

Written by

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Danielle Grant, director of the Indian Education Department at Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS), on October 16 was recognized as one of three Outstanding American Indian Administrators by the Minnesota Indian Education Association (MIEA) at the organization's annual conference.

Grant is the first administrator from an urban school district to receive the award. Honorees are selected based on the nominee's role in the education community, leadership skills and the way that he or she reflects American Indian culture in his or her life and work style. "An outstanding administrator is someone who is a role model and leader, someone who tries to make a difference in the education community and someone who is working to improve the lives of American Indian students," a representative from MIEA said in a statement. "Danielle meets, and far exceeds, those requirements. She truly deserves the award."

During Grant's four years with MPS, her department has shifted from an intervention model of providing direct student services to a proactive model that builds partnerships with community leaders and organizations. "As a school district, we have embraced a systematic change that will benefit our Native families," Grant said.

Grant and the Indian Education Department are working to build trust between the school system and the Native American community. "The American education system, especially during the boarding school era, took the family, the community and the tribe out of education in a dramatic way that was devastating to us culturally," Grant said, referring to the boarding schools of the late 19th to mid-20th centuries that sought to suppress Native culture and enforce European-American cultural values. "The only way to heal from that is to bring family and community engagement back into the schools."

In addition to building partnerships with the community and families, the Indian Education Department provides teachers and school staff with curriculum, resources, professional development and coaching to help them shift classroom elements and instructional practices to better engage Native learners. The department also provides support for school readiness including the High Five program at Anishinabe Academy and college readiness for high school students through counseling services and an academic mentoring program called College Personalized Resources and Education Pathways (PREP).