

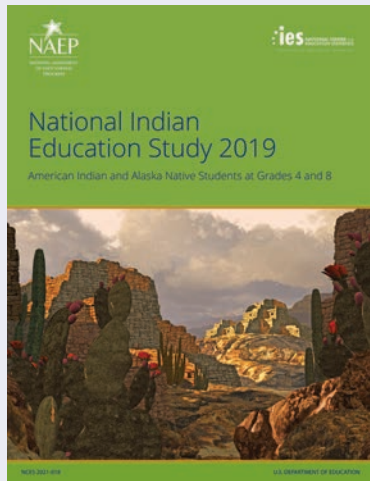
# National Indian Education Study 2019

## Setting the Context

written by  
members of the Technical Review Panel  
*for*  
The National Indian Education Study

Statement to accompany the release of  
*National Indian Education Study 2019*





The National Indian Education Study (NIES) is designed to describe the condition of education for American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) students in the United States. The study provides educators, policymakers, and the public with information about the academic performance in mathematics and reading of American Indian/Alaska Native fourth- and eighth-graders as well as their exposure to Native American cultures and languages.

The study is sponsored by the Office of Indian Education (OIE) and conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) for the U.S. Department of Education. NIES is authorized under Executive Order 13592, Improving American Indian and Alaska Native Educational Opportunities and Strengthening Tribal Colleges and Universities, which was issued in 2011 to improve education efforts for American Indian/Alaska Native students nationwide.

Conducted in 2005, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2015, and 2019, NIES provides data on a nationally representative sample of American Indian/Alaska Native students in public, private, Department of Defense, and Bureau of Indian Education funded schools. An additional aspect of the study is conducted through surveys to explore the educational experiences of fourth- and eighth-grade American Indian/Alaska Native students based on responses to the NIES student, teacher, and school questionnaires. The surveys focus on the integration of Native languages and cultures into school and classroom activities.

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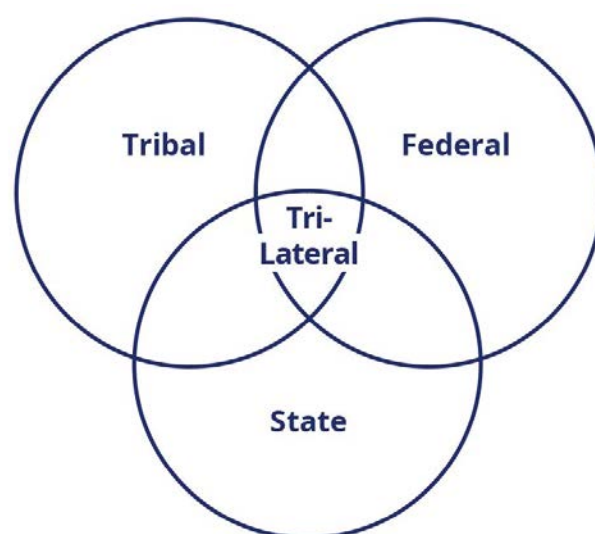
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As members of the Technical Review Panel (TRP), we are honored to take an active role in the design, implementation, and analysis of data for the National Indian Education Study (NIES). In taking on this responsibility, we affirm the unique relationship between federal and state governments and tribes, a relationship based in large part upon tribes' unique status as sovereign nations. At the same time, we recognize the federal government's legal and political obligation to provide for the health, education, and welfare of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) peoples. AI/AN students are unique in that they are the only student group, other than students with disabilities and students attending Department of Defense schools, for whom the federal government has a legal obligation to provide educational supports and services. Based on treaty obligations and constitutional authority, the federal trust responsibility for the education of AI/AN students extends to those attending Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) and tribal schools, as well as public schools across the nation.

Reinhardt and Maday (2006) characterize the relationships between tribes, the federal government, and states as an area of shared tri-lateral responsibility. They explain that tribes retain the right to educate their citizens in whatever manner they choose, as well as to educate others about their tribes and tribal citizens. According to Reinhardt (2015), nearly 150 treaties between tribes and the United States contain educational provisions. There are also a range of laws at tribal, federal, and state levels that address education and require all three levels of government to work together for the successful implementation of these laws.

In addition to the federal trust responsibility for Indian education, it is important to note that the current federal education law, known as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), requires state education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) to consult with tribes. SEA and LEA representatives operate under both federal and state laws, and as such must comply with treaty provisions and federal legislation regarding tribes and their citizens. It is also important to note that although the ESSA requires SEA and LEA representatives to consult with tribes, it does not specifically include a role for federal agency representatives in that process, although there are other mechanisms, such as the 2004 *Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies*, regarding "Government-to-Government Relationship with Tribal Governments," that do require such consultation on a more general level (The American Presidency Project, nd).

As the Technical Review Panel for this groundbreaking study, we expect the federal trust responsibility for Indian education to be upheld. We also recognize and respect the role of Indigenous languages and cultures in creating and sustaining nurturing learning environments. As such, we feel strongly that educators, researchers, tribal community members, and policymakers should use data from this study to explore and formally document the impact of culturally relevant and sustaining teaching and learning practices in schools on AI/AN student academic outcomes. As educators, researchers, and community members who are deeply knowledgeable about education, and more specifically, the education of AI/AN youth, we know firsthand that positive academic outcomes can be evidenced when AI/AN youth have access to learning environments that recognize, elevate, and





honor their linguistic, cultural/tribal, and academic diversity. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of published research on this topic. This study provides a unique and much-needed opportunity to explore these relationships. As such, the TRP recommends the following:

- (1) data be collected in such a way that enables the identification, development, and implementation of culturally relevant and responsive educational practices and services for AI/AN youth; and
- (2) data be reported in such a way as to not suggest causal inferences.

The TRP also recognizes the significance of collecting and reporting data in ways that acknowledge and honor the cultural and linguistic “funds of knowledge” that AI/AN students and their families bring to the educational arena (e.g., Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). It is equally important to acknowledge that results from the NIES do not provide sufficient data to identify, develop, or implement culturally relevant and responsive educational practices for AI/AN youth. These limitations are directly related to the design of the study, which is nonexperimental and cross-sectional. As such, NIES provides a snapshot, rather than a more detailed picture, of the state of mathematics and reading achievement and of AI/AN youths’ exposure to Native languages and cultures within schools.

The results of the NIES, as summarized in subsequent reports, may lead readers to conclude that there are positive or negative relationships between certain sets of data that were collected from educators and students. However, we encourage readers not to jump to such conclusions, but rather to use these data as a starting point to further investigate potential relationships, and to discuss such findings with community stakeholders who can provide important perspectives and considerations. For instance, this report shares the results of data related to teachers who integrated AI/AN culture or history into their instruction. However, this study is not designed to explain how they did so, nor is this study able to evaluate the quality of teaching methods or instructional materials. Absent such contextual information, readers are urged to use caution when interpreting the results of this study.

The TRP also acknowledges that there are more than 600 state and federally recognized tribes, and that approximately 200 Native languages are still spoken to varying degrees, across the United States. Given such diversity of cultures and languages represented among this nation’s AI/AN peoples, readers should interpret the results of this study with a further degree of caution. In addition to linguistic and cultural diversity, it is important to acknowledge the wide range of types and quality of schools AI/AN students attend (e.g., public, BIE operated and funded, tribal, private, Department of Defense), as well as their geographic location. These data must also be interpreted in light of the sociopolitical relationships between tribes, states, and the federal government, considering the lingering effects of an educational system that for years aimed to acculturate and assimilate Native youth rather than embrace the tribal, communal, and individual assets and strengths these youth possess. Regardless of how well Native students perform on academic assessments such as those reported on in this study, we must remember that standardized tests have historically been designed and administered in the English language, a language that was imposed upon Native peoples as part of this nation’s attempts to acculturate and assimilate them. As a result, such tests tend to measure students’ ability to perform in English rather than their ability to perform in a bicultural manner or maintain Native cultures and languages.

Ensuring that AI/AN youth are able to flourish both academically and culturally is critically important to tribes and tribal communities. The TRP is especially interested in findings from the NIES that speak to the ways in which Native languages and cultures potentially help to promote resiliency and future aspiration among Native youth. As a result, we were struck by findings such as the following: when grade 4 students were asked about how much they know about their American Indian tribe or Alaska Native group, although most reported having at least “a little” knowledge, 17 percent reported knowing “nothing.” From a tribal education lens, such findings are quite alarming as this suggests schools may not be doing enough to infuse Native languages and cultures into the teaching and learning process. As Cajete (1994) reminds us, “education is for life’s sake,” and the healthy future of our tribes dwells within our children. For Native students to achieve their full potential, educational systems and practices must work diligently to feed their bodies, nurture their spirits, and grow their minds.

One of the greatest challenges is ensuring that Native students are able to perform well academically while maintaining their Native cultures and languages. Native peoples’ ability to exist and persist in a society that often fails to honor and respect their Native languages and cultures is an important reminder of Native peoples’ resilient nature in the face of seemingly overwhelming circumstances. The adoption and use of culturally relevant teaching and learning practices are critical to nurturing and maintaining that resiliency (see for example, Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Demmert & Towner, 2003). It is in this spirit that we share this report with individuals, communities, and organizations across this nation.

As we concluded from previous administrations of the NIES, we are hopeful that findings from the NIES will help create and sustain more positive academic and social outcomes for AI/AN students. However, we also acknowledge that there is much work to be done to foster stronger and more supportive relationships among tribal, federal, and state governments as they work to honor their trilateral responsibility for the education of AI/AN youth. We believe that stronger consultation and meaningful relationships between governments can and should exist by incorporating the types of data referenced in this report—data that help to shed light on the educational conditions and subsequent academic achievement of AI/AN students.

In overseeing this study, the members of the TRP are committed to influencing positive change for AI/AN students, their peers, and the schools and staff who serve them. We honor and thank all those who join us in this work. As we envision the future of the National Indian Education Study, we urge the United States Department of Education’s Office of Indian Education (OIE), the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), and Educational Testing Service (ETS)—partners in this research endeavor—to continue to listen and be responsive to the concerns and recommendations of tribes and tribal citizens. They have a legal and moral right to culturally affirming and sustaining education that honors the languages, cultures, and ways of knowing and doing that are so critical to their continued existence. As stated in the Executive Order 13592 on American Indian and Alaska Native Education, “Federal agencies must help improve educational opportunities provided to all AI/AN students, including students attending public schools in cities and in rural areas, students attending schools operated and funded by the Department of the Interior’s Bureau of Indian Education (BIE). This is an urgent need. Recent studies show that AI/AN students are dropping out of school at an alarming rate, that our Nation has made little or no progress in closing the achievement gap between AI/AN students and their non-AI/AN student counterparts, and that many Native languages are on the verge of extinction.” As such, the federal government, and its actors, must take action to address and remediate these issues and to ensure that American Indian and Alaska Native children are provided the education they deserve and are legally bound to receive.

## Members of the Technical Review Panel

The Technical Review Panel for the National Indian Education Study is made up of individuals with expertise in matters related to the education of American Indian and Alaska Native students. Members oversee the development of the NIES questionnaires, and guide the planning, drafting, and revision of NIES publications with their ongoing expert consultation.

**Mandy Smoker Broadbuss** – Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux – is a practice expert in Indian Education at Education Northwest. She previously served as the Director of Indian Education for the state of Montana for almost 10 years and has also served at the tribal college and school district levels. Her work has been centered in equity and inclusivity, with emphasis on tribal/community/family/student engagement and cultural responsiveness. She received the 2015 National Indian Educator of the Year award by the National Indian Education Association, as well as an appointment by President Obama to the National Advisory Council on Indian Education.

**Doreen E. Brown** – Aniak Tribe – Yup'ik – has worked in Title VI Indian Education in Alaska for 30 years in a variety of roles: teacher, mentor, and executive director of Title VI Indian Education. Ms. Brown is a member of the National Advisory Council on Indian Education and is currently the Senior Director for Title VI Indian Education and Migrant Education programs for the Anchorage School District.

**WaziHanska, aka Robert Cook**, is an enrolled citizen of the Oglala Lakota Nation, Pine Ridge Reservation South Dakota. A nationally recognized educator and administrator in Native Education, WaziHanska is the National Senior Managing Director of the Native Alliance at Teach for America.

**Dr. Steven Andrew Culpepper** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Statistics at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. His research interests include large-scale assessments, Bayesian statistical methods, and psychometrics. Dr. Culpepper serves as an elected member of the Board of Trustees of the Psychometric Society, Associate Editor for *Psychometrika*, and the Editor of the *Journal of Educational and Behavioral Statistics*.

**Dr. Susan C. Faircloth, Chair** – Coharie Tribe – is a Professor and the Director of Colorado State University's School of Education. Dr. Faircloth's research interests include Indigenous education, the education of culturally and linguistically diverse students with special educational needs, and the moral and ethical dimensions of school leadership. She has published widely in such journals as *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *Harvard Educational Review*, *The Journal of Special Education Leadership*, *International Studies in Educational Administration*, *Values and Ethics in Educational Administration*, *Tribal College Journal of American Indian Higher Education*, *Rural Special Education Quarterly*, and *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*.

**Dr. Chris Gordon** – Anishinaabe – is the Anishinaabe Language/Culture Coordinator and Instructor at the K-8 Joseph K. Lumsden Bahweting P.S.A., Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan. Dr. Gordon is a second language learner of Anishinaabemowin with over 20 years of teaching language and culture to all grades K-8 during that time.

**Dr. Jameson D. Lopez** is a member of the Quechan Tribe from Fort Yuma, California. Dr. Lopez is a U.S. Army veteran and tenure track professor in higher education at the University of Arizona. Dr. Lopez and his family currently reside in Tucson where he researches to support tribal nation building that will advance the capacity of tribal nations to collect and analyze data. He hopes

that his effort to collect data with tribes will inform tribal decisions and policies that create new opportunities for educational advances for Native people.

**Jeremy MacDonald** – Chippewa-Cree/Blackfeet – is from the Rocky Boy Reservation in Montana. Mr. MacDonald is the Superintendent at Box Elder Schools, his alma mater. His educational background includes bachelor's degrees in Elementary Education and Native American Studies from the University of Montana, a master's degree from Arizona State in Curriculum and Instruction as well as principal and superintendent internships from the University of Montana. He has been an educator for 16 years, working to assist young minds in developing their potential.

**Dr. Hollie J. Mackey** is an enrolled member of the Northern Cheyenne Nation and an Associate Professor of educational leadership at North Dakota State University. Her scholarship empirically examines structural inequity of Indigenous and other marginalized populations in educational leadership and public policy through multiple critical frameworks and methodologies. As an experienced policy consultant, public speaker, program evaluator, and community educator, she seeks to bridge theory and practice as a means of addressing complex social issues from an interdisciplinary perspective. She serves as the Director of the Consortium for the Study of Leadership and Ethics in Education and Associate Co-Director for the Barbara L. Jackson Scholars Network at the University Council for Educational Administration.

**Jeanette Muskett-Miller** – Navajo (Diné) – is a teacher of 13 years on the Navajo Reservation. Currently teaching secondary mathematics and business in the Central Consolidated School District in the northwest corner of New Mexico, Ms. Muskett-Miller also coaches sports and supports extracurricular activities for her students.

**Debora Norris** – Navajo (Diné) – is a third-generation Arizona educator. She is a certified Native American Language teacher and school administrator from rural Northern and Southern Arizona. She has worked with school districts and education communities on school capital finance and education programs for two decades. Ms. Norris is a former State Legislator who served on the Arizona House of Representatives Education Committee for four years, having passed education and school capital finance laws impacting learning environments for hundreds of Arizona schools. She also served as the Arizona Indian Education Director for over a decade at the Arizona Department of Education. Her current role is tribal liaison for the Arizona School Facilities Board, where she is supporting effective learning through Innovative Learning Environments throughout the state.

**Sedelta Oosahwee** – Three Affiliated/Cherokee – currently serves as a Senior Program/Policy Analyst/Specialist (American Indian/Alaska Native Liaison) with the National Education Association (NEA). In this role, she serves as a team lead on racial justice in education, manages national partnerships, and advises on American Indian and Alaska Native issues. Prior to NEA, Ms. Oosahwee served in the Obama Administration as a Senior Advisor in the Office of the Secretary at the United States Department of Agriculture and as Associate Director of the White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education at the United States Department of Education.

**Dr. Martin J. Reinhardt** is an Anishinaabe Ojibway citizen of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians from Michigan. He is a tenured professor of Native American Studies at Northern Michigan University, and serves as the president of the Michigan Indian Education Council. His current research focuses on revitalizing relationships between humans and Indigenous plants and animals of the Great Lakes Region.

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