

Results in Brief: Study of Native American and Alaska Native Children in School Program: FY 2011 and FY 2013 Cohorts

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The Native American and Alaska Native Children in School (NAM) discretionary grants program aims to reduce the persistent achievement gap between Native American and Alaska Native (NA/AN) youth and their peers in reading and English language arts (ELA) and college readiness in reading. NA/AN students enter school with varying levels of skill in the English used in classroom instruction. The purpose of the NAM program is to build or improve NA/AN English learners' (ELs') English language proficiency (ELP) skills to promote their overall academic success, while simultaneously honoring and promoting NA/AN languages and cultures. Program priority areas for funding for the FY 2011 and FY 2013 competitions included NA/AN languages and cultural revitalization, parent and family engagement, postsecondary preparation and success, early childhood development, data-based decision making, and civic learning and engagement. This qualitative study examined the types of activities grantees funded, and the perceived benefits, challenges, and lessons learned that they experienced in implementing these activities.

Study Questions

1. How do NAM grantees use NAM funding to support activities intended to increase NA/AN EL student academic achievement?
2. How do grantees work with partners to provide funded services?
3. How do grantees measure progress and outcomes of funded services?
4. What benefits do grantees perceive as resulting from the grant?
5. What challenges do grantees experience in implementing grant-funded activities?

Study Design

The study included case studies of 19 grantee sites, representing a total of 22 FY 2011 and FY 2013 grant awards (two of the sites were awarded both FY 2011 and FY 2013 grants, and one site was awarded both an elementary school and a high school grant in FY 2013). The study team collected data through telephone interviews with grant coordinators and visits to sites across 10 states in fall 2016 and spring 2017: Alaska, Arizona, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Washington and Wisconsin. The site visits consisted of interviews and focus groups with individuals involved in implementing NAM-funded activities and their partners. The study team analyzed data to examine grantees' funded activities; the benefits, challenges, and lessons learned experienced by grantees; and differences between tribal and Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) grantees and public school system grantees.

Highlights

- Ninety-five percent of grantees identified improving students' ELP as a primary focus area of their grants, followed by revitalizing NA/AN languages and cultures (68 percent).
- Grantees most commonly used NAM funds for instructional personnel salaries and instructional materials or services (95 percent each); grantees also used funds for professional development, curriculum development, and technology resources.
- All of the grantees reported working with at least one partner particularly to gain professional or cultural expertise to support funded activities; the most common types of partners across all grantees were tribes, nontribal colleges and universities, and community-based organizations.
- Grantees' most frequently reported data to monitor progress were state ELP assessment results (74 percent) and state ELA assessments results (58 percent). Grantees reported Native language proficiency data less frequently (32 percent).
- Grantees' most commonly reported benefits were gains in revitalization of NA/AN languages and cultures and increases in students' English language proficiency.
- Grantees' most frequently reported challenges were limited staff capacity, low parent and family engagement, and lack of adequate assessment data.

NAM-Funded Activities

Grantees most frequently supported English language development (ELD) and NA/AN languages and cultural activities; many also directed resources to parent and family engagement, postsecondary preparation and success, and early childhood development.

One of the most commonly funded resources to support the program's purpose and priorities across the 19 grantees was instructional personnel, including teachers who provided ELD instruction and teachers and tribal elders who provided NA/AN languages and cultural instruction. Grantees also commonly purchased supplemental materials to provide culturally responsive content instruction in English, and augment instruction in NA/AN languages and cultures. Some grantees dedicated funds to developing their own NA/AN languages and cultural curriculum or instructional materials in English specific to the needs and languages of NA/AN students. Some funded technology resources and equipment to better engage or assess students in English language or NA/AN language content.

The majority of grantees also funded professional development, mostly to support their teachers' abilities to better meet the unique needs of NA/AN ELs. Grant-funded supports varied, but included literacy coaches, professional learning communities, and formal training institutes on teaching second languages.

Nearly two-thirds of the grantees directed resources to activities supporting postsecondary success, including credit recovery and dual-credit programs; and most reported funding parent and family engagement activities. Nearly half funded early childhood development services. Some of these types of activities included home visits and resources to help parents develop their children's school readiness and potential for long-term academic success.

Grant Partners and Their Roles

Tribes were the most common type of partner across all grantees but were particularly common among the public school system grantees.

All of the grantees worked with at least one type of partner to support or provide grant-funded services and activities, most frequently with tribes, nontribal colleges and universities, and community-based organizations. All of the public school system grantees described partnering with tribes to help ensure that grant activities reflected and honored tribal values and cultural knowledge. Many of the tribal and BIE grantees partnered with school districts to gain resources, professional development, or technical assistance related to assessing students' ELP, using technology, and supporting English and Native language and literacy instruction.

Measures and Uses of Data

All grantees reported collecting data to monitor progress and inform grant activities for ELP, as required, including data

from state ELP assessments, state ELA assessments, and English benchmark and progress monitoring assessments.

To a lesser extent, grantees reported collecting Native language oral proficiency assessment data, with many indicating the limited availability of NA/AN language assessments as a challenge. Some grantees collected data on student attendance, high school graduation, and postsecondary enrollment to monitor student engagement and progress of funded services.

Benefits, Challenges, and Lessons Learned

Grantees reported experiencing gains in the revitalization of NA/AN languages and cultures and increases in students' ELP, the former measured through the greater presence and integration of NA/AN languages, cultures, and heritage in the schools, and the latter through improved scores on ELP and ELA assessments.

Seventy-four percent of the grantees indicated that their NAM-funded activities had resulted in positive changes in the revitalization of NA/AN languages and cultures. Grantees reported greater tribal community engagement in the school and an increased use of Native languages among school staff and students. They also perceived an increased sense of pride among students. Nearly two-thirds reported that they had observed performance gains in ELP assessment scores, which they attributed at least in part to NAM-funded services.

Although the majority of grantees cited some implementation challenges, they also described learning important lessons based on these challenges.

Sixty-eight percent of grantees indicated limited staff capacity to provide the tailored instruction and learning experiences NA/AN ELs needed. Many also reported low engagement of parents and families as a challenge (63 percent). At the same time, grantees described learning important lessons from their challenges, including the importance of identifying alternate sources of data to track student and grant progress when standardized assessment data were limited; including families and tribal communities early in the grant process to encourage engagement in grant activities; and providing targeted professional development for teachers on meeting unique needs of NA/AN ELs.

Although grantees reported challenges related to sustainability, several grantees reported strategies to continue the support of ELD instruction, professional development for teachers, and NA/AN language and curriculum development beyond the end of the grant period.

Additional Information

The complete report is available at www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/opepd/ppss/reports.html.