

# Native Education Factsheet

February 2018

## THE NATIONAL INDIAN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION'S HIGHER EDUCATION ACT REAUTHORIZATION PRIORITIES



The National Indian Education Association (NIEA) believes all Native students should have access to a high-quality academic and cultural education that prepares them to succeed in life. The reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) and strengthening Native-serving institutions under Title III, is an opportunity to improve opportunities available to Native students and spark economic growth in Native communities across the country. Congress must seize this opportunity and uphold its federal trust responsibility to tribes and Native students.

### Achievement of Native Students

Native enrollment in college has more than doubled since 1976<sup>i</sup>, which indicates that there is a steady increase in access and opportunity for Native students in higher education.

- 14% of the Native population in the United States holds a bachelor's degree and 8% have solely an associate's degree.<sup>ii</sup>
- Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) have grown since their creation in the late 1960's in number, enrollment, and percentage of students graduating. Today, 37 TCUs serve more than 28,000 students through degree granting programs.<sup>iii</sup>
- Non-tribal colleges and universities have also seen growth in the number of Native students and Native graduates over the past 20 years from 76,100 enrolled student in 1976 to 181,000 in 2006 and from approximately 5,500 in 1976 to just over 19,000 in 2006.<sup>iv</sup>

### Barriers to Higher Education Faced by Native Students

Native students face barriers to entry, challenges funding their post-secondary education once accepted, and obstacles to graduation which any reauthorization of HEA must address. To support Native students graduating with college degrees, we must remove these obstacles.

- Just 23% of Native students between ages 18 to 24 years were enrolled in college in 2015.<sup>v</sup>
- Income barriers are a big challenge: 85% of Native post-secondary students receive financial aid.<sup>vi</sup>

- Numerous studies of Native students in college settings dating back to 1973 show that distance from family and community ties present significant barriers to matriculation and persistence.<sup>vii</sup>

### Priorities for Native Students in the HEA

#### 1. Improved Access and Collection of Data

Critical information on Native students is often missing due to gaps within federal policy and a lack of investment in the systems necessary for data collection. As a result, policy makers are left in a vacuum when making decisions on how to support Native students. NIEA supports investment in systems for obtaining and maintaining accurate data that respects Native student interests and recognizes tribal sovereignty. TCUs, tribes, and Native serving institutions must have the resources to effectively develop and maintain information on Native enrollment and success.

- **Give Tribes Access to Student Data** - This provision in HEA has recently been interpreted as meaning that Native students are not allowed to give their tribe permission to see their student financial aid records. This interpretation runs directly counter to the fundamental tenants of tribal sovereignty and is a barrier to Native students that depend on support from their tribe to complete their education. Reauthorization of HEA must include a solution to this unintended problem.
- **Establish a Student Unit Record** - This ban prevents analysis of how well programs are doing in meeting the needs of students and information is unable to be compared against private colleges and universities. Without data on student performance, best practices cannot be identified and established.



The opportunities and challenges with respect to completion at TCUs and Native-serving non-tribal institutions cannot be effectively studied. NIEA supports both additional investment in Native student data and a student unit record for all students.

## 2. Access and Affordability

- **Support and Fully Fund TCUs** - TCUs are a critical route to and through college for many Native American students, yet funding parity with non-Native institutions has never been reached. NIEA supports the simple idea that the 37 TCUs should have resources, funding, and facilities comparable to land grant colleges and institutions. The approximately 160,000 American Indian and Alaska Native students who attend TCUs deserve nothing less.
- **Fund Pell Grants and Student Loan Programs** - Native students depend on Pell Grants and Federal student loan programs to help afford college. Pell Grants help increase college access by boosting college enrollment, reducing drop-out rates, and improving student outcomes.<sup>viii</sup> NIEA supports increasing funding for Pell and indexing it to inflation, along with measures to make sure colleges and universities do not simply increase tuition rates in light of Pell increases.
- **Strengthen Dual Enrollment and Upward Bound to Support Native Student Enrollment** - Access to college and post-secondary studies must include support for programs that help low-income Native students on college campuses. Programs

like Student Support Services, Upward Bound, and Talent Search help students matriculate and prevent students from leaving college before graduation. Native cultures value community, so the transition to college and the challenges of staying in college are particularly acute for many Native students. Investing and scaling up these critical programs is essential to Native student success.

## 3. Completion and Career Readiness

- Among Native American and Alaska Native students, nationwide, completion—finishing a student’s program of study and graduating—is a significant challenge that NIEA believes must be addressed. Based on 2014 data, just 22% of American Indians and Alaska Natives over the age of 25 have received an associate’s degree or higher<sup>ix</sup>. NIEA supports policies that identify best practices and invest in them, such as the TRIO set of programs that provide counseling and support in getting to college, but also support students once they are at college.

## 4. Eliminate Unnecessary Paperwork to Help TCUs and Native Serving Schools

NIEA supports elimination of the pre-application process currently required of TCUs in HEA. Specifically, we support the deletion of the Section 316A of Title III of the Higher Education Act, which requires a pre-application for TCU funding. The pre-application is unnecessary because Title III has a formula that determines funding for each TCU.

For additional information or questions, please contact NIEA at (202) 544-7290.

## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> *Status and Trends in the Education of Native Americans: 2008. National Center for Education Statistics. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2008/nativetrends/index.asp>. P. 126.*

<sup>ii</sup> *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups: 2017. National Center for Education Statistics. P. 129.*

<sup>iii</sup> *Booker, Yvette; Gasman, Marybeth; Samayoa, Andres; Spyridakis, Demetrios; and Stull, Ginger. Redefining Success: How Tribal Colleges and Universities Build Nations, Strengthen Sovereignty, and Persevere Through Challenges. Center for Minority Serving Institutions. 2015. P.1.*

<sup>iv</sup> *Status and Trends in the Education of Native Americans: 2008. National Center for Education Statistics. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2008/nativetrends/index.asp>. P. 126 & 134.*

<sup>v</sup> *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups: 2017. National Center for Education Statistics. P. 91.*

<sup>vi</sup> *Ibid, P. 104.*

<sup>vii</sup> *Guillory, Raphael and Wolverton, Mimi. It's About Family: Native American Student Persistence in Higher Education. The Journal of Higher Education, Vol. 79, No. 1 (January/February 2008), pp.72.*

<sup>viii</sup> *Protopsaltis, Spiros and Parrott, Sharon. Pell Grants – A Key Tool for Expanding College Access and Economic Opportunity – Need Strengthening, Not Cuts. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. July 2017.*

<sup>ix</sup> *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups: 2017. National Center for Education Statistics. P. 129.*

