Indigenous Insighter

MCPS Native American Student Services Department Newsletter. February 2023

# Powwow Poster Art Contest

# We are looking for MCPS students who would like to create a design that will honor our graduating seniors. The design will be used for our Native Youth Powwow poster. Prizes for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place. Entries must be submitted by February 24, 2023. Submit your design to mfplumage@mcpsmt.org or call 406.728.2400 ext. 1049 if you have questions.

# 2022-2023 Staff Contact Information and School Assignments

* Glenda Weasel, Title VI Data Support, Native American Specialist at Paxson Elementary School and Seeley-Swan High School; 406-728-2400 ext. 1063, [gfweasel@mcpsmt.org](mailto:gfweasel@mcpsmt.org)
* Ray Kingfisher, Native American Specialist at CS Porter Middle School, Hellgate High School, and Washington Middle School; 406-728-2400 ext. 1047, [rdkingfisher@mcpsmt.org](mailto:rdkingfisher@mcpsmt.org)
* Melissa Hammett, Native American Specialist at Sentinel High School and Willard High School; 406-728-2400 ext. 1028, [mshammett@mcpsmt.org](mailto:mshammett@mcpsmt.org)
* Dacia Griego, Social Work for Native American Student Services Department and Native American Specialist at Rattlesnake Elementary School; 406-728-2400 ext. 1068, [dgriego@mcpsmt.org](mailto:dgriego@mcpsmt.org)
* Duran Caferro, Native American Specialist at Big Sky High School; 406-728-2400, [dcaferro@mcpsmt.org](mailto:dcaferro@mcpsmt.org)
* Mary Plumage, Native American Specialist at Jeanette Rankin Elementary School, Russell Elementary School, and Meadow Hill Middle School; 406-728-2400 ext. 1049, [mfplumage@mcpsmt.org](mailto:mfplumage@mcpsmt.org)
* Chayse Buckskin, Native American Specialist at Franklin Elementary School, Lewis & Clark Elementary School, and Lowell Elementary School; 406-728-2400 ext. 1050, [cbuckskin@mcpsmt.org](mailto:cbuckskin@mcpsmt.org)
* Benji Headswift, Native American Education Specialist at Chief Charlo Elementary School, Hawthorne Elementary School, and Jefferson Preschool Program; 406-728-2400 ext, 1064, [bheadswift@mcpsmt.org](mailto:bheadswift@mcpsmt.org)

# Welcome New Staff Member

We are happy to welcome the newest member of the NASS team, Benji Headswift! Benji is a Northern Cheyenne tribal member, Army veteran, and former Northern Cheyenne tribal council member. He graduated from the University of Montana with a degree in Native American Studies.

# 2022-2023 MCPS Native American Student Services Calendar

* Native American Heritage Day Celebration: DerRic Starlight, Indigenous Puppeteer. Wednesday, September 21, 2022 from 6:30pm to 8:30 pm at the UC Theater, University of Montana.
* Traditional Belt Making Workshop. Friday, September 23, 2022 and Saturday, September 24, 2022. Day 1: 5-8pm, Day 2: 10am – 5pm. MCPS Professional Learning Lab.
* American Indian Heritage Day (Montana). Friday, September 23, 2022.
* Orange Shirt Day/National Day of Remembrance (US/Canada). Friday, September 30, 2022.
* Indigenous Peoples’ Day (US). Monday, October 10, 2022.
* Halloween Carnival. Saturday, October 29, 2022 from 2:00pm to 5:00pm at Franklin Elementary School.
* Native American Heritage Month. November (US).
* Rock Your Mocs Day. Tuesday, November 15, 2022.
* Round Dance. Thursday, November 17, 2022 from 6pm to 9pm at Meadow Hill Middle School
* Winter Gathering. Friday, December 2, 2022 from 6pm to 10pm at Meadow Hill Middle School.
* Sunday Funday: Powwow Club. Cancelled.
* Native Youth Powwow. Saturday, April 29, 2023. Grand Entry at 12pm and 6pm at Sentinel High School.
* Native Youth Art Market. Date and location to be announced.
* Title VI Public Hearing. Date and location to be announced.
* End of Year BBQ. Date and location to be announced.

# Community Events and Resources

* Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI) is a free civics and leadership course that empowers parents and caregivers to become leading advocates for children. Missoula PLTI is open to Missoula County parents, grandparents, foster parents, and other adults who wish to improve the lives of children and families in their communities. For more information contact [missoulaPLTI@missoulaunitedway.org](mailto:missoulaPLTI@missoulaunitedway.org)
* Indigenous Made Missoula is hosting the First Peoples’ Market – Sweetheart Popup on Saturday, February 11th from 2pm – 5pm at the Missoula Public Library. For more information visit [www.indigenousmademissoula.com](http://www.indigenousmademissoula.com)
* Learn how your school can receive free school meals for every student! Attend the School Meals are for Everyone Engagement Night on Thursday, February 9th from 5:30 – 7pm at 1720 Wyoming Street. Dinner and Childcare are provided.
* All Nations Health Center is hosting a “We’re Connected: Soup & Stories” series from 5-7pm on Zoom. The dates are February 13th, February 27th, March 13th, and March 27th. Register at: [www.bit.ly/3iXVHY5](http://www.bit.ly/3iXVHY5) For more information contact All Nations Health Center at 406-829-9515 or visit [www.allnations.health](http://www.allnations.health)

# Title VI Parent Advisory Committee (PAC)

The Title VI Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) is made up of parents, students, and teachers within the MCPS community. The Title VI PAC provides support to the MCPS Native American Student Services Department throughout the year. PAC meetings are open to the community and we welcome families and MCPS staff to attend. Meetings are held on the first Wednesday of each month from 6pm to 8pm in the MCPS Professional Learning Lab (in Building B). Onsite childcare available.

2022-2023 PAC Members are:

* Parent Representatives
  + Amber Shaffer (Chairperson)
  + Shauna Yellowkidney (Vice Chairperson)
  + Stacie Brod
* Student Representative
  + Alishon Kelly (Hellgate High School)
* Teacher Representative
  + Linsey Kuntz (Lowell Elementary School)
* Alternate Student Representatives
  + Shawndaya Butler (Sentinel High School)
  + Jaiden Crawford (Sentinel High School)

# As the Rez Turns by Mary Plumage

Happy Winter!!! Happy New Year! As we go forward from here on out, it will not be long before the skies are blue and the grass is green. Which will bring us closer to the end of the year. Please continue to encourage your students to keep striving and achieving. Also, parents pat yourself on the back as you made the halfway point of the school year!

We have been learning Nakoda color words in some of the elementary classrooms. Discussing how important it is to learn another language and expand your knowledge. It is simply amazing how fast the students pick up on new words and retain the information.

Russell Elementary 4th grade class will be learning about the Round Dance in P.E. this month. Thanks to Mr. Benji for helping with that and singing for a great group of students.

I want to update the Meadow Hill Dreamcatchers lunch group that the NEW day is Wednesday. No more Thursdays. So bring your lunch and stop on by the small conference room right by the cafeteria.

Joke of the day:

What kind of animal has to wear a wig?

A bald eagle!

Mary F. Plumage

# Ta[nsi](https://www.creedictionary.com/search/index.php?q=t%C3%A2nisi&scope=1&cwr=35218) N[itôtêm](https://www.creedictionary.com/search/index.php?q=nit%C3%B4t%C3%AAm&scope=1&cwr=29954)! by Dacia Griego

Tânsi nitôtemak! Hello my friends! I am the department Social Worker and one of the Native American Education Specialists. I am currently assigned to Rattlesnake Elementary School where I host weekly lunch groups with Native students and work in the classrooms through the IEFA Read Aloud Program and collaborations with classroom teachers. I also host a 5th grade lunch group with Native students at Paxson Elementary School.

I look forward to spending time with the students at lunch groups each week where I get to hear about their day, learn about their interests and strengths, and encourage them to do their best each day in school and in the community. We are spending time learning greetings in Montana tribal languages and practicing introducing ourselves. We are learning about the Montana tribal flags at Rattlesnake Elementary School in preparation for a tribal flag ceremony where we will present the Montana tribal flags to be displayed in the school cafeteria. At Paxson, we are working on a land acknowledgment that will be read every morning during morning announcements. It is so inspiring to see the youth feel valued and empowered as we work on these projects!

Through my IEFA Read Aloud visits I have shared stories and teachings about long hair and specifically “Boys with Braids” using the book Thunder’s Hair by Jessie Taken Alive-Rencountre. This winter I also read: Awasis and the World Famous Bannock by Dallas Hunt, Finding My Dance by Ria Thundercloud, Kumak’s Fish: A Tall Tale from the Far North by Michael Bania, and Beaver Steals Fire by the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes. I have also visited classrooms to present on the Montana tribal flags. At Rattlesnake, I spent two days with all of the students teaching round dance and traditional games during their “specials” time.

This spring I’ll be teaching about the seasonal rounds of the Anishinaabe and other Plains people, traditional uses of the bison, and Powwow 101 as we approach powwow season. I am also facilitating the District’s Anti-Bias Working Group, IVALUE. Through this working group we will be hosting an anti-bias training series for MCPS staff where they will learn about historical trauma, recognizing our own biases, and responding to microaggressions and discrimination.

Finally, I’m so excited for our upcoming youth powwow. The theme this year is “Honoring our Graduates.” We can’t wait for our community to gather and celebrate!

Dacia Red Thunder Griego

Anishinaabe, Nehiyaw, Xicana | she/her

Native American Education Specialist/Social Worker

Missoula County Public Schools

# Stoodis! by Duran Caferro

Hello!

I hope everyone had a great winter break with family! At Big Sky High School we are all set for the second semester. This is a good opportunity to stay caught up and prevent stress later on.

I had to take some time away to take care of my health, but I look forward to getting back to our regularly scheduled programming:

RISE - a statewide Native student leadership group meets every other Thursday at 2:00-3:30 via zoom. We host a group in room 21 at Big Sky so we can attend together.

Morning Circles – I have partnered with a study skills class to host a talking circle every Monday at 9:00-9:20. I will also lend one-on-one academic support on Wednesday and Friday.

Big Sky Native American Study Lab – Room 21 is our affinity space provided to help our students have a space to get work done, access resources, host our programs and meetings, and feel safe and supported. Students may come in before the bell or at lunch Monday-Thursday and say hello. Students or caretakers may also send me an email to schedule a meeting if those times are difficult.

Students are also lending their expertise to the planning of the Montana Office of Public Instruction Youth Days Conference. Youth Days is a conference for High School students to learn leadership and community service skills. Students play a major in planning the event, including some Big Sky Native Leaders, so it is shaping up to be meaningful and inclusive. The conference is scheduled for April 16 and 17 at the Holiday Inn – Missoula. Email me for information on attending or joining the planning team.

I am working on getting a direct phone line at Big Sky. For now, please contact me via email if you have any questions or concerns.

# [*Á*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%82#:~:text=%C3%82%2C%20%C3%A2%20(a%2Dcircumflex,of%20the%20letter%20%22a%22.)*aaa Oki by Chayse Buckskin*

Ahhh Oki,

I hope you all had a good holiday with your loved ones. This new year has started off strong as I have been spending more time at each school I’ve been assigned to. I will be continuing my read alouds with the K-2 classes and have been doing Montana Tribal Flags with the older grades. Something new I have been offering at the schools is a Lunch group where I’m planning to teach a lesson on Montana tribes. This group also helps bring the students who don’t know each other together in a safe space. Please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions or concerns.

# Data Guru by Glenda Weasel

Tansi:

The beginning of a New Year 2023. Welcome back to school. The holidays were too short. LOL. I can’t wait to meet and greet with the students.

I will be starting at Paxson Elementary on Wednesdays.

I meet with Seeley Swan in person once a month on Tuesdays. The other Tuesdays we meet virtually using Google Meet. I have a great group of students at Seeley Swan High School. They are very engaging.

Everyone stay warm during our winter months and stop in and visit with the Native American Student Services staff.

Glenda Weasel

# Oki Niksookowaaksi Tsa Niitaapi? by Ray Kingfisher

Okii Niksokowaaks,

I hope you all had a great holiday season. Now that it is over we are back to the grind. I am employed as one of the seven (7) “Native American Education Specialists.” I am scheduled at C.S. Porter Middle School, Washington Middle School and Hellgate High School. The Native American Student Services has undergone some new leadership, structure and schedule. This new structure allows for the specialist to be on the campus of one school for the entirety of the school day, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursdays. Leaving Mondays and Fridays for meetings, home visits, planning, debriefing, sharing content, and preparation.

Here is a glimpse of what a day at the school would look like. I report to the school around or at 7:30am. I sign-in with the front office to document that I am there in attendance. I make my way to the “space” that I am afforded. Once settled in and “Good Mornings” are said I log on my Chromebook and start to check and reply to MCPS staff emails. Upon completion I begin to look through my “Native American Student School List” of students. I use “Infinite Campus” on the MCPS Website, which allows me to observe your students behavior, schedule, grades, and attendance.

At Porter, I have sixty-two (62) students. At Washington, I have thirty-three (33) students and at Hellgate High School I have eighty-five (85) students that identify as Native American/Alaska Native. These students represent the twelve (12) Tribal Nations in Montana and many of the Tribal Nations around the U.S. I go through the list and begin to compile a smaller list of students who I will seek out and “visit” with. I do not have any training as a counselor or as a teacher. I use life experience, cultural background, knowledge and an education of the Native American experience to help the students understand and succeed.

In these visits I will ask a few questions in hopes of gaining some trust to build a Student/Mentor relationship. I find that the students need some sort of familiarity experience for them to allow that bond. I usually rely upon my coworkers for information and cultural expertise on different tribes other than my own. My research is limited to the internet as of now. During the visit, as an ice breaker, the questions I ask are, How are you? Are you related to…? Do you know? Have you lived in Missoula your whole life? What tribe do you represent? Do you play basketball? In an attempt to establish that familiarity, I will then use my experience and tell a short story with the information I receive.

Once established, I go over the information from “Infinite Campus” and show the student missing assignments, attendance record, and the grade they have in each class at that time. Ultimately, I encourage the NA students to do good and to “do the best that they can.” As we discuss the information sometimes the reason “why” the student is missing school, why they have behavioral problems or why they struggle is disclosed to me. Most of the problems are social ills that are produced from historical federal policies and experiences of Native American people. Today, we see that the NA students, families and Indigenous people are a product of those policies.

The job becomes hard as it switches to somewhat, “counseling/social work.” I get to hear the good, the bad and the ugly. Somedays, It takes a huge toll on my mental health and anxiety. When students trust me with information, I think, “Who would understand this situation from my perspective?.” So, the questions arise, “where do I take this information?” “Who do I pass this information to?” If I do pass this along “what happens to the trust I built?” “Am I getting my community members' kid taken away?” I always think “Could I be the only one that understands what/how/why has happened?” I possibly could be.

During lunchtime I host what I call “Native American Student Lunch Gathering” in each of my schools. In there, I encourage the students to eat, check in with them, tell a few corny jokes and start with the content. Videos are popular amongst the students. There are some great discussions of what did you see? What did you hear? How do you feel about it? It is always good to hear some of the basis of tribal knowledge and culture. They always say “This is what my dad/mom taught me.” I encourage them to continue to extract and learn all they can about who they are. It is always a good time when the student participates and brings that knowledge.

After lunch, I take care of any of the students' needs that come up. I do some research on any and all topics that the students talked about during that time. By doing this it prepares me for the upcoming gatherings with them. Knowing the students' likes and interests keeps that relationship building going. I will then get a start on the next day's lesson at the next school up. Overall our students are out there doing their best. I commend them for being there and doing what they can. I am hoping we can start getting some “Cultural Enhancement” going. Our students need that identity piece. I am in hopes that we can all sit down at the table and figure out how that can be done.

# Creatively Indigenous by Melissa Hammett

* Willard lunch club: Every Wednesday
* Check-ins with Willard students and Sentinel Students
* Sentinel days: Tuesday afternoons
* Willard: Personal Finance class 1st period and Native American Studies class 2nd period.
* Sentinel: Study Skills class 7 th period.
* RISE meetings for Willard and Sentinel every other Thursday.
* NASS Department (Mary Fran, Glenda and family and I) made Frybread for Willard’s 2nd block graduation at Willard.