

Helping Native Students Walk in Two Worlds



Bridging Families, Tribes, and Schools

Dr. Nicky Mendoza works as the middle school Native American Liaison for Los Lunas Public Schools in Los Lunas, New Mexico. In this role, she bridges the gap between families, tribes, and schools, serving as an advocate and counselor for approximately 200 Native American students. During the 2024-25 school year, Dr. Mendoza participated in the GenerationAI Community of Practice through Indigitize, a nonprofit organization that supports educators in bringing culturally relevant computer science and artificial intelligence experiences to Indigenous youth. Her problem of practice focused on identifying appropriate AI resources for students, tribal members, and teachers.

Supporting Students Between Home and School

Dr. Mendoza provides individualized student support, as well as professional development opportunities for administrators and teachers new to working with Native communities. With four sovereign nations and dozens of tribes represented in the district, Dr. Mendoza navigates a multitude of cultures daily. “We’re the same but very different,” she said, noting that each tribe has its own customs and ways of life. Because of these unique differences, cultural sensitivity is critical to Dr. Mendoza’s work.

One way Dr. Mendoza helps students “walk in two worlds” is by using AI to support their transition from home to school. Native students often learn English as a second language, so AI-powered tools like Grammarly help them improve their communication. Additionally, Dr. Mendoza uses AI-powered tools like Quizlet to tutor students and help them complete their homework.

Dr. De'Treach “Nicky” Mendoza

Native American Liaison
Los Lunas Public Schools

Los Lunas Public Schools

- 8,200 students across 16 schools in a public school district
- Student demographics: 62% Hispanic, 30% White, 5% American Indian, 2% Multiracial, 1% Black

Indigitize CS/AI Resource Hub

New Mexico Indigenous Instructional Scope 2.0



Connecting Students to Ancestral Culture

Beyond individualized instructional and language support, AI can also help students connect with their own culture. In an activity designed and led by Dr. Mendoza, her students used generative AI to input descriptors of their individual tribes and create images of their ancestors and other visual representations of their culture. Then, they used generative AI to further describe their ceremonies and ways of life through supplemental text. There is no blueprint for this kind of transformative learning, but Dr. Mendoza is blazing a trail.

Expanding the Work

In addition to supporting students, Dr. Mendoza leads professional development for the district and across New Mexico. While her professional development sessions often highlight specific AI tools like Canva, Gemini, and MagicSchool, she also emphasizes the importance of culturally relevant activities and content for Native students.

This year, Dr. Mendoza is working on expanding social-emotional learning supports that help students build empathy, motivation, and positive mental health. She shared that Native students are often reluctant to talk about their personal lives, especially when they're struggling, and hopes to provide them with more opportunities to process their emotions.

She added that her goal is "to make students feel comfortable." One way she's doing this is by using AI-powered creativity tools with students to create art, music, and poetry that expresses how they're feeling.

GenerationAI's Communities of Practice bring together educators across roles and regions in yearlong cohorts to explore shared opportunities around AI in education. Through collaborative learning and experimentation, participants develop responsible, context-informed approaches to integrating AI in teaching and learning.

GenerationAI is a groundbreaking educational movement led by ISTE+ASCD alongside six coalition partners designed to empower PK-12 educators with the knowledge, tools, and confidence to safely and responsibly capture the power of AI in the classroom.

Learn more and join the movement at generationalai.org.