

## Meeting Notes

Arizona ACEs Consortium | Wednesday, August 5, 2026 | 1:00–2:00 PM  
Arizona Time

Chair: Casandra Stouder | Topic: Back to School & Resource Sharing

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### OPENING

The circle opened with a land acknowledgment and a blessing. Relatives were invited to feel the ground beneath their feet — past the floor, past the concrete, down to the roots and the earth — and to consider the histories and the life paths created on that ground long before us. Mother Earth holds not one person or one thing, but all living things, and we are all sitting on her back right now.

The opening prayer asked that our focus stay on the children we represent, that we be open with the wisdom and experience we carry so it can reach the youth, the schools, and the groups that need it, and that we be grounded and patient with no expectations. Blessings were asked for those who are without, who are suffering or sick, and for the children in need right now.

The invitation for the day: come in with a solution, a tool, or a resource — and feel free to take one. Giving and taking, balance and reciprocity.

### PRESENTATION

#### Waylon Honga — “Reservation Cultural Values”

Waylon Honga is from the Hualapai Nation and based in Flagstaff. He is a longtime member of this committee, and his work is creating civic education materials for tribal populations. He is preparing to present at the Hualapai Youth Council Conference. Ahead of the circle, relatives received an excerpt from Kareem Abdul-Jabbar’s *A Season on the Reservation*, about coaching the White Mountain Apache high school basketball team and his observation that growing up on the reservation teaches an unspoken rule: learning to fit in.

#### **The core idea: the group is more important than the individual**

Waylon first encountered that phrase in a book on Japanese corporate culture while he was a student at NAU. Years later, back home and asking why his tribe could not seem to solve certain social problems, it connected. He came

to believe many tribes live by that same value — but unlike Japan, where it is taught and said out loud, on the reservation it is unwritten and unspoken. You are never outside the group, never outside the circle. You keep your head down. You are nobody special.

He developed this presentation in 1999 and has added to it over the years.

### **The behavioral implications he named**

- You do not raise your hand. You do not ask questions. You do not talk loud or draw attention to yourself. You learn to be quiet.
- Silence is not awkward. It is easy and comfortable to be quiet.
- Nobody says these rules out loud and they are not written down — growing up on a reservation, you simply learn them.
- Mainstream idioms and cultural shorthand (“dog and pony,” “old hat”) can pass right over our heads, and sometimes we don’t know what is being said.

### **Stories and evidence he walked us through**

- **New shoes.** In sixth grade at Peach Springs he wore new shoes to school. Classmates pointed — “new shoes.” So did kids at recess, and again in the cafeteria. He started doing it too. Looking back: for a week or two he had something nobody else had. He stuck out, and you are not supposed to do that.
- **Kingman High School.** Four years at a white school off the reservation, and he believes he raised his hand once — even when he knew the answer. He never thought about why.
- **Page School District.** A Navajo Times headline described the district’s August training for new teachers, where they are told outright that their Navajo students will never ask questions.
- **Dr. Tommy Rock (NAU).** High school diploma, bachelor’s, master’s, and a PhD — and nobody said congratulations. What he heard was “now you think you’re better than us.” He wrote about crabs in a bucket.
- **The ASU basketball player from Shiprock.** She wore headphones without the music on, so people would assume she couldn’t hear them and wouldn’t talk to her. She just wanted to move between class, practice, and the cafeteria unbothered.

- **“Shadow of a Nation” (Sports Illustrated), on the Crow in Montana.** A player averaging thirty points a game went unrecruited. A college coach in Montana gave up recruiting Native athletes altogether because they left mid-semester — not for lack of skill on the court, but because of the classroom, the locker room, and the dorm, where they were alone in a different culture. Jonathan Takes Enemy’s Crow name translates to “does not put himself above others.” Studying too hard or getting good grades drew the accusation of trying to be a white man.
- **Ira Hayes (Gila River).** After the flag raising at Iwo Jima he was paraded across the country and put on a pedestal to raise money for the war effort — an extremely uncomfortable place for someone raised with the group-first teaching.

### **How other cultures say the same thing — and how the U.S. says the opposite**

- Japan: the nail that sticks out gets hammered down.
- Korea: the tallest tree gets cut.
- The United States: be number one, raise your hand, make your mark — the squeaky wheel gets the oil.

Waylon noted this pattern seems strongest on reservations in rural areas, and may look different in tribes near metropolitan areas.

### **Generational trauma and lifespan**

He shared research on how traumatic experience may be carried across generations — three generations present in one body, and studies suggesting sperm cells carry traces of a father’s stress. He then shared his own data. His reservation had no high school when he graduated eighth grade at Peach Springs in 1979; students chose among boarding schools or bused to town. He listed all fifteen classmates from that class and asked his enrollment office for their ages at passing. **The average age at passing for his class was 43. For the class before him, 44. For the class after him, 33.** He did this because published figures listing Native men’s average lifespan near 74 did not match what he has lived and seen.

### **Waylon’s other presentations**

He also presents on economic development — explaining capitalism, because tribes take a different approach to job creation and rural reservations are struggling with jobs, while creation stories mean tribes are not leaving their land regardless of economic conditions. And on politics — the differences between the two major parties and the importance of voting. His view: understanding these systems helps Native people make more informed choices for themselves. He offers these presentations at no charge; the hardest part, he said, is getting an audience.

Contact: waylonhonga@hotmail.com

## **DISCUSSION FOLLOWING THE PRESENTATION**

### **How do we approach this work with grace?**

Andi Fetzner asked how to navigate these conversations without being pushy — how to be informed and invite people in appropriately while working alongside communities in the White Mountains. Waylon answered honestly that he does not have a clean answer; it is hard even for him, and there are things only another Native can say to Natives. He also cautioned against the romanticized version of Native people, saying plainly that Native people are human like everyone else, with the same capacity for pettiness and prejudice.

Andi offered what has worked for her — naming it up front: *I'm going to do my best, I really want to hold space and connect, I might do it in a clunky way, so please allow me the grace.*

The chair added: once we set down the anxiety and the constriction and simply show up as human beings, good things happen. Trust the path, the wisdom, and the experience you have put into the role you carry — the people you serve can see it.

### **Silence as trust-building**

Sarah Harris, newly counseling at San Carlos Middle School, shared that her own professional instinct is “there’s no dumb question” — which runs against what Waylon described. She found real comfort in hearing that silence is okay. Sometimes a student will come in and just sit, and it is not about the question or the concern. Letting that sit builds trust for the next time, even if nothing happens this time.

## **Waylon's closing thoughts on the discussion**

- Many Native people have never heard this framing before and may be surprised by it — but he believes it will resonate once they hear it.
- Be yourself. It does take time for students to feel comfortable with you.
- In college he would wait until class ended and approach the professor alone rather than draw attention by asking in front of everyone.
- Even so, he encourages young people to ask questions and raise their hands. When you put a problem into words, you internalize it — it takes a different shape and you understand it better.
- Naming the pattern does not change it overnight. A student may acknowledge they tend to be quiet and still need time, practice, and role play before anything shifts.

## **BACK TO SCHOOL: THE FIRST TWO WEEKS**

The chair opened the circle's main question: what do the first two weeks or the first month look like in your programs, partnerships, and networks — and what are you able to do for Indigenous children in Arizona right now?

### **From San Carlos Middle School — Sarah Harris**

- Set up in the hallway at Meet the Teacher night alongside the district's new parent educator, handing out fidgets, water, and chips, and simply introducing herself.
- Rode along on roughly fifteen home visits with the truancy officer — learning the layout and the history of the community, hearing the local names for places, meeting parents and grandparents, and identifying the real barriers keeping kids from school: clothing, immunizations, and the like.
- Cultural success coaches were already running a care center with clothing, food, backpacks, and snacks. She chose to observe and learn rather than step over established processes.
- Introduced herself to sixth grade classes; now that school is in full swing she is being pulled into conflict resolution and the reactive side. Some students talk with her; others are flat and not ready to trust yet — she is a brand new face.

The chair offered encouragement: this work takes courage. Our children are always watching, and they know who is genuine and who is sincere. You can affect a child's life without ever directly working with them. Keep showing up and keep doing the next best thing.

## **Culture at the start of the year**

The chair raised whether culture is being introduced at registration and in the opening days. Some schools do not jump straight into instruction — they begin with acquaintance and relationship building, then move gradually into the formal work. Much of that language ties to the original stories of our tribes. When Indigenous teachers come in with that cultural root, those creation stories prepare a young person — they create the illustration of what a child identifies with, how we came to be a people, and the fact that we have survived many, many years. The chair would love to see more original teachings at the beginning of a new school year.

Sarah Harris noted that her assistant principal, who is not Native, wore her camp dress on the first day of school, and that sixth grade specials at San Carlos include learning and strengthening the Apache language — the point where students there get the most cultural exposure.

## **What would you want every new teacher to know?**

- **Waylon Honga:** that it is a chore for a Native child to raise their hand and say something. It is out of character and it is not easy, even when they know the answer. Public speaking is already among the most anxiety-producing things a person can do — add the group-first value on top of it and you have poured gas on that fire.
- **Sandra Sandoval (in chat):** be patient and understanding of Native students, because a lot can be happening at home that we don't know of. They won't open up until trust has been established, and that takes a lot to build.
- **Sarah Rocha:** educators should make space to acknowledge that summer is not always celebration and fun for every child — and to say plainly, *I'm here before and after school, I want to get to know you, and if one-on-one is easier than a group, I can make a couple of minutes.* That space tells a student they don't have to speak in a big group. Most educators plan in groups because of time, but a little of this goes a long way. (This closely

echoes the implicit bias conversation from our July circle.)

- **Waylon Honga, on praise:** from his years with the Native American outreach program at Freeport-McMoRan, he watched supervisors publicly single out a Native employee in front of the whole crew for doing something right — a genuine good, but a pedestal, and deeply uncomfortable. The same caution applies to the Native student with the highest grade in the class.

The chair shared her own first-grade memory of finally raising her hand, giving an answer that made the whole class laugh, and deciding never to raise it again. What she would tell that teacher now: find an appropriate moment to pull that child aside, embrace her, and support her the next time she walks into the classroom — because it is going to feel scary. That disconnect is exactly where we have the opportunity to show up.

### **An idea worth carrying forward — Diane Stuart Englehardt**

Diane proposed creating a “Top 10 Things a Native Child Would Like You to Know About Them” list for teachers, modeled on the version she has long shared with ESS and general education staff for students with autism. She noted it is especially timely: her district has a major push this year on collaborative and team-based work, with teachers actually being evaluated on how their students work together as a team — and after hearing Waylon, it is clear that group work may look very different for Native students. She asked whether such a resource already exists, or whether it is something worth creating.

## **RESOURCES SHARED**

Full details are in the companion resource handout distributed with these notes.

- **Office of Indian Education Summit** — September 8–10, 2026, Phoenix (*Sandra Sandoval*)
- **\$750 Back-to-School Supply Grants**, National Life Group / LifeChanger of the Year — **applications close August 15, 2026** (*Waylon Honga*)
- **“Our Youth, Our Future” youth survey**, Colorado State University — for schools on or near a reservation; participating schools receive reimbursement (*Sarah Harris, who ran it with her 6th–8th graders last year*)

- **Gila River CASA / GAL Program** — volunteers needed; Sharon Banda, CASA Coordinator, 520-562-9860 ext. 9928 (*Diane Stuart Englehardt*)
- **Resilience Empowerment Project (REP)**, Arizona ACEs Consortium — training for educators and school staff (*Chair*)
- ***The Regulated Classroom*** by Emily Read Daniels (*Chair*)

## WHO SAT IN CIRCLE WITH US

Relatives who introduced themselves and offered their contact information for continued connection:

- **Waylon Honga** — Hualapai Nation, based in Flagstaff — waylonhongahong@hotmail.com
- **Sarah Harris** — School Counselor, San Carlos Middle School, Gila County — sa.harris@sancarlos.k12.az.us
- **Andi Fetzner** — Co-founder, Origins Training and The Resilience Learning Community; Behavioral Health Consultant, Elk Ridge Health (Apache and Navajo counties); Telehealth Therapist, Integrative Counseling; based in the White Mountains — andi.fetzner@originstraining.org
- **Erin Yager-DeConcini** (she/her) — Program Director, TISAPP (Trauma-Informed Substance Abuse Prevention Program), Child & Family Resources, Tucson — eyager-deconcini@cfraz.org (*first circle with us — welcome!*)
- **Nanmathi Manian** — Adjunct professor and evaluation technical assistance provider, joining from Maryland; trauma-informed and social emotional learning practices — NanmathiManian@westat.com
- **Diane Stuart Englehardt** — School Counselor, Heartland Ranch K–5, Coolidge, Pinal County
- **Nicole Olvera** — DES Division of Child Support Services — nicoleolvera@azdes.gov
- **Sandra Sandoval**
- **Sarah Rocha**
- **Adrian** (she/her)

## FOLLOW-UP

- Recording and resource handout to be shared with the full committee.
- Relatives working in schools: apply for the LifeChanger supply grant before the **August 15** deadline.
- Waylon Honga invited to present again — the chair will schedule additional time for his economic development and politics presentations.
- Open question from Diane: does a “Top 10 for teachers of Native students” resource already exist, or should this committee help create one? Bring findings and thoughts to a future circle.
- Chair to send the flyer for September’s speaker and topic.
- Committee members: keep your role, organization, county, and email current in the chat so the running list stays accurate and we can confirm we are reaching rural Arizona.

## CLOSING

The circle closed in prayer — gratitude for Waylon’s presentation, for the time spent together, and for the topics and ideas shared; a request that what was learned be carried gently and in a good way back into our work and our lives; and a reminder that the whole purpose of this is to walk into our children’s schools and environments with this knowledge and this support, so that we can better serve them.

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*Our next circle: Wednesday, September 2 | 1:00–2:00 PM Arizona time*  
*A new speaker and topic — flyer to follow. All relatives are welcome. Please bring someone with you.*

*With gratitude for the wisdom you carry,*

**Cassandra Stouder**

*Chair, Rural & Indigenous Community Committee*

*Arizona ACEs Consortium*