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The essence of Native involvement in school reform movements is accepting the responsibility to fulfill our sacred trust of educating the young. This is a trust long established among American Indians and Alaska Native people through ancestral traditions and more recently through treaty provisions agreed upon by sovereign Native nations and the United States of America. As we enter a new millennium, it becomes important to create a baseline to monitor progress in specific areas of educating Native people. To do so, this Digest draws upon the literature and a recent National Center for Education Statistics (1997) study using Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) data. SASS is an integrated survey of U.S. schools, school districts, principals, teachers, and student records that includes an oversample of schools funded or operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and public schools with high percentages of Indian student enrollment. The Indian supplement to the ongoing SASS data collection program represents an opportunity to describe (a) schools and school districts that serve a significant percentage of American Indian and Alaska Native youth, (b) the background of principals and teachers, and (c) the characteristics of American Indian and Alaska Native students.

The SASS data reflect the characteristics of American Indian and Alaska Native education from 1990-1991 and 1993-1994, and we hope conditions will have improved by the year 2000 when the next SASS data collection is scheduled. In particular we might reexamine: (a) the characteristics of schools with 25% or more Indian student enrollment, (b) rates of high school graduation and college application among their American Indian and Alaska Native students, and (c) the background characteristics of these schools' Native principals and teachers who are enrolled tribal members. Examining characteristics of schools helps us understand the context of education in schools with high percentages of Native students. Studying high school outcomes provides a way to monitor Native student participation at the critical undergraduate level. Last, in light of a growing demand to have Native people in organizational and classroom leadership positions, studies of Native educators and other variables such as the economic conditions of tribal communities, type and quality of services provided, and teacher demand and supply give us data needed to monitor developments in Indian education.

SCHOOLS

INDIAN SCHOOL TYPE AND NATIVE STUDENT ENROLLMENT. The findings are divided into three Indian school types for comparison: (a) schools controlled or funded by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA/tribal schools), (b) public schools with 25% or more Indian student enrollment (high Indian enrollment [HIE] public schools), and (c) public schools with less than 25% Indian student enrollment (low Indian enrollment [LIE] public schools). In 1993-94, nearly half of all American Indian and Alaska Native students (approximately 229,276 students) were enrolled in approximately 170 BIA/tribal

schools¹ (41,911 students) and 1,244 HIE public schools (187,365 students). On average, Native students represent a significant majority (between 57% and 98%) of the total student body in these two school types. The remaining Native students (262,660 students) in the public school system are scattered across nearly 79,500 public schools with an average of 0.6% American Indian and Alaska Native enrollment. It is interesting to note that BIA/tribal schools and HIE schools represent approximately 1.7% of the total number of publicly funded schools but enroll 47% of the total Native student population.

The relatively small number of schools enrolling a relatively large number of Native students has provided fertile ground to improve Indian education. Exemplary programs have advanced Indian education throughout the nation and, although improvements are still warranted overall, a growing number of schools have dramatically improved academic achievement among Native students (see for example, Chavers, 1996; in progress). Another promising sign for tribal elders is that ties to traditional cultures are evident in these schools, where approximately one-third of Native students in BIA/tribal schools and 16% of the Native students in HIE public schools speak a language other than English in their homes. Education programs incorporating Native culture and values are important attributes of today's Indian education programs and will continue to be the preferred direction of Indian education (Skinner, 1999; Yazzie, 1999). Moreover, "research, once the domain of university researchers, has been demystified to include research partnerships with local people asking their own questions and constructing appropriate paradigms for funding solutions" (Deyhle & Swisher, 1997).

COURSEWORK TOWARD GRADUATION. The public is often unaware of remarkable strides made by Native communities to ensure that students receive a proper education. As shown in Table 1, when compared to public schools with low Indian student enrollment, high school students in BIA/tribal schools were required to pass more coursework in English and language arts, mathematics, social studies, and the sciences. Graduation requirements in BIA/tribal schools were also more strict than the requirements in HIE public schools in all core areas except English and language arts. National initiatives to raise graduation requirements in BIA/tribal schools were launched in 1994. It is possible these schools will continue to be more likely to require course work in computer science and foreign languages than will public schools with high and low Indian student enrollment (St. Germaine, 1995a).

GRADUATION RATES AND COLLEGE APPLICATION RATES. There are approximately 45 BIA/tribal and 450 HIE public high schools. The 1989-90 high school graduation rate at BIA/tribal was 82%, compared to 91% in HIE and 93% in LIE public schools. College application rates at BIA/tribal schools were 33% during the same period, compared to 43% at HIE public schools. High school graduation and college application rates in BIA/tribal schools increased substantially by the 1992-93 school year but remained about the same in HIE public schools, while college application rates at BIA/tribal schools were 47% and 45% at HIE public schools.

The improvements in graduation and college application rates suggest that tribal self-governance and national school improvement movements during the late 1980s and early 1990s are having a positive impact on Indian education (Indian Nations at Risk, 1992; Pavel, Swisher, & Ward, 1996; Pavel, 1999; St. Germaine, 1995b). A growing number of innovative strategies are being used to increase high school graduation and postsecondary participation rates. For example, the Wellpinit School District-Spokane Indian Reservation's Focus on Excellence Program uses a "whole school success" approach combined with computer-aided instruction. Improvement efforts focus on meeting the needs of students and teachers to ensure that "all" students graduate and are encouraged to further their education.

PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS

The quality of students' educational experiences is determined, in large part, by the learning environment principals and teachers create. The need for Native educators who can serve as positive role models and catalysts for improvement in administration and teaching is ongoing. Seventy-seven (or 47%) of the 164 BIA/tribal school principals identified themselves as American Indian or Alaska Native; of these, virtually all were enrolled members of a state or federally recognized tribe. Of the 1,158 principals in HIE public schools, 153 (just 13%) were either American Indian or Alaska Native, 84% of whom reported they were tribally enrolled. Only 38% of the teachers in BIA/tribal schools were American Indian or Alaska Native; however, 95% of these Native teachers reported they were tribally enrolled. Only 15% of the teachers in HIE public schools were American Indian or Alaska Native, 84% of whom were tribally enrolled. Though important to all schools, it is vital that schools serving a high percentage of Indian students increase the number of American Indian and Alaska Native administrators and teachers who are tribally enrolled (Fuller, 1992; Hawley, 1989; Quezada, et al., 1996). The presence of Native people in school leadership positions brings much-needed positive role modeling and training in how to design programs for Native students (McGee & Cody, 1995; Solomon, 1997; Sorensen, 1992).

Moreover, tribal enrollment is an essential element of sovereign Indian society because it allows each Nation to determine who is a citizen. It is especially relevant in BIA/tribal schools since these institutions were established to serve Indian students. Tribal enrollment is equally relevant to HIE public schools because most of these institutions are located on or near Indian reservations.

CONCLUSION

A considerable number of American Indian and Alaska Native students can be found concentrated in a relatively small number of publicly funded schools. BIA/tribal schools and public schools with high Indian student enrollment, in particular, made important strides during the early part of this decade (1990-94) to raise standards for high school

graduation while improving graduation and college application rates. However, there was and still remains a shortage of Native people who can serve as positive role models in administrative and teaching positions. When we again look at the characteristics of American Indian and Alaska Native education in the year 2000, we hope to see continued improvement in academic outcomes. We also look forward to a greater number of Native administrators and teachers who can provide leadership and instruction that will prepare Native children to live productive lives well into the 21st century.

ENDNOTES

1. These schools were identified from a list of 176 institutions contained in the 1992-93 Education Directory of the BIA Office of Indian Education Programs. After NCES removed schools that were out-of-scope (e.g., peripheral dormitories that did not offer instruction, kindergarten-only schools), 170 BIA/tribal schools were eligible for sampling in the SASS.

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AVERAGE YEARS OF INSTRUCTION REQUIRED FOR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION,??



BY SUBJECT AREA AND INDIAN SCHOOL TYPE: 1993-94.??



Average Years of Instruction % Schools Requiring??



School English & Social Phys/Bio Computer Foreign??



Type Lang. Arts Math Studies Science Science Lang.??



BIA/tribal 3.9 3.0 3.2 2.4 51.3 33.5??



HIE public 4.0 2.5 2.8 2.2 37.9 17.6??



LIE public 3.8 2.5 3.0 2.2 36.2 17.4??

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