

# Bishop Elementary

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Collaborating with Students to Create a  
Better Social Studies Curriculum

Case Study



Studies  
Weekly®

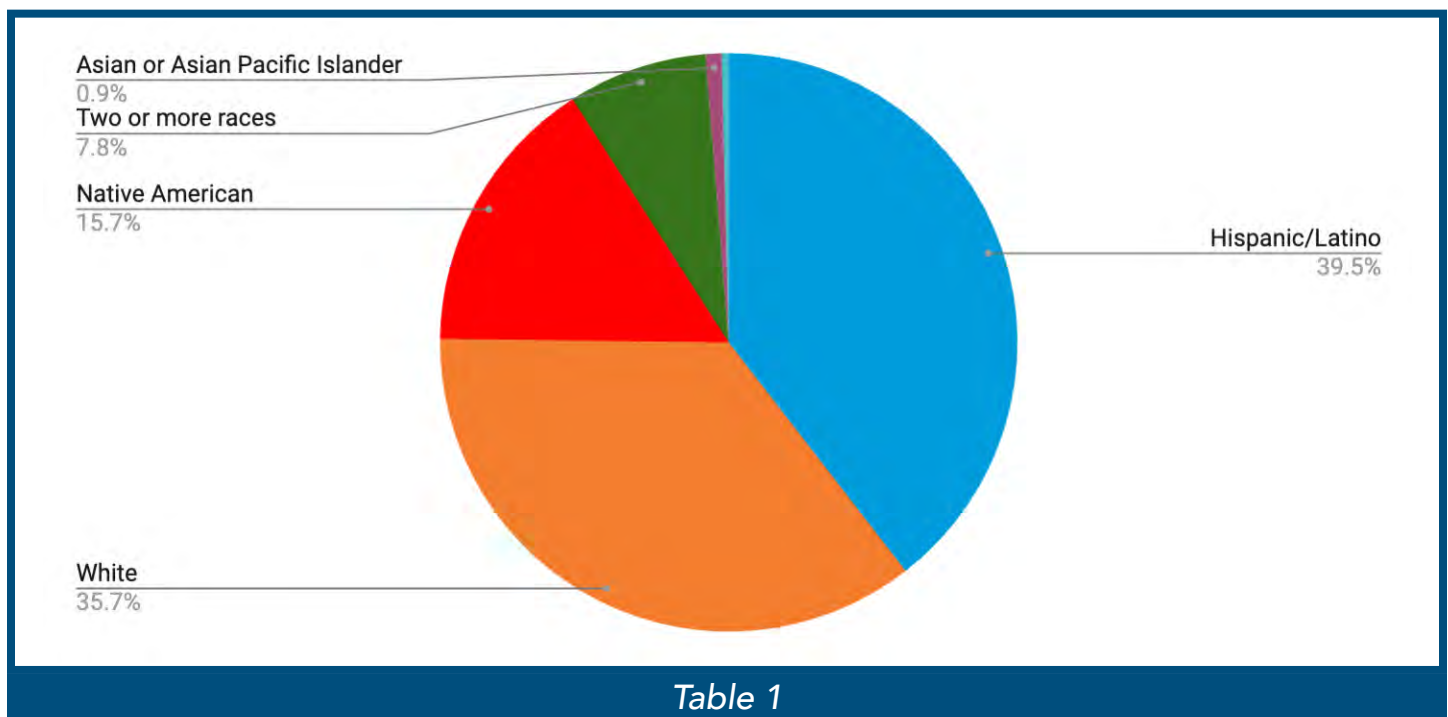
## Introduction

Studies Weekly turned a classroom’s product feedback into an excellent opportunity for students to take civic action and collaborate with the company’s curriculum team to strengthen and amplify the voices of California’s indigenous tribes in Studies Weekly Social Studies.

The collaboration kicked off when fourth-grade students in Tiffany Vandehoven’s class at Bishop Elementary School in the Bishop Unified School District in California reached out to Studies Weekly and asked for more representation of indigenous people in California social studies content.

## The Story of Bishop Elementary

As shown in Table 1, Bishop Elementary has a diverse student body with 15.7% identifying as Native American. It was important to the school district to have a curriculum that shines a light on each group in their community, including the Indigenous People of California.



Located in Inyo County, Bishop Elementary is a part of the territory that historically belonged to two tribes: Paiute and Shoshone. (See map on the next page) While the Studies Weekly California Social Studies curriculum includes significant information about various indigenous tribes in the state, the students wanted more content about their local tribes.



Indigenous peoples from these tribes still live in and near Bishop Elementary, including the students. With the help of Mrs. Vandehoven, they wrote letters to the Studies Weekly Team. Here are a few of the letters:

*Dear Studies Weekly Publishers,*

*I'm writing this letter to you to share my opinion on Studies Weekly. First I want to tell you a little about me. I'm five foot and five inches tall (almost taller than my teacher) and I'm in fourth grade in Bishop CA, also known as Payhuunadu. My family is part Shoshone and Paiute. I like that I learn more about California during social studies. I like that you include other tribes in Studies Weekly. I like that when I don't have time to read, I can watch the videos.*

*The one flaw that I want to bring to your attention is that I don't see a lot about the Paiute tribe or Shoshone tribe who are both important parts of California's history. I'd like Studies Weekly newspaper readers to learn how Paiute and Shoshone people lived peacefully for thousands of years. Also, it would be interesting to learn about our language and culture, and what it was like for my ancestors when the explorers came here. Maybe there should be information about indigenous people in every week of the weekly readers?*

*So in conclusion, it's starting off great, but in my opinion, Studies Weekly needs more about local tribes and the perspective of Native Americans included throughout please.*

*Thank you, Waylan*

*Deer Studies Weekly Publishers,*

*I am writing this letter to you to share my opinion on Studies Weekly. First, I would like to tell you a little about me. I am a 4th Grade student in Bishop California, also known as Payhuunadu. I like to play sports like basketball. Also I'm from Chico, California. I would now like to tell you things I like and I would like to change about Studies Weekly. I really like the newspapers because there are crossword puzzles and also we can learn about some Native American tribes.*

*In the newspaper, I really like learning about the tribes because I like the primary source documents that we can look at, and we can watch the videos from home. What I think you should change about Studies Weekly is to please include the Navite Americans' perspective and include all of the tribes in California, such as Paiutes. I wonder if the Native American perspective could be included in each week? Most importantly, I would like to change the use of past tense words when talking about the Native Americans because it makes it sound like we are not still here. It would be interesting to add information about how the Paiutes make baskets and how we pass on our traditions. So please consider this request.*

*Thanks,  
4th Grade Student from Bishop, also known as Payhuunadu*



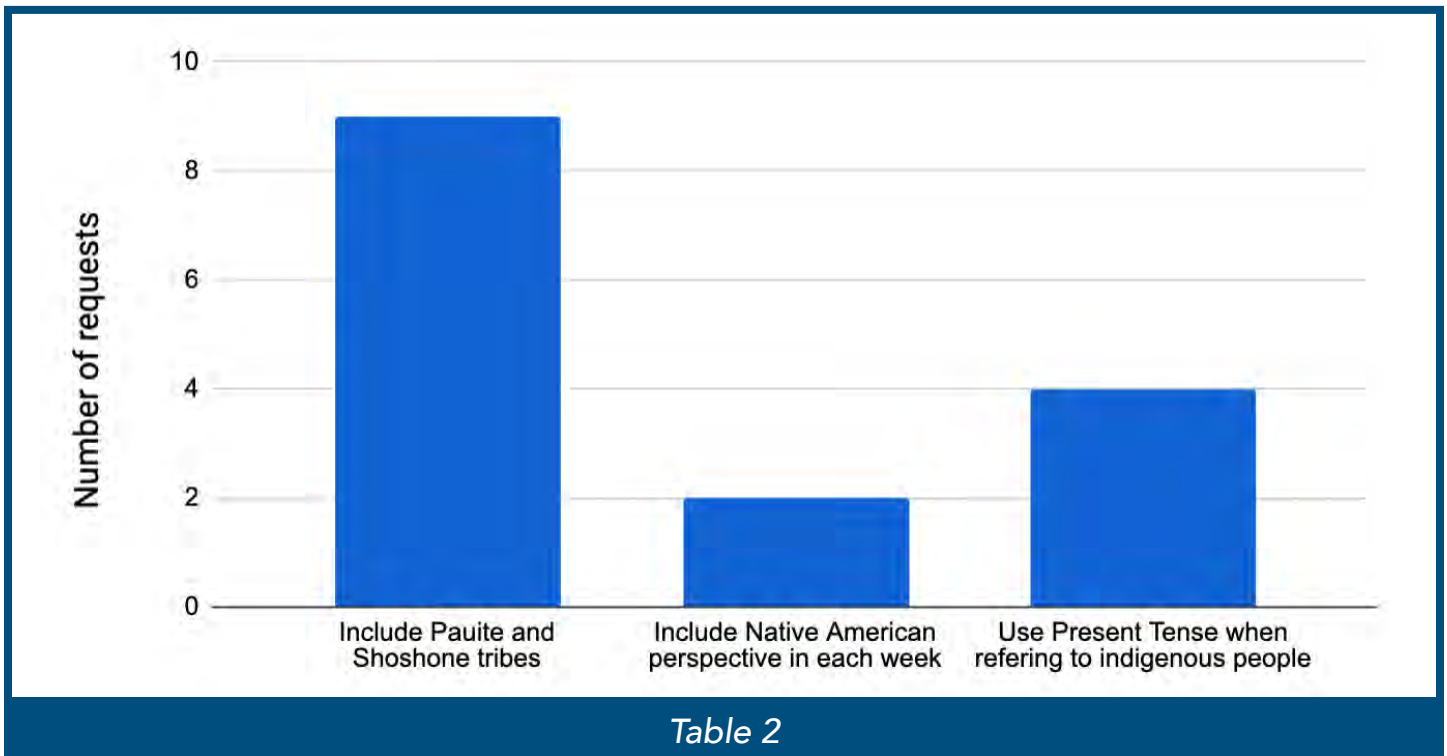
*Dear Studies Weekly Publishers,*

*I am writing this letter to you to share my opinion on studies weekly. First I'd like to tell you a little about me. I am a fourth grader in elementary school. This is my family, two dogs named Cody and Tanke, my mom and dad, and my sister. Oh, and my name is summer! My favorite thing to do is horseback riding. My favorite animal is a horse. I have blond hair and blue eyes. My friends are Alya Owen Nattile and Nathine and a few more, but we don't have time to talk about all of my friends.*

*I like the pictures in Studies Weekly, and the crosswords. And I love history. I like learning about explorers. But I think it would be more accurate to be a little more inclusive. For example, we would like you to talk more about Paiute, our local tribe.*

*Thank you, Summer*

Overall, the students of Mrs. Vandehoven’s class wanted the curriculum to share more of the history of Paiute and Shoshone tribes and show their importance in California. Students also asked Studies Weekly to use present tense when talking about Native Americans because their heritage is still continuing among modern communities.



## The Perfect Opportunity to Collaborate

Mrs. Vandehoven emailed Studies Weekly on behalf of her students, expressing their wishes for more representation and region-based content and sending the students’ letters. Because the email was so specific and content-related, the support team forwarded it to Dr. Noelle Carter, Studies Weekly’s chief curriculum architect.

Dr. Carter was so inspired by the students’ letters, she decided to work with Mrs. Vandehoven to create an inquiry research project for the class.

“As a former teacher, I thought that this might be a great opportunity to give the class some real-world experience to make claims that they support with evidence and to take civic action to make changes for good,” Dr. Carter said. “Tiffany was great to work with as we set up the project.”

She continued, “The idea was that it would be a great opportunity for her students to do an inquiry research project that ended in letting their voices be heard.”

## The Process

The students researched California tribes, and local tribal leaders came to the class to share their own knowledge about the tribe or tribes they were from. They also helped the students connect their heritage to modern day.

“Tiffany had quite a few Native American students from a couple of different tribes in her classroom, so the project was very relevant, but I was also impressed that all of the students were invested in the project and in the heritage of their location,” Dr. Carter said.

The tribal leaders were also impressed since they never learned about their heritage in school. It made them happy to see the younger generation discovering more about their tribe’s history and culture in an educational setting.

Once students completed their research, they wrote essays about what they learned.

Mrs. Vandehoven arranged for Dr. Carter to meet with the students over a Zoom call to present their findings. Chris Stott, Studies Weekly regional manager, went to Bishop to be there in person.



*Dr. Noelle Carter, center on screen, collaborated with Tiffany Vandehoven, far left, and her 4th grade class and local California tribal leaders to add additional content to the California social studies content.*

The students read their research essays out loud to Dr. Carter

“That was evidence to me that she is a good writing teacher. The essays were nicely organized and had excellent details and support for their claims,” Dr. Carter said.

Dr. Carter led a discussion about what the students wanted to see in Studies Weekly about their specific community. The students also talked about how the learning they gained about their heritage would benefit them in different careers.

“It’s so powerful for students to be part of an experience like that. It teaches you that you really can make a difference and that you

can be a thought leader no matter how old you are,” Dr. Carter said.

## The Results

Dr. Carter and her team used the students' research to upgrade the California Social Studies curriculum with more representation of Indigenous People from that region.

She and Mrs. Vandehoven have followed up on the subject and decided the students have more to offer. The students are working on another research project with the goal to present their essays to Studies Weekly's production team at a later date. Studies Weekly will add their research to the online publications, while giving FERPA-safe credit to her class for the work.

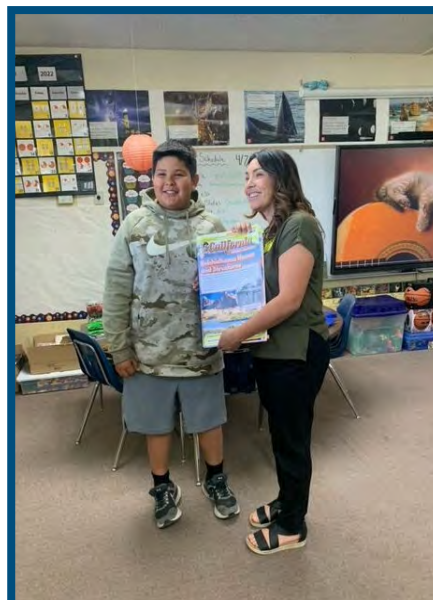
"I'm excited to see their writing, and I'm grateful to Tiffany for being the kind of teacher who would provide this kind of learning opportunity for her students," Dr. Carter said.

While Dr. Carter and her team did extensive research and contacted local tribes as part of their work to create the new California Studies Weekly publications, it was impossible for them to cover all 111 federally recognized California tribes in depth.

"But thanks to Mrs. Vandehoven's class, we'll be able to include content on two or three more tribes, and most importantly, they are telling their own story," Dr. Carter added. "I'm grateful that we have a venue for their story to be heard."



*Sage Romero (tribal member) telling a story*



*Waylan holding up the draft of the new CA curriculum*



*Koso showing his bow to the class*