

Good morning. I am so pleased to be here this morning as I always cherish opportunities to talk about education, and, in particular, I love to talk about Indian Education. First introduced in 1972, the Indian Education Act has always been part of the Elementary and Secondary Education umbrella. The last thing Senator Robert Kennedy did before his untimely death, was to go into Indian country. He found the conditions deplorable and that parents had little say in the education of their children. Therefore, the call for Indian Education was Kennedy's way of addressing this critical matter. Indian Education is about self-determination where Native parents do have a say in their children's education. Our program is called the Title VI Indian Education Program of the Nulhegan of the Coosuk Abenaki Tribe, located in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont. Our program works with the support of the North Country Supervisory Union and the Orleans Central Supervisory Union. It is our intention to work with students so that they learn about the rich Vermont history which truly defines our State. Toward that end, it is our belief that youngsters should learn the Abenaki history and in this way, they may learn about the cultural diversity which is so much a part of Vermont. Through the Indian Education program, we send in Nulhegan citizens/educators who can tailor-make programming to fit whatever it is the teacher or school requests. We can explore the pre-contact period right through the Abenaki community today. We try to incorporate hands-on learning wherever possible because that's how many students learn. We introduce the housing, clothing, hunting, gardening, food preservation, pottery, baskets, transportation, drumming, and singing traditions that defined our people 10,000 years ago! We then offer workshops on the contact period when the Europeans arrived, and compare and contrast the European traditions with those of my ancestors. While it is never our intention to castigate or put down the White man, we do ask this question of the students: "Do you think the Indians were better off once the Europeans came and sought assimilation, or were they better off before they came?"

This question asks students to turn introspective and really think about the Native experience in a way they have never before thought. This is called critical thinking and it is our hope that through our presentations, and the follow-up activities that we try to present, students will have a much more informed understanding of history. This is our hope and feedback has been very encouraging. Indeed, we are able to prepare our curricular offerings to all age groups, ranging from Pre-K through Grade 12. There are certain topics we do not teach the younger children, as developmentally many young people are not prepared to hear about the Vermont Eugenics program of the 1920's when Henry Perkins, a zoology professor at the University of Vermont, headed up the most deplorable movement in our history, when the state practiced sterilization to rid itself of the "undesirables." Unfortunately for the Abenaki, and others like the "mixed bloods," gypsies, mentally defective, and others were routinely rounded up and given a stark choice of either going to jail or submitting to sterilization. This was how Vermont dealt with "hoards" of immigrants and peoples who did not fit the "anglo saxon" mode of desirability. For further information, please read Jane Gallagher's seminal book, "Breeding Better Vermonters." Of course, you now understand why we need to be very sensitive about subject matter introduced in classrooms, yet it is important to consider that we believe it is only by understanding history, that we will not repeat it. Thus, we look at how students embrace the materials we teach. We look at outcomes through discussions with students where the aforementioned questions are posed to children. We are in the midst of developing evaluation methodology with the support of those community members well-versed in participatory dialogue. We are always looking to make our presentations better and more interesting to students, and this is why we believe the use of follow up questionnaires will support us in this desire. Furthermore, we believe it is critical to collaborate wherever possible, as this is the best way to leverage additional resources that would not be available from our modest grant. We are very proud of our partnerships that include: The Vermont Rural Education

Collaborative; the Equity Collaborative; the Vermont Commission on Native American Affairs; and our sister Title VI Program located in the Missisquoi Valley Union School District. In closing, I want to just say that your support in our obtaining State Recognition was critically important, as we work to fulfill the tenets of social justice and equity. The reality is we still have much that needs to be accomplished in Vermont. Classrooms are dotted with interesting applications of our rich history and culture, yet too often when Vermont history is taught, there is no reference made to the Abenaki. We believe that all 4th grade classrooms should include students learning about the Abenaki. We do not ask to have prescribed lesson plans taught, as there are many teachers throughout Vermont who want to include a section on the Abenaki, and these are extremely talented individuals. Still, in too many cases, teachers have neither the time nor resources to make this happen. Therefore, we have tried to look at after-school programming as the way to include the Abenaki. We have piloted the teaching of Abenaki through the arts that include crafts, music ( mostly traditional drumming ), and other hands-on possibilities that young people are very much drawn to. The 21st Century model is one used in Vermont, and we very much support this particular programming. The bottom-line is this: Vermont has been the home to my people for thousands of years, and in the name of teaching students history that is inclusive, we must integrate the teachings of the Vermont Abenaki. Our program has shown that when given the opportunity, classroom teachers want to include the Abenaki. Through creative programming, two supervisory unions have benefited from a rich collaboration, and it is our hope that more students have the opportunity to learn about the cultural diversity that enriches all of us. As kids take their place in global communities, it is important they learn that despite our differences, we share a commonality, and that is a commitment to democratic learning . Thank you for the opportunity to share something about our Title VI Indian Education Program, and I am available for any questions, or for further discussion at a later date.

