

# Educating Native Students, Then and Now

NAPTAC's Summary of "Native Nations and American Schools: The History of Natives in the American Education System"

A product of NAPTAC  
Native American Parent Technical Assistance Center  
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## Native Nations and American Schools



## Who wrote the report?

National Indian  
Education Association



## Use this summary of the report to:

- better understand the historical context and current state of Native education; and
- inform your work with families who are American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN).

## Did You Know...?

**574**

Federally Recognized Tribes in the U.S.



**5.2 million**

U.S. citizens identify themselves as having AI/AN ancestry

**42%**

AI/AN population under the age of 25

**78%**

AI/AN population living outside of Tribal areas

## Essential Understandings

*Recognizing the painful past*

Oppressive federal policies of the past have had a **devastating impact** on Native communities.

### Boarding School Era

To enforce assimilation, Native children were taken from their tribal communities and sent to boarding schools far from home.

These were harsh environments where students were not permitted to wear their Native clothing, speak tribal languages, or practice tribal customs.



### 1926 Meriam Report

*An investigation into the conditions in Indian country & the impact of federal policy on tribal communities.*

**Findings** | "Indian schools had significantly lower social & educational standards than urban and rural schools serving the general population of American students."

**Recommendations** | Base curriculum on Native cultures and history. Acknowledge the diversity between tribes and their needs.

*continued* →



Native American Parent Technical Assistance Center

Online at: <https://www.parentcenterhub.org/naptac-tier1-culture/>



## Essential Understandings

*continued*

### In 1934

New Federal laws passed brought changes.

#### 1934 Indian Reorganization Act

- Revised policies about assimilation of Natives
- Provided *some* recognition of tribal sovereignty

#### 1934 Johnson O'Malley Act

- Provided funds for public schools that had schools located on or near tribal land

### In 1969



Report released on 2-year national study of conditions and education in Indian Country.

#### The Kennedy Report

Detailed the low quality of virtually every aspect of the education of Native students in both the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and public schools



#### Recommendations of Report

Echoed many in the 43-year-old Meriam Report

## Modern Education Laws

*A Brighter Future for Native Students*

Legislation in the 1970s and after marked a shift in federal policy, which now it supports the ability of tribes to approve or disapprove of programs for their own Native students.

#### 1972 Indian Education Act

- Formula grant program of the U.S. Department of Education
- Focuses on the “unique culturally related academic needs” of Native students
- Created the National Advisory Council on Indian Education, which oversees all U.S. DOE programs and funds that impact Native students

#### 1975 Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act

Tribes now contract directly with the federal government to operate their own education programs.

## Types of Schools Native Students Currently Attend

### Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) Schools

- Funded within the U.S. Department of Interior
- Operated by the BIE

### Tribally Controlled Grant/Contract Schools

- Funded through the BIE
- Operated through tribal control, grant, or contract

### Public Schools

- Funded primarily by states with supplemental funds from the U.S. DOE

**93%**

AI/AN students educated in public schools

## Promising Practices

### Culture-Based Education

Academically effective and locally meaningful for Native students and communities



### Immersion Schools

Full-day or half-day teaching and learning in a Native language, including instruction in all content areas

### Language Nests

For young children from birth to 5 • Provide vibrant, home-like environments where young children interact with fluent speakers of Native languages

### Other sections in NIEA's *Native Nations and American Schools*

- Federal policy toward Native Alaskans
- Barriers to success faced by Native students
- Key Native education legislation and Executive Orders