



# Equity Dispatch

The State of American Indian Education: Equity Considerations



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## **IMPACT: Educate, Engage, Empower--For Equity**

The schools (residential boarding schools) kept cemeteries. Schools like the Carlisle and Haskell in some years buried hundreds of children in one year. Incredible. I don't know how many of you can imagine sending your children to school and not even getting the bodies back for burial, but that was the Native experience with education. Some things really marked that experience as different from that of, say, Black people in this country, for example. I think for Black Americans education was an opportunity - always seen as an opportunity - that was unfairly denied. For Native people, education was seen as a tool to assimilate. And that distinction ends up being important.

--Dr. Anton Treuer, Ojibwe scholar and cultural preservationist

November 2013



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**Meet the Authors:**

The newsletter at Great Lakes Equity Center is written and edited by [Kitty Chen](#), [James Kigamwa](#), [Erin Macey](#), [Juhanna N Rogers](#), [Marsha Simon](#), [Seena Skelton](#), and [Kathleen King Thorius](#).

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**Equity Spotlight**

## Educate

Beginning this month, we are launching a four-part series of newsletters focused on special student populations that are frequently marginalized in United States education discourse, policy, and practice. Our efforts are aimed at facilitating educators' deeper understanding of each group's struggles through an analysis of their educational history, key considerations related to current realities, and recommendations for future work with these student groups. In this month's installment, we focus attention on people indigenous to the United States. While keeping in mind within group diversity, societal controversies regarding naming indigenous people, as well as subversive educational practices waged against Native students and tribes, we hope to help draw attention to salient issues vis-à-vis educating Native children and youth. The following discussion is intended to provoke additional dialogue and action on the topic. Because the Great Lakes Equity Center does not have any staff members who are of Native American descent, it is important to us that we privilege the perspectives of those who identify with the groups we are discussing. Therefore, for the first time, we have an invited guest blogger who will help bring a Native American perspective to the discussion. Be on the lookout for our eBulletin announcing this exciting opportunity to join the conversation.

### The Historical Trajectory of Education for Native Americans

Indiana serves as one site among many of the historical Native American tribal diaspora. The Illini, the Miami (including the Wea) and the Shawnee were the original inhabitants of the region that became the state of Indiana. Seven other tribes migrated into or through the region of Indiana after Europeans arrived. Today, there are no federally recognized American Indian tribes based in Indiana (Native American Tribes of Indiana, 2011). The dramatic dispersion of Native American tribes, which resulted in decreased recognition and tribal influence in educational policies and practices, is not limited to Indiana (Juneau & Tribe, 2001). Throughout the region, and indeed, throughout the nation, the sociocultural displacement, instability, and "othering" of Native American people is perhaps most evident in schooling contexts (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Skinner, 1999). Education and schooling for Native American children has been a complex, contentious issue from the beginning of public education in the United States (Assembly of First Nations Education, Jurisdiction, and Governance, 2012).

Many indigenous people had and still have structures and practices in place to teach their children. Some hunt and fish with their children to teach them the sustainability of nature; others practice different ceremonies to help children build spiritual connections with their homeland; still others continue family routines to demonstrate the importance of taking responsibility for care of family (Treuer, 2012). Many of these practices were not recognized by early European people who tried to use education to assimilate tribe members into the dominant culture (Minnesota Indiana Affairs Council and Minnesota Humanities Center, n.d.). Religious groups and government agencies set up day schools and boarding schools while policies required particular tribes to enroll every eligible child in order to educate them (Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture, 2007); however, this 'civilization' of Native Americans was actually in many ways a deprivation of cultural identity (Valenzuela, 2008). For instance, many Native American students who attended reservation schools were required to cut their hair and change their names. This is an issue even today; in 2011, a Native American student was suspended for refusal to cut his hair (American Civil Liberties Union,



Dr. Rev PM Crowell Hillstrom currently serves as the Equity Program Manager for Saint Paul Public Schools. An educator, activist, artist, musician, and advocate, Dr. Hillstrom's educational background is reinforced and complimented by his passion for the arts. Dr. Hillstrom studied music at Normandale Community College and earned a bachelor's degree in American Indian Studies and Music from Augsburg College. Immediately following, he went on to earn a master's degree in ethnomusicology, cultural studies, from Bethel University in St. Paul, Minnesota. Dr. Hillstrom holds a doctorate in teaching and learning from the University of Minnesota- Duluth.

Dr. Hillstrom's work is steeped in his indigenous worldview. He utilizes culturally relevant pedagogy to engage learners in transformative learning experiences. Dr. Hillstrom creates arts-based workshops that challenge students' and educators' perceptions of race, culture, and identity. He aims to enrich participants' understanding of who they are and their relationships with the world around them. Dr. Hillstrom believes that fighting for equity and justice is impacted by one's ability to recognize his/her relationships to those who appear similar or different. Therefore, Dr. Hillstrom believes that infusing learners' lived experiences and knowledge with classroom content cultivates an environment that enriches the mind, body, and spirit.

A driving force for Dr. Hillstrom's work is his own educational experience. "As a young man, I was kicked out of classes more times than I could remember," he shared. "I want to create better experiences for youth today." Understanding the dynamics of race and racism, with support from his

2011). In addition, Native languages were forbidden in school, and indigenous students were forced to adopt Christianity rather than maintain their traditional spiritual heritage (Relations: Dakota & Ojibwe Treaties, 2013). Utley (2004) has observed that education became a way to attack basic Indian values, and was likely to succeed; because children, the targets of education, were forced to go to residential boarding schools at early stages of development--they knew little about their tribes' customs and values. Current equity-related concerns related to education and Native American identity and participation, then, run deep into history.

### Key Considerations for Equity and Social Justice

The U.S. Census Bureau (2010) estimates that about 0.8% of the U.S. population (around 2.5 million individuals) self-identify as being of American Indian or Alaska Native (AI/AN) descent, and 28.3% of Native Americans are below the age of 18. Approximately 624,000 AI/AN students are enrolled in elementary and secondary schools in the U.S. (Freeman & Fox, 2005), and around 92% attend public schools while 7% attend schools operated or funded by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (Tippeconnic & Faircloth, 2006). The national graduation rate for American Indian high school students was 49.3% for 2003-2004 school year, compared with 76.2% for white students, and only 13.3% of Native Americans have undergraduate degrees, versus 24.4% of the general population (National Indian Education Association, n.d.). These statistics reflect dismal schooling outcomes for Native American students, regardless of whether they attend public schools or Bureau schools. As with other historically marginalized student groups, these outcomes indicate that U.S. schools are not meeting the needs of Native American students as a congregate, due largely to a lack of culturally relevant and responsive schooling contexts and structures.

Cultural identity remains an area of critical concern in Native American education. Although many studies regarding the role of culturally responsive education (CRE) for Native American students have been conducted, few are backed by empirical evidence (Assembly of First Nations Education, Jurisdiction, and Governance, 2012). However, many scholars posit that consistent omissions of Native American language and culture in education curricula and pedagogy fuel persistent gaps in academic outcomes for Native American students. In addition, education that neglects Native cultures and presents biased or irrelevant curricular materials robs indigenous students of their cultural pride and personal identities (Skinner, 1999). For example, English is the official language used in most schools, and history is often taught from a Euro-centric perspective. Celebrations like Thanksgiving are described in ways that are not true to what Native American students' ancestors experienced; and in fact, that particular celebration of the survival of early arrivals to the "new land" actually marked the beginning of a nightmare for most Native people (Keeler, 1999). To incorporate Native American students in school and embed their values, ideas and priorities in No Left Child Behind (NCLB), educators should first respect their cultural identities.

Curricula and pedagogy that treat Native American culture as appendages to mainstream education and culture, compounded by persistent factors such as unequal opportunities to learn and continued poverty, perpetuate spaces of thinking and being which impose a "walking in two worlds" (Sorkness & Kelting-Gibson, 2006) existence for scores of students. The second world of public education imposes the need for Native American students to negotiate cultural markers of identity, tradition, language, and power structures that contradict students' lived experience. As described by Native scholars and research participants, many Native American students have different ways of knowing and different values when compared to students from other cultural backgrounds (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Mestre, 2010). These ways of knowing, for instance, illustrate how many Native American students tend to observe first and practice by themselves. They may be inclined to not answer questions quickly because of their tradition to respect others (Stokes, 1997). Native students may also favor working cooperatively and may learn better by seeing things as whole rather than separate segments. For example, within Indigenous ways of knowing, knowledge of a unified and complex reality is far more valuable than the generalized memorization of facts and narrow sets of specialized concepts and rules that are taught in mainstream educational settings (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001). They also "show strength in visual, perceptual, or spatial information as opposed to information presented verbally and frequently use mental images rather than word associations" (Butterfield, 1994, p.4) Since education involves not only

mentors Glenn Singleton, Representative Carlos Mariani, Dr. Rose Chu, Mitch Walking Elk and many others, allows him to develop his talents and grow his passion. As an educator and artist, he aims to interrupt the systematic racism that occurs in schools. Dr. Hillstrom believes this is possible if we can humble ourselves. Humility, he asserts, is crucial to equity, and particularly work focused on the experience of Indigenous youth and their community. In addition, he asserts that "we need a deeper understanding of race by exploring the consciousness of culture. The only way we can overcome inequities is by realizing that we are all connected on a level that creates life; without it we will not exist." We commend Dr. Hillstrom for his commitment to assisting all learners in the understanding of our interconnectivity.

You can learn more about Dr. Hillstrom's work [here](#).

## Upcoming Events

### Illinois

Nov. 13-15, 2013

[Illinois Education & Technology Conference \(IETC\)](#)  
Springfield, IL

### Indiana

Nov. 19-20, 2013

[School Safety Specialist Academy Basic Training](#)  
Indianapolis, IN

May 27-31, 2014

[National Conference on Race and Ethnicity](#)  
Indianapolis, IN

### Michigan

May 5-7, 2014

[Conference on Exceptional Gifted Students](#)  
Grand Rapids, MI

May 15-17, 2014

academic learning but also learning of values (Okakok, 1989), what Native American students learn and how they learn may not translate easily to high stakes testing and standardization that are developed largely based on dominant student groups (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). Therefore, lack of achievement in math and reading tests skew the real educational performance for Native American students (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). Without providing culturally responsive learning opportunities and culturally matched assessment for Native American students, they could be misjudged as lacking intelligence based on performances that do not align with the dominant patterns of student engagement (Stokes, 1997). These perceptions fuel low expectations and disproportionate rates of referral to special education (NEA policy brief, 2008), ultimately resulting in high dropout rates and low graduation rates (Vue, 2010).

Finally, poverty is an ongoing challenge to Native American children's access to quality learning opportunities and potential success in school. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), one-third of American Indians live on reservations and remote rural areas with inadequate transportation services that limit students' access to high quality education. Even though most Native youth now attend regular public schools, 31% of them attended a public school that ranked as high-poverty as compared to 6% of White students in 2010-2011 (Lehr, 2013). Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2008) show that 32%-39% of American Indian children lived in poverty, which was nearly twice as high as the percentage for the total U.S. population. American Indians also have low employment rates, and this is closely related to low graduation rates. Since poverty, education, and employment are highly related, providing a better education environment (e.g. systemic change within and across a number of levels in our schooling system; sustained attention to tribal sovereignty and self-determination, eradication of the racism experienced by indigenous youth, and indigenous epistemologies; high expectations for Native American students and steps to ensure these expectations are realized) for Native American students should be a priority to help them escape from poverty (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Gay, 2000; Stegman, 2012).

### Ways to Address Inequity

To address the issues mentioned above, there are several actions we can take. First of all, recommendations for culturally responsive education (CRE) for Native American children should focus on culturally and locally contextualizing curricula and instruction through engagement of elders and local communities in determining educational objectives and standards (Beaulieu, 2006; Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; McCarty, 2009). Two immersion schools ----Niigaane Ojibwemowin Immersion School and the Waadookodaading Ojibwe Language Immersion Charter School serve as strong models for this. In both programs, students are taught their academic subjects entirely in the Ojibwe language and within the values and traditional practices of the Ojibwe culture. Fluent speaking elders also collaborate with teachers who have learned Ojibwe to support learning (First Speakers, 2013). Learning from this model, responsive educators may teach content in Native languages and at the same time emphasize the values and traditional practices as a routine part of the school day. Similarly, teaching styles and assessment methods should cater to the needs of Native American students. If from observing and getting to know a student, the student demonstrates better learning through holistic experience, educators should then focus on the wholeness of the materials and provide sufficient time for Native American students to observe, practice, and perform. In addition, cooperative learning, which reduces the traditionally competitive nature of schooling can increase student engagement and increase student achievement (Demmert, 2001; Gilliland, 1995). Moreover, portfolio assessment has been identified as being a particularly well-suited type of assessment for many Native Americans (Bordeaux, 1995). In spite of all mentioned above, educators should always remember that within-group difference is likely to be larger than between group difference (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). Therefore, understanding students' real needs before making assumptions about their needs based on their cultural/racial/ethnic identities is fundamental.

Communicating with Native American families and receiving support from them is vital. Not only is this important from the standpoint of school/family relationships, which has been shown to increase achievement, but it also enables us to better teach in a responsive manner. There may be an automatic distrust from Native parents because of their difficult history with

[31st Annual Michigan Home Education Conference](#)  
Lansing, MI

### Minnesota

Nov. 20-23, 2013  
[2013 CIEE Annual Conference](#)  
Minneapolis, MN

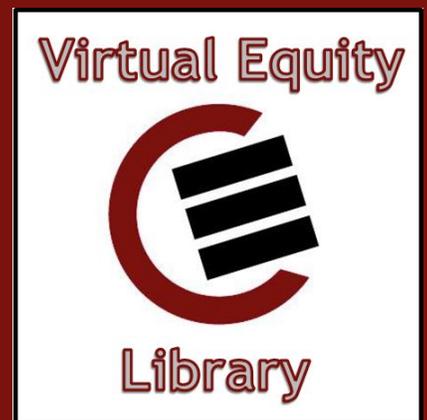
Feb. 21-22, 2014  
[Minnesota Conference on Science Education](#)  
Mankato, MN

### Ohio

Jan. 27-29, 2014  
[Educational Technology Conference](#)  
Columbus, OH

### Wisconsin

Nov. 17-18, 2013  
[National Quality Education](#)  
Milwaukee, WI



educational institutions and government officials (Treuer, 2012). To break down this sense of distrust and rebuild connection with Native American communities, educators should develop their understanding of Native American students, their homes, and their communities (Reyhner & Eder, 2004) through direct engagement. To close the gap between the school system and community, school staff can invite Native American parents or community members to share legends and stories related to their tribes to keep their culture alive and help children associate with their cultural identity. Educators can also participate in community events and collaborate with community members on projects both within and outside of schools (McCarty & Watahomigie, 2004). Through community involvement, better personal and community level connections can be made among students' experiences and knowledge. Community and family are an important part of Native American students' lives, and they would be influential for their educational success (Reyhner, 2001). The point is to fully include families in the school's institutional culture. Only through building mutually trusting and respectful relationships between schools, families, and communities can this work be accomplished.

### Conclusion

Culturally responsive education that is grounded in strong awareness of Native American students' backgrounds and lived experience is an important step toward restoring the severely damaging consequences of early efforts to educate Native American children in an assimilationist manner. Working alongside Native American students, families, and communities to build the kind of educational system that will serve them well – one that will open doors to both the future and the past – is a debt we owe to our Native American students and their ancestors.

Have a question or comment about this article? [Share it here!](#)

## Engage



*"Illinois has a rich cultural heritage and vibrant Native presence, even today. But unlike other Great Lakes states, Illinois has few resources available to teachers," Bechtle says.*

Montessori educator Linda Bechtle established the not-for-profit Midwest Institute for Native American Studies (MINAS) in 1999 to bring appropriate, truthful, and culturally-sensitive materials about Native people to young elementary students. MINAS advocates for teaching and learning about historical and contemporary Native experience, specifically in urban communities. Today, the organization's members analyze historical documents, prepare curriculum for teachers, and publish a newsletter that provides content and lessons for early education teachers. "We need to empower teachers and provide resources that can help expose this history and build a bridge to understanding" Bechtle says. "Getting the information into the hands of teachers will make a difference." The curriculum products and newsletters MINAS produces do just that.

Bechtle has observed that students have many misconceptions about Native people that needed clarification. "So many younger students believe that all 'Indians' wear animal skins, live in tepees, ride horses, build totem poles and talk in mono-syllables," claims Bechtle. Originally, MINAS created curriculum to help elementary students dispel these stereotypes

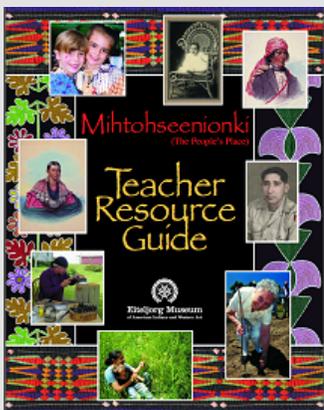
by investigating how Native people met their fundamental needs--food, clothing, housing, transportation, etc.--across the country. The finished works are graphic realizations of the similarities and differences among cultural groups. Today, MINAS creates a multitude of materials focused on the Northeast Woodlands cultural area. These materials help students understand the traditional lifeways of people in Illinois through multidisciplinary and hands-on activities. In addition, MINAS is actively engaged in constructing exhibits that share Native history.

MINAS has partnered with researchers and educators across the Midwest. The organizations collaboration with the Illinois State Museum led to the "Timeline of Illinois Civilizations" and accompanying teacher resource guide to give older students a fascinating glimpse into the past 12,000+ years of life in this state. MINAS has also been working closely with members of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians in Dowagiac, MI to create sets of mini-ethnographies on the area's most recent Native inhabitants. In late November, the organization will share a presentation on Native American history in the curriculum at the National Social Studies Conference in Saint Louis. Through these engagements, the organization ultimately aspires to launch a public teacher campaign to collaborate with more public school teachers in Illinois. To encourage that collaboration, Director Bechtle hopes to see questions about Native American people and culture on state exams. "If the information was included on standardized tests, then teachers would be mandated to learn and teach about Native/Indigenous history," proclaimed Director Bechtle. As an Equity Assistance Center, we appreciate MINAS' commitment to full inclusion of all students' histories in the curriculum.

MINAS materials are run past a Board of Native and non-Native members and consultants. Please visit their website [here](#) to download a materials brochure or newsletter, and feel free to contact Linda at [potawproj@gmail.com](mailto:potawproj@gmail.com) for more information.

## Empower

### Something to Use!



The *Mihtohseenionki Teacher Resource Guide*, created by the Eiteljorg Museum's staff and educators with input from Native American cultural experts, is designed to help students better understand the histories of tribes indigenous to the Indiana region through art and other cultural artifacts. The lessons offered in this guide are aligned to the Indiana Academic Standards in grade 3 through 5 and grade 8 in social studies, visual arts and language arts. These lessons can also be used to teach other grade levels. Lessons are linked to particular tours in the Eiteljorg Museum.

### Something to Read!

*The Menu of Possible Interventions for Native American Students: Guidance, Practices, Programs, Strategies and Resources* provides a comprehensive set of guidelines for supporting Native American students. It first identifies research-based areas of need and then offers some

Menu of Possible Interventions for Native American Students Guidance, Practices, Programs, Strategies and Resources	
<b>Native American Student Issues Identified by the Literature</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Dropout prevention programs are needed in schools attended by Native American students.</li> <li>2. High school graduation programs (i.e., GED) are a high priority education need identified by tribal leaders.</li> <li>3. Teachers should incorporate traditional Native approaches which emphasize cooperation and reflection.</li> <li>4. Consideration must be given to the particular challenges of the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. urban poverty and community development programs</li> <li>b. increasing student proficiency in their Native language as well as in English</li> <li>c. incorporating their culture, values and beliefs in instruction</li> <li>d. encouraging student leadership and having a high-expectation climate</li> </ol> </li> <li>5. Teachers must strive to incorporate Native learning styles into classroom instruction.</li> <li>6. Teachers must know how to nurture confidence and teaching self-esteem in students.</li> <li>7. Students may benefit from the use of role playing or scenario writing settings.</li> <li>8. Consideration must be given to the most effective instructional techniques in the community in which they teach.</li> </ol>
<b>Schools and District Support Recommendations</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provide professional development on culturally-responsive pedagogy to provide activities that would increase students' self-efficacy and academic success in their educational setting.</li> <li>2. Develop a culturally-responsive curriculum that will provide high quality, high-challenge, high-visibility, and culturally relevant instruction.</li> <li>3. Create awareness of Native American communities' learn among classroom teachers.</li> <li>4. Increase community and parent engagement efforts through workshops and training sessions. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Increase community and parent support for Native American parents and families.</li> <li>b. Provide community services to address common concerns with tribal and government collaborative opportunities with tribal and government.</li> <li>c. Support district and schools in providing home visitations for Native American students who are at risk or in need of intensive interventions.</li> </ol> </li> <li>5. Develop ongoing partnerships for Native American students that provides a holistic approach to address: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. academic achievement</li> <li>b. social-emotional well-being</li> <li>c. health and wellness</li> <li>d. career and workforce preparation</li> </ol> </li> <li>6. Develop partnerships, networks, and initiatives that promote shared partnerships among tribal government, tribal education departments, Native American institutions of higher education, and other communities to establish or strengthen collaborative relationships.</li> </ol>
<b>Cultural Response Teaching Strategies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make classroom practice consistent with students' language skills, cognitive functioning, motivation, and self-esteem.</li> <li>• Present the Big Idea first and relating the details to it, rather than presenting details first and then relating them to the Big Idea.</li> <li>• Use storytelling to describe or present ideas that are being studied, since Native Americans have a strong oral tradition of oral literature.</li> <li>• Help the class of high-achieving students, quiet and passive, and involving participation and roles in sharing the stories and history of the community.</li> <li>• Assess the needs of students in making individual completion and drawing attention to their needs and interests.</li> <li>• Encourage learning strategies and team projects that will allow to promote a sense of teamwork and respect.</li> <li>• Encourage students to learn to give positive feedback or receive positive feedback from the presentation of their students.</li> <li>• A cooperative and caring spirit.</li> <li>• Provide multiple means of assessment, including portfolios, peer or self-assessment tools, non-standardized tests, and criterion-referenced tests in conjunction with standardized assessments. Often other ways than tests of assessment are used. See Appendices in the report.</li> <li>• Make thoughtful and creative use of the content organizing principle of the curriculum, rather than a single class that lies outside of the main curricular framework.</li> </ul>

recommendations and strategies including,

- Allow language and culture to be the central organizing principle of the curriculum, rather than a single class that lies outside of the main curricular framework.
- Study the lives of real Native American heroes, past and present, and involve grandparents and elders in sharing the stories and history of the community.
- The document also lists some state and national programs and initiatives with a chart of instructional strategies for teachers.

## Something to Watch!

### [“We Are Still Here”—A Documentary on Today’s Young Native American](#)

In this video, three young Native Americans from Minnesota talk about their lives and the challenges they face. They also mentioned how the historical traumas encountered by many Native Americans influenced their lives, and what they want to do pass on their values and stories to the next generation.



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