



The State of Native Education: Facts for Parent Centers

This brief shares key findings from the National Indian Education Study (NIES) report released in March 2017. Understanding the academic performance of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) students in reading and mathematics, as well as their exposure to Native culture in school and in the home, provides Parent Center staff with important contextual information that may contribute to outreach initiatives with AI/AN parents and communities.

What is the National Indian Education Study?

The NIES is a national study conducted every two years between 2005 and 2011 by the National Center for Educational Statistics for the Office of Indian Education in the U. S. Department of Education. After 2011, the study was authorized every four years; the latest study was completed in 2015. The study informs educators, parent organizations, and policy makers to better address the educational needs of Native students.

The full NIES report includes a wealth of findings, including state-specific results, much more than we can summarize here.

Find the report online at:

<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/nies>

Who Participated in the NIES?

14 States | Alaska, Arizona, Minnesota, Montana, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin, Wyoming

Participating Schools | 1,500 public, 100 Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), 30 Department of Defense (DoD), and 10 private. (Student numbers in DoD and private schools were too small to be reliable, so their results aren't reported in NIES.)

Respondents | AI/AN students, their teachers, and school administrators

Student Respondents | **8,500** fourth graders (15% with disabilities); **8,200** eighth graders (16% with disabilities)

Grouping of Participating Schools

For analysis and reporting purposes, the study divided “schools attended by Native students” into three categories:

- *Low density public schools* | Enrollment with less than 25% AI/AN students
- *High density public schools* | Enrollment of more than 25% AI/AN students
- *BIE schools* | Enrollment of 100% AI/AN students

What Findings Emerged from the NIES?

The report summarized 5 questions for Native students, 10 questions for their teachers, and 1 question for school administrators; select findings are offered below.

Select Findings from Native Students

What did Native students report...about their knowledge of and involvement with their Native culture at home and in school?

- Over 50% of all students knew **“some” to a “lot”** about their tribe and its history
- Additionally:

Nature of Question	Students in Low Density Schools	Students in BIE Schools
How often did students participate in tribal ceremonies and gatherings?	“Never” 45%	“Several times a year” 52%
How often did students hear their Native language used at home?	“Never or hardly ever” 69%	“Once a week or more” 75%
Did their school offer classes taught in a Native language?	No 75%	Yes 60%

Select Findings from Teachers

Who’s teaching Native students?

- In public schools, Native students were primarily taught by white teachers (92% of 4th graders in *low density* schools; 73% of 8th graders in *high density* schools).
- In *BIE* schools, Native students were taught almost equally by white and AI/AN teachers.

What did teachers report...about “attending professional or community-based professional development programs” in the last two years to prepare them to teach AI/AN students?

- **“Never”** | 80% of teachers in *low density* public schools; 60% of teachers in *high density* schools.

- **“Yes”** | About one-third of grade 8 teachers at *BIE schools* **had** “attended culturally relevant professional development programs.”

What did teachers report...about “implementing culturally specific instructional practices” in class?

- **“Never”** | 45% of 4th grade teachers and 75% of 8th grade teachers in *low density* public schools
- **“To a moderate or large extent”** | Over two-thirds of teachers in *BIE schools*

What did teachers report...about how often they “integrate materials about AI/AN culture and history” into their reading/language arts lessons?

- **“About once a year”** | Two-thirds of teachers in *low density* public schools
- **“Once a week or more”** | Nearly half of teachers in *BIE schools*

What did teachers report...about how often they “integrate AI/AN culture or history” into their mathematics lessons?

- **“Once a month or more”** | 22% of 4th grade teachers in *high density* public schools; 60% of 4th and 8th grade teachers in *BIE schools*.

Select Findings from School Administrators

What did school administrators report...about why AI/AN community members visited the school “3 or more times” in a school year?

- **“To discuss education issues”** | 70% of administrators in *BIE schools*
- **“To share AI/AN traditions and cultures”** | 68% of administrators in *BIE schools*
- **“To participate in Indian Education Parent Groups”** | 41% of administrators in *high density* public schools

Select Reading and Mathematics Performance Findings

- **How Are Native Students Nationally Performing in Reading?**
The NIES results show that, nationally speaking, the reading skills of Native students in the 4th and 8th grade of public schools have remained static over a 10-year period. In *BIE schools*, the reading skills of AI/AN 8th graders have shown a slow, small increase over the same 10-year period, but their scores remain lower than AI/AN students in *low* and *high density* public schools.

- **How Are Native Students Nationally Performing in Mathematics?**

The NIES showed that the math performance of Native students in public schools has also largely remained static over a 10-year period. In *BIE* schools, the average math scores of AI/AN students have shown a 3-point increase from 2011 to 2015, which is statistically significant. The slow increase over the 10-year period is welcome news, but the scores of BIE students remain lower than AI/AN students in *low* and *high* density public schools.

Suggestions for Parent Centers

- Read and share this brief to encourage your Parent Center staff to learn current facts about the education of AI/AN youth.
- Recognize that the NIES reflects the national experience of the 1,275 fourth graders and 1,312 eighth graders in the study who are Native students with disabilities.
- Realize that NIES findings are particularly relevant for your center, if your Parent Center is located in one of the 14 states in the study.
- Note that the NIES reports that Native students have access to their culture in the home but rarely in public schools, indicating a cultural need unmet outside the home. Help meet this need by recognizing and honoring cultural context when working with Native youth and their parents.
- Assist Native parents in locating tutoring and similar services to improve their students' reading and mathematics achievement scores.
- Share this brief in your exhibit booths at AI/AN events and trainings.
- Share this brief with the schools with whom your Parent Center works.

References

Ninneman, A.M., Deaton, J., & Francis-Begay, K. (2017). *National Indian Education Study 2015* (NCES2017-161). Washington, DC: Institute of Education Sciences, U. S. Department of Education. Online at: <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/nies>



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