowledge, and/or awareness surrounding Native/ Indigenous history, contributions, knowledge, perspective, voice, and inclusion in K-12 education in MN. Additionally, it could encompass ignorance surrounding diverse perspectives, voice, and inclusion. The following are some exemplary quotes of the ignorance code derived from these data.

“Even after we’ve said we don’t agree with what the district is providing our students, and we put in these demands on the district...and if the demands aren’t met, they think oh, we’ve done enough...we’ve done a land acknowledgment... we use incorporated language, we put posters up in your in our schools, and I’m thinking and yeah, that’s it?!” – Native Parent/MN K-12 Educator

“I think you know, one thing for (daughter’s name) in kindergarten...it was like cultural dress day, like show your culture and stuff. We talked to her about her dress, she (daughter) wore her traditional waije (Hoocak style dress) and she kind of came home feeling sad because kids were making fun of her...because they didn’t know or understand why she was wearing it. And so that’s another challenge and she went to school with a more diverse atmosphere.” – Native Parent/MN American Indian Parent Advisory Committee

**EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMIC INJUSTICES**

were discussed among half of the participants as a barrier experienced in K-12 education in Minnesota. It should be noted that all participants who discussed this barrier either have work or currently work in either higher education, American Indian education, or K-12 education in Minnesota. Educational systemic injustices are systemic, political, societal, and individual-level factors that maintain the status quo and lead to unequal opportunities and education for marginalized populations and communities. Some examples of educational systemic injustices include the exclusion of Indigenous perspective from the curriculum, biased policies and funding mechanisms, lack of Indigenous knowledge taught in the educational system, lack of Indigenous representation, and any practice, policy, or knowledge system that perpetuates inequality, discrimination, racism, and exclusion of marginalized communities and populations. The following are some exemplary quotes of the educational systemic injustices code derived from these data.

“...I know every person of color has really seen or experienced injustice. No matter what because it's a man-made, White-made system...and then especially for Native people, because that was the way that they got to us and eliminated everything with assimilation and genocide through work school. I think it's definitely just in a different form...now because you still have the school-to-prison pipeline, which I think was a really big part in this.” – Native High School Student

“...And as we know the Truth (referring to Truth Report) research leads this directly back to the founding of the University of Minnesota. And these revisionist narratives were created on purpose, to commit genocide and ethnic cleansing against Indigenous peoples in an attempt to steal our land and deprive us of our cultures. And they failed! They failed! And we're still here! But that doesn't mean that the tactics that they have used have not had an effect and don't continue to have an effect and an impact on our families. And so there are significant

instances, right, that we all experience inside and outside of K-12. And that's just like the beginning and for our kids to have to go to school to learn that this is what they're going to have to deal with the rest of their lives...this bullshit...” – Native parent/MN Higher Education Educator

“I have a 20-year-old student who has already graduated. And she literally says she vocalizes to me, that the reason she did not pursue higher education is because she had such an awful experience (in K-12 education in MN). As a brown Native woman who identifies as Native, Black, and White, racially...because of her experience with the system, 'the man' and she said, 'I refuse to be colonized with higher education anymore'. And so she's connecting more with her cultures and not within education, higher institutionalized education. She is pursuing our ways of education and culture. So I love that about her that she's finding strength in her culture and in herself to follow the path where she feels more strongly connected. But that is a direct reflection of the same shit in institutionalized education.” – Native Parent/MN K-12 Educator

**LACK OF TRUST IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM**

was discussed by most participants regarding K-12 education in Minnesota. All parents and some high school students frequently discussed lack of trust as a significant barrier experienced in K-12 education in Minnesota. Lack of trust in the educational system includes the absence of trust in MN K-12 education system to uphold the standards for safety, wellbeing and care for Indigenous/Native students and families. There are numerous contributing factors to the lack of trust and a significant contributor frequently cites back to Native boarding schools, where all Indigenous/Native students and families are impacted by boarding school trauma. The following are some exemplary quotes of the lack of trust code derived from these data.

“ I feel like I’ve always had a fear with my kids. And when you think about epigenetics in our ancestral stories that we carry with us, like do I carry that feeling from my great grandma who was in boarding school. Or what about my biological Mom’s family? I don’t know anything about them, you know? And so how much of that fear to that is even me and it’s just more of my map from my ancestors and their parenting and that’s what they (boarding schools) did, my great grandma said she was not going to teach her kids Dakota no more, because she was beat for doing it every time and she would never do that to her children...so sometimes it’s like, well, how much of it is mine and how much of it is not? It’s all intertwined...” – Native Parent/Educator/Healer

“ And honestly, I think for a lot of our kids, it’s even to the point where I think it’s not just parallel, but maybe even a little bit worse because of the fact that people can’t sit there and say it’s on ignorance anymore. People know! And so they know that it’s offensive! They know that it’s hurtful! But they continue to perpetuate this system. And even when there are little changes, small changes in legislature and policy it takes time to be able to disseminate that in a system that wasn’t made for us (Native people).” – Native Parent/ MN K-12 speaking



# Discussion



The purpose of this qualitative exploratory evaluation research study was to explore the lived experiences of Native/Indigenous students and families surrounding barriers and challenges experienced in K-12 education in Minnesota. Importantly, in this exploration, it was discovered that all participants overall, regardless of participant demographics of being a student, parent, age, gender, or tribal affiliation all participants frequently cited discrimination, racism, stress, lack of Indigenous representation, lack of support, and mental health and wellbeing impacts as barriers to K-12 education in Minnesota. Among participants, these top barriers **were significant to their experience in K-12 education in Minnesota and had impacts on their mental health.**

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In participants that cited educational systemic injustices and lack of trust in educational systems, most responses were interconnected with the intergenerational boarding school experiences, genocidal and ethnocidal tactics, and education systemic failure and/or inaction. Most participants who frequently cited these codes were employed in social justice work, Indigenous education, and health equity.

Consideration should be given to that these ten top barriers are not all-encompassing and all these barriers are thematically interconnected by discrimination and racism. Addressing these barriers speaks to the urgency of a call to action and incorporating an inclusive educational system for diverse Indigenous students.

The results of this qualitative exploratory evaluation research study speak volumes to the current K-12 educational system in Minnesota and how it is failing Native/Indigenous students, families, and communities. Discrimination and racism are the foundational basis for current educational systems and are taught through white-washed perspectives and false narratives (Sabzalian, 2019). This is harmful and if the status quo continues, discrimination and racism will be perpetuated and Native/Indigenous students, families, and communities will continue to experience these barriers that manifest in educational and health inequities (Sabzalian, 2019).

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### Limitations

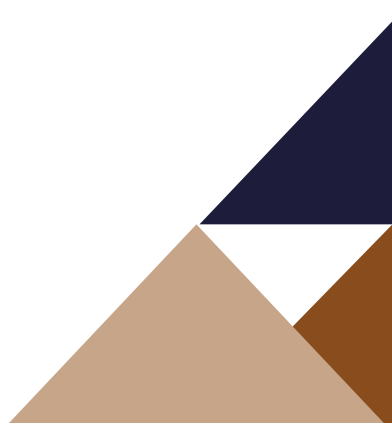
Some limitations of this evaluative research project consisted of a small sample size and lack of generalizability. Although there were rich, significant responses given by all participants, there were only seven total participants. Additionally, regardless of commonalities in participants' responses and among similar research addressing Native/Indigenous students, families, and communities' barriers, these results may not be generalizable depending on the sample. It should be noted that all participants were recruited with their educational background and involvement in educational and health equity work.

### Strengths

The methodological strengths of this evaluative research study are attributed to the foundational insightful Indigenous perspective and connective partnership of researcher's shared lived experiences as an Indigenous matriarch with children in K-12 education in Minnesota. The methods were implemented with care, respect, and scaredness for reciprocal relationships of participants are reflected in researcher's understanding, empathy, and Indigenous values. The relationships bonded between researcher and participants held a deep trustworthiness that were reflected in rich data of this study. This study was also conducted, analyzed, and interpreted by an Indigenous scholar that has a deep cultural understanding of what it means to be a good relative and connect with Indigenous community in partnership.

### Implications

The top five critical barriers in K-12 education in Minnesota for Native/Indigenous students and families are discrimination, racism, stress related to discrimination, lack of Native representation, and lack of support. To address these critical barriers, the following considerations are urgent next steps needed to expand and improve educational systems to be more inclusive for Native students and families and address educational inequities that Native students and families encounter.



# Next Steps

There is not just one solution to these educational injustices and inequities. These barriers and challenges are systematically incorporated to exclude and oppress Native/Indigenous students, families, and communities. Invisibility in K-12 education in Minnesota fuels discrimination and creates toxic environments for Native students and families. That is why it is important to understand and make visible, historical and cultural contexts through an Indigenous perspective, to share Native values and contributions that have been

severely appropriated and misrepresented. Systemic justice is not just a Native/Indigenous responsibility, everyone must step up and do their part. In the current way, educational systems are in K-12 in Minnesota, no one benefits from Native/Indigenous exclusion and perpetuating discrimination and a system that continues to eradicate and erase Native narratives. These are a few suggestive calls to action; there is tremendous work to be done, and we can all step up and do our part in this critically important work.

## STRATEGIES TO ELEVATE NATIVE/INDIGENOUS VOICES AND IMPROVE ON NATIVE/INDIGENOUS INCLUSION, REPRESENTATION, AND VISIBILITY IN MINNESOTA K-12 EDUCATION

Elevate Native/Indigenous voices, perspectives, and narratives.

Use contemporary and accurate representations of Native/Indigenous people and communities, not false historical narratives.

Eliminate false toxic stereotypes and narratives from the K-12 curriculum in Minnesota.

Speak and educate self, educators, and students on the historical events of genocide and ethnocide that the U.S. government and the state of Minnesota forced Native/Indigenous people to endure. Furthermore, speak to how those events continue to impact Native/Indigenous people in the present day.

Learn about the significant contributions that Native/Indigenous people made historically and continue to make presently. Some examples are but are not limited to democracy, modern political systems, economic systems, village waterway systems, health, healing, medicine, loving kinship/parenting, sovereign food systems, eating with the seasons, science, cultural artistry, music, housing structures, community supportive systems, etc.

Educate about the sovereignty of tribal nations and broken treaties that are still not being upheld in present day.

Take responsibility for your education that impacts Native communities. Your education is not anyone's responsibility but your own.

When Native/Indigenous people offer education and insight to learning about their perspectives, values, and lived experiences, listen and learn, do not try to insert yourself into their narrative.

Listen to Native communities and offer support. Take time to build relationships and trust of Native students, families, and communities and be respectful of their insight.

Educate and advocate educators and students about Native/Indigenous historical, intergenerational, boarding school experiences, adverse childhood experiences and present-day traumas and how those trauma impact present day educational and health inequities.

Educate and advocate educators and students about present-day issues like school self-determination, cultural and traditional land preservation, environment preservation and protection, missing and murdered Indigenous relatives, toxic nature of Native mascots, inequities with unhoused and incarceration rates, and present-day impacts of boarding school experiences.

Learn about myths and the harms of perpetuating them. Speak up when you encounter these myths and why they are harmful.

Find out about amazing, contemporary, and historical Native people who continue to have positive impacts on Native communities and mainstream societies.

Speak to the strength, resiliency, and preservation of Native/Indigenous people regardless of genocidal tactics we are still here!

Look for opportunities to share and elevate Native/Indigenous narratives, perspectives, and values on social media and other publication venues that have reach impact.

Commit to including Native people by collaborating in visibility efforts, hiring Native/Indigenous educators, administration, content experts, speakers and make Native/Indigenous students, families and communities equal partners in education equity, making policy and curriculum changes. And pay them equally, respectfully to show their contributions and value!

Respect tribal data sovereignty and understand that Native/Indigenous people must be the authors of Native/Indigenous narratives to disseminate educational injustices and inequities. Seek out Native artists, writers, storytellers, etc., to tell accurate narratives.

Call out negative and stereotypical narratives that perpetuate toxic stereotypes and false narratives.

Learn from and incorporate opportunities to elevate Native community leaders, scholars, experts, organizations, communities, and changemakers.

Elect Native/Indigenous people to school boards.

Train and educate all educators and administrators to teach to Native/Indigenous students in a respectful, accurate way that elevates Native/Indigenous narratives and contributions.

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## APPENDIX A:

# Interview Routes

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### Stage 1 Interview Route

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#### Opening Questions

- 1) To begin, could each of you please take a moment for introductions and to share something about yourself (cool fun fact, what you enjoy, hobbies, etc.)?
  - 2) Could you tell me your tribal affiliation(s) and ethnic identities?
  - 3) Could you tell me about the K-12 school you have attended? (urban, rural, tribal, public, private, etc.)
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#### Transition Question

- 4) The main goal of this discussion is to learn more about the social barriers and challenges that you/child(ren)/family faces in K-12 education in Minnesota as they relate to being Indigenous/Native. Please describe these challenges/barriers and how you feel when encountered, how frequently they are encountered and if they are recognizable. In other words, you may feel that school presents challenges for you, but don't necessarily identify and/or know specific events or incidences of barriers? (Prompts: How do you recognize barriers and/or challenges in school, if at all? What are the signs? How does it feel? What happens to you?)

#### Key Questions

- 5) What social barriers and challenges do you/your student/family experience in K-12 education in Minnesota?
- 6) What are you/your student/family's top three barriers and/or challenges in K-12 education in Minnesota?
  - a) How are these barriers and challenges most commonly experienced by you/your student/family in K-12 in Minnesota?
  - b) Are the barriers and challenges where you/your student/family attend K-12 education different or similar to other places?
- 7) You have self-identified as being Native/Indigenous. Are there any examples of barriers and challenges related to your K-12 education in Minnesota as a Native person that you can recall or share?
  - a) Prompts: Discrimination, stereotypes, cultural identity issues, other
  - b) Prompt for specifics as needed
- 8) Do you feel these barriers and challenges are unique to Indigenous/Native people/communities in K-12 education in Minnesota?

- 9) Are these barriers/challenges significant stressors for you and your family regarding K-12 education in MN?
  - 10) How, if at all, do you cope with or deal with the stress of these barriers and challenges in K-12 education in Minnesota?
  - 11) Overall, how significant are the barriers and challenges in K-12 education in Minnesota in your life? For example, do these barriers and challenges impact your stress and mental health? Do you feel you are generally under a lot of stress, just sometimes, or something else because of these barriers and challenges in K-12 education in Minnesota? (please prompt for explanation and detail).
  - 12) What resources or support can you think of (if any) available to help you/ your student/ family manage and overcome barriers and challenges in K-12 education?
  - 13) What would you like to have available to you/ your student/family to reduce these barriers and challenges of K-12 education in Minnesota in your lives?
  - 14) The goal of this discussion today was to understand better the barriers and challenges in K-12 education you/your student/family face in your everyday life, especially as a Native/ Indigenous person. Is there anything else you would like to share with us about this? Have we left anything out?
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## Stage 2 Interview Route

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- 1) Why do you feel that Native students and families encounter barriers and challenges in K-12 education in Minnesota?
- 2) What resources do you feel would support and assist you and your family in reducing these barriers and challenges in K-12 education in MN?
- 3) As a Native person, what would make you feel seen, valued, and represented in K-12 education in MN?
- 4) Could you share an experience that you had as a Native student/Native parent/wellness community educator?

## APPENDIX B:

## Research Benefits &amp; Risks

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**Research Benefits**

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Research benefits may include the following but it is not limited to these predicted benefits of potential impact:

- + Native/Indigenous families and student digital stories will influence change in academic curriculum and legislative policy.
- + Increase diverse Indigenous visibility, value, and representation.
- + Acknowledge the need for Indigenous teachers and administration in academic institutions.
- + Develop and create a digital story that highlights the needs, wants, and educational challenges of Indigenous families and students to share with communities, educators, stakeholders, influencers, and policymakers.
- + Develop a support system that advocates for Indigenous voice, value, and representation in education systems.

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**Research Risks**

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The potential risks associated with this research project and digital campaign are minimal. The following potential risks may be encountered:

- + Loss of confidentiality may be potentially experienced with the optional digital campaign. If confidentiality needs to be maintained the participant can participate in the voice interview only.
- + Social risk may be encountered with exclusion and discrimination due to the nature of social justice and DEI research.
- + Psychological risk may be encountered when sharing deeply personal and unique experiences of this research project.

Although these are minimal potential risks that participants may encounter, it is the responsibility and obligation of the research team to acknowledge that these potential risks can occur.

## APPENDIX C:

# Methods Continued

### Data Access

The primary researcher and EdAllies team will have access to data collected in interviews. Additionally, the Videographer, will have access to on-camera interviews for co-editing and co-compiling the digital campaign. The data collected will be used in an evaluative report and optional digital campaign. All participants who are just participating in Stage 1 interviews have the option to remain de-identified in the evaluation report. All participants, if they choose to participate in Stage 2, the digital campaign, they were asked to sign a media release waiver and will be given the option to accept or decline the terms of the media release waiver. For minors, the release waiver must be signed by both the parent and minor, if they wish to participate in the digital campaign. Data collected in the digital campaign will be subject to promotion on the internet, and social media, and shown during presentations for legislation policy change, and social change funding sources.

### Data Management

Data will be maintained in secure data storage. Participants and investigators can request access to data and it is housed within a secure data management system with PI and shared with EdAllies associates upon request. All data will be the property of EdAllies and may be used for future campaigns.

### Voluntary Participation

Participation in this research study was voluntary and whether participants chose to participate in either stage of the research study was completely voluntary. Participants could withdraw at any time during the research process without penalty and their decision will not be held against them. The importance of understanding participants' rights to withdraw at any time was communicated multiple times during the research process.

### Compensation

All participants were compensated with a delivery digital meal card of their choice in the amount of \$100. All participants were also compensated \$100 for participation in Stage 1 interviews and an additional \$100 for participation in Stage 2 on-camera interviews.

### Funding

This research project was funded by EdAllies and Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies.



# A Letter From the Author

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Haini wii cara hi pii,

My Hocak name is MaZaaHeexWinga (Swan that dances before take-off) and my colonized name is Jill Greendeer. I am an enrolled citizen of Ho-chunk Nation, and Potawatomi and Kaw descendant. I am Deer Clan and have lived in the Twin Cities for over 20 years. As a Hocak hinuk (woman), Nani (mother), sister, and relative, my life purpose resides within the space of Indigenous diversity, equity, and inclusion and is part of the bridge between Indigenous communities, Indigenous healing and empowerment, data/food sovereignty, cultural wellness, Indigenous representation in academia and healthcare. My life work and lived experience have prepared me for this role.

I have experience working in academic, corporate, clinical, and community settings both within Native communities and outside of Indigenous societies. I have lived experience as an Indigenous woman in both urban and rural environments that adds to my diverse worldview and gives me a strong sense of grounded Indigenous narrative to pursue my life purpose of helping to heal and empower Indigenous people.

My experiences pursuing a PhD at the University of Minnesota School of Nursing as an Indigenous woman allowed me to develop a heightened awareness of systemic racism and oppression.

I recognize systemic racism and oppression are deeply embedded within healthcare and academia.

Far too often, we see non-Indigenous people benefit at Indigenous communities' expense when they are rewarded as leaders and advocates of diversity and equity. They often publish research articles and misrepresent, misinterpret, and misguide their 'findings' within Indigenous communities with adverse impacts on Indigenous communities. This experience gave my life purpose and call to action a deeper sense of need and urgency: the opportunity to stand my ground, speak my truth, share my Indigenous lived experience, and find comfort in uncomfortable spaces, conversations, and initiatives.

I am the Program Manager at Dream of Wild Health and Founder of Indigenous Visions Research and Wellness LLC. I understand that we all have tremendous work to do and cannot accomplish this alone. I hope to continue to network with others who want to uplift and empower diverse, and Indigenous voices and perspectives and see the value of protecting the sacred.

Pinagigi wii,  
Jill Greendeer PhD, MA, MS



**EdAllies partners with schools, families, and communities to ensure that every young Minnesotan has access to a rigorous and engaging education. We advance policies that put underserved students first, remove barriers facing successful schools and programs, and foster an inclusive conversation about what's possible for students.**

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**EdAlliesMN.org**