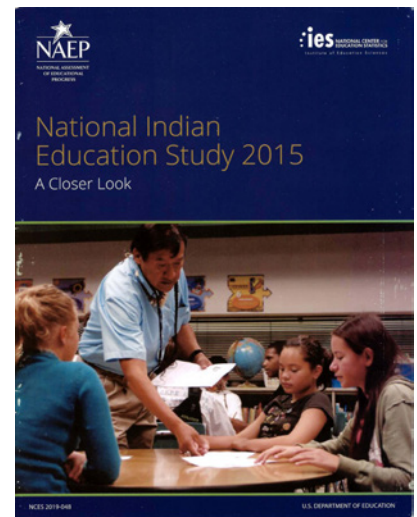


National Indian Education Study Supports Culturally-Responsive Education

Jon Reyhner, Northern Arizona University

Since 2005 the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in the United States has included an Indian education component. In May 2019 NAEP issued a follow-up report to its 2015 Indian education data, looking at the contextual factors associated with higher and lower performing American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) students and how those students saw themselves in terms of their Native languages, cultures, and aspirations for the future (National, 2019).

The data showed that schools with higher performing AI/AN students had more materials about AI/AN people, and higher performing AI/AN students were more likely to live in homes with more than 25 books and a computer that students could use. As would be expected, higher performing AI/AN students also had better school attendance, and they were more likely to read more than 20 pages every day for school and homework. Students allowed to read books of their own choosing were



Percentage of fourth- and eighth-grade AI/AN students in NAEP mathematics and reading, by performance level and selected factors: 2015

Factor and performance level	Mathematics		Reading	
	Grade 4	Grade 8	Grade 4	Grade 8
School has materials about AI/AN people				
Higher-performing AI/AN students	80*	83*	77*	88*
Lower-performing AI/AN students	59	70	60	67
Home has more than 25 books				
Higher-performing AI/AN students	67*	68*	70*	70*
Lower-performing AI/AN students	37	27	41	32
Home has computer that student can use				
Higher-performing AI/AN students	78*	85*	78*	82*
Lower-performing AI/AN students	62	67	62	60

* Significantly different (p < .05) from corresponding result for lower-performing AI/AN students. Significance tests were performed using unrounded numbers.

NOTE: AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native. Only selected response options are shown for each factor; not all response options are shown.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), 2015 National Indian Education Study.

also more likely to do better academically, and higher performing students were more likely to see reading as a favorite activity. Interestingly, a 2019 article in the *Navajo Times* was headlined “Libraries Saved My Life.” In it a Navajo graduate of Ramah Navajo High School noted that “Libraries are essential because it was there that I applied. It was there I’d read up on things” (Denetclaw, 2019, C3).

Ninety-five percent of the AI/AN students surveyed believed their schooling would bolster their chances for a successful future, however one half of AI/AN students reported never being exposed to their Native languages, and only 16% of eighth-graders reported having a lot of cultural knowledge. The NAEP data aligns with research on culturally-responsive education for American Indians and Alaska Natives. In their *Review of Educational Research* article entitled “Culturally Responsive Schooling for Indigenous Youth” Angelina Castagno and Bryan Brayboy (2008) echo the conclusions of the Alaska Native Knowledge Network that culturally responsive curriculum:

- reinforces the integrity of the cultural knowledge that students bring with them.
- recognizes cultural knowledge as part of a living and constantly adapting system that is grounded in the past, but continues to grow through the present and into the future.
- uses the local language and cultural knowledge as a foundation for the rest of the curriculum.
- fosters a complementary relationship across knowledge derived from diverse knowledge systems.
- situates local knowledge and actions in a global context. (Alaska, 1998)

American Indian and Alaska Native students, like many other ethnic minority students, have been shown in study after study to have disproportionately high dropout rates, and the most frequent reason given for dropping out is that their classes are not interesting (see e.g. Bridgeland, Dilulio & Morison, 2006). Culturally-responsive education relates what is going on in school to the experiential/cultural background students bring to school and allows students to better see the relationship of what they are learning to their lives.

References

- Alaska Native Knowledge Network. (1998). *Alaska standards for culturally-responsive schools* (adopted by the Assembly of Alaska Native educators). Retrieved from <http://ankn.uaf.edu/Publications/Standards.html>
- Bridgeland, John M., Dilulio, John J., Morison, Karen Burke. (2006). *The silent epidemic: Perspectives of high school dropouts*. Retrieved from <http://www.ignitelearning.com/pdf/TheSilentEpidemic3-06FINAL.pdf>
- Castagno, Angelina E., & Brayboy, Bryan McKinley Jones. (2008). Culturally responsive schooling for Indigenous youth: A review of the literature. *Review of Educational Research, 78*(4), 941-993.
- Dentclaw, Pauly. (2019, Jan. 14). “Libraries saved my life.” *Navajo Times*, C3.
- National Center for Educational Statistics. (2019). *National Indian education study 2015: A closer look*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2019048>