

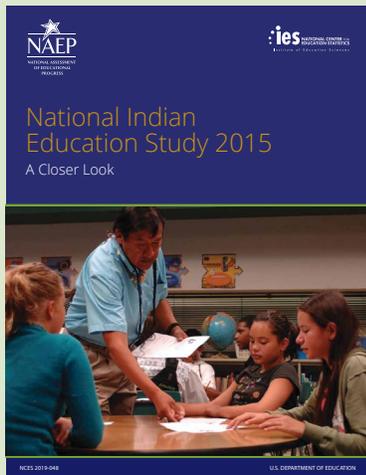
National Indian Education Study 2015

Setting the Context

written by
members of the Technical Review Panel
for
The National Indian Education Study

Statement to accompany the release of
National Indian Education Study 2015: A Closer Look





The National Indian Education Study (NIES) is designed to describe the condition of education for American Indian and Alaska Native students in the United States. The study provides educators, policymakers, and the public with information about the academic performance in mathematics and reading of American Indian/Alaska Native fourth- and eighth-graders as well as their exposure to Native American cultures.

The study is sponsored by the Office of Indian Education (OIE) and conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) for the U.S. Department of Education. NIES is authorized under Executive Order 13592, Improving American Indian and Alaska Native Educational Opportunities and Strengthening Tribal Colleges and Universities, which was issued in 2011 to improve education efforts for American Indian/Alaska Native students nationwide.

Conducted in 2005, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2015, and 2019, NIES provides data on a nationally representative sample of American Indian/Alaska Native students in public, private, Department of Defense, and Bureau of Indian Education funded schools. An additional aspect of the study is conducted through surveys to explore the educational experiences of fourth- and eighth-grade American Indian/Alaska Native students based on responses to the NIES student, teacher, and school questionnaires. The surveys focus on the integration of Native languages and cultures into school and classroom activities.

Printed by Sault Printing Co., Inc.
a Native American-owned and operated business in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan
Distributed by Tribal Tech, LLC
a Native American woman-owned business based in Alexandria, Virginia

As members of the Technical Review Panel (TRP) for the National Indian Education Study (NIES), we are honored to take an active role in the design, implementation, and analysis of the nation's most comprehensive study of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) education. What makes this study different from others is the fact that not only are AI/AN students culturally and linguistically diverse, they are also the only student group in the United States for whom the federal government has a trust responsibility to educate. This responsibility, based on treaty obligations and constitutional authority, extends to AI/AN students attending Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) and tribal schools, as well as public schools. As the technical review panel for this groundbreaking study, we not only honor the federal trust responsibility for Indian education, we also recognize and respect the role of Indigenous languages and cultures in creating and sustaining nurturing learning environments. As such, we feel strongly that data from this study should be used to explore and formally document relationships between student academic outcomes and culturally relevant teaching and learning in schools. As educators, researchers, and community members with years of experience in education, and more specifically, the education of AI/AN youth, we know firsthand that positive academic outcomes can be evidenced when AI/AN youth are exposed to and participate in learning environments that recognize and honor their linguistic, cultural/tribal, and academic diversity; however, we also recognize the dearth of published studies documenting this relationship. NIES provides a unique and much needed opportunity to explore these relationships.

As the technical review panel for this groundbreaking study, we not only honor the federal trust responsibility for Indian education, we also recognize and respect the role of Indigenous languages and cultures in creating and sustaining nurturing learning environments.

In keeping with this commitment to honoring the federal trust responsibility for Indian education, and examining and documenting the relationship between culturally relevant and responsive education and academic outcomes for AI/AN students, the TRP recommends that (1) data be collected in such a way as to be useful in identifying, developing, and implementing culturally relevant and responsive educational practices and services for AI/AN youth; and (2) data be presented in such a way as to not suggest causal inferences.

We also note the importance of collecting and reporting data in ways that recognize and honor the cultural and linguistic "funds of knowledge"¹ AI/AN students and their families possess and that they can and do bring to the educational arena. However, it is also important to point out that results from NIES do not provide sufficient data to identify, develop, or implement culturally relevant and responsive educational practices for AI/AN youth. These limitations are directly related to the design of the study, which is nonexperimental and cross-sectional. As such, NIES is only able to provide a snapshot, rather than a more detailed picture, of the state of mathematics and reading achievement and AI/AN youths' exposure to Native languages and cultures within schools.

¹ For more information on "funds of knowledge," see Moll, L.C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory Into Practice*, XXXI(2),132-141.

We also acknowledge the fact that there are more than 600 state and federally recognized tribes, and more than 200 Native languages still spoken to varying degrees, across the United States. Given such diversity of cultures and languages represented among this nation's Native peoples, readers should interpret the results of this study with a degree of caution. In addition to linguistic and cultural diversity, it is also important to acknowledge the wide range of types and quality of schools AI/AN students attend (e.g., public, BIE operated and funded, tribal, private, Department of Defense), as well as their geographic location, and in many cases isolation. All of this must also be interpreted in light of the sociopolitical relationships between tribes, states, and federal governments, and the lingering effects of an educational system that for years aimed to acculturate and assimilate Native youth, rather than embrace their tribal, communal, and individual assets and strengths. Regardless of how well Native students perform on academic assessments such as those reported on in this study, we must remember that standardized tests are designed and administered in the English language, a language that was imposed upon Native peoples as part of the nation's attempts to acculturate and assimilate them. As a result, such tests tend to measure students' ability to perform in English rather than their ability to perform in a bilingual or bicultural manner.

For Native students to achieve their full potential, educational systems and practices must work diligently to feed their bodies, nurture their spirits, and grow their minds.

One of the greatest challenges is ensuring that Native students are able to perform well academically while maintaining their Native cultures and languages. Native people's ability to exist and persist in a society that has too often failed to honor and respect their Native languages and cultures is an important reminder of their resilient nature and ability to persist in the face of seemingly overwhelming circumstances. For Native students to achieve their full potential, educational systems and practices must work diligently to feed their bodies, nurture their spirits, and grow their minds. The adoption and use of culturally relevant teaching and learning practices is critical to achieving this goal. It is in this spirit that we share this report with individuals, communities, and organizations across this nation.

In reviewing the findings presented in this report, the TRP was particularly interested in relationships that speak to the resiliency and aspirations of Native youth. For example, the report found that

- AI/AN students who were the most engaged² with their schoolwork scored higher in both reading and mathematics than their less engaged peers (see pp. 14–15), and
- approximately 95 percent of AI/AN eighth-graders, regardless of the type of school they attended, had similar aspirations and expectations and believed that their schooling would bolster their chances for a successful future (see p. 16). Again, this finding was consistent across school types, which represented a range of socioeconomic situations and geographical locations.

² "Engagement" indicated the extent to which students put a lot of effort into their schoolwork, desired to be one of the best students in their class, enjoyed being challenged in their classes, and felt they belonged at school.

We are hopeful that findings such as those reported above will be useful in helping to create and sustain more positive academic and social outcomes for AI/AN students. However, we also acknowledge that there is much work to be done to foster stronger and more supportive relationships among tribal, federal, and state governments as they work to honor their trilateral responsibility³ for the education of AI/AN youth, responsibilities based on the more than 600 treaties entered into between tribal nations and the federal government throughout the history of the United States. Current federal legislation, including the Every Student Succeeds Act, also has mandates for tribal consultation regarding the education of AI/AN youth. We believe that such consultation can and should be strengthened and made more meaningful by incorporating the types of data referenced in this report, data that help to shed light on the educational conditions and subsequent academic achievement of AI/AN students.

We are committed to affecting positive change for AI/AN students, and the schools and staff who serve them, and we honor and thank those who join us in this work on behalf of Native youth across this nation.

In closing, we recognize that the future of this nation's Native youth is compromised if we do not work to improve their educational conditions and subsequent academic and social outcomes. We are committed to affecting positive change for AI/AN students, and the schools and staff who serve them, and we honor and thank those who join us in this work on behalf of Native youth across this nation. We believe that the data presented in this report can assist us in these efforts. However, as we envision the future of NIES, we urge the United States Department of Education's Office of Indian Education, the National Center for Education Statistics, and Educational Testing Service (ETS)—partners in this research endeavor—to continue to listen and be responsive to the concerns and recommendations of the TRP as it strives to ensure the practical utility and meaningfulness of this research.

³ See for example, Reinhardt, M.J., & Tippeconnic, J.W., III. (2010). The treaty basis of Michigan Indian Education. *Indigenous Policy Journal*, XX(4).

Members of the Technical Review Panel

The Technical Review Panel for the National Indian Education Study is made up of individuals with expertise in matters related to the education of AI/AN students. Members oversee the development of the NIES questionnaires, and guide the planning, drafting, and revision of NIES publications with their ongoing expert consultation.

Doreen E. Brown – Yup'ik – Anchorage School District – has worked in Indian Education in Alaska for almost 30 years in a variety of roles: teacher, mentor, and executive director of Title VI and Title VII initiatives. Ms. Brown was a member of the National Advisory Council on Indian Education during President Barack Obama's second term and is currently the Senior Director for Title VI for the Anchorage School District.

WaziHanska, aka Robert Cook, is an enrolled citizen of the Oglala Lakota Nation, Pine Ridge Reservation South Dakota. A nationally recognized educator and administrator in Native Education, WaziHanska is the National Senior Managing Director of the Native Alliance at Teach for America.

Dr. Steven Andrew Culpepper is an Associate Professor in the Department of Statistics at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. His research interests include large-scale assessments, Bayesian statistical methods, and psychometrics. Dr. Culpepper serves on the Board of Trustees of the Psychometric Society and on the editorial boards of the *Journal of Educational and Behavioral Statistics*, the *Journal of Educational Measurement*, and *Organizational Research Methods*.

Dr. Susan C. Faircloth, Chair – Coharie Tribe – is a Professor and the Director of Colorado State University's School of Education. Dr. Faircloth serves as a Senior Associate Editor of the *American Journal of Education* and is a member of the editorial board of the *Journal of American Indian Education*.

Dr. Chris Gordon – Anishinaabe – is the Anishinaabe Language/Culture Coordinator and Instructor at the K-8 Joseph K. Lumsden Bahweting P.S.A., Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan. Dr. Gordon is a second language learner of Anishinaabemowin with nearly 20 years of teaching language and culture to all grades K-8 during that time.

Dr. Jameson D. Lopez – A member of the Quechan Tribe from Fort Yuma, California. Dr. Lopez is a U.S. Army veteran and tenure track professor in higher education at the University of Arizona. Dr. Lopez and his family currently reside in Tucson where he researches to support tribal nation building that will advance the capacity of tribal nations to collect and analyze data. He hopes that his effort to collect data with tribes will inform tribal decisions and policies that create new opportunities for educational advances for Native people.

Jeremy MacDonald – Chippewa-Cree/Blackfeet from the Rocky Boy Reservation in Montana. Mr. MacDonald is the Superintendent at Box Elder Schools, his alma mater. His educational background includes bachelor's degrees in Elementary Education and Native American Studies from the University of Montana, a master's degree from Arizona State in Curriculum and Instruction as well as principal and superintendent internships from the University of Montana. He has been an educator for 16 years, working to assist young minds in developing their potential.

Dr. Hollie J. Mackey – Northern Cheyenne – is an Associate Professor of Women’s and Gender Studies at the University of Oklahoma. Her research examines women in leadership, Indigenous education, Title IX and disability law, and equity literacy through critical and Indigenous frameworks. Dr. Mackey is the Associate Co-Director for the Barbara L. Jackson Scholars Network through the University Council for Educational Administration and Director of the Title IX and Equity Consortium at the University of Oklahoma.

Jeanette Muskett-Miller – Navajo – is a teacher of 13 years on the Navajo Reservation. Currently teaching secondary mathematics and business in the Central Consolidated School District in the northwest corner of New Mexico, Ms. Muskett-Miller also coaches sports and supports extracurricular activities for her students.

Debora Norris – Navajo – is a third generation Arizona Educator. She is a certified Native American Language teacher and school administrator from rural Northern and Southern Arizona. She has worked with school districts and education communities on school capital finance and education programs for two decades. Ms. Norris is a former State Legislator who served on the Arizona House of Representatives Education Committee for four years, having passed education and school capital finance laws impacting learning environments for hundreds of Arizona schools. She also served as the Arizona Indian Education Director for over a decade at the Arizona Department of Education. Her current role is liaison and tribal liaison for the Arizona School Facilities Board, where she is supporting effective learning through Innovative Learning Environments throughout the state.

Sedelta Oosahwee – Three Affiliated/Cherokee – currently serves as a Senior Program/Policy Analyst/Specialist (American Indian/Alaska Native Liaison) with the National Education Association (NEA). In this role, she serves as a team lead on racial justice in education, manages national partnerships, and advises on American Indian and Alaska Native issues. Prior to NEA, Ms. Oosahwee served in the Obama Administration as a Senior Advisor in the Office of the Secretary at the United States Department of Agriculture and as Associate Director of the White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education at the United States Department of Education.

Dr. Martin J. Reinhardt is an Anishinaabe Ojibway citizen of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians from Michigan. He is a tenured professor of Native American Studies at Northern Michigan University, and serves as the president of the Michigan Indian Education Council. His current research focuses on revitalizing relationships between humans and Indigenous plants and animals of the Great Lakes Region.

Supplemental Resources

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