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Increasing the High School Graduation Rate of Native American Students in Public Schools

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Claremont McKenna College

**Increasing the High School Graduation Rate of Native American
Students in Public Schools**

SUBMITTED TO

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AND

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BY

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for

SENIOR THESIS

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Chapter One: Introduction

The United States' overall high school graduation rate has steadily increased over the past several years reaching 75.2 percent in 2013.¹ In addition to the rising overall graduation rate, during the past decade, the achievement gaps between African and Hispanic American students compared to students overall have declined dramatically.¹ In stark contrast, the graduation rates of Native American students have hovered around 51.0 percent, leading to an increase in the achievement gap between Native and non-Native students.¹ Poverty and cultural differences are key issues for all ethnic minorities; however, there is something unique to the interaction between the Native American society and the dominant American society impeding students from succeeding in the public education system.

For decades, scholars and activists have proposed theories as to what is reducing academic success among Native students, identifying the main problems to be alienation in the classroom, poverty, and policymakers' decisions to discount the small Native population when collecting and analyzing data. While these difficulties have been recognized since the 1970s, Native students continue to attain the lowest graduation rates among all minorities. Although these theories are valid, they neglect to address the deep-

¹ "Diplomas Count," Education Week, last modified June 2, 2014, <http://www.edweek.org/ew/dc/>.

The terms Native American and Native will be used throughout this paper. Please see Appendix B for the reasoning behind this decision.

rooted basis of the barriers that reduce the chances of academic success for Native students.

In this paper, I argue that prior traumatic experiences with the education system and institutional racism are the main reasons behind the failure of the education system to serve Native students. These arguments predominantly stem from analyzing the history of the Federal Government's treatment of Native Americans and data collected through original interviews conducted in the spring and fall of 2014. Throughout the centuries, many White Americans have maintained the idea that they are superior to Natives, and thus argued, and continue to argue, that they must impart their wisdom onto the "backward" society through assimilation tactics by using the education system. Education policies and practices emerged to push Natives to abandon their languages, cultures, and lifestyles in order to become more "White." I argue that these policies and practices continue to damage Native students by leaving behind not only traumatic residue but also the assumptions that Natives are inferior learners. Moreover, this history has led to the establishment of an education system that is racist against Native students. I chose these arguments because the field demands novel theories to explain the persistence of low graduation rates; my theories do not disagree with other scholars' works but instead are a continuation of these ideas, and each argument allows for the development of a solution. My arguments differ from other scholastic work in that they focus on policy changes in addition to, rather than solely dependent on, the development of relationships between tribal leaders and school districts. Unlike any other work I read, my thesis incorporated interviews from high school teachers and administrators as well as Federal Government

agents; from these interviews, problems were identified and conclusions were drawn.²

These interviews enabled me to develop more wide-based policy recommendations and identify more generalized changes that should be made to increase Native graduation rates. While I refrain from making federally-based curriculum changes, I do argue that the Federal Government should provide funding and incentives to enable each school district to work with surrounding tribes to create culturally-founded curricula. These arguments provide criticisms at the national and Departmental level; I do not blame any specific person for the flaws of the current system. Rather, these arguments identify major problems with the public education system, thus enabling readers to devise and implement policies that can change the lives of thousands of Native students.

This introduction develops my main arguments after reflecting on the findings of other scholars. The second chapter will further investigate the current situation for Natives in the United States, including academic decline and the importance of a high school diploma. In the third chapter, I examine the ways in which the lasting effects of historic traumas, inflicted by the education system, now impact Native students. The chapter will discuss the history of Natives' education in the United States and consider the reflections of educators and government agents, found through interviews, to show the ways in which these historic abuses continue to have detrimental effects on Native students today. Chapter four delves into institutional racism by identifying specific practices implemented by the U.S. Department of Education that harm Native students. Finally, chapter five will draw upon these chapters to propose solutions in the form of

² In other scholastic work, scholars interviewed students and sometimes teachers, but I never read a piece where the author interviewed administrators or government officials.

policy recommendations for the Federal Government to improve the high school graduation rates of Native American students as well as efforts Natives can make to demand their voices be heard.

1.1 Research Methods

The research described in this paper uses several methodologies to determine the impact of the abusive education system and the significance of institutional racism for students in the public education system in order to develop techniques to improve Native high school graduation rates. This paper utilizes previous studies, interviews of Native educators and government agents, and comparative studies to highlight programs and policies that better meet and understand the needs of Native students. In total, I conducted seven interviews: two teachers, three administrators, and two Federal Government officials. These interviews provided important insights to this thesis, including the significance of the history of the education system. Without an interview with an administrator, I likely would have overlooked the impact that these atrocities continue to have on Native students. Additionally, many of the interviews validated the institutional racism argument, which was critical because no other research has yet delved into this specific topic. While many that I interviewed were disturbed by the terminology of “institutional racism,” all but one of the interviews concluded with an agreement that there is an advantage in the education system for White students. Furthermore, I did not interview people specifically because they were Native students, however, five of the

interviewees were Native, three went through the public education system, and, thus, their answers inherently described the difficulties they themselves experienced.

1.2 Limitations of this Study

This study, like all others before it, is limited by the questionable quality of all data sets at national, state, and private research institutes levels. This is likely due to Natives' "highly mobile populations, undercounting of the population and distrust among this population regarding the use of data by the Federal Government."³ While data has been gathered from federal and state governments as well as respectable private entities, it is still necessary to note that any data pertaining to Native Americans may be imprecise.

Furthermore, it is important to note the distain many have toward the term “institutional racism.” Critiques of this thesis may argue that I should have used the term “cultural bias” instead, however, vocabulary is critical to demanding change. If the Native population and advocates for this group unite and promote the factually-based argument that the policies and practices of the U.S. Department of Education are institutionally racist, change will come. The reality of the United States is that change is difficult, but if a group demonstrates that practices and policies are so wrong that you

³ Susan C. Faircloth and John W. Tippeconnic, III. *The Dropout/Graduation Crisis Among American Indian and Alaska Native Students: Failure to Respond Places the Future of Native Peoples at Risk* (2010): 6, <http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/school-dropouts/the-dropout-graduation-crisis-among-american-indian-and-alaska-native-students-failure-to-respond-places-the-future-of-native-peoples-at-risk/faircloth-tippeconnic-native-american-dropouts.pdf>.

could rightfully designate them as racist, many Americans will push their elected officials to modify those practices and policies. In short, “cultural bias” is not only an inaccurate portrayal of the situation, but it also undermines the chances of actual change occurring.

1.3 Analysis of the Foundational Problems for Native Children

Several hypotheses have been proposed regarding the most influential variable behind Native children's low graduation rate as the gravity of the issue calls for attention. Theories as to why Natives have the lowest graduation rate include alienation in the classroom, poor analysis and limited collection of data, and the impoverished state of many Native students as well as the implications of such a socioeconomic position. While each issue substantially contributes to the situation, all three are manifestations of underlying issues in the public education system. These problems show the effects of a horrific history and institutional racism, thus they are both symptoms and causes that have created a perpetual cycle of low graduation rates.

1.3a. Alienation in the Classroom

Many scholars argue that alienation in schools and classrooms is the most detrimental problem for Native students. Native beliefs and values often directly conflict with the culture of the public education system. For Native students, education is often considered a homogenizing force that pushes all students to incorporate the beliefs of mainstream America. In “When Tribal Sovereignty Challenges Democracy: American Indian Education and the Democratic Ideal,” Tsianina Lomawaima and Teresa McCarty declare, “Critical democracy demands that the United States be a nation of educational

opportunity for all, not merely a [...] standardizing machine, unable to draw strength from diversity.”⁴ Many of these scholars often argue that the U.S. Department of Education should become more knowledgeable about the beliefs of Native children so that the system can better meet their unique academic and cultural needs.

Many Native students were raised in environments that clash with common academic requirements and assessments used by the public education system. In her work, “Bridging the Horizon: American Indian Beliefs and Whole Language Learning,” Wendy Kasten provides an overview of key elements of Native belief systems. She writes that a sense of community and cooperation are central to many Native students’ way of life.⁵ In contrast, the public education system focuses on the individual student. The entire funding of the system is based on the utilization of standardized, multiple-choice exams, which supposedly evaluate competency. Additionally, the system’s environment frequently nourishes competition and discourages teamwork. Bryan M. Brayboy, Amy J. Fann, Angelina E. Castagno, and Jessica A. Solyom describe the differences in worldviews: “institutions view students as individuals where the [Native American] student views him or herself as part of a connected web of family and community.”⁶ Kasten also discusses the idea that many Natives maintain faith in harmony with the

⁴ Tsianina K. Lomawaima and Teresa L. McCarty, "When Tribal Sovereignty Challenges Democracy: American Indian Education and the Democratic Ideal," *American Educational Research Journal* 39.2 (2002): 281.

⁵ Wendy C. Kasten, "Bridging the Horizon: American Indian Beliefs and Whole Language Learning." *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 23.2 (1992): 109.

⁶ Bryan M. Brayboy, Amy J. Fann, Angelina E. Castagno, and Jessica A. Solyom, *Postsecondary Education for American Indian and Alaska Natives: Higher Education for Nation Building and Self-determination* (Hoboken, NJ:Wiley Periodicals, 2012), 61.

Earth and all those who inhabit it.⁷ Many Native students grow up in an environment that focuses on the present, the process, and the journey. The public education system, however, demands students to emphasize the future and work toward the final product. Kasten also notes that Native students may be raised in environments that regard speech as significant and bragging as disrespectful.⁷ These students may suffer in evaluations at their schools, as classes commonly assign a grade to class participation; students are required to speak often in order to demonstrate involvement and to “brag” about their knowledge.⁸

While many Americans may find it hard to believe that culture could so substantially impact academic success, Native students have attested that the tension between the cultures can lead to an overpowering desire to drop out. Bryan Brayboy, in “Transformational Resistance and Social Justice,” studied Native students attending Ivy League Universities. During individual interviews, many students commented that the universities’ environments were “uptight and out-of-control stuffy.”⁹ These sentiments were the result of the institutions promoting competition, “getting ahead,” and overemphasizing the importance of earning money. A female student in the study explained that it was difficult to leave home and her way of life to attend college in the first place, but that it was even more challenging to leave home after school breaks knowing that she would return to an institution that neglected to meet her needs in and

⁷ "Bridging the Horizon: American Indian Beliefs and Whole Language Learning," 110.

⁸ Bryan McKinley Brayboy, "Transformational Resistance and Social Justice: American Indians in Ivy League Universities." *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 36.3 (2005): 201.

⁹Ibid, 198.

out of the classroom.¹⁰ All of the students in the study commented on feeling as if they had “[sold] out” to the mainstream American culture, which rejects their cultures, in order to meet their academic obligations.¹¹ As these are the sentiments of students who did complete high school, it is easy to understand scholars’ claims that most Native students are forced to bear the burden of either assimilating to mainstream culture or failing to receive a high school diploma. Unfortunately, a large proportion of Native American students are forced into the latter position.

Many scholars argue that Native and White students have different learning styles. In “The American Indian High School Dropout Rate,” John S. Backes shows a sampling in which this argument is true. By using a method to test the most effective learning styles of various students, the *Gregoric Style Delineator* (GSD), Backes tested Native students to find which learning style best suited their needs. The GSD presents test takers with four learning styles, including concrete sequential, abstract sequential, abstract random, and concrete random.¹² Briefly, Backes describes concrete sequential as “orderly, step-by-step, structured, and practical,” abstract sequential as “logical, academic, structured, and theoretical,” abstract random as “sensitivity, emotion, personalization, and imagination,” and concrete random as “independence, creativity, calculated risk-taking, and varied.”¹² Subjects rate words in ten four-word sets on a 1-4 scale based on which most closely match the needs of the student. Based on the findings of this study, Backes concluded that the tribe that underwent the testing overwhelmingly

¹⁰ Ibid, 201.

¹¹ Ibid, 204.

¹² John S. Backes, “The American Indian High School Dropout Rate: A Matter of Style?” *Journal of American Indian Education* 32.3 (1993): 3, <http://jaie.asu.edu/v32/V32S3Ame.htm>.

chose the deductive, holistic methodology – abstract random – whereas White subjects most commonly tested as concrete sequential learners.¹³ Although this is only a small sample-based experiment, it does help to demonstrate that there are cultural differences between Native children and their White peers. Psychiatrist Erik Erikson states that in order for children to build their personal identity, teachers need to reinforce and build on the cultural messages that the child receives at home.¹⁴ However, scholars at Northern Arizona University point out that "too often in schools today, teachers are not reinforcing what Native parents show and tell their children, producing cultural discontinuity between home and school, [thus] forcing Native children to choose between their Native heritage and school success with disastrous results."¹⁴

Some scholars argue that many Native students feel alienated in the classroom due to the structure of the public education system. Students' sense of alienation stems from several differences between most of mainstream society and the current situation for many Natives, including family health problems, pregnancy, substance abuse, or from the overwhelming feeling of forced assimilation.¹⁵ These problems are enormous issues for Native children and, some scholars argue, are likely a root cause for why many students leave school before graduation.¹⁶ However, there are weaknesses to this argument. The argument presumes that most Native children are of the same or closely related cultural

¹³ Ibid, 8.

¹⁴ "American Indian School Dropouts and Pushouts," Northern Arizona University, last modified November 24, 2014, <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~jar/AIE/Dropouts.html>.

¹⁵ Anonymous source, high school administrator, in interview with the author,

¹⁶ High school teacher #1, in person interview by Sierra Gibson, March 31, 2014, transcript in Appendix A.

background. In their book, *To Remain an Indian: Lessons in Democracy from a Century of Native American Education*, K. Tsianina Lomawaima and Teresa L. McCarty write:

Stereotypes about Native learners – as “silent,” “stoic,” or “visual” – have strategically reinforced the necessary difference and distance between “civilized” and “primitive” students. [Rather, they] propose that any “theory” that posits human beings as one-dimensional learners does great damage to the truth of human complexity.¹⁷

Within over 560 federally recognized tribes, Native students are raised in extremely varied cultures. To assume that there is a single type of learning style for all Native students reduces the students down to one-dimensional people; this ideology strips Natives of their background, culture, language, upbringing, family life, socioeconomic status – everything that makes us three-dimensional, or real, people. This assumption is particularly dangerous when proposing solutions for the problem of alienation, as these proposals often claim that Natives are an “inferior” race and thus slower or worse learners. Alienation in the classroom is a very important contributor to low high school graduation rates, but it is also important to note the need for flexibility and diversity of learning styles within the ethnicity and not to stereotype this group of people when discussing this theory.

1.3b Statistically insignificant/inadequate data collection/disaggregation

The discussion of data collection revolves around two major themes: first, the government’s and educational institutions’ inadequate use of available data to determine specific areas of concern; and second, the poor disaggregation of data and the lack of establishing metrics to assess which practices and policies best serve Native students.

¹⁷ K. Tsianina Lomawaima, *To Remain an Indian: Lessons in Democracy from a Century of Native American Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2006), 17.

With inadequate data collection and insufficient analysis, it is difficult to statistically define problems and to determine whether a practice is beneficial.

One theory argues that Native Americans are often considered a statistically insignificant population and, thus, are overlooked when establishing educational policy. In "Failure to Respond Places the Future of Native Peoples at Risk," Susan C. Faircloth and John W. Tippeconnic, III argue that the fact that Natives make up less than two percent of the total population and, furthermore, are dispersed across the country, thus establishing a lack of critical mass, "often results in urbanized [Natives] being treated as the 'invisible minority.'"¹⁸ Scholars Faircloth and Tippeconnic found that, because Natives are such a small population to begin with, plus they are spread out geographically, most public school districts have extremely small Native populations, often amounting to one to ten students.¹⁹ The Federal and state Governments neglect to help the invisible minority, according to this theory, because they argue that the population is too small to even consider.

There is certainly validity to this argument. With a total Native population of only 5.2 million, separated into 568 federally recognized tribes, in addition to hundreds of indigenous organizations that are not registered with the Federal Government, policy makers often ignore the population and neglect to address the problems that Natives face, such as inadequacies in the public education system. I drew a conclusion from these scholars' research: though there are policies established for Native students in the public

¹⁸ *The Dropout/Graduation Crisis Among American Indian and Alaska Native Students: Failure to Respond Places the Future of Native Peoples at Risk*, 25.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 23.

education system, such as the Johnson O'Malley Act and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act Titles VII and VIII, these policies must be more flexible to adapt to the diversity of Native cultures and peoples as well as better serve urban Native students.

Many scholars argue that these problems lead to incompetent educational policies that do not consider or improperly consider Native children. Howard S. Adelman, Linda Taylor, and Perry Nelson argue that data must be disaggregated by gender, socioeconomic status, and tribal affiliation to ensure that researchers and policy makers may seek the root of each problem; accordingly, without this information, policy makers cannot adequately create or modify policies and practices that solve these issues.²⁰ The National Advisory Council on Indian Education's Annual Report to Congress (2013) focuses on another aspect of the lack of data. Here, scholars found that "Congress should direct the Office of Indian Education to require all grantees [...] to disseminate broadly information on promising practices that could be replicated elsewhere in Indian Country."²¹ This advisory committee argued that, despite the likelihood of existing examples of success, it is nearly impossible to prove outcomes with limited to no available data. As a result, best practices developed at some schools are not being replicated in other public schools that serve Native students. In "Voices of Native Educators," the National Indian Educational Association and the National Education

²⁰ Howard S. Adelman, Linda Taylor, and Perry Nelson. "Native American Students Going to and Staying in Postsecondary Education: An Intervention Perspective." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 37.3 (2013): 31.

²¹ The National Advisory Council on Indian Education. *Annual Report to Congress* (2013): 3, <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oese/oie/nacie2013annualreport.pdf>.

Association identify best practices and work to disseminate the programs.²² Under this theory, it is key to publicly report Native programs' findings to establish effective and thoughtful policy that will improve high school graduation rates.²³

Limited data collection, disaggregation, clarity, and dissemination prevent policy makers from further improving existing policies and practices. Without enhanced data collection and analysis practices, it will be extremely difficult for the Federal, state, and tribal governments and private not-for-profit institutions to properly identify and disseminate best practices that improve high school graduation rates.

1.3c Poverty and its Implications

Many argue that the socioeconomic status of Native students is the most important contributor to their low graduation rate. These scholars contend that the low socioeconomic status of the majority of Native students limits the students' academic opportunities for success. According to the authors of "Voices of Native Educators," many Native students struggle with substance abuse activities, high suicide rates, gang violence, and incarceration – all problems that increase with low socioeconomic populations.²⁴ Scholars argue that these problems prevent students from completing high school.²⁴ During an interview that I conducted, a tutor noted that high teen pregnancy rates and family deaths prevent students from prioritizing school over family; when

²² National Indian Educational Association. *Voices of Native Educators: Strategies that Support Success of Native High School Students* (April 2010), <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED528946.pdf>.

²³ Ibid, 19.

²⁴ Ibid, 15.

family needs arise, they leave school to tend to them.²⁵ This quote supports the scholars' argument that the public education system must provide equitable learning conditions in order to allow Native children to succeed.²⁶

In addition to a lack of equitable learning conditions, Native students living in poverty are not provided with an education equal to that of their wealthy counterparts. New, unprepared, teachers are more likely to instruct at low-income schools.²⁷ These teachers are even more likely to instruct at schools with racial diversity located in rural settings, further disproportionately impacting Native students, as these are often the schools they attend.²⁸

While poverty plays a huge role in causing low graduation rates, there is still a significant difference in high school graduation rates between African and Hispanic Americans and Native Americans, despite similar poverty rates and income levels. Despite comparable socioeconomic positions, in 2013, the Native graduation rate was 10.6 percent lower than African Americans and 17.0 percent lower than Hispanic Americans.²⁸ In 2011, African Americans had a poverty rate of 27.4 percent and an annual median household income of \$32,068, Hispanic Americans had a poverty level of 26.6 percent and an annual median household income of \$37,759, and Native Americans

²⁵ High school teacher #1, in person interview by Sierra Gibson, March 31, 2014, transcript in Appendix A.

²⁶ *Voices of Native educators: Strategies that Support Success of Native High School Students*, 57.

²⁷ Douglas Gagnon and Marybeth J. Mattingly, "Beginning Teachers are More Common in Rural, High-Poverty, and Racially Diverse Schools," *Carsey Institute*, Summer 2012, <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED535961.pdf>.

²⁸ "High School Graduation Rate Approaching Milestone, Reaches Highest Point in 40 Years," *Education Week*, last modified June 6, 2013, http://www.edweek.org/media/diplomascount2013_release.pdf.

had a poverty level of 29.1 percent and a median annual household income of \$35,310.²⁹

While poverty is a major contributor to low graduation rates across all minority ethnic groups, it is only one of many factors contributing to Native Americans' particularly low academic success.

The difference in on-time graduation rate between the ethnic groups demonstrates that there is a unique factor that is further preventing the academic success of Native Americans. While many authors correctly claim that the public education system alienates Natives more so than other ethnic groups, the true problem stems from the legacy of abuse and the continued use of a system created for White Americans.

1.4 Conclusion

Although many variables contribute to Native students' poor academic performance in public schools, my argument is that a complete understanding of the problem must include the historical trauma established after centuries of assimilation tactics and institutional racism. Historically, the Federal Government tried to use the public education system to convert Natives into "White" or "civilized" people. Physical

²⁹ "Facts for Features: Black (African-American) History Month," U.S. Census Bureau News, last modified January 28, 2013, http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/pdf/cb13-ff02_black_history.pdf.
 "Facts for Features: Hispanic Heritage Month," U.S. Census Bureau News, last modified July 30, 2013, http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/pdf/cb13ff-19_hispanicheritage.pdf.
 "Facts for Features: American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month," U.S. Census Bureau News, last modified October 31, 2013, http://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/newsroom/facts-for-features/2013/cb13ff-26_aian.pdf.

and emotional abuses were consistently used to achieve this goal. Residual trauma still harms Native students to this day. Institutional racism is also a severely detrimental factor affecting Native students in the public education system. According to the New York organization Erase Racism, institutional racism “is a term that describes the way government and other public and private institutions systematically afford White people an array of social, political, and economic advantages, simply because they are White, while marginalizing and putting at a disadvantage [people of minority descent].”³⁰ Institutional racism is present in the public education system, illustrated in policies and practices that the U.S. Department of Education implements that negatively impact Native students. For example, the institutionalization of standardized testing as the primary measure of student competence and the basis for federal school funding is a federal policy that marginalizes Native students and provides an advantage to White students.³¹ To date, few researchers have investigated these problems as the systemic reasons behind the low graduation rates. While many scholars emphasize the importance of creating a system that is better able to address the variety of cultural and academic needs of Native students, there is very little publicly accessible research that evaluates the effectiveness of the current system. Furthermore, there are nearly no non-governmental proposals that offer recommendations to change the government structure to better tend to the needs of a group that has suffered through enormous and consistent traumas at the hands of the United States government.

³⁰ “Race and Racism,” Erase Racism, <http://www.eraseracismny.org/our-work/race-and-racism>.

³¹ Tsianina K. Lomawaima and Teresa L. McCarty, “When Tribal Sovereignty Challenges Democracy: American Indian Education and the Democratic Ideal,” *American Educational Research Journal* 39.2 (2002): 292-294.

Chapter Two: The Problem

*We have to fight fire with fire and utilize the natural relationships that might be counterintuitive to some in order to win this war...Make no mistake that we are at war for our lives, cultures, and rights...*³²

- Heather, a Native American undergraduate at an Ivy League College

Educational researchers use several measures to evaluate students' success and educational effectiveness. One common measure is the "on-time high school graduation rate," which the Federal Department of Education defines as the ratio of the number of students who graduate in four years with a regular high school diploma to the number of students who have finished their fourth year of high school in a given year.³³ Native students continue to attain the lowest on-time high school graduation rates out of all races and ethnicities. Strikingly, the achievement gap between Native students and their non-Native counterparts has increased since 2005; Native students graduate at approximately the same rate, about 51.0%, while White and other non-White students continue to improve (Figure 1). Despite widespread awareness of obstacles that impede Native students from succeeding, neither lasting nor successful changes have been implemented in the past decade. This chapter discusses the environments in which many Natives are raised and reflects on the significance of education's ability to improve the quality of life for this population.

³² "Transformational Resistance and Social Justice: American Indians in Ivy League Universities," 194.

³³ U.S. Department of Education. *High School Graduation Rate: Non-Regulatory Guidance*, <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/hsgrguidance.pdf>.

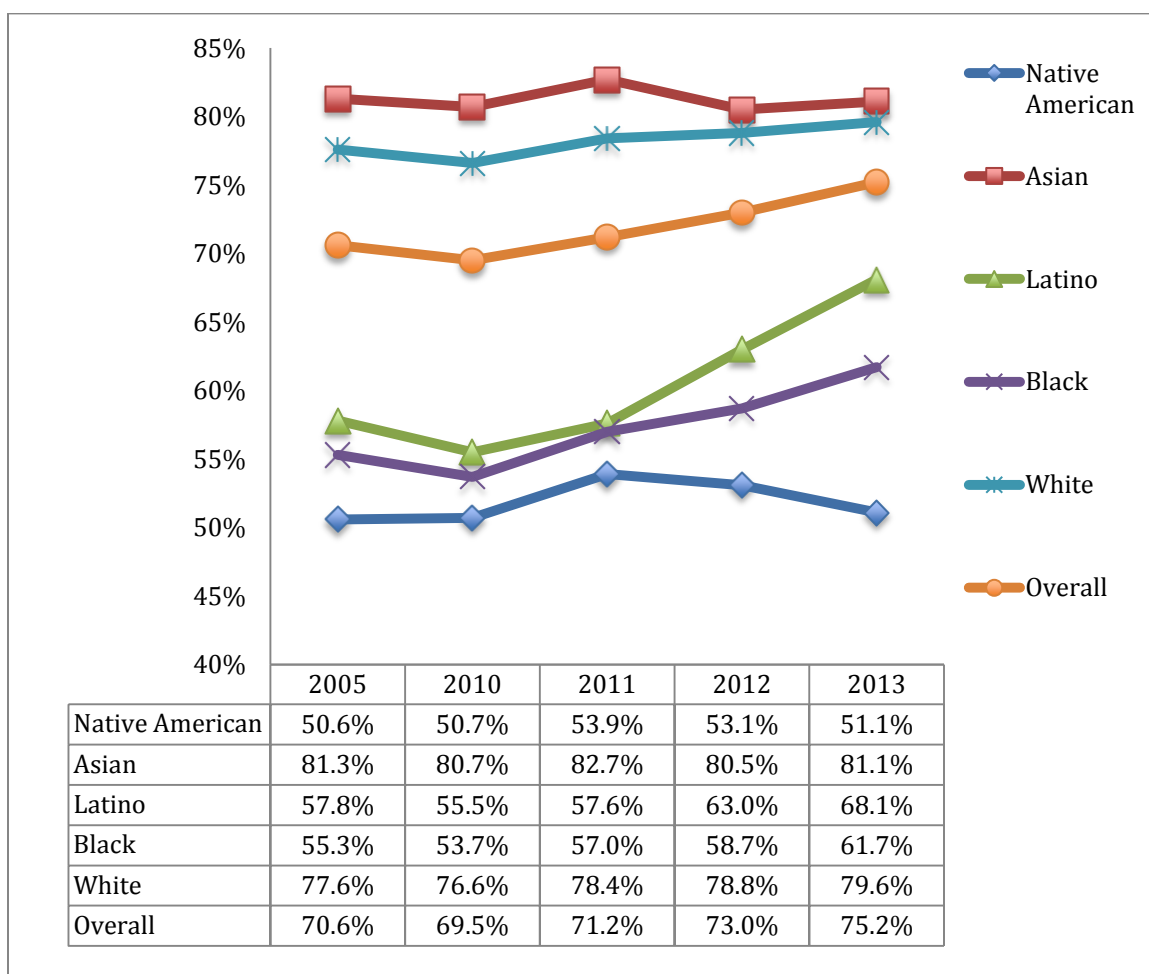


Figure 1: Estimated Cohort Annual On-time Graduation Rate by Race/Ethnicity³⁴

In order to fully comprehend the multifaceted problems that lead to the low graduation rates of Native Americans, one must consider the context in which these students are educated. There are approximately 500,000 Native students in kindergarten through twelfth grade in United States public schools. This represents about 92 percent of all Native children in school between the grades of kindergarten through twelfth.³⁵ Most of the remaining eight percent attend schools operated or funded by the Federal Bureau of

³⁴ “Diplomas Count.”

³⁵ “Number and percentage of 9th- to 12th- graders who dropped out of public school by race/ethnicity, grade, and state or jurisdiction: 2009-10,” *National Center for Education Statistics*, 2012, http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d12/tables/dt12_126.asp.

Indian Education under the Department of the Interior; less than one percent attend private schools.³⁶ This paper will address the problems that Native students, living both on and off reservation, face at public schools. While there are certainly differences between these groups of students, there are overarching barriers that they both face when working to graduate high school. By focusing on the broader problems, I hope to provide evidence for the need to change policies to better meet the needs of all Native students. The best practices and policies identified by this thesis could also be applicable to the Bureau of Indian Education and private schools.

2.1 United States' Public Education System: Overview

To begin, it is important to understand the current state of public education in the United States. About 90 percent of Americans attend public schools.³⁷ According to the Center on Education Policy's report, *The Public Education Primer*, "more public school students attend school in suburbs, towns, and rural areas than in urban areas."³⁸ The Center on Education Policy also found, "more than one-third of public school students are from low income families [and] one in every ten public school students is an English language learner – a student whose first language is not English and who is learning English."³⁹ Approximately 35 percent of the country's school districts enroll less than

³⁶ *The Dropout/Graduation Crisis Among American Indian and Alaska Native Students: Failure to Respond Places the Future of Native Peoples at Risk*, 4.

³⁷ Center on Education Policy. *A Public Education Primer* (2012): 9.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 10.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 15.

600 students.⁴⁰ Moreover, the report found that “Most key education policies are determined at the state and local level rather than the federal level.”⁴¹

Over the past decade, the overall high school graduation rate has increased by about 5 percent for public schools in the United States (Figure 1). White and Asian American students graduate at a much higher rate than the students from other ethnicities; the United States’ public education system successfully graduated about 80 percent of both ethnic groups in 2013. Graduation rates for African and Hispanic Americans have increased by 6.4 and 10.3 percent, respectively, since 2005. Contrarily, Native students’ graduation rate has scarcely deviated from 50 percent during the same time period, increasing by just 0.5 percent.

In 2010, there were 48.7 million students in the United States’ public education system. Only 500,000 – or 1 percent of the total student population – were Native American students. White students make up just over half of the student population, while African and Hispanic Americans each make up about one-fifth of the student population (Table 1).

⁴⁰ Ibid, 17.

⁴¹ Ibid, 19.

Table 1: Number (and percentage) of students in the public education system in 2010 by race/ethnicity in the millions⁴²

	Total	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/Pacific Islander	Native American
2010	48.7 (97%)	25.9 (52 %)	8.4 (16%)	11.4 (23%)	2.5 (5%)	0.5 (1%)

President Barack Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan devised an education budget for fiscal year 2013 that included \$69.8 billion in discretionary appropriations for the Department of Education.⁴³ This budget was a \$1.7 billion, or 2.5 percent, increase from fiscal year 2012, and included funding for three major initiatives in 2013.⁴⁴ The goal of the first initiative, tangent to the topic of this paper, is to improve the affordability of higher education; \$1.5 billion in funding was allocated for the Race to the Top Initiative and student financial aid. The purpose of the second initiative was to “[elevate] the teaching profession to the same status it enjoys in nations with highest-performing education systems.”⁴⁴ \$5.5 billion was requested in the budget for this project.⁴⁴ Finally, the Department of Education requested funding to “strengthen the connection between school and work and better align [...] job training programs with workforce demand.”⁴⁴ Although the first initiative does not stand to directly benefit

⁴² “Number and percentage of 9th- to 12th- graders who dropped out of public school by race/ethnicity, grade, and state or jurisdiction: 2009-10.”

⁴³ U.S. Department of Education. *Fiscal Year 2013 Budget Summary and Background Information* (2012): 7, <http://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/budget13/summary/13summary.pdf>.

Native students, enhancing the skillsets and quality of teachers and establishing relationships between public schools and employers will likely improve Natives' graduation rates and employment opportunities.

2.2 Native American Population: Overview

The Native American population itself is very unique. According to the 2010 census, Natives make up almost 2 percent of the nation's population (Figure 2).⁴⁴ Nearly half of the 5.2 million respondents who identified as indigenous were biracial or multiracial.⁴⁵ Native Americans are predominantly concentrated in 15 states; more than 100,00 Natives live in each of Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Oklahoma, Oregon, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Texas, and Washington.⁴⁶ Additionally, eight tribes have over 100,000 members: Cherokee, Navajo, Choctaw, Mexican-American Indians, Chippewa, Sioux, Apache, and Blackfeet.⁴⁶ While many consider Native Americans as a single entity, there is vast diversity within the race. There are 568 federally recognized indigenous tribes and hundreds of other organizations and tribes in the United States, each of which has unique cultural, historic, and linguistic elements. Additionally, the Census found that nearly 30 percent of Natives are bilingual and use a language other than English at home.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ "Facts for Features: American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month."

⁴⁵ Nadra Kareem Nittle, "Five Interesting Facts about Native Americans," <http://racerelements.about.com/od/diversitymatters/a/Five-Interesting-Facts-About-Native-Americans.htm>.

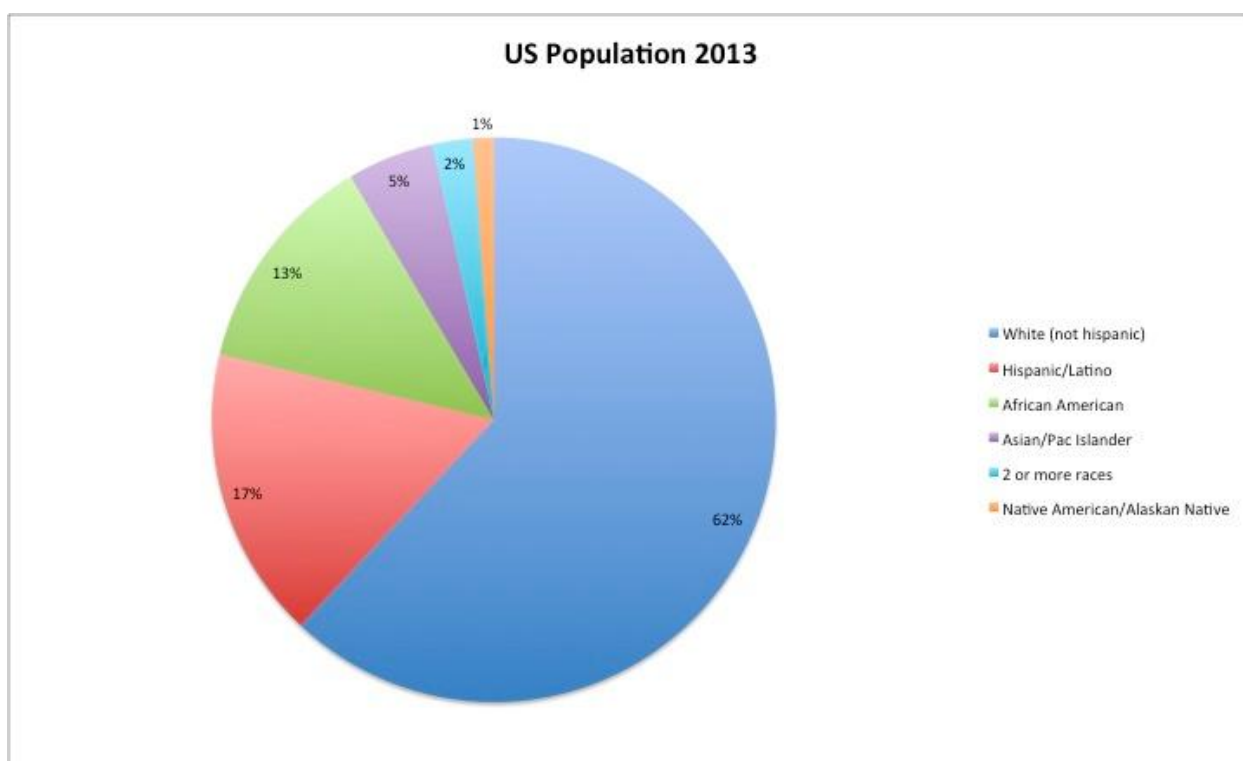


Figure 2. U.S. Population by race (Percentage).⁴⁶

The recent growth in the Native population adds urgency to increasing Native American high school graduation rates. Between 2000 and 2010, the Native American population grew from 4.0 to 5.2 million.⁴⁷ The vast majority of children from this population growth will attend public schools, based on the current percent of Native students who attend public schools. With the highest attendance in history, it is imperative that the public education system improves to better address the needs of Native students to increase on-time graduation rates.

⁴⁶ “The Unbearable Whiteness of Librarianship,” *Feral Librarian*, March 3, 2014, <http://chrisbourg.wordpress.com/2014/03/03/the-unbearable-whiteness-of-librarianship/>.

⁴⁷ Tina Norris, Paula L. Vines, and Elizabeth M. Hoeffel, “The American Indian and Alaska Native Population: 2010,” 2010, <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-10.pdf>.

The Native American population is spread out geographically throughout the country. When analyzing the eleven states most populated with Native Americans (Table 2), it can be noted that the three states with the largest achievement gaps are South Dakota (45.2 percent), North Dakota (41.3 percent), and Idaho (28.2 percent) (Figure 3). On the other hand, the three states with the smallest achievement gaps are Oklahoma (7.0 percent), New Mexico (8.8 percent), and California (17.7 percent) (Figure 4). Oklahoma represents the state with the largest Native American student population as well as the smallest achievement gap between overall and Native American graduation rates. Although New Mexico has a relatively small achievement gap, this is, in part, due to the state's low overall graduation rate (54.1 percent) compared to the country as a whole (about 70 percent). It is also worth noting that the states with the largest achievement gaps all have 5-10 percent higher overall graduation rates than Oklahoma and California. However, these two states still have practices that would benefit more Native students with broader implementation.

Table 2. Native American student population with a comparison between Native students' graduation rates compared to overall graduation rates in 2010. This considers 11 of the top 12 states with the highest American Indian populations due to a lack of data from other states.⁴⁸

State	Student Population	Native American Graduation Rate	Overall Graduation Rate	Achievement Gap between NA and Overall Graduation Rate
Alaska	26.3	46.8	67.2	-20.8
Arizona	6.2	52.4	73.4	-21
California	0.8	52.4	70.1	-17.7
Idaho	1.6	48.4	76.6	-28.2
Montana	75.7	50.0	75.7	-25.7
New Mexico	11.1	45.3	54.1	-8.8
North Dakota	8.3	37.9	79.2	-41.3
Oklahoma	18.0	63.8	70.8	-7.0
Oregon	2.3	42.7	70.4	-27.7
South Dakota	11.0	30.4	75.6	-45.2
Washington	2.7	42.7	68.8	-26.1

⁴⁸ *The Dropout/Graduation Crisis Among American Indian and Alaska Native Students: Failure to Respond Places the Future of Native Peoples at Risk*, 9 and 12.

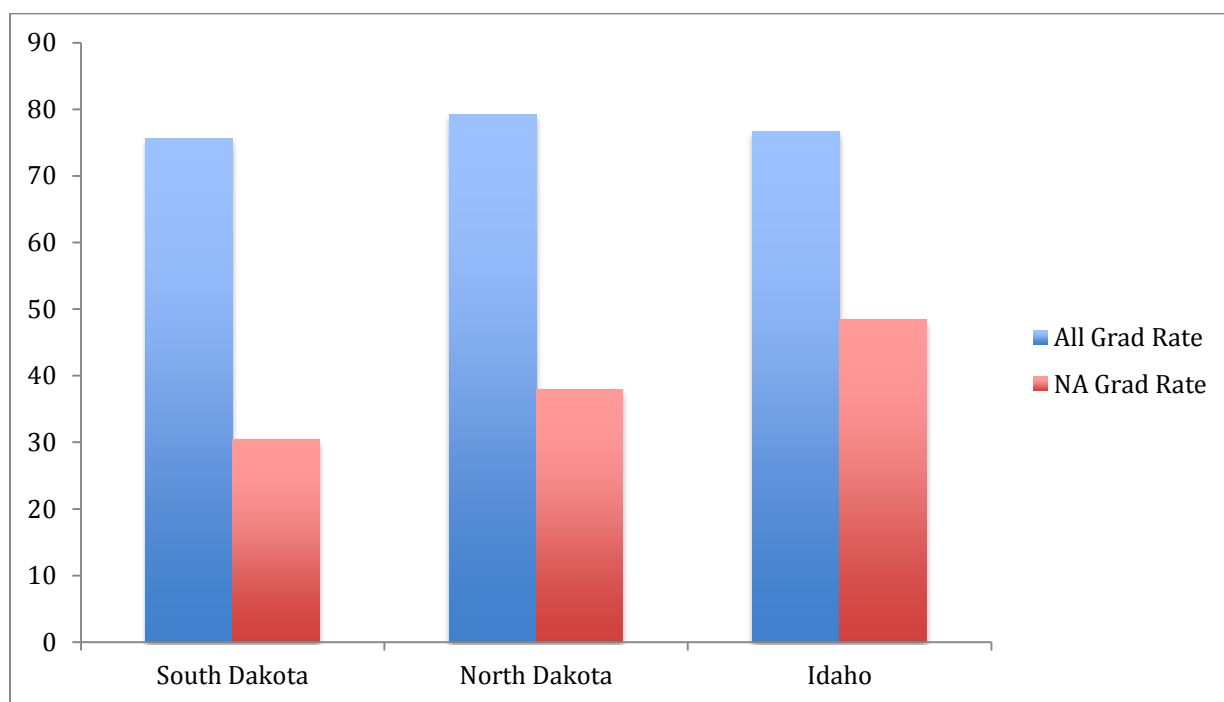


Figure 3. The Three States with the Largest Achievement Gaps between Native American and Overall Graduation Rates.

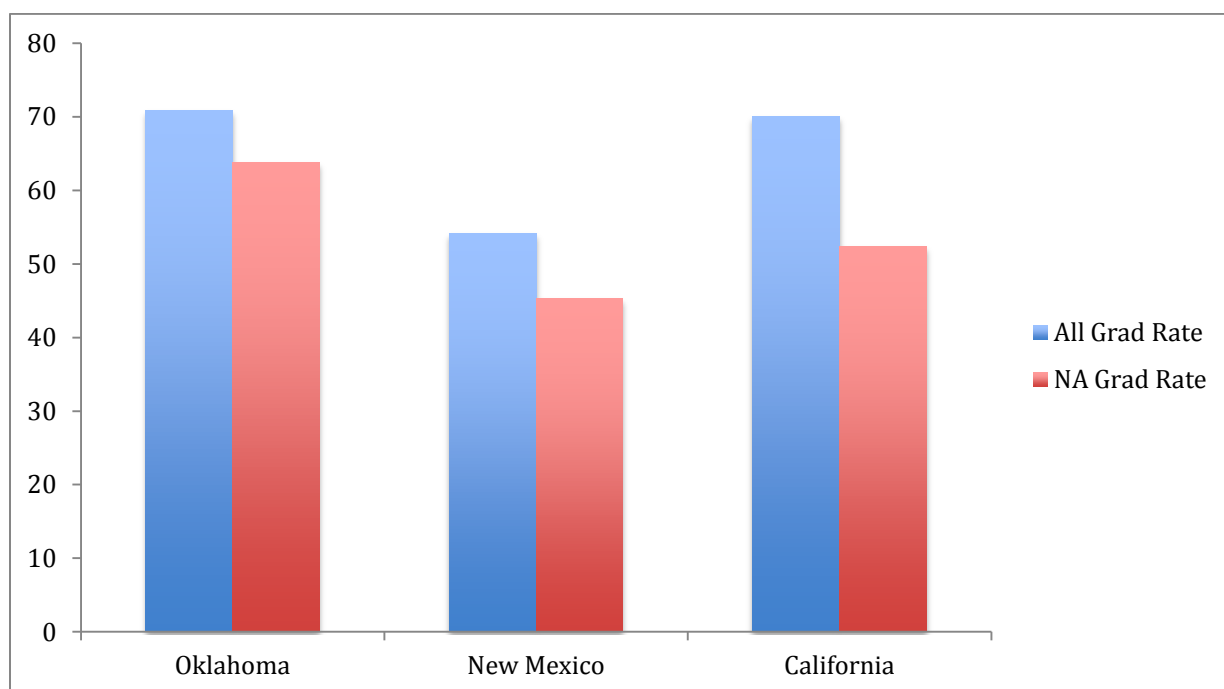


Figure 4. The Three States with the Smallest Achievement Gaps between Native American and Overall Graduation Rates.

2.2a Oklahoma Best Practices

Oklahoma has a Native population of 120,122 students, comprising nearly 20 percent of the Native population, and the nation's highest Native graduation rate at 63.8 percent. One public high school, Norman High School in Norman, Oklahoma, developed an entire "Indian Education program."⁴⁹ This program hosts PowWows, consists of staff and support structures to assist Native students, offers college and career help specific to Native Americans, provides Tribal information and representation, and surveys parent satisfaction.⁵⁰ The public school district in Collinsville, Oklahoma, also implemented an "Indian Education Program."⁵⁰ This program uses Federal funding to support its services, which include tutoring, providing financial aid to students for school supplies and graduation expenses, reimbursement for ACT/SAT testing for high school students, a Cherokee language course, and a "Cherokee Challenge Bowl" class where students learn about the culture of the tribe.⁵¹ From these programs, states could draw conclusions that incorporating tribal life into the school, even when the Native concentration is low, increases graduation rates for Native students and can also benefit other students' graduation rates, as demonstrated by Oklahoma's high overall graduation rate (Table 2).

While it is important to extrapolate practices that Oklahoma's Department of Education implements in order to produce such promising numbers, it is also important to note a distinctive difference between Oklahoma and other states with lower graduation

⁴⁹ "Indian Education Programs," Norman Public Schools, Norman, OK, <http://www.norman.k12.ok.us/index.php?district-program-indian-education>.

⁵⁰ "Collinsville Indian Education Programs," Collinsville Public Schools, Collinsville, OK, last modified August 2, 2014, <http://www.collinsville.k12.ok.us/00-IndianEducation.html>.

rates. The National Caucus of Native American State Legislators explains, “American Indian/Alaska Native students in Oklahoma, when compared to other states in the study group, are relatively evenly distributed among schools” whereas students from relatively low performing states, “Alaska, Arizona, and New Mexico, for example, [...] are much more likely to attend schools that have higher concentrations of Native students.”⁵¹ This implies that when Native students are in a more diverse environment, they have higher academic success. The Caucus argues that this is likely due to the fact that when the density of a Native population is high, the area will likely be more economically disadvantaged.⁵² However, “In economically advantaged districts across Indian country, achievement is higher, regardless of the level of racial concentration.”⁵³ Thus, Oklahoma may have best practices that should be emulated in other states; however, the state’s high graduation rates may be caused by an economy that better supports Native Americans.⁵³

2.2b California Best Practices

California, like Oklahoma, achieves a high graduation rate for Native students – 52.4 percent – with an overall Native population of 50,758.⁵³ In California, there was a program, developed in the 1990s by a group of elders and parents of the Morongo Band of Mission Indians in southern California, which offers practices that can be emulated by other public schools and districts due to its impressive success.⁵⁴ The group had become concerned with the low high school graduation rates of their children and grandchildren

⁵¹ National Caucus of Native American State Legislators, “Striving to Achieve: Helping Native American Students Succeed,” *National Conference of State Legislators*, 2008, 18, <http://www.ncsl.org/print/statetribe/strivingtoachieve.pdf>.

⁵² Ibid, 20.

⁵³ Ibid, 8.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 15.

and, in response, created the Morongo Tutoring Program.⁵⁵ While the program initially focused on tutoring services, it expanded to encompass educational programs devoted to life skills.⁵⁵ Later, the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University's Honoring Nations Program recognized the program in 2006 due to its outcomes, which included decreases in absences, improvements in graduation rates, higher college enrollment numbers, and test scores at or above grade level.⁵⁵ In addition to this program, the California Department of Education established programs and services for Native students, as well. State government agents working in the Department wrote, "Educators need to ensure that [there are] educational programs for American Indian students" that "recognize and support the unique cultural and educational needs of American Indian students" and "help Indian students meet state academic content standards."⁵⁵ In order to better meet the needs of at-risk Native students, the Department utilizes research-based educational programs "to help reduce the educational barriers that result from cultural and linguistic needs" and "ensure that students receive appropriate coordinated educational services, including support services, that address their [unique] needs."⁵⁶ Additionally, the programs devised by the Department work to incorporate school-based and tribally-based discussions to identify the problems Native students face and improve the system to better meet these needs.⁵⁶ Similar to the programs provided in Oklahoma, California programs incorporate tribal input and provide tutoring services to Native students.

⁵⁵ California Department of Education. "Programs and Services," January 6, 2014, <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/ai/ps/>.

2.3 The Importance of a High School Diploma

The proportion of Native American students who do not graduate from high school is the highest among all races and ethnicities at 48.9 percent, representing approximately 245,000 Native American students leaving the public education system prematurely each year.⁵⁶ As is commonly known,

Today, jobseekers enter a market where the average wage for individuals without a high school degree is far lower than it was forty years ago. High paying unionized jobs with limited formal educational qualifications are gone, and the risk of joblessness, family instability and involvement with the criminal justice system are much higher for those who drop out of school.⁵⁷

Native Americans have a poverty rate of 28.4 percent compared to 15.1 percent in the country as a whole (Figure 5).⁵⁸ Low high school graduation rates undoubtedly contribute to Native Americans' high unemployment rate of 11.3 percent in civilian jobs (Figure 6).⁵⁹ Native American households have a median income level of \$35,192, while the United State's median household income was \$50,502 in 2011 (Figure 7).⁶⁰ Furthermore, nearly 30 percent of all Natives were not covered on a health insurance plan as of 2011, compared to only 15 percent nationally (Figure 8).⁶¹ The Global Partnership for Education, explained that education "is one of the most important investments a country

⁵⁶ "Number and percentage of 9th- to 12th- graders who dropped out of public school by race/ethnicity, grade, and state or jurisdiction: 2009-10."

⁵⁷ *The Dropout/Graduation Crisis Among American Indian and Alaska Native Students: Failure to Respond Places the Future of Native Peoples at Risk*, 22.

⁵⁸ "Facts for Features: American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month," Annalyn Censky, "Poverty Rate Rises in America," *CNN Money*, September 13, 2011, http://money.cnn.com/2011/09/13/news/economy/poverty_rate_income/index.htm.

⁵⁹ Bryce Covert, "The Unemployment Rate for Native Americans has been Over 10 Percent for Five Years," *Think Progress*, October 29, 2013, <http://thinkprogress.org/economy/2013/10/29/2855951/unemployment-native-americans/>.

⁶⁰ "Facts for Features: American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month."

can make in its people and its future and is critical to reducing poverty and inequality. If all students in low income countries left school with basic reading skills, 171 million people could be lifted out of poverty.”⁶¹ With a median age of 31.3 years and a population increase of 1.2 million since 2000, or a percentage increase of 27.5, the public education system must immediately work to better engage the Native American community. The improvement of the public education system will not only increase graduation rates, but it will also augment income levels and enhance living standards.⁶²

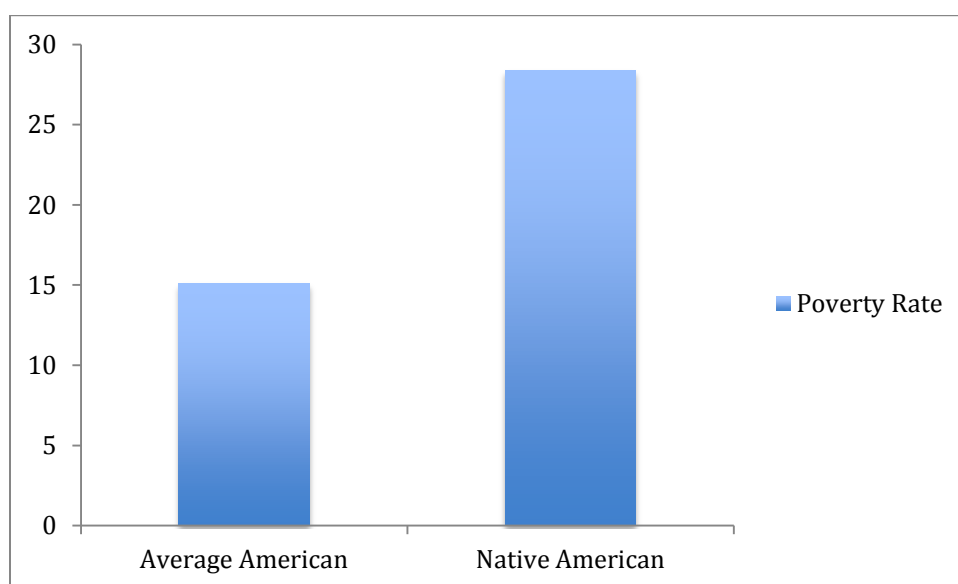


Figure 5. Poverty Rates⁶¹

⁶¹ “The Benefits of Education,” *Global Partnership for Education*, 2014, <https://www.globalpartnership.org/education>.

⁶² “Facts for Features: American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month.” Matthew Snipp, “Sociological Perspectives on American Indians,” *Annual Review of Sociology* Vol. 18, (1992), 351.

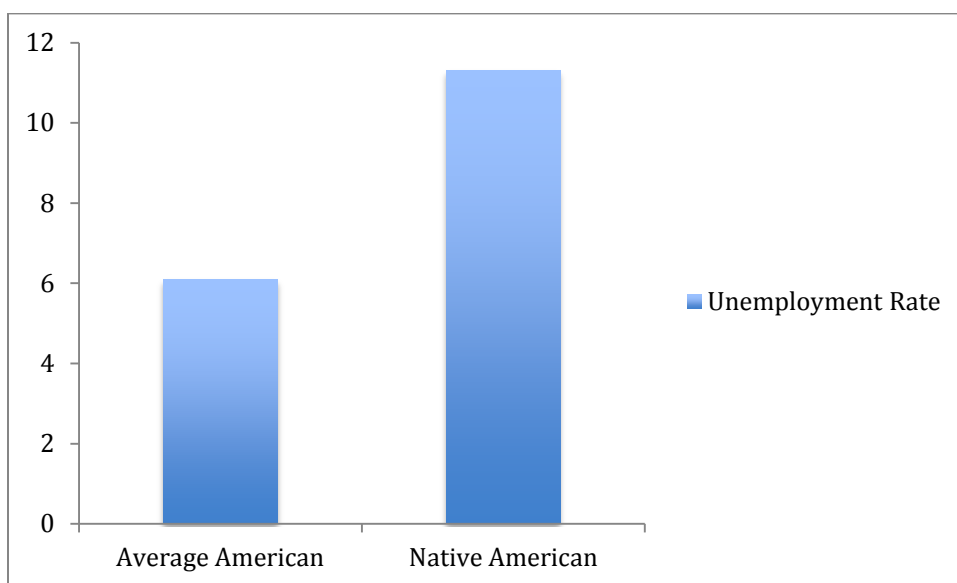


Figure 6. Unemployment Rates⁶³

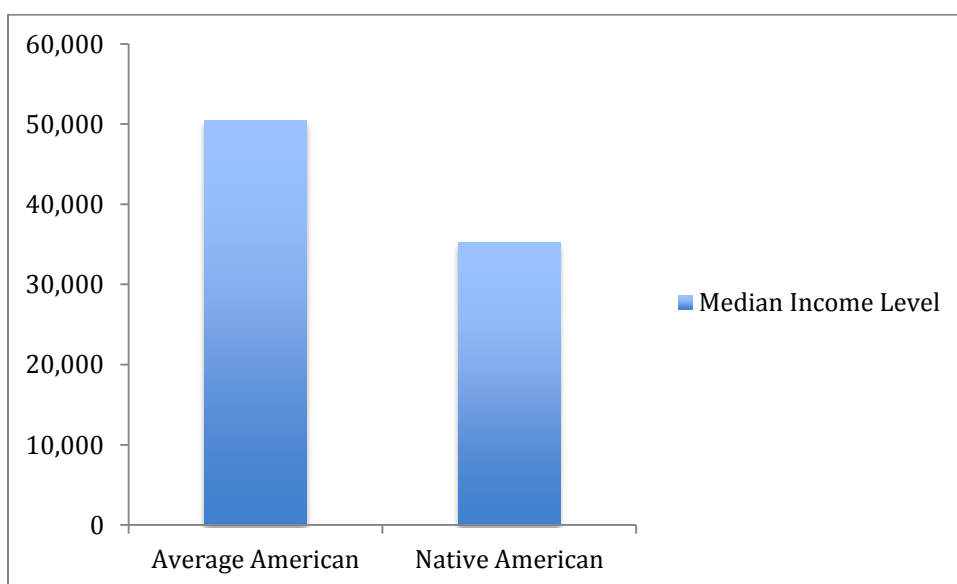


Figure 7. Median Income⁶¹

⁶³ “The Unemployment Rate for Native Americans has been Over 10 Percent for Five Years.”

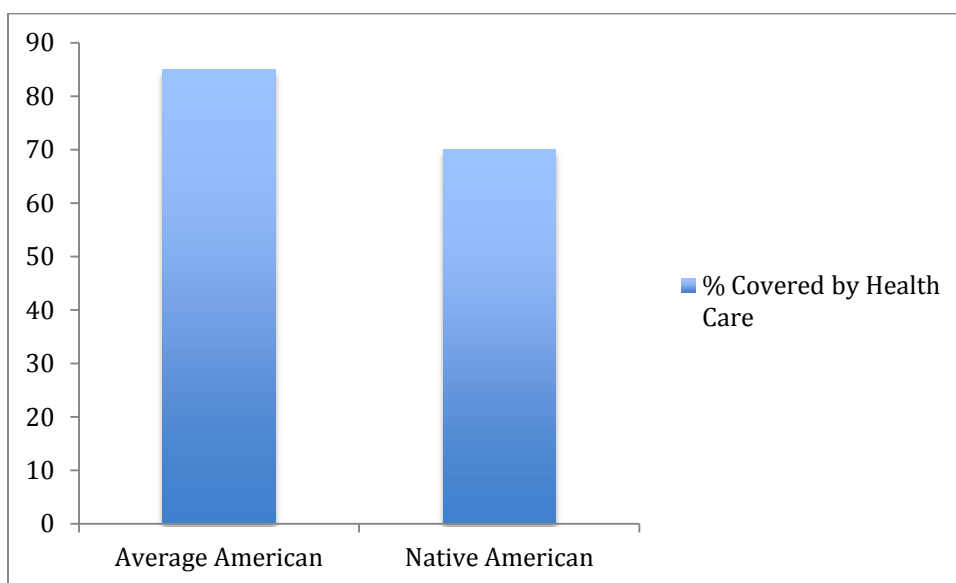


Figure 8. Percent Covered by Health Insurance⁶¹

Several health benefits are also associated with completing high school, as this is where many children receive sex, drug and alcohol, and overall wellness education. According to DoSomething.org, “American Indians/Alaska Natives [AI/AN] are 1.6 times more likely to contract HIV than non-Hispanic Whites in America. More than 20 percent of AI/AN high school [aged] students were never taught about AIDS or HIV.”⁶⁴ Safe sex is often taught as part of a high school curriculum but with such high drop out rates and such low attendance rates, often Native students are more likely to miss these crucial lessons. Without the stability of schools, combined with the fact that most of these schools are equipped with poorly trained teachers in low-income areas, Native students typically do not receive much education in mental health. This likely contributes to the high suicide rate among Native people; suicide was the second leading cause of death for Native people between the ages of 10 and 34.⁶⁵ Similarly, concerns about anxiety

⁶⁴ “11 Facts about Native Americans,” Do Something, <https://www.dosomething.org/tipsandtools/11-facts-about-native-americans>.

disorders are widespread in Native communities.⁶⁵ Clearly, education is important for financial stability, but it is also critical to helping students achieve a healthy and well-balanced life.

In addition to improving the financial positions and wellness of Native Americans, formal education helps Natives to preserve and protect their sovereignty, cultures, and languages. Education is a tool Native Americans use to help their communities; a diploma bestows more than individual wealth. This statement is significant because the most commonly cited reasons for improving educational achievement levels are almost purely financial. The importance of education to Native Americans transcends financial stability. When considering the significance of education to Native Americans, Brayboy suggests that mainstream views regarding the value of education ought to be replaced with that held by many Natives: “school learning is part of the answer for helping us help ourselves.”⁶⁵ Many Native Americans seek diplomas not to increase lifetime earnings, but to strengthen tribal sovereignty and to improve the lives of other Natives. For many Native Americans, education provides the tools necessary to negotiate fair employment opportunities for their community or tribe.⁶⁶ For example, diplomas help enable Natives to fight for social justice or facilitate discussions between mainstream society and tribal members to establish an understanding of Native views and cultures.⁶⁷ Additionally, attaining educational degrees provides Native Americans with

⁶⁵ “Transformational Resistance and Social Justice: American Indians in Ivy League Universities,” 194.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 205.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 206.

the skills and credentials necessary to enable them to defend their political sovereignty and continue to fight for and protect their unique cultures.

The public education system must change to increase high school graduation rates within the Native American population to allow Native people to develop productive partnerships with the Federal Government. This would end the current arrangement in which most Natives are only given one option: to work within an education system that is inherently biased against their success.⁶⁸ Unfortunately, limited tribal input in establishing educational policies and practices combined with an insufficient knowledge of Native cultures has resulted in the establishment of a system in which only 51.1 percent of Native American students graduate high school on time.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Tsianina K. Lomawaima and Teresa L. McCarty, "When Tribal Sovereignty Challenges Democracy: American Indian Education and the Democratic Ideal," *American Educational Research Journal* 39.2 (2002): 30.

⁶⁹ "Diplomas Count."

Chapter Three: Legacy of Abuse

I think it is challenging [Native American students]. [Teachers should stop] treating them like poor you, you need help. [They should stop just] saying you have it tough, [thus lowering expectations and] allowing them to fail from the same problems. [Rather, they should be] challenging them like everybody else. Being rigorous in the curriculum, being the same as everybody else, treating them equally. Public schools [can help Native students] by [acknowledging that] they have it tough, [but ensuring that public school teachers] make it feel like [Native students] have an out, [a way to improve their lives].⁷⁰

- Above is the answer of a high school teacher when asked what the public education system and teachers could do to best improve success rates of Native American students.

Since the colonization of the United States of America, education has been used to force Native Americans to assimilate to Western ideologies of “civilization.” Fallacies were created to reduce Native Americans to sub-human levels. This enabled powerful politicians to guiltlessly force Natives into vocational education, brutally remove them from their land and into abusive boarding schools, adopt dehumanizing pedagogies, attempt to destroy their cultures, and create a “democracy” that maintains Native governments as subordinate institutions. This chapter considers the history of education and how this legacy of abuse has led to the current low graduation rate of Native American students, which also establishes the low standard of living discussed in the previous chapter.

Native cultures have survived, despite an overwhelming number of assaults since the colonization of the United States. Before the United States gained its independence

⁷⁰ High school teacher #2, March 31, 2014.

from Britain, the Federal Government signed treaties with tribal nations. These treaties promised that the Federal Government would recognize Native Americans' right to self-governance and provide Natives with a high-quality education in exchange for their rights to land, water, and minerals.⁷¹ The Constitution itself reaffirms these promises in both the Commerce Clause and Supremacy Clause. Under Section 8, clause 3 of the Commerce Clause, the Constitution recognizes tribal nations as sovereignties: it empowers Congress “to regulate Commerce with foreign Nations and among several States, *and with the Indian Tribes.*”⁷² One educational implication that arises from this clause is that Native American tribes, constitutionally, should have input in developing and implementing policies and practices that affect their students. Article VI of the Constitution, the Supremacy Clause, requires the Federal Government to uphold its guarantees as established through treaties, such as the promise to provide Native people with education in exchange for their land and natural resources. It states, “All debts contracted and engagements entered into, before the adoption of this Constitution, shall be as valid against the United States under this Constitution as under the Confederation.”⁷³

Unfortunately, the government has consistently refuted both Constitutional Articles throughout its history. From the 18th century through today, European Americans have used education as a tool for assimilation; colonialists as well as the current education system replace Native languages with English, “paganism” with Christianity,

⁷¹ Exec. Order No. 13175, 3 C.F.R. 2806 (2000).

⁷² U.S. Const. Art.I, §8, cl. 3 (emphasis added).

⁷³ U.S. Const. Art VI, § 2.

and Native political institutions with more “civilized” forms.⁷⁴ As evidenced by the contemporary persistence of Native cultures and languages, these assimilation efforts have not been entirely effective. However, this lack of success did not thwart the efforts of the Federal Government to use education to mainstream Native peoples.

Before the genocides raged against Native Americans when the colonialists set foot on American soil in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Native Americans had established lifestyles, belief systems, government structures, and economies.⁷⁵ Despite Western romances that depict Natives as nomadic, Native Americans owned and settled land. K. Tsianina Lomawaima writes,

European Americans viewed the New World as a sparsely populated virgin wilderness, thinly settled by roaming nomadic groups, this suited the notion that it was European American manifest destiny to “settle” this continent: If few Native people lived here, colonial intrusion could be described as settlement rather than conquest. Acknowledging that much of North America was well populated by Indian communities with advanced agricultural sciences and sophisticated technologies would have made European American notions of settlement much more difficult to justify. Hence, images of “the virgin wilderness” and “roaming nomads” became accepted over time as *natural* truths.⁷⁶

Thus, from the initial contact, European Americans created fallacies about Native Americans that made it easier to conquer the people. Education, often viewed as the way

⁷⁴ Tsianina K. Lomawaima and Teresa L. McCarty, "When Tribal Sovereignty Challenges Democracy: American Indian Education and the Democratic Ideal," *American Educational Research Journal* 39.2 (2002): 282.

⁷⁵ Donald Warren, “American Indian Histories as Education History,” *History of Education Quarterly* 54.3 (2014), 258.

⁷⁶ K. Tsianina Lomawaima, “The Unnatural History of American Indian Education,” *Educational Resources Information Center* (1999): 3.

to teach children how to participate in society, was the natural tool used to force Natives to assimilate.

When considering the history of Native American education, it is important to also reflect on the broader context of Native American history in the United States: ““American Indians are victims of a legacy which includes economic exploitation, military conquest, political manipulation, and social disregard.””⁷⁷ Education has been used to assure the goals of the government of the United States, to “distinguish safe from dangerous cultural differences” of Native Americans and to quash the seemingly “dangerous” dissimilarities. In order to accomplish these aspirations, four major tactics have been deployed since the birth of the American government, as identified by Lomawaima:⁷⁸

1. Depicting Native Americans as “savages” and “wild” animals needing to be civilized.
2. Civilizing Native Americans through Christian conversion.
3. Forcing Native tribes to be politically and legally subordinate to the federal and state governments, generally accomplished through relocation.
4. Applying dehumanizing pedagogical teaching structures to enable the education system to “overcome [fake] deficits in mental, moral, and physical characteristics.”⁷⁸

These tactics have been implemented through the ages of Native American education: the colonial, federal, and self-determination eras. As scholar Mitchell J. Moore wrote, “It’s

⁷⁷ Mary Jo Tippeconnic Fox, Shelly C. Lowe, and Georges S. McClellan, editors, *Serving Native American Students* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 8.

⁷⁸ “The Unnatural History of American Indian Education,” 17-18.

ironic that Indian people are not allowed to be experts in themselves—it's usually someone else 'defining' the Indian.”⁷⁹

This chapter will further delve into the history of Native Americans' education since the arrival of colonialists. It will include an analysis of the colonial era, where false pedagogies and myths about Native peoples were created and the Federal Government began relocating Natives. This will be followed by a review of the federal era, which involved boarding schools and vocational learning. Next, this chapter will consider the self-determination era, where Natives and activists worked toward implementing education policies and practices that better met the needs of Natives, primarily through the augmentation of tribal control. It will conclude with an examination of how the history of education influences the contemporary education of Native students.

3.1 Three Eras in Native American Education

The history of Native American education is complicated. It is important to note that, for Native Americans, there are two distinct types of education. In her paper, “The Unnatural History of American Indian Education,” K. Tsianina Lomawaima describes them: the first is “the education of American Indian children by their parents, extended families, and communities,” and the second, “the education of American Indian children, teenagers, adults, and communities by colonial authorities, particularly European

⁷⁹ University of Minnesota, Federal Bureau of Prisons, Federal Correctional Institution, Mitchell J. Moore. *An Anglo-American Rethinks Native American Education: Can we Avoid Yesterday's Tragedies?*: 1, <http://www.usca.edu/essays/vol142005/moore.pdf>.

American institutions.”⁸⁰ This chapter will specifically focus on the ladder through the history of the eras. The analysis of this history demonstrates that the physically and psychologically abusive policies and practices adopted by the Federal Government have left Native students at a disadvantage in the formal sense of education.

3.1a Colonial Era: From When Colonialists Arrive through 1870

The Colonial Era thrived on the fact that power was distributed only among White men who were relatively in agreement about the structure that the United States government should adopt. At this time, the dominant American society and political figures argued that Western cultures were the world’s epicenter, “and the rest of the world the surrounding periphery.”⁸¹ The overarching ideology of the education system at this time was based on two axioms: “most human communities are uninventive, and a few human communities are inventive and thus remain permanent centers of cultural change and progress.”⁸¹ The Federal Government used education to change and “update” the cultures that disagreed with the White man’s convictions. Ideologies and philosophies were developed to dehumanize Native Americans during the colonial era. According to K. Tsianina Lomawaima, “These tenets were not based on natural truths but were culturally constructed and served specific agendas of the colonizing nations.”⁸² The Federal policies and practices at the time aimed to eradicate Native cultures and force the

⁸⁰ “The Unnatural History of American Indian Education,” 4.

⁸¹ *An Anglo-American Rethinks Native American Education: Can we Avoid Yesterday’s Tragedies?:* 4.

⁸² “The Unnatural History of American Indian Education,” 3.

ethnic group to adopt all “White” mannerisms, ideologies, and values – predominantly to ensure that White men could maintain power.⁸³

Native Americans have always been represented as “savages” and “beasts,” a people with no regard to any form of society.⁸⁴ These racist notions were devised because the newly dubbed Americans were afraid of what they did not know or understand. This concept is not novel, nearly all human societies have deep-seated fears of the unknown, these fears can be traced back all the way to Greek philosophy and mythology.⁸⁴ Due to these fears, the Federal Government, the media, and many White American citizens declared that, rather than work with Natives and learn from their cultures, they would work to eradicate them. With the depictions of “wild” and “uncivilized” “animals” running around, the Federal Government and dominant American society decided that education had to be used to provide instruction on the proper way to live for Native Americans.⁸⁵ This “education,” or assimilation, involved learning English, adopting Western European customs as well as government and economic structures, and converting to Christianity.⁸⁶

Despite the efforts of the Federal Government and many in the general public, Native people persevered, along with their traditions, cultures, languages, religions, and lifestyles. When the Federal Government feared the strength of the Native American communities and tribes, relocation of Native people seemed to be the only way to weaken

⁸³ Ibid, 4.

⁸⁴ Vine Deloria, Jr. and Daniel R. Wildcat, *Power and Place: Indian Education in America* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum, 2001), 1.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ “The Unnatural History of American Indian Education,” 17.

them.⁸⁷ Although much of the rhetoric at the time depicted Natives as nomadic, when faced with settled Native tribes, colonialists quickly turned to relocation and the creation of reservations. K. Tsianina Lomawaima describes the situation as follows,

Submission to authority and domination of colonial power were at the crux of the colonial encounter between American Indians and European Americans. Control is the key word here; the creation of these new communities was all about imposing military, political, economic, and social power.⁸⁸

Resettling Native Americans enabled the Federal Government to hold power over Natives while they feared for their lives and cultures. Native communities were deemed “bad” while American townships were considered “good” simply because of the power struggle of the American government.⁸⁸ The Federal Government and many colonialists considered Natives to be “shackled by the communal tribal bond,” while White Americans were seen as “free individuals within the liberal American nation.”⁸⁹ Relocation and alienation were key to weakening the Native American population; President Andrew Jackson was not above deploying physical force and terror tactics to assert dominance over tribal communities.

In the early 1800s, President Andrew Jackson, along with the support of many southern state governments, forced Native Americans from their homelands onto reservations west of the Mississippi River.⁸⁹ President Jackson deployed dehumanizing tactics to justify signing into law the Indian Removal Act of 1830, which ultimately led to

⁸⁷ Ibid, 7.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 11.

⁸⁹ "Indian Treaties and the Removal Act of 1830 - 1830–1860 - Milestones - Office of the Historian." *Indian Treaties and the Removal Act of 1830 - 1830–1860 - Milestones - Office of the Historian*. U.S. Department of State, April 1, 2014, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1830-1860/indian-treaties>.

the Trail of Tears of the Cherokee people and the removal and deaths of thousands of Native Americans. This legislation not only overlooked a Supreme Court ruling that declared Native Nations as sovereignties, but it also was an abuse of powers by President Jackson as he manipulated tribes, often through brutal force, to sign treaties giving away their lands.⁹⁰ In many of these forced treaties, Natives signed their rights to land away in exchange for the promise of education. This “education” of sorts was provided during the federal era through boarding schools, which frequently utilized physical and emotional abuse in an attempt to instill “White people” characteristics into the Native children.

The Federal Government and many citizens argued that Native Americans required “special” pedagogical practices in order to overcome the notions of Natives’ “sub-human weaknesses” that some White colonialists created to maintain power.⁹¹ This racist ideology enabled White Americans to hinder any social mobility for Native Americans because the education system revolved entirely around teaching Natives about Christianity and manual labor. Although the rhetoric explained that this education was used solely with the intent of “civilizing” Native Americans, implying that the Federal Government was doing what they believed was best for the population, it was likely utilized due to White Americans’ need to maintain power.

⁹⁰ “Indian Removal: 1814 - 1858.” *Public Broadcasting Service*.
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p2959.html>.

⁹¹ “The Unnatural History of American Indian Education,” 12.

3.1b Federal Era 1870 – 1965

The federal era involved government-imposed education.⁹² Scholars point to a plethora of federal laws during this period that developed the legislative foundation of Native American education: the Snyder Act (1921); the Johnson O'Malley Act (1934); Impact Aid; the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965); and the Indian Elementary and Secondary School Assistance Act (1965). Together, these legislations provided enough ammunition for the Federal Government to create and control boarding and residential schools for Native Americans.

The boarding school experience began in 1860 when the Bureau of Indian Affairs created the Yakima Indian Reservation in the state of Washington.⁹³ The intention of these schools was to continue to “civilize” Natives and eliminate “dangerous” and “concerning” cultural practices. After twenty years of the creation of the first boarding school, there were 60 schools with 6,200 Native students.⁹⁴ Most boarding schools devoted half of the day to teaching English and the other half to instructing students on industrial training.⁹⁴ Furthermore, many of the Federally-controlled schools were not boarding schools, but rather set on the reservations. Many Federal officials believed that the tribal influence prevented the conversion of Natives from Native Americans to White people, so they pushed Natives to send their children to off-reservation boarding schools.⁹⁴

⁹² *An Anglo-American Rethinks Native American Education: Can we Avoid Yesterday's Tragedies?:* 7.

⁹³ “History and Culture: Boarding Schools,” *American Indian Relief Council*, http://www.nrcprograms.org/site/PageServer?pagename=airc_hist_boardingschools.

One of the most famous, if not the most recognized boarding school, was the Carlisle Indian School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Colonel Richard Henry Pratt was headmaster of the school from 1879 through 1904.⁹⁴ Pratt was the “single most important figure in Indian education during this time” because he created the motto, “Kill the Indian in him and save the man.”⁹⁴ In order to accomplish this horrific, racist goal, Pratt used immersion tactics by removing Natives from any contact with their tribe; this was done by moving boarding schools far from reservations and making Native children stay with White families in the summertime.⁹⁴ He, like many Federal officials and White Americans, hoped that when the Native students graduated, they would choose not to return to their reservation but integrate into White society.

Like the practices of Carlisle, most off-reservation boarding schools intended to “kill the Indian and save the man.” Young boys had to cut their long hair and children were given standard uniforms.⁹⁴ K. Tsianina Lomawaima found, “Boarding and residential schools elevated manual labor and hard work to a pedestal as effective civilizing practices; cleanliness and orderliness were equally privileged pedagogical instruments of cultural transformation.”⁹⁴ Changing the outfits of Natives, forcing them to cut their hair, and changing their overall appearance were all part of the “remaking” process.⁹⁵ Students were forced to abandon their traditional foods, as they were only provided with food considered “civilized” by White society; they literally could not even eat in their own way, but were forced to eat as White people.⁹⁵ They were not allowed to keep their names, but were rebranded with “White people names,” including surnames.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ “The Unnatural History of American Indian Education,” 13.

⁹⁵ “History and Culture: Boarding Schools.”

The children were not allowed to speak their native tongue, even to each other – with grave punishments at stake for disobeying this rule.⁹⁶ An elder from a southwestern tribe described his appalling experience in a boarding school,

It was rough. I was young, maybe fix, maybe six, when I left for school. The teachers would beat us for speaking [our tribal language]; they cut our hair and told us we were good for nothing...Of course, we talked to each other in [our tribal languages]...and we never learned how to be White. They tried, but they failed... We didn't learn much in school either...⁹⁶

The boarding schools tried to strip the identity from Native children through psychological and physical abuse.

In addition to changing Native children's appearance, work habits, and value systems, Federal policies created an education system where educators had inaccurate preconceived notions about Native learners. Educators used emotionally charged pedagogical instruments, "such as liturgical music, popular songs and lullabies, ceremonies, dramas, and pageants," all to "reshape emotional expression, emotional life, and affective connections to culture and society."⁹⁷ Most of the staff of these boarding schools began to create and proliferate stereotypes of Native American learners. These stereotypes were depicted as "deficiencies" and helped many within the Federal Government explain why they had to reshape Natives' emotional life and expressions.⁹⁸ For instance, federal staff wrote that Native students tended to be stoic in nature.⁹⁸ Rather than considering the psychological reasons for this behavior – such as the fact that children "found themselves in difficult, often hostile circumstances, where their own

⁹⁶ "Transformational Resistance and Social Justice: American Indians in Ivy League Universities," 194.

⁹⁷ "The Unnatural History of American Indian Education," 14.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 16.

language, religion, culture, behavior, and individualism were under constant, systematic attack” – educators and staff declared this a defect and decided that it required the total overhaul of the students’ emotional expression.⁹⁸ In fact, in a 1900 newspaper interview, Estelle Reel, the Federal Superintendent of Indian Schools, stated the following about the Native children under her care:

[The Native child’s] face is without that complete development of nerve and muscle which gives character to expressive features; his face seems stolid because it is without free expression, and at the same time his mind remains measurably stolid because of the very absence of mechanism for its own expression.⁹⁸

This quote embodies the mentality of many Federal officials at the time: Native Americans were an “inferior” race in need of the White man in order to not go extinct. While the quote is disturbing and dehumanizing, so too was the entire treatment of Native American children at this time in the education system.

Aside from removing Native American children away from everything they knew, federal staff decided disciplinary action was necessary when children behaved too much like a Native American. There were various tactics deployed, none of which were humane. There was confinement, or imprisonment, deprivation of privileges, threat of corporal punishment, restriction of diet, and physical abuse.⁹⁹ Additionally, Native children were ravaged by disease at the boarding schools. Tuberculosis, trachoma, measles, and pneumonia killed many of the children.¹⁰⁰

The racism continued through their curriculum, in that Natives learned history from a White bias (which is still true). Native students had to celebrate Columbus Day as

⁹⁹ “History and Culture: Boarding Schools.”

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

not only a great day in European American history, but also a day that forever “improved” the Native American race and put the ethnicity on the timeline of “important” history.¹⁰⁰ Thanksgiving was a forced holiday to celebrate “‘good’ Indians having aided the brave pilgrim fathers.”¹⁰⁰ These sickening practices continued: on Memorial Day, many children at off-reservation boarding schools were forced to “decorate the graves of soldiers sent to kill their fathers.”¹⁰⁰

3.1c Self-Determination Era 1965 – present

Both the colonial and federal eras were about education controlled by others, whereas the self-determination era is defined by Native Americans working to control their own education. This advancement brings focus and emphasis on indigenous knowledge, cultures, histories, and teaching pedagogies.¹⁰¹ There are many benefits to Native control of the education of their students, including an increased presence of indigenous languages and cultures being taught in the classrooms through bilingual and bicultural education.¹⁰¹ Equally important was Natives’ efforts to overturn the lens that the historic education system saw Natives through, as an inferior race that requires more to learn less; Native control equates to Native freedom from this prison of low expectations.

Two important legislations by the Federal Government assisted Natives in working toward the goal of Native control of schools, particularly by working on

¹⁰¹ *An Anglo-American Rethinks Native American Education: Can we Avoid Yesterday’s Tragedies?:* 7.

improving Native input in public schools. These major legislations were the Indian Education Act of 1972 and Executive Order 13592 (Table 1).

Table 1. Important Legislations to Improving the Public Education of Native Students.

Indian Education Act or Elementary and Secondary Education Act VII ¹⁰²	Department of Education	Created the Office of Indian Education to distribute grants to public schools with a high percentage of American Indian students	1972
Executive Order 13952 for the White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education ¹⁰³	Department of Education	Improve educational outcomes and opportunities for Native students	2011

3.2 Historical Impacts on Current Education of Native Students

As George Santayana stated, “Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”¹⁰⁴ History must be analyzed to understand its influences on modern society and eradicate misunderstandings and fallacies. This is especially prevalent in Native American education, as many educators and citizens hold so many

¹⁰² “About ED/Offices,” U.S. Department of Education Office of Indian Education, <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oese/oie/index.html>.

¹⁰³ Executive Order 13592 of December 2, 2011, Establishing the White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education (2011): <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/12/02/executive-order-improving-american-indian-and-alaska-native-educational->.

¹⁰⁴ “Those Who Fail to Learn from History,” National Churchill Museum Blog, November 16, 2012, <http://www.nationalchurchillmuseum.org/blog/churchill-quote-history/>.

falsehoods to be true simply because racist colonialists deployed tactics to force Native Americans to be subordinate to White people. The statistics surrounding Native American education “are the legacies of decades of repressive administration, when Native parents and communities were denied the right to local control over education, when they were denied the privilege of choice.”¹⁰⁵

3.2a Trauma

As the Director of a Native high school program stated in his interview, “the historical trauma of our ancestors continues to influence the experience of our children today.”¹⁰⁶ Native American students continue to feel the impacts of the historical movement to reservations and the establishment of boarding schools, the genocide of their people, the loss of identity, and the assimilating education system. Yet, the most common reaction that occurs to support Native American students’ today is that teachers and administrators pity the students and lower their expectations. A high school instructor stated that it is all too common for teachers, administrators, and the general public to still believe that Native students are less intellectually capable than their White or Asian student counterparts.¹⁰⁷

The historical trauma that has accumulated against Native Americans continues to plague the population. A high school administrator explained,

¹⁰⁵ *To Remain an Indian: Lessons in Democracy from a Century of Native American Education*, 6.

¹⁰⁶ High school administrator #2, in person interview by Sierra Gibson, March 31, 2014, transcript in Appendix A.

¹⁰⁷ High school teacher #2, in person interview by Sierra Gibson, March 31, 2014, transcript in Appendix A.

You have a lot of historical trauma, you have in almost all tribes, a lot of historical trauma. That's what makes tribal populations different than any other minority group. Because that trauma is still being experienced today. You can't be identified as who you are just because the Federal Government hasn't recognized you, you can't do the customs you know of because you can't be recognized or don't have the location to do it. You know who you are but you're not allowed to say it.¹⁰⁸

The trauma felt by Natives historically continues to ripple through the nation's people.

The same administrator stated that, personally, his grandmother was traumatized by her placement in a boarding school, and she, along with her trauma, influence the administrator, his parents, and his children.¹⁰⁸ He extrapolates a generalization from his personal experience, "Kids are coming in [to the school system] facing this trauma and these issues are basically weighing heavy on our kids."¹⁰⁸ Although current children in the public education system did not experience the boarding school atrocities, they remember what the Federal Government did to their families and tribes through their grandparents. This memory leads to a disdain and distrust of the public education system, which means that when many Natives begin to feel alienated in their classrooms, they are immediately willing to drop out.

3.2b Historical Biases

The creation of fallacies about Native Americans as learners happened because they helped advance the goals of the Federal Government.¹⁰⁹ According to scholars, it is important to look at the fallacies created during the historical eras of Native American education because they are now considered "*natural*," a word that implies "*normal, true, or commonsense*."¹⁰⁹ In an interview with a government official, he explained that the

¹⁰⁸ High school administrator #2, March 31, 2014.

¹⁰⁹ "The Unnatural History of American Indian Education," 3.

entire government “has treated [Natives] as the inferior race.”¹¹⁰ In fact, he continued to state that the education system has always been the institution used to “bring the society up to speed to the most grotesque degree.”¹¹⁰ K. Tsianina Lomawaima elaborates,

As human beings, we take for granted much of what we think, experience, and remember. Over time, certain ideas and perceptions of the world are taken as *natural* – in other words, not as artificial or man-made but as unexceptional components of the natural order of things. Over the years, certain invented and stereotyped ideas about American Indians have been accepted, by both Indians and non-Indians, as self-evident, *natural truths*. Many untrue ideas have been aggressively promulgated by European and American authorities.¹⁰⁹

There are many stereotypes about Natives as learners that are now taken as truths. These stereotypes negatively impact Native students because: they lead to lowered expectations by educators, they lower Native children’s self-esteem, and they continue to enable the Federal Government to pass policies for Native children without updating their ideas on the various academic needs of the diverse ethnic group.

As previously stated, the false ideology that Natives were “primitive” and nomadic justified colonialists’ stealing of Native lands, political suppression, and forced assimilation through education.¹¹¹ Stereotypes developed during the first two eras of Native education history – such as stereotypes that Natives are “silent,” “stoic,” and “visual” learners – “have strategically reinforced the necessary difference and distance between ‘civilized’ and ‘primitive’ students.”¹¹¹ However, these stereotypes reduce

¹¹⁰ Federal Government Agent #1, interview, over the phone, by Sierra Gibson, September 26, 2014, transcript in Appendix A.

¹¹¹ *To Remain an Indian: Lessons in Democracy from a Century of Native American Education*, 17.

Natives to one-dimensional learners, which greatly minimizes the nature of human complexity and devalues the race as whole.¹¹²

Historic and current rhetoric depict the differences in Native learners as problematic and evidence that the students are “inferior.” For example, many educators stereotype Natives as “silent learners,” however, this is due to the history of Natives’ being forced to abandon their native languages.¹¹² In other instances, Natives are reduced to simply “observational or private learners; cooperative versus competitive learners; visual learners; [...] and ‘ecological,’ ‘holistic,’ or ‘spiritual’ learners.”¹¹³ These stereotypes have led to disastrously low expectations from the public and educators. In an interview with a high school teacher, she explained that these historical stereotypes have led people to believe that Natives “are less than everybody else, not as smart as everybody else, not the same intellectual ability as everybody else.”¹¹⁴ In order to best improve Native graduation rates, “we must recognize the serious error [...] of reducing our ideas of any learners to one-dimensional proportions” and more accurately describe the learning habits of Native learners.¹¹⁴

Despite what is now known about the problems of oversimplifying learners, the myths about Native learners persevere. These myths originated in colonial and federal era times, however, they have continued because the current education system relies on reducing students to single-dimensional learners, where they are considered inferior to European students; “narrow, standardizing institutions demand myths that simplify the

¹¹² Ibid, 19.

¹¹³ Ibid, 21.

¹¹⁴ High school teacher #2, March 31, 2014.

world” whereas “Expansive, liberating places of education demand realities that complicate it.”¹¹⁵ In an interview, a government official explained, “education is not a vehicle of opportunity for [Native students]” because the system fails them.¹¹⁶ He described the situation for Natives: at home, they are taught to help to improve their tribal community, which is probably enveloped by violence, substance abuse, and lack of opportunity, but when they go to school “they are portrayed as stupid and told that it is their only way out, yet nobody at the school helps them out, nobody says this is a way to help improve your community.”¹¹⁷ This legacy of abuse continues to harm Native students today through notions such as trauma and lowered expectations; the legacy significantly contributes to the current low graduation rates of Native students.

¹¹⁵ *To Remain an Indian: Lessons in Democracy from a Century of Native American Education*, 22.

¹¹⁶ Federal Government Agent #1, September 26, 2014.

Chapter Four: Institutional Racism

Belief systems are the framework upon which cultures and societies function. It is the bond that holds civilizations together, and it is the small voice inside each of us that urges us to be true to what we have been taught. As Native people, we cannot separate our spiritual teachings from our learning, nor can we separate our beliefs about who and what we are from our values and our behaviors. As Indian people, we ask that educational systems recognize our right to religious freedom and our right, as Sovereign Nations, to live in harmony as we were taught. However, non-Indians must be educated to the traditional beliefs that Indian people may have before they can understand what changes may be needed.
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- Carol Locust, University of Arizona, Tucson

The term “racism” often invokes an emotional response in an audience. By reflecting on the educational efforts of the Federal Government toward Native Americans as both institutionally and systematically racist, this paper understands that its audience will naturally be taken aback. However, this chapter will provide evidence to demonstrate that the Federal Government’s neglect not only to educate Native students properly but also in the lack of action taken to diminish societal prejudices qualifies as institutional and systematic racism. Furthermore, this chapter will consider how these forms of racism negatively impact Native students and thus account for the students’ low graduation rates. The historical treatment of Native Americans is essential to improving their current

¹¹⁷ Carol Locust, “Wounding the Spirit: Discrimination and Traditional American Indian Belief Systems,” *Harvard Educational Review* 58.3 (1998), 328.

graduation rates, and in order to most effectively do this, scholars Vine Deloria Jr. and Daniel R. Wildcat argue,

There is no better place to start than with an effort to give our children an inheritance too many generations of American Indians were outright denied or have struggled mightily to maintain: identity within tribal cultures we were actively engaged in, as opposed to existence within a culture of indoctrination facilitated most effectively through U.S. government education programs.¹¹⁸

In order to best meet the academic and cultural needs of Native students, the public education system must better incorporate Native value systems into the curriculum and evaluation structures.

To start, it is necessary to provide definitions of the various forms of racism that occur within the United States against Natives. Many have heard of “individual racism,” which “consists of overt acts by individuals that cause death, injury, destruction of property, or denial of services or opportunity.”¹¹⁹ While it is undeniable that these acts take place against Native Americans within the United States, this paper will focus on the other two types of racism. Contrary to individual racism, institutional racism “is more subtle but no less destructive” as it involves “policies, practices, and procedures of institutions that have a disproportionately negative effect on racial minorities’ access to and quality of goods, services, and opportunities.”¹¹⁸ The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines an institution as “a place where an organization takes care of people for a usually long period of time.”¹²⁰ It is important to note that institutional racism “can occur without

¹¹⁸ *Power and Place: Indian Education in America*, 8-9.

¹¹⁹ Vernellia R. Randall, “What is Institutional Racism?” 2008, <http://academic.udayton.edu/race/2008electionandracism/raceandracism/racism02.htm>.

¹²⁰ *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*. 11th ed. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 2003, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/institution>.

any awareness that it is happening.”¹¹⁸ Finally, there is systematic, or structural, racism. This form of racism “is the basis of individual and institutional racism; it is the value system that is embedded in a society that supports and allows discrimination.”¹¹⁸

It is important to distinguish between the definitions of institutional and systematic racism and the meanings of prejudice and discrimination. Prejudice is defined as “an unfair feeling of dislike for a person or group because of race, sex, religion, etc.” or “a feeling of like or dislike for someone or something especially when it is not reasonable or logical.”¹¹⁹ Discrimination means “the practice of unfairly treating a person or group of people differently from other people or groups of people;” “the ability to recognize the difference between things that are of good quality and those that are not;” and “the ability to understand that one thing is different from another thing.”¹¹⁹ While Natives face prejudice and discrimination, instances of racism also occur; many Federal Departments are institutionally racist against Natives and there are several examples of systematic racism against Native Americans.

Most research is devoted to individual racism, however institutional and systematic racism frequently occur within Federal institutions of the United States that negatively impact Native Americans. Furthermore, the limited research on institutional and systematic racism largely revolves around African Americans, so there is practically no information published on institutional and systematic racism against Natives. This chapter will consider general ways in which both the Federal Government and the media engage in institutional and systematic racism against minorities and Natives within the United States. The examples will assist in creating a clear definition of the terms.

Afterward, this paper will reflect on one specific example of institutional racism within the public education system: the cultural bias against Natives with the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act and the Common Core education policy. The chapter will conclude with an analysis of two aspects of the public education system's systematic racism through the lack of understanding of Native Americans and the problems with the overarching system.

4.1 General Examples of Institutional Racism

The Aspen Institute, a Washington, D.C. educational and policy research organization, offers a definition of institutional racism.¹²¹ The Institute states:

Institutional racism refers to the policies and practices within and across institutions that, intentionally or not, produce outcomes that chronically favor, or put a racial group at a disadvantage. Poignant examples of institutional racism can be found in school disciplinary policies in which students of color are punished at much higher rates than their white counterparts, in the criminal justice system, and within many employment sectors in which day-to-day operations, as well as hiring and firing practices, can significantly disadvantage workers of color.¹²²

Slavery is arguably the most researched and recognizable case of institutional racism in the United States' history. The first slave was brought to the country in 1619; slavery continued for roughly 250 years. During this time period, many federal laws were established to maintain and enable slavery, including the Fugitive Slave Act in 1793, the

¹²¹ "Aspen Institute Home Page," Aspen Institute, <http://www.aspeninstitute.org/>.

¹²² The Aspen Institute. *Glossary for Understanding the Dismantling Structural Racism/Promoting Racial Equity Analysis* (2014), <http://www.aspeninstitute.org/sites/default/files/content/docs/rcc/RCC-Structural-Racism-Glossary.pdf>.

Missouri Compromise in 1820, the Compromise of 1850, and the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854. In 1857, the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in the *Dred Scott v. Sanford* case advanced the institutionalized racism by declaring slavery constitutional: "the U.S. Supreme Court stated that slaves were not citizens of the United States and, therefore, could not expect any protection from the Federal Government or the courts."¹²³ Furthermore, "the opinion also stated that Congress had no authority to ban slavery from a Federal territory."¹²⁴ Similar to the example of slavery the Federal Government has engaged in institutional racism against Native Americans by passing many policies and practices, such as the practices of the criminal justice and the health care systems.

The criminal justice system, as an institution, established racist methods of practice that produce outcomes that are disadvantageous to Native Americans.¹²⁵ For example, the incarceration rate of Natives is 38 percent above than the national rate.¹²⁶ The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights attributes this abysmal rate to "differential treatment by the criminal justice system, lack of access to adequate counsel, and racial profiling."¹²⁶ The Death Penalty Information Center has found the following:

Law enforcement agents arrest American Indians and Alaskan Natives at twice the rate of the greater U.S. population for violent and property crimes. On average, American Indians receive longer sentences than non-Indians for crimes. They also tend to serve longer time in prison for their sentences than non-Native

¹²³ "Slavery in the Capital," American Treasures of the Library of Congress, July 27, 2010, <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/trm009.html>.

¹²⁴ "Dred Scott v. Sanford (1857)," Our Documents, <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=29>.

¹²⁵ *Glossary for Understanding the Dismantling Structural Racism/Promoting Racial Equity Analysis*.

¹²⁶ "Native Americans and the Death Penalty," Death Penalty Information Center, 2014, <http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/native-americans-and-death-penalty>.

Americans. The suicide rate is higher among American native inmates incarcerated in jails than non-Indians. Within the prison system, Native Americans are often subject to abuse when attempting to identify with native cultures through the wearing of headbands, using native languages, maintaining long-braided hair, listening to native music, and securing culturally related educational material.¹²⁶

Despite the United States Government's awareness of the many problems within the justice system for Native Americans, "representative studies of crime and violence [...] have never been done across all tribal communities."¹²⁷ The current criminal justice system produces outcomes that are unfairly damaging to Native communities. Another component to consider for the effects of this harsh "justice" system is the school-to-prison pipeline. It is not uncommon for students, when expelled or suspended (which is done at higher rates for minority students), to get into legal trouble while out of school or to fall too far behind to catch up and ultimately drop out (which also leads to statistically higher chances of ending up in prison).¹²⁸

The institution of the health care system has established many policies and practices that also lead to harmful and detrimental outcomes for Native Americans. As declared by the United States Commission on Civil Rights, "it has long been recognized that Native Americans are dying of diabetes, alcoholism, tuberculosis, suicide, and other

¹²⁷ "Tribal Crime and Justice," National Institute of Justice, February 20, 2013, <http://nij.gov/topics/tribal-justice/Pages/welcome.aspx>.

¹²⁸ Carla Amurao, "How Bad is the School-to-Prison Pipeline," *Public Broadcasting Service Southern California*, March 28, 2013, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/tavissmiley/tsr/education-under-arrest/school-to-prison-pipeline-fact-sheet/>.

health conditions at shocking rates.”¹²⁹ The report continues to state that the “nation’s lengthy history of failing to keep its promises to Native Americans includes the failure of Congress to provide the resources necessary to create and maintain an effective health care system for Native Americans.”¹²⁹ In fact, the report found that there are “cultural, social, and structural barriers that continue to limit Native American access to health care” such as a poor and inadequate education system to serve Native Americans.¹²⁹ Examples of ways in which the health care system could better provide for the Native population is to offer Natives mental and physical health resources that make the population aware of the risks associated with an unhealthy diet, not tending to mental health problems, and not visiting a doctor when an illness arises.

4.2 General Examples of Systematic/Structural Racism

Systematic racism does not necessarily come from bad intentions, but may stem from lack of data, information, and resources. Defining a system or a person as racist automatically turns people away from considering their role in the problem. However, to overcome these structural deficiencies and to better account for the needs of Native communities, Federal Government officials, media correspondents, and citizens must understand the structural racism that persists against Natives. The Aspen Institute defines systematic or structural racism as:

¹²⁹ U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. *Broken Promises: Evaluating the Native American Health Care System* (September 2004): 3, <http://www.usccr.gov/pubs/nahealth/nabroken.pdf>.

A system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequality. It identifies dimensions of our history and culture that have allowed privileges associated with “whiteness” and disadvantages associated with “color” to endure and adapt over time. Structural racism is not something that a few people or institutions choose to practice. Instead it has been a feature of the social, economic, and political systems in which we all exist.

In order for systematic racism to persevere, institutions must enable, the country must perpetuate, and the media must maintain discriminatory behaviors, which promote and support racial group inequality. An example of systematic racism is as simple as the thematic messages of films. Robert C. Bulman, author of “Teachers in the ’Hood: Hollywood’s Middle-Class Fantasy,” writes, “the urban-high-school genre of film reinforces the ‘culture of poverty’ thesis” as it promotes the notion that a wealthy, White teacher can come into an urban high school to solve all of the “poor people’s” problems.¹³⁰ The White teacher represents “middle-class hopes that the students in urban schools can be rescued from their troubled lives not through significant social change of school reform, but by the individual application of common sense, good behavior, a positive outlook, and better choices.”¹³¹ This example demonstrates that, today, many from the dominant American culture truly believe that wealthy Whites are superior to the underprivileged. Other examples of structural racism, specific to the Native community, are sports’ mascots and the blood quantum argument.

Professional sports, colleges, and high schools have long used derogatory and racist forms of Native Americans as mascots to promote sports teams. The establishment

¹³⁰ Robert C. Bulman, “Teachers in the Hood: Hollywood’s Middle Class Fantasy,” *Urban Review* 34.3 (2002), 251.

¹³¹ Ibid.

of a culture that accepts and a government that does not create policies that prohibit these mascots is an example of systematic, or structural, racism. For example, the Florida State University's mascot depicts a primitive, violent, and warlike Native American – promoting misconceptions and stereotypes of Natives that are detrimental to society's outlook on the indigenous cultures and people.¹³² Similarly, Hannah Provost wrote, “popular professional sports teams, such as the Washington Redskins of the [National Football League], the Cleveland Indians of the [Major League Baseball], and the Atlanta Braves of the [Major League Baseball], use negative depictions of Native Americans, including the use of the fan-favorite, ‘tomahawk chop.’”¹³⁴ Provost's article continues to state that the many organizations “working against the use of Native American images as mascots, mottos, and nicknames have on specific goal in mind in terms of their achievement: education.”¹³² In *Last Real Indians*, Danielle Miller wrote, “Because Native American mascots are not being properly addressed by administrators, educators, and parents, we see students from schools all over the nation callously joking about the history of Native American genocide.”¹³³ The best way to overcome this systematic racism is through awareness and education of current and historic cultures as well as the education of the actual “discovery” of the “new” world.

¹³² Hannah Provost, “The Use of Native American Images, Mottos, and Nicknames as Professional and College Sports Mascots,” *Resistance Against Racist Oppression in the United States*, <http://antiracistresistance.wordpress.com/the-use-of-native-american-images-mottos-and-nicknames-as-professional-and-college-sports-mascots/>.

¹³³ Danielle Miller, “‘Trail of Tears’ Signs Mocking Genocide at Multiple High Schools Point to Epidemic of Racism and Insensitivity Against Native Americans,” *Last Real Indians*, November, 2013, <http://lastrealindians.com/trail-of-tears-signs-mocking-genocide-at-multiple-high-schools-point-to-epidemic-of-racism-and-insensitivity-against-native-americans-by-danielle-miller/>.

The government side steps the problems listed above (within the criminal justice and health care systems) by claiming that Natives' "self-reporting" is not adequate in producing statistically reliable data, consequently throwing the data away. The National Institute of Justice writes,

Currently, no single definition of "Indian" satisfies all legal, social and personal requirements. In fact, many different definitions of [American Indian] and [Alaska Native] are used in health care, social service, government and academic contexts. When determining whether a person is regarded as an "Indian," the primary factors to be considered include tribal enrollment, tribal affiliation, and formal government recognition. For many jurisdictional and statutory purposes, the person must be considered a member of a federally recognized tribe. Because the enrollment is often the key to acceptance as a member of the tribal community, it provides by far the best evidence of Indian status.¹³⁴

Enrollment into "federally recognized tribes" requires Natives to "prove" a specific amount of blood – or a specific blood quantum. This practice leads to a lack of self-identity. In an interview, a high school administrator explained that blood quantum policies began in the 1800s to force Native tribes to assimilate to European government structures, as adopting these practices would be the only way to become federally recognized.¹³⁵ Claiming that something is not what it says it is, in this case Native American, due to blood quantum, in itself, is systematically racist, and exceptional only to dogs, horses, and Native Americans.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ "Tribal Crime and Justice."

¹³⁵ High school administrator #2, March 31, 2014.

¹³⁶ Russell Means, "Indians, Horses, and Dogs," *Indian Country Today*, August 1, 2007, <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2007/08/01/indians-horses-and-dogs-91279>.

4.3 Standardized Testing as Mandated by No Child Left Behind and the Common Core

The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) and Common Core (2014) are detrimental to Native students in several ways: the laws require standardized testing at all public schools that participate in the programs, despite research demonstrating that students of minority decent receive lower test scores than students of European or Asian decent, and the policies tie high stake testing to school funding and teacher evaluations. The No Child Left Behind Act, or the current iteration of President Lyndon B. Johnson's Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, was established to hold teachers and schools accountable for the success of their students.¹³⁷ The legislation links federal education funding for states to the results of reading and math tests administered annually between the third and eighth grades and once in high school.¹³⁷ The Common Core, similarly, "ties standards to assessments that are still being developed."¹³⁸ The legislation was proposed by the Obama Administration in response to the No Child Left Behind Act – likely a political move to give the Obama Administration a legacy in education. A report by the organization ReThinking Schools argued, "We have seen this show before. The entire country just finished a decade-long experiment in standards-based, test-driven school reform called No Child Left Behind," which they go on to say, failed dismally.¹³⁸ The biggest relevant difference between Common Core and No Child Left Behind is that

¹³⁷ "Elementary & Secondary Education Act Title I - Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged," U.S. Department of Education, <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg1.html>.

¹³⁸ The Editors of ReThinking Schools, "The Trouble with the Common Core," ReThinking Schools, Summer 2013, www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/27_04/edit274.shtml.

Common Core now ties teacher evaluations to testing scores.¹³⁹ There are two major aspects of these legislations that make the Department of Education qualify as institutionally racist: the damaging effects of standardized testing on Native students and the detriment of ensuring that misconceptions and myths about Native learners persevere.

Standardized testing qualifies the Department of Education as institutionally racist because it is unfairly disadvantageous to Native students. In an article by ReThinking Education, Harold Berlak states,

Standardized testing perpetuates institutionalized racism and contributes to the achievement gap between whites and minorities. [...] Also, research has shown that minorities statistically have lower standardized test scores than whites because of existing, hidden biases in the development and administration of standardized tests and interpretation of their scores. Therefore the achievement gap will not begin to close until current standards and assessment tests are significantly reformed.¹⁴⁰

Standardized testing has been proven to be detrimental to students of minority decent, yet the Obama Administration has continued to pursue such practices for assessments.

By tying standardized testing results to funding as well as teacher evaluations, the legislations contribute to high teacher turnover rates and to low-income schools losing money to higher income schools with higher test scores. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development cited research that found teacher quality to often be based on student and class outcomes, which, in turn, are generally measured by standardized

¹³⁹ Center for American Progress. *Using Teacher Evaluation Reform and Professional Development to Support Common Core Assessments* (2013): 8, <http://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/YoungsCommonCore.pdf>.

¹⁴⁰ Ronnie Reese, "Minority Testing Bias Persists," *The Huffington Post*, April 23, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ronnie-reese/test-bias-minorities_b_2734149.html.

test scores.¹⁴¹ William Sanders, through his work with the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System, found that teacher effectiveness is “the single biggest factor influencing gains in achievement.”¹⁴¹ Furthermore, Kati Haycock and the Education Trust have established that “poor students, low-performing students, and students of color are far more likely than other students to have teachers who are inexperienced, uncertified, poorly education, and under-performing.”¹⁴¹ The *New York Times* reports that a study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education found that “black, Latino, American Indian and Native Alaskan students are three times as likely as white students to attend schools with higher concentrations of first-year teachers.”¹⁴² Simply put by an administrator at a liberal arts college, “You need dynamic teachers, the top of the top. But, unfortunately, the schools with large Native populations aren’t getting them.”¹⁴³

Aside from high teacher turnover rates and the schools losing funding for low test scores, research has demonstrated that

Test results can do harm to the self esteem and confidence of the Indian student, sometimes resulting in the student giving up or dropping out. With regard to the interpretation of achievement test results, false conclusions concerning the Indian

¹⁴¹ “The Effects of Chronic Teacher Turnover on School Climate and Organization,” Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, September 14, 2004, <http://www.ascd.org/publications/researchbrief/v2n19/toc.aspx>.

¹⁴² Motoko Rich, “School Data Finds Pattern of Inequality Along Racial Lines,” *The New York Times*, March 21, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/21/us/school-data-finds-pattern-of-inequality-along-racial-lines.html?module=Search&mabReward=relbias%3As%2C%7B%22%22%3A%22RI%3A17%22%7D&_r=0.

¹⁴³ College administrator, in person interview by Sierra Gibson, April 11, 2014, transcript in Appendix A.

student may result leading to teacher allegations of laziness, disinterest, or stupidity.¹⁴⁴

Research shows that standardized testing is a factor in the achievement gap between Native and non-Native students because it prevents many of the schools Natives students attend from attaining Federal funding, increases teacher turnover rate and thus increases the likelihood of Natives learning from inexperienced and unprepared teachers, and harms Native students' self-esteem – all factors push Native students to leave school. Many tribal communities argue that the type of curriculum developed to revolve around standardized testing is wrong for the needs of their students.

4.4 Lack of Cultural and Historical Knowledge

Few people know the real histories and cultures of Native Americans. This travesty affects students in that they are not properly taught America's history and thus are unable to fully comprehend the Federal Government's role in the genocidal acts that took place against Natives in the founding of the country. In fact, the colonization of the United States is most often so poorly depicted in the curriculum of our public schools in the United States that it led a group of high school students at a public school to make signs mocking the genocide that was the Trail of Tears (Figure 1).¹⁴⁵ The students feel no remorse; they "continue to tweet defending the banner, attempting to minimize the

¹⁴⁴ William Brescia and Jim C. Fortune, "Standardized Testing of American Indian Students," U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement, www.nativechild.com/resources/test.html.

¹⁴⁵ "'Trail of Tears' Signs Mocking Genocide at Multiple High Schools Point to Epidemic of Racism and Insensitivity Against Native Americans."

apology released by administrators, and in turn, the genocide that happened to Native Americans.”¹⁴⁵ The system itself is at fault for this display of the students’ callous behavior as it improperly informed the students about the true histories and cultures of Natives.



Figure 1. Sign Mocking the Trail of Tears¹⁴⁶

The public education system does not cooperate with tribal communities in that it educates the students in a manner opposite to the education they receive at home, the values they learn to honor from their families and tribal elders. In an interview with a government official, he stated,

The societies that the [Native] students are born into, by definition, are unique and different in many ways. This [lifestyle] points to the emphasis on collective responsibility to family, critical aspect of that, the individual aspirations in the

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

dominant cultures are not the important factors in the Native communities. Not only immediate family, but extended family unit within the tribal communities, that relationship is emphasized and when you go into public school systems, public school curriculum and standards force Natives to look at themselves as individuals, [they] lose their connections to the greater good and the relevance to the tribal community are not immediately seen, respected, or apart of the teaching or learning. That is true throughout the system so that is very limiting.¹⁴⁷

Many Native students are forced to choose between academic success or maintaining tribal ties. In another interview, with an administrator at a liberal arts college, the administrator stated “To keep [Natives] in school, we must support the academic but also the cultural. Tradition for life, education for the future.”¹⁴⁸ In order to increase Native high school graduation rates, the public education system must better incorporate tribal life into the curriculum and classroom, thus eradicating the need for Native students to make this awful choice.

Many misconceptions and myths have persistently influenced educators due to inadequate Federal education policies, misrepresentation in the media, and limited education about Natives.¹⁴⁹ In education, Natives are frequently overlooked by the curriculum, other than in the context of teaching about the “good Indians” who helped the “pilgrims” in the relationship that led to Thanksgiving. Natives students are often clustered into categories by teachers: thrown into a single-dimensional holistic learner group as discussed in the previous section. Unfortunately, the oppressive tactics deployed in the colonial and federal eras continue to negatively impact Native students as many educators often consider Natives to be students who are not as intellectually capable as

¹⁴⁷ Federal Government Agent #1, September 26, 2014.

¹⁴⁸ College administrator, April 11, 2014.

¹⁴⁹ “Myths and Misconceptions,” Society for American Archaeology and Public Education Committee, <http://www.uark.edu/campus-resources/archinfo/myths.pdf>.

non-Native students or lazy students who do not value education.¹⁵⁰ In an interview with a government official, he explained that teachers have “low expectations for native students, which traps Native students because they don’t want to be in an environment where nobody believes in them” so they drop out of school.¹⁵¹

4.5 Problems with Discombobulated System

After decades of the Federal Government establishing legislations that attempt to improve the education of Native students, a system of near anarchy has been established. Below is a synopsis of some of the federal organizations that are involved in the creation and implementation of Native policies most related to education and factors that influence education (Table 1):

¹⁵⁰ “Statistics on Native Students,” National Indian Education Association, <http://www.niea.org/Research/Statistics.aspx>.

¹⁵¹ Federal Government Agent #1, September 26, 2014.

Table 1. Table of the Federal Agencies that affect Native American Education

Name of Federal Entity	Year Created	Mission Statement
<i>United States Congress</i>	1789	
House Committee on Indian and Alaska Native Affairs	1805	“The Subcommittee on Indian and Alaska Native Affairs oversees all matters regarding Native Americans, including the approximately 566 federally recognized tribes and Alaska Native corporations, with nearly 1.9 million enrolled members.” ¹⁵²
Senate Committee on Indian Affairs	1977	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Committee has jurisdiction to study the unique problems of American Indian, Native Hawaiian, and Alaska Native people and to propose legislation to alleviate these difficulties.”¹⁵³
<i>United States Department of Education</i>	1965	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “To promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.”¹⁵⁴
Office of Indian Education	1972	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “To support the efforts of local educational agencies, Indian tribes and organizations, postsecondary institutions, and other entities to meet the unique educational and culturally related academic needs of American Indians and Alaska Natives so that these students can achieve to the same challenging state standards as all students.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Subcommittee on Indian and Alaska Native Affairs, U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources,
<http://naturalresources.house.gov/subcommittees/subcommittee/?SubcommitteeID=5066>.

¹⁵³ “History,” United States Senate Committee on Indian Affairs,
<http://www.indian.senate.gov/about/history>.

¹⁵⁴ “About ED,” U.S. Department of Education, <http://www2.ed.gov/about/landing.jhtml>.

¹⁵⁵ “About ED/Offices.”

White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education	2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Initiative shall help expand educational opportunities and improve educational outcomes for all [American Indian and Alaska Native] students, including opportunities to learn their Native languages, cultures, and histories, and receive complete and competitive educations that prepare them for college, careers, and productive and satisfying lives.”¹⁵⁶
<i>United States Department of the Interior</i>	1849	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Department of the Interior protects and manages the Nation’s natural resources and cultural heritage; provides scientific and other information about those resources; and honors its trust responsibilities or special commitments to American Indians, Alaska Natives, and affiliated island communities.”¹⁵⁷
Bureau of Indian Affairs	1824	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Bureau of Indian Affairs’ mission is to enhance the quality of life, to promote economic opportunity, and to carry out the responsibility to protect and improve the trust assets of American Indians, Indian tribes, and Alaska Natives.”¹⁵⁸
Bureau of Indian Education	2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “To provide quality education opportunities from early childhood through life in accordance with a tribe’s needs for cultural and economic well-being, in keeping with the wide diversity of Indian tribes and Alaska Native villages as distinct cultural and governmental entities.”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Executive Order 13592 of December 2, 2011, Establishing the White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education (2011).

¹⁵⁷ “Mission Statement,” U.S. Department of the Interior, <http://www.doi.gov/whoweare/mission-statement.cfm>.

¹⁵⁸ “Mission Statement,” U.S. Department of Interior Bureau of Indian Affairs, <http://www.bia.gov/WhoWeAre/BIA/>.

¹⁵⁹ “Mission,” U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Indian Education, <http://www.bie.edu/>.

<i>U.S. Department of Justice</i> ¹⁶⁰	1870	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “To promote and establish justice and the appearance of justice by vigorously and fairly representing the United States and its citizens in all matters, civil or criminal, within our jurisdiction.”¹⁶¹
Office of Tribal Justice	2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “To provide a principal point of contact within the Department of Justice to listen to the concerns of Indian Tribes and to communicate the Department’s policies to the Tribes and the public; to promote internal uniformity of Department of Justice policies and litigation positions relating to Indian country; and to coordinate with other Federal agencies and with State and local governments on their initiatives in Indian country.”¹⁶²

With so many government entities residing over Native education in so many different Departments and, then, organizations within these Departments, it is extremely challenging to streamline and create overarching policies to better meet the needs of Native students. This problem is an example of systematic racism as the entire system minimizes the chances and has produced poor outcomes for creating an education system that provides a quality education to Native students.

¹⁶⁰ The U.S. Department of Justice is included in this list of institutions as many Native Americans earn their General Educational Development degree in prison or jail.

¹⁶¹ “Mission Statement,” Department of Justice Diversity,
<http://www.justice.gov/usao/msn/about/missionstatement.html>.

¹⁶² “About the Office,” U.S. Department of Justice Office of Tribal Justice,
<http://www.justice.gov/otj/about-office>.

4.6 Conclusion

Institutional and systematic racism negatively impact the success rates of Native students throughout their education. They are forced to work within a system that diminishes the relevance of their value system and ignores or improperly discusses the history of Natives since the colonization of the United States. These issues persist due in large part to the fact that the governmental institutions that oversee Native education are organized in separate departments. This leads to a minimal chance of the government implementing an overarching, collaborative policy that would help the public education system better meet the needs of Natives. In an interview with a government official, he offered a simple statement about the system: “Using one race’s [European] language, history, discipline approach to science, governance, and economics – with no other view point as to how to analyze the world – that is racist.”¹⁶³

¹⁶³ Federal Government Agent #1, September 26, 2014.

Chapter Five: Policy Recommendations

This we know.
The earth does not belong to man;
Man belongs to the earth.
This we know.
All things are connected,
Like the blood which unites one family
All things are connected.
Whatever befalls the earth,
Befalls the sons of the earth.
Man did not weave the web of life;
He is merely a strand in it.
Whatever he does to the web,
*He does to himself.*¹⁶⁴

- Chief of a tribe in Seattle, Washington

This poem describes the outlook on life held by a Seattle, Washington tribe's Chief and reflects the beliefs of many traditional Native Americans. The beauty of the culture flows through this poem as it illuminates a new perspective for many Americans who are worried about material goods and money. Cultural diversity enables individuals to understand others' perspectives and alternative ways of thinking. Improving the education of Native Americans benefits all of society as it brings to the classroom unique

¹⁶⁴ "Native American Poems," Salt Cross, <http://www.saltcross.com/amepoems.htm>.

and, often, innovative thought processes, a respect for life, and an authentic understanding of American history.

5.1 Overview

Native students face a plethora of challenges when working to earn their high school diploma. Native children today must overcome the inheritance of distrust of the Federal Government, the establishment of detrimental and dehumanizing pedagogies for Natives, which continue to cloud teachers' ability to educate these children, and the wound created by boarding schools and assimilation attempts continue to pain Native children. Institutional and systematic racism play a large role in the problem as well. Standardized testing continues, despite research proving that this assessment is detrimental for students of minority descent; specifically, it negatively impacting Native students and their schools by tying funding and teacher evaluations to test scores. Additionally, standardized testing requires teachers to reduce students to one-dimensional learners, leaving them unable to consider each student's individual needs. Furthermore, most public school staff and faculty are not educated on Native cultures and histories. Finally, too many government agencies work to resolve the issues that the public education system forces Native children to suffer through.

Solutions to these problems do exist. To begin to mend the broken relationship between the Federal Government and Native people, the Federal Government should work to further publicize President Obama's recent formal apology to Native Americans. Additionally, President Obama should amend the apology to ensure that the Federal

Government takes responsibility for the genocidal actions it committed against the indigenous population. Moreover, Federal policies should work to overturn negative pedagogies through curriculum changes and professional development that would help teachers adopt more inclusive and culturally sensitive practices. Furthermore, Native students would stand to benefit if the Federal Government decreased the importance of standardized testing in allocating education funding. Complications created by the division of responsibilities among various agencies could be minimized if the role of guiding the education of Natives was condensed to a single agency within the Department of Education. Finally, Native people should unite and mobilize politically to demand that their children's graduation rates increase.

5.2 Policy Recommendations

5.2a Publicize Federal Government's Formal Apology to Native Americans

As is common in American history, the Federal Government and the media gave minimal attention to a news event regarding Native Americans. In May 2010, "the United States formally apologized to American Indian tribes [...] for 'ill-conceived policies' and acts of violence committed against them."¹⁶⁵ In a speech about the resolution, President Obama explained,

These cases serve as a reminder of the importance of not glossing over the past or ignoring the past, even as we work together to forge a brighter future. That's why, last year, I signed a resolution, passed by both parties in Congress, finally recognizing the sad and painful chapters in our shared history – a history too often marred by broken

¹⁶⁵ "Apology to Tribes- US Apologizes to American Indians for Mistreatment," *Native American Times: Today's Independent Indian News*, May 23, 2010, <http://www.nativetimes.com/index.php/news/tribal/3651-apology-to-tribes-us-apologizes-to-american-indians-for-mistreatment>.

promises and grave injustices against the First Americans. It's a resolution I fully support – recognizing that no statement can undo the damage that was done; what it can do is help reaffirm the principles that should guide our future. It's only by heeding the lessons of our history that we can move forward.”¹⁶⁶

President Obama's speech represented the extent of publicity by the Federal Government, and media coverage of this resolution was virtually nonexistent.

Few popular media outlets reported on the apology, only Native-affiliated newspapers and media outlets disseminated the information. The New York Times published a single article on the topic, but it appeared before the official presidential signing; instead of the final resolution, it discussed the original, more meaningful version debated in Senate.¹⁶⁷ Several other major media outlets failed to publish even a single article on the topic, including the Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, USA Today, the Chicago Tribune, the Boston Herald, and the Washington Times.

While the resolution was a kind gesture, it was merely that: a gesture. Many Native Americans argue that there was no real depth to the apology. As Rob Capriccioso wrote in the Indian Country Today newspaper, “Is an apology that's not said out loud really an apology? What if the person expressing the apology doesn't draw attention to it?”¹⁶⁸ In fact, the resolution was not even a direct apology, but, rather, it apologized “on behalf of

¹⁶⁶ “President Obama Acknowledges need for Native American Apology,” *First Peoples Worldwide*, <http://firstpeoples.org/wp/tag/the-apology-to-the-native-peoples-of-the-united-states/>.

¹⁶⁷ “The Long Trail to Apology,” *The New York Times*, June 28, 2004, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/06/28/opinion/the-long-trail-to-apology.html?module=Search&mabReward=relbias%3As%2C%7B%22%22%3A%22RI%3A17%22%7D>.

¹⁶⁸ Rob Capriccioso, “A Sorry Saga: Obama Signs Native American Apology Resolution; Fails to Draw Attention to it,” *Indian Country Today*, January 13, 2010, <http://www.indianlaw.org/node/529>.

the people of the United States to all Native peoples for the many instances of violence, mistreatment, and neglect inflicted on Native peoples by citizens of the United States.”¹⁶⁹

Worse yet, the resolution contains a disclaimer that it does not authorize or support any legal claims against the United States, nor does the resolution settle any claims.¹⁶⁶

Although the apology is a historic step, the Federal Government should not think of it as a concluding chapter to the genocide it committed against Native Americans.¹⁶⁶ There should be a new iteration of the apology, in which the Federal Government must claim full responsibility for the genocide that took the lives of thousands of Natives along with the other human rights abuses it took part in against Native Americans.

Again, the question persists: Is this a real apology if non-Native Americans never heard about it? Many Native Americans argue that it does not count. This paper recommends that the Federal Government publicize this apology and pass a stronger resolution to apologize for the Federal Government’s actions, not just those of the “citizens of the United States.”

5.2b Curricula that allow better inclusion of Native Cultures and Histories

The Federal Government should provide grant opportunities to states working on better instituting culturally responsive teaching. The grants should require that states’ Departments of Education work with local tribes to incorporate culturally relevant lessons in the curricula. The Education Alliance, a program at Brown University, describes the importance of culturally responsive teaching:

¹⁶⁹ A Joint Resolution to Acknowledge a Long History of Official Depredations and Ill-Conceived Policies by the Federal Government Regarding Indian Tribes and Offer an Apology to all Native Peoples on Behalf of the United States of 2009, H.R. 3326, 111th Congress, 1st Session (April 30, 2009); Public Law 111-118.

Culture is central to learning. It plays a role not only in communicating and receiving information, but also in shaping the thinking process of groups and individuals. A pedagogy that acknowledges, responds to, and celebrates fundamental cultures offers full, equitable access to education for students from all cultures.¹⁷⁰

Native students are neglected in the education system: either teachers inaccurately discuss their histories and cultures or they ignore them completely. This disconnect between culture and school prevents students from recognizing the relevance of lessons to their lives and enjoying their education. A study conducted by the Department of Education found that “Schools that adjust their curriculum to accommodate the variety of cultures served are more successful than schools that do not” and “schools that respect and support a student’s language and culture are significantly more successful in educating those students.”¹⁷¹ Furthermore, the National Indian Education Association and the National Education Association found that “culturally based education is valued across Native communities and is viewed as essential to improving educational outcomes for Native students.”¹⁷² Native American graduation rates would likely rise when their teachers begin to respect and integrate their cultures into lessons.

Most important for state governments to create curricula that most effectively communicates with Native children is working with the tribes in that state. For example, in Nebraska, teachers of Native students in public schools gathered with teachers from

¹⁷⁰ “Culturally Responsive Teaching,” The Education Alliance at Brown University, <http://www.brown.edu/academics/education-alliance/teaching-diverse-learners/strategies-0/culturally-responsive-teaching-0>.

¹⁷¹ Abner Oakes and Traci Maday, “Engaging Native American learners with rigor and cultural relevance,” *The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement*, August 30, 2009, 3.

¹⁷² *Voices of Native educators: Strategies that Support Success of Native High School Students*, 11.

reservation schools and local tribal elders and historians to create a curriculum “for grade K-12 that incorporated Native American literature and activities into the academic areas that they teach in order to make their instruction more culturally relevant.”¹⁷³ In addition to creating relevant lesson plans, state governments should engage tribal communities in the educational process. For instance, the Bridge of Hope Program works with the Dinè, or Navajo tribe, to educate schools in the ways in which Natives live, informing the public about Native cultures and religions.¹⁷⁴ This program enables public schools to “adopt a Native elder” in order to forge “a Bridge of Hope between Native Americans and other cultures.”¹⁷⁴ In return for their time and service to the community and school, “the Program provides food, simple medicines, clothing, fabric, and yarns to help these Elders live on the land in their traditional lifestyle.”¹⁷⁴ Programs like this help public schools share the ways in which Natives live to their students and better engage Native students in the process. Partnerships could be forged between state governments, school districts, and tribes to establish projects such as having elders attend a few classes a year or by creating lessons that incorporate Native values.

In order to significantly improve Native graduation rates, their cultures, languages, and histories must be accurately incorporated into the curriculum. An example of this inclusion is a curriculum developed by the University of Alaska at Fairbanks in

¹⁷³ “Native American Education Curriculum Guide: Grades K-12,” Nebraska Department of Education, Summer 2004,

http://www.education.ne.gov/mce/PDF/Empowering_Teachers_1.pdf.

¹⁷⁴ “Adopt-A-Native-Elder Program,” Bridge of Hope, <http://www.anelder.org/index.php?ID=879&XID=879:0:0:0:0>.

partnership with nearby tribal communities.¹⁷⁵ In particular, the program tried to incorporate tribal relevance into math and science lessons for elementary school students: the schools asked students to calculate how many fish they would need to catch to feed their families, and then to calculate the perimeter and area of the smoke house they would need to build to cook the fish.¹⁷⁶ In another example, the organization Academia found that, by using the traditional Native American game, “Snow Snakes,” as context, Natives’ learning experiences in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) were enhanced. The project “explicitly applied mathematics (scaling and data), and science (force and motion) to an engineering prototype iteration that used available materials and tools (technology) for success,” thus enhancing cultural relevance of STEM topics to Native students, fostering interest, and better engaging the students in the materials.¹⁷⁶ In a third example, President Obama, the Office of Economic Impact and Diversity, the American Indian Science and Engineering Society, and the American Indian Higher Education Consortium partnered to enhance Native interest in the STEM areas through hands-on experience.¹⁷⁷ The program introduces Native students to STEM careers by providing internships and research opportunities to undergraduate students.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ “School of Education,” University of Alaska Fairbanks School of Education, http://uaf.edu/catalog/current/programs/education_grad.html.

¹⁷⁶ “Snow Snakes and science agency: Empowering American Indian students through a culturally-based science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) curriculum,” *Academia.edu*, 2014, http://www.academia.edu/3727971/Snow_snakes_and_science_agency_Empowering_American_Indian_students_through_a_culturally-based_science_technology_engineering_and_mathematics_STEM_curriculum.

¹⁷⁷ “Celebrating our Work with Native American Students in STEM During National Native American Heritage Month,” Office of Economic Impact and Diversity, November 15, 2012, <http://energy.gov/diversity/articles/celebrating-our-work-native-american-students-stem-during-national-native>.

Specifically, the American Indian Research and Education Initiative funded student and faculty teams, paired from tribal and mainstream universities, “to run energy projects on tribal lands.”¹⁷⁷ Similarly, the Navajo Nation, the Navajo Technical College, and Arizona State University “are studying the effectiveness of solar photovoltaic system design in meeting the energy demands of Navajo homes and public buildings.”¹⁷⁷ All of these examples demonstrate the ability of the public education system to work with surrounding tribes to create projects tailored to Native students and incorporate Native values into the curriculum.

Examples such as these help Native students understand the connection between their formal education and their communities at home. In order to continue to develop curricula incorporating Native elements, public school districts must work in partnership with tribal communities and Native organizations to learn about their cultures, religions, and values. The U.S. Department of Education has the ability to facilitate and foster these partnerships. In May 2012, the U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan launched a pilot program, the State-Tribal Education Partnership (STEP) Program, which aspires to form connections between states and tribes.¹⁷⁸ The Program requires applicant states to discuss the agreement between a tribe, represented by its tribal education agency, and the respective state education agency; the intended agreements will enable the tribal education agencies to perform some state-level functions, such as instating a state-wide

¹⁷⁸ Cameron Brenchley, "Duncan Announces Pilot Program to Increase State-Tribal Collaboration." *U.S. Department of Education*, May 31, 2012, <http://www.ed.gov/blog/2012/05/duncan-announces-pilot-program-to-increase-state-tribal-collaboration/>.

curriculum, in public schools located on tribally controlled lands.¹⁷⁹ Stakeholders agree that the Program will serve a large percentage of Native students and foster collaboration and partnerships between state and tribal governments. The Program is an effort to integrate tribes into states' development and implementation of policy affecting Native students in public schools. The STEP Program increases tribal input in public education and promotes long-lasting partnerships between states and tribes. Efforts such as this must persist in order to further include Native voices in the creation of curricula. Furthermore, Congress should increase appropriations to the U.S. Department of Education to support the development of partnerships between state governments and their local tribes. An important way to increase Native graduation rates is to strongly consider the input of Native Americans in the creation of curriculum and policies adopted by local school districts serving Native students.

5.2c Professional Development that Fosters Multicultural Education

The Federal Government should fund professional development programs to overcome the biased and false pedagogies created during and perpetuated since the foundation of the country. While some data has been collected on the effectiveness of different teaching styles for Natives, it is important to remember that each student deserves an individualized, culturally sensitive education. I recommend that, due to a near constant shortage in staff and time, the various agencies responsible for Natives' education should provide grant opportunities to private not-for-profit education research firms to investigate the most effective ways to educate teachers on the cultures and

¹⁷⁹ Lou Sgroi, "Office of Elementary and Secondary Education: State-Tribal Education Partnership." *Tribal Law Updates*, May 30, 2001, <http://www.tlpi.wordpress.com/2012/05/30/state-tribal-education-partnership/>.

histories of Native students. This training should provide teachers with a better understanding of the needs of Native American children, the respect that these communities deserve, and knowledge about the abuses that Natives have experienced and the rights that were stripped from them over the last few centuries.

Teachers are the key to change. The authors of the report, “Empowering Teachers to Empower Students,” compiled by the Nebraska Department of Education, wrote:

There are many ways that teachers can teach students. They have an endless influence on students. Along with that comes a great responsibility. One teacher can do so much to promote acceptance of diversity. My hope for American Indian Education and education in general is for teachers to understand and accept this responsibility, embrace this responsibility, and use it to create a world where all people are accepted for who they are and the contributions they can make to society as a whole, and to bring about a smaller world of peace and justice for all.¹⁸⁰

Providing professional development workshops to teachers would enable them to embrace their role in promoting the acceptance of diversity and fair and equal treatment of all students, in this case, particularly, Native American children.

Precedent for the effectiveness of professional development programs can be seen in the award winners of the Department of Education’s 2014 Indian Professional Development Awards. Many programs, such as the Southeastern Oklahoma State University’s and the University of Massachusetts, Boston’s, focus on improving the training of early education teachers.¹⁸¹ Portland State University’s award winning proposal aims to increase the number of Native American teachers in the state of Oregon,

¹⁸⁰ “Native American Education Curriculum Guide: Grades K-12.”

¹⁸¹ “Indian Educational Professional Development Grants,” U.S. Department of Education, last modified 2014, <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/indianprofdev/awards.html>.

as only 0.6 percent of Oregon’s teachers are Native, though Natives represent 1.8 percent of the state’s population.¹⁷⁷ The proposal’s primary goals are to:

1. Prepare 15 highly qualified AI/AN teachers to meet the demonstrated shortage of culturally responsive teachers in Oregon urban/reservation schools serving AI/AN students;
2. Provide a quality indigenized teacher preparation program that supports the unique needs of Native teachers throughout their coursework and first year of teaching;
3. Collaborate with partners within and external to [Portland State University] to sustain and build the capacity of the program to provide high quality educational services to tribes and Native communities;
4. Monitor and collect data on participant outcomes for ongoing formative evaluation of the program.¹⁷⁷

While this program is important for the efforts it makes to increase the proportion of Native teachers, it is also critical that its progress is evaluated to allow it to continue to improve. Similar to Portland State’s, the Research Foundation at State University in New York, Potsdam’s proposal had two goals: in the short term, to train Native teachers for local schools, and in the long term, “to attract and train future cohorts through the development of an education curriculum which features Native American pedagogy as part of a culturally-responsive professional approach to teaching.”¹⁷⁷

While increasing the number of Native teachers is an important part of helping schools better understand the needs and cultures of Native students, all teachers should receive professional development on the topic of cultural competency. The National Education Association wrote a policy brief, “Promoting Educators’ Cultural Competence to Better Serve Culturally Diverse Students,” in which they define cultural competency as “center[ing] on the skills and knowledge to effectively serve students from diverse

cultures.”¹⁸² In addition, the report lists reasons why educators must be culturally competent: “students are more diverse than ever [...], culture plays a critical role in learning [...], cultural competence leads to more effective teaching [...], culturally competent educators are better equipped to reach out to students’ families [...], cultural competence reinforces American and democratic ideals [...and] cultural competence helps educators meet accountability requirements.”¹⁷⁸ Furthermore, the report discusses the efforts made by Alaska’s Department of Education, which created guidelines for implementing their curriculum standards that “address the preparation of culturally responsive schools boards, [nurture] culturally healthy children, [respect] cultural knowledge, [strengthen] indigenous languages, and [create] and [implement] cross-cultural programs.”¹⁸³

Many programs have been created in an effort to improve teachers’ cultural competency. However, best practices cannot be disseminated without evidence that they work. Therefore, the U.S. Department of Education should offer grants to educational research firms to determine the outcomes of these programs, in order to establish best practices. Once determined, best practices for improving teachers’ cultural competency should be disseminated throughout state governments.

5.2d Minimize Impact of Standardized Testing and Research Alternative Evaluation Methods

¹⁸² “Promoting Educators’ Cultural Competence to Better Serve Culturally Diverse Students,” *National Education Association*, 2008, http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/PB13_CulturalCompetence08.pdf.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

In order to improve Native students' high school graduation rate, the Federal Government should decrease the significance of standardized testing by uncoupling standardized test scores from school funding and teacher performance evaluations. In an article in *Mar: Culture, Politics, Economics, Race*, author Rahkyt stated, "high stakes assessment techniques have been found to reinforce prevailing patterns of cultural bias toward ethnically and economically marginalized populations, resulting in the continuation of miseducational patterns that have been readily apparent for decades."¹⁸⁴ Unfortunately, few policymakers have faith in alternative teaching strategies designed to excite students and to provide students with an equal level of evaluation standards, regardless of race, culture, or socioeconomic standing. However, with further research and experimentation, alternative evaluations could replace the current system to more fairly and accurately assess students' knowledge.

Similar to the example of the Federal Government enhancing professional development programs, the U.S. Department of Education agencies, specifically the Office of Indian Education and the White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education, should provide grants to fund the research of alternative methods to evaluate students. This research would find alternative techniques to better and more fairly assess students' growth and abilities as well as content knowledge. While researching new and evaluating current methods of evaluation are important to improve the high school graduation rate of Native and minority students, there are known

¹⁸⁴ Rahkyt, "Marginalized Students and Alternative Learning," *MAR: Culture, Politics, Economics, Race*, last modified January 5, 2012, <http://rockeymoore.wordpress.com/2012/01/05/marginalized-students-and-alternative-learning/>.

evaluation practices already in existence that could be used in place of standardized testing for now.

One alternative form of evaluation is portfolio-based assessments. Portfolio-based assessments, rather than evaluating students solely on standardized and unit tests, “serves as a compilation of student work meant to show growth over time.”¹⁸⁵ Portfolio samplings could come from written assignments, artwork, class projects, and other types of work that demonstrate a student’s growth.¹⁸¹ These assessments evaluate students based on samplings throughout a student’s school year, thus emphasizing the developmental progress of the student’s education.¹⁸¹ While this assessment can be used to establish a grade or score each year, it can also serve as a method to keep track of students’ progress throughout their schooling.¹⁸¹ Portfolio-based assessments were designed to “equalize and individualize learning for all students, while also making learning and assessment relevant to the students’ lives.”¹⁸¹ In addition, portfolio-based assessments would help keep at-risk Native students in school due to their greater opportunity to demonstrate progress with this more holistic method.

In addition to portfolio-based assessments, schools and teachers could use capstone projects to evaluate students’ understanding of the content taught throughout a school term. A capstone project is a “multifaceted assignment that serves as a culminating academic and intellectual experience for students, typically during their final year of high

¹⁸⁵ Ashley Tipton, “Portfolio-Based Assessment,” Weebly, <http://ashleytipton.weebly.com/portfolio-based-assessment.html>.

school or middle school.”¹⁸⁶ This concept is similar to a college thesis in that it is a long-term project encompassing all that is learned throughout the students’ school year and schooling. Education Reform describes a capstone project:

Students may be asked to select a topic, profession, or social problem that interests them, conduct research on the subject, maintain a portfolio of findings or results, create a final product demonstrating their learning acquisition or conclusions (a paper, short film, or multimedia presentation, for example) and give an oral presentation on the project to a panel of teachers, experts, and community members who collectively evaluate its quality.¹⁹⁵

Capstone projects would enable teachers to individualize students’ curriculum, as students would be able to pick topics of study that interest them. These projects could be used in courses that help students prepare for careers and identify their academic interests, for example in literature and science courses. These evaluations would be based on a multifaceted methodology, rather than a culturally biased, high-stakes test. These evaluation methods would demonstrate to Native students that teachers want to emphasize strengths, encourage students to continue their education, and enable students to explore passions in ways students deem culturally appropriate and relevant.

5.2e Establish Overarching, Interdepartmental Federal Agency Devoted to the Education of Native Americans

Three Federal Departments, the Department of Education, Department of the Interior, and the Department of Justice, influence and affect the education of Native children. Unfortunately, this prevents any single agency from cohesively understanding the underlying problems that Native students and inmates (included due to the large number

¹⁸⁶ “Capstone Project,” Education Reform, last modified February 17, 2014 <http://edglossary.org/capstone-project/>.

of Natives who receive their GEDs in prisons and jail) face in working to get their high school diploma or certificate of high school equivalency. The lack of cohesion also makes it difficult to communicate best practices within all of the Departments and agencies. Consequently, there is duplication of some services, which is a very inefficient use of the already limited funding. With so many agencies and Departments in control of the education of Native Americans contributes to a lack of accountability on the part of the Federal Government to properly educate and provide services to Native children. The creation of an overarching, interdepartmental agency would minimize if not eliminate these issues. This agency should coordinate allocation of funding for all Native education to established programs in order to prevent overlap of initiatives, promote best practices, and improve accountability and transparency.

5.2f Native American Unity Toward Political Change

Native Americans have historically suffered at the hands of the Federal Government, and they continue to suffer from the use of a biased education system that primarily uses the value system of the dominant culture. While there are many ways in which policy solutions could help the public education system improve graduation rates of Natives, it is also important to empower Natives to help themselves. Many other minorities have established powerful lobbying firms that work to change policy in Washington, D.C. Examples of these organizations include the Jewish Anti-Defamation League, which works to ensure that the voices of the Jewish community are heard by lobbying the White House, and the Southern Poverty Law Center, a nonprofit civil rights organization that historically worked to eliminate white supremacy and has since

expanded its civil rights efforts to protect other populations that suffer from discrimination, by teaching tolerance.¹⁸⁷

A specific model for organizing Natives to improve the education system can be seen in the Natives' organized efforts to force the owner of the Washington Redskins National Football League team to change its name. For example, a large group of Natives in Texas and the surrounding states organized a rally outside of the Dallas Cowboys' stadium to protest the use of the term "Redskins" when the Cowboys played the Washington Redskins in October 2014.¹⁸⁸ In New York, a Native tribe launched a national media campaign and held a conference near Washington, D.C. where other National Football League owners joined Natives to demand the change.¹⁸⁹ United, the Native American population has effectively challenged the use of the term, calling it offensive and demeaning. These protests have led to the media, Congress, and the President calling on the team to change its name. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid "took to the Senate floor to say [the owner of the Redskins] should 'do what is morally right' and change the name."¹⁸⁵ In response to the efforts of Natives, President Barack Obama stated "'If I were the owner of the team and I knew that there was a name of my

¹⁸⁷ "Anti-Defamation League Home Page," Anti-Defamation League, <http://www.adl.org/>.

"Southern Poverty Law Center Home Page," Southern Poverty Law Center, <http://www.splcenter.org/>.

¹⁸⁸ "Native American Community Set to Protest Redskins Team Name Monday," *MyFoxdfw.com*, October 26, 2014, <http://www.myfoxdfw.com/story/27019442/native-american-community-set-to-protest-redskins-team-name-monday>.

¹⁸⁹ Theresa Vargas and Annys Shin, "President Obama says, 'I'd think about changing' name of Washington Redskins," *Washington Post*, October 5, 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/president-obama-says-id-think-about-changing-name-of-washington-redskins/2013/10/05/e170b914-2b70-11e3-8ade-a1f23cda135e_story.html.

team – even if it had a storied history – that was offending a sizeable group of people, I’d think about changing it.”¹⁸⁶

Using these models, Natives can significantly improve their lobbying power by modeling the successful strategies of the Jewish Anti-Defamation League and others by uniting and strengthening the National Indian Education Association.¹⁹⁰ This organization advocates for “educational excellence, opportunity, and equity for Native students,” and works to advance “comprehensive educational opportunities for American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians throughout the United States.”¹⁸⁸ Despite the establishment of this organization, many tribes still individually lobby Congress and the White House.

In order to strengthen and empower Native people, Native communities should rally behind the National Indian Education Association and unite to become a powerful voice that demands the improvement of Native education outcomes by offering policy recommendations that better meet the needs of Native students. In addition to working within the Association, a united Native population could organize demonstrations that ensure that their voices are heard. Demonstrations could be as simple as disseminating their graduation rates or publicizing current events such as a public high school’s hurtful attacks against Natives by threatening a second Trail of Tears over a high school sporting event. If the Native community unanimously supported the efforts of the National Indian Education Association and organized rallies and protests that increased awareness of the abysmal success rates of Natives’ education due to the failure of the public education

¹⁹⁰ “National Indian Education Association,” National Indian Education Association, <http://www.niea.org/>.

system, the media would likely pick up on the efforts and help the public join forces with Natives to demand change. It is likely that, similar to the results of the protests against the Redskins' name, Congress and the President would work to create policies that would better meet the needs of Natives in the public education system.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interviews

High school teacher #1, in person interview by Sierra Gibson, March 31, 2014, transcript.

Interviewer: I'm looking into various factors as to why Native students have the lowest high school graduation rates. I think people have done similar research but often overlook discussions with Native communities and, to me, Native input is the most important to finding solutions.

Interviewer: I have some general questions on demographics, could you tell me your impressions of the following:

Interviewer: Information about income of the families? Even impressions, such as "this is a working class school" would be helpful.

Respondent: This is a working class school.

Interviewer: On average, the highest degree of education the Native students' parents received:

Respondent: Assuming a lot don't have anything after high school diplomas.

Interviewer: Overall graduation rate at the high school? Is that different for the Native students? Has that rate increased or declined over the past 5 years? Do you know how this compares to the national averages?

Respondent: Lower than overall public high schools.

Interviewer: Do you work directly with Native students?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: What is your role in the program? How does this impact Native students?

Respondent: [Teacher], supervise the program itself, so the tutoring, helping out in the classrooms, doing the reading program, organizing use of the grant, helping students with iPads and technology, help with [collegiate] course.

Interviewer: What does the Department of Education require to receive the demonstration grants?

Respondent: Documentation – tutoring based; as long as scores and grades are improving and as well as retention rates, trying to get them to graduate and go on to college.

Interviewer: Is there statistical evidence to prove whether a program is improving the education of Native students?

Respondent: Look at event drop out rate.

Interviewer: Why do you think Native students have the lowest graduation rate among all races and ethnicities?

Respondent: 1. Academically, they do their work but they don't turn their assignments in.

Respondent: 2. Longer term, a lot of the students have a lot of things going on outside of school. Healthy relationships course – discovered that a huge part is family problems, deaths in the family. These students feel so connected to their families that education is put on the back burner and they need to help their families. If that means day care for their younger siblings, getting a job, they are going to do that. The pressure that society and their families are putting on them. A lot of them qualify for help with college financially but they don't want to leave because they don't want to leave their families.

Interviewer: Are there examples of racism that you have seen against this group? If so, where is that racism coming from?

Respondent: Public high school – much more private, conservative. This school, protects each other, few occasions of bullying, they all have the similar background.

Interviewer: Have you considered institutional racism? If so, in your words, what is institutional racism?

Respondent: No answer.

Interviewer: Institutional racism describes any kind of system of inequality based on race. It can occur in institutions such as public government bodies, private business corporations, and universities.

Interviewer: Can you think of an example of how institutional racism is affecting students at your school?

Respondent: On Columbus Day, students yelled out "We were here first." Sit "Indian" style in elementary school. [Native students] do take offense to that. Halloween when kids dress up with feathers in their head, it's really offensive.

Interviewer: What do you consider to be best practices for improving the graduation rates for Native students? What is most detrimental to Native students, in your opinion?

Respondent: Give students a reason to be here. Make it more worthwhile to get their education because at home they have so much other things to deal with so they feel like they're wasting time here. With the iPad program, they've really gotten – they take pride in it. In public schools there is more racism then here, but I feel like the students could get more out of it here. The students could get a little bit better education and better resources. The problems here are alcohol and drugs. Some of them are trying to find ways to go home – if I have weed and get caught with it, then I get to go home.

Interviewer: Is there anything you find important that I have not addressed in my questions?

Respondent: The students are so young, they start families young. It's hard because I want to just say just wait. There are plenty of couples, they don't have the resources where in public schools they could go get protection, they are fighting the urge. This will effect graduation later on, if they have kids they will drop out and they will go home and some don't have the support of families that will watch their kids.

Interviewer: Thank you so much for your time and thoughtful reflections.

High school teacher #2, in person interview by Sierra Gibson, March 31, 2014, transcript.

Interviewer: I'm looking into various factors as to why Native students have the lowest high school graduation rates. I think people have done similar research but often overlook discussions with Native communities and, to me, Native input is the most important to finding solutions.

Interviewer: Do you work directly with Native students?

Respondent: Yes, I work with two groups of students. Two blocks. Two periods each: students who fail [a specific class] and [another specific group of students].

Interviewer: Why do you think Native students have the lowest graduation rate among all races and ethnicities?

Respondent: One of the major reasons is how the generations first resisted colonialism, treated badly and lands taken away, then placed in reservations with little to no access to the same education as the "regular" population so that they don't have a formal education background, as we know it. A lack of access to formal education. Issues going on at the

home and different reservations. A lot of them have to leave home and go to boarding schools so that they don't repeat the same cycles as their families. If they stay they will get in trouble with alcohol, drugs, gangs. They don't want to go through that again. There are a lot of issues within the native community, society has placed them there with little access to every thing else.

Interviewer: Have you considered institutional racism? If so, in your words, what is institutional racism?

Respondent: Yes. The government has by putting them in reservations and separating them from their families, affirmative action was good but it causes it also pushes saying they are less than everybody else, not as smart as everybody else, not the same intellectual ability as everybody else. They have issues like alcoholism but b/c placed in a box separated from society's accesses. By putting them in the reservations it is like we don't have to take care of them. Tribes value sovereignty but it's the government washing their hands of the problems and blaming tribes for the problems they have.

Interviewer: Institutional racism describes any kind of system of inequality based on race. It can occur in institutions such as public government bodies, private business corporations, and universities. Do you know of any examples that look similar to this?

Respondent: Not off of the top of my head, but there certainly are examples.

Interviewer: What do you consider to be best practices for improving the graduation rates for Native students? What is most detrimental to Native students, in your opinion?

Respondent: I think it is challenging them. Not treating them like poor you, you need help. Not saying you have it tough but that is allowing them to fail from the same problems. Challenging them like everybody else. Being rigorous in the curriculum, being the same as everybody else, treating them equally. Public schools by allowing them to say they have it tough, if they make it feel like they have an out.

Interviewer: Is there anything you find important that I have not addressed in my questions?

Respondent: I believe you covered it all.

Interviewer: Thank you so much for your time and thoughtful reflections.

High school administrator #1, in person interview by Sierra Gibson, March 31, 2014, transcript.

Interviewer: I'm looking into various factors as to why Native students have the lowest high school graduation rates. I think people have done similar research but often overlook discussions with Native communities and, to me, Native input is the most important to finding solutions.

Interviewer: Why do you think Native students have the lowest graduation rate among all races and ethnicities?

Respondent: Where they live and the available resources. A lot of Natives live on reservations and they want to keep things going from what their families started. Life on the reservation is not the best. They don't have the financial resources for a good education.

Respondent: They do what they see, a lot of students get into drugs and drinking and they get caught up in other things besides focusing on education.

Interviewer: Are there examples of racism that you have seen against this group? If so, where is that racism coming from?

Respondent: No racist experiences in high school. People didn't really know I was Native, people didn't really ask what ethnicity. Friends would joke around, but I wouldn't say it would be anything against me, I was the only Native in my group of friends.

Respondent: In college, at [college name], the Native program there failed because Natives weren't getting along with Natives. If somebody isn't this much blood or if somebody hasn't lived on a reservation – fights breaking out because they didn't want "non-Natives" there.

Interviewer: Is there anything you find important that I have not addressed in my questions?

Respondent: It sounds like you are researching interesting ideas.

Interviewer: Thank you so much for your time and thoughtful reflections.

High school administrator #2, in person interview by Sierra Gibson, March 31, 2014, transcript.

Interviewer: I'm looking into various factors as to why Native students have the lowest high school graduation rates. I think people have done similar research but often overlook discussions with Native communities and, to me, Native input is the most important to finding solutions.

Interviewer: Why do you think Native students have the lowest graduation rate among all races and ethnicities?

Respondent: World of difference between public that are reservation based and those that are urban based. We here at Sherman have 89 tribes represented from Alaska to Florida, Rhode Island to local tribes. We're not really a public school since it is federally run. Don't fall under requirements of states, but federal. Students here basically come from schoolhouses, little house on the prairie where everybody was at the same school and several grade levels in the same class. Others right down the street that could go to La Sierra High School.

Respondent: When you look at the different areas, and you're looking at primarily reservation-based rural reservations, you don't have the resources that you would at a larger city. When you look at the urban, you may have the resources but our population isn't in the wealthy area so we're still falling under limited resources.

Respondent: One thing that I would state is most Native Americans will not make a declarative statement because I will not and cannot speak for Native Americans. I do not have permission and will not speak for my tribe, I will just make a generalization. That's important because I'm going to get differing opinions.

Respondent: Students of Native American decent come from a different situation, they basically when you look at it, they are dealing with multiple issues at the same time. A lot of it is, psycho-social issues, a lot of it is stuff that is put onto them, instead of something that they are doing on their own. You'll get individuals that live out in the middle of nowhere and don't have water in their homes. They have to fill out barrels twice a week to get water. No Internet. Limited resources. You might have situations where parents aren't supportive or parental involvement because both mom and dad are off working all day and evening and the kids are latchkey kids. They're lacking that parental guidance. A lot of it could just be that – my experiences growing up, I came from a poor family, I had to work since I was little. I know within my family out of 7, only 2 have gone on to college. It's a difficult trek.

Respondent: It's difficult because psycho-socially, you don't fit in. You don't fit into the – you're seen as Hispanic or Asian-Pacific American. I didn't really fit in. Tribal beliefs and food differentiated. With regards to reservation, didn't have a strong connection in the ability to go to a reservation and know everybody there, not totally involved there. You know who and what you are, but you don't fit in. Being poor added to the situation because now you have a high family involvement, you're expected to do certain things for the family, you're expected to – juggling the two worlds – but it's more than two worlds, it's a matter of you're juggling in every different environment you go into because you're not really of it. A lot of our urban students feel the same way. They don't come out and say I'm Native because then the assumption that the Federal Government dishes out money and a free education – which is pretty untrue. [A specific region of the country] is different than the majority of the country because we have so many prominent reservations that are economically stable. Out of the federally recognized tribes, there are 92 casino tribes, out of those, close to 80% of all of the money comes from around 10 of them. And those tribes are local. That's why [this area] is seen as "You're native, you must be getting a lot of money." Same thing with education, funds are available for the group just as any other minority, but for Natives it's primarily because we make up less than 0.4% of any college.

Respondent: The rational and reasoning behind this is – talk to [several names]. Between them all you will find that you have a lot of Natives that don't identify as Natives, so you're not getting an accurate rate of how many Native students actually make it to college. It's easier to be accepted to those groups, and a lot of times you don't want to be identified by the Federal Government. Children will identify as either race that they are.

Respondent: All of this comes in because most of our kids have a faint identity of who they are. They know they belong to a tribal organization, but don't have the means to support that because customs hadn't been passed down to them. You don't have the support/test prep for them because they're growing up in low socioeconomic communities. You have a lot of historical trauma, you have in almost all tribes, a lot of historical trauma. That's what makes tribal populations different than any other minority group. Because that trauma is still being experienced today. You can't be identified as who you are just because the Federal Government hasn't recognized you, you can't do the customs you know of because you can't be recognized or don't have the location to do it. You know who you are but you're not allowed to say it.

Respondent: My grandmother experienced trauma, had to be sent to a boarding school type of issues. She was always influencing him, his kids, his parents. That influence of this is what we experienced. When you look at it, civil rights, equal rights, came to the majority of US citizens in the '60s, it started to come to tribal America in the late '70s.

Respondent: Native American Bill of Rights instituted for everybody in the late '70s. Freedom of everything. You have laws that inhibit the power even on reservation land. Where you have the major crimes act, which basically took a lot of the power away from tribes and put it in the fed. You can see last year that when president signed VAWA, tribes pushed for it. Non-Native population doing that to Native people but since it happened on tribal land, the legality of it fell out of the tribal jurisdiction and into the Federal Governments. Tribe has no authority over the individual.

Respondent: PL280 is where 1954 Federal Government is terminating tribe and it was to reduce the Nation-to-Nation correspondence, it basically brought in the state so now you dealt with the state. CA is a PL280 state so this means that after 1954, health insurance did not come from Indian health service, it came by way of the state. It went also from legal – it did not take away from the tribes legal rights, it just caused more roadblocks. You lost a lot of power outside in states that didn't have PL280 because there was no legal jurisdiction, it all fell to Department of Justice.

Respondent: Kids are coming in facing this trauma and these issues are basically weighing heavy on our kids. So when you look at it, it's like in any other minority population, when you have a lot of problems, the kids are going to feel it.

Respondent: Water rights. Small town where the town members know the water table is under reservation land. Tribal members who go to school, local public school, experience different conditions. An example is that a math teacher was giving bad grades to Native kids despite them getting the right answers. Took it to the principle, and if he wasn't there it would've gone to him failing out. Now this kid has to deal with the idea that he isn't smart enough, but he's getting it right, but he's being told, you're wrong you're a failure, you're getting an F. And not knowing anymore what's right and wrong.

Respondent: I've been to other areas where kids are so poor that they don't eat until they get to the tribal location after school. Or they go to school because they can eat with a meal program. And if a child doesn't eat, are they going to have the energy to really learn.

Respondent: Most of our kids are being affected by their environment. You have a lot of tribal support, it's doing whatever it can for the kids. You'll get a lot of the local tribes trying to help out the urban facilities – kids not even from their tribes. It's just that they are Native. A lot of the Natives don't get that help because they don't know of it, it's difficult to access, or we didn't have time because we had to work. Not every kid can handle juggling all of this. So then you have those that go against the system. There isn't that support.

Respondent: When you put that all together, if you want to look at why our kids aren't graduating, it starts at the elementary level. And then it goes from there. Because they don't have all of the resources to help them get through it. To help them learn the foundational material. If they don't have that foundation of food and family support, they are going to slip right through. Native Americans are seen more, not because there are fewer of us, but because there are fewer identified of us. You'll have lots that are Native but the Federal Government doesn't recognize them. What does it mean to be identified? Tribes do that, they'll say it can be through lineage, or it can be through blood quantum. Tribes did it because in order to be federally recognized, they had to have a system that mirrored the dominant society. The US wouldn't recognize a tribe unless it had a system that looked like theirs. You had to have a leader, a "chairman or chief," and then you have a board (like a Senate) and usually the tribal board – it's the community voting. A lot of it started back in the early 1800s.

Respondent: Kasten & Brayboy reading – style of learning and culture extremely different. Some kids get everything through stories and learn everything through the stories, they know how to dissect the stories so that it isn't just talk – it's basically that this story will tell me everything. Everything for most cultures was passed down through stories. In traditional Western society, expectations are different. Disconnect affects students psycho socially, I don't really belong anywhere, I am not important.

Respondent: To nail down why our kids aren't graduating, it's all of these other issues affecting the student when he goes in to learn. There's a strong psycho-social, correlation to not having the academic support, or sufficient academic support, or not knowing the system. Most minority populations don't have a generation that has gone to college yet, something as simple as the FAFSA is a huge obstacle for kids. It's layer upon layer, there is no one cause. But I would say that the strongest is psycho-social.

Respondent: We have students that come that are behind in reading, English, math, writing, sciences, and it goes all the way back to elementary school and middle school levels.

Respondent: Intertribal educational collaborative. It's to educate the parents and the students as to the availability of higher education. The goal is help Native students get to college.

Respondent: Psycho social doesn't mean behavioral health issues, I am saying It's the expectations of what is okay and what isn't okay. When you look at psycho social, simple things like having long hair. The cultural expectations are different. And that's where a lot of times with the different minority populations may be similar. For example, Natives

may be closely related to another ethnic group – by how they respect their elders. Or the expectations they have for the family.

Interviewer: Is there anything you find important that I have not addressed in my questions?

Respondent: A lot of different perspectives attributed to Europe pre-war. You have in America over 568 federally recognized tribes, but then there is probably 5 times that that haven't been recognized. You have so many different countries, close geographically but they don't know each other. They all have their own different opinions. Differences even within reservation system.

Interviewer: Is there anything you find important that I have not addressed in my questions?

Respondent: You are doing important research, think carefully.

Interviewer: Thank you so much for your time and thoughtful reflections.

College administrator, in person interview by Sierra Gibson, April 11, 2014, transcript.

Interviewer: I'm looking into various factors as to why Native students have the lowest high school graduation rates. I think people have done similar research but often overlook discussions with Native communities and, to me, Native input is the most important to finding solutions.

Interviewer: Why do you think Native students have the lowest graduation rate among all races and ethnicities?

Respondent: I think it's the trauma. Unlike other groups in the United States, American Indian education is a bit unique because a lot of these other groups didn't have the boarding schools that forced assimilation. A lot of the times kids parents I work with now are products of the boarding schools. Now recruiting kids to come to these colleges, they don't trust me, when I was sent away X, Y, and Z happened to me. On the side of parents and tribal schools there is a deep seeded hesitation.

Respondent: I had 10 students coming from the Momo organization and at the last minute parents cancelled the program because they didn't have a relationship with me, it took a lot of building personal relationships with them. After these were built, I got like 12 students.

Respondent: Again, Native American students, keeping them in high school is difficult. A lack of understanding of our current schools and institutions that our kids fall under.

We work with Sherman Indian High School and sometimes the school is used as a dumping ground because reservation life is so bad that they would rather send them out of the reservation.

Respondent: At [a local high school] itself, disengaged teachers, just burnt out. You need dynamic teachers, the top of the top. But unfortunately these schools aren't getting them. That being said, there's a real strong push from a lot of tribal communities, gaming tribes, to push their kids to finish high school and to go on to college and beyond. This is the past 5 years, in some cases these casino tribes get their whole education paid for. But they're not coming to these schools. It's all about relationship building, meeting students, and building those relationships with the schools, students and parents.

Respondent: There is definitely a change going on, more the cultural is being injected into the school. In particular [specific high school]. They have a tribal school that is amazing, in the morning before everybody starts school they have a ceremony where everybody circles up and the president does the opening ceremony. That is important because it is giving them the cultural needs.

Respondent: To keep them in school, we support the academic but also the cultural. Tradition for life, education for the future. Introduce the tribal kids to elders and resources at colleges, when things get tough they won't fall into drugs, they will fall into tradition.

Interviewer: Have you considered institutional racism? If so, in your words, what is institutional racism?

Respondent: Definitely. One of the models of our summer program is to inspire students to finish high school and then go off to college. Even in this school that is meant for Native Americans, it's there. That's what you have to work with. How do you do that in a good way. Building that relationship, knowing why should we trust you.

Interviewer: What is most detrimental to Native students, in your opinion?

Respondent: Lack of positive role models in Indian Country or in media. In Indian Country, if you're connected, you know about people. Unless you're involved, you really do not know about them. The lack of visibility for positive role models. Just the possibilities, being sovereign under the United States has been detrimental because they became dependent for food, housing, education. Tribes now have key positions held by non-Natives. Because they don't have the expertise or education or the necessary skills to run the tribal government. We're trying to push instilling the sense of responsibility and duty into these students, to go back and serve in their tribal communities and government, it's not far reaching, it's possible. Hence why a lot of these gaming tribes, money is not a

concern, but you have to hear about it. Making the colleges have the bridge, the cultural bridge. A lot of tribes want their kids to go into tribal governments or cultural revitalization like museum stuff.

Interviewer: Is there anything you find important that I have not addressed in my questions?

Respondent: I think we covered the important areas, but keep researching this because it is a very complicated and confusing topic.

Interviewer: Thank you so much for your time and thoughtful reflections.

Federal Government Agent #1, interview, over the phone, by Sierra Gibson, September 26, 2014, transcript.

Interviewer: This interview will remain anonymous, you will be noted as a government agent in my thesis and no revealing qualities about yourself will be mentioned. I thank you for your time in helping me with this project, and I appreciate your concern with the issue at hand. My research question is: Why do Native American students have the lowest on-time high school graduation rate? Through this interview, I hope to gain insight as to the theories at play that cause the low graduation rate of 51.0 percent in 2013.

Interviewer: Why do you think Natives have the lowest high school graduation rate?

Respondents: Multiple facets contribute to that. The societies that the students are born into, by definition, are unique and different in many ways. Points to the emphasis on collective responsibility to family, critical aspect of that, the individual aspirations in the dominant cultures are not the important factors in the Native communities. Not only immediate family, but extended family unit within tribal communities, that relationship is emphasized and when you go into public school systems, public school curriculum and standards force Natives to look at themselves as individuals, loses their connections to the greater good and the relevance to the tribal community are not immediately seen, respected or apart of the teaching or learning. That is true throughout the system so that is very limiting.

Respondent: Lack of cultural responsive curriculum, resources that go along with that, strategies, product of the education within those communities. Students have opportunities to engage in different societal roles than they want based on cultural ties, whether that be social, economic, or so on, affecting students. Students are not adequately prepared for social mobilization, the relevancy of higher education.

Respondent: Socioeconomic issues – quality education is lacking in lower-income areas, the curriculum is off, standards and curriculum are lacking. Low expectations for Native students, which traps Native students because they don't want to be in an environment where nobody believes in them. There is a continuous sense of hopelessness. Upward mobility is just not there for them.

Interviewer: Do you think that institutional racism plays a role in preventing Natives from achieving higher rates of graduation? Examples of institutional racism would be: overlooking data because the race is too small, establishing a system of accountability based on standardized testing that has proven to be detrimental to non-White students, using a culturally insensitive curriculum, and so on.

Respondent: I think the term “racism” doesn't sit too well with me, particularly because the intent behind an educational system is to control how students are socialized, control what opportunities contribute to system of economics and governance – all of that work is, by design, full of bias. Unilateral system behaves in a predictable manner. Once you set up the system like that, there is bias and it treats people as, by treating people in this bias way, that is a condition that withholds opportunity and access to others – that is where racism comes in. A part of me says yeah even the design could be racist. It's a human dilemma that we are dealing with. We need to emphasize that this is not only racist but humanistic in many ways where we prioritize ourselves above others. Institutional racism exists, but I think that all systems want to achieve certain goals and want to be flexible to the needs of the diverse students, in the scope of education, to me, looking at the goals. We want to understand the world and have that part of the conversation and have that be apart of our own experiences as well. Institutional racism tries to compartmentalize those things into predetermined categories. Yes I think it contributes, but the degree: I don't know – at what point is it institutional bias and therefore personal if not pathological bias that it happens without knowing? I think that's a huge issue.

Respondent: What we emphasize in the ways of teaching and learning and how we go about teaching and learning and this can be racist, analyzing history and milestones enables us to see this. Using one race's language, history, discipline approach to science, governance, economics – no other view point as to how to analyze the world. That is racist.

Interviewer: Could you briefly describe how the education system has historically treated Native children?

Respondent: I think it has treated them as a historically humanistic evolution, as the inferior race. You talk about the Neanderthals, and that path to civilization, that Western

civilization has approached. All people of color have been less “civilized,” “modern,” and less defined as *Homo sapiens*. The practices to educate and “civilize” was to assimilate them through education as the most cost effective way to “bring those societies up to speed” – to have them collectively and individually be apart of society. I think that has been the approach to education, they’ve operated in systematic ways to really think that these individuals and societies cannot work for themselves, so they structured everything for them and forced upon and imposed systems on them. The most grotesque degree. We’ve been fighting for self-determination and the sovereignty that we have come to expect and being able to choose our own ways of knowing and being.

Interviewer: How do you think this history has affected children’s attitudes toward education today? Their parents and families?

Respondent: I think that education is not a vehicle of opportunity for them. They have more contract and feedback – that telling them that they should approach in the most positive way because not only is it that people who they know and love leaving but they see that it is not leading to better jobs, not helping to preserve who they are and what their communities represent. This makes school an imposed entity on them, non-Indian teaching. The idea of preserving tribal history and culture that they experience at home is lost at the public education system. It makes them feel trapped and it leads to compulsory attendance rather than something that they aspire to.

Respondent: They live in violence, alcohol, substance abuse, lack of opportunity, so they have these aspirational goals to improve the community: We are all one. To have all of this happen and then go to schools where they are portrayed as stupid and told that it is their only way out yet nobody at the school helps them out, nobody says this is a way to make this better. Greater influence is how it will rich Native students, helping them experience the changes that they can make with an education, with that degree of influence.

Interviewer: Is there anything you find important that I have not addressed in my questions?

Respondent: The influences that affect the low American Indian graduation rate are complex, there is no one answer.

Interviewer: Thank you so much for your time and thoughtful reflections.

Federal Government Agent #2, interview, via email, by Sierra Gibson, September 28, 2014, transcript.

Interviewer: This interview will remain anonymous, you will be noted as a government agent in my thesis and no revealing qualities about yourself will be mentioned. I thank you for your time in helping me with this project, and I appreciate your concern with the issue at hand. My research question is: Why do Native American students have the lowest on-time high school graduation rate? Through this interview, I hope to gain insight as to the theories at play that cause the low graduation rate of 51.0 percent in 2013.

Interviewer: Why do you think Natives have the lowest high school graduation rate?

Respondent: The educational system has not evolved with today's society. Students have a hard time completing XX number of credits in 4 years due to the many factors that are happening in their lives (work/pregnancy/poverty). In this day and age, saying that the only way kids can graduate is when they attend 4 years with X number of credits; it doesn't work with this highly mobile population. I might even compare military kids and graduation rates with American Indian kids.

Interviewer: Do you think that institutional racism plays a role in preventing Natives from achieving higher rates of graduation? Examples of institutional racism would be: overlooking data because the race is too small, establishing a system of accountability based on standardized testing that has proven to be detrimental to non-White students, using a culturally insensitive curriculum, and so on.

Respondent: If institutional racism has to do with how kids identify themselves on standardized tests, then yes, there is bias.

Interviewer: How would you define institutional racism?

Respondent: Identifying yourself as multi-racial or something else, means American Indian data is skewed.

Interviewer: Can you think of examples of institutional racism?

No response

Interviewer: How do you think this history has affected children's attitudes toward education today? Their parents and families?

Respondent: The history of educating American Indian children is bleak and sad, however, those that it directly affected would depend on the region of that tribe.

Interviewer: Did this eternally break the trust between the public education system and Natives?

Respondent: No, I just think education is irrelevant to those who have a hard time finding food and shelter. It needs to be relevant to the lives that it affects.

Interviewer: What policy recommendations do you think would improve the education system to better meet the needs of Native children?

Respondent: Alternative educational settings with many different ways to graduate (if that is the goal). Why not figure out what will work with the population and then build the education system around it.

Interviewer: Is there anything you find important that I have not addressed in my questions?

No response.

Interviewer: Thank you so much for your time and thoughtful reflections.

Appendix B: Vocabulary

In this paper, the terms Native American and Native will be used to refer to the indigenous populations of the continental United States and Alaska. This paper specifically chose not to use the term “American Indian” or “Indian” as they further the racism towards Natives that followed the colonization of the Americas with the arrival of Christopher Columbus.