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**National Indian Education Association Launches Landmark Whole Child Initiative at 53<sup>rd</sup> Annual Convention and Trade Show Presidential Session**

***Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, October 4, 2022*** – This week, the National Indian Education Association (NIEA) is hosting its 53<sup>rd</sup> Annual Convention and Trade Show from October 5-8 at the Oklahoma City Convention Center in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

As part of the Presidential Sessions this week, NIEA is launching its Whole Child Initiative on Thursday, October 6, 2022, from 2:30-5:00pm. This landmark initiative creates a framework that is part of the academic wheel, closing gaps in our current education systems that address mental, spiritual, physical, and emotional needs of Indigenous students.

“The Whole Child Initiative is the next step in our journey to return to our Indigenous knowledge and values for our children and families,” said Diana Cournoyer, Executive Director of the National Indian Education Association. “Through Education Sovereignty and the Whole Child Initiative, we are committed to healing school communities and engaging the hearts, souls, and spirits of students in ways that are both practical and sustainable as we move into a new era of Indigenous education.”

The NIEA Whole Child Team has developed responsive framework driven by Indigenous values and measured through culturally relevant quantitative and qualitative evaluation to meet the primary goals of the initiative:

- 1) Establish new standards and assessments in Native education;
- 2) Create a sustainable system of wrap-around education; and
- 3) Formalize a vision for the next steps in community-based and community-informed education.

“The National Indian Education Association has long been a leader in the Indigenous education space, blazing the trail for supporting Native students across the country,” said Jason Dropik, President of NIEA’s Board of Directors. “With the Whole Child Initiative, we will continue to innovate and revolutionize the ways we uplift our students and communities.”

“Our initiative framework is based on four pathways developed by the Center for Educational Improvement,” said Melanie Johnson, Director of the Whole Child Initiative at NIEA. “Focusing on prevention, support, building resiliency, and developing protective factors, the Whole Child Initiative reclaims the strengths of Indigenous students and taps into their innate brilliance through the power of Education Sovereignty.”

The theme for the 53<sup>rd</sup> Annual NIEA Convention and Trade Show is “**Education Sovereignty. Our Choice.**” This convention brings together partners, stakeholders, tribal leaders, educators,

teachers, parents, and community members to impact the future of Native education. We are in a new era of Native education empowered through tribal sovereignty, self-governance, and Indigenous knowledge learning models. This is Education Sovereignty: Our Culture, Our Curriculum, Our Schools, Our Students, Our Choice.

Join the Presidential Session on Thursday, October 6, 2022, at the Oklahoma City Convention Center from 2:30 to 5:00pm in Ballroom A. Titled “Cultivating Whole Child Approaches Through an Indigenous Lens,” presenters from the NIEA Whole Child Initiative Team will include Raquel Ramos, Whole Child Initiative Prevention Specialist, and partner organization We R Native to discuss the codification of the Whole Child work.

For more information on the Initiative, contact Whole Child Initiative Director Melanie Johnson at [mjohnson@niea.org](mailto:mjohnson@niea.org).

For more information on the 53<sup>rd</sup> Annual NIEA Convention and Trade Show agenda, visit NIEA’s website [here](#).

For all press inquiries, please contact [press@niea.org](mailto:press@niea.org).

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*The National Indian Education Association (NIEA) advances comprehensive, culture-based educational opportunities for American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians. NIEA was formed in 1969, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, by Native educators who were anxious to find solutions to improve the education system for Native children. The NIEA Convention was established to mark the beginning of a national forum for sharing and developing ideas and influencing federal policy.*