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# SKC Division of Education

# Conceptual Framework Summary

**Fall 2021**

# Salish Kootenai College

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#### Description of College

 Salish Kootenai College (SKC) is located in scenic Pablo, Montana, at the center of the Flathead Indian Reservation. The Flathead Reservation is surrounded on the east, west and south by mountains. To the north is the majestic Flathead Lake, the largest natural freshwater lake west of the Mississippi and winding its way through the reservation from north to south is the lovely Flathead River. The Flathead Indian Reservation is home to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. The tribes include the Bitterroot Salish, Pend d’Oreille, and Kootenai and this region is their aboriginal territory with land tenure from time immemorial (SPCC, 2003). The 1.317 million acre reservation is home to approximately 7,920 enrolled members of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. Of this population, about 5,000 live on the reservation (Montana Office of Public Instruction Division of Indian Education, 2015).

 Established in 1977, Salish Kootenai College enrolled 835 students in Fall 2016. Enrollment over the past 10 years averaged 1,089 students with a range from 1,175 to 785 driven by economic forces. The Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges granted initial accreditation to Salish Kootenai College in December, 1984; the most recent reaffirmed accreditation was in 2014. The first accredited bachelor’s degree program at Salish Kootenai College was added in 1998. In 2017, SKC boasts 47 degree or certificate programs, with 18 of them full 4 year bachelor degrees.

#### Salish Kootenai College Vision Statement

Salish Kootenai College aspires to be the pre-eminent educational center of excellence for American Indian Students, grounded in the cultures of the Séliš, Ksanka and QÍispé people of the Flathead Nation. The college will empower students to improve the lives of their families and communities through research, leadership and service.

#### Salish Kootenai College Mission Statement

The mission of Salish Kootenai College is to provide quality post-secondary educational opportunities for American Indians, locally and from throughout the United States. The College will promote community and individual development and perpetuate the cultures of the Confederated Tribes of the Flathead Nation.

#### Salish Kootenai College Core Themes

Salish Kootenai College identifies four Core Themes that encompass the mission and vision of the College. The Core Themes provide a focus for all activities at SKC.

1. Provide Access to Higher Education for American Indians;
2. Maintain Quality Education for Workforce or Further Education;
3. Perpetuate the Cultures of Confederated Salish and Kootenai Peoples; and
4. Increase Individual and Community Capacity for Self-Reliance and Sustainability.

To fulfill its mission and vision, Salish Kootenai College has endeavored to create meaningful and substantive programs to improve the lives of Indigenous people on the Flathead Indian Reservation and across the United States. The Education Division is key to these efforts and currently offers the following degrees preparing future teachers from Early Childhood through High School.

* Early Childhood Education: (Birth to age 8, A.A. and B.S. Degrees)
* Early Childhood Education: P-3 (Preschool to Grade 3, A.A. and B.S. Degrees)
* Elementary Education and Elem. Education: Native Language Emphasis (A.S. and B.S. Degrees)
* Secondary Science Education (B.S. Degree)
* Secondary Math Education (B.S. Degree)
* Native Language Teacher Education (A.S. Degree)

Salish Kootenai College established teacher education programs to address the major concern in Indian education of the absence of qualified American Indian teachers particularly in schools that serve significant numbers of Indian students. A Montana Office of Public Instruction Report on American Indian Student Achievement (2016) reported the following demographics:

* “6.6% of Montana’s total population is American Indian (2015 Census Estimate), made up mostly of the twelve tribal nations of Montana: Assiniboine, Blackfeet, Chippewa, Cree, Crow, Gros Ventre, Kootenai, Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa, Northern Cheyenne, Pend d’Oreille, Salish, Sioux
* For the 2015-2016 school year, there were 20,401 American Indian/Alaska Native students in Montana that report American Indian/Alaska Native as at least one of their races. The number of American Indian students in Montana is increasing every year. 14.0% of Montana’s students are American Indian.
	+ 44.9% or 9,151 of American Indian students attend a school physically located within a reservation with 55.1% or 11,250 located outside a reservation boundary.” (Montana Office of Public Instruction, 2016)
* “The percentage of American Indian teachers in Montana has barely increased since the mid-1990s—rising from 1.9 percent in the 1995-1996 school year to 2.3 percent today.” (Cummings, 2015)

How does this impact American Indian youth? It is well documented that instruction informed by children’s home and community culture is critical to supporting a sense of belongingness that ultimately impacts academic achievement (Banks, 2002; Osterman, 2000). Educators who are from different cultural perspectives than the children they teach, “may render it difficult to “see” the cultural identities shaping the behaviors and achievement of their students” (Moore, 2004, a).

“Research supports the idea that students, and especially minority students in poor communities, need teachers who grew up in similar circumstances. Thomas Dee, a professor of education at Stanford University, reanalyzed test score data from an experiment in Tennessee that randomly placed teachers with students. Focusing on black and white students, he found that students who were paired with a teacher of their own race performed significantly better on math and reading tests. Other research has shown that minority students who have more minority teachers are more likely to have higher graduation rates and lower rates of suspensions and expulsions.” (Cummings, 2015)

Salish Kootenai College has attempted to address the issue of too few qualified American Indian teachers and its academic and social ramifications for Indian youth through the provision of degree granting teacher preparation programs that provide culturally responsive teacher education curriculum to predominantly American Indian teacher candidates.

#### SKC Education Division Vision Statement

The Education Division envisions a culturally responsive teacher education program and curriculum supporting candidates’ development through fostering learning communities that build on past experiences along with life dreams. A culturally responsive education will support the personal as well as professional development and success of SKC candidates, affording them greater life options.

Furthermore, the Education Division envisions SKC teacher candidates will be culturally competent and skilled educators empowered to transform curriculum and instruction to address the developmental, linguistic and ethnic diversity of every child they teach; SKC teacher candidates as future professional educators, advocates and leaders will empower the students they teach, expanding their life options through nurturing culturally responsive learning communities.

#### Salish Kootenai College Education Division Mission Statement

The professional education programs at Salish Kootenai College seek to support teacher candidates in making connections between their personal development and their professional growth, in meaningful integration of cultural learning and in collaborative efforts toward the larger good for local and global communities. The critical areas of professional preparation that distinguish Salish Kootenai teacher education graduates include:

* Knowledge of American Indian student context and best educational practices leading to developmentally and culturally appropriate pedagogy.
* Identification with American Indian culture and community values imbedded in content and pedagogy.
* Commitment to meeting the needs of developmentally, ethnically and linguistically diverse learners.
* Commitment to reflective practices leading to personal and professional development.
* Development of collaborative relationships with mentoring teachers and peers organized into learning communities that promote application of knowledge, skills and dispositions in real settings.
* Strong evidence of effective communication, critical thinking, cultural understanding and citizenship.

#### Program Purposes

The professional education programs function to meet three overarching purposes. These include:

* Developing education degrees that are culturally responsive to the teacher candidates within the community served by SKC.
* Preparing candidates to be culturally competent and skilled educators.
* Preparing candidates to provide culturally responsive curriculum to American Indian children as well as other diverse learners.

#### Central Principles and Beliefs of the Division of Education (2021)

Instruction and curriculum in the professional education programs at Salish Kootenai College are guided by central principles and beliefs that respect and reflect the rich, holistic perspectives of the Séliš, Ql̓ispé and Ksanka people.

1. **Culturally revitalizing and sustaining instruction and curriculum will lead education to its promise of opportunity and equity.**
2. **Creating connections with the larger community promotes the construction of knowledge.**
3. **Reflective practice leads to the continuous flourishing of both teacher and student.**
4. **Each learner’s uniqueness, when valued and invited in all its diverse forms, enriches the learning experience.**
5. **Demonstration and application of communication, critical thinking, cultural understanding, and the principles of citizenship cultivate teachers as community leaders.**

#### Statement of Philosophy and Professional Commitments

The teacher education programs at Salish Kootenai College are built upon central principles and beliefs that together form a framework reflective of SKC’s individual context, community and culture. The Conceptual Framework informs the teacher education curricula, evaluation and assessment, as well as faculty and administrative decisions. The education faculty members agreed upon these central principles and are committed to decision making based upon these beliefs.

Philosophically, the education faculty members believe all learning occurs within an individual’s social, cultural and life contexts. Therefore, culturally responsive instruction, instruction that links students’ home and community culture to school culture, is at the heart of the Education Division’s mission. The faculty recognizes and addresses the history of forced cultural assimilation through formal education that oppressed many Indigenous people through a commitment to provide equal educational opportunities for SKC teacher candidates empowering these candidates to provide equal educational opportunities for their future students. Hence, the faculty members promote socially just and democratic learning communities through culturally responsive instruction; the faculty believes that such learning communities will lead education to its promise of opportunity and equity for all.