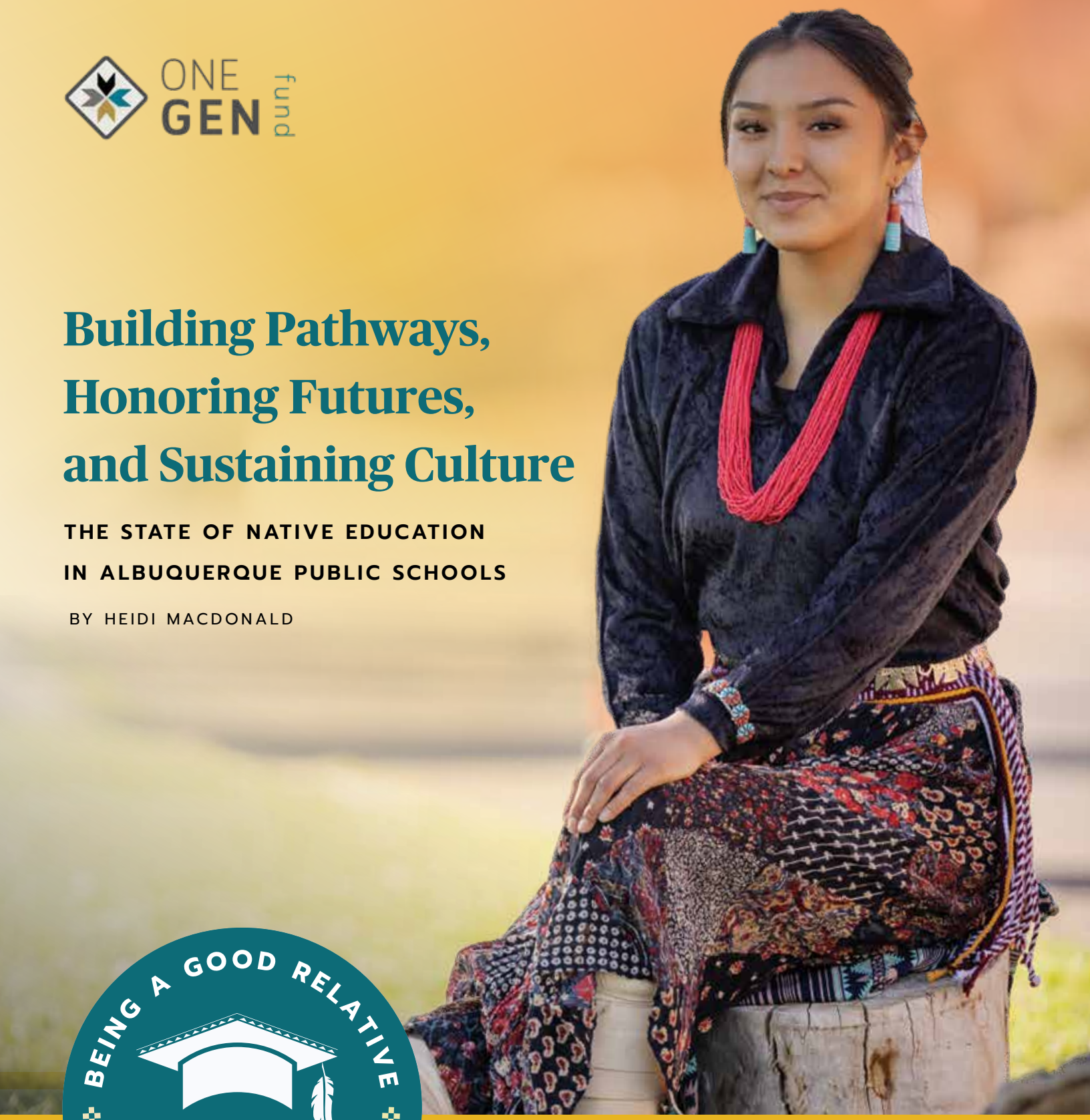
ONE GEN fund

Building Pathways, Honoring Futures, and Sustaining Culture

THE STATE OF NATIVE EDUCATION IN ALBUQUERQUE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

BY HEIDI MACDONALD



BEING A GOOD RELATIVE

NATIVE AMERICAN STUDENT SUCCESS INITIATIVE

RECIPROCITY ✣ EMPOWERMENT ✣ CULTURE ✣ LANGUAGE

2025

BEINGAGOODRELATIVE.ORG

Executive Summary

RECLAIMING EDUCATIONAL PROMISE

NATIVE STUDENTS' JOURNEY IN APS

FAMILIES AND TRIBES CONSISTENTLY PRIORITIZE EDUCATION AS A PATHWAY TO PRESERVE LANGUAGE, TRADITIONS, AND COMMUNITY WELL-BEING. Native American students and families in Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) bring remarkable strengths, including deep cultural roots, a commitment to cultural preservation, and strong leadership. Families and tribes enrich APS with their knowledge, language, cultural traditions, and commitment to ensuring a better future for their youth and grandchildren. Urban Indigenous leaders in Albuquerque collaborate to provide spaces where students feel connected, supported, and valued, such as through the Urban Indigenous Education Summits and among many Albuquerque Native-led organizations. These assets form the foundation for an educational system that is welcoming to Native families and enables success for their students.

Families, educators, tribal leaders, community partners, and students are eager to work together to ensure APS becomes a model educational system that honors Native cultural identity while preparing students for college, careers, and life. This vision includes culturally responsive curriculum, language preservation programs, leadership development, college access, land-based learning, and mentorship and career apprenticeship opportunities.

To honor the assets of Native students and families and address persistent inequities, APS can:*

PRIORITIZE COHERENCE, CONSISTENCY, AND COMMITMENT

- Establish a shared vision and plan for serving Native students.
- Establish interdepartmental committees or teams with a specific charge of better serving Native students.
- Promote collaboration related specifically to student needs.
- Regularly assess the effectiveness of programs or initiatives intended to serve Native students.
- Develop formal and shared processes and protocols to engage in reflective practice.

ADDRESS NATIVE EDUCATOR EXPERIENCE AND SUPPORT

- Set clear goals for expanding the Native educator workforce and report progress annually.
- Develop a plan to implement targeted strategies to prepare, recruit, retain, and promote more Native educators.
- Track and report on differential teacher retention and turnover rates.

PROMOTE ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE, RELEVANCE, AND EQUITY

- Monitor district course offerings and screening practices to determine whether Native students are being provided a college- and career-ready course of study.
- Require schools to report when Native students specifically are assigned to below-grade-level courses; have uncertified teachers; are receiving tutoring, remedial, or credit recovery programs; or are in danger of failing core courses in English, math, and science.
- Pilot universal screening for all Native second graders to better identify Native students for gifted and talented tracks.
- Monitor rates of identification for special education services for Native students.
- Implement land-based learning for Native students to integrate the natural environment, local ecosystems, and cultural traditions into the curriculum.
- Partner with community organizations and tribes to implement experiential and flexible learning models.
- Teach accurate history and draw upon the knowledge of this history among community members and tribal leadership.
- Provide culturally responsive college advising to all Native secondary students in the district.
- Provide Indigenous language courses, summer programs, learning experiences, and opportunities for students that are in partnership with families, tribes, and community members, and are sustainable.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITY ACADEMY & NISN

While the strengths of Native students and families are profound, systemic barriers persist:

ACADEMIC GAPS

Native students face lower proficiency rates in reading, math, and science compared to their peers. Graduation rates remain lower, and dropout rates are higher.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Legacies of forced assimilation and relocation programs continue to affect Native students, manifesting as economic instability, cultural disconnection, and educational inequities.

SENSE OF BELONGING

Many Native students report feeling invisible or disconnected in their schools, underscoring the need for greater representation and culturally affirming environments.

USE DATA HOLISTICALLY

- Share data about Native students in ways that are clear, accurate, and accessible to key stakeholders.
- Enable data systems to report on students' progress after graduation, including postsecondary access and completion, formal apprenticeships, military participation, and remediation rates.
- Set and monitor goals for programs serving Native students.
- Collect and share information on positive contributions from Native students and provide opportunities for Native students to receive academic credit for cultural funds of knowledge.
- Acknowledge the unique history and present manifestations of settler colonialism in New Mexico's society and Albuquerque schools.

ENGAGE COMMUNITY AND FOSTER COMMUNITY-LED INITIATIVES

- Regularly convene Native families and students – beyond required tribal consultations – to build an ongoing dialogue.
- Foster healing and reconciliation with Native communities as a way to address the historical injustices and trauma caused by past policies and actions.
- Provide challenge grants and/or targeted funding for innovative initiatives or programs targeted at serving Native students.
- Launch a one-to-one high school mentorship program for Native students.

STRATEGICALLY UTILIZE FUNDING

- Share a transparent plan for how the district allocates funding to ensure that Native students have equitable access to resources to support their education.
- Conduct periodic resource allocation reviews (RARs) to examine the connection between resource allocation and student outcomes.
- Establish processes for reallocating or transferring funds within the same budget year if they are not able to be expended in a timely manner.
- Prioritize coordination of public funding and services.
- Ensure that the staff who are responsible for these funds are qualified and accountable.

LEVERAGE POLICY AND ADVOCACY

- Advocate at the state and federal levels for policies that provide financial and structural support for Native teachers.
- Work with state and federal agencies to secure funding and support for initiatives aimed at improving opportunity for Native students and educators to meet the unique needs of Urban Native American students.
- Share successes and lessons learned from district efforts to target and better serve Native students.
- Advocate with city and county governments to provide support for Native youth and families in partnership with organizations who specifically serve Native communities.

For a detailed version of the recommendations, see section at the end of the report.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITY ACADEMY & NISN

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COVER PHOTO COURTESY OF APS

Introduction

VOICE OF NATIVE YOUTH

IN 2022, 2023, AND 2024 THE URBAN INDIGENOUS EDUCATION SUMMITS WERE HELD IN ALBUQUERQUE to highlight the voices, needs, and experiences of Native students. When Native people come together – based on a collection of Indigenous core values and cultural ways of life, philosophies, and worldviews – a connection through community is formed. Though they may be from different tribes, this community is a place where folks bring their own professional experiences and expertise, cultural teachings and knowledge, perspectives, songs, and prayers. It is a space created by the community for our community. The Summits, a partnership between APS, and three Indigenous-led community organizations, Americans for Indian Opportunity (AIO), NACA Inspired Schools Network (NISN), and One Generation Fund, created a welcoming space that had not existed prior to 2022.

During the Summits students, educators, and community members shared stories of hope, challenges, and a vision where Indigenous students are centered and can thrive in a system where their unique needs are met. In particular, students said they want to feel they belong in the district's classrooms, that they see themselves reflected in the curriculum, and that they have access to culturally responsive activities and learning opportunities. Moreover, students simply want to connect with one another; to create and be in spaces that offer peer support and affirmation of their Indigenous identities. Through the three Summits, it became evident that the students must be – and remain – the center of this collective work.

The 2024 Summit was responsive to the needs of the students, and it was driven by the community - from the inspiring words of student poets to breakout sessions reflective of students' and their communities' priorities. It is our hope that these urban Indigenous Education Summits continue on an annual basis with Indigenous students at the center of it all.

The Summits have allowed a space for Indigenous students, educators, and community to come together to fulfill a need that has been voiced throughout the last three years, and for so many, beyond that timeframe. Reflecting on this, One Generation Fund, NISN and AIO joined together again to partner with APS to create the Native Student Success Initiative - Being a Good Relative.

Being a Good Relative is a multi-year initiative where Native students in APS will be learning and engaging in Indigenized learning experiences, aligned with a vision for holistic well-being, and life success, benefiting from a robust support system, and creating a community within APS, Albuquerque, and surrounding communities. This initiative aims to foster collaboration among APS, Native students and families, tribes, and community-based organizations to improve outcomes for this generation of Natives and for generations to come.

PHOTO COURTESY ONE GEN FUND

THE FOUR PILLARS OF
Being a Good Relative

Pillar 1

Enhancing reciprocity, empowerment, and learning with the urban Indigenous community

Pillar 2

Indigenous language and culture preservation through culturally and linguistically responsive education and professional development

Pillar 3

Relevant real-world learning experiences

Pillar 4

Expanding college and career possibilities

Through dialogue, relationship-building, education, and training, this holistic approach to serving Indigenous students will enhance overall well-being – intellectually, physically, culturally, relationally, socially, globally, and throughout life – for Native students in APS. Additionally, the district will build trust and have a stronger partnership with the community.

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Voices of the Urban Indigenous Community

DESPITE THE STRUGGLES OF LIVING IN AN URBAN LOCATION, many Native people have built cohesive and collaborative communities in the metropolitan area of Albuquerque over the past few decades. Moving primarily for work, health care, and educational opportunities, many Native people have chosen to remain in the city, finding connection and alliance among each other even where their tribal backgrounds differ. The strengths of the urban community are reflective of their core values, beliefs, philosophies, and worldviews - community-minded; connected to culture, language, land, and identity; and focused on ensuring their students receive educational opportunities so they are successful in school and in life. The persistence, strengths, and hopes of the urban Native community will continue to bring light to the challenges and needs of Albuquerque's Native citizens, while also ensuring they remain grounded in tribal core values and worldviews. This report is the culmination of the work of education stakeholders - including district leadership, and Indigenous-led nonprofits working together in partnership to ensure Native students are seen, their voices are heard, and that their unique needs are met.

PHOTO COURTESY ONE GEN FUND

FEDERAL INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOLS

Indian boarding schools were a system created in the early to mid-19th century with the intent of fully assimilating Native American children to Euro-American culture. At these schools, children commonly suffered emotional, physical, and sexual abuse at the hands of the educators, and were banned from speaking their Native language or practicing any non-Christian religious customs.

In Albuquerque, the Albuquerque Indian School was a Native American boarding school which operated from 1882 to 1982. Originally established by the Presbyterian Church, the school soon became part of the U.S. campaign to separate Native children from their families and communities and assimilate them more thoroughly into the dominant culture. It was one of the oldest and largest off-reservation boarding schools in the United States.

In June 2021, Secretary of the United States Department of Interior Deb Haaland announced the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative, a comprehensive effort to recognize the troubled legacy of federal Indian boarding school policies. This initiative and accompanying reports included the first official list of federal Indian boarding schools across the United States, which included 46 sites identified in New Mexico.

Based on available records, the Department has been able to identify by name and tribal identity at least 18,624 Indian children who attended federal Indian boarding schools between 1819 and 1969. Based on available records, the report found that at least 973 documented Indian child deaths occurred in the federal Indian boarding school system and confirmed the presence of 74 marked and unmarked burial sites at 65 different federal Indian boarding schools.

ALBUQUERQUE'S NATIVE POPULATION

ACROSS THE UNITED STATES, approximately seven out of 10 Native Americans reside in an urban area, according to the 2010 U.S. Census. The transitions from tribal lands or traditional homelands to urban or metropolitan areas have resulted from volition or failed federal relocation efforts from the U.S. government. The City of Albuquerque alone has the seventh largest urban Indigenous population (approximately 30,000 people), representing more than 400 tribal nations. The urban indigenous population has grown nationally and locally over the past 20 years and is projected to continue to grow.

In the 2023-2024 school year, 3,644 Native American students (5.3 percent of enrollment) attended Albuquerque Public Schools, with this number rising to 6,532 students (9.6 percent) when including all who self-identify as tribally affiliated. These students are part of APS's total enrollment of 68,137 students in grades pre-kindergarten through 12th grade (not including charter schools). The Indian Education Department serves all students who identify as American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) or as tribally affiliated.

Both Albuquerque and APS have significant representation from different tribal nations. These statistics have been consistent throughout the decades as more and more Native people moved into urban areas.

Beginning in "the late 1940s and early 1950s, the U.S. government began encouraging Native Americans to leave rural reservations and move to metropolitan areas. This push was part of the government's policy of termination, which aimed to assimilate Native Americans into mainstream culture and end federal supervision over Native tribes."[1] These failed federal relocation efforts have been linked to intergenerational challenges for Native people whose "past losses [including those related to language and culture] may have amplified the sense of dislocation from reservation to urban life, the loss of connection to land, community, and extended family systems."[2]

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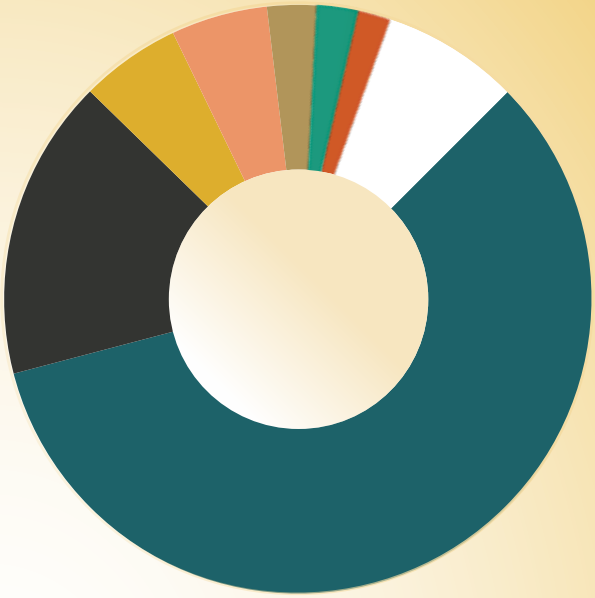
PHOTO COURTESY ONE GEN FUND

Tribally Affiliated Students

Of all Indigenous students who identified a tribal affiliation in APS during the 2023-2024 school year, the five largest student populations are from the following tribes:



- Navajo Nation 58.4%
- Other (tribes outside New Mexico) 16.4%
- Pueblo of Laguna 5.5%
- Pueblo of Zuni 5.3%
- Pueblo of Acoma 2.8%
- Pueblo of Santo Domingo 2.3%
- New Mexico Tribes representing less than 2% including: Jicarilla Apache 1.1%, Mescalero Apache 0.4%,
- New Mexico Pueblos representing less than 2% including: Cochiti 0%, Isleta1.9%, Jemez 1.5%, Nambe 0.2%, Picuris 0.08%, Pojoaque 0.08%, San Felipe 1.6%, San Ildefonso 0.1%, Ohkay Owingeh 0.4%, Sandia 0.3%, Santa Ana 0.3%, Santa Clara 0.3%, Taos 0.4%, Tesuque 0.09%, Zia 0.2%

Students within APS represent over 125 different tribal nations.

National Native Population

ACCORDING TO THE U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, the current total population of Native Americans (American Indian and Alaska Native) in the United States is approximately 9.7 million people, which includes both those identifying as Native American alone and those identifying as Native American in combination with another race.[3] This number constitutes nearly 3% of the entire U.S. population. There are 574 federally recognized tribes across the country. Both tribal communities and urban Native people hold a unique status that is greatly valued and federal and state governments must uphold their responsibility to meet their needs and recognize their sovereignty.

New Mexico

ACCORDING TO THE 2020 CENSUS, there were approximately 263,615 Native citizens in New Mexico, which is about 12.4% of the state's total population. New Mexico is home to 19 Pueblos (Acoma, Cochiti, Isleta, Jemez, Kewa, Laguna, Nambe, Ohkay Owingeh, Picuris, Pojoaque, Sandia, San Felipe, San Ildefonso, Santa Ana, Santa Clara, Taos, Tesuque, Zuni, and Zia), along with the Jicarilla and Mescalero Apache reservations, and the eastern section of the Navajo Nation.

Each Native nation is a sovereign nation with its own government, cultural knowledge, traditions and strengths, language, and cultural practices. Albuquerque has the highest urban Native population in New Mexico with roughly 30,000 Native residents.[4] In Farmington, approximately 26.2% of residents identify as Native, placing this group as the second-largest demographic.[5] Gallup has an even higher percentage of Native residents, approximately 49% of the population, which is notably higher than any other racial or ethnic group in the city, influencing the city's economy, culture, and community structure significantly.[6]

Historically, Native Americans have been more concentrated in rural and reservation areas. However, over the past several decades, there has been a notable trend of Native Americans moving to urban areas. The U.S. Census Bureau's data from 2020 reveals that approximately 70% of Native Americans now live in urban areas, a significant increase from earlier decades.[7] According to projections, the number of Native Americans living in urban centers will continue to rise, possibly reaching over 80% of the total Native American population by 2030.

Albuquerque

ACCORDING TO THE U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, the American Indian or Alaska Native population in Albuquerque is 28,014 or 5% of Albuquerque's population.[9]

Albuquerque alone has the seventh-largest urban Native/Indigenous population in the country among places with more than 100,000 citizens, according to the U.S. census. Albuquerque is home to numerous Native leaders and organizations and federal agencies who serve the tribes and Native population in Albuquerque and throughout the state and region.

Albuquerque Public Schools

THERE ARE 3,644 NATIVE STUDENTS ENROLLED IN NON-CHARTER ALBUQUERQUE PUBLIC SCHOOLS (APS), making up 5.3% of the student population. Of this, roughly 1,120 are in high school, 800 in middle school and 1,640 in elementary. Schools with the highest numbers of Native students include Cibola High School with around 100, Del Norte High School at 190, West Mesa High School with 119, and Tres Volcanes Community Collaborative at 112.[10]

The number and the proportion of Native students in APS has increased slightly over the last 15 years, as overall student enrollment declined.[11]

NATIVE PEOPLE

ACROSS THE US, NEW MEXICO AND ALBUQUERQUE

9.7 million

native people made up of more than **500 federally recognized tribes** currently inhabit what is today called the United States, including both those identifying as Native American alone and those identifying as Native American in combination with another race.

There are approximately

263,615

Native Americans in New Mexico, **from 23 tribes, nations, and Pueblos,** representing a diversity of traditions, languages, and cultural practices.

125+

different Native American/Alaskan Native Tribes are represented in the APS student body.

3,644

Native American students are enrolled in non-charter Albuquerque Public Schools (APS).

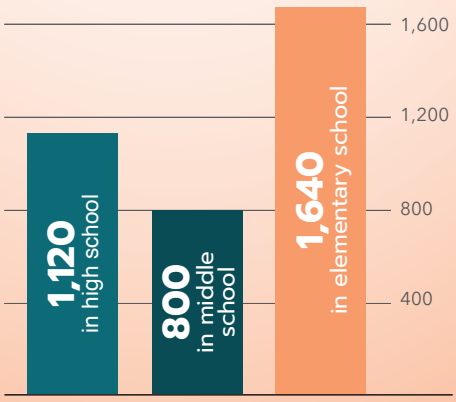
According to the U.S. Census Bureau,
the American Indian or Alaska Native population in Albuquerque is

30,000

Albuquerque has the **7th largest** urban Native/Indigenous population

Native People in the U.S.	Native People in New Mexico	Native People in Albuquerque	Native American students in APS
3%	12%	4%	5.3%
of the entire population	of the state's total population	of Albuquerque's population	of the student population

Native American students in APS



Schools with the highest numbers of Native American students

- Cibola High School **100**
- Tres Volcanes **112**
- West Mesa **119**
- Del Norte High School **190**

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITY ACADEMY & NISN

Native Youth in Albuquerque

NATIVE YOUTH ACROSS THE UNITED STATES and specifically in Albuquerque bring strengths and interests that reflect their deep cultural roots and active leadership in both local and national causes. The Aspen Institute's Center for Native American Youth (CNAY) reports that Native youth are increasingly engaged in initiatives that foster community resilience, promote social and environmental justice, and support cultural preservation.[12] Many young Native leaders participate in arts and storytelling projects, which highlight the importance of identity, historical connection to land, and resilience. Native youth are actively involved in many local efforts to share their voices and work on solutions to issues like mental health, cultural sustainability, and public policy reform, which further strengthens community bonds and instills pride in cultural heritage.[13] In Albuquerque, Native youth play a significant role in local cultural and social events, and their contributions have shaped public policy and enriched educational programs that aim to address the unique challenges faced by Native communities. Technology and social media also play an important role for Native youth, as these platforms enable them to share their stories and build networks across communities.[14]

Locally, similar strengths, interests, and experiences reflect APS students' deep cultural roots and active leadership in causes of significance to them. Current students in APS have highlighted the need for more Indigenous cultural representation in the curriculum, more cultural events and activities, offerings of Native language classes at their school, increased school support, and more Native mentorship opportunities. As these high school students face an increased pressure to represent or speak on behalf of all Native students and to create, organize, and lead any sort of Indigenous school event - without sufficient school backing or initiative - these students have found, developed, and fostered community resilience and cultural preservation. Oftentimes, although the students persevered and gained valuable skills and mindsets along the way, they want and need the opportunity to be heard, seen, and treated as beneficial members of the school communities.[15] Through these strength-based opportunities, Native youth create impact in their communities by challenging stereotypes and fostering inclusive representation in spaces where Indigenous voices have historically been marginalized. Their participation in both traditional and modern initiatives exemplifies a commitment to leading positive change and honoring their cultural heritage while building a stronger future for Native communities in Albuquerque and beyond.

At the same time, however, Native youth in New Mexico, particularly in Albuquerque, often face significant socioeconomic challenges compared to their White and Hispanic peers. Key indicators, including family income, housing stability, and employment, reveal persistent economic disparities. Many Native families in the region experience lower income levels and reduced economic mobility, stemming partly from generational poverty and limited access to stable, high-paying jobs. This environment can hinder educational attainment and overall economic stability for Native children, often limiting their future earning potential and contributing to ongoing intergenerational challenges.[16] In comparison, White and Hispanic youth tend to experience higher household incomes and more stable economic conditions. For instance, the Opportunity Insights research highlights how geographic factors and income disparities affect upward mobility, often giving White and Hispanic families a slight edge in accessing higher-quality schools and neighborhoods, which positively influence long-term economic outcomes.[17]

Data from NM Voices for Children further illustrates that, while Hispanic children also encounter economic challenges, the severity is often reduced compared to Native peers due to greater neighborhood-level access to resources that support educational and economic outcomes. Native youth, however, continue to face high poverty rates, limited access to stable housing, and higher distances from school facilities, contributing to lower rates of economic mobility overall.[18]

ACADEMIC OUTCOMES FOR NATIVE YOUTH IN ALBUQUERQUE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

NATIVE STUDENTS IN APS face significant academic disparities compared to other groups. On average, these students have lower proficiency rates in core subjects like reading and math as measured on standardized assessments, reflecting a trend seen in statewide data as well.[19] Research has shown when Native students feel a sense of belonging and their cultural assets and identity are respected in a school setting, they are more likely to have increased academic performance.[20] The following details current trends in the disparities for Indigenous students; however, it also provides the baseline for which future academic outcomes can be compared.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITY ACADEMY & NISN

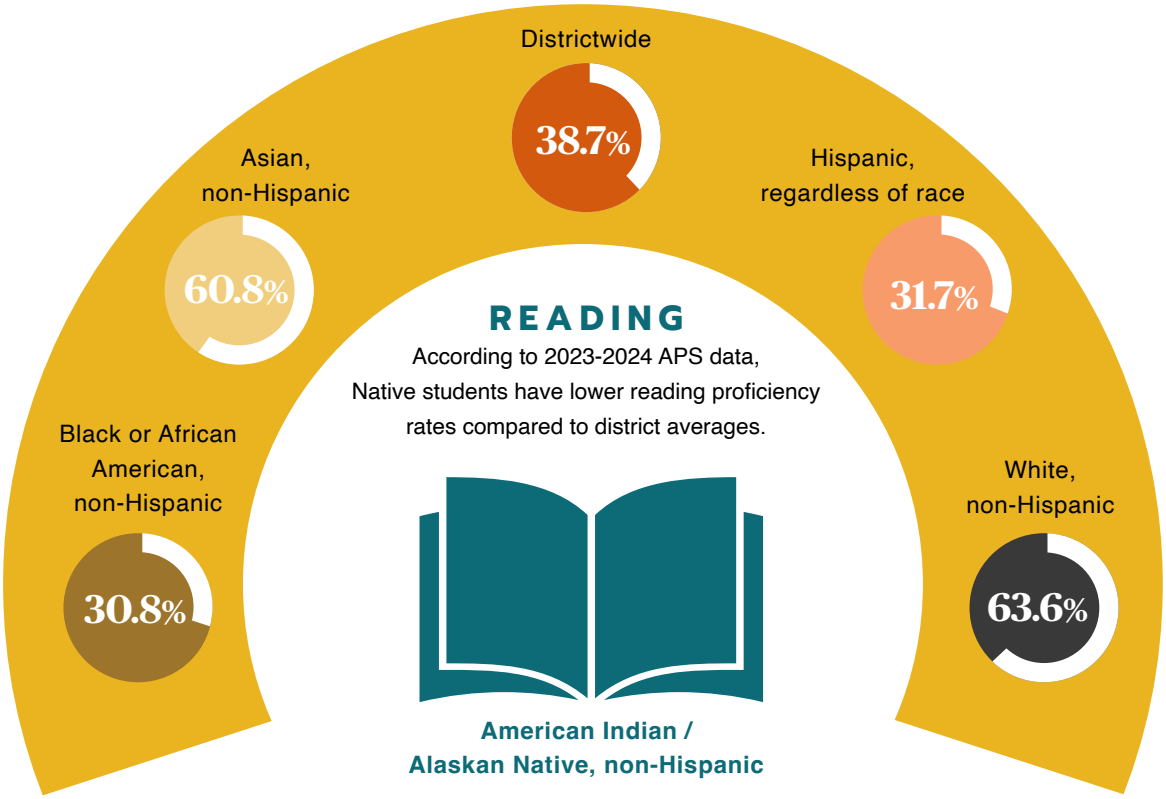
LANDMARK YAZZIE/ MARTINEZ LAWSUIT*

Families represented by the New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) sued the New Mexico Public Education Department (PED) and the state legislature for failing to provide a sufficient and uniform system of education as guaranteed by the education clause of the New Mexico State Constitution. The consolidated lawsuit, Martínez/Yazzie v. State of New Mexico challenged the state's failure to provide students – especially low-income, Native American, English language learners, and students with disabilities – the programs and services necessary for them to learn and thrive, and challenged the state's failure to sufficiently fund these programs and services. In 2018, Judge Sarah Singleton ruled that all New Mexico students have a right to be college- and career-ready and that the state is failing to meet this obligation. As evidence, the judge pointed to NM's 70% graduation rate (the lowest in the nation), low proficiency rates in reading and math (70% of New Mexico students cannot read or do math at grade level), and high rates of college remediation (almost 50% who do attend college need remedial courses).

*ALSO REFERRED TO AS THE MARTINEZ/YAZZIE CONSOLIDATED LAWSUIT.

NATIVE STUDENT PERFORMANCE

in Core Subjects



READING

According to 2023-2024 APS data, Native students have lower reading proficiency rates compared to district averages.

American Indian / Alaskan Native, non-Hispanic

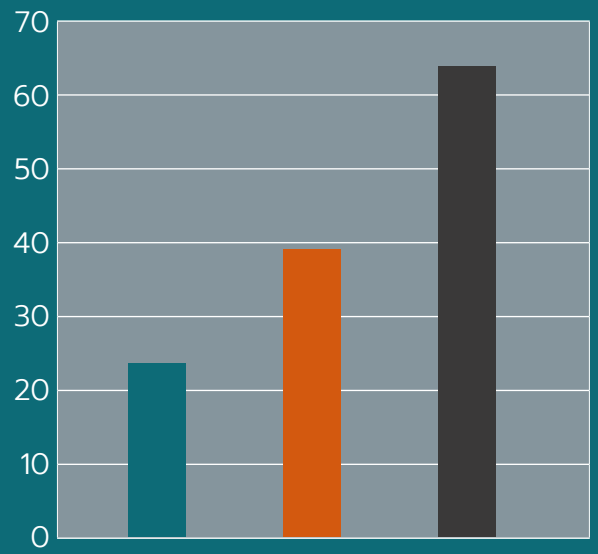
23.4%

The gap between Native students and the district average was

15.3 POINTS

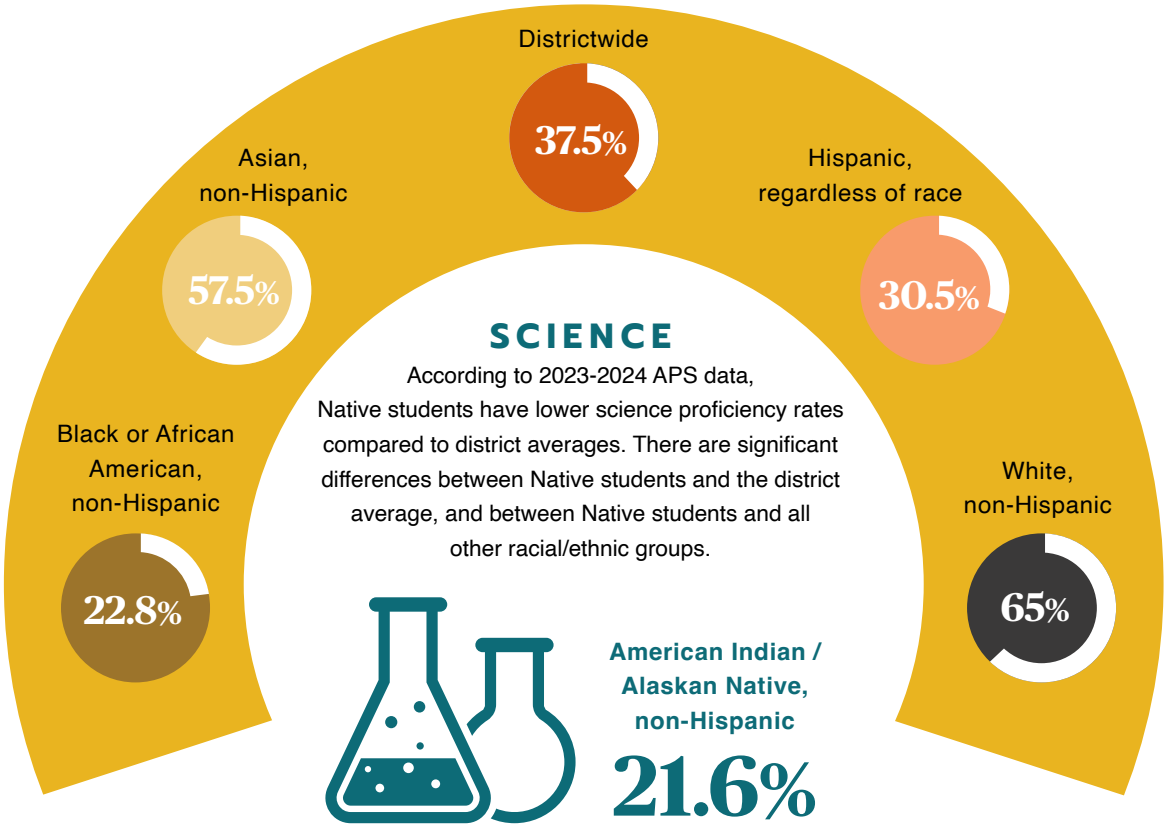
The largest gap is between Native students and White students at

40.2 POINTS



This implies many Native students may be performing at least one to two grade levels below grade level expectations. As the trend line for reading proficiency is creeping up, with most groups showing some year-to-year improvement, the overall size of the gaps remains the same.

American Indian/Alaskan Native, non-Hispanic: 23.4%, Districtwide: 38.7%, White, non-Hispanic: 63.6%

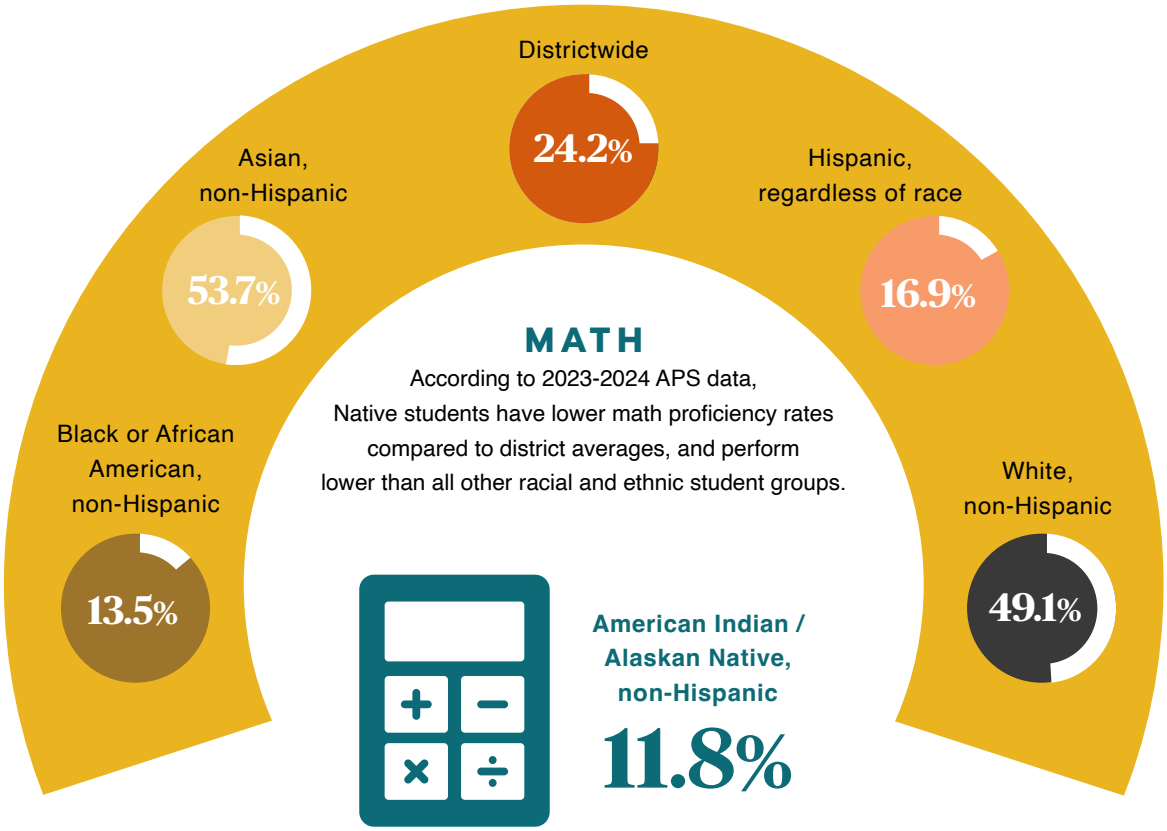


SCIENCE

According to 2023-2024 APS data, Native students have lower science proficiency rates compared to district averages. There are significant differences between Native students and the district average, and between Native students and all other racial/ethnic groups.

American Indian / Alaskan Native, non-Hispanic

21.6%



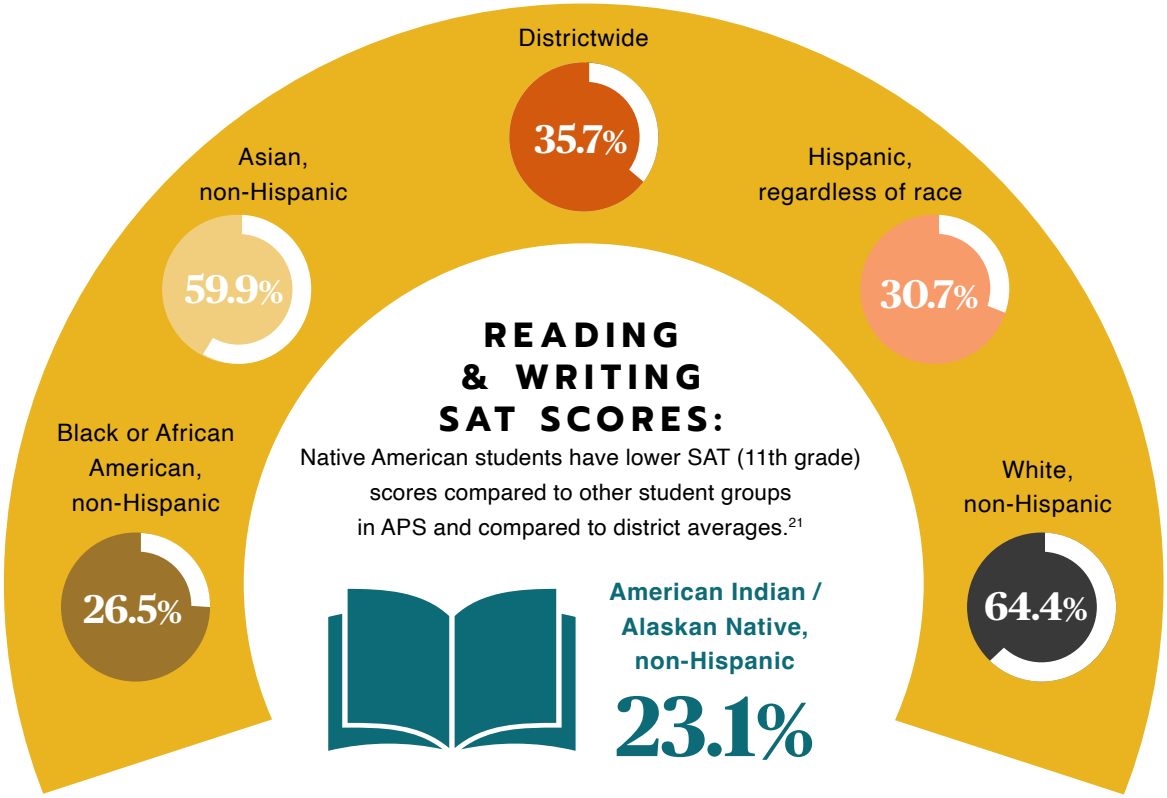
MATH

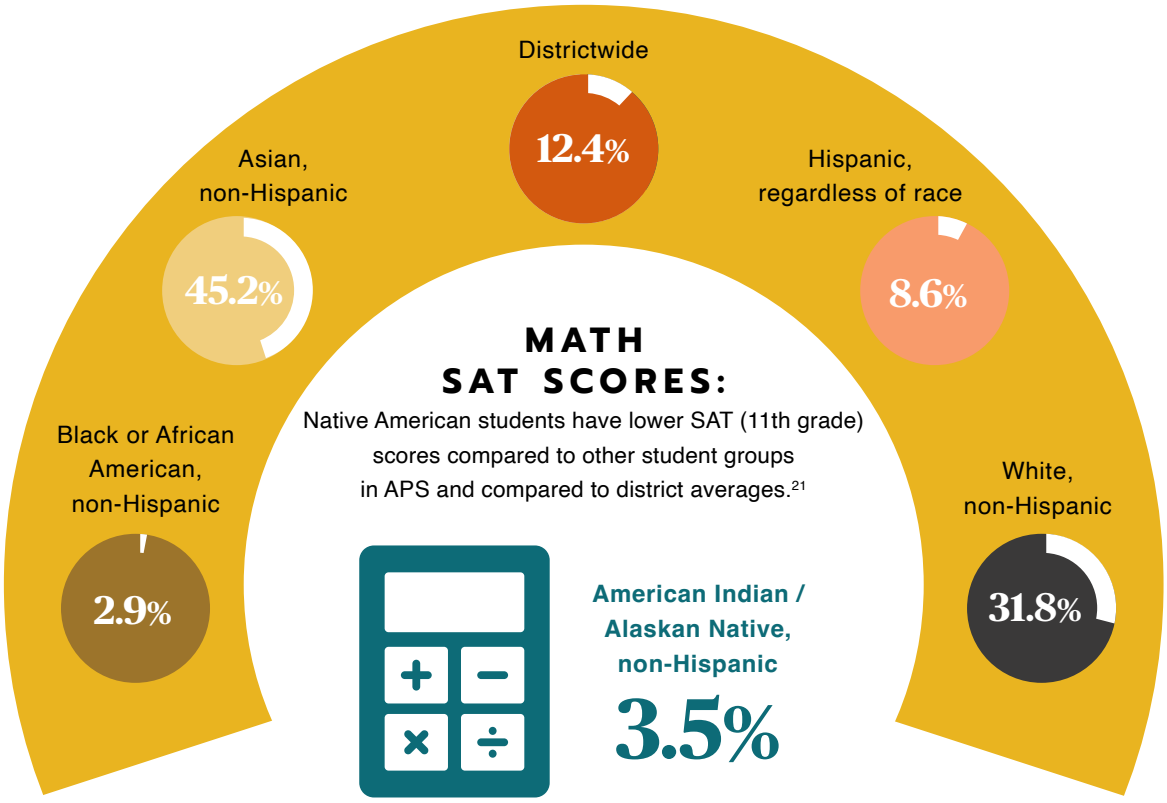
According to 2023-2024 APS data, Native students have lower math proficiency rates compared to district averages, and perform lower than all other racial and ethnic student groups.

American Indian / Alaskan Native, non-Hispanic

11.8%

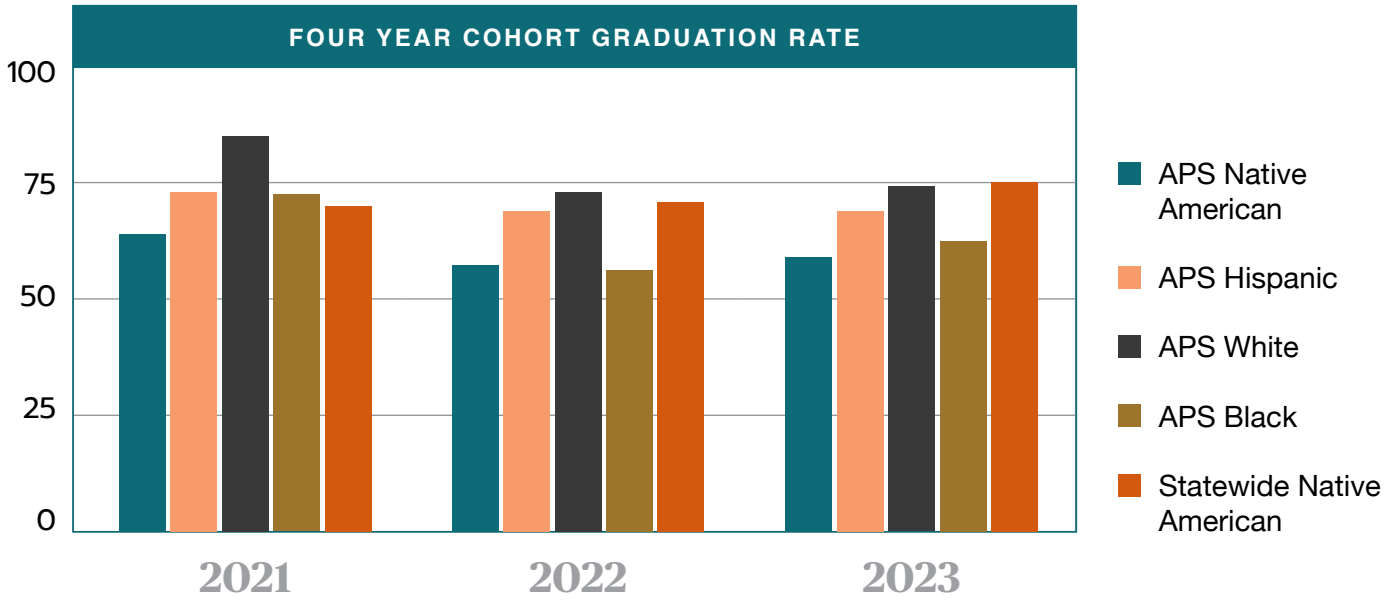
Postsecondary Readiness





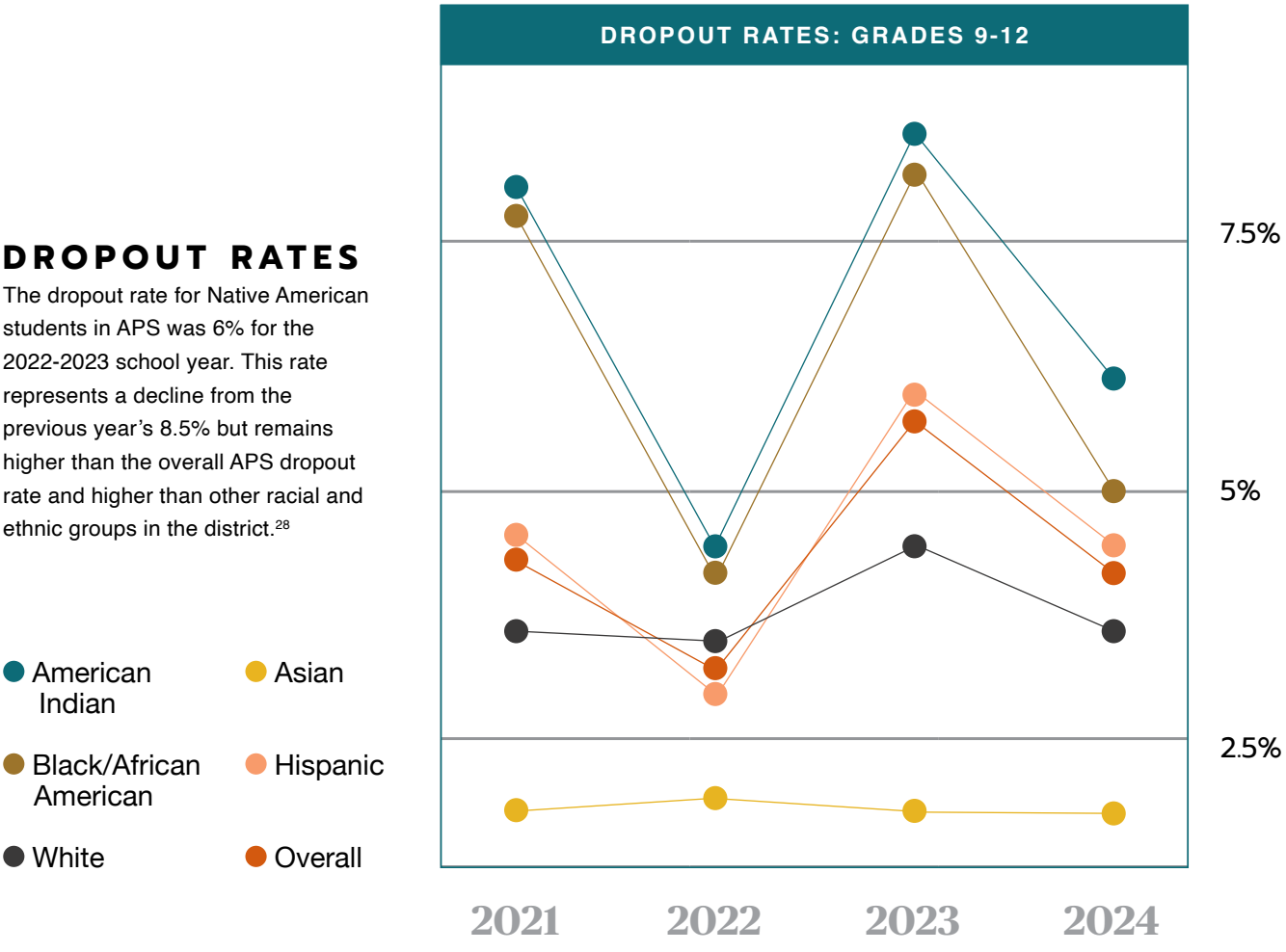
GRADUATION RATES

Native students have lower graduation rates and higher dropout rates than the district average, than Native students statewide, and lower than both White and Hispanic students.[27]



DROPOUT RATES

The dropout rate for Native American students in APS was 6% for the 2022-2023 school year. This rate represents a decline from the previous year's 8.5% but remains higher than the overall APS dropout rate and higher than other racial and ethnic groups in the district.[28]



DROPOUT RATE BY APS SCHOOL FOR NATIVE STUDENTS

There is also variation across the APS high schools that report a dropout rate for Native students. In 2023, this ranged from 0% to 28% at the virtual school and 8% at a traditional high school.[29]

SCHOOL	2019-20	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Albuquerque High School	12.20%	4.10%	7.70%	3.60%
Atrisco Heritage Academy High School	9.10%	0.00%	2.50%	0.00%
Cibola High School	0.80%	1.60%	0.80%	2.80%
eCademy Virtual High School	14.30%	0.00%	21.60%	28.90%
Eldorado High School	2.80%	7.20%	3.80%	5.10%
Freedom High School	30.40%	5.00%	20.00%	14.80%
Highland High School	13.10%	13.40%	17.00%	8.00%
Manzano High School	11.50%	1.70%	9.70%	3.40%
New Futures School	14.30%	8.30%	–	0.00%
Rio Grande High School	16.00%	4.50%	7.40%	7.70%
Sandia High School	8.70%	6.60%	3.30%	0.90%
Transition Services	20.00%	–	18.20%	–
Valley High School	5.90%	2.90%	2.90%	2.80%
Volcano Vista High School	4.30%	5.50%	4.10%	1.10%
West Mesa High School	5.70%	4.60%	9.80%	5.60%

APS Native Students Compared to Native Students Across the United States

WHEN EVALUATING THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE of Native American students in Albuquerque relative to their peers nationwide, data indicates that Albuquerque Native students often score below the national average for Native American students.

COLLEGE-READINESS EXAMS (SAT AND ACT):

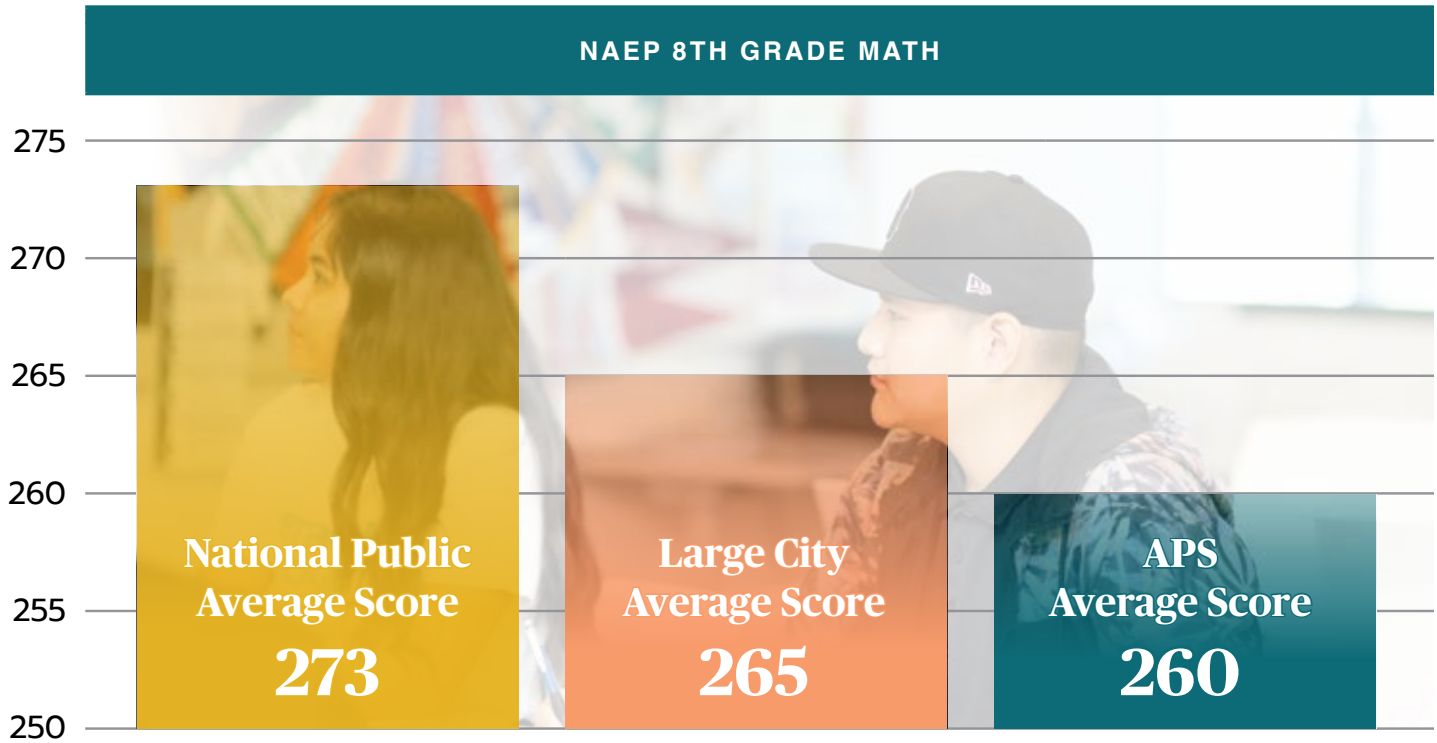
In 2022, Native American 11th-grade students in Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) performed significantly lower on the SAT compared to their Native peers nationwide. Nationally, 50% of Native 11th graders met the SAT College Readiness Benchmark for Evidence-Based Reading and Writing (ERW), but in APS, only 13.8% did. In Math, 25% of Native students nationally met the benchmark, while in APS, just 6.2% achieved proficiency. On the ACT, less than 10% of Native American students nationwide meet readiness benchmarks across all tested subjects, a rate significantly lower than their White and Hispanic peers.

In the 2019–2020 academic year, the average ACT composite score for Native students was 16.7. Whereas Native American students in Albuquerque Public Schools had an average ACT composite score of 17.7

NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS (NAEP):

The NAEP, commonly referred to as the Nation's Report Card, assesses student proficiency in subjects like mathematics and reading across the United States. In 2024, Albuquerque Public Schools reported proficiency rates of 23% in fourth-grade reading and 26% in fourth-grade mathematics. For eighth graders, the proficiency rates were 20% in reading and 17% in math.

While specific NAEP data for Native American students in Albuquerque is limited, statewide reports indicate that Native American students' proficiency performance ranks the lowest among all subgroups in reading, math, and science.[29]



College Readiness

AP COURSE ENROLLMENT

Taking challenging high school courses can help students succeed in college and in life. Advanced Placement (AP) courses, for example, can play a significant role in the college admissions process. They serve as an indicator of academic rigor and can provide an advantage in the competitive admissions landscape.

Access to these opportunities in APS, however, is not equal. The Advanced Placement Program offers 39 courses in a variety of disciplines, including, among others, art, science, math, and history.[30] There are 35 AP courses offered across APS.[31] Of the 10 most common and popular AP courses, Native American students are less likely to be enrolled than their peers.[32] While gaps in prior achievement partially explain the AP participation gaps for Native students, it has been well-documented that "course gatekeeping" produces disparities in participation even among students with similar, relatively low prior achievement. Course gatekeeping has long-term effects, particularly discouraging Native students from attending highly selective four-year colleges.[33]

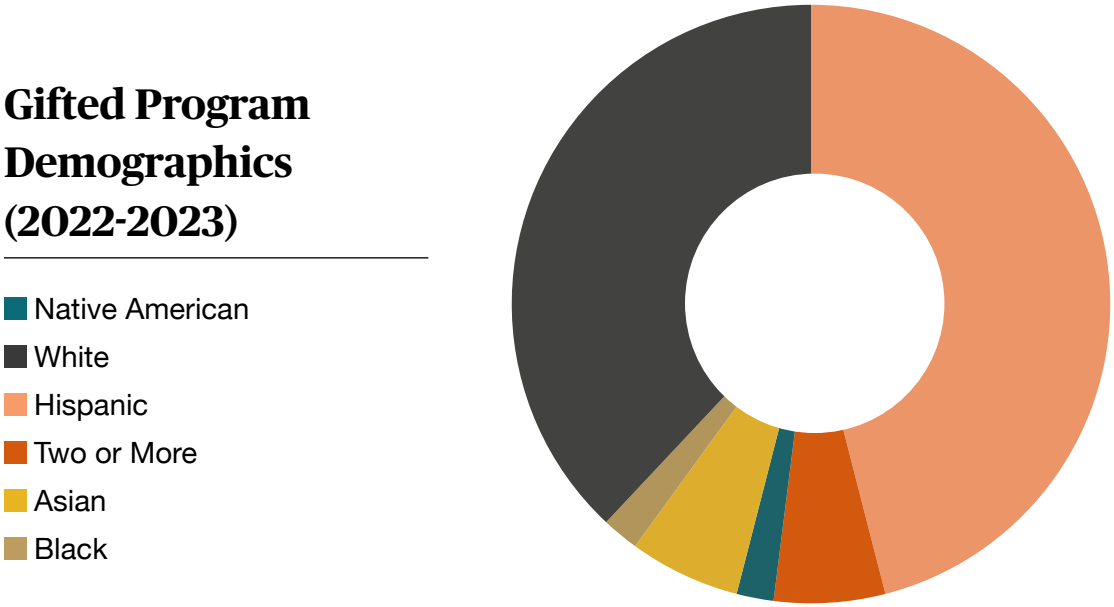
GIFTED PROGRAMS

Gifted and talented programs are designed to serve students who demonstrate significantly above-average abilities in academics, creativity, or other talents, providing them with enriched curriculum and learning opportunities that challenge them beyond the standard classroom setting. Students are typically identified through standardized testing as a result of teacher referral. Unconscious biases in teacher referrals, however, can lead to underrepresentation of certain groups in gifted programs.[34] Specifically for Native students, researchers have identified educational barriers due to lack of teacher understanding of cultural and traditional differences, communication styles, and learning preferences, which contributes to the underrepresentation and underdevelopment of Native American gifted students.[35]

In APS, Native students were less likely to be enrolled in gifted education than other student groups and the proportion of Native students participating in the gifted program is below their subgroup representation in the district.[36] This is in contrast to the national average of about 4% of Native students enrolled in gifted programs nationwide.[37]

APS data indicate significant disparities in reading, math, and science performance between Native students compared to their peers. Participation in AP and gifted programs is also disproportionately low among Native students. Additionally, Native students have lower SAT scores, lower graduation rates, and higher dropout rates than other groups, indicating systemic barriers in APS affecting their academic success.These statistics, however dire they may be, are not an indication of the potential or intellect of Native students. These statistics highlight the opportunity to better recognize and integrate the cultural knowledge, perspectives, and intellectual traditions that Native students and communities bring, ensuring schools honor and build upon these strengths.

Gifted Program Demographics (2022-2023)



Uneven Opportunity

NUMBER OF NATIVE STUDENTS ENROLLED IN AP COURSES

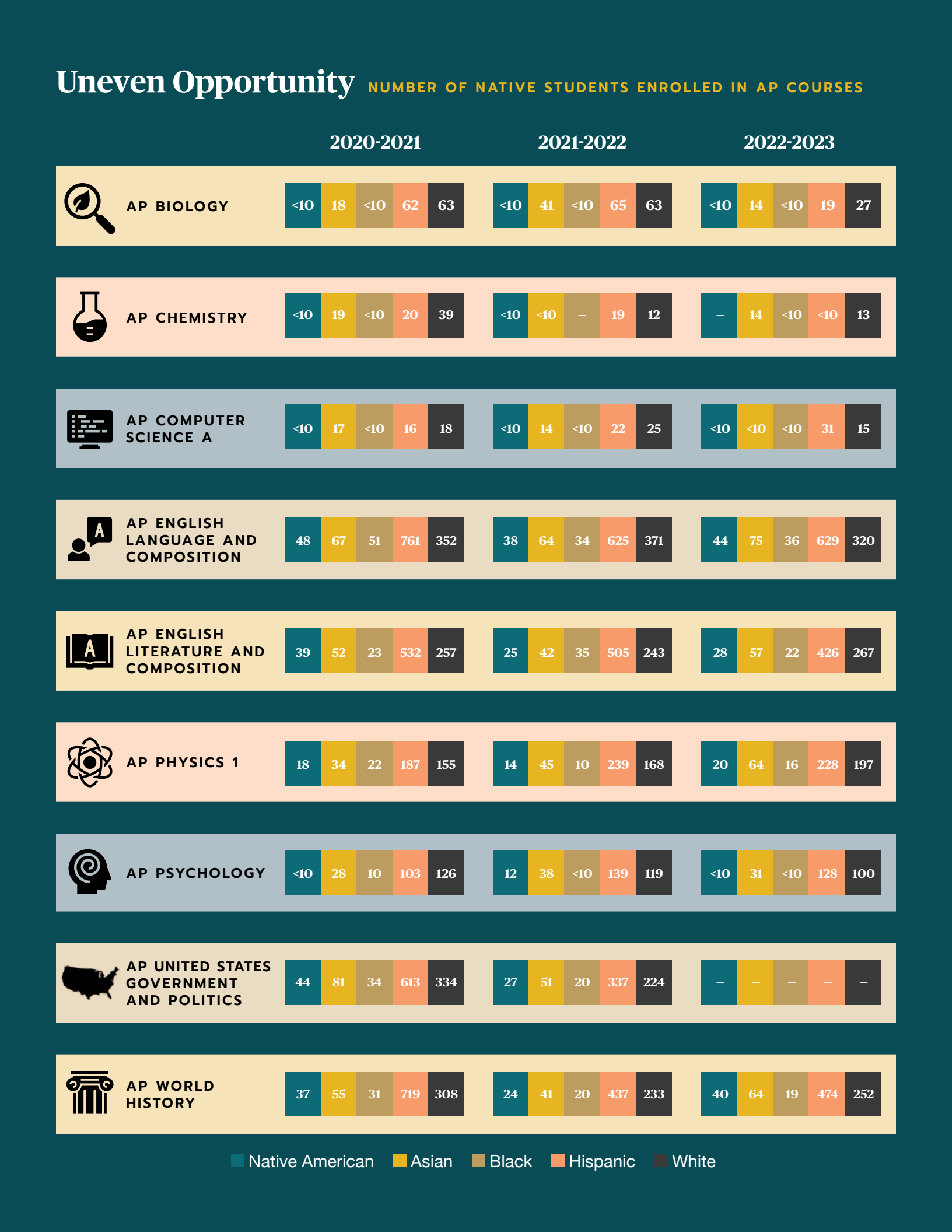


PHOTO COURTESY ONE GEN FUND

PHOTO COURTESY APS

Native American Student Social and Emotional Development and Well-being

NATIVE STUDENTS HAVE LOWER PERCEPTIONS of their own perseverance, self-regulation, self-efficacy, and social awareness than their peers and lower than the district overall. Beginning in 2023, APS administered a survey twice a year to students in third through twelfth grade. The survey contains a series of questions aimed at gauging how students feel when they are at school and how they deal with challenges when they encounter them.

Social and emotional skills are crucial because they are deeply intertwined with academic learning, enabling students to better manage their emotions, build positive relationships, and ultimately achieve greater success both in school and throughout life; research shows that developing these skills can improve academic performance, reduce negative behaviors, and contribute to a positive classroom environment.[38]

School climate and learning environment are important because they significantly impact a student's overall well-being, academic achievement, and social development, as a positive climate fosters a sense of safety, belonging, and trust, which allows students to engage more effectively in learning while reducing negative behaviors like bullying or disengagement; essentially, a positive school climate sets the stage for optimal learning conditions.[39] APS also began measuring students' sense of belonging in 2023. Native students are slightly less likely to report a sense of belonging than other groups, at 43%. The overall district average is 44%. Only 30% of Native students report feeling connected to the adults at their school, in comparison to 29% connectedness for Hispanics, 35% for African American, and 32% for White students. Connectedness in school has been shown to lead to improved academic outcomes, better mental health, less risky behaviors, and increased motivation and engagement. Similarly, only 30% of Native American students feel that they matter to others at school, lower than all other racial/ethnic groups.

ACCESS TO EXTRACURRICULAR OPPORTUNITIES

Currently there are 11 Native American Student Union or similar clubs in APS's 176 schools.[40]

ACCESS TO OUTDOOR AND LAND-BASED LEARNING

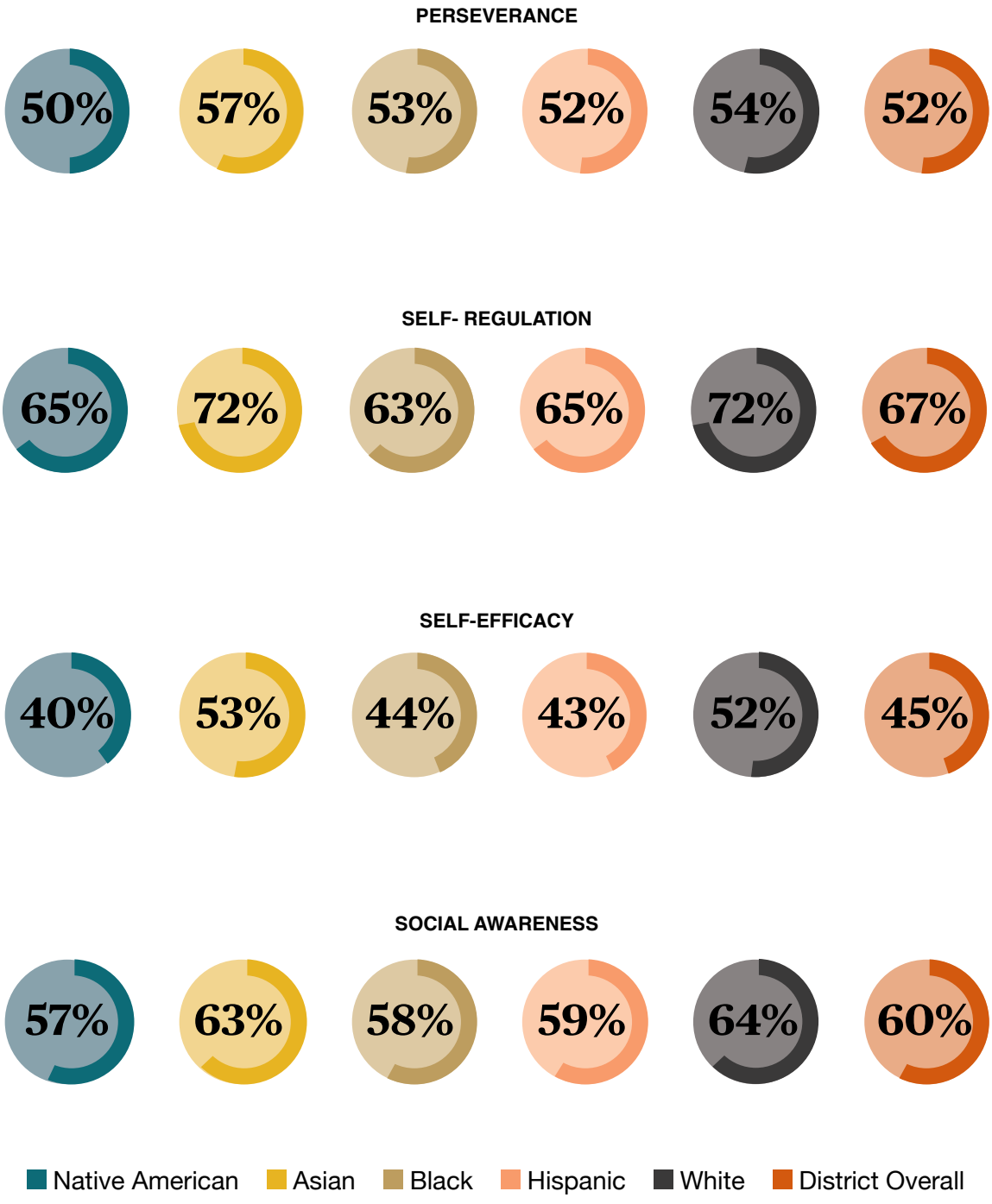
There is clear research about the physical, psychological, and academic benefits of outdoor learning.[41] Research also points to the importance of integrating traditional and Indigenous ecological knowledge into these experiences to ensure that students - and all members of a school community – understand humans' place in the natural world.[42] One such opportunity is located at Los Padillas Wildlife Sanctuary on the campus of Los Padillas Elementary School, which offers opportunities for third graders to participate in a variety of outdoor learning activities that build upon and develop their sense of community, place, and habitats within the Albuquerque bosque and their local community, including connections with local and Indigenous knowledge.[43]

ATTENDANCE AND ABSENTEEISM

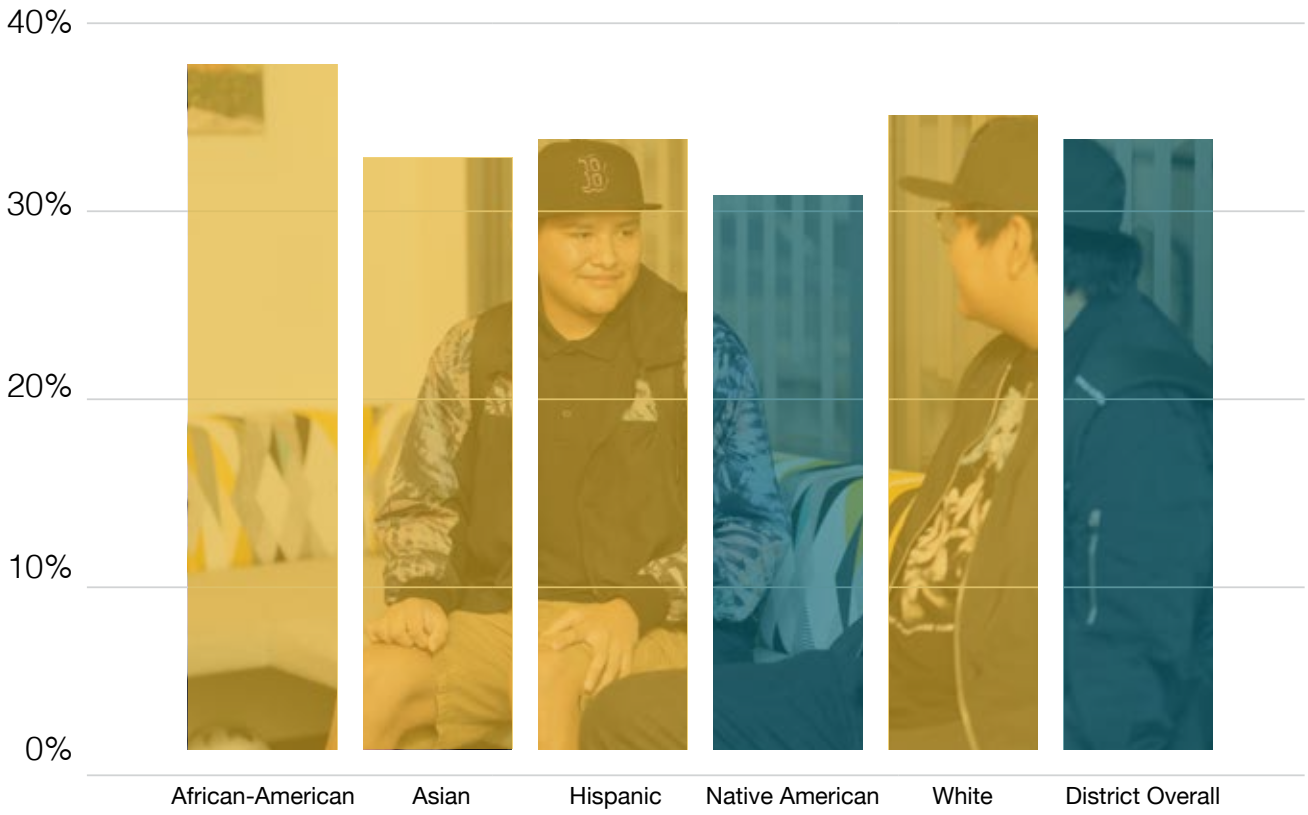
Native students have a lower attendance rate than the other student groups in APS with an attendance rate of 88.2% during the 2023-2024 school year; this is lower than the district average of 90.6%. Additionally, Native students had the highest chronic absenteeism rate (42.5%) compared to 30.8% for all students.[44]

Native American Perceptions of Their Own Student Success

Beginning in 2023, APS administered a survey twice a year to students in third through twelfth grade. The survey contains a series of questions aimed at gauging how students feel when they are at school and how they deal with challenges when they encounter them. Overall, Native students have lower perceptions of their own perseverance, self-regulation, self-efficacy, and social awareness than their peers and lower than the district overall.



HOW MUCH DO YOU MATTER TO OTHERS AT THIS SCHOOL?



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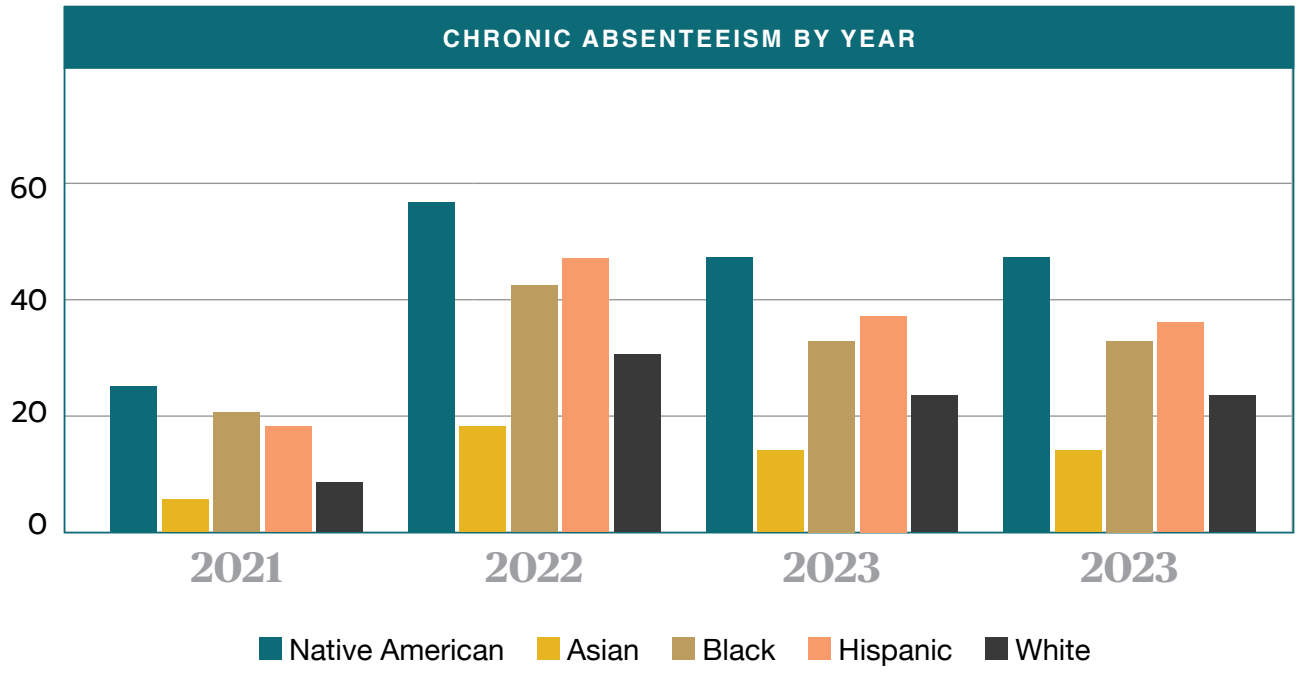

PHOTO COURTESY APS

Cultural and Language Education

AVAILABILITY AND ACCESS TO INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE PROGRAMS AND CULTURAL EDUCATION

DR. TERESA MCCARTY AND DR. TIFFANY LEE have noted in their research that "[L]anguage is vital to cultural continuity and community sustainability because it embodies both everyday and sacred knowledge and is essential to ceremonial practices," according to Dr. Teresa McCarty and Dr. Tiffany Lee. "Language is also significant for sustaining Indigenous knowledge systems, cultural identifications, spirituality, and connections to land."[45] Their research notes that Native language and culture programs help in reducing educational inequalities associated with education relevancy, family and community involvement, and cultural identity.[46] Further research on language- and culture-based education shows that Native students in these particular classrooms exhibit enhanced student motivation, self-esteem, and ethnic pride.[47]

According to APS's Tribal Education Status Report (TESR) from the 2023-2024 school year, Native students have access to the following Native language classes: Navajo and Zuni. Class sizes were on the smaller end, with an average of between five and 10 students per class. Navajo language classes were available for students at 10 different school sites (La Mesa Elementary School; Tres Volcanes Community Collaborative School; eCademy K-8; Cleveland Middle School; McKinley Middle School; Atrisco Heritage Academy High School; Del Norte High School; Sandia High School; West Mesa High School; and the Career Enrichment Center), while Zuni language classes were available for students at five different school sites (Hodgin Elementary School; Hawthorne Elementary School; McKinley Middle School; Manzano High School; and the Career Enrichment Center).

According to the data available, only 6.6% of eligible Navajo students utilized the opportunity to take a tribal language course, while 9.6% of eligible Zuni students participated in their respective language courses.

STUDENTS ELIGIBLE TO TAKE A LANGUAGE CLASS IN THE 2023-2024 SCHOOL YEAR	STUDENTS WHO TOOK A LANGUAGE CLASS IN THE 2023-2024 SCHOOL YEAR
Navajo - 4,227 students	Navajo - 277 students
Zuni - 396 students	Zuni - 38 students

ACCESS TO NATIVE TEACHERS, BY SUBJECT AND GRADE-LEVEL

According to a report from the Learning Policy Institute, teachers of color provide benefits to all students, including students of color, and this leads to improved academic performance and increased graduation rates.[48] Additionally, "[s]tudents of color and [W]hite students also report having positive perceptions of their teachers of color, including feeling cared for and academically challenged."[49] The report also details that while teachers of color overall as a whole are increasing while Native teachers are decreasing on a national level. Their data shows that in 1987, Native teachers made up 1.1% of the overall percentage of teachers in the country; however, in 2015, Native teachers declined to only 0.4%.[50]

According to the APS Dashboard, during the 2022-2023 school year there are 2% of school staff, which includes 222 individuals, in the school district who are American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN).[51] Specifically, there are 18 AI/AN elementary teachers, 17 general special education AI/AN educators, 11 secondary AI/AN educators, five junior high and middle school AI/AN teachers, 340 kindergarten AI/AN teachers, one gifted AI/AN educator, two special education preschool AI/AN educators, and two Native language and culture AI/AN instructors.

Participation Rates in Targeted Programs and Their Outcomes

GENERALLY, NATIVE STUDENTS IN URBAN SETTINGS face challenges accessing a high-quality culture- and language-based education. At APS, Native students represent approximately 125 different tribal nations from New Mexico and across the United States. With such a diverse tribal representation, it would be beneficial to Native students if the district increased access to additional language classes and programs with support from tribal councils and the urban Native community. This collaboration to increase opportunities could occur through partnership, discussions, and the creation of an action plan with the Native Leadership Collective of Albuquerque to determine the need for additional language classes and programs.

BILINGUAL SEAL

APS students can earn a bilingual seal on their high school diploma by completing a dual-language program. The Bilingual Seal, which is also affixed to the student's transcript, signifies proficiency and skills in two languages. The achievement benefits students in college, career, and life. For example, according to a 2022 study, graduates who earned a biliteracy seal were more likely than similar graduates who did not earn a seal to enroll in college within one year of high school graduation. Finally, among graduates who enrolled in college, graduates who earned a biliteracy seal were more likely than graduates who did not earn a seal to enroll in a four-year college and to enroll full time.[52] For the 2024 school year, only four APS high schools offered the bilingual seal (Albuquerque HS, Atrisco Heritage HS, Rio Grande HS and Valley HS). There are currently 10 languages offered in the Bilingual Seal program in APS (Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Keres, Navajo, Spanish, Tewa, Tiwa, and Zuni). According to the TESR, in the 2023-24 school year, although there were Navajo students who took the Navajo Nation Seal of Biliteracy assessment, none of the students passed the assessment to earn the biliteracy seal. During this same time period, no Zuni students took the Zuni Seal of Biliteracy assessment. According to data from APS, 11.8 percent of Native American/Alaska Native (NA/AN) graduates in APS traditional public high schools (non-charter) earned one or more bilingual seals during the 2023-2024 school year. This ranks NA/AN students as the third highest subgroup among all races/ethnicities reported.

DUAL CREDIT

APS high school students can take college-level classes at CNM, UNM, IAIA or CEC and earn both college and high school elective credit for the same class. By taking dual credit courses, students can experience college-level learning tuition-free and gain credit for the courses completed, helping them explore their interests and future career paths after high school. Currently available data from the TESR for the 2023-2024 school year indicates 15 Navajo students and six Zuni students were able to earn college credit by taking a dual credit course offered through a tribal college, the Institute for American Indian Arts. According to data from APS, 5.1 percent of non-Hispanic, Native American/Alaska Native (NA/AN) students in APS traditional public schools (non-charter) enrolled and earned credit in any dual enrollment course for college credit at UNM, CNM, or IAIA during the 2023-2024 school year. This ranks NA/AN students as the second lowest subgroup among all races/ethnicities reported.

ANALYSIS OF ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY RESPONSIVE EDUCATION

National research has documented that many teachers may feel uncomfortable teaching Native students due to a lack of understanding about Native cultures, potentially leading to concerns about misrepresenting their history and experiences, and a feeling of inadequacy in addressing the specific needs of these students in the classroom.[53] With additional training and cultural responsiveness, teachers can become more confident in creating inclusive learning environments for Native students.

Anecdotal evidence has indicated that there have been persistent challenges for Native students who want to access high-quality culturally and linguistically responsive educational opportunities within the school district, including recruitment and retention of Native language teachers and Native teachers in general and access to additional language courses and programs.

Building an inclusive community where all urban Native students get their unique needs met in a holistic manner is the goal. Addressing these challenges requires creating culturally responsive educational environments that integrate Indigenous knowledge systems and emphasize relationship-building with Native communities. Within these culturally responsive education environments, urban Native students can achieve academic success while gaining a development and foundation in their own cultural understandings.

INDIAN EDUCATION ACT, APS INDIAN EDUCATION DEPARTMENT, AND TRIBAL EDUCATION STATUS REPORT

The Indian Education Act in New Mexico aims to improve educational outcomes for Native students by promoting culturally relevant curriculum and addressing systemic barriers.[54] Districts like APS are responsible for implementing programs that support Native student needs, ensuring parental involvement, and enhancing teacher training on Native cultures, via the Indian Education Act Systemic Framework. The act also requires districts to monitor and report on the educational progress of Native students to foster a more inclusive and effective learning environment. As a result, every year, the district publishes the districtwide Tribal Education Status Report (TESR). According to the most recent TESR, current interventions or programs aimed at serving Native students in APS include:

An effort to examine attendance and achievement data

An effort to determine the effects and effectiveness of current universal initiatives for the AI/AN students of specific tribal communities

The expansion of opportunities for heritage language learners to ultimately earn distinction as speakers of their heritage languages

Establishment of a Zuni bilingual immersion preschool

A Diné heritage language immersion program at Tres Volcanes Community Collaborative School

A vision for the first Indigenous Lifeways Center

Programs such as Seals and Stoles, Native American studies, the APS Indigenous Values Framework, dropout and attendance interventions such as Jobs for America's Graduates, and language and mathematics intervention supports

A systemic preK-12 language, culture, and community framework for implementation in the 2024-25 school year

Plans to initiate an Indigenous Education Initiative at Mission Avenue STEM Magnet School, the Center for Mentorship and Peer Learning, the Diné Bizaad Fellowship Pathway Program, and Indigenous Curriculum Infusion Project based at the Career Enrichment Center.

The budget for these programs in 2023-24 was just over $3.5 million.[55]

Additional Challenges and Resources for Native Students

FEDERAL RELOCATION EFFORTS AIMED AT MOVING NATIVE AMERICANS from reservations to urban centers in the 1950s resulted in a mass migration of families migrating to metropolitan areas. Relocation cities included Los Angeles, Chicago, Seattle, Denver, and Albuquerque, among other cities. According to information from the National Archives, when the federal relocation efforts began in the 1950s, approximately 8 percent of Native Americans lived in cities.[56] "Based on 2020 U.S. Census data, the IHS estimates that approximately 87% of the…[American Indian/ Alaska Native] population live in urban areas, while 13% live on reservations or Tribal lands."[57] There have been adverse effects for Natives living in urban areas, including poorer health status and lack of access to adequate health care services. "Urban Indian youth are at greater risk for serious mental health and substance abuse problems, suicide, increased gang activity, teen pregnancy, abuse, and neglect."[58]

Additional challenges faced by urban Native youth and their families include lack of reliable transportation and reliable internet services. Based on a study in 2022 from the National Center for Health Statistics, "American Indian and Alaska Native adults are more likely than any other racial group in the United States to lack reliable transportation for daily living at 17.1 percent, compared to the national average of 5.7 percent."[59] Lack of reliable transportation can lead to other challenges including difficulty getting to work on time or getting students to school on time, increased anxiety and stress, and difficulty accessing grocery stores. Related to broadband internet service, data from a recent report found that lack of internet services impacts both urban and rural Native populations. Specifically, Native Americans are much less likely to have reliable internet access than non-Native Americans in the state.[60] "In the short term, students without broadband access may face learning challenges and limited access to relevant materials. This means they often struggle to complete homework, fall behind, receive lower grades, and sometimes do not graduate."[61]

In addition to economic and financial challenges, Native students also face challenges with finding a sense of belonging whether it is within the city itself, at their school, or within their social ecosystem. During the Urban Indigenous Education Summits and student interviews conducted, students identified feeling invisible within their schools and a need for higher levels of engagement from district staff and teachers. Students, parents, and community members also identified a need for trust and relationship building with open lines of communication between the community and district. Locally, students identified when they do receive the support they are more engaged in class, have increased participation in extracurricular activities, and are participating in a more inclusive school community. Programs like the Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) program and committed, culturally responsive educators make a significant impact, but students are advocating for systemic changes to ensure their culture and identity are celebrated and supported consistently.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITY ACADEMY & NISN

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Students described feeling a disconnect between their Native identities and broader school and community environments. They cited limited cultural understanding among peers and teachers. These comments highlighted the need for Native students to feel connected and belonging in their school and home communities. The comments also highlighted the importance of overall community and mentorship. The JAG program emerged as a vital source of support for the students, providing them with a sense of belonging and mentorship. Additionally, their teacher was particularly praised for their dedication to the students' cultural and personal growth. In particular, the teacher was described as a mentor who helped with the students' sense of belonging related to their culture and simply as humans. The JAG program also was credited with helping the students develop professional skills and networking abilities, increasing self confidence, and preparation for college and career. The program and their teacher assisted in helping them feel seen and valued in an environment where such support was otherwise lacking.[62]

CURRENT NATIVE EDUCATION POLICIES

THERE ARE A PLETHORA OF FEDERAL AND STATE LAWS AND POLICIES impacting Native students at various levels. “Laws specific to education provide the foundational legal framework for academic institutions, and policies guide the implementation of these laws and address specific community needs.”[63] As such, the following overview details some of the current major laws and policies affecting Native students in the district.

In January 2025, President Donald Trump rescinded Executive Order 14049 of October 11, 2021 which had established the White House Initiative on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity for Native Americans and Strengthening Tribal Colleges and Universities. This initiative was first established in 1998 by President Bill Clinton.

The Initiative aimed to improve educational opportunities for Native students, support Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), and preserve Native languages. The rescission disrupted federal support, weakened funding for TCUs, and hindered Native language preservation efforts. This rollback removed a key federal mechanism for addressing educational disparities and honoring tribal sovereignty.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITY ACADEMY & NISN

JOHNSON-O'MALLEY (JOM) ACT OF 1934 (AMENDED IN 2018)

JOM is a federal law that provides financial assistance for the education of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) students. This act, as amended by the Johnson-O'Malley Supplemental Indian Education Program Modernization Act, authorizes contracts for educating eligible AI/AN students enrolled in public schools. JOM programs vary across school districts, but may be used to fund culture, language, academics, and dropout prevention. To be eligible, AI/AN students must be enrolled in a federally recognized tribe or have one-fourth degree of Indian blood.[64] The Modernization Act was signed into law in December 2018. It revises a number of challenges with the original JOM, including requiring the Department of the Interior to annually update the number of eligible AI/AN students, clarifies eligibility requirements, clarifies the funding formula, and updates the regulations.[65]

INDIAN EDUCATION ACT OF 1972

The Indian Education Act is a federal law that provides, among other things, federal funding for AI/AN education at all grade levels. A publication from the Native American Rights Fund details the "federal funding for three new special supplemental programs to assist Indian students: 1) the formula grant program for the special educational needs of Indians; 2) the discretionary grant program for a broad range of educational improvement opportunities; and 3) special Indian adult education and literacy grants. In its original form, the [Indian Education Act] formula grants were available only to state public school districts; the discretionary grants and adult education grants were available to states, school districts, BIA schools [which are now known as Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools], tribes, Indian organizations, and higher education institutions. The major feature of the [Indian Education Act] is the formula grant program. This program requires open consultation by the public school districts with Indian parents and the establishment of Indian parent committees."[66] Under amendments to the federal act in 1978, the formula grant program expanded "to allow funding not only for the special educational needs of Indian students, but for their culturally related academic needs as well."[67]

NATIVE AMERICAN LANGUAGES ACT (NALA) OF 1990

NALA is a federal law that "permitted schools to instruct children using Native American languages and affirmed the right of Native American children to express themselves and be educated and assessed in their Native language."[68] According to the National Coalition of Native American Language Schools and Programs, NALA "established federal policy to allow the use of Native American languages as the medium of instruction in schools."[69]

NEW MEXICO INDIAN EDUCATION ACT (NMIEA) OF 2003 (AMENDED IN 2019)

The NMIEA is a state law that aims to provide equitable and culturally relevant education for Native American students in public schools across the state. According to a publication from the Legislative Education Study Committee, the NMIEA "requires the assistant secretary for Indian education to guide school districts and tribes to ensure resources are allocated to implement and develop culturally relevant curriculum and programs; establish and support the Indian Education Advisory Council; ensure school districts and charter schools are engaging in tribal consultation; and seek funds to implement a plan to increase tribal teachers and school leaders. The secretary of education and the assistant secretary for Indian education are required to implement the Act by coordinating with other PED administrators; collaborating with state and federal agencies and tribal governments; and convening semiannual government-to-government meetings to receive feedback on the education of tribal students."[70] The NMIEA was amended in 2019 "to require all historically defined Indian impacted school districts and charter schools to conduct a needs assessment to determine the services Native students need to graduate and become college- or career-ready and to prioritize funds to address the findings of the needs assessment."[71]

EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA) OF 2015

ESSA is a federal law that is the current reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Under Title VI of ESSA, it "provides funds specifically for the education of Indian, Native Hawaiian, and Alaska Native children. With respect to Indian education, the ESEA authorizes formula grants to LEAs, Indian tribes and organizations, BIE schools, and other entities to support elementary and secondary school programs that meet the unique cultural, language, and educational needs of Indian children."[72] Moreover, "Title VI of ESSA provides further guidance, with the aim of ensuring that Native students have access to high-quality programs that provide for basic elementary and secondary needs as well as unique, culturally related academic needs."[73]

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITY ACADEMY & NISN

RECOMMENDATIONS

THE PATH TO EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE for Native students in APS requires bold, systematic change coupled with targeted support. In the 2023-2024 school year, total Native enrollment in APS at the 80th day count was 3,644. This included roughly 1,600 Native students in elementary schools (K-5), about 800 middle schoolers (6-8), and 1,100 in high school (9-12).[74] The average number of Native students across the roughly 140 APS schools is about 25 Native students per school. The numbers are small enough that the district can be creative and proactive in targeting resources and interventions to support Native students across the district. There is no single solution to centuries of systemic disadvantage but every journey begins with an idea and a step. While APS already has several successful programs in place, the data and research shared in this report provide distinct opportunities for additional approaches to provide Native students with a more meaningful and culturally relevant education.

1. PRIORITIZE COHERENCE, CONSISTENCY, AND COMMITMENT

APS divisions such as the Office of Language and Cultural Equity, Indian Education Department, and Special Education Department - to name just a few - must have regular communication with senior district leaders, and have a clear charge and measurable goals for serving Native students and families. To improve coherence, reduce duplication, and optimize services, the district can:

a. Establish a shared vision and plan for serving Native students. All APS staff should understand the common mission to foster equity, belonging, academic outcomes, and overall well-being for Native students. While the district has developed a systemic framework for Indian education and publishes an annual Tribal Education Status Report (TESR), there is a lack of shared awareness across the district and community about the current status of resources, opportunities, and outcomes for Native students. It is unclear what programs or initiatives exist within the district, how they're funded, how many Native students they serve, or whether access is equitable across the district. The plan should identify specific goals for each program, as well as areas where the programs overlap, ensuring that resources are optimized and there's no redundancy in efforts.

b. Establish interdepartmental committees or teams with a specific charge of better serving Native students. This usually involves regular cross-department meetings with representatives from each program area (Indian education, special education, school climate, language and culture, etc.). These teams can share updates, coordinate services, and ensure alignment of goals and strategies.

c. Promote collaboration on student needs. For example, when working with Native students who also have been identified for special education services, teams from both areas can develop individualized plans that integrate both language/culture and special education goals.

d. Regularly assess the effectiveness of programs or initiatives intended to serve Native students. Via analysis of disaggregated data, surveys, focus groups, and other feedback mechanisms from students, families, and staff, share findings and make adjustments to improve services.

e. Develop formal and shared processes and protocols to engage in reflective practice. District leaders can encourage staff, administrators, students, and families to regularly reflect on how well programs for Native students are implemented and integrated and how practices can be improved.

PHOTO COURTESY APS

2. ADDRESS NATIVE EDUCATOR EXPERIENCE AND SUPPORT

Research shows that Native students benefit from having Native teachers because they are able to experience a stronger sense of cultural identity and belonging, increased self-esteem, improved academic engagement, and a deeper connection to their heritage.[75] Native students in APS, however, are less likely than their White or Hispanic peers to have a teacher who shares their racial and ethnic background. In the 2022-23 school year, whereas about 5% of APS students identified as Native, only 1% of APS teachers - just about 60 - are Native American.[76] The ratio of Native students to teachers is about 59:1. The district can:

a. Set clear goals for expanding the Native educator workforce and report progress annually. This will create clear benchmarks to evaluate the effectiveness of recruitment, retention, and preparation programs aimed at increasing the number of Native educators. Regular progress reports can help identify where strategies are falling short, allowing the district to adjust tactics in real time. For example, if recruitment goals are not being met, the district can reassess its outreach methods, funding for scholarships, or partnership efforts. When districts set clear goals and report progress, they show Native communities that their needs are being taken seriously. It fosters trust and demonstrates a commitment to long-term change.

b. Develop a plan to implement targeted strategies to prepare, recruit, retain, and promote more Native educators. These strategies should focus on both systemic changes and cultural competency.

   - Prepare: Establish partnerships with teacher preparation programs at universities and colleges that include training on Native history, culture, language, and community dynamics. Incorporate Indigenous teaching methods and worldviews in teacher education programs, emphasizing experiential learning, storytelling, and community involvement. Establish mentorship programs where Native students in teacher preparation programs are paired with experienced Native educators for guidance and support.
   - Recruit: Develop outreach efforts tailored to Native communities, including partnerships with tribal nations, Native organizations, and universities with strong Native American studies programs. Highlight successful Native educators as role models to inspire future educators. Participate in career fairs and form partnerships with Native American colleges and universities, such as those that are part of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC). Offer scholarships, loan forgiveness, and other financial incentives to Native students pursuing teaching degrees.
   - Retain: Create school environments that reflect Native culture and history through classroom materials, curricula, and school events. Provide continuous professional development focused on culturally relevant teaching strategies, leadership, and community engagement. Continue to work to ensure that school leadership, including administrators, are trained to be culturally responsive and able to engage effectively with Native staff, students, families, and communities.
   - Promote: Partner with current Native teachers to develop programs that will offer clear career pathways and opportunities for advancement within the district to help retain Native educators. This might include leadership development programs or positions within the district focused on Indigenous education.

c. Track and report on differential teacher retention and turnover rates. Data can be disaggregated by school and race/ethnicity to determine if Native teachers have disproportionately high turnover rates overall, or in particular settings. Educators, like students, thrive when the school climate prioritizes human connection, relevance, and engagement. The district can collect, analyze, and report survey and focus group data about how educators view the teaching and learning conditions at their school. More information on the Native educator experience will enable the district to address the feelings of isolation that many Native teachers face in districts where Native communities are underrepresented. The district can also provide support groups, recognizing the unique stresses Native educators may face in predominantly non-Native environments.

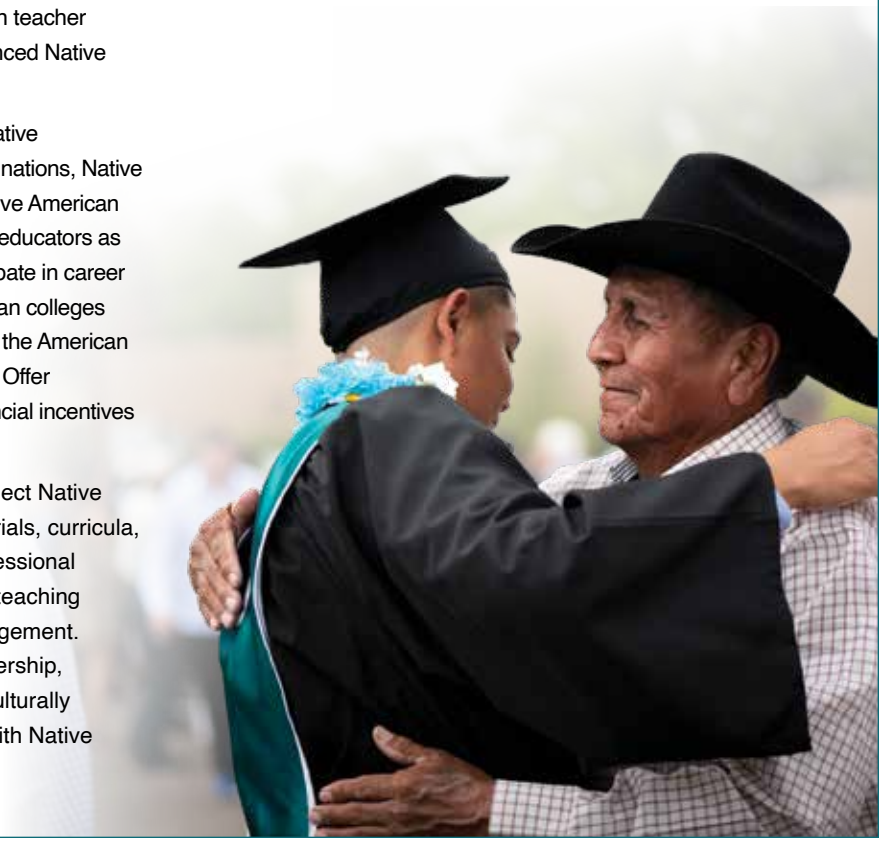

PHOTO COURTESY APS

3. PROMOTE ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE, RELEVANCE, AND EQUITY

Providing Native students with advanced opportunities, challenging courses, and culturally responsive curriculum is essential for fostering academic excellence and ensuring that their unique cultural identities are respected and integrated into their education. Using data helps identify disparities, track progress, and tailor instructional strategies to better meet the needs of Native students, promoting equity and improving overall educational outcomes. Given the relatively small numbers of Native students enrolled in each school, the district can:

a. Monitor district course offerings and screening practices to determine whether Native students are being provided a college- and career-ready course of study. Both unintentional bias and concerns that advanced courses will be too hard for certain students beget persistent gate-keeping practices (e.g., GPA prerequisites, teacher recommendations) keeping Native students out of gifted and talented programs and advanced courses.

b. Require schools to report when Native students specifically are assigned to below-grade-level courses; have uncertified teachers; are receiving tutoring, remedial, or credit recovery programs; or are in danger of failing core courses in English, math, and science.[77]

c. Pilot universal screening for all Native second graders to better identify Native students for gifted and talented tracks. For example, several large school districts, including those in Memphis, TN; Orlando and Fort Lauderdale, FL; and Chicago, have implemented a policy of universal screening for gifted students, rather than relying solely on teacher referrals.[78] A universal screening process for Native students should consider culturally relevant assessments, utilizing tests that account for cultural knowledge and experiences, avoiding bias in language and content. In fact, the New Mexico Public Education Department (PED) provides guidance for implementing a universal screening approach in NM districts.[79]

d. Monitor rates of identification for special education services for Native students, including overidentification and underidentification, and intervene where Native youth are being systematically over- or underrepresented. Use these data to work with schools to determine the reasons for disproportionate identification and provide additional resources or training to reverse these trends. Offer professional development and training for district and school staff involved in identifying and supporting students with disabilities, and include explicit conversations about race, bias, and appropriate services for students.

e. Implement land-based learning for Native students to integrate the natural environment, local ecosystems, and cultural traditions into the curriculum in ways that honor Indigenous knowledge systems and foster a deeper connection between students and the land. The district can utilize existing structures and partnerships to collaborate with local tribes, elders, and cultural leaders to design land-based learning programs that reflect the specific cultural and environmental context of the area. All APS students, not just Native students, will benefit from learning Indigenous ways of knowing and land stewardship practices across subjects like science, history, and social studies.

f. Partner with community organizations and tribes to implement experiential and flexible learning models. These experiences can connect academic learning with the natural world, and non-traditional and community-based education models outside of the regular classroom, while still allowing students to earn credit. Experiential learning provides opportunities to develop connections to the urban community, and regional business and industry while building foundational skills of self-regulation, self-efficacy, and social awareness. Native educators and community leaders can foster reflection, empowering students to connect the meaning of these experiences to their identity, life, and goals. The district can collaborate to collect and use data to monitor the effectiveness of these new learning initiatives, focusing on student engagement, academic performance, and retention.

g. Teach accurate history. Promoting myths like the Pilgrims' harmonious "First Thanksgiving," Columbus "discovering" America, and harmless "exploration" of the "New World" by Francisco Vásquez de Coronado and Juan de Oñate perpetuates a sanitized and Eurocentric version of history that erases the experiences and perspectives of Indigenous peoples. These narratives obscure the violent colonization, displacement, and cultural erasure faced by Native communities in New Mexico, fostering ignorance about systemic inequalities that persist today. The district should ban the teaching of these historical inaccuracies, which normalize historical injustice, reinforce stereotypes, and undermine efforts to build a society grounded in truth, accountability, and respect for diverse identities. Teaching accurate history, on the other hand, is essential for fostering an informed and engaged citizenry and equipping all students to critically analyze current social and political challenges.

h. Provide culturally responsive college advising to all Native secondary students in the district. Efforts, such as providing tailored academic and financial guidance that aligns with Indigenous worldviews, would integrate unique cultural identities, histories, and community values into the college planning process and help address systemic barriers and disparities. Targeted efforts also will help build students' confidence and foster healthy connections with school counselors, mentors, and college recruiters.

4. USE DATA HOLISTICALLY

Information of all sorts, from quantitative data to traditional stories is essential for fostering awareness and urgency, establishing baselines, setting goals, and supporting continuous improvement. The district can:

a. Share data about Native students in ways that are clear, accurate, and accessible to key stakeholders. The APS Strategic Analysis and Program Research (SAPR) Department, the Tribal Education Status Report, and school board progress monitoring reports all provide robust information about the status of Native students in APS. The district and its partners can use videos, infographics, media outreach, tribal consultation, the district's Equity Council, student voice panels, and more strategies to consistently promote and share timely and actionable information.

b. Enable data systems to report on students' progress after graduation, including postsecondary access and completion, formal apprenticeships, military participation, and remediation rates. While APS has robust K-12 data systems in place, the district can do more to track and report on students' post-graduation progress to improve programs and ensure accountability. Partnership with the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) will allow the district and schools to explore and understand trends in Native student college access and success. Given that there are under 200 Native high school seniors in a given year in APS, the district can develop processes to conduct follow-up surveys or interviews with Native graduates to capture qualitative and quantitative data on post-graduation experiences, including those not captured in traditional databases.

c. Set and monitor goals for programs serving Native students. For example, content or curriculum leaders at the district can set a goal of increasing the share of culturally-sustaining curricula and books written by and depicting Indigenous people; human resources can focus on recruiting and hiring more Native educators.

d. Collect and share information on assets, positive contributions from Native students and provide opportunities for Native students to receive academic credit for cultural funds of knowledge. Catalog and leverage the assets and programs of each school as part of the 90-day plans and overall improvement and support strategy. Engage and leverage families, tribes, and community-based organizations and service providers to provide additional expertise, capacity, and support for schools and students.

e. Acknowledge the unique history and present manifestations of settler colonialism in New Mexico's society and Albuquerque schools. Create space for adults in the education system to discuss and address these issues to understand the history of discrimination in public education and explore how unconscious bias may allow these inequities to persist.

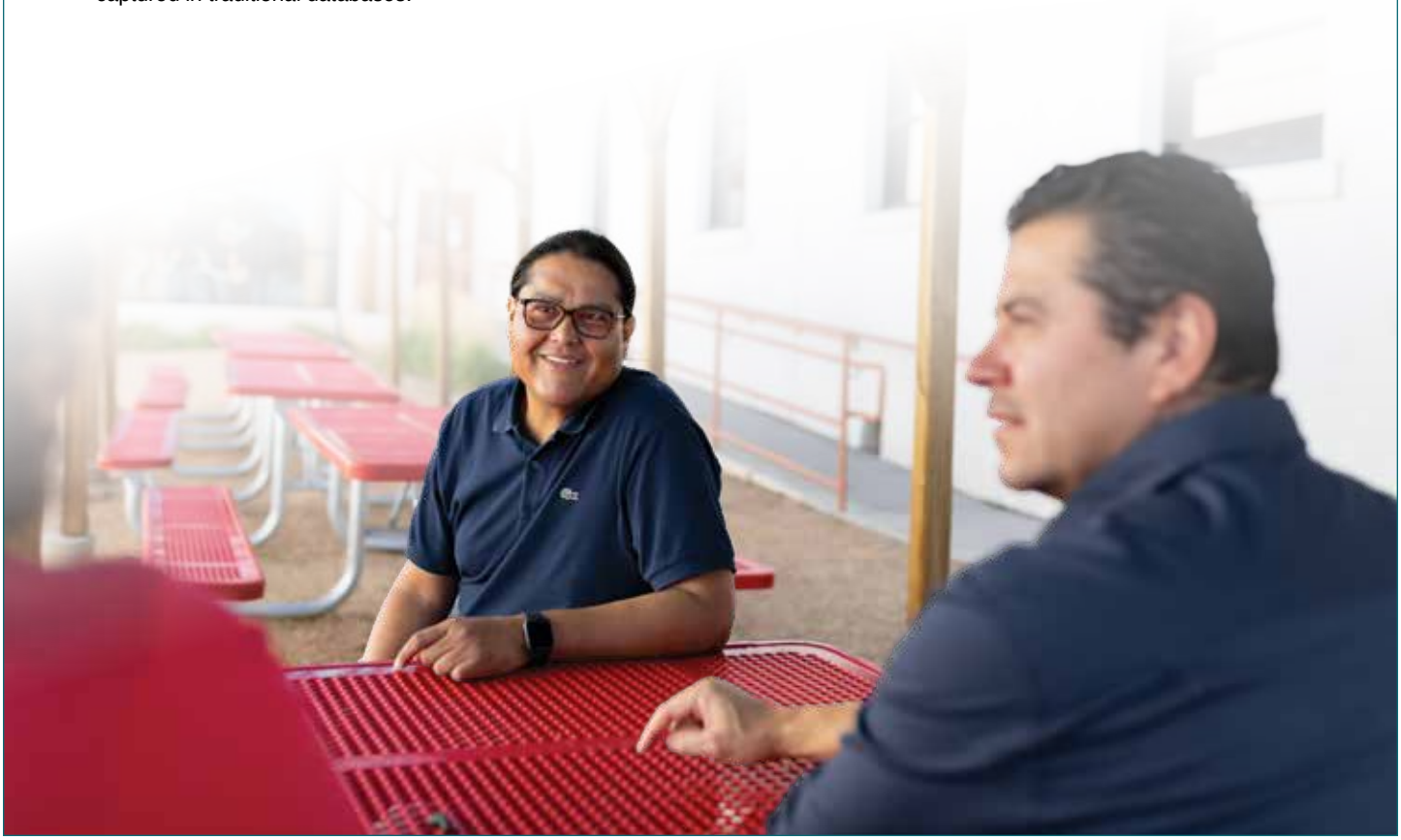

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITY ACADEMY & NISN

5. ENGAGE COMMUNITY AND FOSTER COMMUNITY-LED INITIATIVES

Establishing authentic partnerships with Native families is crucial for APS as a district and for individual schools to create a culturally relevant learning environment, build trust, and ultimately improve academic outcomes for Native students. Healthy and productive relationships between school personnel and Native families can help address specific needs and foster a sense of belonging. Effective strategies include inviting Native elders and community members as guest speakers and incorporating traditional knowledge into curriculum, and actively seeking feedback from families to inform educational decisions. In addition to these approaches, the district can:

a. Regularly convene Native families and students - beyond required tribal consultations - to build an ongoing dialogue. To ensure that these engagements are meaningful and not merely perfunctory, APS leadership can prioritize building long-term, trust-based relationships with tribal leaders and community members. This involves ongoing communication beyond just the consultation periods, such as regular check-ins or collaborative events, to foster a sense of partnership. Instead of following a fixed agenda, or no agenda at all, APS staff can collaborate with tribal representatives to design the agenda topics.

b. Foster healing and reconciliation with Native communities as a way to address the historical injustices and trauma caused by past policies and actions. District staff can take ownership by acknowledging the painful legacy of assimilation and displacement, offering public apologies, and committing to ongoing education about Native history. In light of the troubling 2018 incident at Cibola High School, APS leaders must openly address microaggressions and instances of bias. APS leadership can still issue a public statement acknowledging the harm caused by the teacher's actions and offering a sincere apology to the student and the Native community. Hosting listening sessions or roundtable discussions with Native students, families, and community leaders would provide a platform for their voices and concerns. Additionally, APS should work closely with Native organizations to create restorative practices to help ensure that all students feel respected and valued in their educational environment.

c. Provide challenge grants and/or targeted funding for innovative initiatives or programs targeted at serving Native students. District leaders can partner with the APS Education Foundation, business, and other local funders to provide funding opportunities that center Native voices. Projects should involve Native students, elders, and local leaders in the design and execution of the program, and incorporate Native culture, language, traditions, and history. The district can use school and district data to effectively identify the right schools and topics on which to focus these efforts. For example, supporting projects that offer culturally relevant mental health resources, including counseling, mentorship, and peer support for Native students.

d. Launch a one-to-one high school mentorship program for Native students to foster personal growth, academic success, and cultural connection. The mentor-student relationship would be based on mutual respect and shared heritage, allowing students to feel supported not only in their academic journey but also in their cultural identity. With just over 1,000 Native secondary students, the district could pilot an effort with every high school junior, for example, to provide guidance on issues such as managing cultural identity within the classroom and community, balancing traditional values with modern education, and building resilience in the face of systemic challenges.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITY ACADEMY & NISN

6. STRATEGICALLY UTILIZE FUNDING

To enable successful innovation, implementation, and evaluation of programs and services intended to serve Native students, APS should develop a strategy for effective use - and monitoring - of funds targeted to serve Native students (federal Impact Aid or Title VII of the Every Student Succeeds Act, Title VI Indian Education Formula Grants, Johnson O'Malley Act funds, Bureau of Indian Education funds,[80] and the New Mexico Indian Education Act). The district can:

a. Share a transparent plan for how it allocates funding to ensure that Native students have equitable access to resources to support their education. Regular monitoring and reports should include information about Native student access to resources, including funding, technology, broadband access; science labs; counselors, social workers and support staff; and extra-curricular opportunities such as cultural art, music, and literature.

b. Conduct periodic resource allocation reviews (RARs) to examine the connection between resource allocation and student outcomes.[81] This information should be shared with tribes, families, and community leaders in ways that are easy to understand.

c. Establish processes for reallocating or transferring funds within the same budget year if they are not able to be expended in a timely manner. For example, if the district has budgeted for a certain number of language teachers and is not able to identify and hire them, the funds should be reallocated to other allowable uses that will support Native students, rather than being reverted back to the state or federal government.

d. Prioritize coordination of public funding and services. The district can combine funds from multiple sources for education as well as other services like health and nutrition, and leverage intergovernmental coordination to accomplish this.

7. LEVERAGE POLICY AND ADVOCACY

As the largest school district in the state of New Mexico, APS has an important role to play in advocating for funding and resources for Native students. APS leaders can use their political influence and authority to engage with governors, county commissioners, city councilors, and legislators, providing political leadership, information, and data so other leaders across New Mexico can consider holistic needs of Native students. Specifically, the district can:

a. Advocate at the state and federal levels for policies that provide financial and structural support for Native teachers. This could include the creation of scholarships, teaching fellowships, and research grants focused on Native education.

b. Work with state and federal agencies to secure funding and support for initiatives aimed at improving opportunity for Native students and educators. District leaders can leverage their voice and partner with other leaders to advocate for funding and support to increase the number of Native teachers in the workforce, such as through the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Indian Education.

c. Share successes and lessons learned from district efforts to target and better serve Native students. APS leaders can share information with other district leaders, including superintendents, board members, and principals. This can include presentations through New Mexico School Boards Association (NMSBA), the New Mexico Coalition of Educational Leaders (NMCEL), and New Mexico School Superintendents' Association (NMSSA). For example, APS has embraced the Martinez-Yazzie charge by setting student outcome-focused goals that explicitly name Native students. As the district continues to implement this effort and identifies promising practices, leaders can provide regular updates and share resources and tools.

Other Important Considerations

AVOID STEREOTYPES

All district staff and representatives should be mindful of not perpetuating stereotypes about Native people and culture and ensure accurate representation of diverse experiences.

RESPECT CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

APS staff should be aware of cultural differences and issues that must be approached with sensitivity and awareness. For example, some Native students may not be able to dissect animals due to their cultural beliefs and respect for wildlife. The Diné (Navajo) people believe that animals are part of the creation of the world and have a significant role in their existence. Bird's nests, bones, snakes, and owls are other examples of potentially sensitive items.

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CONCLUSION

The Urban Indigenous Education Summits provided a space for our urban Indigenous families and community. It is a space they have collectively asked for, where Native youth, families, and community members come together to share, dream, learn, and ultimately to build an educational community collective. Native students and families in APS offer a wealth of cultural, intellectual, and social assets that can enrich the entire district. The data and recommendations in this report provide a clear roadmap for turning these dreams into reality. By amplifying their voices and addressing systemic barriers, APS has the opportunity to lead the nation in providing a model of inclusive, equitable, and culturally responsive education. Together, we can ensure Native students thrive academically, culturally, and socially, creating a brighter future for all.

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