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Native American Education: Building Stronger Families, Communities, and Youth through Cultural Education

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**Native American Education: Building Stronger Families, Communities, and
Youth through Cultural Education**

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Abstract

The College dropout rate among Native American students in public high schools, Colleges and Universities is the highest compared to any other student group in the United States. Many have attributed this to the educational disparity that Native American students experience to the lack of cultural education, in addition to cultural bias against them in school or communities. Therefore, this research/applied project is focused on analyzing the collective leadership in Native American communities and the impact it has on a young person's decision in pursuing higher education. In addition it will examine the importance of integrating Native American cultural classes in school curriculum, which will incorporate the importance of tribal values (culture and language preservation), cultural knowledge and skills, along with an enhanced learning environment to cultivate future leaders.

***Keywords:* Native American, Educational Disparity, Cultural Education, Culture and Language Preservation**

Personal Background

When I graduated from high school in 2005, I thought that I would never go back to San Pasqual High School. However, I realized within my first year of college that San Pasqual, along with my family's culture, and my hometown Winterhaven, California are the three most important aspects in my life that keep me motivated to continue on my academic journey. Growing up in a small town alongside a rural and tribal community with a population of approximately fifteen hundred individuals, where drugs and alcohol have overtaken many lives from adults to youths has opened my eyes into the true reality of what future generations will be exposed to. In addition, many adolescents in my community do not have the opportunity to further their education either because they do not want to or because they lack resources. Many end up dropping out of school, becoming single parents, alcoholics, drug addicts, or getting incarcerated. With everything I have seen through the years, I felt the urge to contribute to the lives of current and future generations by motivating and providing them with educational resources that will allow them to pursue higher education and become future leaders. Working for TRIO Student Support Services Program as an Outreach Coordinator and Co-Advisor for its Leadership Club gave me the opportunity to grow as a student, person, and professional. In this position I was able to identify my calling and passion, which is to work with young people. For the past few years I have been volunteering at San Pasqual High School in Winterhaven as a peer mentor guiding juniors and seniors in the area of college/university preparation. This volunteer experience and previous professional experiences have shown me that most high school juniors and seniors among Native American communities are not prepared for college. First, because they don't have the necessary educational tools and second, because they go out into the real world before understanding and finding their true selves and identities.

Leadership Philosophy

Leadership is not defined by personality traits, power, influence or position, but rather by the way someone approaches the situation in order to help others achieve their goals or solve any conflict. Therefore, leadership demands that the people make adjustments in their values, thinking, and priorities to deal with threats, accommodate new realities, and take advantage of emerging opportunities. At its essence, true leadership orchestrates social learning in regards to complex problems and demanding challenges. People must learn why they are in a particular condition in order to invent pathways forward that produce genuine progress, as opposed to hollow and temporary gains (Williams, 2005). To illustrate, I possess a strong foundation in servant leadership; I strive to find ways to make people's lives better, and I approach my work with passion and commitment, knowing that I can and will make a difference. Moreover, throughout my involvement in my hometown high school for the past few years, I have gained a deep appreciation for the cultural impact leadership development can have in a student's life. That is why I believe that my leadership philosophy of Transformational Leadership contributes to my four main areas of focus; which consist of cooperative learning (collaboration), authenticity, mentorship, and communication (communication with respect towards the individuals culture) will help me guide others and myself to build a stronger community that promotes strong relationships, meaningful learning, and new opportunities for all.

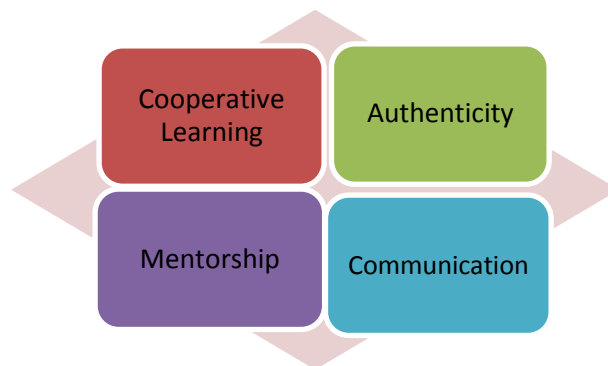


Figure 1.1 Personal Leadership Philosophy

Introduction of the topic

The population of interest is Native American students attending San Pasqual High School in Winterhaven California. I will be exploring the lack of educational, professional, and cultural development resources along with the awareness of group leadership in Native American communities and the possible impact on decisions in pursuing higher education. Based on previous studies, these major challenges and needs must be addressed through collective approaches that include community and school board meetings, while also focusing on a collaborative approach from the Native American community. Thus, the study aims to direct attention towards a need for a more inclusive and cultural form of leadership in curriculum that has the potential to harness the capacities of a community's concept of leadership and create substantive change.

In a broader context, this research hopes to bring attention to disparities within the quality of education available to Native American populations, and the correlation to this segment of the country's population representing the lowest graduation rates in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Through observing varying outcomes of a culturally influenced curriculum, I hope to draw connections between the lack of presence of this population in higher education and the resources available to them. The educational resources given to Native American communities have historically been below average, resulting in the lowest graduation rates of any community within the U.S, and therefore, success through educational opportunities (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Among reports of U.S. education statistics, there is a reoccurrence of rhetoric that aims to explain dismal representations of Native Americans within measures of academic success This population's below average enrollment into postsecondary education and even lower attainment of a post-high school has been the focus of much research.

Many of the existing studies are qualitative assessments, interviews, and analyses that suggest exploration of possible interventions. Furthermore, this literature research will explore the question: How does the perception of collective leadership in Native American communities along with cultural courses impact decisions in pursuing higher education?

From this dichotomy, relationships to educational statistics take on new perspectives. Such as, Native Americans representing the demographic belonging to the lowest graduation rates in the United States, (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Moreover, reasoning behind comparative figures related to disparities in post-secondary learning, such as, 22% of Native Americans obtaining an Associate's Degree compared to 54% of white students coupled with 15% percent of Native Americans being conferred Bachelor's degrees can be processed on a systematic scale (PNPI, 2017). This phenomenon in educational attainment can be explained through an awareness of causal factors, such as cultural influences like leadership and the resulting variances in values founded in definitions and of the collective and/or community. The consequences of oppression on this demographic has not been limited to detrimental effects to education resources, but are also reflected in the labor market. Occupational imbalances are also evident as outcomes of staggering statistics. For example, five percent of American Indians receive graduate or professional degrees, compared to 10 percent for the total population, and only nine percent of American Indians earn bachelor's degrees compared to 19 percent for the US population (Devoe & Darling-Churchill, 2008). The unemployment rates within tribal communities are the highest in the U.S, skyrocketing upwards of 40-50% (Ainsworth, 1989). Tribal communities suffer from inabilities to be part of competitive labor forces when inadequacies in education are connected to preexisting conditions such as manufacturing or administration positions for example: Historical trade restrictions, forced removal, land

allotment, assimilation and targeted relocation are some of the myriad of factors that contribute to the emerging statistics of low educational, occupational, and socioeconomic success. Due to an evident lack of academic resources, students and members of the community enter adulthood with little to no professional development resources, lack of English language comprehension, and insufficient vocational training. Native cultures focus on contribution to a society that is collective and resistant to ideas attached to individualization, thus limiting community exposure to industrial, commercial or technological development (Ainsworth, 1989).

Community Leadership

Leadership is not defined by a position or power trait, rather by the ability to guide and direct others into a positive outcome. Students, especially those among future generations need to understand the true meaning of leadership and have the ability to recognize their own leadership styles. As we may know leadership is not something that we are born with, rather it is something we learn as we grow up and encounter different situations. That is why in order to recognize their own leadership style, they must know their strengths, weaknesses, values, beliefs and how those personal attributes can help them grow and support their families and communities. In addition, the understanding of leadership, including their own styles comes from the help of those around them, including the community itself. At the heart of teaching, learning, leading, and inquiry lies the community. All Native American schools are situated in a unique community context and informed by local values (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2004). Furthermore, the community has a profound effect on the way children are raised and how individuals view themselves, and the opportunities residents have for economic and social well-being (McKnight, 1993).

Students need to serve in collaboration with their teachers to recognize how their community influences their ability to become leaders and pursue higher education. That is why it is important to identify the impact of an educational leadership model grounded in the community, and how it influences the students in their current and future decisions. Not to mention that in order for those positive outcomes to occur, people and the community require having the capacity for change. For example, we individually can act collectively to produce desired results and organize community resolve to be willing to change in efforts to see our desires reflected in the actions of others. In short, we must be willing to model the change we want to see (Guajardo & Garcia, 2016). These types of changes among the community and those individuals who are around the students, will allow them to achieve profound levels of personal, professional, academic, cultural, and leadership development. Integrating leadership concepts and change among students and their communities allow the students to be more capable to become future leaders and pursue higher levels of education. Additionally, this kind of research, if applied to Native American communities will not only enable the community, but it will allow future generations to pursue leadership development and increase levels of interest in pursuing higher education.

Culture and Language: Integration of Graduation requirements

One of the richest aspects of any individual and community is the culture that is developed through its history. As a matter of fact, culture and language can be viewed as orientating values of an individual. These identities are reinforced and revitalized through the passing down from one generation to another. In fact, the academic success of Native American students may rely on the impact that both culture and language preservation has on their personal lives. These values in identity can have an impact that extends to the importance of leadership

contextually within the community so that it may be applied in external settings. Meza (2015) for example, focuses on the importance of promoting sovereignty of Native American tribes among the U.S. and the importance of both language and culture preservation. Additionally, Meza (2015) suggests that increased rates of academic grades, interest in higher education, and self-identity are results of remaining attentive to cultural foundations. Connecting to the past helps propel individuals into the future with a vision of who they can be. Building students' self-confidence and self-esteem would result by allowing Native language to meet the foreign language requirement. Equally important, the mere fact that Native languages are important enough to count as a graduation requirement helps build the view of the importance of the Native culture within postsecondary institutions and therefore reinforces the individual student's identity (Meza, 2015). Furthermore, this article along with other related research such as the Educational Leadership for Community Development: *National Forum of Applied Educational Research Journal* allows educational policy makers to realize that language and culture preservation is important in any Native student's life and it can be incorporated and implemented into policy through schools' curriculum as a graduation or foreign language requirement. In addition to facilitating preservation, it will increase academic grades and graduation rates among the Native population, therefore stemming a rise in higher education enrollment. Moreover, it will permit the individual to realize his/her leadership path, because without leaders who know the traditional culture or language, tribal heritage and civilization is lost (Meza, 2015).

Gap, Challenge and Opportunity

As mentioned before, Native American students have historically been below average in national educational statistics, and persistently remain positioned as having the lowest graduation rates of any subgroup in the United States. Wilcox, Kristen and Campbell (2015) examine

antecedents to Native American enrollment into higher education programs. One of the main reasons for low graduation rates has to do with school dropouts, yet Native American youth continue to leave high school before high school graduation at some of the highest rates of any subgroup (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2009). These high dropout rates are not a recent phenomenon. They have persisted for as long as such data have been compiled. Questions abound as to how educators might improve Native American youth graduation rates and what kinds of schools and classroom support them (Wilcox, Kristen and Campbell, 2015). The greatest contribution of this article is the analytical data of how to improve and increase graduation rates among Native American youth. In addition to increasing graduation rates, it focuses on what elements or services the Native youth population may need in order to succeed and obtain higher education. Moreover, it states that the main cause of school dropouts can be viewed in the context of the cultural disconnection between home, school and higher education institutions. Disproportionately, a high number of Native American students that do not make it to graduation live in a variety of locales including reservation, rural communities, and cities (DeVoe & Darling-Churchill, 2008). Scholars have noted, this problem is associated with other serious concerns regarding the collective maintenance of Native American culture and communities (Wilcox, 2015). Incorporating the importance of how school dropouts and community living are related and relevant to varying levels of graduation rates is an important fact to consider. The reason being is that many Native students depend on their community as well as their families to make educational decisions. Moreover, if schools in tribal communities' integrated Native culture and language, it may create a reciprocal relationship that increases the capacity of community to create a substantive change and help the Native youth further their levels of educational attainment.

Equally important, circumstances that influence recruitment and retention of Native American students in postsecondary institutions provide insight for analysis of differing perceptions and values. Mosholder, Waite, Larsen, and Goslin (2016) provide insight into dilemmas faced by Native American students when enrolling into post-secondary programs and institutions. Through a methodology composed of mostly survey questions, focus groups and analysis of the resulting interview transcripts, researchers have attempted to measure activities and programs that lead to increased accessibility and retention of Native American students in postsecondary university settings. Questions were focused around communities, family, friends and elders inside and outside of these academic settings. In addition, it explored the aspects of how inclusion, values, activities, designated spaces, mentoring programs, adequate money, resources and preparation strengthened student retention and persistence to complete programs. The findings suggest a need to incorporate commonly found collective perceptions of Native American culture into postsecondary planning strategies. Specifically, the results suggest that programs and curriculum cultivated from social components of Native American culture positively correlated with Native American student enrollment and retention, student mentoring increased determination to enroll in and complete postsecondary education, student mentoring's efficacy increased when conducted through an informal relationship, a space for the construction of communal sentiment among Native American students was vital but did not need to be identified through a designated building or space, and effective communication to these students was best done through interpersonal relationships. (Mosholder, Waite, Larsen, and Goslin, 2016)

These findings suggest that there is an emphasis on the collective social fabric for Native American students that are essential in promoting college level enrollment and retention, especially when enrolling into Eurocentric institutions that produce a differing identity of

individualistic adherence from their student bodies. Moreover, such studies also suggest that further explanatory research can be conducted to connect cultural paradigms of varying student ethnicities and how they may influence post-secondary educational decisions.

Looking through the magnifying glass

Conducting an environmental scan provided me with insight into what both the public and private education sectors have to offer in regards to Native cultural classes within their districts. The scan itself gave me a deep synopsis that not many schools teach or offer Native courses as part of their school curriculum, due to the fact that not much research has been done within that area. Although, I did not find any research, the high school I attended, San Pasqual High school currently provides a Kwatsan Native America class to those students who want to learn more about their language and culture. By providing this cultural class students get the opportunity to expand their knowledge, teach others and motivate them to increase their grades and school attendance. In addition, the National Center for Education Statistics: Status and Trends in the Educations of American Indians an Alaska Native: 2008 *Status and Trends in the Education of American Indians and Alaska Native* examines both the educational progress of American Indian/Alaska Native children and adults and the challenges they face within education (Appendix A). This report shows that over time more American Indian/Alaska Native students have pursued higher education and the attainment outlooks have improved. However, in spite of these improvements, 60 percent of Native American eighth grade students are still reporting high absences within the school system nationwide (Appendix C). In addition to that in 2006, 75 percent of Native American Students received a high school diploma compared to 72 percent during the 2014-2015 school year (Appendix D). Moreover, the research illustrates that school administrations have reported serious problems with absenteeism, student tardiness, lack

of involvement and low expectations within at least one fourth of Native American students between fourth to eighth grade. Moreover, in a more extensive view of the research, it states that although students may not feel a sense of belonging within their school, once they enter post-secondary education that sense of belonging develops, due to tribal controlled colleges. The main purpose of tribal controlled colleges is to foster an environment that focuses on American Indian culture in order to preserve, enhance and promote language and traditions. For example, during fall 2001 to fall 2006 tribally controlled colleges increase by 23 percent from 14,1000 to 17,300 (Appendix B). In a broader context the research shows that the reason for increasing rates may be due to the learning opportunities students are receiving, in addition to their personal holistic growth. Therefore, the environmental scan took a deeper look in to the threats that Native American students face during both middle and high school, in addition to the positive outcome of attending a tribally controlled college. For that reason, collective leadership in Native American communities in combination with family involvement and Native American cultural classes can increase not only school attendance within this population, but also the motivation to pursue higher education and one day give back to their community as well to teach future generations.

Conclusion and Directions

Reviewing the plethora of cultural components that exist within the various sovereign tribal cultures within the United States would be a tedious process outside the resources and scope of this review. However, incorporating the thematic values of collective leadership and community that exist throughout many of the Native American nations provides a variable that could contribute to the inequity found in measures of this population's educational success within a traditionally individualized environment that many college institutions are rooted in. Disparate levels of Native American student graduation rates and therefore postsecondary

enrollment can be reduced by community collaboration to strengthen leadership development within this segment of the U.S. population. In addition, it is essential to incorporate both facets of postsecondary institutions and tribal cultural components into the educational community, such as cultural safe spaces, college and university tribal outreach coordinators, and Native American cultural/leadership clubs. Moreover, the perception of collective leadership in Native American communities has the potential to impact the decision-making in pursuing higher education among the population's youth. Ensuring these perceptions are reinforced as a student progresses to postsecondary education and that they are welcomed in higher education environments is vital. Overall, the commitment and collaboration of the community will not only allow the students to become more motivated to attend higher education, but also acknowledge core values of their culture and the impact of leadership through educational achievement and embracing roles within communities to enact positive change.

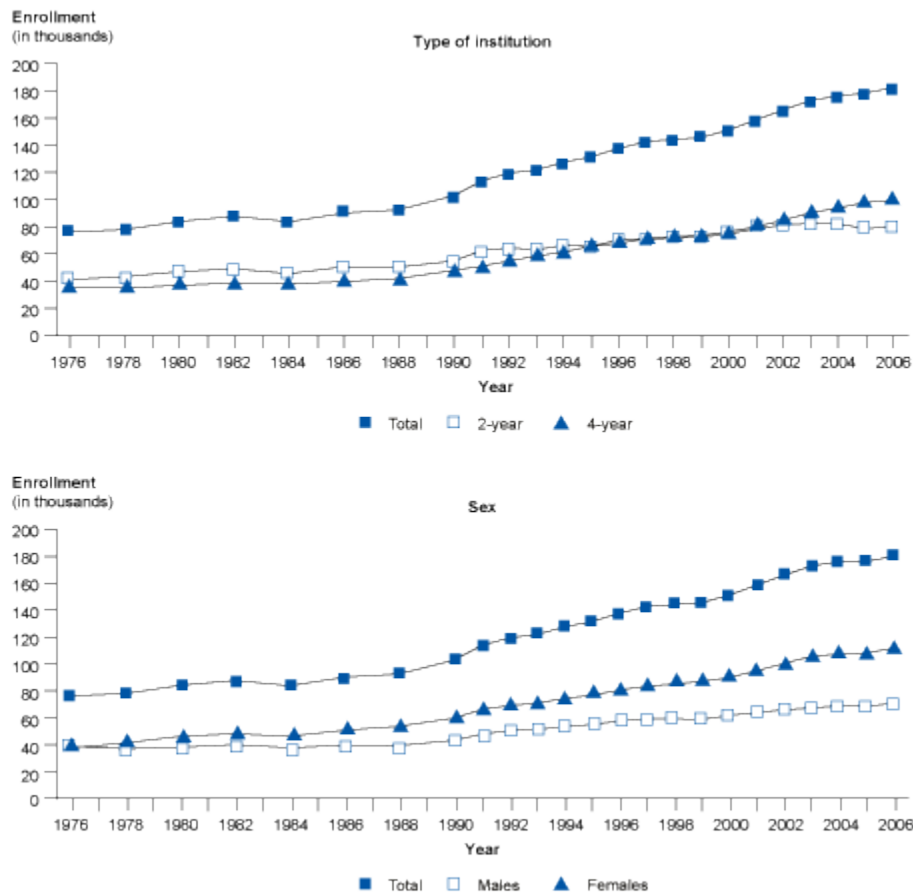
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Appendix A: Colleges and Universities Enrollment

Enrollment of American Indian/Alaska Native students in colleges and universities more than doubled in the past 30 years. In 2006, American Indian/Alaska Native students accounted for 1 percent of total enrollment in colleges and universities.

Figure 6.1. American Indian/Alaska Native enrollment in public and private degree-granting institutions, by type of institution and sex: Selected years, 1976 through 2006



Appendix B: Tribally Controlled Colleges**Table A-6.2. Enrollment in tribally controlled colleges: Fall 1997 through fall 2006**

| Tribally controlled college | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 |
|--|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Total | 13,583 | 13,940 | 13,928 | 13,680 | 14,075 | 15,468 | 17,776 | 17,605 | 17,167 | 17,255 |
| Bay Mills Community College | 453 | 369 | 321 | 360 | 368 | 430 | 386 | 401 | 406 | 550 |
| Blackfeet Community College | 411 | 396 | 291 | 299 | 341 | 418 | 546 | 561 | 485 | 467 |
| Cankdeska Cikana Community College | 142 | 124 | 134 | 9 | 169 | 160 | 190 | 197 | 198 | 233 |
| Chief Dull Knife College ¹ | 508 | 448 | 448 | 461 | 442 | 268 | 442 | 356 | 554 | 359 |
| College of the Menominee Nation | 225 | 249 | 385 | 371 | 407 | 530 | 499 | 507 | 532 | 513 |
| Diné College | 1,732 | 1,875 | 1,881 | 1,712 | 1,685 | 1,822 | 1,878 | 1,935 | 1,825 | 1,669 |
| Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College | 704 | 701 | 935 | 999 | 1,023 | 1,315 | 1,735 | 1,775 | 1,981 | 2,181 |
| Fort Belknap College | 218 | 163 | 266 | 295 | 170 | 158 | 215 | 257 | 175 | 161 |
| Fort Berthold Community College | 223 | 291 | 285 | 50 | 50 | 249 | 274 | 285 | 241 | 196 |
| Fort Peck Community College | 360 | 316 | 370 | 400 | 419 | 443 | 419 | 504 | 408 | 441 |
| Haskell Indian Nations University | 846 | 779 | 885 | 918 | 967 | 887 | 918 | 928 | 918 | 889 |
| Ilisagvik College | — | — | — | 322 | 279 | 316 | 417 | 214 | 278 | 203 |
| Institute of American Indian Arts ² | 109 | 109 | 133 | 139 | 44 | 155 | 154 | 176 | 113 | 192 |
| Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa Community College | 493 | 551 | 485 | 489 | 516 | 550 | 561 | 460 | 505 | 574 |
| Leech Lake Tribal College | 135 | 228 | 222 | 240 | 174 | 244 | 162 | 195 | 189 | 198 |
| Little Big Horn College | 243 | 324 | 207 | 320 | 203 | 275 | 394 | 291 | 259 | 312 |
| Little Priest Tribal College | — | — | 147 | 141 | 88 | 146 | 130 | 154 | 109 | 95 |
| Navajo Technical College ³ | 364 | 227 | 270 | 841 | 299 | 283 | 300 | 306 | 333 | 392 |
| Nebraska Indian Community College | 223 | 186 | 186 | 170 | 191 | 118 | 190 | 190 | 107 | 115 |
| Northwest Indian College | 677 | 695 | 548 | 524 | 600 | 667 | 643 | 519 | 495 | 623 |
| Oglala Lakota College | 1,219 | 1,137 | 1,198 | 1,174 | 1,270 | 1,279 | 1,441 | 1,501 | 1,302 | 1,485 |
| Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College | † | — | — | — | — | 41 | 66 | 109 | 123 | 125 |
| Salish Kootenai College | 967 | 1,016 | 1,075 | 1,042 | 976 | 1,109 | 1,100 | 1,130 | 1,142 | 1,092 |
| Sinte Gleska University | 766 | 1,041 | 910 | 900 | 895 | 787 | 1,055 | 1,400 | 1,123 | 969 |
| Sisseton Wahpeton Community College | 199 | 201 | 219 | 250 | 275 | 285 | 287 | 287 | 290 | 279 |
| Sitting Bull College | 217 | 231 | 233 | 22 | 194 | 214 | 317 | 289 | 287 | 286 |
| Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute | 656 | 653 | 643 | 304 | 723 | 777 | 936 | 772 | 614 | 561 |
| Stone Child College | 166 | 255 | 188 | 38 | 242 | 83 | 434 | 347 | 344 | 397 |
| Tohono O'odham Community College | † | † | † | — | — | — | 181 | 169 | 270 | 198 |
| Turtle Mountain Community College | 579 | 624 | 665 | 686 | 684 | 897 | 959 | 787 | 615 | 788 |
| United Tribes Technical College | 263 | 311 | 299 | 204 | 302 | 463 | 466 | 536 | 885 | 606 |
| White Earth Tribal and Community College | — | — | 99 | — | 79 | 99 | 81 | 67 | 61 | 106 |

Appendix C: Absenteeism

A larger percentage of American Indian/Alaska Native 8th-grade students reported absences from school in the preceding month than 8th-grade students of any other race/ethnicity in 2007.

Figure 3.1. Percentage distribution of 8th-grade students, by number of days absent from school in the preceding month and race/ethnicity: 2007

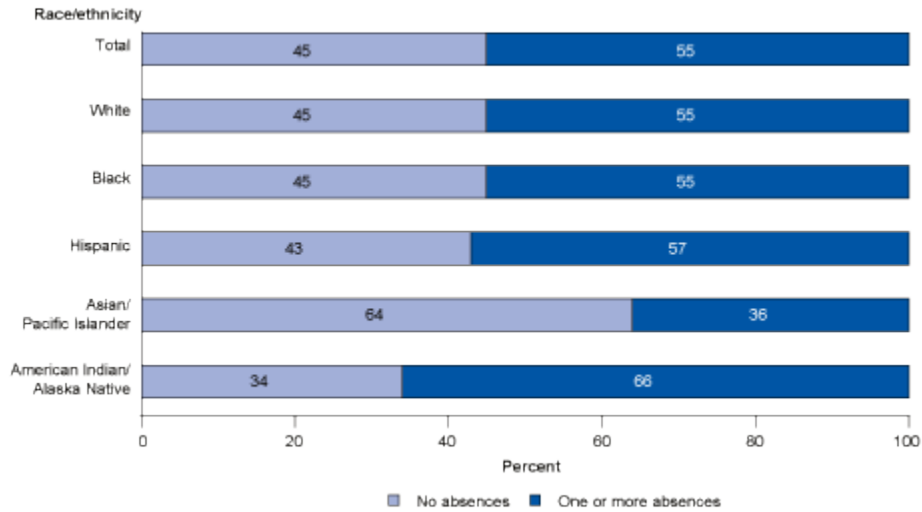


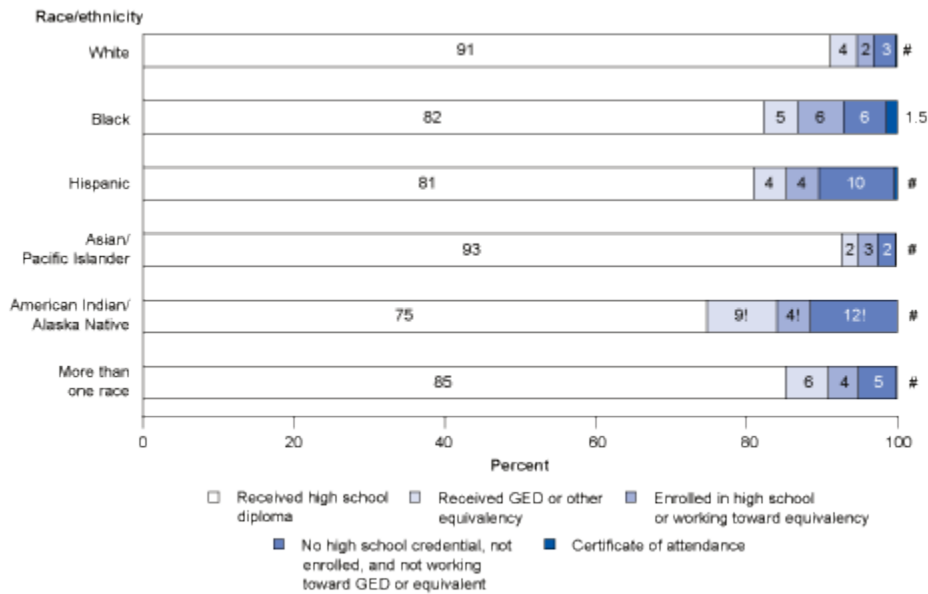
Table 3.3 Percentage distribution of 8th-grade students, by number of days absent from school in the preceding month and race/ethnicity: 2007

| Race/ethnicity | No absences | One or more absences |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| Total¹ | 45 | 55 |
| White | 45 | 55 |
| Black | 45 | 55 |
| Hispanic | 43 | 57 |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 64 | 36 |
| American Indian/Alaska Native | 34 | 66 |

Appendix D: High School Graduation Rates

A smaller percentage of American Indian/Alaska Native spring of 2002 high school sophomores obtained a high school credential by 2006 compared to White and Asian/Pacific Islander students.

Figure 3.3. Percentage of spring 2002 high school sophomores, by high school completion status and race/ethnicity: 2006



Appendix E: SWOT Analysis

SWOT Example of schools after they establish Cultural Classes

| | |
|---|--|
| <p><u>STRENGTHS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly-skilled teachers in cultural related courses. • Diverse and culturally exposed faculty and staff • Diverse student body • Commitment to provide college and university resources (motivate to students to pursue higher education) • Parents and community members involvement • New Faculty • Classroom Management • Leadership Training for Faculty and staff • Organizational infrastructure: student services | <p><u>WEAKNESSES</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current open day’s events not increasing voluntary activity • Narrow focus on open events not partnership activities • Lack of culture among faculty and staff • Organization structure in classrooms |
| <p><u>OPPORTUNITIES</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PTA: plan and organize cultural events • Cultural Participation Project: Students can be asked for their opinions and suggestions. • Use parents to contribute to curriculum delivery • Meeting higher education’s demand • New Campus leadership • Projected growth in demand for higher and continuing education • Higher students attendance | <p><u>THREATS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coercion: participation from teachers, administrative staff • Pupil coercion to do things they do not wish to do • Lack of students preparedness for higher education • Low Students attendance |

Appendix F: SOAR Analysis

SOAR Example of schools after they establish Cultural Classes

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>STRENGTHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly-skilled teachers in cultural related courses. • Diverse and culturally exposed faculty and staff • Classroom Management | <p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide college and university resources (motivate student to pursue higher educations) • Parent and community members involvement |
| <p>RESULTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Identity Development • Community and Leadership Development | <p>ASPIRATIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional Effectiveness and Strategic Initiation • Core curriculum |

Appendix G: San Pasqual High School Native American Cultural Class Pictures

