

EDUCATION: CSUSM report shows American Indian schooling slipping

By By DEBORAH SULLIVAN BRENNAN dbrennan@nctimes.com 7 a.m.Oct. 11, 2012

California Indians drop out of high school at a higher rate than the general population, and graduate from universities at a lower rate than other groups, according to a report released this month by the California Indian culture and Sovereignty Center at Cal State San Marcos.

The report, presented Oct. 5 at the California Indian Conference at the university, is the first attempt to gather statewide figures on the educational attainments and challenges of California Indians and Alaskan natives.

"The purpose of this report was really to capture the data and analyze the data and make the data available," said center director Joely Proudfit. "That just hasn't been done before."

The report was prepared with a grant from the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians in San Bernardino.

"I believe it is vital for policymakers to understand the (American Indian and Alaskan native) educational issues in our state so we can develop policies effective in meeting their diverse and complex needs," state Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson stated in a preface to the report. "It is also critical for elected officials to understand the achievement gaps that exist within (Indian) populations so we can help these children succeed in the classroom."

According to the report, Indian student enrollment in K-12 has dropped over the past decade, from 0.87 percent of the total school population in 2001-02 to 0.68 percent of students in 2011-12. That decline runs counter to an overall growth in the Indian population in California during that decade, Proudfit said.

"According to the United States Census, our numbers are increasing over the last 10 years," she said. "If you look at census data, our population is younger than the mean population for the nation in total. So I don't think (declining school enrollment reflects) a decline in population. What concerns us is, why is that happening?"

She said that subsequent reports would attempt to answer those kinds of questions.

The report also found that 21 percent of Indian students don't graduate from high school. By comparison, about 13 percent of black students, 14 percent of Asian students and 16 percent of white students fail to graduate.

Moreover, only 40 percent of Indian students who graduated from high school met minimum entrance requirements for Cal State or UC campuses, compared to 53 percent for all students statewide.

"If they're graduating with a high school diploma, yet they haven't met the requirements to be CSU or UC ready, it's pretty bleak that they will go onto a four-year institution, and receive a college diploma," Proudfit said. "It makes one wonder, how valuable is that high school diploma?"

Enrollment at colleges and universities is also disproportionately lower for California Indian students than other groups.

Although Indians make up 1.9 percent of California's population, they account for only .4 percent of CSU students, 0.6 percent of community college students and 0.7 percent of UC students. Indian students also graduate from the CSU system at a lower rate than other students, the report found.

The next phase of the report will consider the reasons for these trends, Proudfit said, and look at case studies of schools where Indian students are falling behind, as well as campuses where they're succeeding.

"We're going to have to work with legislators, tribes, community members, school districts, and the superintendent of public instruction," Proudfit said. "It's going to take a lot of different entities and individuals."

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