

# Red Lake Nation College

A Warrior Nation, A Learning Tribe With Opportunity for All

 Red Lake, Minnesota, USA  150 Users  Started 2017



Building a legacy for future generations of students is a primary focus for Red Lake Nation College. Adapting to new technologies is just one way the Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indian community serves students in geographically remote areas and provides them access to higher education and future employment training. That's why they chose Canvas. Its mobile applications keep students in remote areas connected and informed. Professors can update grades constantly, and advisors have real-time updates on students' academic progress and class attendance. And Canvas Analytics allows administrators to connect course-level outcomes to institution-level outcomes.

## The Challenge

Red Lake Nation College is a tribal community college on the Red Lake Indian Reservation in northwestern Minnesota, home to the Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians. With the support of elders and community members, the college serves students in geographically remote locations, providing higher education and training for future employment.

According to Red Lake Nation College President and tribal member Dan King, 33% of U.S. students earn a four-year degree, but that number is only 1.5% within the Red Lake community. "What we have here on our reservation isn't an education gap," King said, "it's an education canyon."

King and other Red Lake administrators aim to close that "canyon" by providing exceptional learning experiences, but their challenges are many. The average Red Lake student is a 29-year-old female with children, and 80% are the first in their families to go to college.

## Key Findings

01

**Red Lake Nation College chose Canvas for its interface, mobile applications, and analytics capabilities.**

02

**Canvas Data helps administrators "see inside the classroom," while features like Canvas Outcomes and the Learning Mastery View for teachers help support accreditation.**

03

**Since Red Lake implemented Canvas, the student retention rate improved 10–20 percent (from 60–70 percent to 80 percent) from semester to semester.**

Distance, transportation, and other issues deter many prospective students from enrolling. Until recently, the college was housed in one 4,500 square-foot building with outdated resources.

Yet, Red Lake Nation is primed to reach its potential. "Our 12,000 people are members of this warrior tradition and warrior people. That's in the DNA of our tribe," King said. In 2015, thanks to King's effort to secure funding, the college constructed a new, state-of-the-art, 45,000 square-foot facility to serve the college's needs better and provide space where every member of the Red Lake community can access Wi-Fi and the Tribal Archives.

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*-Cassy Leepport,  
Director of Library Services and Tribal Archives*

With their physical infrastructure updated, Red Lake recognized the need to invest in learning technology to better prepare students for the future. As Mandy Schram, VP of Operations and Academic Affairs, said, “We have so many staff- and faculty who are dedicated to elevating the school to make it a 21st-century educational institution. Nobody wants to go backward; everybody wants to go forward.”

Going forward for Red Lake meant implementing a learning management system that was, in their words, “excellent, affordable, and user-friendly.”

“Canvas has been a big help for us because we look at technology as a tool, and in our tribal history, adaptation to new technologies has been one of our strengths.”

Dan King, President of Red Lake Nation College

### **The Solution**

Red Lake Nation College partners with three other tribal colleges in Minnesota. Together, the four institutions wanted to adopt the same LMS, ensuring they could work together and “share” classes according to enrollment. Additionally, administrators wanted a system that would help prepare students for four-year schools.

After evaluating at least a half dozen systems, Red Lake chose Canvas. As King said, “Once you compared them all and looked at the key factors, it was kind of an easy decision.”

“Our community and campus are vibrant, and I think that’s what Canvas is...the layout, the structure of it is vibrant. We need that. It instills hope and success.”

Mandy Schram, VP of Operations and Academic Affairs, Red Lake Nation College

With help from the Canvas Implementation Team to integrate their student information system (SIS) and train their teachers and staff, Red Lake implemented Canvas in less than a month, rolling out the system in time for fall 2017 classes. Because so many of their students graduated from high school before technology was ubiquitous, the college also introduced a technology placement test to identify students who would benefit from a developmental technology course.

With Canvas, Red Lake students now have a centralized place to access learning resources, turn in their work, give and get feedback, and progress toward their goals.

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### **Analytics Are the Answer**

Possibly the biggest reason Red Lake chose Canvas was its analytics capabilities, which enable the college to use data to meet larger,

institution-wide objectives. Nadine Bill, the college's director of Assessment and Institutional Effectiveness and member of the Upper Skagit Tribe of Washington State, explains how:

"Canvas allows faculty to monitor assignments, quizzes, and test scores. Through our language classes, we can assess a student's ability to correctly learn language pronunciation through audio samples submitted to the faculty. We're doing cultural preservation in our digital storytelling classes using Canvas apps.

I think our eureka moment came when we were able to see course analytics visually within the course shell. That was amazing because, in the past, as an institutional research or assessment director, I spent hours and hours collecting paper. I'm now able to glimpse—at an administrator-level—teaching and learning without having to be in the classroom myself."

### The Results

Red Lake is currently participating in an accreditation process through the Higher Learning Commission. During one visit, commissioners asked for Red Lake's 10-year plan. Administrators said they now have a 100-year plan because they're building a legacy for students' future generations.

Many native cultures worldwide subscribe to the Seventh Generation philosophy, which says we should consider how every decision will affect our descendants seven generations into the future.

Everyone at Red Lake Nation College says they are committed to that philosophy. Their primary goals are to make students confident, zprepared to earn advanced degrees, and proud of their culture and history.

Success stories on campus include Jen Hart, a student, and library technician, who started college later in life to raise her children. She said she had a hard time finding and keeping a job. Red Lake opened a path for her to become a student again. "[My children] see me now when I'm going to school. I graduated, but I'm continuing—and they're already talking about going to college," she said.

Benicio Tyler, a freshman who left the Wind River Indian Reservation in Wyoming to attend Red Lake, said, "I'm becoming somebody I didn't think I would be. College is just making me a whole different person, for the better, of course. And if you have an education, you can do anything."

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Nokomis Paiz, VP of Student Success at Red Lake, said, "I completely believe in my people and their ability to succeed and go beyond ... and to fill all of the roles that we need in professional realms here on the reservation."

King added: "I think opportunity and access to higher education are what we need to provide our members. Once they get that access and opportunity, they'll do the rest. They just need the same opportunity that everyone else has. And we need to provide it to them in an excellent manner, as our mission says. And the great thing about Canvas is that it helps us do that."