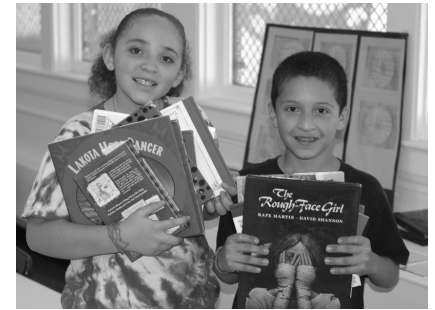




NEWSLETTER

Traditional Native American Education

NATIVE COMMUNITIES HAD AN ORGANIZED SYSTEM FOR EDUCATING YOUNG PEOPLE, BASED ON GENERATIONS OF ACCUMULATED KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE NATURAL WORLD. A COMPLEX EXPERIENTIAL PROCESS, WHICH INCLUDED LEARNING BY DOING, WATCHING, LISTENING, AND EXPERIMENTING, UNDER THE CARING MENTORSHIP OF ELDERS AND EXTENDED FAMILY MEMBERS, WAS WELL DEVELOPED. CUSTOMS, SKILLS, SPIRITUAL PRACTICES, AND LANGUAGES WERE EFFECTIVELY TRANSMITTED ACCORDING TO LOCALLY DETERMINED PRIORITIES. THE EXTENDED FAMILY, CLAN, AND THE LARGER COMMUNITY PROVIDED A SAFETY NET FOR ALL CHILDREN.



Native Education

The understanding that it takes a village to raise a child was the norm in Native communities. There was no concept of “other people’s” children. A child was regarded as a gift from the Creator and members of the community shared responsibility for the upbringing. Many tribes were matrilineal, tracing relationships through the mother’s lineage, reflecting the deep reverence for Mother Earth. The traditional indigenous ways were egalitarian and respectful of both sexes.

Learning was understood to be a lifelong experience, which began before birth. Through songs and ceremonies for the unborn child, infants were prepared for a place in the community. Children commonly spent the first months of life in a cradleboard. Generally, the cradleboard was taken everywhere and was propped up, allowing the child to observe the activities of the family, community, and the environment.

Elders were held in the highest esteem in this system, and grandparents played important roles as teachers of traditional knowledge and carriers of the family genealogy and history. Aunts, uncles, and others who may not be blood relatives all played roles. It was commonly understood that responsibility for teaching was not confined to the biological parents.

As children grew older, a variety of teaching approaches were incorporated. Oral tradition was the most

common practice, through what is often called storytelling, although the process is much more sophisticated than the name implies. Different tribes utilized various forms of symbolic writing. Skills in observation and memorization were vitally important in these teaching approaches.

Learning appropriate roles was accomplished through emulating examples observed in the community. There was great respect given to individuals and individual differences. Mentoring occurred, both on the individual level as well as with groups of youth. Games were also an important vehicle for teaching and learning. Young people were generally free to develop at their own pace.

One of the most important concepts of traditional thought and worldview shared by indigenous people is the emphasis on positive thought. As Cherokees, we are taught that balance, harmony, and beauty are essential to the survival of the planet and that these are achieved through prayer. Our prayers are offered for all of the Creation—humans, animals, insects, plants, minerals, and the elements. Humans can create a positive environment through a process of thinking or conceptualizing, speaking, and singing about the desired outcomes.

Vine Deloria, Jr., the Lakota educator and author of the book, *Indian Education in America*, provides important insight into the traditional approach. “The old ways of educating

affirmed the basic principle that the human personality was derived from accepting the responsibility to be a contributing member of society . . . Kinship and clan were built upon the idea that individuals owed each other certain kinds of behaviors and that if each person performed his or her task properly, society would function . . . Education in the traditional setting occurs by example and is not a process of indoctrination.”

The concept of punishment was not part of the traditional learning process. As an example, the Dakota believed that physical punishment would “enslave the child’s spirit.” The concept of natural, logical consequences for behavior was well understood as the result of intimate involvement in nature and provided further parameters for appropriate behavior.

Indigenous educational approaches provide the foundation for learning based on context and relationship. By expanding the boundaries of the classroom through involvement with the broader community, including the environment, schools can build new relationships, validate the cultures of the young people they serve, and make learning meaningful and appropriate for our future.

(Excerpted from McClellan Hall’s chapter in the NDPC publication, *Creating a Community of Learners*, 2000)

Who Counts as Native?

by Dawn Mackety

How are our Native students performing?

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the 2009 status dropout rate for American Indian and Alaska Natives (AI/ANs) was 13.2% compared to 5.2% for Whites and 8.1% for the national average. The 2008-09 Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate for AI/ANs was 64.8% compared to 82.0% for Whites and 75.5% for the national average. According to a Pacific Regional Educational Laboratory report, the 8th grade reading proficiency rates between 2003-04 and 2008-09 increased 31.3% for Native Hawaiians compared to 28.4% for non-Native Hawaiians.

As Native educators, we applaud instances when Native student performance is reported (it's more typically excluded or reported in an "Other" category). Disaggregating data by race is critical to monitor Native student educational performance and to

ensure the fulfillment of federal obligations to Native people. It's essential for federal agencies to collect and report Native data to determine if and to what extent Native students' educational needs are being met. But do statistics like those above really tell us how our Native students are performing? The answer depends on who is being included—and excluded—from our Native racial categories.

Who Counts as Native?

Native student data are typically reported using the same two Native racial groups used in the U.S. Census: American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) and Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander (NHOPI). The AI/AN racial category is defined as "a person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America), and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment." The NHOPI racial category is defined as "a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands."

The Census brief, *The American Indian and Alaska Native Population: 2010* (#C2010BR-10), reports that within the nation's AI/AN population, 5.5% (N = 285,344) are affiliated with tribes outside of the United States. NHOPI figures from the 2010 Census are not yet available; however, data from the 2000 Census show that within the nation's NHOPI population, 53.5% (N = 460,530) are Other Pacific Islander (e.g., Samoan, Guamanian, Tongan, Fijian, Marshallese, etc.).

Data aren't available regarding how many students in the nation's AI/AN and NHOPI school populations belong to tribes and groups not indigenous to the United States. Based on findings from the Census, though, these numbers may be considerable. This begs the question of the appropriateness of the AI/AN racial category to track the progress of our nation's indigenous students.

Who Doesn't Count as Native?

According to 2010 Census data, 22.8% (N = 1,190,904) of the

nation's AI/AN population and 17.2% (N = 210,307) of the nation's NHOPI population identify themselves as having Hispanic/Latino ethnicity. Additionally, 43.8% (N = 2,288,331) of the nation's AI/AN population and 55.9% (N = 685,182) of the nation's NHOPI population identify themselves as associated with at least one other race (see Census brief 2010BR-02).

In school settings, Native students identified as AI/AN or NHOPI and Hispanic/Latino are counted as Hispanic/Latino. Additionally, Native students identified as AI/AN or NHOPI in combination with any other race are counted in a "Two or more races" or "Multiracial" category. Given these circumstances, how many Native students are excluded from AI/AN and NHOPI racial categories when reporting Native student educational performance? Based on findings from Census data, these numbers could be substantial. Here's one example, according to *The Condition of Education 2011* report, using data from the Current Population Survey, the number of prekindergarten through 12th grade AI/AN students in the nation's public schools dropped by half from 622,000 (1.2%) in October 2002 to 314,000 (0.6%) in October 2003, after the "Two or more races" category was introduced to the survey. Data for NHOPI students weren't reported.

So, how are our Native students performing? How do we know if federal programs and services for Native students are working? Given that the AI/AN and NHOPI racial categories include individuals who aren't native to the United States and possibly exclude a substantial number of our Native students, we may not be able to effectively answer these questions. But we must find a way. I welcome your feedback on this topic and look forward to continued dialogue with our nation's policymakers about it. Together we can improve the quality of education for our Native students.

—Dawn Mackety

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National
Dropout Prevention
Center/Network

NEWSLETTER

The *National Dropout Prevention Newsletter* is published quarterly by the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network. Your comments are always welcome. Please address mail to:

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Network Notes

Meet Our Guest Editor

■ Dawn Mackety, an enrolled member of the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians, is the Director of Research, Data, and Policy at the National Indian



Education Association (NIEA) in Washington, DC. She provides technical assistance and consultation on Native education research, evaluation, and data collection projects across the country; compiles research findings and best practices for dissemination to tribes and educators; and provides research-based evidence for NIEA's education policy and advocacy work. Her content expertise includes Native education academic achievement, graduation, dropout prevention, family and community engagement, student resilience, student mobility, early childhood education, and tribal education departments. Dawn has a Ph.D. in Educational Evaluation, Measurement, and Research and a M.A. in Educational Leadership.

New PSA

■ The NDPC/N has produced a new PSA, and you can find it on our Web site, www.dropoutprevention.org/news/join-team. Atlanta Braves pitcher Tim Hudson makes the case for all to get involved in dropout prevention. Join the team!

Meet the Author

■ Catherine Aurentz Griffith, Ph.D., is a Research Associate at the National Dropout Prevention Center and the author of the new publication,



Research-Based Remedial Strategies for Teens. She recently was responsible for designing, implementing, and reporting on a large-scale research study that investigates the use of the Jamestown Reading Navigator™ on underperforming adolescent readers' skills in reading

vocabulary and comprehension. Out of that experience, this new addition to the *Effective Strategies for School Improvement* series was born. Dr. Griffith earned a Ph.D. in Special Education from the University of Virginia.

Featured Board Members on the Web

■ Have you noticed the new feature on the NDPC/N Web site that focuses on our National Dropout Prevention Network Board? Get to know your board as they answer such questions as: What led you to get involved in dropout prevention? What role do you play on the board? What vision do you have for the Network? www.dropoutprevention.org/about-us/featured-board

Afterschool in April

■ In April, the NDPC has been focusing on afterschool as a dropout prevention strategy, which includes both afterschool and summer programming.



Our guest for *Solutions to the Dropout Crisis* on April 10 is Dr. Terry Peterson, chair of the Afterschool Alliance, and a key leader in the development of the 21st

Century Community Learning Centers. In case you missed the program, it is archived at www.dropoutprevention.org/webcast.

We are also promoting the book, *Powerful Allies*, in our Sale of the Month, as well as posting research and information as it comes in about afterschool and summer programs. As summer approaches, don't forget the importance of summer learning time. Our allies at the National Summer Learning Association have great resources, too!

NDPC Fellows Program

■ A small gathering of a cross-section of Clemson University professors and those from other institutions affiliated with NDPC will take place on the Clemson University campus to begin initial plans for an NDPC Fellows program. This new initiative, under

the facilitative guidance of Terry Pickeral, long-time NDPC member, will help extend the Network through the connections of new strategic partnerships, through new research collaborations, and a linking of educators from throughout the country.

Stand by for more news on the development of the NDPC Fellows program.

Introducing a 21st Century Journal!

■ The NDPC/N is excited to announce the launch of a new international journal, *Engage: An International Journal for Research in Practices of School Engagement*, in partnership with Clemson University Digital Press (CUDP). This new journal will not only be available at no cost online, but it will include some state-of-the-art features which were impossible with the traditional kind of publication like our original international journal. Indeed, this new journal will replace *The International Journal on School Disaffection*.

Jane Clark Lindle, Ph.D., Eugene T. Moore Professor of Educational Leadership at Clemson University, is our new editor. Dr. Lindle envisions a journal which is dynamic in its capacity to link readers to other resources; includes videos and photographs of a diverse range of international educational settings; and hosts a discussion forum, led by authors of the articles.

We look forward to the launch this spring. Stay tuned for further developments, and do consider submitting articles, videos, and photographs for the next issue.



Dr. Wayne Chapman, CUDP, and Dr. Jane Lindle, Editor, shake hands on the partnership.

GAINS in the Bering Strait

by Carl White

By any stretch of the imagination, Alaska is a beautiful place with unique and diverse landscapes and populations of people. But, beneath this beauty lies a problem: Alaska's dropout rate is double the U.S. average.

One project that is trying to make a difference is a consortium of efforts between Kawerak, Inc. (an Alaska Native regional nonprofit organization), the Alaska Staff Development Network (ASDN), and the Bering Strait School District (BSSD). The Graduation and Academic Improvement for Native Students (GAINS) project is trying to implement innovative academic interventions and dropout prevention strategies that result in all students graduating from high school. GAINS provides a full three years of services in five of BSSD's neediest and most isolated schools, which have some of the lowest graduation rates in Alaska and the U.S. Each subsequent year, an additional five schools will be served.

The Bering Strait is approximately 53 miles wide and connects the Chukchi Sea (Arctic Ocean) to the north with the Bering Sea (Pacific Ocean) to the south. It has been speculated that humans migrated from Siberia to the Americas across a land bridge at a time when lower ocean levels exposed a ridge beneath the ocean. The area is sparsely populated and there is no road from the Bering Strait region to the main cities of Alaska.

The Bering Strait School District serves 15 isolated villages in this area. The October 2010 enrollment figures show approximately 1,700 students of whom 97% are Alaska Native Inupiat, Yu'pik, or Siberian Yu'pik Eskimo. Village school enrollments range in size from 38 to 224 students. Although the number of our students is relatively small, the area we work in is approximately 80,000 square miles, a little smaller than Kansas, but larger than 36 states. Most of the schools are accessible only by small bush aircraft although occasionally travel is

by snow machines in the winter and boats in the summer and fall.

The GAINS project is developing four strategies to assist in dropout prevention:

- 1. Create a Dropout Early Warning Intervention System (DEWIS)** in grades 1-12 that interfaces with BSSD's existing data system. DEWIS assists school staffs to identify students who are struggling in reading, mathematics, behavior, or attendance. Research has shown that students who are struggling in at least two of the listed areas have a higher likelihood of dropping out of school. This tool will help the instructional staff at each school identify early on the students who are struggling and then assist in the development of strategies to address the individual needs of the student.
- 2. Develop dropout prevention strategies for students** based upon individual needs of students through each school's Response Team. This team meets weekly and uses a student's academic and behavioral data from DEWIS and then creates a dropout prevention plan for each identified student. Parents are included in the development of this plan. Other resources from the region are also explored.

There is a high teacher turnover rate in BSSD. The annual teacher turnover rate is around 35%. Consequently, in a three-year cycle, most schools have all new teachers, but the same high-need students remain. This results in many teachers each year with limited teaching experience and limited knowledge of the local Alaska Native culture, which adversely impacts student learning.

The following strategies focus on creating stronger and skillful teachers

who have a stronger appreciation of the rich Alaska Native cultures.

- 3. Build instructional capacity** of district administrators, principals, teachers in explicit systemic instruction, language and literacy skills and Response to Intervention/Instruction (RTI) through professional development.
- 4. Provide professional development** in Inupiat, Yu'pik, or Siberian Yu'pik Eskimo cultural awareness and culturally appropriate pedagogy.

The GAINS project will directly serve all teachers, paraprofessionals, principals, district level administrators, and the approximately 1,700 students from BSSD. Dissemination of our results will reach 17 other rural Alaska district comprising 141 schools with around 13,000 Native students.

Alaska is a great place to live. The natural, quiet beauty of our surroundings makes it a place like no other. One can still tread on the pathways of past ancestors when berry picking or hunting for game. Like our long glorious past, our hope for the GAINS project is to provide the early dropout prevention support and improved instructional delivery for our students for years to come.

—Carl White
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Program Profile

SIENA: Comprehensive Education for Native Americans

by Nadine Groenig

The Southwestern Institute for the Education of Native Americans (SIENA) was created on January 19, 2007. Our mission is to provide culturally rich educational events, programs, and resources that promote health and well-being resulting in highly educated, informed, and productive Native Americans.

SIENA was born out of four years of service in the nonprofit sector and mounting frustration with the lack of educational support for the Native American community. As a subgroup, Native Americans consistently achieve at the bottom on the AIMS (Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards) assessment. Knowing that Native Americans have the ability to achieve at high levels, I wanted to do something to change this.

After leaving a meeting that was getting nowhere fast, a friend of mine and I went to lunch and brainstormed about what we eventually saw as the first comprehensive approach to educating Native American children. With the crayons and paper tablecloth provided at the Macaroni Grill, we drew a diagram for the building we pictured as housing SIENA one day. It included a library, cultural center, study carrels, a gymnasium, computer lab, counseling center, and offices. When we left the restaurant, we knew we had something special.

I went back to my office and created an organizational chart which included education, mental health, physical health, physical fitness, and history and culture. I began thinking of individuals who could lend their expertise in developing programs and services that would meet the needs of our Native community. As a result, SIENA has been blessed with some fine board members, most of whom are tribal members. Their passion, dedication, and well-developed sense of humor have helped us get off the ground and kept us going strong in

achieving our mission. Our current board of directors comes from the fields of education, health, and business. Each member brings extremely valuable assets and provides a good balance to SIENA.

Over the last five years, we have held 12 educational conferences. In addition to Arizona participants, representatives from Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Colorado have come to our events. Prior to 2012, we conducted our *Early Childhood Care & Family Development* conference and the *Help Is on the Way: Reaching American Indian Students* professional development conference for educators. On March 28-30, 2012, we will combine those two events into the *Face2Face* conference. The goal of this event is to break down the barriers between Native American families and educators of Native American students in order to improve academic achievement among K-12 students. On September 20-21, 2012, we will hold our 6th annual *Take Charge!—Native American Leadership Today* conference for 7-12th grade students.

In 2011, with funding from the Alcoa Foundation, the Greater Valley Area Health Education Center, and Magellan Behavioral Health, we conducted the *Native American Fitness, Lifestyle, and Health Careers Project* with members of the Gila River Indian Community of Arizona. This community suffers from the highest per capita rate of diabetes in the world. In Arizona, 54.2% of Native Americans have diabetes. The rate of diabetes among Native Americans is 245.2 times the general population. The death rate from diabetes among Native Americans in Arizona is 15.7 per 100,000 (Source: *Native Health*, Sept. 2011)

Nearly 30 Gila River Indian students representing high schools in Bapchule and Sacaton participated in leadership and postsecondary readi-

ness training, nutrition and culinary arts classes, diabetes prevention and management, and a conference dedicated to healthcare career options. During this five-month program, the participants earned achievement points which garnered them prizes and rewards designed specifically for the individual student. In addition, they were exposed to a variety of physical activities, such as mixed martial arts, basketball, and weight training. They even played in SIENA's "Be the Difference" charity golf tournament. They loved it! Their principals also enjoyed seeing their normally sedentary students running up grassy hills to retrieve wayward golf balls. Since the project ended, some of the students started a walking club at their school.

SIENA has a desire to see every Native American live a healthy life and achieve at the highest levels that their potential can take them. Working with our dedicated partners, we will do everything in our power to help them do that.

—Nadine Groenig, Founder and Executive Director, SIENA
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Book Review

Resources

Reclaiming Youth At Risk: Our Hope for the Future (Rev. 2002). Larry K. Brendtro, Martin Brokenleg, & Steve Van Bockern Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service [ISBN 1-879639-86-6]

Reclaiming Youth At Risk: Our Hope for the Future is an educational program that presents a powerful Native American framework for understanding the universal needs of youth at risk. "Native American philosophies of child management represent what is perhaps the most effective system of positive discipline ever developed," emerging from cultures where the primary purpose of life was the empowerment and education of children (p. 35).

The program is premised on the Native concept that all children are sacred, and have four basic needs: belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. The authors claim that these needs make up *The Circle of Courage*. When one need is unmet, the circle is broken, resulting in behaviors that can lead to problems for youth, and ultimately, society.

Belonging is defined as the need all individuals have to be a part of something greater. Youth will go to far-reaching lengths to meet this need. When positive options are unavailable, almost any group will suffice, including unhealthy groups, such as some violent and destructive gangs. **Mastery** is the need one has to have to feel a sense of accomplishment. This can be translated into anything from solving a geometry problem to navigating a wilderness trail. **Independence** involves obtaining autonomy; being able to work on one's own. It is particularly important for youth at risk to be able to claim responsibility for their behaviors and become independent problem solvers. **Generosity** is defined as the need to be of service to others. This can be demonstrated by community service-learning or civic engagement.

The Circle of Courage offers rich opportunities for youth at risk to be engaged with their community in a healthy way. The model is so simple, and yet so integral to the success of youth, who could otherwise be disengaged from the world around them.

—Dr. Jerri Shepard, Associate Professor, School of Education,
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[Reprinted from our Summer 2007 Newsletter]

Also Recommended:

Power and Place: Indian Education in America. (2001). Vine Deloria, Jr. and Daniel R. Wildcat. Fulcrum Publishing. This collection of 16 essays is an effort to open discussion about the unique experience of Native Americans and offers a concise reference for administrators, educators, students, and community leaders involved with Indian education.

Voices of Native Educators: Strategies that Support Success of Native High School Students. (2011). Julia Lara. National Indian Education Association. ED528946. This report summarizes a conversation that took place in April of 2010 in Washington, DC, regarding high school reform and Native American, Alaskan Native, and Native Hawaiian students.

Promoting Resiliency Among Native American Students to Prevent Dropouts. (2010). Bill Thornton and Jafeth E. Sanchez. Project Innovation. EJ930615. This paper provides a brief review of the literature on resiliency and highlights aspects from a resiliency of American Indian high school students.

National Indian Education Association (NIEA)

The mission of the NIEA is to support traditional Native cultures and values; enable Native learners to become contributing members of their communities; promote Native control of educational institutions; and improve educational opportunities and resources for American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians throughout the U.S.
www.niea.org

National Indian Youth Leadership Project (NIYLP)

NIYLP's mission is to nurture the potential of Native youth to be contributors to a more positive world through adventure-based learning and service to family, community, and nature.
www.niylp.org

Events

July 10-13, 2012 New York, NY
National School Climate Center's 15th Annual Summer Institute—*Creating the Foundation for Comprehensive School Climate Improvement: Promoting Equitable, Democratically Informed and High Achieving K-12 School Communities*
www.schoolclimate.org

July 13-14, 2012 Flagstaff, AZ
American Indian Teacher Education Conference—*Honoring Our Heritage*
<http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~jar/AIE/conf.html>

Oct. 14-17, 2012 Orlando, FL
National Dropout Prevention Network Conference—*Ignite the Potential Within: Connect, Inspire, Graduate!*
www.dropoutprevention.org

Oct. 18-21, 2012 Oklahoma City, OK
National Indian Education Association Annual Convention—*Native Traditions: Maintaining Traditions in a Digital Era*
www.niea.org/Membership/Convention.aspx

Seeing the Big Picture

by Susan Osborn

The LaFayette Big Picture School opened in September 2008 in the LaFayette Central School District in LaFayette, New York. As a district, our graduation rate was hovering around 67%, and the Native American dropout rate was around 50%. The mission of the school was to develop personal relationships with our students, create rigorous learning experiences centered on high interest topics, and graduate everyone. The plan was to enroll 15 freshman students each year over a four-year period. In our first year, we enrolled 15 students. Eleven of the 15 were Native American students from the Onondaga Nation. Now in our fourth year, we currently have 53 students enrolled. We have graduated eight students with their original graduation cohort. Currently, 70% of our population is Native American students.

Our philosophy is simple: *One Student At A Time*. When beginning to work with a student, we always start where the student is. We start on the human level. We start by learning who the student is, who their family is, what they are interested in, and where they want to go. For many of our Native American students, we find that their family is of the utmost importance. A large percentage of our Native American students want to learn their traditional language, cultures, medicines, ceremonies, and songs; we honor that. Our staff works diligently to find an adult member in the Nation community that will serve as a mentor to our students. This mentor adds another layer to the personal relationships and support networks of our students. Additionally, many of our Native students are traditionalists and participate in religious ceremonies at the longhouse. Ceremonies include: Maple Sap, Planting, Bean, Strawberry, Green

Corn, Harvest, and Midwinter. Midwinter Ceremony lasts for 21 days. It is possible for students to be absent from school well over 20 days by participating in religious ceremonies. At Big Picture, we want our students to fully participate in their culture. Students are not penalized for being absent during these important times. We help the students combine their traditional learning from the longhouse with the academic goals of New York State.

Since opening the LaFayette Big Picture School, the graduation rate for the district has risen 20 percentage points to a record high of 89% with zero dropouts. All of our students are examples of the power of individualized learning plans, purposeful and meaningful relationships, academic rigor, and career mentoring. In addition to the increased academic achievement, the LaFayette Big Picture is proud of the relationships that we have formed with the members of the Onondaga Nation community.

We are now partnering with activities including a traditional “three sisters” garden of corns, beans, and squash; combining activities with the Nation Youth Group; and encouraging our students to take classes to learn their Onondaga language.

We are graduating students who have real-world learning experiences from spending two days per week in an internship, who are prepared for and attending postsecondary institutions, and who have repeatedly demonstrated the ability to set and achieve both short- and long-term goals.

If you would like more information on Big Picture Learning philosophy and design, please visit www.bigpicture.org. If you would like more information on the LaFayette Big Picture School, please visit <http://sites.google.com/site/lafayettebigpicture/home>.

—Susan Osborn, Principal
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Graduation Day at Lafayette Big Picture School



NEWSLETTER

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Viewpoint

The troubles that have existed for decades that caused youth to drop out of school still exist.

Except now there are more reasons that are further amplified by social media. For Native Alaskan and American Indians, the gulf between entering high school and graduating continues to widen. What are some of the core reasons this has happened? We have to acknowledge that our schools and some of our cultural values have shifted or changed. Native pride of our ancestors and our connection to Mother Earth has been weakened. Few schools teach authentic Indian history during the formative years of adolescence.

By the time students arrive at school in the morning, many have been insulted, put down, teased, cussed out, or threatened by family and peers. Then, while at school, most school systems are structured to discipline the angry or upset student, and ignore the quiet student who sits at his desk with his head down. Add

sleep deprivation, insults on Facebook, and no breakfast for many of our teens! ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

From their perspective, why should they go to school? A study was released in the mid 1990s which showed that high school students averaged 16 negative comments for every one positive comment directed towards them. Some youth may go an entire day at school without hearing one positive statement made to them. In the absence of happiness and faced with mounting societal pressures, the disconnect has been created, they find ways to block or avoid the pain. When that happens, many eventually drop out.

Today it appears the social media accelerates the negativity. Many messages between teens contain damaging and humiliating remarks about other students. An entire school can be aware of a student's "problem" without the student even knowing it. There is very little reason for a teen to want to remain in school when they feel

helpless, ignored, picked on, or bullied.

Educators and parents can play the blame game, but it misses the point. When a teen is in emotional pain, they withdraw. Drugs, alcohol, television, I-Pods, and cell phones effectively allow students to withdraw into their own world. All of it is intended to reduce the pain of rejection.

I believe there are two reasons why students stay in school. One, they have someone who was a positive influence, who gave them confidence, and showed them the value of staying in school. Two, they felt connected to the school. They were on a sports team, belonged to a club, were on the student council, or found a teacher or subject that made them feel good about themselves. It's that simple.

The dropout rate can be reduced!
Is anyone listening?

—Mike W. O'Connor, M.A.
Special Education Consultant
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