



Council of Chief State School Officers
April 9-11, 2003
Summary Report
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The Strengthening Partnerships for Native American Students meeting, sponsored by the Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) in Denver, Colorado on April 9-11, 2003, brought together over fifty educators, most of whom were Natives from across the United States, including Alaska and Hawaii, as well as American Samoa. The meeting provided an overview of issues found in schools educating Native students as they try to implement No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. Many meeting presentations highlighted successful or promising practices, which showed possibilities for replication elsewhere. In addition, participants discussed reactions to the presentations and generated recommendations for implementing NCLB and improving Native schooling. Finally, the participants proposed possible next steps for collaboration after this meeting.

Many of the issues discussed echoed those discussed at previous Native education events (Whitehouse Conference on Indian Education, Indian Nations at Risk (INAR) Task Force and the Indian Education Summit). All present supported the need for accountability for schools educating Native students, yet also emphasized the importance of maintaining and strengthening Native languages and cultures. These cannot be sacrificed in the struggle to improve academic achievement in reading, mathematics and science.

American Indians and Alaska Natives hold a unique position in this country, not because of race, rather because of the legal position granted within treaties. Education is guaranteed in all treaties made with tribes as sovereign nations, and the control of education by tribes is a very recent phenomena. This control is acknowledged in legislation as well.

Key Issues in Implementing NCLB:

Parental choice, teacher quality, student accountability, and structural flexibility have long been goals in Native education. Yet the issues facing schools educating Natives are diverse and complex, given the variety of systems and locations. It is estimated that over ninety percent of Native students attend public schools, both on and off reservations, and about ten percent attend schools funded by Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), including BIA-operated, tribally-controlled grant and contract schools. Native students reside in large urban school districts and rural isolated areas like Alaska, North and South Dakota, Hawaii and American Samoa. Despite these distinctions, however, common concerns with implementing NCLB have emerged.

Assessment Issues:

Support is needed to thoroughly research strategies for overcoming the barriers to successful performance of Native students on statewide assessments. In small rural schools, the numbers of Native students can dramatically alter school-wide data, and skew adequate yearly progress (AYP) determination. To disaggregate data on students in these small schools is meaningless because the numbers of limited English proficient (LEP) and special education students are too small. Confidentiality is also a concern in these instances.

Many Native schools are viewed as alternative schools for surrounding schools and districts. As a result there are larger numbers of low-performing and special education students entering these Native schools. These factors coupled with high mobility rates make it difficult to measure progress with cohort populations of Native students year to year. Schools with recently arrived students are being held accountable for students they did not have a chance to educate.

Native students are dispersed across entire districts, constituting statistically insignificant numbers in any one public school. Data is difficult to collect and disaggregate, and is often inaccurate due to a lack of proper identification of students as Native. The BIA “system” does not function under one assessment “system,” since there are one hundred eighty-five schools in twenty-three states. States are not always willing to support the test preparation of BIA school staff in their jurisdiction. The creation of a single assessment system for the entire BIA will help to properly determine student progress, but it is at least three years in the making.

Using performance-based assessments has been invaluable in closely monitoring student progress in many Native schools, as well as being culturally compatible with Native cultures. By design, standardized, norm-referenced tests are intended to sort learners. Most states are still using a single norm-referenced test, instead of criterion-referenced assessments, thereby allowing most Native students to demonstrate successfully what they may actually know. On norm-referenced tests students at the lower end of the bell curve have a difficult time demonstrating progress because the limited number of test items does not allow one to show fine gradations of growth. Some Native communities are developing proficiency measures in the Native languages in an attempt to more accurately assess students’ skills and knowledge.

Determining AYP is difficult enough based upon test scores, but when dropout rates are factored in as well, most Native high schools are finding this factor alone will cause them to remain in corrective action. Attendance is also a huge problem in Native schools at all grade levels. Unfortunately, there do not seem to be incentives for dropout retrieval efforts within NCLB.

Finally, and most profoundly, too many Native schools need assistance in the **use** of test data to help redesign instruction. Categorizing students into proficient, partially proficient and advanced, is meaningless if nothing changes in the classroom as a result. Significant support is needed in this area.

Teacher Quality and Professional Development:

The most powerful factor to student learning is the classroom teacher. From the Pacific to Alaska, the need for high quality teachers is a universal plea. Lower teacher salaries, extreme isolation, and poverty make many Native communities less desirable places to teach. Due to this geographic isolation, scheduling, logistical, and financial issues are ongoing barriers to providing staff development opportunities in Native schools.

Higher rates of teacher and administrator turnover in rural schools demand continuous training as staff come and go, and there are a large number of Native classroom aides who need additional credits to meet the high quality requirements and deadlines with NCLB. Native classroom aides can be resources for a long-term solution to the teacher shortage in Native communities. The challenge is in training onsite in rural communities.

Creative incentives are needed to attract and retain high quality staff, as well as to retrain Para-professionals and teachers who already reside in these communities. Onsite training and the use of technology must be expanded to help increase the competence of staff at low-performing Native schools. Tribally-controlled community colleges are underutilized resources in this area. Tribes need to put school staff on multiple-year contracts at salary levels competitive with surrounding educator workforce salaries.

In addition, state certification of Native speakers does not happen universally in all states. If they do not receive additional support to meet NCLB teacher quality requirements, the specialized expertise of these cultural resources could be lost to schools.

With the loss of Indian Education Technical Assistance Centers and limited support from states and Regional Labs and Centers, Native schools have been set adrift without resources, specifically in the area of professional development. This requires creative problem solving, collaboration and a commitment of resources from the federal government, the states, and the institutions of higher education to ensure that Native children do **not** get left behind.

Instructional Practices:

When low-performing schools are identified, there is a need to have mentors who can guide staff through a long-term reform process, from data analysis to identification of strategies for changed instructional practice. These schools would not be low-performing if they could solve program and policy issues entirely on their own. Yet, in Native schools the inclusion of culturally appropriate curriculum and the use of culturally compatible instruction is essential. These elements build upon the existing local Native expertise. Implementing NCLB requires a blending of Native control and outside support.

The Effective Practices in Indian Education is one model, which has been used successfully in American Indian schools in the Northwest. The Gates Foundation for Quality Schools Initiative in Alaska may be another possible model, following strategies used in Chugach School district. The Mounds Park All Nations Indian Magnet School in St. Paul, Minnesota is an example of a

successful urban school, and there are a number of successful language immersion schools in Hawaii, which are developing whole systems of education specifically for native Hawaiians.

Support needs to be provided to Native schools due to the high number of LEP students enrolled, the number of teachers who have a limited depth of knowledge of reading content at all levels, and the number of students who are faced with the “crossover effect,” which research suggests happens in fourth grade. Fourth grade is when the vocabulary doubles or triples and reading in the content areas accelerates dramatically. If students are not fluid readers with good comprehension, they continue to fall further behind at this critical point.

Health Services:

The depth of inter-generational trauma within Native communities requires extensive support to schools. The alcoholism, violence, suicides, early pregnancy, and dysfunction require the expansion of therapeutic residential models and funds to develop safety procedures and secure facilities.

Parental Involvement:

The NCLB Act stresses the importance of parental involvement. Moreover, research is clear that the greatest impact on achievement is parents’ direct involvement in supporting their child’s learning in cooperation with the teacher. Yet, historically Native parents have been intentionally removed from the formal schooling process. To overcome this historical barrier, schools must be very committed and creative in their approaches to re-engage Native parents. The Indian Nations at Risk Task Force recommendations on parental involvement provide some useful suggestions. Family Math, Family Science and Family Literacy nights are all showing promise in some Native communities.

The notion of parental choice within NCLB has little relevance in Native schools where there are no other choices within close proximity to remote isolated, rural schools. In addition, local Native control of schools does not always allow for an outside entity to reconstitute a poor performing rural school. Therefore, if Native children are **not to be left behind**, improvements must be made in the schools in which Native children already reside.

Potential Solutions:

Many of the discussions above include solutions; yet, there are many more. The common theme echoed throughout the CCSSO meeting was “more”: more research, more sharing of best practices, more collaboration between states, tribes, native and federal governments, more time for adults to retool and create systemic change, more funding to cover the depth of need, more use of technology, more grow-your-own teacher efforts, more mentoring and onsite technical assistance, more flexibility on the part of U.S. Department of Education, and more acknowledgment of the value of traditional Native languages and cultures.

Recommendations for CCSSO follow-up:

- * Develop a response for Congress, U.S. Department of Education, states and others detailing issues identified in this meeting.
- * Propose recommendations to tribes and states on how to better collaborate.
- * Create a resource guide to document best practices and share with those not in attendance.
- *Identify common concerns and set long-term goals and strategies.
- * Create a steering committee of Native representatives to help plan a possible annual follow-up meeting to check progress.
- * Include in follow-up meetings other Native organizations like National Indian Education Association, Native American Rights Fund, National Congress of American Indians, Alaska Federation of Natives, American Indian Higher Education Consortium, Indian Caucuses of National Education Association and National School Boards Association.
- * Include more states and other stakeholders to articulate a comprehensive response (i.e. State Conference of Legislatures, Council of Governors, Congress).
- * Connect Native issues identified here to other initiatives to help create a greater educational response, like the Rural Task Force being formed by the U.S. Department of Education
- *Support the researching of grants and proposals to help fund innovative ideas and solutions to many of the above-mentioned issues.