

Update on the American Indian Student Achievement Network

Background

According to DPI's Biennial Report (2009), American Indian students comprise approximately 1.5 percent of public school enrollment in Wisconsin. Nearly 60% of American Indian enrollment is concentrated in 25 school districts with the largest populations of American Indian students. With a couple of exceptions (Milwaukee & Superior), these districts serve tribal communities located on reservations and trust lands.

DPI also reports that during the 2007-2008 school year, 22.6 percent of American Indian students in Wisconsin were identified as having a disability, compared to 14.2 percent of the population as a whole. During the period 2007-2009, 14 school districts were identified as having disproportionate representation of American Indian students in special education and/or a specific disability category (ibid).

The average high school graduation rate for American Indians in the U.S. is 46.6 % compared to nearly 70% of the white population (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010). In Wisconsin, while the high graduation rate for American Indians exceeds the national average, the dropout rate for American Indians is four times that of Whites (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010).

According to Faircloth & Tippeconnic (2010), a lack of student engagement is a major factor attributing to the American Indian dropout crisis. They describe some school level factors associated with dropping out as large schools, a perceived lack of empathy among teachers, passive teaching methods, inappropriate testing, and lack of parent involvement. American Indian students cited feeling "pushed out" of schools, and the poor quality of student-teacher relationships among other factors.

Kantowitz (2011) summarized the report's recommendations as follows: "...Educators and policymakers [should] review and revise school policies and avoid practices that exclude, demean, embarrass, harass or alienate Native students. They also recommend making schools physically, mentally and emotionally safe by working to end racism, demonstrate care and concern for all students, actively involve parents and families in schools, provide opportunities for students to be immersed in their Native language and culture, and prepare educators to work with American Indian and Alaska Native students."

The DPI Biennial Report notes very few American Indians working as teachers or administrators in Wisconsin public schools; during the period 2007-2009 there were about 200 FTE American Indians working as licensed staff, and 7.88 FTE working as licensed administrators (2009). American Indian teachers and non-instructional staff in Wisconsin often report frustration, a feeling of marginalization and a perceived lack of understanding and support from the local district administration (American Indian Student Achievement Network Conference, 2010).

The American Indian Student Achievement Network

CREATE Wisconsin provides professional development and network opportunities to instructional and non-instructional support staff who work primarily with American Indian students in grades K-12, as well as tribal language educators who work in schools and communities throughout the state. These services are provided through the CREATE initiative known as the American Indian Student Achievement Network.

The Network is comprised of two groups who receive training and professional development: 1) instructional and non-instructional support staff who work primarily with Native American students in grades K-12; and 2) tribal language educators who work both in schools and communities throughout Wisconsin to maintain and revitalize tribal languages. Andrew Gokee (Red Cliff Ojibwe) is the project coordinator for the Network and works directly with tribal language educators.

Don Rosin (Bad River Ojibwe) is the designated Tribal Ambassador for the Network. Don contacts and/or meets regularly with home school coordinators, tribal councils, education committees, and parent groups from various tribal communities in the state to identify local issues and to promote participation in the Network.

Wisconsin Tribal Language Consortium

In March 2010, tribal language educators meeting in Stevens Point voiced a strong desire to form an organization to continue to support each others' efforts and to advocate for support of tribal language maintenance and revitalization throughout the state. As a direct follow-up, the newly formed *Wisconsin Tribal Language Consortium* met in Stevens Point to discuss organizational development and begin a preliminary needs analysis for the Consortium.

Recently, an online survey has been developed and is currently being distributed to tribal language educators and tribal language program staff. The data collected will be summarized, analyzed and compiled in a report to be presented to Consortium members at the upcoming WI Indian Education Association's annual conference.

Wisconsin Indian Education Association Conference

This year, the American Indian Student Achievement Network is an active planning partner and co-sponsor of the upcoming Wisconsin Indian Education Association annual conference scheduled for April 28, 29 & 30, 2011 in Keshena, WI. The theme of this year's conference is "*Literacy: Learning Today for Tomorrow's Leaders*".

Keynote presenters include Ernie Stevens, Jr (WI Oneida), Chairman of the National Indian Gaming Association; and Dr. Anton Treuer (Leech Lake Ojibwe), author, historian, and Professor of Ojibwe language at Bemidji State University in Minnesota.

WIEA conference sessions will include a Friday meeting of the American Indian Student Achievement Network; the WI Tribal Language Consortium will convene on Saturday.

Other notable presenters include Ryan McMahon (Couchiching Ojibwe), who will discuss the use of humor to challenge stereotypes; he will also facilitate video technology projects for students. Marcus and Brian Frejo (Oklahoma Pawnee) will provide interactive hip-hop workshops for American Indian youth that promote wellness, unity, and Native pride.

The 2011 WIEA conference will be held April 28, 29 & 30 in Keshena, WI at the newly constructed Menominee Casino Resort Convention Center. For more information on the WIEA conference, visit www.wiea.org and click on "conference".