Improving Math, Science, and Technology

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**Scholarly Commons Citation**
Lehrer, H., & Bowen, B. D. (2002). Improving Math, Science, and Technology. Retrieved from [https://commons.erau.edu/ni-s1d-nsf/3](https://commons.erau.edu/ni-s1d-nsf/3)

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Improving Math, Science, and Technology Skills Among Selected Nebraska Native American Children

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Initiative funded by grants from
National Science Foundation/Nebraska EPSCoR
Aerospace States Association
Nebraska NASA Space Grant (NNSG)

Some Foundational Facts

- Motivation for at-risk elementary school children is not new
- Focusing on children in Native American reservation schools is unique
- The NASA Nebraska Space Grant (NNSG) began outreach over 4 ½ years ago
- The administration, faculty, and staff of the 4 Nebraska reservations schools and the two tribal colleges have been the target
- The concept used is called Family Aeronautical Science (FAS)

Three Underlying Principles

- Infrastructure Building
- We must know and trust each other
- Motivation of Students
- Students need to view science and math as fun things to do
- Curriculum Enhancement
- Integrate as much NASA science into the curriculum as possible

The Family Science Concept

- Study basic aeronautics during the regular school day
- Children and their parents attend evenings school functions
- Enjoy joint activities based on aeronautics
- A demonstration project occurred during the 2000-2001 school year at the Santee Community School on the Santee Sioux Reservation

Background

- Many reservation populations are plagued by un-employment
- In many cases, family conditions are poor
- School age children often have difficulty in meeting minimum academic standards
- Few students graduate from high school
- A smaller number attend higher education
- Many have limited skills in mathematics and science
First Demonstration in Santee
- Located on the northern border of NE
- Tribe numbers about 800 members
- School of about 200 students from K –12
- Location is isolated from distractions
- Administration and staff is most supportive
- NICC is located across the street
- Schools has gotten previous NNSG grants

A Key Piece of the Puzzle
- In 1999, one teacher from each reservation school went to NASA Ames
- The schools were Omaha Nation, Santee, Walthill, and Winnebago
- At the RURAL Workshop, teachers learned a multitude of aeronautical and aerospace skills
- We were able to send four more teachers summer of 2001

Basic Family Science Tenants
- Focused on grades 4 to 6 (but included family members in higher or lower grades)
- Integrated aeronautics into science periods
- Used the school computer lab heavily
- Scheduled 4 Family Fun Nights for academic year
- Planned for an evening meal each session
- Prayed heavily that the concept would work

Demonstration Dates and Activities
- October 2000: Forty-seven attendees, weather was clear, played airplane games
- November 2000: One hundred forty attendees, weather clear, CAPOW Wagon
- February 2001: Heavy snow, event cancelled
- April 2001: Forty-five attendees, taught parents to fly simulator, weather clear
- Attendance at other schools currently involved has been overwhelming

Participants’ Comments
- “I’m into that flying now.” Sonny, 8th grade
- “Not enough lift, you stall.” Jeff, 6th grade
- “I have seen my child’s grade go from D’s & F’s to B’s and C’s” (the same student is now on the honor roll)
- “My kids have been to school in Sioux City, and they don’t have anything like this for the kids.”
- “That’s all my boy wants to do is go to the computer lab.”

Second Year Activities
- Continued Santee program except moved focus to grades 1 to 4
- Started new programs at Winnebago and Walthill modeled after the Santee demonstration
- Paid a small stipend to the team leader at each school
• Allowed each school some latitude as to the exact integration of the aeronautics into the curriculum

Aeronautics Day is a Key
• Begun in the Fall of 1997
• Hosted by the 185th Fighter Wing, JetSun, and Sioux Gateway Airport
• Close to 1,000 Nebraska Native American youngsters have attended
• The message is stay in school, do well, study math and science, no drugs or alcohol, and there will be a future for you in aeronautics

Activities
• Day begins with assembly at the 185th Auditorium
• A bit of patriotism
• Pilot briefing
• Tours of the 185th and JetSun
• Groups rotate to both locations
• Lunch together
• Door prizes (everyone gets something)

Conclusions
• A great deal of headway has been made
• We are moving more slowly than many would wish
• We have built from the bottom up
• Such an approach is slower but more solid when completed
• NASA research in science and mathematics is slowly finding its way into classroom
• Students that are experiencing an aeronautics-based approach to mathematics and science seem eager for more
• A marked improvement in grades and achievement has been found in several Santee students
• A great deal of positive is feedback is coming from parents and teachers alike
• More summative evaluation is planned for future activities
• It has become clear that more integration is needed in the math and science preparation streams between reservation school and tribal college
• We believe we are on the right track!

Original Date: 5/1/2002