

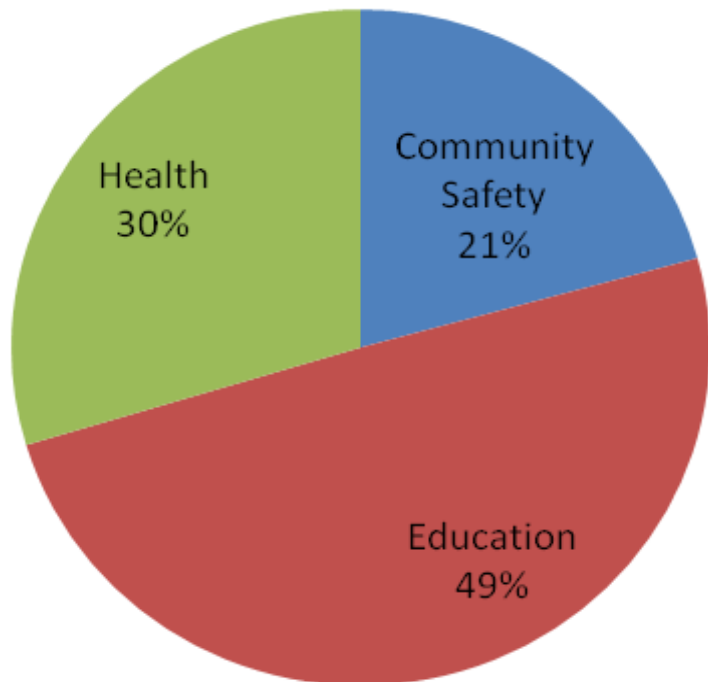


# Tribal Perspective on Discrimination in Schools from the Honoring Our Children Initiative

Presented By Michelle Schulte, Project Director for Inter-Tribal Council of  
Michigan

# Honoring Our Children Initiative

This Initiative was a collaborative effort of all 12 Federally Recognized Tribes in Michigan, the WKKellogg Foundation, and the Inter-Tribal Council of MI to look at the barriers faced by Native American families and their children across Health, Community Safety, and Education.



During the process of identifying priorities of Native American families, 49% (2700) references were made about education

### **School System Issues commonly cited**

Prejudice/Discrimination, funding, Native history/ language, integrated culture, prepared staff, support special needs, access to services, transportation, & Tutoring/ after-school care

# 12 Federally Recognized Tribes in Michigan



Native American Affairs  
Tribal Service Area Matrix  
(Map Reference)

Counties Included in Tribes' Service Delivery Area

Online (MI-DHS-NAA):  
[https://www.michigan.gov/documents/dhs/NAA-Tribal-Service-Area-Map\\_305179\\_7.pdf](https://www.michigan.gov/documents/dhs/NAA-Tribal-Service-Area-Map_305179_7.pdf)



## The American Indian Health & Family Services



For More Information about AIHFS:

[www.aihfs.org](http://www.aihfs.org)

The following six communities sited that a lack of cultural awareness was one of their top 3 issues that Native American children face in education in Michigan:

Cultural Awareness has 3 subthemes which are-the school does not include enough or accurately portray Native Americans; Teachers need more education on Native American History; and Prejudice against Native American children.

- ▶ Hannahville Indian Community: **Cultural awareness 28%** of all sited issues with education (a) School does not include enough or accurately portray Native Americans (2%), (b) Teachers need more education on Native American History (21%), and (c) Prejudice against Native American children (5%)
- ▶ Keweenaw Bay Indian Community: **Cultural Awareness 37%**; (a) School does not include enough or accurately portray Native Americans (7%); (b) Teachers need more education on Native American History (24%); (c) Prejudice against Native American children (6%)
- ▶ Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa & Chippewa Indians: **Cultural Awareness 38%**; (a) School does not include enough or accurately portray Native Americans (12%); (b) Teachers need more education on Native American History (26%); (c) Prejudice against Native American children (0%)
- ▶ Little Traverse Bay Band of Odawa: **Cultural Awareness 33%**; (a) School does not include enough or accurately portray Native Americans (8%); (b) Teachers need more education on Native American History (13%); (c) Prejudice against Native American children (12%)
- ▶ Matcheбенashewish Band of Pottawatomi (Gun Lake): **Cultural Awareness 28%**; (a) School does not include enough or accurately portray Native Americans (8%); (b) Teachers need more education on Native American History (6%); (c) Prejudice against Native American children (14%)
- ▶ American Indian Health & Family Services of SE MI (Detroit Area): **Cultural Awareness 28%**; (a) School does not include enough or accurately portray Native Americans (8%); (b) Teachers need more education on Native American History (6%); (c) Prejudice against Native American children (14%)
- ▶ Bay Mills Indian Community & the Sault Ste Marie Band also sited 21% & 17% (respectively) of their concerns with schools is the unsafe environment which has some overlap to bullying and discrimination in some cases (For All Tribes combined this was 10% of the issues with school systems)

# School System Barriers

## Cultural Awareness and Native American Language/History

### **Barrier:**

- Negative cultural biases still exist throughout the general school system and many aspects of its curriculum at all levels. Books that depict Native American people inaccurately, less than human or as mystics are harmful to all students. Methods used to teach students may not be addressing all of the learning styles and intelligences that a child brings to the classroom.
- Teachers/providers should be aware of the cultural nuances, etiquette, and manners of Native American families/children.
- The integration of local Native American history and culture is important for building the identity of all students and especially for Native American students even in communities where there is not a reservation nearby. Much of the development of the United States and especially the State of Michigan is attributed to the relationship leaders have had with the local Native American communities.
- Not all Native cultures are the same. Using “science-based” categories or labels and not using the correct Tribal name to address Tribes or individuals can be degrading. For example, Navajo was a derogatory name given to one tribe from another. People from those communities refer to themselves as Dine.

### Strategy:

Educate employees & staff in culture  
Services must be sensitive, flexible,  
& unafraid to ask for understanding  
Learn/observe verbal & non-verbal  
forms of good communication  
Tribal support for language/culture  
across programs/local schools

Integrate cultural events/activities  
into programming  
Encourage language learning; be open  
when others use Native language  
Maintain high expectations for  
performance but respectful of  
differences

The *Anishinaabe language* is an endangered language  
rich in science and history.  
*Learning the language connects speakers to the environment.*

For Anishinaabe families,  
*it is the blueprint of the culture* that  
solidifies their identity and helps deepen the speaker's  
understanding/relationship to the past,  
connecting people to their ancestors  
and the world around them.





# School System Barriers

## Unsafe environment

### ***Barrier:***

- Bullying and Cyber-bullying can hinder student growth and development.
- Young children are being exposed at younger ages (early elementary) to drugs/alcohol/tobacco and sex on school grounds.
- Many tribal families report that they are witness to or have experienced some form of prejudice at school. Tribal students may feel their identity is a threat to being completely comfortable in the school system. Often the school curriculum contains inaccurate information/history regarding Native American people. Modern Native American contributions are obscure and sometimes non-existent in the curriculum. Staff are not prepared to handle cultural differences that may arise.
- Cultural bias and prejudice that is not addressed properly can be traumatic for children and families.
- Transportation and a lack of safe places to walk are an issue in several communities.

**Strategy:**

Bridge the culture gap  
Involve families in finding solutions/  
implementation  
Provide education  
Support community policing

Visit families at home & in the  
community  
Raise awareness  
Improve monitoring, follow-up &  
communication when students report  
issues

*Historical trauma has led to a cycle of abuse and neglect.*

*Boarding Schools left a generation of adults without identity and parenting skills they would have learned growing up in the care of their family. Rates of substance abuse and neglect are high.*

*Sometimes it is difficult to recognize problems in one's own parenting.*

*We hear families say;*

*"It's the way my family did it and I turned out OK".*

*Breaking the cycle means getting to know the healthier side of who we are as Anishinaabe people.*



# Also reported by Native American Parents

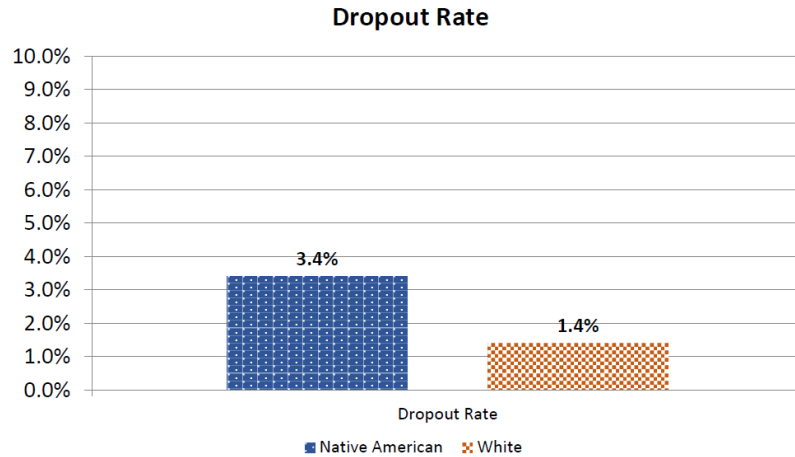
- ▶ Racial slurs and intimidation at sport events-stereotyping (especially of those with Native Mascots or when there are visiting Tribal Schools)
- ▶ Gross misunderstanding of sovereignty and treaty rights-"...Native kids get everything..."
- ▶ There is a belief that Native Americans do not exist and have died off a long time ago—as if we were a species
- ▶ Many of our history books still use the word Savage to describe native people and in elementary reading programs. Native American History often stops after the late 1800's. Literature example-The Sign of the Beaver by Elizabeth George Speare—won literary awards and historical novel. This book is used as a regular reading novel in late elementary school. While this is based on true historical events, teachers aren't prepared to teach and don't properly prepare children for the bias and discriminatory language in the book used toward Native Americans.
- ▶ Kids/Parents report touching hair and teasing boys for having long hair or for having Tribal names
- ▶ There are disproportionate numbers of students in Special Ed.

# Significant Disproportionality

ISD	District Name	Year	Area	Race	Disability
Traverse Bay Area ISD	Suttons Bay Public Schools	2007	Identification	Native American	Emotional Impairment
Oakland	South Lyon Community Schools	2010	Identification	Native American	ALL
Ingham ISD	Mason Public Schools (Ingham)	2012	Identification	Native American	ALL
Ingham ISD	Lansing Public School District	2013	Identification	Native American	Other Health Impairment
Cheb-Otsego	Gaylord Community Schools	2014	Identification	Native American	ALL
Traverse Bay Area ISD	Traverse City Area Public Schools	2014	Discipline	Native American	
St. Clair County RESA	Port Huron Area School District	2015	Discipline	Native American	
Traverse Bay Area ISD	Traverse City Area Public Schools	2015	Discipline	Native American	

# Native American Dropout Rate Compared to White Students in Michigan

• More than twice as likely to dropout



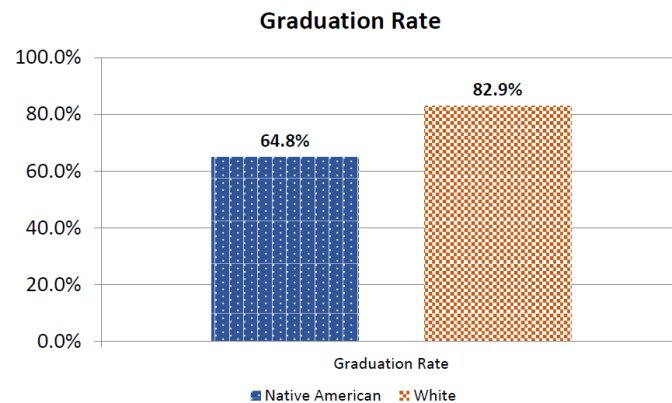
“In Grand Rapids, the school superintendent closed the Native-focused Bimaddiziwin High School in 2007 because “It focused on Native literature, art, language classes and traditional teachings” and his belief that Native American students should be assimilated into society.”

-reported by David Cournoyer, Native American Children in Michigan, 2012

# Native American Graduation Rate Compared to White Students in Michigan

• 22% less likely to graduate high school in 4 years.

• Data Source: MI School Data Graduation and Dropout Rates at [MI School Data](#). 2013-14 four-year graduation cohort.



Within the home visiting setting, up to 40% of Native clients are profile-tested for newborn drug (substance abuse) screening. Of those, only 15% screened positive. Michigan law does not employ the CDC-endorsed practice of universal newborn drug-screening at birth. Instead, individual hospitals develop their own policies related to drug screening. Many hospitals still use profile-testing which disproportionately targets women of color. -reported by ITCMI, Tribal Home Visiting Report, 2017



# Gross misunderstanding of sovereignty and treaty rights

Sec. 2. Fundamental Principles. In formulating or implementing policies that have tribal implications, agencies shall be guided by the following fundamental principles: (a) The United States has a unique legal relationship with Indian tribal governments as set forth in the Constitution of the United States, treaties, statutes, Executive Orders, and court decisions. **SINCE THE FORMATION OF THE UNION, THE UNITED STATES HAS RECOGNIZED INDIAN TRIBES AS DOMESTIC DEPENDENT NATIONS UNDER ITS PROTECTION.** The Federal Government has enacted numerous statutes and promulgated numerous regulations that establish and define a trust relationship with Indian tribes. (b) **Our Nation, under the law of the United States, in accordance with treaties, statutes, Executive Orders, and judicial decisions, has recognized the right of Indian tribes to self-government. As domestic dependent nations, Indian tribes exercise inherent sovereign powers over their members and territory.** The United States continues to work with Indian tribes on a government-to-government basis to address issues concerning Indian tribal self-government, tribal trust resources, and Indian tribal treaty and other rights. (c) **The United States recognizes the right of Indian tribes to self-government and supports tribal sovereignty and self-determination.**