

April 5, 2021

Dear State Department of Education,

My name is Carol A. Wahpepah and I just recently retired from being an English Language Arts public school teacher for the past 30 years. I was fortunate to teach in a small rural 3A school for four years where there was a diverse student population; many of whom were Native American. My last 27 years were spent in a larger 6A school with a few Native American students. Neither schools offered any type of Native American societies or clubs. My being a teacher and being visibly Native American, hopefully encouraged my Native American students that they could finish high school and continue on to college. I worked on building relationships to bring those students in to counsel them and just to let them know that I was there for them. Both the schools that I worked in, did provide tutoring for the Native American students and occasionally offered field trips that related to their culture.

When I heard about Sovereign Community Schools in Oklahoma City, I was excited about how this would impact our Native American students, many of whom seem lost in public schools. According to the U.S. Department of Education's Indian Nations at Risk Task Force, Native American students have the highest drop rate of any ethnic or racial group. About three out of every 10 indigenous students drop out before graduating from high school. Sovereign offers classes that are rigorous and culturally relevant which can only increase Native American student engagement. This will, in turn, help develop productive citizens with high school diplomas and/or college degrees.

I fully support the mission and efforts that Sovereign has continued to put forward. The school is working hard to ensure the future of indigenous students in Oklahoma. Despite the pandemic of the past year, Sovereign hustled to meet the needs of all its students. It would be a great loss not to allow Sovereign the opportunity to continue to grow in Oklahoma, which has one of the highest proportions of Native Americans.

Thank you,
Carol A. Wahpepah
Norman, Oklahoma