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Developing a Community-Led Education Pipeline

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Developing a Community-Led Education Pipeline

Christine Meyer and Laura Laumatia

Abstract

The Coeur d'Alene Tribe, the University of Idaho Extension, and other community and regional partners have been collaborating on the development of an education pipeline as a result of several years of leadership training in the community. Through their collaboration, gaps in educational services have been identified, new partnerships are being developed, and a deeper analysis of the root causes of the high rate of school dropouts is taking place.

Bridging the Educational Achievement Gap

In the fall of 2007, the University of Idaho began an 18-month partnership with the Coeur d'Alene Tribal Reservation community in Northern Idaho through the Horizons program, a program aimed at poverty reduction through grass-roots leadership. The process included an asset-based approach to addressing long-standing issues on the reservation. Through the process, a community steering committee broadened its definition of poverty to include not just economic issues, but social, emotional, intellectual, and cultural/spiritual challenges as well. Our participation in Horizons empowered us to tackle our community's most challenging obstacle: the educational achievement gap. Although we have made great economic strides in recent years, our graduation rates have plummeted in the past decade, and recent classes have seen an average of only 25 percent of entering high school freshmen graduate.

As education director and extension educator, respectively, we realized that the collaborative community-led approach we learned in Horizons was foundational to transforming our education system from a passive recipient of state-mandated programming to an active, engaged community that meets the needs of our students. The Tribal Department of Education developed an education pipeline (Figure 1), a linear, visual presentation, inventorying community partners and supports for education from cradle to grave. The pipeline includes the Tribe's Early Childhood Center, local schools, and the higher education programs offered by

the Tribal Department of Education, as well as all of the programs and services that support our community members at each educational stage, including family services, out-of-school-time programs, sports, tutoring, career programs, and college preparation programs. We created an interagency team to inventory the services other programs were providing. We now meet quarterly with the Tribal Youth Activities staff, local clergy, school administrators and staff, Tribal Court, social services, and higher education representatives. We have identified where services overlap, where gaps in services exist, and where community partners need to develop shared visions for student success based on the intellectual, social, emotional, physical, and cultural needs of each learner.

The development of the pipeline led to new questions that our team is now studying, using participatory action research with middle and high school students. We are now asking when and why students disengage from the education pipeline.

Risky Behaviors Contribute to Poverty

Our collaboration has led to deeper community analysis of root causes of our dropout issue. Our team recently studied five freshman classes, from 2004-2008, through their senior year. The resulting identification of drugs, alcohol, and pregnancy as primary factors in student dropouts led to our recognition that social and emotional poverty is the underlying issue that we need to address as a community. Our next phase will analyze all services or programs in our pipeline to determine appropriate interventions.

Our actions and research have empowered our team to inform community leaders and school administrators about actual student needs, rather than relying on anecdotal information. We also are better poised to work with our university partners to design projects and programs that faculty and community can co-research to help build a stronger community.

About the Authors

Christine Meyer is director of education, Coeur d'Alene Tribe, and Laura Laumatia is extension educator at the University of Idaho.

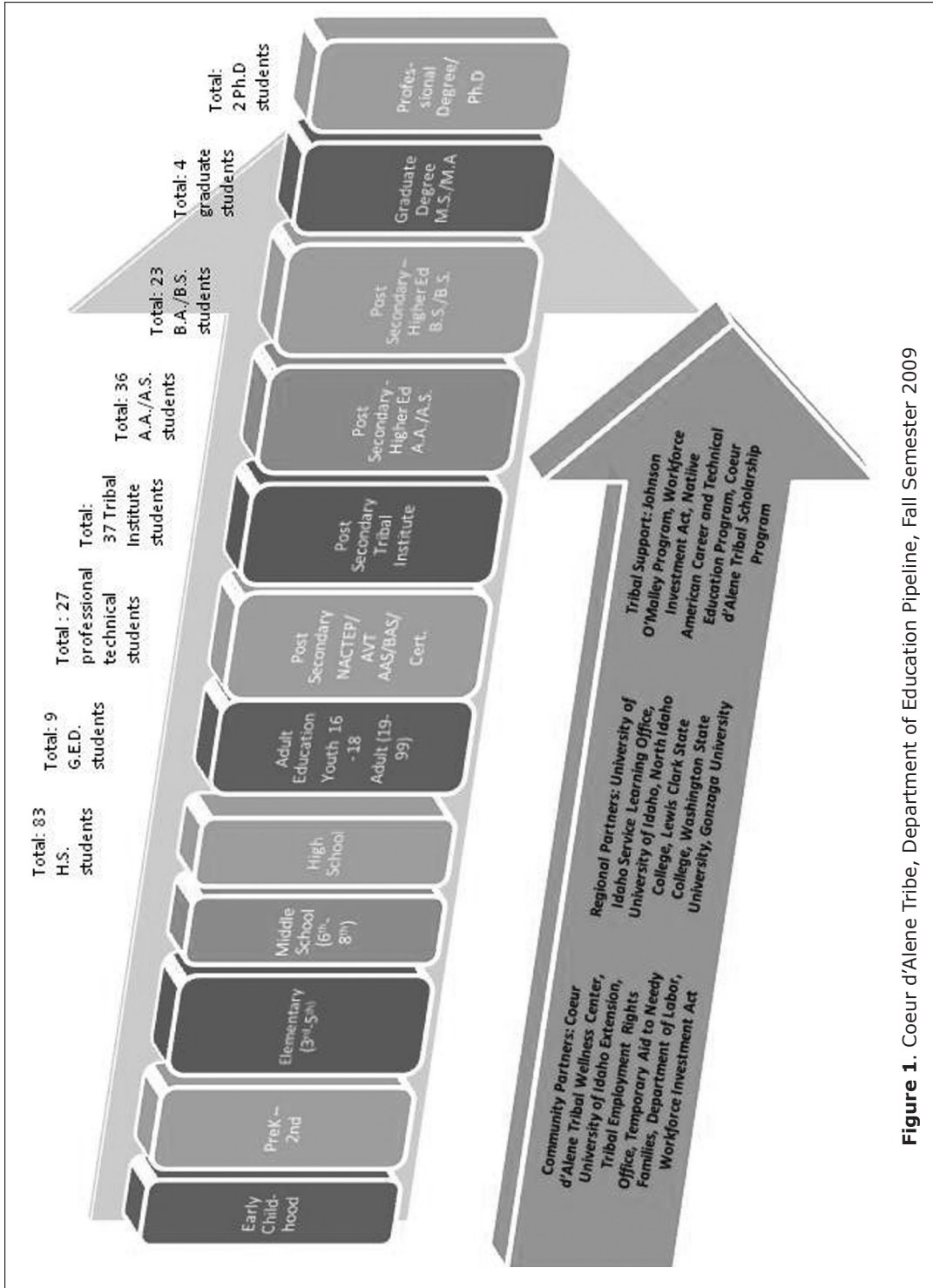


Figure 1. Coeur d'Alene Tribe, Department of Education Pipeline, Fall Semester 2009