



To: Ways & Means Subcommittee on Education  
From: Reyn Leno, Chair, Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde  
Date: March 10, 2015  
Subject: Education Budget

Madame Chair, Mr. Chair, Members of the Committee,

My name is Reyn Leno, I am the Chairman of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak with you today. We are here today in support of your Budget and would ask that you please continue to prioritize Education and to make sure that it is adequately funded.

We are here today to advocate for two specific items within the budget that we know will be a positive for both Oregon's nine sovereign tribal governments, and the state. First, another full-time position to work with Oregon's Indian Education Specialist, and second to fund the Tribal Attendance Pilot Project.

#### **Indian Education Specialist**

We are very appreciative that Oregon has a dedicated Indian Education Specialist, and we want to make sure that the person in that role has the dedicated resources and help to continue to do great things that benefit both Oregon and the tribes. We have identified such great need with our students and within our communities.

#### **Tribal Attendance Pilot Project**

I have attached to my testimony a summary from the recent "Condition of Education for Oregon's Tribal Students" study conducted by Spirit Mountain Community Fund and The Chalkboard Project. This study clearly shows that there is a great deal of work that needs to be done for our tribal children throughout Oregon.

Since passage of the government-to-government legislation over a decade ago, we are very encouraged with the level of communication between our governments and the successful results that have come from this relationship. We expect nothing but continued momentum and take comfort in the fact that we have been able to work so well together. Thank you again for this opportunity to speak with you today. We are confident that you will fund these important proposals and continue in the government-to-government tradition that we all as Oregonians can be so very proud of.



# Condition of Education for Oregon's Tribal Students

## INTRODUCTION

The educational achievement and attainment of Native students—American Indians and Alaskan Natives—has received increased attention during the past year. The last decade of standards and heightened school accountability have seen improved outcomes for Latino, African American, and Asian students—but not for Native students. Nationally, the achievement gap has widened between Native students and their white peers during the past decade.<sup>1</sup> Recent reports have primarily focused on the problem's description, but their early diagnoses point to conditions of poverty and disproportionate enrollment in underperforming schools as probable causes. Notably, Native students in Oregon and Oklahoma fare better than their peers in other states.<sup>2</sup>

Within this national context, the Spirit Mountain Community Fund and the Chalkboard Project commissioned ECONorthwest (ECO) to assess the condition of education for a specific group of Native students in Oregon: enrolled members of Oregon's federally recognized tribes. A data-sharing agreement between the tribes, the Oregon Department of Education (ODE), and ECO made the study possible. Through a memorandum of understanding with ODE, ECO maintains de-identified longitudinal records of student outcomes for all Oregon K12 students dating back to 2003. For this study, each of the nine federally recognized tribes with offices within the State were invited to send the names and birthdates of its Oregon resident members aged 5 – 24 to ODE. ODE then matched enrolled members to unique identification codes. ODE shared the codes—but no personally identifying information—with ECO. The match allowed ECO to identify and follow Oregon tribal members in the larger dataset.

This research allowed Oregon tribes—for the first time—to assess educational outcomes specific to their enrolled members. Prior to this work, tribal leaders were limited to

With the challenge better defined, the study's goal is to assist tribal leaders, educators, and policymakers as they develop strategies to accelerate achievement gains and boost high school and postsecondary graduation rates.

reviewing outcomes for ODE-identified American Indians or Alaskan Natives in school districts in close proximity to their reservations. But as this work shows, not all tribal students live, or attend school this close to their tribe's reservation. And not all ODE-identified American Indians or Alaskan Natives who live close to a reservation are enrolled in the tribe.

This work reports achievement and attainment findings across the seven participating tribes but does not report findings for individual tribes<sup>3</sup>. The findings are primarily descriptive and outline the existing condition of education for tribal members.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

*An accompanying Powerpoint presentation steps through the details of the achievement and attainment findings for the seven Oregon tribes that participated in the study.*

Below is a summary of the key findings:

- In the 2011-12 school year, 67,172 Oregon public school students were identified as AI/AN in standard ODE ethnicity reporting (ODE AI/AN). Our data match

<sup>1</sup> The Education Trust. August 2013. *The State of Education for Native Students*. And Education Week. 2013. *American Indian Students Lose Ground* <http://www.edweek.org/ew/projects/2013/native-american-education/running-in-place.html#losing-ground>

<sup>2</sup> The Education Trust (2013), page 12

<sup>3</sup> ECO has briefed and provided reports for each participating tribe.

identified 3,210 students who were enrolled in federally recognized Oregon tribes. Oregon tribal-enrolled students accounted for 4.4 percent of all students who were identified as AI/AN. This work compares student outcomes of the Oregon-based tribal members to the larger population of ODE AI/AN, as well as to all ODE-identified non-AI/AN students. As illustrated in the detailed findings, we find significant differences in outcomes between enrolled Oregon tribal members and other ODE-identified AI/AN for several key measures.

- Seventy-four percent of enrolled tribal members are identified as only AI/AN and no other ethnicity in ODE reporting. Another 18 percent are identified as American Indian in combination with another race/ethnicity. Eight percent of enrolled Oregon tribal members are not identified as AI/AN in ODE's records.
- Seventy-five percent of Oregon tribal-enrolled students are eligible for free- and reduced-price lunch, which indicates their households have incomes below 185 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). By contrast, 50 percent of non-AI/AN-identified students are eligible for the lunch programs.
- Almost one-third of Oregon tribal students are enrolled in so-called priority or focus schools. These are schools that are deemed underperforming through federal and state rules and are targeted for management intervention. By contrast, only 6.6 percent of all Oregon students are enrolled in priority or focus schools.
- Oregon tribal-enrolled students show elevated rates of chronic absenteeism—that is, missing 10 percent or more of school days. One-third of Oregon tribal students were chronically absent in 2011-12 compared to 19 percent of non-AI/AN-identified students. Rates are highest at the high school level, with 43 percent of Oregon tribal students chronically absent.
- Almost half of all Oregon tribal-enrolled students in the study group are attending school in rural locations. These students meet or exceed OAKS reading and math benchmarks at much lower rates than their Oregon tribal student peers. This gap does not exist among other ODE AI/AN students and all other Oregon students.
- Achievement gaps in reading—as measured by differences in raw RIT scores, a standardized measure of academic improvement, on Oregon's OAKS test—are apparent in the first testing year (3rd grade) and remain relatively constant thereafter. In reading, Oregon tribal students score 5.1 scale points behind non-American Indian peers in 3rd grade—roughly a year's worth of achievement. Oregon tribal-enrolled 8th graders have a similar 4.7 point gap. The reading findings suggest

Oregon tribal students are exhibiting learning gains that are comparable to their non-AI/AN identified peers but fail to close the initial 3rd grade gap.

- In math, the achievement gap starts at 4.3 points in 3rd grade and grows to 5.8 points in 8th grade. Unlike the reading trends, this suggests somewhat lower math gains for Oregon tribal students during 3rd-8th grade.
- Fifty-five percent of Oregon tribal students from the high school class of 2011 graduated on time with a traditional diploma—compared to 68 percent of non-AI/AN-identified students. Fourteen percent of those not graduating continued enrollment for at least an additional year, of which only another four percent of the class earned a traditional diploma.
- Tribal students who graduated from high school enrolled in postsecondary education at rates that are comparable to their non-AI/AN identified peers. Two-thirds of 2010 high school graduates enrolled in postsecondary education within 16 months of graduation.
- Thirty-one percent of Oregon tribal-enrolled students live more than 60 miles (or roughly an hour) from their tribe's offices. The concentration of population near tribal headquarters can be a key factor in service delivery. Tribes with concentrated populations have the option to develop and deliver wraparound educational services (e.g., mentoring, parental engagement). Service delivery is inherently more challenging for tribes with disperse populations.

## POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

The primary purpose of this work is to shed light on the condition of education for enrolled members of Oregon's federally recognized tribes. With these findings released, the conversation will appropriately turn to changes in policy that could strengthen the outcomes. Tribal leaders, educators, and other policymakers have several promising options to consider. First, at the state level, routine and more transparent reporting of outcomes of enrolled members is key. Second, policies that strengthen student engagement, reduce absenteeism, and boost high school graduation rates would address the most severe gaps identified in this work. And third, tribes could redouble their already successful efforts to provide better information about postsecondary options to high school graduates.