

The Civil Rights Project



Proyecto Derechos Civiles

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NEW REPORT EXAMINES GRADUATION RATES AMONG AMERICAN INDIAN AND ALASKA NATIVE STUDENTS IN TWELVE STATES

-- findings report less than 50% graduate from high school --

On average, less than 50% of American Indian and Alaska Native students from the Pacific and Northwestern regions of the United States graduate high school, according to a new study by The Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles at UCLA's Graduate School of Education and Information Studies (GSE&IS).

The report, "The Dropout/Graduation Crisis among American Indians and Alaska Native Students: Failure to Respond Places the Future of Native People At Risk," reveals drastic disparities in graduation rates between American Indian and Alaska Native students and non-American Indian and Alaska Native students. It includes the most recent graduation statistics as well as a discussion of challenges and possibilities specific to the education of American Indian and Alaska Native students in the states of Alaska, Arizona, California, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Washington and Wyoming.

"Many American Indian and Alaska Native students face a wide variety of challenges including attending schools in rural and isolated areas, high teacher and principal turnover, lack of relevant curricula and assessment practices, inadequate funding, and other health, social, and economic disparities. Effective leadership at the local, tribal, state and national levels is essential to addressing these challenges," said co-author of the report, John W. Tippeconnic, III, director of the American Indian Leadership Program and Batschelet Chair of Educational Administration at Pennsylvania State University.

Unfortunately, there has been a lack of published studies and other data focused on the educational conditions and subsequent academic outcomes for Native students. According to Susan C. Faircloth, co-author of the report and associate professor of education at Penn State, "American Indian and Alaska Native students continue to graduate at alarmingly low rates across the nation. With the exception of Arizona,

California, Montana and Oklahoma, on average, less than 50% of Native students in the states included in this study graduate each year. Failure to respond to this crisis will have devastating effects on the educational, economic, health and social well-being of Native peoples and communities.”

Overall non-Native student graduation rates in the 12 states included in this study ranged from 54.1% to 79.2%, with an average of 71.4%. In contrast, graduation rates for American Indian and Alaska Native students ranged from 30.4% to 63.8%, with an average of 46.6%. The graduation rates for all American Indian and Alaska Native students were lower than the overall state rates, and with the exception of Oklahoma and New Mexico, the degree of disparity was approximately 17 percentage points or more.

On average, the report found that graduation rates for American Indians and Alaska Natives (46.6%) were lower than the graduation rates for all other racial/ethnic groups including whites (69.8%), Asians (77.9%), Blacks (54.7%) and Hispanics (50.8%).

Gary Orfield, co-director of the Civil Right Project stated, “We have been working on the dropout issue for almost a decade and constantly frustrated by the lack of data on American Indian students, so we are fortunate to be working with prominent Native scholars who answer these major questions.”

The report indicates that a lack of student engagement is a primary attributing factor to the dropout crisis. School level factors associated with dropping out of school include large schools, a perceived lack of empathy among teachers, passive teaching methods, inappropriate testing and lack of parent involvement. Student level factors specific to American Indian and Alaska Native students include feeling “pushed out” of schools, poor quality of student-teacher relationships, lack of parental support, peer pressure, distance from school, difficulty with classes, poor attendance, legal problems and language barriers, among other factors.

Co-authors Tippeconnic and Faircloth recommend educators and policymakers review and revise school policies and avoid practices that exclude, demean, embarrass, harass or alienate Native students. They also recommend making schools physically, mentally and emotionally safe by working to end racism, demonstrate care and concern for all students, actively involve parents and families in schools, provide opportunities for students to be immersed in their Native language and culture, and prepare educators to work with American Indian and Alaska Native students.

“A variety of comprehensive, yet flexible approaches are needed to decrease the dropout rate and in turn increase the number and percent of Native students who go on to graduate from high school. When developing and implementing these strategies, schools must work in consultation and collaboration with Native families, communities, tribes and organizations. Unfortunately, the education of Native students has historically been conducted without their input, thus nurturing a sense of distrust and detachment from the educational system for many Native families and communities,” said Tippeconnic and Faircloth.

To view the report, visit www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu

Founded in 1996 by former Harvard professors Gary Orfield and Christopher Edley Jr., the Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles is now co-directed by Orfield and Patricia Gándara, professors at UCLA. Its mission is to create a new generation of research in social science and law on the critical issues of civil rights and equal opportunity for racial and ethnic groups in the United States. It has commissioned more than 400 studies, published 13 books and issued numerous reports from authors at universities and research centers across the country.

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