



## Support and Strategies for Enriching Achievement of Native American Students

<b>Date</b>	July 31, 2014
<b>Request</b>	01246

One of the states served by the Southeast Comprehensive Center (SECC) requested the center’s assistance in compiling information regarding educational support for Native American students. To obtain this information, SECC staff contacted 16 states that have state agency contacts for Indian Education and/or that indicate a population of more than 4,000 Native American (NA) students (U.S. Department of Education, 2008, 2014).

The center’s request to the 16 state departments of education (SDEs) consisted of the following, with respect to Native American students:

We would like to identify successful strategies and related policies that states, schools, and school districts have implemented to support and enrich academic performance, specifically to:

- Improve graduation rates
- Reduce dropout rates
- Reduce student suspensions
- Increase enrollment in upper level high school courses
- Increase enrollment in extracurricular activities
- Increase family engagement

Discussed below are the procedure for selecting materials for this report, general limitations of the resources, details regarding the states’ responses, and summaries of the selected resources.

Throughout this report, the following terms are used interchangeably: *Native American* and *American Indian* and *Alaska Native* and *Alaskan Native*, because the request team found that both sets of terms were used in literature to refer to these student groups.

## PROCEDURE

To identify potential content for this report, the Information Request team contacted 16 SDEs that provide support for Native American students (as noted, only states that indicated a population of more than 4,000 NA students were included), conducted several online searches, and reviewed materials that resulted from these efforts.

The request team conducted online searches—through EBSCO Academic Search Elite, ERIC, Google, and Google Scholar—for research studies, papers, briefs, reports, etc., that examined how states are supporting NA students. The request team used a combination of these search terms: American Indian/Native American education, high school graduation, cohort graduation rates, dropout rates, and dropout prevention strategies; ACT and SAT participation strategies; Advanced Placement (AP) strategies; student suspension programs, school/district discipline policies, and suspension rates; attendance rates, truancy, risk factors, and policy; bullying exclusion; school engagement; high school credits and credit accrual; instructional strategies, academic achievement, academic performance; family involvement, family literacy, parent engagement, and community engagement strategies; disadvantaged students; Title VII–Indian Education Act of 1972 and Title VII education requirements; instructional support, English learners/language development, and language barriers; alternative education programs; career and technical education (CTE); teacher quality; teacher expectations; rigor, core subjects, and core subject areas; mental and emotional supports; motivation; school culture, cultural perceptions, and culturally responsive education and policy.

The team reviewed 26 resources and selected 11 for inclusion in this report, based on two selection criteria: (a) publication date within the past 10 years and (b) content addressing support for Native American students or recommendations for addressing the educational needs of these students. The selected resources consist of a mix of peer-reviewed articles, research briefs, government reports, and research guides. The 11 resources highlight efforts to support Native students in a sampling of states—Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Minnesota, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, and Washington. They also discuss considerations, strategies, and recommendations regarding enriching the achievement of NA students. See the Resource Summaries section of this report for additional details.

## GENERAL LIMITATIONS

Of the 16 state agencies contacted by SECC, only two responded prior to completion of this report (Minnesota and North Carolina). The information provided by these states describes their practices and/or those of their respective schools and school districts. The request team did not attempt to determine if these practices were supported by a research base.

Additionally, there is a limited research base around successful strategies and support for Native American students. Therefore, this report focuses on the state-based information and summaries of both peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed resources from the following journals and organizations:

- *Education*
- ACT
- Center for Comprehensive School Reform
- Harvard University Native American Program
- Montana Office of Public Instruction

- National Center for Education Statistics
- National Indian Education Association
- Purdue University's Gifted Education Resource Initiative—Native American Research Initiative
- UCLA Center for Civil Rights Remedies at the Civil Rights Project
- U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance
- U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics

The request team provides the above comments to assist stakeholders in making informed decisions with respect to the information presented. SECC does not endorse any approaches, practices, strategies, or recommendations described in this report.

## RESULTS OF REVIEWS

With growing focus on addressing the needs of struggling students, some states also may face challenges related to differing cultural perspectives and priorities of student groups, such as American Indian and Alaska Natives (AI/AN) (Oakes & Maday, 2009). The authors state that according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2007), average reading scores for Native American and Alaska Native students have not changed significantly since the 2005 report, and these scores were below those of non-AI/AN students in 2007. Consequently, a number of states are seeking ways to close the achievement gap and address the educational needs of AI/AN students.

States, such as Minnesota and North Carolina (respondents to SECC's query), are taking a comprehensive approach to meeting the needs of Native American students. For example, Minnesota has statutes that focus on Indian Education, and it offers a wide range of services and supports. These include an Office of Indian Education, a dedicated website that contains resources and information about activities (<http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/StuSuc/IndianEd/>), culturally relevant curriculum frameworks, strategies and training for teachers, and parent advisory committees.

Similarly, North Carolina has a state-mandated State Advisory Council on Indian Education and provides numerous supports and services for NA students. These include an American Indian Studies course; tutoring for low-performing students; workshops; camps; and access to computer equipment, library materials, and other enrichment activities for students and their families.

According to the resources selected for this report, experts recommend various strategies for improving educational outcomes for Native American students. Most approaches emphasize that educators should incorporate indigenous culture and history into school curriculums and include Native teachers, tribal groups, and families in the learning environment. A few are highlighted below.

- **Use small groups and a team-based approach (Dorer & Fetter, 2013).**  
A review of teaching practices at Sante Fe Indian School (Lippert, 1993) revealed that providing instruction in small groups was beneficial to Native students (Dorer & Fetter, 2013). Dorer and Fetter also indicate that in a later study, teachers in South Dakota reported that small-group settings allowed them to interact more positively with their students (Sorkness & Kelting-Gibson, 2006).

- **Set high expectations and standards (Gentry & Fugate, 2012; Dorer & Fetter, 2013).**  
Gentry and Fugate (p. 8) state that “educators can communicate high expectations for students and offer opportunities for meaningful exchange of ideas by creating an environment built on trust, respect, and support through consistent guidelines for academic and social successes (Thornton, Collins, & Daugherty, 2006).” According to Dorer and Fetter (2013), teachers at the Native American Magnet School in New York indicated that holding high expectations was crucial to the success of their Native students (Hollowell & Jeffries, 2004).
- **Infuse indigenous history, culture, and language into curricula and instruction (Dorer & Fetter, 2013; MinnCAN, 2013; Oakes & Maday, 2009).**  
As mandated by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), schools that receive Title VII funding have to include culturally relevant education in their curriculums (Dorer & Fetter, 2013). According to Dorer and Fetter, culturally relevant education has been identified as a crucial factor in the academic success of Native students (Lipka 2002). A number of schools have taken steps to address the educational needs of Native students. At Anishinabe Academy in Minnesota, a teacher and a Native language specialist used language-immersion classes to make the Ojibwe language part of instruction for preschool students (MinnCAN, 2013). At Minneapolis South High School, a teacher incorporated works by Native scholars to provide background for discussion of a historical event (MinnCAN, 2013). Rough Rock Demonstration School in Arizona created a bilingual curriculum in Navajo studies for students in grades K–9, which included “culturally relevant experiences and topics while promoting competency in English and Navajo” (Oakes & Maday, 2009, p. 4).
- **Use alternatives to out-of-school suspensions and employ restorative practices (Losen & Martinez, 2013).**  
From their study of data for more than 26,000 students in U.S. middle and high schools, Losen and Martinez found that “reserving out-of-school suspension as a last resort can lead to higher achievement and improved graduation rates” (p. 2). The authors also explained that the focus of restorative practices is to help students to develop more respect for themselves, others, and their community, with the hope that increased accountability will lead to fewer behavioral problems. According to Losen and Martin (2013, p. 22), “The Christian Science Monitor recently featured one high school in the Oakland Unified School District that has implemented restorative practices and cut its suspensions in half (Khadaroo, 2013).”
- **Provide opportunities for students and their families to engage in relevant school-based activities (MinnCAN, 2013).**  
Parents at Minnesota’s Detroit Lakes elementary and high schools mentor each other and work on projects related to tribal culture. These include drum and dance performances; quiz bowls; and presentations of the eagle feather, which is given to all Native high school graduates by the Indian parent committee (MinnCAN, 2013).
- **Collaborate with tribal representatives to help students reach their academic potential (Oakes & Maday, 2009).** At Zuni High School in New Mexico, freshmen take a Zuni language and culture class, and in one of the social studies classes, students interview tribal members and create books based on these interviews (Oakes & Maday, 2009). According to the authors, “Zuni High School is making significant strides: for 2009 it attained adequate yearly progress (AYP) in reading and experienced a 94.8 percent jump in mathematics achievement” (p. 6).

Further discussion of state-based efforts to support Native American students and recommendations for enriching achievement of this student group occur below.

## REFERENCES

- Dorer, B., & Fetter, A. (2013). *Cultivated ground: Effective teaching practices for Native students in a public high school*. Harvard University Native American Program. Retrieved from [http://www.niea.org/data/files/research/dorer.fetter.2013\\_cultivated%20grnd%20effective%20tch\\_nq.pdf](http://www.niea.org/data/files/research/dorer.fetter.2013_cultivated%20grnd%20effective%20tch_nq.pdf)
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- Oakes, A., & Maday, T. (2009, August). *Engaging Native American learners with rigor “and” cultural relevance* (Issue Brief). Washington, DC: Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED507588.pdf>
- U.S. Department of Education. (2008, February 28). *About ED/offices: OESE, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Indian Education—Formula grants to local education agencies*. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/indianformula/awards.html>
- U.S. Department of Education. (2014, April 8). *About ED/offices: OESE, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, state education agency Indian Education contacts*. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oese/oie/statecontacts.html#skipnav2>

## STATES' RESPONSES REGARDING SUPPORT FOR NATIVE AMERICAN STUDENTS

In June 2014, the Information Request team contacted staff in 16 SDEs to obtain responses regarding the following objectives, with respect to Native American students (repeated from page 1 of this report): We would like to identify successful strategies and related policies that states, schools, and school districts have implemented to support and enrich academic performance, specifically to

- Improve graduation rates
- Reduce dropout rates
- Reduce student suspensions
- Increase enrollment in upper level high school courses
- Increase enrollment in extracurricular activities
- Increase family engagement

Two states responded to SECC's request—Minnesota and North Carolina. Their responses, which were edited by the comprehensive center, are provided below.

## **Minnesota Department of Education**

Provided by: Dennis W. Olson, Director, Office of Indian Education

Date: July 7, 2014

For information on the topic of support for Native American students, see Minnesota's Indian Education Act of 1988, which governs Indian Education programs in the state (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=124D.71>). These statutes may be among the strongest in the nation, according to Olson.

Minnesota also supports Indian Education programs in 32 schools and districts throughout the state through a state-funded grant program called "Success for the Future." The goals of the grant are to enhance academic performance and increase academic achievement. Schools and districts have implemented programs to increase graduation rates, reduce dropout rates, increase enrollment in rigorous courses and postsecondary enrollment options, and increase participation in extracurricular activities. There is also a strong family engagement component mandated through the grant and through the state's statutes.

Every school district that enrolls 10 or more American Indian students must have an established Local Indian Education Parent Advisory Committee. The committee advises the district throughout the school year and must annually develop a resolution of concurrence/non-concurrence. The resolution process allows the parent committee to develop recommendations about programming for American Indian students. By law, the local school board must respond to each recommendation and state reasons for either implementing or not implementing recommendations.

## **North Carolina Department of Public Instruction**

Provided by: Debora Williams, Special Assistant, Graduation Initiatives

Date: July 8, 2014

### **State Board of Education**

The North Carolina State Board of Education (SBE) adopted an Indian Education policy to provide a process for identifying issues pertaining to the education of American Indian students in grades K–12. In the same year, the North Carolina General Assembly enacted Article 13A (NCGS 115C-210 *et seq.*) to establish the 15-member State Advisory Council on Indian Education (SACIE) to serve as the mechanism for advocating on behalf of American Indian students. Specifically, the council is charged with the following duties:

- Advise the SBE on effective educational practices for American Indian students
- Explore programs that raise academic achievement and reduce the dropout rate among American Indian students
- Advise the SBE and the department of public instruction on ways to improve coordination and communication for the benefit of American Indian students affected by state and federal programs administered at the state level

- Prepare and present an annual report to the SBE, tribal organizations, and to conferees at the annual North Carolina Indian Unity Conference
- Advise the SBE on any other aspect of American Indian Education when requested by the SBE, educators, parents, students, business leaders, and other constituents

Additionally, the SBE adopted the North Carolina Educator Evaluation System of professional standards for individuals who work in the state’s public schools. Each set of standards captures the skills, knowledge, and behaviors that should be displayed by individuals in their specific roles. Educators in North Carolina are measured on their ability to create environments that value diversity and support every public school student graduating from high school.

### Department of Public Instruction

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) provides curriculum and instructional resources for the American Indian Studies course. American Indian Studies, an elective, is a conceptually driven course that introduces students to the exploration of the rich and diverse history and culture of American Indian societies. Instructional resources are online and available via the North Carolina Common Core Instructional Support Tools

([http://www.livebinders.com/play/play\\_or\\_edit?id=112587](http://www.livebinders.com/play/play_or_edit?id=112587)) and LearnNC

(<http://www.learnnc.org/search?aphrase=indian+education&area=lesson+plans>).

### Title VII Programs

The U.S. Department of Education supports 18 traditional and charter public Title VII programs in North Carolina. A sampling of programs and descriptions is below.

#### Wake County Public School System

The Title VII Program for the Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) serves North Carolina’s capital city and surrounding communities. WCPSS maintains an Indian Education Center in Garner, the focal point for academic, cultural, and service activities that serve over 430 American Indian students from 78 different tribes. A part-time coordinator schedules and facilitates Indian Education activities and works with the parent committee through monthly meetings to plan activities, publish a newsletter, and promote involvement in local and regional American Indian initiatives.

The program provides academic tutoring for low-performing students in core subject areas and offers additional enrichment activities. Activities include open study times, reading clubs, creative writing seminars, hands-on science activities, and academically focused culture classes. The Indian Education Center houses computers, books, sewing machines, and other resources. The program provides support for students to attend summer camps for STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education and to participate in the NC Native American Youth Conference.

Wake County’s Title VII Program recently enhanced student resources by adding iPads to its check-out inventory. Another new initiative is a community garden focused on American Indian crops and planting techniques. K–12 students participated in all aspects of the community garden, from clearing the land to harvesting and eating from this venture, a popular event that will continue with seasonal crops.

With program support, Native American students attend summer weeklong workshops at North Carolina State University in the areas of math/science and engineering, with the goal of raising student achievement in those areas. The program also has supported ACT training and the purchase of

Advanced Placement (AP) workbooks with the goal of increasing college readiness. In addition, the Indian Education Center has hosted college night in which representatives from area universities visit and discuss college requirements and the application process.

### **Public Schools of Robeson County**

Funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Indian Education, the Indian Education Title VII Program in Robeson County serves more than 11,300 American Indian K–12 students and is one of the largest in the United States. The grant’s major goals are to increase reading, math, and science scores; increase the graduation rate; and decrease dropouts. The program staff includes youth development specialists (YDS) who are assigned to each school. The program also provides parents and students with daily access to the computer lab, library materials, and year-round tours of the museum and art gallery. The elected parent committee meets monthly to advise and monitor the program.

Services for students include attendance monitoring; conferences; reading, math, and science tutorials and enrichment; cultural enrichment; Native American Student Association (NASA) and American Indians in Science and Engineering (AISES) Clubs; and financial assistance with the SAT, ACT, and college applications. In addition, the students participate in local, state, and national conferences.

The resource center sponsors an After Hours Cultural Academy, Saturday Academy, Summer Enrichment Camp, NASA clubs and NASA Days for middle and high school students, and AISES Club activities. In addition, the program coordinates annual schoolwide Indian Heritage Month programs.

### **Cumberland County Schools**

Tutorial services are offered during school hours for American Indian and Alaskan Native students in kindergarten through eighth grade who score below proficiency level on end-of-grade tests. Schools with significant American Indian populations are classified as Target Schools.

### **Clinton City Schools**

Clinton City Schools receives Title VII (Indian Education) funds. The goal of this program is to ensure that programs that serve American Indian children are of the highest quality and provide for not only the basic elementary and secondary educational needs but also the unique educational and culturally related academic needs of these children.

These funds are used to support the schools, Indian tribes and organizations, postsecondary institutions, and other entities to meet the unique educational and culturally related academic needs of American Indian and Alaskan Native students so they can meet the same challenging state academic achievement standards expected of all students.

### **Graham County Schools**

Graham County Schools expects every American Indian student to graduate from an academically rigorous and culturally relevant high school as a well-prepared lifelong learner who is globally competitive for work and postsecondary education. The mission of the program is to provide an environment that offers educational experiences and cultural opportunities that promote high expectations and accountability for the academic achievement of American Indian students.



### Program Goals

- Improve communication between American Indian families and the school system
- Increase academic achievement
- Improve school attendance
- Provide assistance to parents, teachers, and students
- Increase the high school graduation rate
- Assist graduates in applying to the military and to colleges
- Work with Tri-County Community College to provide joint enrollment opportunities
- Work with tribal programs to ensure students receive maximum benefits
- Promote an appreciation of American Indian culture and heritage
- Assist in home-to-school and school-to-school transitions
- Host local artisans and crafters

### Services Available

- Tutoring for preK–12<sup>th</sup> grades
- Cultural programs
- Advisement
- Outreach
- Supplies and materials
- Classroom books, videos, and tapes for checkout
- Progress monitoring
- Attendance monitoring
- Parental support

## RESOURCE SUMMARIES

**ACT. The Condition of College & Career Readiness: 2013: American Indian Students. Iowa City, IA: ACT. Retrieved from <http://www.act.org/newsroom/data/2013/states/pdf/AmericanIndian.pdf>**

This ACT report presents the current condition of college and career readiness for Native American students and a description of related data trends as of 2013. The introduction provides key indicators related to readiness for postsecondary education and an explanation of the assessment’s validity. The report aims to answer the following questions (p. 3):

- Are American Indian students prepared for college and career?
- Are enough American Indian students taking core courses?
- Are core courses rigorous enough?
- Are younger American Indian students on target for college and career?
- What other dimensions of college and career readiness should we track?
- Are American Indian students who are ready for college and career actually succeeding?

The second section of the report presents an overview of the achievement gap between American Indian (AI) students and other racial/ethnic groups with regard to various measures within the College and Career Readiness test. Outcomes on American Indian student readiness include the following:

- Gaps between AI and all students on attainment of college and career readiness in all core subjects (23% in English; 22% in math)
- Low attainment of college- and career-readiness benchmarks (26% reading; 22% math)
- Lowest numbers of AI students participating in the ACT
- Second to lowest participation and opportunity rates by subject (African American rates were the lowest in each subject)

The last two sections of the report provide policies and practices on how to increase college readiness. Recommended strategies for states include providing (a) common expectations, (b) clear performance standards, (c) rigorous high school courses, (d) early warning monitoring and interventions, and (e) data-driven decision making. In terms of district, school, and classroom recommendations, ACT suggests implementing its ACT Core Practice Framework, which includes 15 practices that fall under five themes:

- Curriculum and Academic Goals
- Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building
- Instructional Tools—Programs and Strategies
- Monitoring Performance and Progress
- Intervention and Adjustment

The report provides a resource list of state-administered ACT programs, services, and partnerships.

**Dorer, B., & Fetter, A. (2013). Cultivated Ground: Effective Teaching Practices for Native Students in a Public High School. Harvard University Native American Program. Retrieved from [http://www.niea.org/data/files/research/dorer.fetter.2013\\_cultivated%20grnd%20effective%20tc\\_hng.pdf](http://www.niea.org/data/files/research/dorer.fetter.2013_cultivated%20grnd%20effective%20tc_hng.pdf)**

This report resulted from a case study research project prepared for the Harvard University Native American Program and the Native American Nation Building Course “to access the effective teaching practices being used in one or more superiorly performing United States high schools that have a number of American Indian/Alaskan Native students” (p. 4). The research consisted of a literature review and interviews with teachers, students, and administrators at two public high schools—one in Alaska and the other in North Carolina. This project is an expansion of similar research completed in 2011.

The research criteria required that schools exhibit high test scores in all tested areas with 80% or more of students tested being proficient, evidence that the schools were consistently improving over time and demonstrating that American Indian/Alaskan Native students and other minority students were scoring at or above the student body as a whole. The researchers revealed that although the majority of Native students attend public high schools, there is a lack of case studies profiling public schools performing successfully and illustrating effective teaching strategies, specifically for Native students.

The report highlights two models, culturally responsive teaching and culturally based education (CBE). Culturally based education has been advocated in numerous studies as an effective practice for Native students as well as other minority students. Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act requires all schools receiving funding to include CBE in their curriculums.

Other effective strategies highlighted in the report include the following:

- Small group settings and a collaborative environment
- Curriculum/cultural relevancy
- High expectations and high standards
- Respect for students' backgrounds
- Bilingual or immersion language education

The American Indian/Alaskan Native culturally responsive model also supports the presence of “native teachers within the school and the need for community, and parental and tribal buy-in” (p. 9).

Dorer and Fetter conclude the report by sharing their belief that teaching practices that are successful with American Indian and Alaskan Native students have the potential for improving educational outcomes for all students. They also suggest research topics for further study for additional insight into the needs of Native students.

The report includes a list of references and two appendices that present Report Card information for the high schools featured in the report.

**Gentry, M., & Fugate, C. M. (2012). Gifted Native American Students: Underperforming, Under-Identified, and Overlooked. Purdue University's Gifted Education Resource Institute (GERI) – Native American Research Initiative. Retrieved from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/pits.21624/abstract>**

Gentry and Fugate (2012) examine the educational condition of Native American youth and gifted Native American students using the construct of sociocultural motivation in their overview of the Diné (Navajo) Nation. This literature review is organized under the following framework: (a) environment, context, and culture; (b) the achievement gap between Native American students and their non-Native counterparts; (c) parental involvement in school; (d) culture and motivation; and (e) relationships within the school environment.

The researchers emphasize the importance of treating Native American tribes as distinct groups versus a homogeneous aggregate. Values and perceptions vary among tribes, which has implications for instructional and curricular decision making among educators (e.g., whether to use cooperative groups or competitive classroom activities). They also note that educators must regard these students as individuals before linking them with a particular cultural group.

While the focus of this article is to promote Native American students in gifted and talented education programs, the recommendations stress the importance for educators to know who their students are and to value their strengths. Specifically, the recommendations include the following (pp. 10–11):

- Embracing the idea that talent exists within Native American populations
- Fostering opportunities for development, growth, and motivation, and ensuring inclusion in services and programs through counseling, psychological services, and instructional services
- Making an effort to understand the students' cultures
- Identifying role models and inspiring teachers and counselors who advocate for and connect with students
- Using a strength-based perspective with a willingness to take action

**Lara, J. (2011). *Voices of Native Educators: Strategies That Support Success of Native High School Students*. Washington, DC: National Indian Education Association.**

Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED528946.pdf>

This 2011 report is the summary of a meeting of distinguished educators focused on high school reform that was cosponsored by the National Indian Education Association (NIEA) and the National Education Association (NEA). The report provides stories of Native American, Alaskan Native, and Native Hawaiian student successes told from the perspective of Native educators. The framework for the meeting and the report was provided by the Campaign for High School Equity (CHSE) in a report titled, "A Plan for Success" (p. 11). The plan outlines six policy areas intended to support the transformation of high schools. Success stories in the report provide examples to support the six policies identified.

The report begins by briefly highlighting data on the status of Native students as compared with White students and other minorities. It then discusses the underlying challenges specific to Native students that impact their academic achievement.

Lara's focus for this report was on solutions rather than challenges, and she organized her recommendations into the six major policy areas below (p. 17):

- Make all students proficient and prepared for college and work.
- Hold high schools accountable for student success.
- Redesign the American high school.
- Provide students with the excellent leaders and teachers they need to succeed.
- Invest communities in student success.
- Provide equitable learning conditions for all students.

For each policy area, specific examples of research on high school programs and practices were cited. In addition, student voices were added to share personal stories regarding how the program and/or practices benefited them in their journeys toward high school graduation.

The report concludes with a set of 10 recommendations to improve outcomes for American Indian/Alaskan Native/Native Hawaiian students and a twelve-point dropout prevention plan developed by NEA. It provides participant biographical sketches and information about each of the sponsoring organizations.

**Losen, D. J., & Martinez, T. E. (2013). *Out of School and Off Track: The Overuse of Suspensions in American Middle and High Schools*. Los Angeles, CA: The UCLA Center of Civil Rights Remedies at the Civil Rights Project. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED541735.pdf>**

This report was written to highlight data surrounding the overuse of suspensions in middle and high schools and the serious academic implications for students and schools with high student suspension rates. Losen and Martinez collected data from more than 26,000 schools and estimated more than 2 million suspensions during the 2009–2010 school year. The data details information on race, gender, and disability status along with secondary school discipline policies. “Hotspot schools” (p. 2) (those that suspended 25% or more of any subgroup) were contrasted with low-suspending schools (at or below 10% for each subgroup enrolled). Lists of 10 districts with the largest number of hotspot secondary schools and 10 districts with the largest number of lower suspending secondary schools were presented to highlight that alternative programs and practices are already in place in some schools. North Carolina, California, and Maryland appear on both the high suspension and low suspension lists.

Losen and Martinez compare national suspension rates in 1972–1973 with 2009–2010 suspension data to illustrate how suspension rates have increased over time. A significant disparity along racial lines was identified for African Americans (17%), American Indians (8%), and Latin Americans (7%), while White students were suspended at a rate of only 5%. Data also indicated even larger racial disparities among students with disabilities.

The authors conclude that when tracking more than 3,752 school districts that did not exceed a 10% suspension rate for any subgroup, it was apparent that alternatives to suspension were possible to implement. They offer research that supported the following alternatives that have worked (pp. 21–26):

- Change codes of conduct to ensure that exclusion is a measure of last resort.
- Implement Systemwide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS).
- Provide support and training for teachers and leaders.
- Apply ecological approaches to classroom management and social-emotional learning.
- Use restorative practices (restorative justice).

In addition, specific recommendations were provided for parents and children’s advocates, federal and state policymakers, and for the media.

The report includes a list of references, three appendices (Appendix A: Data Omissions, Appendix B: Methods and Treatment of Errors, and Appendix C: School District Reports), footnotes, and endnotes.

**MinnCAN. (2013). Native American Achievement in Minnesota. Minneapolis, MN: Author.**  
**Retrieved from**

<http://minncan.org/research/native-american-student-achievement-minnesota>

This report was published in October 2013 and was produced by MinnCAN, the Minnesota Campaign for Achievement Now. It details the efforts of MinnCAN to share practices found to help Native American students realize their academic potential in the Minneapolis Public Schools. The report identifies state policy decisions that were instrumental in creating a climate to promote student success. The legislation created a permanent statewide position for an Indian Education director, mandated ongoing consultation with the Tribal Nations Committee, and called for an annual statewide listening session on Indian Education. In 2006, the Native American community and the Minneapolis Public Schools signed a memorandum of agreement (MOA) to work together toward the needs of American Indian student achievement.

The MOA resulted in specific action plans and specific targets that identified districtwide goals for all schools and three Indigenous Best Practice Sites with a concentration on Indian Education. Sites were established in one elementary school, one middle school, and one high school. Teachers in the Best Practice Sites were required to participate in indigenous language learning activities, allow classroom observations, and participate in coaching on the inclusion of cultural relevance into the curriculums.

MinnCAN representatives visited schools, talked with educators, parents, students, and community members and reported finding impressive results when visiting sites that exhibited the strategies below to promote success for Native American students (p. 24):

- Set high expectations for students and focus on their assets.
- Build relationships with students and their families.
- Integrate indigenous history, culture, and languages.
- Put a premium on mentoring and supporting teachers.

Other promising strategies included early intervention for struggling students, ongoing collaboration with the Native community, high-quality Native teachers, and substantive parental involvement.

MinnCAN staff also captured the voices of Minneapolis high school students on track to graduate as a part of the Class of 2014. The students identified what helped them to be successful at school, which included the following (pp. 21–23):

- Attention to personal learning styles and honest feedback
- Curriculums that include Native American perspectives
- Teachers who focus on the positive and cultivate personal relationships
- Connection of learning to personal interests
- Acknowledgement of significance of rite to passage ceremony

The report also lists the group's plans to expand efforts to improve the academic success for Native American students in the Minneapolis Public Schools.

**National Center for Education Statistics. (2012). National Indian Education Study 2011: The Educational Experiences of American Indian and Alaska Native Students at Grades 4 and 8. NCES 2012-466. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics.**

Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED533306.pdf>

This report is a summary of the National Indian Education Study (NIES), which was administered as part of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The intent of the report was to provide additional details of the achievement and experiences of American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) students in grades 4 and 8 through a review of their NAEP scores and from survey responses of students, teachers, and administrators. NAEP tests include reading and mathematics with scores being disaggregated by gender, school location (e.g., rural, urban), student populations (e.g. low-income, English language learners) and other variables. Comparisons between AI/AN student performances and non-AI/AN students' scores are provided and are addressed over time (e.g., 2009, 2011).

### **National Results of Reading and Mathematics Scores of American Indians**

#### Reading Scores

- No significant changes in average reading scores for AI/AN students in 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades in 2011 as compared to scores in 2009 or 2005
- Scores differed by some student characteristics—higher for female students, those attending suburban schools, and those attending public schools
- Scores lower for students eligible for National School Lunch Program (an indicator of lower family income)

#### Mathematics Scores

- In 2011, there was a larger increase in the gap between non-AI/AN and AI/AN students than in 2005, at both 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades.
- Scores differed by some student characteristics in ways similar to those in reading.

### **National Survey Results**

NIES administered a national survey to gain additional information about AI/AN students' experiences in school, "such as those related to identifying practices and methods that raise the academic achievement of AI/AN students, and assessing the role of native language and culture in fostering that improvement" (p. 40). The survey participants were 25,000 AI/AN students in grades 4 and 8 and almost 11,000 teachers and school administrators at grades 4 and 8.

The NIES selected states, of which North Carolina was one, with AI/AN populations large enough to provide an appropriate sample of the United States. Student questions focused on three topics: (a) knowledge/awareness of Native history and traditions, (b) assistance received on schoolwork, and (c) assistance from school counselors.

From the surveys, it can be determined that (a) students in both grades indicate a lack of or limited knowledge about their own history, culture, and traditions as well as current issues; (b) 4<sup>th</sup> graders receive some adult support with their homework; and (c) 8<sup>th</sup> grade students are not planning or meeting with their school counselors. This data has implications for policy and planning for schools, school districts, and state departments of education.

**Ngai, P., & Allen, K. (2007). A Process Guide for Realizing Indian Education for All: Lessons Learned From Lewis & Clark Elementary School. Helena, MT: Montana Office of Public Instruction. Retrieved from <http://opi.mt.gov/pdf/IndianED/08processguide.pdf>**

This guidebook describes the implementation of Indian Education For All (IEFA), a grant program initiated at Lewis & Clark Elementary School in Montana. It is divided into five sections: (a) Integrating Indian Education as a Form of Place-based Multicultural Education, (b) Securing School-based Commitment and Teamwork, (c) Partnering with Indian People; (d) Intercultural Communication—Essence of Indian/non-Indian Partnerships, and (e) Supporting Teachers to Cross Over the Tipping Point.

The IEFA principal investigators advocate for an ethnonational model wherein students study cultures and diverse views with the goal of including “selected tribal perspectives, along with other cultural perspectives ... when studying various issues, concepts, and events throughout the school year” (p. 14). The authors suggest that schools begin the program by identifying and studying a tribe in close proximity to the school, then spanning out to other tribes in the state over the subsequent school years. The authors contend that for Indian Education to thrive, it must be deeply integrated with the school curriculum in which multiple perspectives are learned and validated by the schoolwide community.

Recommendations for instructional frameworks integrated with Indian Education are provided in the guidebook. For example, in kindergarten, the unit on natural resources would include learning about the use of wood and tribal relationships with the natural world. The article provides examples of lesson plans, units, and related school projects implemented at the school. This guidebook includes a step-by-step process for implementing aspects of the IEFA and cultural information about Indian tribe partners and their ways of communication. Anecdotes and testimonials from project participants, including the principal, teachers, and Native American partners are presented throughout the guidebook.

The authors provide a list of references and four appendices in this comprehensive document:

- Appendix 1 – Background information on Native Americans and Indian Education (no title)
- Appendix 2 – Developing a Native American Library Collection
- Appendix 3 – Indian Education Survey for Grades 1 and 2; Indian Education Survey for Grades 3–5
- Appendix 4 – Assessing Levels of Implementation

While reading achievement was not a primary goal of this grant program, improvements to school culture and climate were observed and may have an impact on student achievement and literacy.



**Oakes, A., & Maday, T. (2009, August). Engaging Native American Learners With “Rigor” and “Cultural Relevance” (Issue Brief). Washington, DC: Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED507588.pdf>**

This issue brief focuses on Native American students and potential strategies for improving their educational outcomes as well as examples of strategies implemented in three schools. The authors report that education for Native American students has a long and troubling history with unequal funding and provisions from the federal government, leading to a distrust and disenfranchisement by students, parents, and communities. Lack of classroom teachers’ awareness about the history and culture of NAs perpetuates the problems. As a group, NA students perform lower academically than their non-NA peers and demonstrate no significant growth in mathematics or reading between 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades (National Assessment of Educational Progress).

Additionally, their struggles may be hidden due to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act’s accountability system. Student subgroups of less than a minimum number do not need to be disaggregated or reported. Thus, schools/districts with small numbers of NAs would not identify those students as failing in reading and/or math or with having a high percentage of dropouts. The brief suggests that in response, schools/districts need strong data systems and reviews to follow their NA students and determine supports they need.

The literature suggests students from all cultures and language groups learn best when teachers utilize curriculums and instruction that are culturally appropriate for them. Three culturally relevant strategies are described in the brief for Native American students: instructional practices, curriculum content, and school climate.

**Instructional Practices and Cultural Relevance.** According to the brief, instructional practice should be congruent or similar between home and community life in what is learned in school and how it is learned (Demmert & Towner, 2003, p. 8). Teachers should learn about their students’ adult-child relationships and peer-to-peer relationships and adhere to a similar model, when possible, in the classroom. An example from Hawaii notes that children typically turn to their peers and older siblings for assistance rather than adults. This knowledge would allow the teacher to establish a peer-paired learning environment in the classroom.

**Curriculum Content and Cultural Relevance.** Studies indicate that NA students often report being bored at school—they see no relevance between school and their lives. A solution is discussed to provide a curriculum that is culturally relevant in all content areas. Some schools embed contemporary and historical content about NAs into courses. Montana developed an Education Act for All to help all students (not just Native Americans) gain knowledge about the NA experience and history. States having curriculum standards with historical and contemporary content about NAs include Alaska, Arizona, and Wisconsin. School staff and tribal and community members also should review textbooks and curriculums for biases and stereotypes that are inaccurate and make changes in them, as needed.

**School Climate and Cultural Relevance.** Aspects of school climate may have a negative impact on NA students. The areas of concern for Native American students are lack of engagement and increased dropout rates. Some issues underlying the negative aspects for school climate as identified by Reyhner (1992) include the following: biased curriculum with stereotypical material about NAs, large and impersonal schools, teachers and counselors untrained in cultural awareness and needs of NA students, culturally biased tests, lack of support for English learners, and lack of parent involvement. Suggestions for turning around these negatives begin with providing professional development to all staff about the culture of the students, meeting with community and tribal members,

providing ways for students to connect with adults in the school to build trust, and implementing positive behavior supports.

The brief concludes with three examples of schools and districts in New Mexico, Colorado, and California that are using best practices to assist their Native American students. Ideas described include the following:

- An Indian-controlled independent school district
- High school Native language classes that the state counts as a foreign language
- Tribal citizen participation, using materials and skills from the NA culture, in high school content area classes
- Block scheduling to allow more time in high school classes and the development of trust between teachers and students
- Funding from a private foundation for the first year of a Native language instruction program
- Meeting with tribal representatives to discuss students that are struggling and to determine appropriate data-driven strategies to help them

**Smiley, R., & Sather, S. (2009). Indian Education Policies in Five Northwest Region States (Issues & Answers, REL 2009-081). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest. Retrieved from [http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northwest/pdf/REL\\_2009081.pdf](http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northwest/pdf/REL_2009081.pdf)**

This study describes the state policies and mechanisms for the education of American Indian and Alaskan Natives (“Native American” used to include both) in five Northwest states: Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington. These states enroll significant numbers of American Indians and the largest minority groups in Alaska (11%), Montana (25%), and 3% in Idaho, Oregon, and Washington (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). As a whole, the five states serve 16% of the Native American students in the country (Sable & Noel, 2008). The design of the study included three components: (a) web-based and Internet searches of policy development for the years 1988–2009 for each state; (b) interviews with key state education agency staff; and (c) policy analysis by two researchers, conducted independently of one another.

The results revealed six policies occurring in all five states (p. 5):

- Academic standards address Native American culture and history.
- Native American students may learn their native language as part of their education program.
- Native American culture and history are part of the school curriculum.
- Native American community members are involved on advisory boards.
- Teacher certification is promoted for speakers of NA languages.
- College scholarship or tuition assistance programs are provided for NA students.

Four of the five states noted additional policies (p. 5):

- All teachers are required to have training in Native American culture and history.
- The state has a policy to reduce the achievement gap between Native American and other students.
- Tribes have government-to-government status.
- Tribes and state agencies are authorized to enter into contracts for Indian Education.

The researchers noted that the study is limited in that no attempt was made to “assess the merit of any of the policies, how successfully they were implemented, or what effect they had on Native American students’ academic achievement” (p. 6). However, the fact that a number of the same policies occurred across the five states indicates an interest in these policies, and therefore, may be worthy for other states to consider.

**Thornton, B., & Sanchez, J. E. (2010, Winter). Promoting Resiliency Among Native American Students to Prevent Dropouts. *Education*, 131(2), 455464.**

This article describes the Nevada State GEAR UP grant program designed to support Native American students at risk of dropping out of school, and it explores the concept of resiliency and how educators can develop it among Native American students. Thornton and Sanchez (2010) define resiliency as “the ability to cope with stress; a positive capacity of an individual to responds [sic] under pressure ... in theory, resilient youth successfully adapt to the school environment independent or in spite of poverty, family factors, and/or social issues” (p. 455).

Thornton and Sanchez apply Garmezy’s (1991a, 1991b) conceptual framework to illustrate resiliency, which consists of three elements: individual, family and family support, and external support. The authors question the second factor, family and family support, as Native Americans within both unsupportive and supportive family contexts exhibit resiliency. The discussion on external supports involves the school community and leads to the description of the GEAR UP program.

GEAR UP is a federally funded grant program that stands for Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs. The goals of this grant program are to change Nevada’s school culture by raising expectations of personnel and to promote college readiness. Many schools that participate in the grant program have high Native American populations, and many are located on Native American reservations in rural areas. Some of these schools have formed partnerships with institutions of higher education.

For example, the Center for Culture and Diversity at one area university sponsored a conference called *GEAR UP Leadership Summit: Let’s Start Now!* and invited Native American students to attend. They provided sessions and activities to prepare NA students for higher education. One activity included a mock lecture designed to orient students to an actual college classroom experience and to quell any fears about college life. As the program evolves, the Center for Culture and Diversity will continue to use similar strategies for resiliency with other groups of students.

The latter portion of this article discusses evidence-based recommendations that schools can implement to develop and foster resiliency. Recommendations include (a) professional development for school staff related to resiliency, (b) long-term programs that foster resiliency and encourage a perspective of strengths versus deficits, and (c) providing protective processes that shield children from negative risks and behaviors. The article contains references and copy information.

**Information Requests** are customized reports that are prepared to fulfill requests for information by the departments of education of the states served by the Southeast Comprehensive Center at SEDL. The requests address topics on current education issues related to the requirements and implementation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). For additional information, visit the SECC website at [secc.sedl.org](http://secc.sedl.org).

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