



National
Caucus of
Native
American
State
Legislators

STRIVING TO ACHIEVE

HELPING NATIVE AMERICAN STUDENTS SUCCEED





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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In July 2007, the Education Committee of the National Caucus of Native American State Legislators (NCNASL), commissioned a study of the academic performance of American Indian, Alaska Native (AI/AN) and Native Hawaiian students. In addition to the study, the NCNASL Education Committee convened an Education Policy Summit in September 2007 to bring together key stakeholders to develop policy recommendations for state legislators, tribal leaders and education policymakers. This report is the result of the commissioned study and the policy recommendations developed during the policy summit.

While the study was being written, the Education Committee of NCNASL met several times to discuss the preliminary results and the best ways to disseminate the findings. A consistent theme in these discussions was the importance of culture in learning. Members of the Caucus felt a strong need to protect Native cultures, especially in the school environment.

Both case studies and qualitative studies have demonstrated the educational benefits of culturally based education. Although the Education Committee of the National Caucus of Native American State Legislators felt that future studies are likely to demonstrate that a strong commitment by schools to culturally based education improves achievement, members also felt that existing studies were insufficient to solidly promise that end. The Caucus, therefore, encourages future studies to examine the link between culturally based education and achievement to determine how public schools can re-establish native language and culture and simultaneously leverage gains in achievement for Native students. The Caucus also feels strongly that the reasons to attend to culturally based education go beyond potential achievement benefits. Culturally based education is an important part of a general quality education.

The Caucus recommends that, while awaiting confirming research, policymakers and educators continue to support cultural and language learning programs and policies. Programs such as Native language immersion; teaching Native customs, history and legal obligations to all students; and professional development supporting cultural sensitivity for teachers and administrators are key to maintaining the presence of culture in public schools.

This report is the culmination of an effort by many individuals and organizations who have contributed to this project and shared our belief that we must take action to close the academic achievement gap for American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian students. The National Caucus of Native American State Legislators would like to recognize these individuals and organizations.

Thanks to all participants at the September 2007 Educational Summit held in Helena, Montana, for traveling from 14 states to help develop policy recommendations.

Thanks also to the following associations for their financial support of both the Educational Summit and this report:

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Thanks to the committed staff of the National Conference of State Legislatures, who worked with the Education Committee and Caucus to help produce this report: Linda Sikkema, Melissa Savage, Douglas Shinkle, Carlos Valverde, Andrea Wilkins, Steffanie Clothier, Sia Davis and Irene Kawanabe. Special thanks to Leann Stelzer for editing, designing and coordinating production of the report.

Thanks also to our lead researcher, Christopher Lohse, who conducted the research and provided the analysis necessary to demonstrate the challenges that must be addressed.

ABOUT THE RESEARCHER

Christopher D. Lohse is lead researcher for the American Indian, Alaskan Native and Native Hawaiian Achievement Gap Study, jointly commissioned by the National Caucus of Native American State Legislators, the National Conference of State Legislatures and the National Education Association. He presently is the director of research for Teach for America's Knowledge Development and Public Engagement arm, where he focuses primarily on researching teacher effectiveness.

Before joining Teach for America in late 2007, Chris served as the director of policy research and federal liaison for the Montana Office of Public Instruction. For several summers, Mr. Lohse has worked as a mentor for math and science masters' candidates in teaching and curriculum at Harvard University, where he holds degrees in teaching and curriculum and administration, planning and social policy. In addition to investigative roles he has held in the sciences, Mr. Lohse also taught high school science in South Central Los Angeles—primarily honors and advanced placement chemistry—for five years after graduating from Willamette University with a degree in biology and chemistry.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The state of education in our nation's K-12 schools for Native students is distressing. Native students perform two to three grade levels below their white peers in reading and mathematics. They are 237 percent more likely to drop out of school and 207 percent more likely to be expelled than white students. For every 100 American Indian/Alaska Native kindergartners, only seven will earn a bachelor's degree, compared to 34 of every 100 white kindergartners. These statistics represent a snapshot of the current problem facing Native students.

One contributing factor to this achievement gap is that most American Indian/Alaska Native students are not prepared to learn when they walk through the doors of their school. In addition, the effects of poor economic conditions in many Indian communities add to the challenges facing families and schools. Low-income homes, lack of adequate health care, and other factors create challenges that add to the achievement gap.

The North American continent once was home to at least 500 distinct Native cultures. Now, many cultures have disappeared or are struggling to survive. Native people throughout the United States have attempted to regain the practices that helped define them as a people. Many tribes have created dictionaries of their languages, elders have been asked to record their knowledge and memories, and countless other efforts have been made to connect the past with the present. Educational systems have been vital in many of these efforts, as tribal colleges and public schools have worked to restore and catalog this knowledge.

This report details the overall school experience for American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian students. Included are discussions of the Native student and information about where Native students live and attend school. Because defining the Native student is difficult,

many rely on federal recognition to identify them. Information also is included about where these students live. American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian students are not evenly distributed across the country; many live on reservations, while others live in urban areas. Data showing the number of students in specific states is included, with information about which states have the largest populations of American Indian/Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian students.

Closing the achievement gap is of key importance to state legislators because 90 percent of American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian students attend public schools, and state legislators ultimately are responsible for appropriations and policy that govern a state's public schools.

The National Caucus of Native American State Legislators (NCNASL—the Caucus), with assistance from education policy experts and other stakeholders, developed a series of policy recommendations. The recommendations provide options for all state legislators to consider as they contemplate policies to help close the achievement gap between American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian students and their non-Native peers. The following policy recommendations are further discussed in this report, with additional supportive policies.

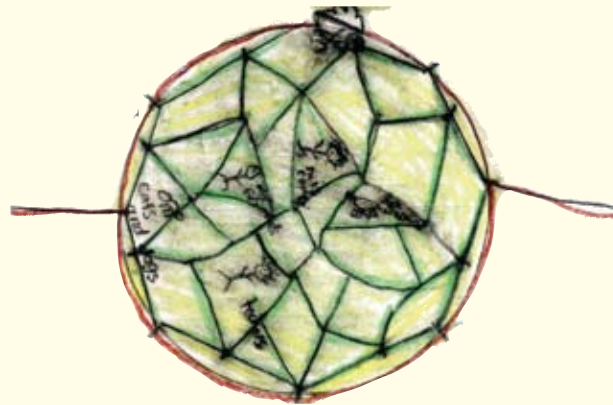
- Ensure access for Native students to a curriculum that prepares them for the rigors of a new economy and college, thus enabling them to fully participate in the workforce.
- Address the multi-dimensional, contextual problems associated with decreased achievement in schools before students begin school, thereby helping them arrive at school ready to learn.

-
- Offer an outstanding teaching force to American Indian/Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian students.
 - Increase the voice of Native peoples and their participation in the work of schools, and make schools more culturally relevant places for Native children.
 - Increase awareness on the issue of American Indian/Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian student achievement by sharing best practices and research on Native students.
 - Ensure adequate distribution of resources to Native students.

The Caucus feels strongly that a commitment to these goals, together with consideration of the specific strategies proposed, will lead to better, more equitable education for all students in the nation's public schools.

Although the Caucus is mindful of the importance of culturally based education, the purpose of this report is to provide information to the nation's state legislators about the existing educational achievement gap facing American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian students and to offer policy recommendations for consideration when identifying possible solutions to the problem.

This report represents a call for assistance from the National Caucus of Native American State Legislators to our colleagues in every state—regardless of the size of their American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian student population—to close the achievement gap between these students and their non-Native peers. It also is an effort to reach out to the many partners—on state boards of education, on tribal councils, and in education agencies—we have as legislators in the hope that they will redouble their efforts to support our goal of higher educational achievement. Collaborative efforts are required, and we invite all to join us in the pursuit of educational excellence and equity for Native students.





INTRODUCTION

Across the United States and among its many cultures, education has long been viewed as the golden road to the American dream, a pathway of hope that offers the possibility of a better life. Unfortunately, for many students—primarily those from low-income, minority homes—that pathway has been obscured. The roadblocks are most substantial for American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian children (hereafter collectively referred to as “Native students”). This report analyzes and discusses the educational achievement gap between Native students and their non-Native peers and offers policy recommendations to close the gaps in performance.

It is important to establish a clear definition of an “achievement gap.” Although differences in achievement between individuals are expected, the differences in achievement between entire groups of individuals—boys and girls, poor and non-poor, Native or non-Native—are an indication of educational harm for the group that is disadvantaged by the comparison. In this report, achievement gaps refer to differences in group performance, not to individual student achievement.

Although parents, teachers and students may find this report of interest in shaping their understanding of education and its broader context, it is primarily aimed at state legislators who can enact changes in state law to extend educational opportunities to Native students. The report also can provide useful insight for members of state boards of education, Tribal Council members and members of Congress. The state legislative role in creating policy and appropriating funds for public school instruction makes the Native student achievement gap an especially important issue for state legislators, since 90 percent of Native students attend public schools.

Because of the Caucus’s unique obligation to inform the larger National Conference of State Legislatures on issues that affect Native Americans, we present this report on the achievement of Native students in our public schools.



WHO IS THE NATIVE STUDENT?

Identifying American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian Students

Tribes, along with other government entities and agencies, have varying criteria for determining tribal membership. Generally, American Indian and Alaska Native students have some degree of Indian blood and are recognized as tribal members by the U.S. government. The more than 550 federally recognized tribes in the United States represent different cultures, different languages and different homelands, such as the Alaskan Native Corporations or the Rancheros of California. For this reason, it is difficult to define a typical American Indian/Alaska Native student.

As a result of treaties and other legal precedents, the U.S. government has a special trust relationship with American Indian/Alaska Native people who are members of a federally recognized tribe. In exchange for the millions of acres of land ceded by Native American tribes to the federal government—which allowed creation of this country—the federal government agreed to provide for the health, education and well-being of tribal citizens in perpetuity. This principle is referred to as the doctrine of trust responsibility.

Members of federally recognized tribes have a unique legal and political status that entitles them to certain services, including the provision of educational services, in furtherance of the trust responsibility. Some states—through either the state constitution or statutes—have special obligations regarding the educational services provided to American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian students. Montana state laws, for example, require that American Indian heritage and culture be included in the educational curriculum of the public school system. The state constitution specifies that, "...[t]he state recognizes the distinct

and unique cultural heritage of the American Indians and is committed in its educational goals to the preservation of their cultural integrity" (Art. X, Sec. 1(2)). Codified by the Montana Legislature in 1999, these provisions are known as "Indian Education for All."

Where Do Native Students Live?

In the 2006-2007 school year, 594,663 students were American Indian and Alaska Native. These students are not evenly distributed throughout the country, however; in the District of Columbia, only one in every 1,000 students is American Indian or Alaska Native, compared to more than one in every four students in Alaska (Table 1).

While Table 1 shows states with the largest number of American Indian and Alaska Native students, Table 2 shows the states with the largest concentrations of American Indian and Alaska Native students. The distinction is important. Even in states that have a large number of American Indian and Alaska Native students, collecting information on their achievement can be difficult for various reasons when analyzing results from assessments—such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)—that randomly sample. In any given school, even if a state's overall popula-

Table 1. States with the Largest American Indian and Alaska Native K-12 Student Populations

Oklahoma	120,122
Arizona	67,498
California	50,758
New Mexico	36,210
Alaska	35,393
Washington	27,208
North Carolina	20,463
Minnesota	17,400
Michigan	16,675
Montana	16,422

Source: Common Core of Data (CCD), 2005-06.

Table 2. States with the Largest Concentrations of American Indian and Alaska Native K-12 Students

Alaska	26.55%
Oklahoma	18.92%
Montana	11.29%
New Mexico	11.08%
South Dakota	10.47%
North Dakota	8.63%
Arizona	6.17%
Wyoming	3.54%
Washington	2.64%
Oregon	2.35%

Source: Common Core of Data (CCD), 2005-06.

tion of American Indian/Alaska Native students is large, there may be too few to draw reliable conclusions about their achievement. In some instances, data in this report come only from states with a high concentration of American Indian and Alaska Native students; in other instances, the data is provided for the entire nation.

Pacific Islander students. In others, the results for Native Hawaiian students are included with the results for Asian students. Often, a report will not address Native Hawaiian students. This lack of consistency made it difficult to conduct the same analyses using the same data sources for Native Hawaiian students as for other Native students. It was even difficult to determine an accurate count of Native Hawaiian students, since the most reliable data counts the number of children between birth and age 17, rather than the actual number of students. In addition, the only state with a concentration of Native Hawaiian students sufficient for analysis was Hawaii (Table 3).

Table 3. States with the Largest Number of Native Hawaiian Children Between Birth and Age 17

Hawaii	92,219
California	20,662
Washington	4,913
Nevada	2,739
Texas	2,665
Oregon	2,309
Arizona	1,840
Florida	1,725
Utah	1,561
Colorado	1,419

Source: Common Core of Data (CCD), 2005-06.

A Special Note on Native Hawaiian Students

Identification of Native Hawaiian students can be made through genealogical or certified birth records or through Hawaiian elders. Essentially, Native Hawaiian students are identified as those who are U.S. citizens and are descendants of the aboriginal people who occupied and exercised sovereignty in Hawaii prior to 1778.

The relationship between Native Hawaiians and the U.S. government differs from the relationship American Indians and Alaska Natives share, however. The U.S. government has not given Native Hawaiians the same legal and political status as American Indians and Alaska Natives. As a result, no government-to-government relationship exists between Native Hawaiian people and state or federal governments.

Partially due to this differing relationship, a challenge in the preparation of this report arose because of the lack of uniformity in how Native Hawaiian students are analyzed statistically. In some instances, the results of Native Hawaiian students are included with the results of

Regardless of the lack of consistent information identifying Native Hawaiian students, state programs are in place that address some of their needs. The Native Hawaiian Education Act (20 U.S.C. 7201), for example, authorized and promoted creation of educational programs designed to benefit Native Hawaiian students. Other activities authorized under the act include:

- Development and maintenance of a statewide Native Hawaiian early education and care system (prenatal to age 5);
- Operation of family-based education centers, literacy programs in either English or Hawaiian among students in kindergarten through grade three, and combined language literacy for Hawaiian speakers in grades five and six;

- Programs to meet the needs of Native Hawaiian students with disabilities;
- Programs to address the needs of gifted and talented Native Hawaiian students;
- Development of materials that incorporate Native Hawaiian traditions and culture in math and sciences and materials written in Hawaiian for children and adults;
- Professional development for educators who teach Native Hawaiians and recruitment of Native Hawaiian teachers; and
- Operation of community-based learning centers that address the needs of Native Hawaiian families and communities.

Even with the help of government programs, most Native Hawaiian students face the same achievement gap as Native students on the mainland. Standardized test scores of Native Hawaiian students who attend public schools fall below national norms, and educational disparities exist in rural areas with large Native Hawaiian populations. In addition, public schools with large numbers of Native Hawaiian students tend to employ teachers with fewer qualifications, and the turnover rate is high. During the last several years, both public and private schools have experienced a decline in high-achieving Native Hawaiian students or those enrolled in gifted and talented programs. Native Hawaiian students also are overrepresented in special education programs.

To more fully address the achievement gap among the Native Hawaiian student population, the Caucus suggests that a report similar to this be published to focus solely on the outcomes of Native Hawaiian students in public schools.

HAWAII'S KAMEHAMEHA SCHOOLS

Hawaii's Kamehameha Schools were established in 1887 with a mission to create long standing educational opportunities for people of Hawaiian ancestry and to improve their overall welfare. In accordance with the will of the school's benefactor, Native Hawaiian students traditionally have been given preference for admission to the school, and this has caused some controversy over the years.

The schools currently provide a kindergarten through grade-12 education to more than 5,000 Native Hawaiian children. The school places a priority on early childhood education and operates approximately 30 preschools. The education of indigent students also is a priority within the school, and enrollment among the poor has steadily increased over the years.

During the past few decades the school has undergone management changes and reorganization, but its two campuses (on Maui and Hawaii) are filled to capacity and continues to effectively educate Native Hawaiian students.

Although U.S. Census projections indicate an overall decline in the percentage of the U.S. population that is Native, many states with the highest concentration of Native students predict growth in their Native population. Because American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian students thus will represent a growing percentage of the workforce in these states, it is important to examine their educational achievement and attainment.

A major reason that certain states serve greater concentrations of Native students is the location of reservations within their boundaries (Table 2). Overall, approximately 35.9 percent of American Indian families live on American Indian areas or Alaska Native village statistical areas. American Indian areas include federal reservations and/or off-reservation trust lands (20.9 percent), Oklahoma tribal statistical areas (9.3 percent), tribal designated statistical areas (0.1 percent), state reservations (0.04 percent), and state-designated American Indian



statistical areas (3.2 percent). As shown in this report, students in the most economically disadvantaged reservations also are the most at risk educationally.

Great diversity exists not only in state demographics, but also in the demographics of reservations and other trust lands. In Oklahoma, for instance, only 13.3 percent of those residing within major tribal statistical areas are American Indian or Alaska Native, while South Dakota reservations—primarily the Rosebud and Pine Ridge reservations—average more than 90 percent American Indian or Alaskan Native. This difference is relevant because concentrating students of minority status often means concentrating students by economic status, as well.

Because the federal government has a unique legal obligation to Native students and families, because the educational success of Native students is linked to state and national economies, and because there is a simple moral imperative to do everything within our power to ensure educational opportunity, the NCNASL wishes to sound a call to local, state and national policymaking bodies. The Caucus offers this fresh, unbiased look at the achievement of our nation's Native students and respectfully requests that, as policymaking bodies move toward improving outcomes for students who most need our help, they carefully study the recommendations in this report.

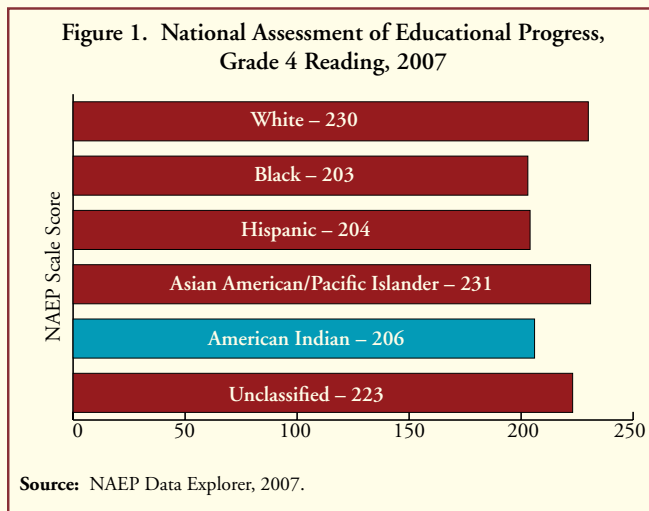


THE STATE OF EDUCATION FOR NATIVE STUDENTS

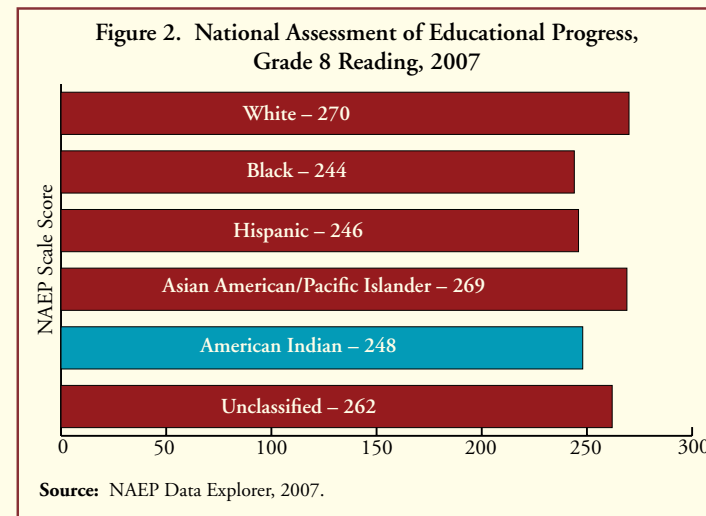
Administered continuously since 1969, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is considered the standard for large-scale educational assessments in the United States. It is the only source of data that compares the academic performance of students in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Department of Defense schools. The 2007 NAEP shows that, whether reading or math is tested or fourth or eighth graders are assessed, Black, Hispanic and American Indian/Alaska Native students perform below the national average and Caucasian and Asian students perform above it.

Reading Performance

In 2007, the average scale score (scores on a single scale with intervals of theoretically equal size) for American Indian/Alaska Native students in grade four reading on the NAEP was 206, compared to a national average for Caucasian students of 230, a difference of 24 points (Figure 1).

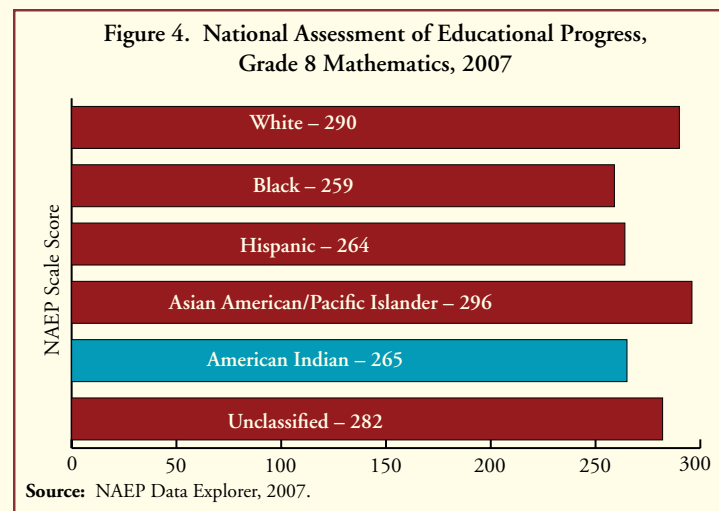
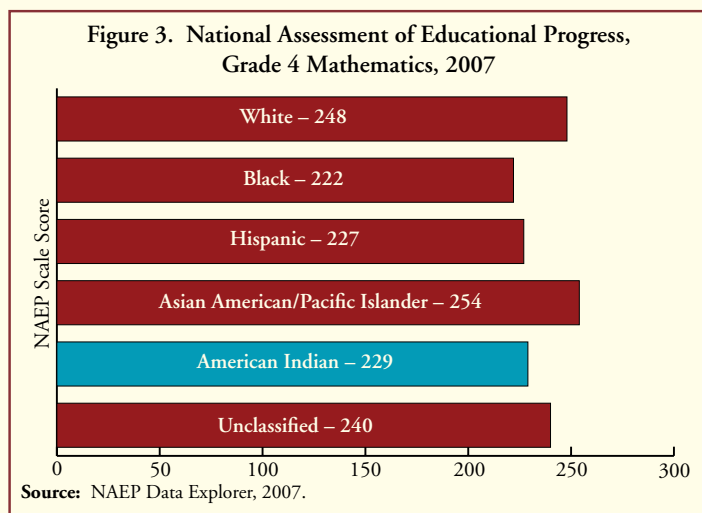


The scale scores of the NAEP are related to the specific skills associated with a child’s development, making it a “vertically scaled assessment,” that assesses student abilities over a wide range of performance criteria. An easy way to understand NAEP results is to apply a simple formula—every 10 points of achievement on the NAEP is roughly equivalent to a grade level of learning. Using this rule, American Indian/Alaska Native students perform 2.4 grade levels (24 points) behind their white peers in reading in grade four. In grade eight, the results are only slightly more encouraging (Figure 2). The average scale score in 2007 was 248 for American Indian/Alaska Native students and 270 for white students, a gap of 2.2 grade levels.



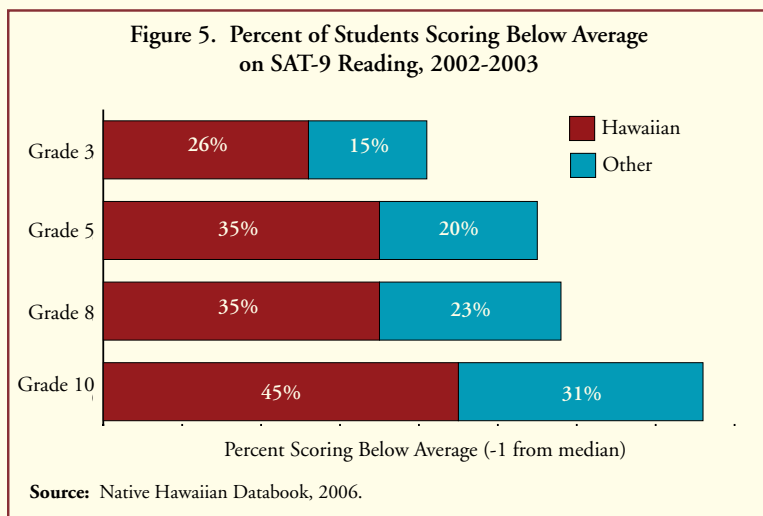
Mathematics Performance

Similar achievement patterns are found in mathematics. Figure 3 shows that American Indian/Alaska Native students in grade 4 perform 19 points—1.9 grade levels—behind their white peers and 2.5 grade levels behind their Asian peers. Although the dynamics of achievement are slightly more encouraging in the eighth grade for reading, they are slightly more discouraging in mathematics. By eighth grade, the gaps in performance are startling. Figure 4 shows a difference of 2.5 grade levels between American Indian/Alaska Native students and their white peers, and 3.1 grade levels separate the performance of American Indian/Alaska Native students and their Asian peers.



The NAEP does not separate the results for Native Hawaiian students from all other students. Results from assessments administered in Hawaii provide information about how Native Hawaiian students perform in relation to their peers. A comparison of achievement results between Native Hawaiian students and all others in Hawaii is shown in Figure 5. Thus, Native Hawaiian students, like their Native peers elsewhere, also exhibit depressed exam performance. Across grade levels, higher percentages of Native Hawaiian students fail to meet exam proficiencies than their peers.

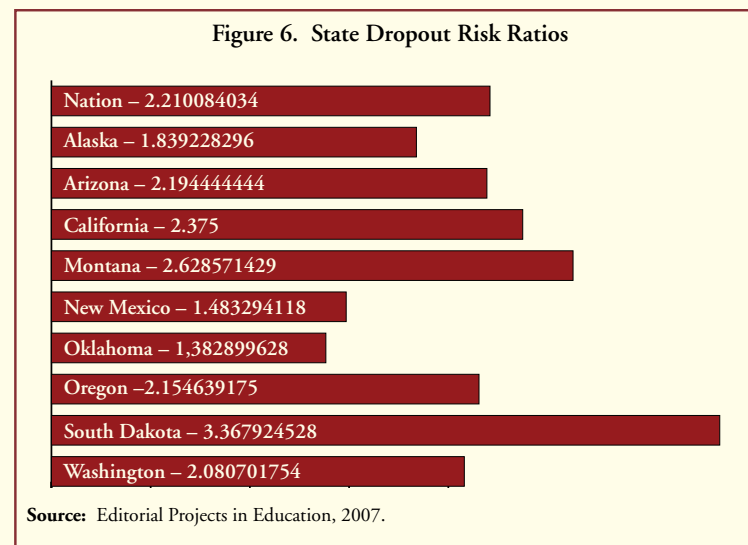
Clearly, academic achievement among American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian students demands national attention. Due to low enrollment of American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian students in many schools, however, this crisis has escaped the attention of the general public and many policymaking bodies. The disservice to Native students does not end with low test performance, however.



Other Contributing Factors to the Achievement Gap

Native student performance on exams is only one contributing factor to the existing achievement gap. Native student retention and disciplinary problems also are of concern. According to a 2004 study by the education research team, Editorial Projects in Education, and a reanalysis conducted for this report, American Indian/Alaska Native students, are 117 percent more likely to drop out of school than their white peers, and that is the average. In South Dakota, American Indian/Alaska Native students are 237 percent more likely to drop out than their white peers. State data is presented in Figure 6.

The Hawaii Department of Education tracks cohorts of ninth grade students for four years to determine the graduation and drop-out rates for each class. In the 2006-2007 academic year, Native Hawaiian students, like American Indian/Alaska Native students, were found to be more educationally at risk; they are 24 percent more likely to drop out than their peers.



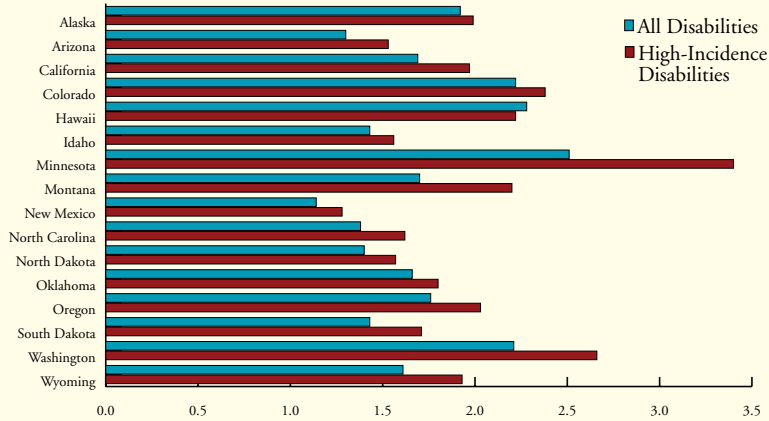
Expulsion rates exceed dropout rates. An analysis of 2002 data from the Office of Civil Rights found that American Indian/Alaska Native students in states with high concentrations of such students were 207 percent more likely to be expelled from school than their white peers.

Special education enrollment

Enrollment in special education is not normally considered a risk to education. Special education can be a remarkably transforming tool for students who are in need. Studies have demonstrated, however, that special education can actually inhibit student achievement for those who do not legitimately need it.

The National Center for Culturally Responsive Teaching (NCCResT) has noted a persistent pattern of over-enrolling minority students in special education services (Figure 7). In states with high concentrations of American Indian/Alaska Native students, American Indian/Alaska Native children were 73 percent more likely to be enrolled in special education services, according to the 2005 Census.

Figure 7. Risk Ratios for American Indian Students with Regard to Special Education Enrollment, Including High-Incidence Disabilities



Source: National Center for Culturally Responsive Teaching and the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2005.

Over-enrollment is especially high among students who have a general learning disability. In most cases, school officials make the determination that a student has a general learning disability if the student cannot make academic progress at the same rate as his or her peers. Among these more common special education assignments, American Indian/Alaska Native students are 96 percent more likely to be identified as having a disability. (Data for Hawaii is included for American Indian/Alaska Native students, but it is not clear if Native Hawaiian students were included as American Indian/Alaska Native in NCCResT reports.)

Post-secondary involvement and completion

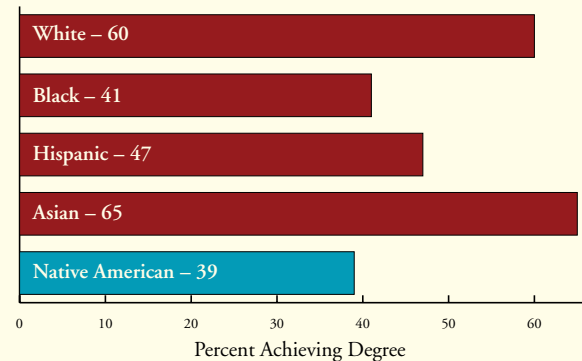
High school completion rates for American Indian/Alaska Native students are much lower than for white students and, in most cases, higher education does no better to prepare American Indian/Alaska Native students for the most successful chance at life. In one of the most recent longitudinal studies of college completion rates, American Indian/Alaska Native students are least likely to complete college (Figure 8).

THE MORONGO TUTORING PROGRAM

In the early 1990s, elders and parents of the Morongo Band of Mission Indians in southern California became concerned about low high-school graduation rates and even lower rates of college matriculation and graduation. In response, the Band formed the Morongo Tutoring Program. It initially provided tutoring services, but later expanded to a robust program focused on life skills.

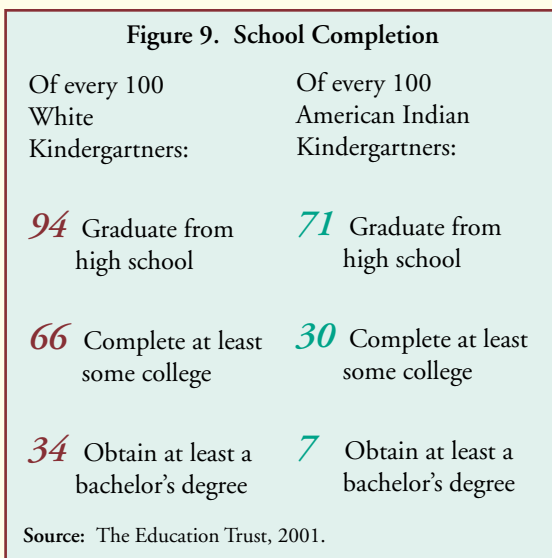
The program was recognized by the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University's Honoring Nations Program in 2006. The citation noted that, as a result of the interventions designed by the community, "...absenteeism is down, graduation rates are up, more people are enrolling in college, and students are testing at or above grade level in all grades."

Figure 8. U.S. College Completion Rates by Racial Subgroup, National Center for Education Statistics, 1997-2003



Source: National Longitudinal Education Study, 2007.

The cumulative effects of these disparate levels of risk and decreased achievement results are summarized in research conducted by the Education Trust, a Washington-based education advocacy organization (Figure 9). Only seven of every 100 American Indian/Alaska Native kindergartners will eventually earn a bachelor's degree, compared with 34 of every 100 white kindergartners. Given the known value of educational credentials, this means that the chances for living a successful life for American Indian/Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian students are limited.



Cultural competency

In conversations with American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian parents, educators and children, one factor about the school experience is mentioned consistently: The school seldom honors Native culture. This situation is confirmed by data analysis. The most ambitious review of the presence of culturally relevant instruction was conducted by the National Indian Education Study (NIES).

The NIES split schools into two categories. They were either “low-density” or “high-density,” with density referring to the concentration of American Indian/Alaska Native students. In low-density schools—usually those in urban areas or states with few American Indian/Alaska

Native students—American Indian/Alaska Native populations were less than 25 percent of the overall student population. In high-density schools American Indian/Alaska Native populations made up more than 25 percent of the overall population.

Students in high-density schools were much more likely than those in low-density schools or U.S. schools overall to report participation in their schools by members of local tribes or Alaskan Native communities (Figure 10). Because of the importance and value of cultural instruction to Native students, this oversight is a disservice. The instruction preferred by American Indian/Alaska Native communities in the United States—rich cultural instruction, embedded throughout the curriculum—is even less likely to occur than an occasional visit from a tribal elder or tribal council member. As Figure 11 illustrates, only 4 percent of eighth grade mathematics teachers in low-density schools reported either daily or extensive classroom use of an American Indian/Alaska Native perspective.

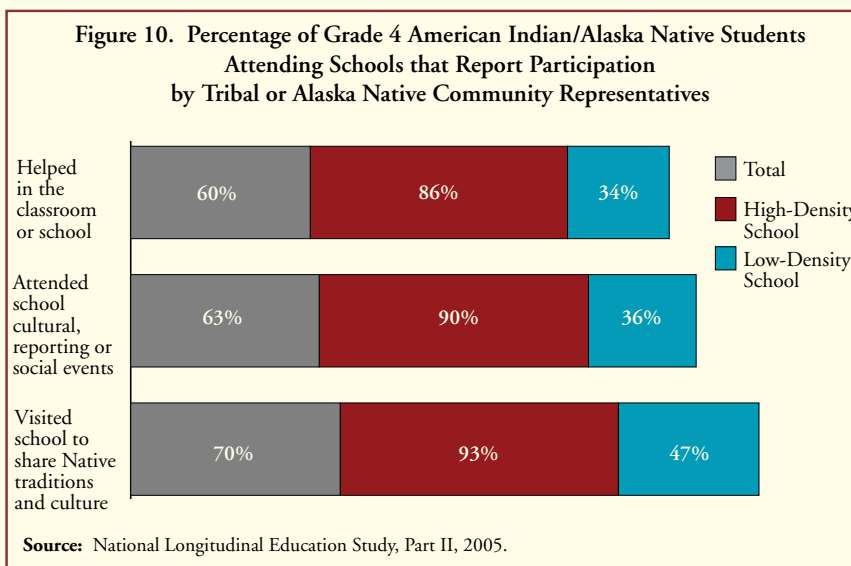
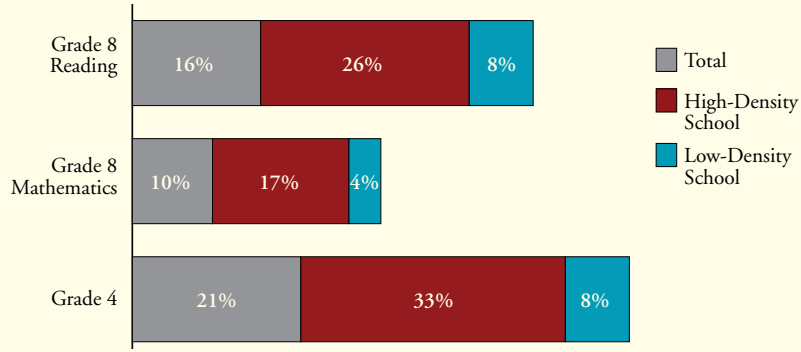


Figure 11. Percentage of Grade 4 and Grade 8 American Indian/Alaska Native Students Whose Teachers Reported Either Daily or Extensive Use of an American Indian/Alaska Native Perspective in Instruction



Source: NAEP Data Explorer, reanalyzed by C. Lohse, 2007.

Although it is too early to draw conclusions about the relationship between achievement and culturally based education, it is clear that the kind of education many American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian families want for their children is not being delivered in the schools. This mismatch between the desire of families and the practice of schools may contribute to the achievement difficulties experienced by American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian students.

A Clear Call for Action

The statistics speak powerfully on behalf of change. The American Dream—to live productive, healthy lives, free from want and full of choices—depends upon a robust education system. We have work to do to ensure that opportunities are equitably distributed to all American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian students.





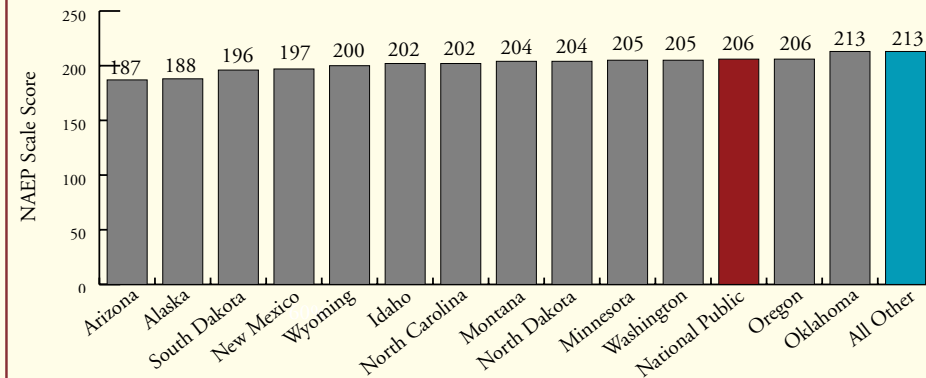
A CLOSER LOOK: A CALL FOR GREATER SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

How Native students navigate and interact with the economy and how their chances for a successful life differ from the rest of the nation's population. This approach—examining more than the effect of education when analyzing achievement—is not without controversy in educational circles. Some believe that examining the context for providing educational services is irrelevant or distracting in an analysis of school and student performance. The Caucus understands this argument, but believes that policymakers have an obligation to consider other perspectives when developing effective responses.

Bill Daggett of the International Center on Leadership in Education and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation have called for revising the “three R’s” of education—relationships, relevance and rigor. The Caucus wishes to add a fourth “R” to the agenda—readiness: Ensuring that students come from healthy, safe families and communities so they are ready to learn. The evidence that many students do not arrive at school prepared to learn is ample and, although students face complex problems, data indicates achievement is low when students experience deep, generational, isolated and concentrated poverty. American Indian students experience this in disproportionately high numbers.

Although results from the NAEP are consistent across grade levels and subjects, they also are consistent in patterns among states. Figure 12 shows the 2005 NAEP results, disaggregated by state, where American Indian students attend schools in concentrations high enough to permit statistically sound analysis. In addition, the average performance for students in other states has been statistically reconstructed. Rank orders among states are relatively consistent across NAEP testing instruments (reading tests, math tests, etc.) and over time, to the extent that trend analyses are possible.

Figure 12. Achievement in States with Low Concentrations of American Indian Students, Grade 4



Source: NAEP Data Explorer, reanalyzed by C. Lohse, 2007.

A coincidence is evident in these consistent patterns. Students in Oklahoma, for example, are consistently high-performing. American Indian/Alaska Native students in Oklahoma, when compared with other states in the study group, are relatively evenly distributed among schools. In states with relatively low performance—Alaska, Arizona and New Mexico, for example—American Indian/Alaska Native students are much more likely to attend schools that have higher concentrations of Native students. This same trend is evident in federal Bureau of Indian Education schools and high-density public American Indian schools, most often on American Indian reservations. American Indian/Alaska Native student achievement in federal schools is lower than anywhere else. In public schools on reservations it is higher than the federal schools, but much lower than in schools with fewer American Indian/Alaska Native students.

THE HOPI ENDOWMENT FOR COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIPS

College completion rates for Native students are lowest among all racial subgroups in the United States, despite the fact that achievement in the K-12 system actually is statistically higher for Native students than it is for their Black or Hispanic peers.

Part of the reason for low college completion rates may be access to financial resources for college expenses. The United Negro College Fund, for instance, took on the challenge of making college more affordable for Black students and has successfully funded many college educations over the years.

A similar effort is under way with the Hopi Tribe in Arizona. The Hopi Tribal Council established an education endowment to provide scholarships to Hopi students. The endowment fund, a tribally chartered nonprofit corporation, is primarily funded through tribal lease agreements and community philanthropy. Managed by an independent investment committee and brokered professionally, the endowment has grown from \$10 million to almost \$15 million.

Furthermore, state test results indicate that American Indian/Alaska Native student achievement decreases as the concentration of American Indian/Alaska Native students in the school increases. Other studies have noted how concentrated poverty affects student achievement. In many cases, when there is a concentration of American Indian/Alaska Native students in a school, there generally is more poverty in the community. Income distribution by race (Figure 13) in the United States is similar to the achievement results in education.

Figure 13. Median Family Income in the Past 12 Months by U.S. Census Bureau Racial Categorization, 2005



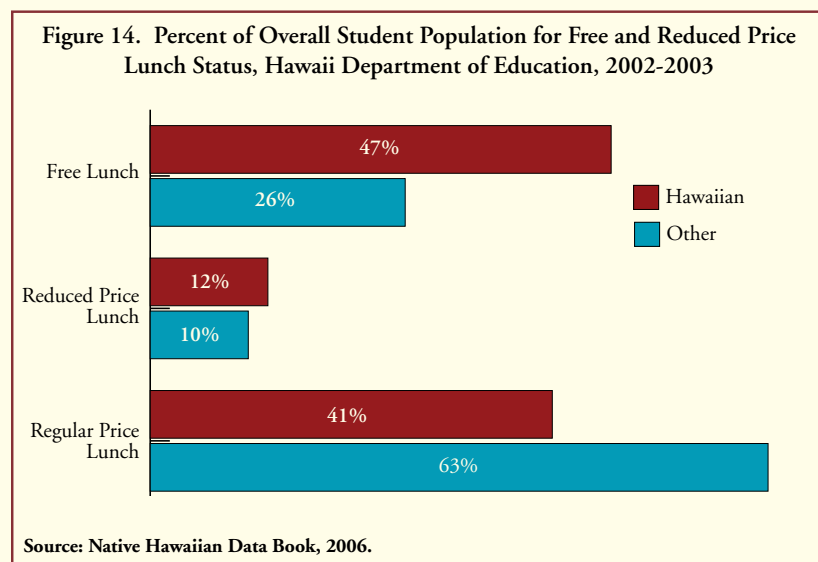
Source: Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2007.

Other social indicators—health care access, life span, rates of home ownership, and access to credit—show similar patterns. Several indicators—rates of incarceration, drug abuse, and unstable family structures—exist in reverse. These consistent patterns have significant policy and budget implications for state legislators.

Clearly, all these social indicators interact in complex ways. The Caucus view, however, is that underlying these social problems—including disparate educational outcomes—is the imbalance of income.

Analysis of higher performing school districts in Indian Country supports this view. In economically advantaged districts across Indian country, achievement is higher, regardless of the level of racial concentration. Thus, a best practice of schools in Oklahoma may be merely a function of an economy that better supports American Indian/Alaska Native students. Research for this report showed that higher performing districts in Indian Country were almost uniformly healthier economically than other areas of Indian Country.

Native Hawaiian students demonstrate the same trend. Results of the SAT-9 (a Hawaii state test) show that Native Hawaiian students performed substantially lower than all other groups. Statistics show that Native Hawaiian students are more likely than all other students in Hawaii to come from low-income families as evidenced by rates of participation in free and reduced price lunch programs on the islands. Figure 14 shows that Native Hawaiian students are underrepresented only in the percentage of students who receive regular price lunch (41 percent vs. 63 percent).



Thus, improving the economy in Indian Country is an important part of improving school performance. Improved schools also may lead to better community health, decreased crime rates, lower levels of drug abuse and more stable families.

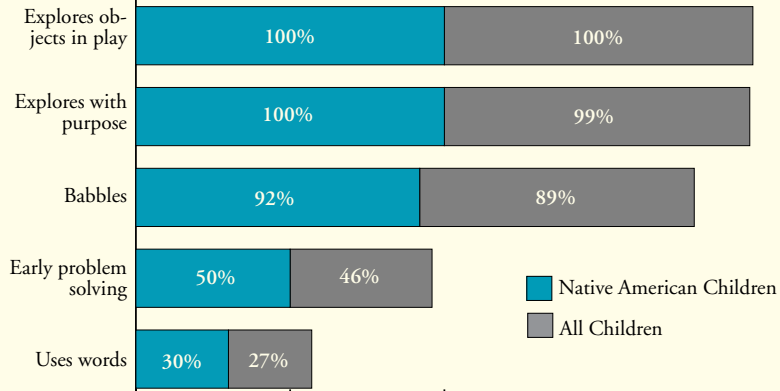
Some may argue that it is difficult to address poverty, particularly the severe, concentrated poverty experienced by many Native students. The challenge of poverty is complex and deserves its own study and companion policy recommendations. Although additional research is warranted, the Caucus believes some conclusions can be drawn in this report. The benefits of early childhood education; comprehensive, universal children’s health insurance; and a successful economy can contribute to Native students’ academic achievement.

Early Childhood Education

Results from the Early Longitudinal Childhood Studies (ELCS) now being conducted by the NCES show that, as late as age 22 months, cognitive gaps do not exist between American Indian students and all others (Figure 15). By kindergarten, however, significant gaps are evident. Figures 16 and 17, from the most recent ELCS study, indicate that American Indian/Alaska Native students in many areas—literacy, mathematics, understanding of shapes, and even fine motor skills—start school as the lowest performing group.

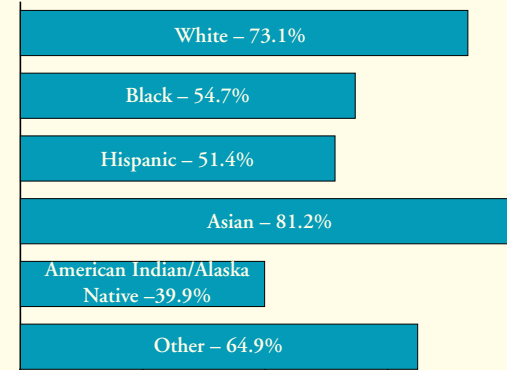
These findings provide guidance on an appropriate window of time to begin addressing achievement problems. Several programs—such as Head Start—already serve a large number of American Indian students. In several states, however, little effort has been made to ensure that standards are in place to provide appropriate instruction and qualified teachers at the early childhood level. Further, few states have aligned any early childhood standards with those for the K-12 system.

Figure 15. Percentage of Children Demonstrating Specific Mental Skills by Child's Age at Assessment (14 months to 22 months)



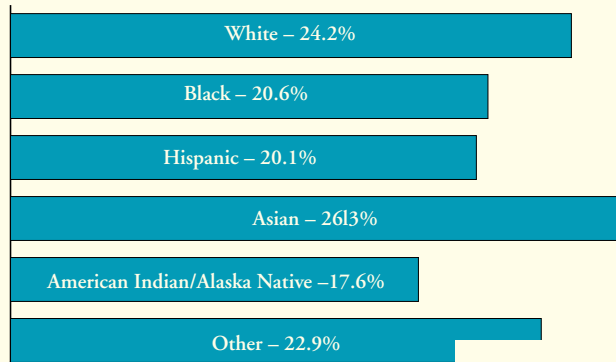
Source: Early Longitudinal Childhood Study, Birth Cohort, 2005.

Figure 17. Percent of Children Demonstrating Proficiency in Shapes and Numbers by Child and Family Characteristics for Children Age 48 Months Through Age 57 Months at Time of Assessment, 2005-2006



Source: Early Longitudinal Childhood Study, Birth Cohort, 2005.

Figure 16. Average Overall Mathematics Score by Child and Family Characteristics for Children Age 48 Months Through Age 57 Months at Time of Assessment, 2005-2006



Source: Early Longitudinal Childhood Study, Birth Cohort, 2005.

Returns on investment in early childhood education are substantial. Some economic analyses—Michigan’s High/Scope Perry Pre-School Project, for example, that compared students enrolled in preschool programs with those who were not—have shown returns of nearly 1,300 percent on initial investments in pre-kindergarten education. Savings are realized in the form of decreased social costs—fewer incarcerations, less reliance on welfare and other social safety nets, and less expensive access to health care—and government revenues increase due to tax revenues from the higher incomes these students later earn.

Comprehensive, Universal Children’s Health Insurance

Children’s health is critical to increasing student achievement. Because of special legal arrangements with the federal government, many Native citizens have access to health care through Indian Health Services (IHS). IHS is not universal and eligibility is complex, but it is not available to other groups. State and federal policymakers will want to work together to increase the quality of care and the diversity of services

available through IHS, thus seizing on the extraordinary opportunity it provides to American Indian/Alaska Native people.

One study demonstrates that, by providing low-income, under-insured students with appropriate eyewear, academic achievement gaps are significantly reduced. Hearing problems also occur more often among low-income students, perhaps as the result of untreated ear infections in early childhood. Many other medical problems—increased incidence of diabetes, asthma and dental caries—disproportionately affect the health of American Indian/Alaska Native students. In addition to the significant distractions these health impediments create to learning, the simple fact that the health problems often lead to student absence helps explain some achievement differences observed between American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian students and their non-Native peers. Ensuring better childhood health care could significantly improve academic achievement. The definition of health also must encompass mental health. The rate of suicide and substance abuse are higher than the national average among American Indian and Alaska Native students.

Robust Economic Development

Helping communities move toward a more successful economy may be one of the best ways to end the concentration of poverty on many reservations and thereby increase student achievement. Economic development models could be created and developed by individual tribes and reservations, and state legislatures could offer assistance, cooperation and support to tribes in this area.

Where economies have thrived, so have educational outcomes. As a result, communities that once imported government resources become exporters. Examples of this phenomenon have been noted by researchers Joseph Kalt and Stephen Cornell in their ongoing studies of tribal economies.

MAINTAINING NATIVE WAYS: THE CHICKALOON VILLAGE SCHOOL

The Chickaloon Village of Alaska, unlike many Alaskan Native communities, does not face the challenges associated with rural and island isolation. Instead, because of its close ties to Anchorage, the community was more concerned about maintaining Native ways.

That's why the community of Ahtna Athabascan Indians began its Ya Ne Dah Ah ("Ancient Teachings") school. A novel early childhood education program, it provides students with the skills necessary for mainstream academic success and also helps students develop knowledge, pride and skills in traditional Athabascan culture.

The school, which serves both pre-K and elementary school students, provides full-time and year-round services, and is the only one of its type in Alaska. The school now serves students through sixth grade and plans to expand as students grow older by adding a seventh grade, then an eighth. It eventually will serve students through a tribal college. In the true spirit of indigogy, the village wants to ensure that its schools serve the entire community from birth through adulthood.



A CLOSER LOOK: A CALL FOR EDUCATION REFORM

State legislatures play an important role in ensuring that disadvantaged students obtain a quality education. The Caucus wishes to be clear in its suggestions for public education. Although we challenge everyone to do better, we stand firmly in support of our public schools and their teachers. They have done much already to close the academic achievement gap for Native students, and with support and a drive toward continuous improvement, they can do even more. Among the options for legislatures to consider within their respective education systems are staffing patterns; course offerings; and parent, family and community support.

Staffing Patterns

Many education advocacy groups believe that creating equity in staffing patterns—in other words, ensuring that poor children are as likely to be taught by a qualified professional as other students—is the key to improving educational performance. The Caucus believes that ensuring equitable distribution of qualified teaching staff is necessary. Results from the 2005 National Indian Education Study suggest that differences in teacher quality and experience alone do not explain the full magnitude of the achievement gap in Indian Country. Statistically, American Indian/Alaska Native students are no more likely to be taught by an unqualified teacher than are other students nationally. Therefore, bringing equally qualified teachers to unequally prepared students will not be enough to close the gap. The only way to rely on teacher quality to close the achievement gap is to ensure that Native students have access to the best teachers. This goal may be difficult to achieve, but the Caucus believes that, with political commitment, it is possible.

Another problem for American Indian/Alaska Native students is the under-representation of Native teachers in the nation's schools. Again,

data from the 2005 National Indian Education Study is particularly useful (Table 4).

Table 4. Percentage of Grade 4 and Grade 8 American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) Students, by School Density and Their Teachers' Race/Ethnicity, 2005

Teacher Race/ Ethnicity	Total	High-Density >25% AI/AN	Low-Density <25% AI/AN
Grade 4			
White only	73	56*	89
AI/AN only	18	35*	1
AI/AN in combination	4	5	3
Other race or ethnicity	5	4	7
Grade 8 Mathematics			
White only	76	65*	85
AI/AN only	11	19*	4
AI/AN in combination	6	9	2
Other race or ethnicity	8	7	9
Grade 8 Reading			
White only	75	60*	88
AI/AN only	10	20*	1
AI/AN in combination	4	5	3
Other race or ethnicity	12	15	9

*Indicates statistically significant differences from low-density schools.

Source: National Indian Education Study, Part II, 2005.

Particularly in low-density schools where the teaching force is only 1 percent American Indian/Alaska Native, more can be done to ensure that Native teachers will teach Native students. Even in high-density schools, Native teachers may be significantly under-represented compared to the make-up of the student body. This is important because students need role models. One state educator, while visiting a school on a reservation, asked a young girl what she wanted to be. The girl replied, “A teacher aide.” When asked why she was not interested in becoming a teacher, she replied, “Indians are teacher aides, not teachers.”

Native Hawaiians are similarly under-represented in the teaching force. Estimates of the percentage of Native Hawaiians alone on the Hawaiian Islands vary between 6.6 percent and 12.5 percent. The percentage of people who indicate some Native Hawaiian heritage varies between 19.8 percent and 22 percent. In the Hawaiian teaching force, however, only 1 percent of teachers are Native Hawaiian alone, and 9.6 percent indicate some Native Hawaiian heritage.

Course Offerings

All too often, as schools attempt to help students achieve at an age-appropriate grade level, standards and expectations for students may be eased, as evidenced by the lack of advanced placement courses offered to American Indian/Alaska Native children. Remediation is important, but it must occur when students are being challenged, perhaps through extended day or extended school year opportunities.

Ample evidence exists that American Indian/Alaska Native students are less likely to be exposed to the most demanding courses. Three major longitudinal studies of the experiences of students in school, conducted by the NCES, demonstrate that American Indian/Alaska Native students are less likely than all other students to complete rigorous science or mathematics courses.

The College Board adds another relevant point. Figure 18 illustrates the racial makeup of the national Advanced Placement (AP) examinee population, compared with the overall student population. While Hispanic students are equally represented in the examinee population and Asian students are overrepresented, American Indian/Alaska Native and Black students are much less likely to take the exams. This over- and under-representation also are shown in Figure 19.

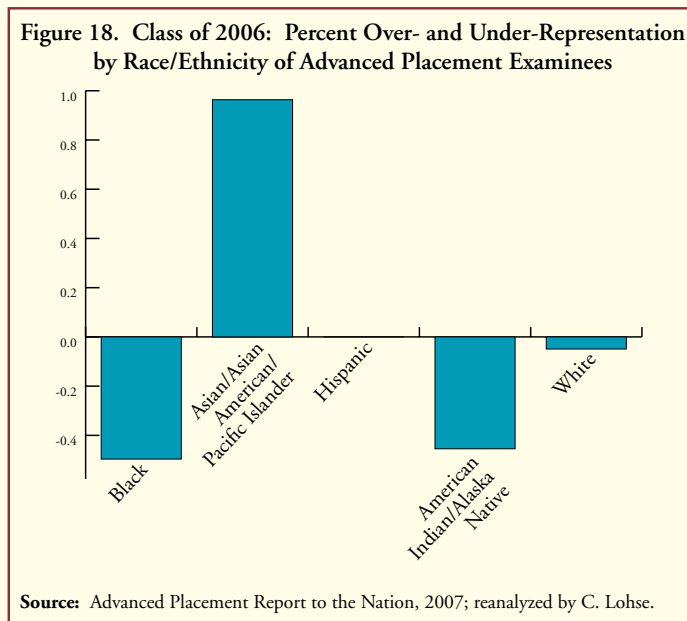
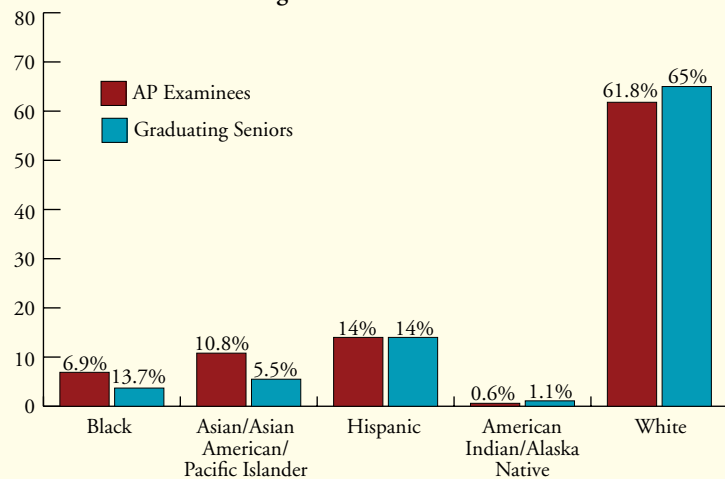


Figure 19. Class of 2006: Race/Ethnicity of Advanced Placement Examinees vs. Graduating Seniors in U.S. Public Schools



Source: Advanced Placement Report to the Nation, 2007.

State policymakers can help ensure an appropriate, pre-collegiate education in every school by examining their state accreditation standards. Although legislation may be necessary, state lawmakers influence other state policymaking bodies, such as state boards of education. By working together on accreditation standards, it may be possible to honor an implicit promise to young people: Hard work and success in school will help prepare them to pursue their dreams.

Strengthening Parent, Family and Community Support

Montana was included in the present study of achievement and, like several other states represented, showed a sizeable gap between the performance of American Indian and white students. Contributing to this problem is the fact that all Montana schools that have been identified as in need of restructuring under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act are on American Indian reservations. No off-reservation schools have been similarly classified.

School support teams from the state education agency were dispatched to these schools to conduct a comprehensive analysis of school effectiveness based on research conducted by Dr. Larry Lazotte. When reports for the 33 schools were compiled and analyzed, an interesting finding emerged. The factor most correlated with higher achievement was the school's effort to engage parents, families and communities in the school, outweighing even school leadership, teacher quality and curriculum. One possible explanation for the Montana finding could be that, in areas where communities and families are not convinced of schools' value and purpose, children are unlikely to view school as important. Working together, schools and communities can learn from each other.

Schools across Indian Country have experienced success when a firm commitment is made to strategies that encourage teaching and learning from and for all. Some schools bring grandmothers or other elders into the school. Other schools promote events at a community park with a barbecue and celebrations of accomplishment along with meaningful time for input and understanding of the challenges schools and communities face. Such strategies have produced remarkable stories of school turnaround. State legislatures can help promote these activities through their leadership and sponsorship of grants and research.

Together, the dynamics associated with the performance of American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian students present a policy challenge that is far-reaching in scope and requires not only attention, but also new resources, diligent watchfulness, compassion, a need to honor Native voices and demands, and a willingness to identify new community-specific solutions. Given the political sovereignty and strong will of Native people, the Caucus is filled with hope that American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian students may be the first to close the achievement gap with other students, acting as a beacon of hope and a template for the success of other educationally disadvantaged groups. The challenges inherent in such a proposition are great, but the rewards are far greater.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The National Caucus of Native American State Legislators, in conjunction with many partners and with hosts Montana Governor Brian Schweitzer and the Montana superintendent of public instruction, invited a diverse group of stakeholders to the Montana State Capitol in September 2007 to discuss preliminary research and help develop policy recommendations aimed at closing the achievement gap found among Native students.

The work of those stakeholders and a review by the Caucus led to the following recommendations. If an entity other than the legislature would be responsible for taking action, it is identified in parentheses.

To ensure access for Native students to a curriculum that prepares them for the rigors of a new economy and college, enabling them to fully participate in the workforce:

- Encourage state boards of education to position the elementary and middle school standards in core subjects to prepare students for a rigorous high school curriculum.
- Support or explore the creation of dual/concurrent enrollment (designing safeguards to ensure that college courses are as rigorous as high school courses), advanced placement, international baccalaureate, or other rigorous curriculum options for all students.
- Convene a state leadership group that connects prekindergarten, K-12, and postsecondary governance and fosters communication along the prekindergarten to graduate school continuum (P-20 councils).
- Support increased career education and workforce readiness programs in schools so that students see the connection between school

and careers after graduation, integrate 21st century skills into the curriculum, and provide all students with access to 21st century technology.

- Create a legislative task force to research and explore options to use distance learning as a tool for instruction for students who are at risk, for students in rural communities with hard-to-fill instructional areas, and for alternative learning environments.
- Support early diagnosis and intervention programs and reevaluate current placement to reduce the disproportionate number of American Indian/Alaska Native students identified as requiring special education services.
- Explore early aid commitments to guarantee support for low-income students who prepare for college.
- Set a bold goal that state public schools increase the graduation/completion rate of American Indian/Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian students to a minimum of 85 percent, investing additional targeted funding in schools that have a four-year high school completion rate of less than 70 percent for their American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian students.
- Support state American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian dropout prevention research and programs developed with community and tribal collaboration.
- Explore student development accounts that reward students regularly as they make their way through the educational system.

-
- Provide adequate resources for schools and other programs to develop and implement youth financial education that is culturally appropriate and effectively teaches pertinent financial management.

To address the multi-dimensional, contextual problems associated with decreased achievement in schools thereby helping students arrive at school ready to learn before they enter school and every day during their school years:

- Establish an interim state legislative committee on communities and children in poverty that would include the expertise of all executive agencies (education, labor, health, justice and corrections) to solve issues associated with poverty, with a particular emphasis on American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian communities.
- Encourage school boards, state boards of education, principals' organizations, and school superintendents' organizations to develop a policy that addresses the needs of American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian students and families who are in poverty.
- Provide adequate support to schools with at least a 40 percent poverty level (as measured by the free and reduced lunch programs) to administer health screenings, including vision, dental and hearing.
- Develop and support strong programs for youth and family, understanding that foundations for learning are built between birth and age 5.
- Fund and implement a voluntary, universal prekindergarten program for 3- and 4-year-olds, emphasizing areas with high-need/high-risk children.

- Support home-based resources and services to families to support early development and learning.
- Facilitate a collaborative effort between states, the federal government and tribes to: 1) recognize the long-term educational and economic benefits of early childhood education; and 2) identify policy changes to strengthen existing services (Head Start, child care, preschool, IDEA, home-based, and K-12 services) and create new ones for American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian children who can benefit from early childhood education.
- Support the routine data collection on American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian children's participation in early education programs.
- Support academic and non-academic enrichment before-, after- and interim-school programs that are culturally appropriate and allow culturally relevant learning environments.
- Offer extended learning opportunities for students who are academically behind.

To offer the best teaching force to American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian students:

- Offer incentives or grant programs to teachers in hard-to-staff schools, including loan forgiveness, higher rates of pay, and/or assistance with home purchases.
- Provide adequate housing for teachers in rural, isolated tribal communities to schools that meet criteria established by the state educational agency as serving a rural and isolated community that does not have adequate housing for teachers.

- Ensure that educators have the necessary training and resources to prevent students from dropping out by funding professional development focused on the needs of diverse students and students who are at-risk; up-to-date textbooks and materials, computers and information technology; and safe, modern schools.
- Support incentives for teacher education programs at colleges and universities (including tribal colleges) that recruit and retain high-performing, diverse students to become teachers, as well as programs that focus on the unique needs of Native children.
- Create incentives for American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian teachers who teach in Native communities to become nationally board-certified.

To increase the voice of Native people and their participation in the work of schools and to make schools more culturally congruous places for Native children:

- Include American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian representation on education boards, departments and committees at the state and federal levels.
- Encourage state agencies to seek the advice of local tribes to develop the State Education Plan required under Title I to ensure the State Education Agency has engaged in timely and meaningful consultation with representatives of Indian tribes to meet the unique cultural, linguistic and educational needs of Indian students.
- Help state and local boards of education use innovative pilot programs to increase parental/guardian involvement among American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian families.

- Investigate new ways to involve families in students' learning at school and at home in creative ways so that all families—single, poor, minority—can support their children's academic achievement, help their children engage in healthy behaviors, and stay actively involved in their children's education from preschool through high school graduation.
- Ensure that Native students are included in after-school programs during the academic year by providing resources to schools with at least a 40 percent poverty rate (as measured by the free/reduced lunch program) to offer ongoing student activities, including school-sponsored activities and activities developed in partnership with community organizations.
- Promote tribal certification for teaching Native language, culture and oral traditions.
- In consultation with tribes and tribal education departments, direct state and local education agencies to develop culturally based curriculums—including Native language, culture and history curriculums and culturally appropriate standards—in alignment with state standards, and ensure effective implementation through ongoing adequate and sustainable state, federal and tribal funding.

To increase the visibility of American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian student achievement through the dissemination of best practices and research for Native students:

- Request that reports on the achievement of American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian students be submitted to state leadership.
- Require the state public school system to maintain a data base on American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian students to provide accurate information on student achievement and to assess progress.

- Request that annual reports on Native student achievement be conducted by the K-12 state education department and delivered to the legislature, governor, tribal councils, and other state leadership organizations—including assessments administered in compliance with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, graduation and completion rates, special education enrollment rates, data from the Office of Civil Rights on suspensions and expulsions, and other data routinely collected by state education agencies on their K-12 school districts.
- Support the continued disaggregation of data for all accountability subgroups, as required by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, with a minimum subgroup size of 10.
- Integrate data systems to track students' P-20 progression and their transition into the workforce using an identifier that stays with the student across districts and provide adequate financial support to build and maintain such data systems.
- Support public and private grants for pilot projects to research and implement best practices for K-12 students in communities that have a large percentage of high-risk student behavior (as determined by the state education agency), including such factors as communities that have a 40 percent or higher poverty level, high numbers of families that rely on public support, high teen pregnancy rates, high crime rates, and other factors that affect student academic success.
- Provide additional support to grantee schools, depending on their individual needs, to create support systems, including partnerships with local agencies or programs that could deliver needed services with the school, additional counseling services, drug and alcohol treatment, teen parenting programs, resource officers, expanded school day options, and student activities.

- Direct K-12 schools to develop an evaluation system that investigates reasons for the disparity in suspension and expulsion rates for American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian students and their non-Indian peers and to take appropriate steps to make changes, if appropriate, to create a more equitable system of discipline for all students.
- Provide alternative learning opportunities that will allow students who are suspended or expelled to continue their education and to provide support services for students who may need a more flexible attendance option. Colorado has passed successful legislation on alternative learning opportunities, and initial results from their work are encouraging.

To ensure adequate distribution of resources to Native students:

- Ensure adequate financial support to high-need K-12 schools to meet the increased expectations.
- Examine the state funding formula and work to provide adequate funding to the neediest schools, realizing that Native students will likely need more resources.





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THE NATIONAL CAUCUS OF NATIVE AMERICAN STATE LEGISLATORS

In 1992, the National Caucus of Native American State Legislators (NCNASL) was formed with the following goals:

- To provide a forum for discussion and increased communication among Native American legislators;
- To increase awareness of the diverse Native American cultures in the United States;
- To support the establishment and maintenance of state-tribal communications to encourage open dialogue, understanding and cooperation; and
- To act as an advisory body for the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) on issues that affect Native Americans.

Today, the seven policy committees of the 80-member caucus meet regularly to discuss issues of importance to Native American state legislators and their constituents. The caucus is comprised of the following committees:

- Community Wellness and Criminal Justice;
- Economic Development;
- Education;
- Environment, Water, Natural Resources and Energy;
- Health and Human Services;
- Transportation; and
- Tribal Relations and Trust Responsibility