



Center for Indian Country Development

FEDERAL RESERVE BANK of MINNEAPOLIS

Early Childhood Development in Indian Country Conference Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis

Welcome Remarks | Patrice Kunesh
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Good morning everyone ~ Cante Wasteya Tima Hiyu Wo

In the Lakota language of my relatives - Come in with a good heart!

Welcome and thank you for joining us today.

I am Patrice Kunesh, co-director of the Center for Indian Country Development. My co-director and colleague Sue Woodrow is here from Helena.

To begin with, here are a few housekeeping details. Today we are joined by a Livestream audience, so welcome to those of you watching the conference remotely. For those of us in the room, we ask that you speak into a microphone during the question and answer periods so our Livestream audience can hear the discussion. Also, we encourage participants here and on Livestream to use the conference Twitter hashtag #NativeChildDevelopment to share ideas. We really want to get the word out about early childhood development in Indian Country. Thank you.

Last year, the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis established the Center for Indian Country Development with a mission to help American Indian communities throughout the United States attain their economic development goals. Our vision is to be a nationally recognized thought leader and principal point of contact for Indian Country matters and initiatives in the Federal Reserve System, as well as a respected contributor to the research critical to emerging economic issues that are of vital interest to Indian Country constituents and the Bank's mission.

The Center's work will focus in four areas: land, business & entrepreneurship, homeownership, and education. These are the fundamental building blocks for workforce and economic development throughout Indian Country.

We know that success later in life is directly tied to nurturing and attention at the beginning of life. Thus, it is fitting that we launch our education work with a focus on early childhood development.

So we must start our discussion today with this basic question: How are the children? How are the children - physically, socially, and academically? Not only is this the right question, it is the most important economic question to consider, because the true measure of any society is measure of the well-being of our children.

With this conference, we take a close look at early childhood development in Indian Country through the lens of culture, brain science, and economics.

This is especially compelling because one of the most persistent challenges in Indian Country is historical trauma, the transmission of harmful stress from one generation to the next. Indeed, historical trauma is now firmly situated in the field of brain science, and extensive research is under way to understand the transmission cycle and ways to break it.

The good news is that we now have a clearer picture of the need, the evidence, and the solutions for expanding early childhood development programs throughout Indian Country. Moreover, many tribes, several represented in this room today, are making investments in their future by providing quality early care and education programs and by addressing systemic issues that impede healthy development and community well-being.

I have lived in the shadows of the welfare system and understand the dire need and painful struggle to access support services, in my own family and throughout Indian Country. I have also witnessed the life saving and transformative impacts of good interventions and support programs:

- of providing a safe and secure home
- of the Head Start and after school programs that feed and teach our children
- of restoring community and cultural connections, and
- of creating a sense of belonging and hope for the future.

As importantly, I know quite well the complexity of funding and administering these human services programs. For what it means to parents and families, this important work is one of the highest forms of service to the community.

Helping parents prepare their children does even more in the larger economic context. Many people worry that economic growth cannot be sustained and shared, but I believe providing high quality education to all our children, and nurturing especially the youngest, is the key to expanding opportunities, promoting economic mobility, and creating enduring prosperity.

When governments invest in high-quality early childhood education, they are investing in economic development - providing the future workforce of their economy with an extraordinarily high public return. Not only does society at large benefit from these returns through higher productivity and lower education and social service costs, they build stronger family resiliency.

Why this is important? Few of Indian Country's financial and institutional challenges today are new. There is nothing new about persistent poverty or woefully inadequate funding to support essential services such as housing, education, healthcare, and public safety.

What is new is our ability to see and understand how the problems and solutions connect. We have become more sophisticated in the use of data and more willing to tackle problems systematically and holistically. I want to use this deeper understanding to showcase new ideas and tackle old problems.

You have been invited to participate in this inaugural conference of the Center for Indian Country Development because each of you is a Solution Finder.

A Solution Finder believes that the most powerful ideas often come from the most unexpected places - the hidden genius of your colleagues and the collective brilliance that results from collaboration.

For quite some time, the Federal Reserve Bank has seen the incredible power of convenings to create shared dialogue, spur debates about pathways to impact, and catalyze groundbreaking ideas. Learning

from this practice, I seized the opportunity to harness the collective intelligence of thought leaders and change agents such as each of you, to invite you into the quest for improving education in Indian country.

We also will enter the conversation asking different questions. Not only will ask about the well-being of the children, we will ask questions about culture, self-determination, and science to create promising prospects for our children's futures.

As counselled by Black Elk, the Oglala Lakota Medicine Man, "Grown men may learn from very little children, for the hearts of little children are pure, and, therefore, the Great Spirit may show to them many things which older people miss."

This work cannot be done in isolation and it may take a few years to accomplish. Thus, we need a powerful effort, together and in each of our communities, to turn things around for our children.

So on behalf of the planning team, thank you for making the commitment to being here today and to supporting this incredibly important work.

It is now my sincere privilege to introduce the President of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, Neel Kashari.