

Background

American Indian/Alaska Natives (AIANs) are the indigenous people of this land. While many native people have migrated to different locations, there is archeological evidence of inhabitants on the North American continent for over 10,000 years. Because of this, AIANs have a strong attachment to place.

American Indians maintain a unique status as sovereign nations within a nation due to the treaties signed with the U.S. government. The United States recognizes tribal rights as sovereign in Article 6 of the U.S. Constitution. Treaties guarantee tribes their lands and certain rights including hunting and fishing in usual and accustomed places and economic development on their lands. This also explains why a few tribes have established gaming casinos as one means of economic development.

There is tremendous diversity within the AIAN population. Though AIANs comprise 1 percent of the total U.S. population, they represent 50 percent of the nation's languages and cultures. There are 562 tribes in the United States. American Indian and Alaska Native languages and cultures exist nowhere else on the face of this earth, and too many are in jeopardy of disappearing altogether. Policy and resources are needed to restore and preserve native languages and cultures.

Over 93 percent of AIAN students attend public schools. Less than 10 percent of AIAN students attend Bureau of Indian Affairs schools, which is a system of 184 schools spread over 23 states.

Education Issues

The AIAN community faces educational issues similar to other minority groups, including the need for adequate funding for schools serving minority and disadvantaged students, as well as other issues with a special impact on community:

- Student achievement gaps need to be aggressively addressed. For example, while 71 percent of AIANs age 25 or older had a high school diploma or more in the 2000 census, only 11 percent had

a Bachelor's degree or more, compared to 27 percent of whites.

- There is an increasing need for quality teachers in Indian schools. Due to rural isolation, low teacher salaries, high poverty, and differences in languages and cultures, it is difficult to recruit and retain quality teachers in Indian schools. Further, the need for special education teachers is growing since the representation of AIAN students in special education is 18 percent, almost double the rest of the student population at 10 percent.
- The contributions of AIANs in American history and contemporary society have not been adequately recognized in public school curriculum. Too few students know, for instance, that the U.S. Constitution was developed in part upon concepts of democracy gained from the League of the Iroquois. Misconceptions about the "discovery of America by Columbus" do not recognize the pre-existence of sophisticated Indian nations. In addition, the "land bridge" theory of migration perpetuates the myth that all people immigrated to this continent. More needs to be taught about the value and importance of AIAN history and culture.
- Native schools continue to be plagued by safety concerns, with high suspension and expulsion rates, and the highest percent of all groups to report injury with weapons and fights on school grounds.

AIAN Community Issues

- Regaining and maintaining the right of self determination and governance.
- Expanding tribal opportunities for social, health, educational and economic development.
- Addressing the suicide rate for AIANs which is 2 1/2 times the national average. According to the BIA annual survey, suicide is the second highest cause of death for 16-24 year olds.

- Focusing upon the needs of AIAN students in urban communities, where they are spread across districts, making it difficult for AIAN students to feel a sense of community. Their numbers are smaller, so the needs of these students often go unnoticed.

Demographics

- There are 4,543,660 U.S. citizens who identified themselves as having AIAN ancestry.
- Eleven states have more than 100,000 AIANs, including:

California	Oklahoma	Arizona
New Mexico	Washington	Michigan
Florida	Texas	New York
North Carolina	Alaska	

- Cities with the largest population of AIANs are New York, Los Angeles, Phoenix, Tulsa, Oklahoma City, and Anchorage.
- According to the U.S. census, 25.7 percent of AIANs are at the poverty rate, compared to the national average of 12.4 percent.
- There are 32 tribally controlled community colleges and universities (seven of which are four-year institutions).

Resources

C.A.R.E: Strategies for *Closing the Achievement Gaps* is a new guide from the National Education Association providing a multi-themed approach to closing the achievement gaps. It can be found at www.nea.org/teachexperience/careguide.html. For more information, contact NEA Human and Civil Rights, 202-822-7700, hcrinfo@nea.org.

U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Special Reports, *We the People, American Indian/Alaska Natives in the United States*, (Washington, D.C.), www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/censr-17.pdf.

Rampey, B.D., Lutkus, A.D., and Weiner, A.W. (2006). National Indian Education Study, Part I: *The Performance of American Indian and Alaska Native Fourth-and Eighth Grade Students on NAEP 2005 Reading and Mathematics Assessments* (NCES 2006-463). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.