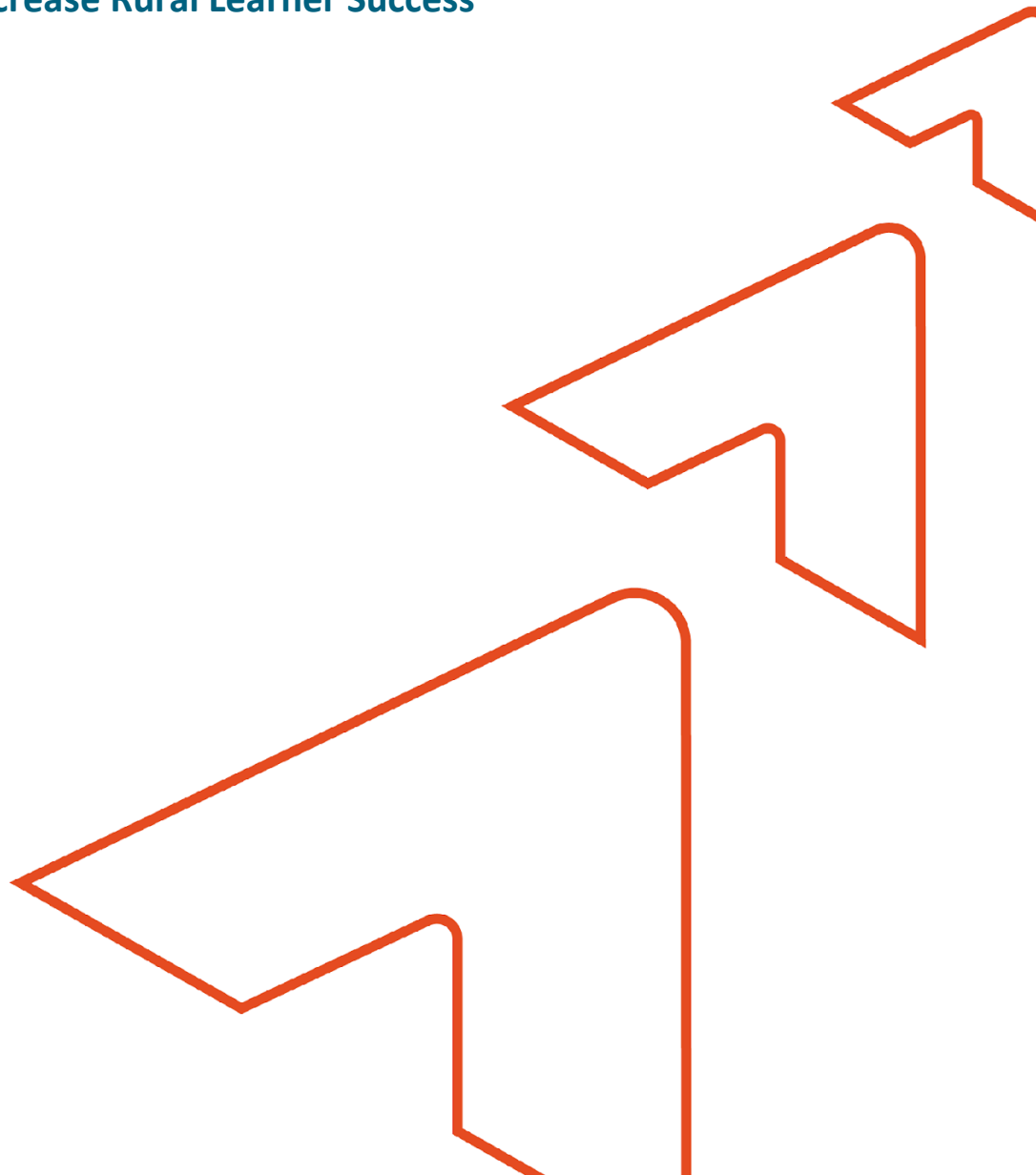


Project Summary

Family-Friendly Tribal and Rural Campuses

Building Evidence to Increase Rural Learner Success



Family-Friendly Tribal and Rural Campuses

The American Indian College Fund (the College Fund) and Urban Institute | Washington, D.C.

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The College Fund was pleased to partner with the Urban Institute on a pivotal project that enhances the capacity of Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) to serve their students. TCUs are experts in serving nontraditional students, and this project allowed them the opportunity to enhance their knowledge on student-parents, resources, and proven practices to serve their own students.

– Cheryl Crazy Bull, President and CEO, American Indian College Fund

This project has generated insights and strategies to support student caregivers' success at Tribal Colleges and Universities and rural colleges generally. We appreciate our partners' thoughtfulness, collaboration, and dedication to making innovative changes to support strong institutions and successful students.

– Theresa Anderson, Senior Fellow, Urban Institute

Project Overview

This project focused on promoting family-friendly campuses in rural contexts through a collaborative effort between the Urban Institute and the College Fund, with support from PERG Learning. A family-friendly campus is one that provides resources and support for students who are raising children or providing caregiving support to other family members. The research team brought together the Family-Friendly College Toolkit (the Toolkit)—a widely adopted tool to support parenting and caregiving students on campus—with insights drawn from TCUs' expertise. These insights reflect culturally responsive, intergenerational education supports developed in resource-constrained environments.

Research Objectives Achieved

1. Identified strategies for rural TCUs to leverage their existing resources to support students with caregiving responsibilities and ultimately strengthen opportunities for all students.
2. Identified what aspects of the Toolkit work well for rural TCUs and identified further Toolkit refinements.
3. Learned how TCUs change institutional practices that promote success for students with caregiving responsibilities.
4. Connected findings to strategic enrollment management initiatives and processes, including data-informed decision-making to support student-caregiver success.

Research Methodology

The research team conducted a mixed-methods study to examine the Toolkit and how the TCU partners support—or could better support—students with caregiving responsibilities. The team conducted site visits, collected focus group data from staff and students, and helped colleges collect survey data from students at three rural-serving TCUs: Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe University, Salish Kootenai College, and Turtle Mountain College.

The goal was to understand how colleges can further create family-friendly environments for caregiving students, informed by data and student and staff perspectives.

Key Findings

- TCUs adopted new strategies to support caregiving students to enhance their college experiences and promote transformative and systemic changes that impact Native student success.
- Cultural belonging and community are key factors in student well-being, particularly for Native students in rural communities.
- TCUs are nimble, flexible, and creative in identifying and/or adapting strategies to support student caregivers' childcare, finances, navigation, and connections with others—the most highly requested supports—and they are strongly motivated to respond to students' real needs even with limited resources.
- TCUs use student caregivers as a key population indicator for their strategic enrollment management (SEM) processes. SEM seeks to design long-term strategies to improve student enrollment, retention, persistence, and completion in ways that reflect community and cultural values.

Implications and Recommendations for Policy and Practice

- Strengthen supports at Tribal and rural higher education institutions, not only for student parents but also for students with elder-care responsibilities or other types of caregiving responsibilities.
- Include caregivers in colleges' priority student populations and expand eligibility for campus resources and programs to include all students with caregiving responsibilities in TCUs—and possibly in all rural college contexts.
- Expand the definition of student caregiver to include not only those caring for children, but also those providing care for adults and older family members. Broadening this definition has important implications for determining which caregivers are eligible to access supports and resources.
- Revise college applications and other appropriate data collection touchpoints to enable identification of student parents and caregivers.
- Ensure students have access to public and Tribal supports that address basic needs and childcare. Provide colleges with concrete examples of possible supports, such as on-campus childcare or child-friendly campus policies, and guidance on partnering with TCUs, Tribes, or local governments to implement them.
- Learn from TCUs' approaches to enhance student success because TCUs have a strong sense of inclusivity, belonging, cultural and community awareness, nimble decision-making, and resource efficiency.
- Incorporate a focus on student caregivers into strategic enrollment management and use culturally reflective data to inform institutional policy and practice changes.
- Provide resources and supports that help colleges build capacity to collect and interpret their own data, understand feasibility-study findings, make data-informed decisions, and implement policy and practice improvements.
- Leverage student capacity through practicums and relevant academic internships (e.g., early childhood and elementary education) to provide supports for student caregivers, especially those in rural areas facing barriers such as transportation.

Resources

For more information on this project, please see:

- Project pages:
 - [Family-Friendly Tribal and Rural Campuses](#)
 - [Family-Friendly Tribal and Rural Campuses | Family Friendly College Toolkit](#)
 - [Cultivating Native Student Success](#)
- [New Family-Friendly College Toolkit](#) (2026)
- [Family-Friendly Tribal and Rural Campuses: A Knowledge Exchange to Support Student Caregivers at Tribal Colleges and Universities](#) (2026)
- Family-Friendly Tribal and Rural Campuses college snapshots:
 - [Serving Student Caregivers at Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe University](#) (2026)
 - [Serving Student Caregivers at Salish Kootenai College](#) (2026)
 - [Serving Student Caregivers at Turtle Mountain College](#) (2026)
- [Family-Friendly Tribal and Rural Campuses narrative videos](#) (2026)
- [Family Friendly Tribal and Rural Campuses Webinar](#) (2025)
- [Cordero Holmes' Reflects on His Experience at the National Indian Education Association Conference](#) (2025)