

**Proposed 1-time allocation for creation of materials for Minnesota Public Schools that help students understand American Indian Perspectives on environment and ecology**

**We urge:**

*Include American Indian perspectives in environmental education: Specifically, we recommend a one-time allocation from the Minnesota legislature to bring together knowledgeable American Indian educators, and students. The appropriation would be used to create materials that Minnesota public schools can use to include American Indian cultural perspectives when students study these issues. It would be allocated to the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council, which would manage the project. Materials could include, but not be limited to, for example, videos with interviews, project possibilities, written documents written at various reading levels, and links to existing materials defining American Indian perspectives. The allocation might also include funding for several training programs in which American Indian educators and youth could provide training to others on how these materials could be used.*

*Rationale:*

*The National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF) reports that environmental education is instrumental in intellectual development, promoting awareness about social and environmental issues, and cultivating a connection with nature. "Incorporating aspects of environmental education into STEM topics can help illustrate the power of Environmental Education. It can also be combined with art instruction to deepen understanding of both areas."*

*A paper examining the crossroads of public art, nature, and environmental education states that the benefits are: Promotes intellectual development, encourages inspiration, supports consciousness about social and environmental issues, develops a sense of connection with nature, teaches how to ask questions and examine contextual information." Integrating environmental education into STEM and art enhances understanding and promotes a more holistic educational approach that not only benefits the child's education, but in the long run will benefit the environment as more awareness and holistic thinking is applied to it.*

*The involvement of American Indian groups is crucial in developing education content and lesson plans that reflect their unique perspective on the environment, and more specifically how to coincide with it. An essay by University of Alaska faculty Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagley and Ray Barnhardt explains:*

*"Indigenous peoples throughout the world have sustained their unique worldviews and associated knowledge systems for millenia, even while undergoing major social upheavals as a result of transformative forces beyond their control. Many of the core values, beliefs and practices associated with those worldviews have survived and are beginning to be recognized as having an adaptive integrity that is as valid for today's generation as it was for generations past. The depth of indigenous knowledge rooted in the long inhabitation of a particular place offers lessons that can benefit everyone, from educator to scientist, as we search for a more satisfying and sustainable way to live on this planet."*

*Any type of initiative to promote environmental education on a statewide basis should be led nearly completely by American Indian environmental groups. Therefore, we suggest a one-*

*time appropriation to provide specific funding to American Indian environmental groups working with educators and students to:*

- *Create educational content/lesson plans for districts.*
- *Develop curriculum materials that educators can use for their lessons.*
- *Hold workshops during summers with educators to educate them on how to do environmental education via project based and service-learning.*

#### Increase visibility/participation of American Indians in environmental policies/decisions.

American Indians have always lived in accord with the environment, treating all living things in the environment with respect, dignity and as equals. To this day they continue to include this in their daily practices. American Indians often face the first impacts of environmental degradation, and they are also the first ones at the forefront of combating it, with traditional practices being increasingly recognized as effective environmental solutions.

John Poupart, founder and director, American Indian Policy Center (in Minnesota) explains this reasoning. He quotes Professor Donald Fixico: "American Indians have a unique perspective that emphasizes the interconnectedness of all things, making them crucial players in combating environmental degradation. Indian Thinking is seeing things from a perspective emphasizing that circles and cycles are central to the world and that all things are related within the universe. For Indian people who are close to their tribal traditions and native values, they think within a native reality consisting of a physical and metaphysical world."

American Indians not only will be the most effective at leading us to a brighter and healthier environment, but we should also do it because it is morally reprehensible not to. John Poupart explains this same concern "there is a prevailing influence that dictates to shape the dialogue toward Western European versions of thought; thereby shrinking the influence of American Indian interpretations. The outcome is that American Indian culture takes a back seat once again and fails to make its way into the outcome. We missed the boat, again. Unless a conscious effort to make sure this doesn't happen again; it will happen again."

American Indian leaders should be involved in conversations about the environment not just off of a logical sense, but a moral one.

#### References

*Angayuqaq, Oscar Kawagley and Barnhardt, Ray, Education Indigenous to Place: Western Science Meets Native Reality, Alaskan Native Knowledge Network, University of Alaska, Fairbanks, 2007*

Fixico, Donald. *The American Indian Mind in a Linear World*. 2003. Routledge, New York, NY

Kawagley, Oscar and Barnhardt, Ray, "Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Alaska Native Ways of Knowing," *Anthropology and Education Quarterly, Volume 36, No 1, (May 2005)*

Poupart, John, *Indian Research and Evaluation, 2021*