



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### LAKOTA IMMERSION SCHOOL OPENS ON ROSEBUD

*Wakanyeja Tokeyahci (Children First) launches virtually with a class of kindergarteners.*

**MISSION, South Dakota (August 25, 2020)** – The inaugural class of students of Wakanyeja Tokeyahci Wounspe Tipi (WT) or “Children First Learning Center” began their school year virtually on Tuesday, August 25<sup>th</sup>. WT is a Lakota-based immersion school located on the ancestral homelands of the Sicangu Lakota Oyate, a subdivision of the Oceti Sakowin (Great Sioux Nation), on what is now commonly known as the Rosebud Indian Reservation.

Wakanyeja Tokeyahci is a privately-operated school taking a holistic approach to education grounded in Lakota values, culture, and worldview. The school’s mission is to create a better world for future generations by providing an education that focuses on Lakota language fluency, academic preparedness, holistic health, and grounding in Lakota identity. “As Lakota, we believe that our children are sacred. The word for sacred (wakan) is actually the root word for child or children (wakanyeja),” said Sage Fast Dog, the Director of WT. “When we think about ways to create change, it always comes back to our youth.”

The Lakota-based education will ensure that Lakota lifeways and language continue through future generations. “A Sicangu nation-wide survey found that there were only about 500 fluent speakers living on the Rosebud Reservation, most of whom were over the age of 65, and none under the age of 18,” said Sicangu CDC Director Wizipan Little Elk. “Lakota language is at a crisis point here in Rosebud. Rather than sit and do nothing, we are acting in order to save the language.”

The Lakota-based education model is not the only unique aspect of Wakanyeja Tokeyahci. WT is also committed to using a balance of individualized student-led learning and a project-based curriculum geared toward developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills. “I’m so excited for incoming students to immerse themselves in a culturally rich environment that will empower, challenge, and nurture student’s minds, bodies and spirits,” said Dr. Nora Antoine, the Chair of the Sicangu CDC Board of Directors.

To commemorate the opening of the school, Sicangu CDC hosted a socially distanced ceremonial prayer, blessing, and opening remarks prior to the first day of classes. Additionally, a virtual open house will take place on Thursday, August 27<sup>th</sup>, with videos posted on the Sicangu CDC Facebook page every hour throughout the day, culminating with a live virtual Q&A session with school staff.



Four-year old Carlos Iron Eagle Feather is one of the students who is part of initial cohort. “I want to go to this school because I want to learn Lakota and other things,” he said. “When I grow up, I want to be an Army soldier like my dad.”

More information about the school can be found at: <https://www.sicangucdc.org/wakanyeja-tokeyahci> or on the Sicangu Community Development Corporation Facebook page.

**About the Sicangu Community Development Corporation**

Sicangu CDC is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization located on the Rosebud Reservation in Mission, South Dakota. As Lakota, we believe we are all related, and it is our duty to create a better world for future generations. At Sicangu CDC, we do this by empowering people, strengthening families, and building community – Lakota style. The Sicangu CDC is focused on revolutionizing the food, housing, education, and healthcare systems of the Sicangu. For more information please visit our website [www.sicangucdc.org](http://www.sicangucdc.org) or Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/sicangucdc>.

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