



Native Approaches to Special Education (NASPED) *Family Stories*

The Torrez Family Journey

As a single mother of five beautiful children, two of whom receive IEP services, I've come to understand that navigating special education as a Native family in an urban setting is not just a process – it's a spiritual and cultural journey. It started over 15 years ago when I had to step into advocacy for my oldest daughter. I remember the lump in my throat walking into those early meetings, feeling unprepared and unsupported. There were few resources, little tribal support, and long delays between meetings. But I refused to accept 'I don't know' as an answer.

I taught myself the system. I researched, I reached out, and I made space at the table for my voice—and my daughter's. I included our cultural identity in every conversation: what it means to be Native, to pray daily, to walk in balance, and to find our children's roles in both the school and our community.

Now, years later, I continue the journey with my youngest, who has medical needs requiring new approaches to learning. Again, I returned to that

table, not just for her, but for others.

I now sit beside Native families in Sioux City who are also learning how to advocate for their children. We don't always have the support services we need—but we do have each other, our culture, and our will to keep showing up.

Culture and prayer are the cornerstones of our family's growth. They are what sustain us – through IEP meetings, medical appointments, and the everyday demands of being Native in an urban setting. Our faith and traditions are not separate from education; they are the strength that carries us through it. Watching my children embrace who they are – Dakotah, Native, resilient – gives me hope. In our community, we may not always be known by name, but through our perseverance and shared values, we are seen and we are rising.

~ Falon Torrez, Isanti Dakotah



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