



## Educational Leadership

The challenges facing American Indian students in Montana must be addressed. The purpose of this Indian education summit brief is to highlight issues and research around educational leadership and Indian education.

This Summit is convening educators and leaders from across the state to develop an action plan on how to close the achievement gap for American Indian students and ensure that schools can successfully implement Indian Education for All. It will be the collective wisdom of all the participants that will ultimately lead to developing strong educational leadership for Indian education.

*“There is reason to be cautiously optimistic about the future of Indian education in the United States, but it will take a broader approach. This approach should include a partnership among tribes, states, the federal government and other interest groups that will provide leadership and minimize politics while maximizing quality education for Indian students.”* (Tippeconic, 1991)

### Related Issues

To help focus and frame discussions during the summit, the Indian Education Summit Planning Committee recognized the following issues as related to drop out and retention issues. They are inter-related and not meant to be all inclusive.

#### ✓ Retention and Recruitment

Turnover in school staff is a major concern among Indian schools. Geographic isolation, reverse culture shock, and teacher burnout are some possible reasons for teachers leaving Indian schools after only one year. Teaching shortages in areas such as music, vocational education and special education are another consideration. Indian schools need help in not only locating qualified candidates, but also in developing systems to retain the teachers they already have. Recruitment and retention issues of American Indian students in higher education must also be addressed if we are to significantly increase the number of American Indian teachers and administrators.

#### ✓ Shared Decision Making

True leadership is about doing right things rather than doing things right. Policies and procedures can support – or inhibit -- efforts to improve Indian education. What are the policies in Montana that need to be changed? Given the unique issues facing contemporary American Indian people on and off the reservation, it is necessary to design and implement approaches that are reflective of their unique needs. Shared decision making is a model that needs further exploration and discussion.

*“To get the needed gains for kids, we adults must expect and endure the pain that comes with ambitious rethinking and redesign of schools. To pretend that serious restructuring can be done without honest confrontation is a cruel illusion”* (Thoedore Sizer, The Coalition of Essential Schools)

#### ✓ Stability/Consistency

Consistency in Montana’s efforts to improve Indian education, whether it is education about American Indians or education for American Indian students, is critical. What are the turnover rates of teachers and administrators in schools that serve primarily American Indian students? How are current and future school leaders provided with the necessary knowledge and skills to work in and with Indian country? Can more be done?

#### ✓ Professional Development

A goal of professional development is to improve instruction for and about American Indian students. We know from research that professional development is most effective when it is on-site, ongoing, and collaborative and job embedded. A search for the magic bullet is an effort in futility. One shot workshops and in-service trainings may raise awareness, but how much do they really change teacher knowledge and practice? What can be done to ensure that educational leaders at all levels (school, district, state, tribal, higher education) are aware of their unique obligations with Indian education?

Many of the Tribal Colleges currently offer culturally-based, professional development for schools located on or near their reservation. How can these efforts be expanded statewide?

## ✓ Tribal Leadership

American Indian people have a unique status from other minorities, due to their distinct legal and political relationship with the United States Government as set forth by the Constitution, treaties and executive orders. This extremely important status must be taken into account and reflected in our actions. Indian Education for All mandates that schools work cooperatively with tribes. What can we do to foster true collaboration at every level? Given the history surrounding Indian education efforts, we must not only work harder but smarter in our efforts to include tribal nations as we work together on improving education for and about American Indians. For example, State Superintendent McCulloch's "Government to Government Proclamation" sets forth how the OPI will work with Montana's Tribal Nations. Tribal Education Departments and tribal governments need to play an integral part of all reform efforts.

## ✓ Teacher Quality

When test scores and admission tests are discussed, comparisons to Indian and non-Indian students inevitably arise. The comparisons become "apples to oranges" when equity is brought into the discussion. Bias reviews may eliminate racial biases in assessments; however, it doesn't eliminate issues related to equity. Indian students will continue to perform at a level below their non-Indian peers as long as access to quality instruction is limited. Teachers must be provided appropriate instructional materials and support. And administrators must work with their teachers to improve the quality of education at their schools.

*Good teachers use multiple teaching methods to meet the unique learning style preferences of all learners, regardless of their cultural or racial background.*  
(Collected Wisdom, 1998)

## ✓ American Indian Teachers/Administrators

The number of American Indian educators is not proportionate with the number of American Indian students in schools. Waiting for a critical mass of American Indian educators is not an option. It may well happen, however, with a well planned and coordinated effort. What can be done in our institutions of higher education to do help?

## ✓ Role Models

Positive role models need to be highlighted, especially youth leadership in schools and communities. What can Montanan do to nurture young leadership? What are the practices and programs? Carefully examine how tribal ceremonies and practices are passed from one generation to the next. This is often an overlooked aspect of leadership. In some communities there is an effort to combat the influence of gangs. Traditionally many Indian cultures had "gangs" as part of their cultural fabric – referred to as "societies". Some of our schools on and near the reservations are revitalizing some of our youth societies as a way to maintain traditions and foster positive self-esteem and collective identity.

## ✓ School Boards

K-12 Accreditation Standards, adopted October 2000, require that all schools will have an Indian education policy statement in place. Do all school boards understand their obligations in regard to Indian Education for All?

## ✓ Program Supervision

What attributes make for an effective leader in an American Indian school? Are there effective school leadership models in place now? What innovative ideas exist that may be adaptable to Montana's Indian schools?

*"As Indians we expect and demand the right to participate – for information – for truth — people need to be leading in a way that matches the value expectations of people. Historically people made leadership decisions with the best interests of the tribe as a whole – now seems like we are making leadership decisions based on the needs of the few."*

(Tom Thompson, Former Board of Public Education Member)

What can schools and tribal communities do to ensure that tribal specific cultural knowledge is included as part of the basic curriculum for those schools that serve predominantly Indian students? What can schools all across Montana do to ensure an accurate portrayal of historical and contemporary Indian issues are included in the curriculum?