

CHARTER LEADERS OF COLOR **MATTER.**

Anpao Duta Flying Earth

Executive Director

Native American Community Academy



I grew up on the Standing Rock Reservation in South Dakota. My mom, Winona Flying Earth, is a blend of Lakota, Dakota, Ojibwe, Scottish, and Irish. Wendell Schurz, my dad, is of the Akimel O'odham tribe. I went to elementary school off of the reservation, because my parents wanted me to have the best possible academic experience. This is the place where I felt different. I was raised having long hair; I looked like a native child. When I returned to the reservation for middle school and high school, it was a new learning experience, interacting with native students.

Reflecting on my own schooling, it is so important that as educators, we don't get stuck thinking in a binary way. It doesn't have to be "either or"—we can teach culture and develop student identity and also have rigorous academics. Believing otherwise creates institutional racism in our country. At Native American Community Academy (NACA), I want to break down those kind of misconceptions. After receiving my Bachelors degree in Government at Cornell University, I was fortunate to be a part of the three-person team that founded NACA in Albuquerque, NM, in 2006.

GROUNDING AND GROWING

Conversations with 200 community members over the course of a year surfaced the mission of NACA. The majority of our governing board members are community members, and many parents of students and alumni are our faculty and staff.

At NACA, it is very important to us to develop students as strong leaders who are secure in their identities. We have found that building community and celebrating culture offers our students a stable, joyful groundwork from which to develop their own ways of giving back to the world. Our children learn academics intertwined in the languages, music, sports, arts, and philosophies inherent to Native American cultures (our school represents 60 different tribes!). We challenge every person in our school—from student to leadership team member—to think compassionately about their connection with others and the impact of this connection.

One of my students comes to mind here—he is a very high performer at school, and also very connected to his community and spirituality. I see him secure in who he is, applying to upper-echelon colleges, grounded and happy with the future open before him. Alumni have shared with us that going through NACA enabled them to be more emotionally secure in their college pursuits.

100% of NACA students are accepted into college. Every student applies to at least 7 colleges and at least 7 scholarships. We teach students to access thought in terms of what is possible. The longer a student stays with us, the greater growth they experience as compared with district and state averages. This is true with respect to their performance on standardized tests as well. In Grade 11, NACA students are 56% proficient or advanced in English Language Arts (ELA), versus 46% in the state of New Mexico and 48% in Albuquerque Public Schools.

GENIUS LIFTING

Language and traditions can be a point of excellence. We are working to lift up genius and expertise that have always been in our communities. This is a different energy approach than a feeling of deficit or hardship, for example, which brings with it tension and stress. Genius lifting is innovation and potential. To me, being an indigenous school leader means lifting genius within the communities that I serve.

"Genius lifting is innovation and potential."

It's imperative that school leaders represent the directly impacted communities that they serve. My position allows my students to see themselves differently—both because they learn about their native culture and because they see someone in a position of influence who resembles them. As you consider who you are as you walk about your life, what would it mean to not see well-respected people who look like you in the culture around you—in sports or on social media, for example? What does it mean to instead see the culturally insensitive “Cleveland Indians” or “Kansas City Chiefs” sports teams?

When students see school leaders who look like them, they are much more likely to move about the education space with agency and power, because they have living examples in front of them. We need to find structures and supports for developing diverse leaders together.

Native American Community Academy

“A school of excellence and relevance grounded in community and identity.”

Location	Albuquerque, NM
Year Opened	2006
Student enrollment	475
Grades served	K-4, 6-12
Website	nacaschool.org

Student Demographics

Native American	90%
White/Caucasian	2%
Hispanic/Latino	8%



Homeless Youth	2.8%
At Risk Students	13.7%
Students with Disabilities	16.6%
ESL Students	18%



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