

ACCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

117th Congress

PROMOTING NATIVE STUDENT ACCESS AT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The National Indian Education Association (NIEA) supports high-quality academic and cultural education opportunities that prepare American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians for future success.

NATIONAL LANDSCAPE

Access means building a strong culture-based education system designed to maximize Native student success, from the day students enter preschool to the day students graduate from college. That system must address potential pathways to higher education and academic success.

When deciding to pursue postsecondary opportunities, Native students disproportionately face barriers to entry, persistence, and graduation from institutions of higher education. Lack of data regarding how well institutions serve Native students reduces their ability to make informed decisions during the college selection process. These challenges not only create an uneven playing field for Native students—they also represent a failure of the federal government to uphold its trust responsibility for Native students. Barriers to higher education must be removed to ensure Native students have the opportunity to thrive, inside the classroom and beyond.

BEST PRACTICES

Strong postsecondary pathways are key to improving student enrollment, retention, and completion at institutions of higher education.

Most institutions of higher education fail to offer high-quality programs and services that support the unique cultural, academic, and community-based needs of Native students, creating a rocky transition to college and erecting barriers to persistence. It does not have to be this way. Native students thrive when we make robust investments in college-bound high school students and strengthen our support for students enrolled in college. These investments equip Native students for long-term success and, as a result, enrollment, retention, persistence, and graduation rates increase. We must make this vision into a reality for Native students.

>> ENGAGE IN MEANINGFUL, ONGOING TRIBAL CONSULTATION



Native nations know their students best. Historically, schools and programs that serve Native communities have been developed without tribal input or consultation, resulting in poor outcomes for our students across the nation. This is unacceptable. Tribes have the ability to serve as the link between tribal communities and institutions of higher education. Our nations contain the knowledge and resources necessary to promote Native student retention and completion. Native consultation is critical to developing culturally-responsive education programs and curricula that fully serve Native students, no matter where they attend school.

>> SUPPORT AND EXPAND FEDERAL TRIO PROGRAMS



Programs that support low-income and first generation students are critical to expanding postsecondary opportunity in Native communities, as Native students often hail from low-income and first generation families. TRIO programs enable low-income students to become the first members of their families to earn a college degree. TRIO programs such as Upward Bound and Student Support Services support Native students as they work toward graduation and matriculate into college. While Native students currently make up one percent of the student body in higher education, three percent of TRIO recipients are Native students,¹ demonstrating the critical importance of TRIO programs for Native students.

>> SUPPORT AND EXPAND CHILDCARE SERVICES ON CAMPUS



Native students are more likely to be nontraditional students, who often have families to support while attending class. Safe and affordable campus childcare services, such as the Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program, are critical to ensuring that all of our students are able to pursue postsecondary opportunities. This program provides critical childcare on college campuses across the country to support parents in pursuit of a degree.

>> IMPLEMENT FLEXIBLE, CULTURALLY-RESPONSIVE STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES



Most institutions of higher education in the United States lie outside of tribal communities and have limited institutional knowledge related to Native nations and peoples. As a result, many Native students often choose to either travel long distances for class or move away from community support systems to pursue a higher education. However, higher education institutions often lack the resources to recognize and provide support for culturally-responsive support services necessary for Native students to complete their degree.

According to a 2019 report by the Center for Community College Student Engagement, 38 percent of tribal college students indicated that they had considered withdrawing from school or from class due to how far they had to drive for class. Nearly half of all tribal college students reported that lack of reliable transportation represented a barrier to attending class or college.² Long commutes raise disproportionate barriers to scheduling required classes, attending office hours, and accessing academic support services.

On the other hand, students living on campus often feel disconnected from community, a vital part of Native cultures. Implementing extended office hours, opportunities for virtual academic support services, and culturally-responsive student support services and centers are vital steps to ensuring that all students have the tools necessary to successfully complete their degree.

¹ Council for Educational Opportunity (citation pending)

² Center for Community College Student Engagement (http://www.ccsse.org/center/SR2019/Tribal_Colleges.pdf)