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Governance Brief

Native American Students in California Public Schools

by Manuel Buenrostro

Introduction

Native American students (identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native by the California Department of Education) bring with them social, cultural, and personal assets that can contribute to learning in all public schools. While there are relatively few Native American students in California, they face significant challenges. They are among the most socioeconomically disadvantaged students in the state, and based on several measures, the least connected to school.

This brief summarizes key demographic and achievement data as part of an effort to highlight challenges faced by Native American students and the need to provide them with more opportunities for success. School district and county board members can use this information to better understand these students and identify strategies to support them.

Enrollment Trends

Of the 6.2 million K-12 students who attend California public schools, 32,500 are Native American.¹ Over the past 15 years, both the number and proportion of these students in California's public schools have declined. From the 2002–03 to the 2017–18 school years, the proportion of Native American students decreased from 0.86 percent to 0.52 percent, while their total numbers decreased from 53,955 to 32,500 students—a 40 percent decrease.²

Enrollment by County

Native American students attend school in all 58 California counties. In most counties, however, fewer than 1 percent of students are Native American. Those counties with a higher concentration of Native American students are among the smallest and most rural in the state.³

In this brief you will find:

- » An overview of the enrollment trends of Native American students, including their enrollment and concentration by county and local educational agency (LEA).
- » Information about their socioeconomic, special education, language, homeless, and foster youth status.
- » A summary of their academic achievement outcomes.
- » A summary of indicators of school connectedness, including high school graduation, dropout, chronic absenteeism, suspension, and expulsion rates.
- » Questions for board members to consider.

Enrollment by LEA

The concentration of Native American students varies considerably at the LEA level (which includes school districts, charter schools, county offices of education, and state special schools). Most LEAs (86 percent) enroll at least one Native American student, but more than half enroll fewer than 15 of these students.⁴ This means Native American students have few peers of the same cultural backgrounds, a factor which may impact their level of school connectedness (see School Connectedness section on page 5).

Table 1. 2017-18 Native American Student Enrollment by County

County	All Students	Native American Students	Percent
Alpine	80	38	47.50%
Del Norte	4,228	589	13.93%
Inyo	4,497	436	9.70%
Humboldt	18,501	1,620	8.76%
Siskiyou	5,934	452	7.62%
Trinity	1,584	106	6.69%
Mendocino	13,203	874	6.62%
Modoc	1,411	86	6.09%
Lassen	3,791	176	4.64%
Lake	9,549	427	4.47%
Mariposa	1,865	76	4.08%
Shasta	26,935	1,077	4.00%
Plumas	2,169	68	3.14%
Amador	4,147	114	2.75%
Tehama	10,958	280	2.56%
Butte	31,760	782	2.46%
Tuolumne	6,076	146	2.40%
Yuba	14,619	335	2.29%
Mono	1,890	37	1.96%
Glenn	5,581	108	1.94%
Colusa	4,627	74	1.60%
Calaveras	5,461	83	1.52%
Nevada	11,424	142	1.24%
Sierra	407	5	1.23%
Kings	29,203	337	1.15%
Madera	31,728	343	1.08%
Imperial	37,716	392	1.04%
El Dorado	27,875	259	0.93%
Sutter	23,690	209	0.88%

County	All Students	Native American Students	Percent
Sonoma	70,449	610	0.87%
San Joaquin	148,948	1,161	0.78%
Tulare	104,049	777	0.75%
Sacramento	245,906	1,615	0.66%
Placer	74,063	477	0.64%
Fresno	204,418	1,275	0.62%
Kern	189,949	1,054	0.55%
Stanislaus	109,990	585	0.53%
Merced	58,812	301	0.51%
Yolo	30,067	152	0.51%
San Luis Obispo	34,733	171	0.49%
San Diego	508,169	2,456	0.48%
Riverside	428,992	2,033	0.47%
Solano	63,481	297	0.47%
San Bernardino	403,137	1,872	0.46%
Marin	33,741	133	0.39%
Santa Barbara	69,752	258	0.37%
San Francisco	60,898	218	0.36%
Santa Cruz	40,393	136	0.34%
Santa Clara	272,132	893	0.33%
Contra Costa	178,060	551	0.31%
Napa	20,402	53	0.26%
Alameda	228,356	577	0.25%
San Benito	11,253	28	0.25%
Ventura	137,758	328	0.24%
Los Angeles	1,492,652	3,433	0.23%
Orange	485,835	1,079	0.22%
Monterey	77,954	145	0.19%
San Mateo	95,155	161	0.17%

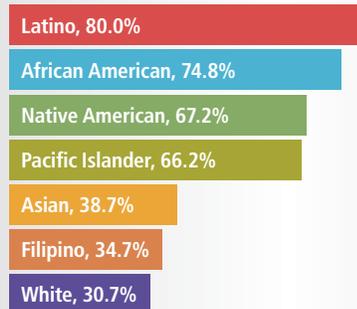
Student Characteristics

When looking at characteristics of Native American students, there are multiple factors that impact their educational attainment. Understanding these characteristics in their counties, districts, and schools can help board members better meet the needs of Native American students. This section is based on data from the 2017–18 school year.

Socioeconomic Status

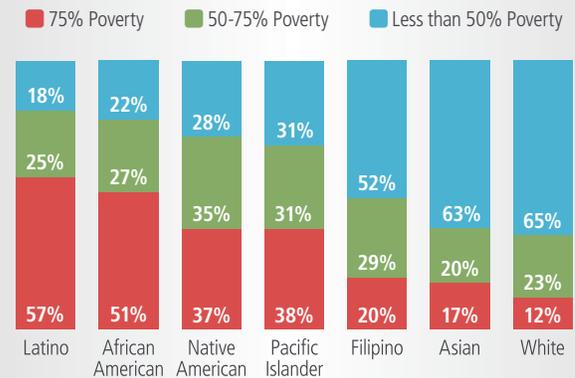
Native American students are among the most socioeconomically disadvantaged students in the state. Socioeconomically disadvantaged students are those for whom neither of their parents received a high school diploma or who are eligible for the free or reduced-price meals program. More than two in three (67.2 percent) Native American students are socioeconomically disadvantaged, compared to fewer than one in three White students.⁵

Figure 1: 2017–18 Percentage of Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Students, by Ethnicity



Of particular concern is the concentration of Native American students in high-poverty schools. High-poverty schools have less access to factors that are key to creating educational opportunity, including the most experienced teachers, 21st-century facilities, libraries, and other resources. Nearly three in four (72 percent) Native American students attend schools where half or more students are eligible for the free or reduced-priced meals program (the most common barometer for measuring poverty among student groups). Moreover, almost 40 percent of Native American students attend school where three-quarters of their peers are eligible for the free or reduced-priced meals program.

Figure 2. 2017–18 Enrollment by School Proportion of Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Meals



Students with Disabilities

Native American students are identified as having disabilities at considerably higher rates than most of their peers, second only to African-American students. While 11.3 percent of all students are identified as students with disabilities, 15.4 percent of Native American students are identified.⁶

Students with disabilities have learning or physical differences that may range from minor to severe. Schools provide a vital service by ensuring all students can meet challenging objectives. In fact, the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires LEAs to identify all students in their jurisdiction who have a disability, and ensure the provision of “resources, adapted instruction, and specialized assistance to mitigate the effects of [their] disability.”⁷

English Learners

Only 5.3 percent of Native American students are English learners, defined as students whose native language is not English and who have not yet developed the English proficiency to participate in the regular classroom program. The proportion of Native American students who are English learners is greater for those in the earlier grades—9.2 percent of first-grade Native American students are English learners, compared to 4.2 percent in sixth grade and 3.2 percent in ninth grade.⁸

Homeless Students

Homeless students are “individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.”⁹ Native American students—along with their African American, Latino, and Pacific Islander peers—experience higher rates of

homelessness when compared to Asian, Filipino, and White students. For example, 4.4 percent of Native American students experience homelessness compared to 1.4 percent of White students. Of the state’s 204,085 homeless students, 1,439 (0.7 percent) are Native American.¹⁰

Foster Youth

Native American and African American students are more likely to be in foster care than their peers from other student groups. Data show 1.6 percent of Native American and 1.9 percent of African American students are foster youth; the next highest proportion is 0.6 percent for Latino students. Of the state’s 34,426 foster youth, 526 (1.5 percent) are Native American.¹¹

Students in foster care face circumstances that are more challenging than those faced by many of their peers. For example, almost half of students in foster care changed school midyear in their first year of foster care and 34 percent of 17- and 18-year-olds in foster care had attended five or more schools.¹² For more resources from CSBA about foster youth, visit bit.ly/2NsnYp4.

Academic Achievement

According to the 2017–18 California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) results in English language arts and math, there is a significant achievement

gap between Native American students and their White and Asian peers across all tested grades. For example:

- » Among sixth-grade students who met or exceeded standards in English language arts, there is a 28.7 percentage-point gap between Native American students and their White peers, and a 41.7 percentage-point gap between Native American students and their Asian peers.¹³
- » Among sixth-grade students who met or exceeded standards in math, there is a 28.7 percentage-point gap between Native American students and their White peers, and a 48.3 percentage-point gap between Native American students and their Asian peers.¹⁴

The California State University system and many community colleges have been using 11th-grade math and English language arts standardized test scores to indicate college readiness for several years. 11th-grade CAASPP scores will be included in the College and Career Readiness indicator as part of the state accountability system, the California School Dashboard. Given this approach, 11th-grade results suggest that less than half (46.2 percent) of Native American students are ready or conditionally ready for college-level English language arts coursework, compared to 68.5 percent of White and 78.9 percent of Asian students. In math, less than one in five (18.9 percent) of Native American students are ready or conditionally ready for college-level coursework, compared to 43.9 percent of White and 68.9 percent of Asian students.¹⁵

Figure 3. 2017–18 CAASPP English Language Arts Percent of Latino, Asian, and White Students that Met or Exceeded Standards

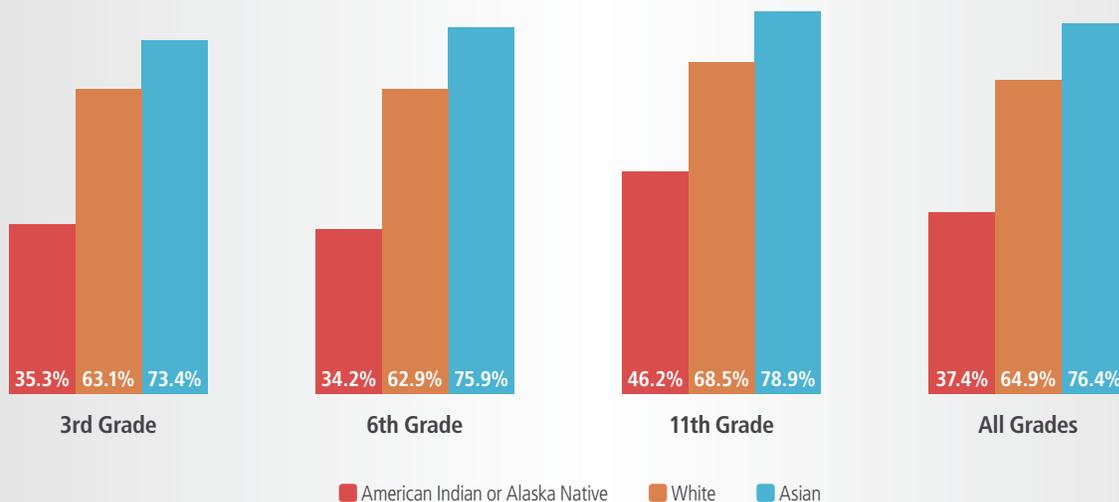
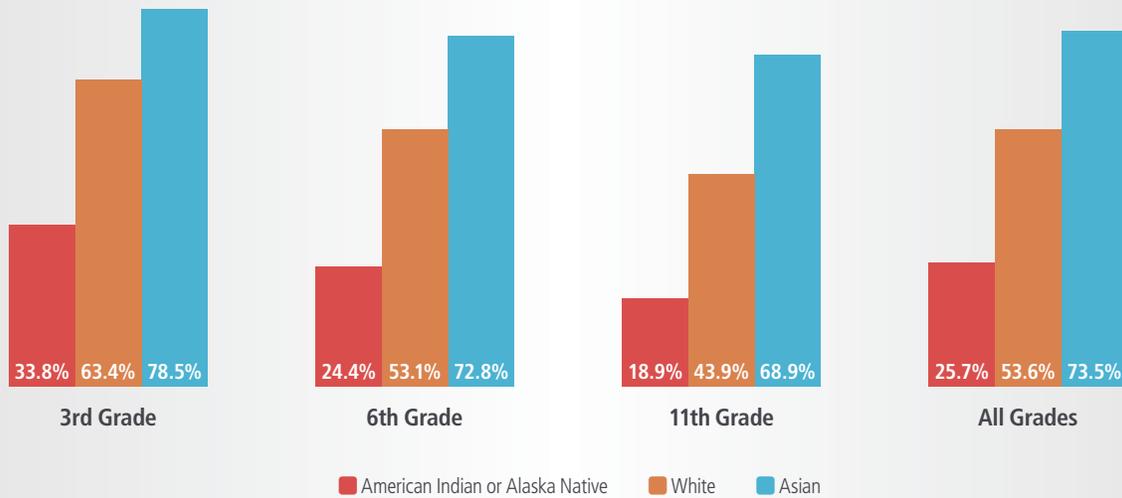


Figure 4. 2017–18 CAASPP Math Percent of Native American, Asian, and White Students that Met or Exceeded Standards



School Connectedness

A major issue among Native American students is their connectedness to school, which has a profound impact on their ability to learn, make progress, and graduate from high school. When compared to all other student groups, Native American students have:

- » The lowest high school graduation rate and the lowest proportion of graduates meeting A-G requirements;
- » The highest dropout, chronic absenteeism, and expulsions rates; and
- » The second highest suspension rates, when compared to other student groups.

Given these troublesome statistics, boards should look at their local data and learn more about strategies to support the connectedness of Native American students in their schools.

High School Graduation

According to 2016–17 four-year cohort graduation data, Native American students had the lowest graduation rate of all student groups—68.2 percent of Native American students graduated from high school, compared to 87.3 percent of White and 93.1 percent of Asian students.¹⁶

Moreover, this statistic becomes more worrisome when considering that Native American students who graduated from high school also had the lowest rates of preparedness for admission to and success in a University of California (UC) or California State University (CSU) campus. According to 2016–17 data, the most recent available, only 28.6 percent of Native American students graduated from high school having completed their A-G course requirements, compared to 52.1 percent of White and 73.5 percent of Asian students.¹⁷

Dropout

Native American students have the highest high school dropout rate among all groups. In fact, the dropout rate for Native American students (5 percent) is more than twice the rate of all students (2.4 percent) and more than three times the rate of White students (1.5 percent).¹⁸

Chronic Absenteeism

When looking at the proportion of students who are chronically absent (those who are absent for 10 percent or more of the days they are expected to attend school), the rate for Native American students is again the highest among all student groups. More than one in five (20.9 percent) Native American students are chronically absent, compared 9.7 percent of White and 3.6 percent of Asian students.¹⁹

Suspensions

Native American students have the second highest suspension rate of all student groups and are more than twice as likely to be suspended than their White peers. The suspension rate for Native American students is 7.4 percent compared to 3.2 percent for White and 1.1 percent for Asian students.²⁰

Expulsions

Native American students have the highest expulsion rate of all student groups. The expulsion rate for Native American students is 0.25 percent compared to 0.07 percent for White and 0.02 percent for Asian students.²¹

Questions for Board Members to Consider

As decision-makers in their districts and county offices of education, board members have the responsibility to ask questions and think strategically about closing achievement gaps for all students. While this brief has focused on state-level statistics, the challenges for individual districts and county offices of education will depend on their demographics, geography, history, and local community needs.

Seeking answers to the following questions can help board members better understand their local context:

1. How many Native American students are in my district or county and where are they attending school?
2. Within individual schools, do Native American students have access to and enroll in rigorous coursework? What supports are provided to help Native American students succeed in these rigorous courses?
3. What is the achievement of Native American students across the county or district and within individual schools? What is the achievement gap countywide, districtwide, and in each school?
4. Looking at indicators of school connectedness (drop-out, absenteeism, graduation, etc.), how are Native American students doing in the county, district, and in each school?
5. Does the county or district offer courses that include the experiences and backgrounds of Native American students (for example, does the history curriculum highlight the achievements of Native American communities)?

6. Does the teaching and administrative staff reflect the diversity of the student population? Does staff have professional learning that prepares them to work with Native American students and their families effectively?

Conclusion

This brief is part of CSBA's continued effort to shed light on California's diverse student population. As Native American students are foundational to the Golden State's cultural fabric, it is critical for governing boards to understand their backgrounds and needs, and the challenges educators face in providing them with the necessary supports to meet their potential. CSBA will continue to produce additional briefs, fact sheets, and articles to highlight research-supported strategies and recommendations for board members to consider.

Resources

Sample policies and administrative regulations are available to subscribers of CSBA's policy services through [GAMUT Online](https://www.csba.org/GAMUTOnline) at www.csba.org/Gamutonline. These include:

- » BP/AR 6146.1 - High School Graduation Requirements
- » BP/AR 6164.4 - Identification and Evaluation of Individuals for Special Education
- » BP/AR 6173 - Education for Homeless Children
- » BP/AR 6173.1 - Education for Foster Youth
- » BP/AR 6174 - Education for English Learners

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Endnotes

- 1 CSBA Analysis: California Department of Education, DataQuest. *2017-18 enrollment by ethnicity*. Downloaded September 6, 2018, from <https://bit.ly/2runvWt>
- 2 CSBA Analysis: California Department of Education, DataQuest. *Selected statewide data for the year 1997-98, 1998-99, 1999-2000, 2000-01, 2001-02, 2002-03, 2003-04, 2004-05, 2005-06, 2006-07, 2007-08, 2008-09, 2009-10, 2010-11, 2011-12, 2012-13, 2013-14, 2014-15, 2015-16, 2016-17, and 2017-18*. Downloaded May 8, 2018, from <https://bit.ly/2jFV0ke>
- 3 See endnote 1.
- 4 See endnote 1.
- 5 CSBA analysis: California Department of Education. *Unduplicated student poverty – free or reduced price meals data 2017-18*. Downloaded Sept. 4, 2018 from www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/sd/filessp.asp; and California Department of Education, Dataquest. *Enrollment in California public schools by ethnic designation, 2017-18*. Downloaded Sept. 4, 2018 from <https://bit.ly/2PEZfLc>
- 6 See endnote 1.
- 7 Hibel, J., Farkas, G., & Morgan, P. L. (2006). Who is placed in special education? *Sociology of Education*, 83(4): 312–332. Available at <https://bit.ly/2xnCnc2>.
- 8 See endnote 1.
- 9 California Department of Education. *Definition of homeless children and youths*. Available at <https://bit.ly/2PQkdGL>.
- 10 See endnote 1.
- 11 See endnote 1.
- 12 California School Boards Association. (2016). *Our foster youth: What school boards can do*. Available at <https://bit.ly/2O1orhs>.
- 13 CSBA Analysis: California Department of Education, California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress. 2018 *California statewide research file*. Retrieved on Oct. 3, 2018 from <https://bit.ly/2DWPk2A>.
- 14 See endnote 13
- 15 See endnote 13.
- 16 California Department of Education, DataQuest. *Cohort outcome summary report by race/ethnicity*. Downloaded April 2, 2018, from <https://bit.ly/2G0hWDD>
- 17 California Department of Education, DataQuest. *12th grade graduates completing all courses required for U.C. and/or C.S.U. entrance: State of California 2016-17*. Downloaded May 8, 2018, from <https://bit.ly/2FYyTyv>
- 18 California Department of Education, DataQuest. *Dropouts by ethnic designation by grade: 2016-17 state of California*. Downloaded April 12, 2018 from <https://bit.ly/2v4SbSk>
- 19 California Department of Education, DataQuest. *2016-17 chronic absenteeism rate*. Downloaded April 12, 2018 from <https://bit.ly/2EJG1OE>
- 20 California Department of Education, DataQuest. *2016-17 suspension rate*. Downloaded April 12, 2018 from <https://bit.ly/2HzoThy>
- 21 California Department of Education, DataQuest. *2016-17 expulsion rate*. Downloaded April 12, 2018 from <https://bit.ly/2Hx2gdF>