

DATA IN HIGHER EDUCATION

117th Congress

IMPROVING POSTSECONDARY DATA COLLECTION AND TRANSPARENCY

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

Accurate and reliable data is the foundation of effective policies that meet the needs of students, and even more critical for students with small populations, such as Native students. Tribal leaders and policymakers rely on high-quality data to inform programs that serve our students. Data can ensure that students are well informed when selecting a college, that institutions are serving Native students well, and that any disproportionality can be elevated and, ideally, remediated.

Due to small sample sizes, Native students are often excluded from postsecondary research on access to, transition to, and completion of postsecondary education. This exclusion has been exacerbated by a decision by the federal government to misconstrue race and ethnicity with Native nations. In 2007, the OMB released new Standards for Maintaining, Collecting, and Presenting Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity, which limited federal data related to Native communities to those who identify exclusively as American Indian or Alaska Native. According to data from the 2010 Census, this rule excludes 57 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native citizens from being identified as Native in federal data collections. Due to the growing number of multi-racial students that are citizens of Native nations, these rules have a disproportionate effect on our students and their families. The result is a systematic erasure of Native students in federal data systems, mirroring the federal government's historic efforts to make Native populations disappear.

BEST PRACTICES

Improved data collection and transparency is necessary to promote informed policies and programs that support student success.



>> ACCURATELY COUNT NATIVE STUDENTS IN FEDERAL DATA COLLECTIONS



In 2011, NIEA membership passed a resolution to combine all Native students into a single category that includes American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students, regardless of whether they also identify as Hispanic/Latino or in combination with any other race or ethnicity. Such action is required to uphold the federal trust responsibility to our students, families, and nations.

>> CLARIFY AND ALIGN DEFINITIONS OF NATIVE STUDENTS ACROSS FEDERAL DATA COLLECTIONS



Unlike many student subgroups, federal statutes include definitions that refer to Native students, including “Indian”, “Alaska Native”, “Native Hawaiian”, and “Native American”, among others. These terms are often defined differently not only between the underlying statute for programs and services between agencies, but also among different programs within the same agency. For example, the definition of an Indian student under Title VI of the Every Student Succeeds Act is different than that of an Indian student for enrollment at Tribal Colleges and Universities or Native American Serving Non-Tribal Institutions.

Due to the diversity of legal language in underlying statute, data collection on student enrollment across federal agencies and programs is highly inconsistent. Even schools and institutions participating in the same programs often utilize diverse definitions and methods to identify and report on services that support Native students, further compounding the lack of clarity in data collection.

>> UPHOLD DATA SOVEREIGNTY AND REMOVE BARRIERS TO DATA FOR TRIBES



Data sovereignty is critical both for Native students and for tribes. Tribes are sovereign nations and, in accordance with federal law, treaties, and Supreme Court cases, must be treated as such by the federal government. Furthermore, tribes contribute hundreds of thousands of dollars to funding higher education for their citizens. When tribes do not have access to data, it is a barrier to Native students that depend upon support from their tribe to complete their education.

>> ESTABLISH A STUDENT UNIT RECORD



Access to student-level data is essential. By establishing a student-unit record, prospective students and their families would have access to information that would: show how well institutions are meeting the needs of specific populations; highlight institutions that are effectively serving populations; and educate students about various majors and earning potential after graduation. The availability of this data could lead to the identification and dissemination of best practices and ensure students can make well-informed decisions when choosing a college.