

U.S. Department of Education

Statement of Victoria Vasques,

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Hearing on the Status of Indian Education

Senate Committee Hearing on Indian Affairs

June 16, 2005

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, on behalf of Secretary Spellings, let me thank you for this opportunity to appear before you to discuss the current status of Indian education. I am here with my colleagues Darla Marburger, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy in our Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, and Thomas M. Corwin, Director of the Division of Elementary, Secondary, and Vocational Analysis in the Department's Budget Service.

Today, I will provide an overview on the educational performance of American Indian and Alaska Native students from their early childhood years, for elementary and secondary education, and through the postsecondary education level. Collecting accurate data on the American Indian/Alaska Native population has been a long-term challenge for the Department. American Indian/Alaska Native students are a highly diverse group, both culturally and linguistically— there are over 560 federally recognized tribes in the United States. Indian students, though, constitute a very small proportion of the general student population and they are not evenly spread out among the various US regions. Furthermore, many Indian families reside in small towns and rural areas. For these reasons, it is difficult for any study to include a sufficient number of Indian students to yield accurate, high-quality data on this population.

I am pleased that the Department, in recent years, has taken major actions to collect, analyze, and report useful, high-quality data on the educational status and needs of Indian students. We have supported those efforts through strategic investments of National Activities funds provided through the Indian Education appropriation. Our efforts have covered the schools operated or funded by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, other schools that have high concentrations of Indian students, and Indian children and adults more generally. In the coming months, we will publish several significant reports in this area.

One example of this activity is our oversampling of American Indian students in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), in order to generate adequate representation of Indian students in the NAEP. This will give us reliable, national-level data on Indian students' performance in reading and mathematics, adding a whole new

subgroup of students to the Nation's Report Card. We have also invested in the National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Birth Cohort (ECLS-B). Through this study, we will obtain information on the early development of a nationally representative sample of Indian children from birth into kindergarten, and be able to compare their progress to that of the general population of young children and to young children in the other major racial and ethnic groups.

Indian Students

Indian students constitute about one percent of all students enrolled in public schools and often attend rural schools; over half of all Indian students attend schools in small towns and rural areas.¹ In 2002, there were approximately 628,000 American Indian/Alaska Native students in public elementary and secondary schools, including Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools. Approximately 582,000 (or 93 percent) attended public schools and 46,000 attended schools administered by BIA. Department of Education programs contribute a significant amount of funding to the BIA for the education of Indian students who attend BIA schools. The Department has a long-standing partnership with the BIA over the administration of these programs, and we expect to sign a new Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the BIA, covering No Child Left Behind issues, very soon.

I will now provide a summary of some of the key statistics on the educational status of American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Early Childhood Data

New data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS-B) paint a picture of the early development of Indian children not unlike that of other young children. The ECLS-B is designed to provide detailed information about children's early life experiences; it looks at children's health, development, care, and education during the formative years, from birth through kindergarten. The data we have collected to date reveal that Indian infants and toddlers show early motor and cognitive skill development similar to that of the general population. The skills assessed included eye-hand coordination, sitting, independent walking, balance, early problem-solving, and use of words.²

Indian Student Performance on NAEP

Overall, the data on Indian students show that their performance continues to lag below the national average.

American Indian/Alaska Native student performance on the latest NAEP reading, mathematics, and science assessments show similar trends. American Indian students'

¹ US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), State Non-Fiscal Survey, 2002-03.

² ECLS-B restricted use file, NCES 2004-093, 2004.

scores in the NAEP 2003 Reading assessment were lower than white and Asian/Pacific Islander students' scores in both 4th and 8th grade assessments, but higher than the scores of one other group, African-Americans. In the 4th-grade reading assessment, 63 percent of all students attained an achievement level of basic or above basic. The figure for American Indians/Alaska Natives was 47 percent, compared to 75 percent for white non-Hispanic students, 70 percent for Asian/Pacific Islanders, 44 percent for Hispanics, and 40 percent for non-Hispanic blacks. The general pattern for 8th grade NAEP reading results is the same. (See Figures 1 and 2.)

In the 2003 NAEP Mathematics assessment, Indian students also scored lower than white and Asian/Pacific Islander students but, again, were not the lowest-scoring group. Among 4th-graders who took the NAEP mathematics assessments, 77 percent of the total population attained an achievement level of basic or above basic. The figure for Indians was 64 percent, compared to 87 percent for white non-Hispanic students, 87 percent for Asian/Pacific Islanders, 62 percent for Hispanics, and 54 percent for non-Hispanic blacks. The general pattern for the 8th-grade mathematics assessment was the same. (See Figures 3 and 4.)

The data for 2000 NAEP Science assessments show similar results. In the 8th-grade science assessments, Indian students performed below the level of non-Hispanic white and Asian/Pacific Islander students but better than their non-Hispanic black and Hispanic counterparts. Sixty-one (61) percent of all students who took the NAEP Science assessment attained an achievement level of basic or above. Thirty-nine (39) percent of Indian students attained that level, compared to 74 percent of non-Hispanic whites, 64 percent of Asian/Pacific Islanders, 35 percent of Hispanics, and 26 percent of non-Hispanic blacks.³ The general pattern for the 4th-grade science assessment was similar. (See Figures 5 and 6.)

In sum, the NAEP data document continued achievement gaps among different racial and ethnic groups in the 4th and 8th grades. Within the continuum, Indians have scored well below the levels of whites and Asian/Pacific Islanders, but not as low as blacks and, in some cases, not as low as Hispanics.

Before 2002, NAEP did not consistently assess enough Indian students to provide reliable information about their performance. The Department has embarked on an effort to ensure that NAEP produces more reliable national-level data on the performance of Indian students. We now have a benchmark to measure Indian students' academic progress through the years. Our work also supports the Department's accountability efforts. Disaggregated data are a key tenet of the accountability embedded in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). We will use NAEP data to measure the performance of Indian students, and the programs that serve them, over time.

³ NAEP 2003 Reading Assessment, NAEP 2003 Math Assessment, NAEP 2003 Science Assessment.

Secondary Education Attainment

High school graduation and dropout rates are important indicators of academic achievement at the secondary level. The “status” dropout rate for Indian high school students is higher than the dropout rate for any other racial/ethnic group, except for Hispanics. In 2003, 9.9 percent of all individuals aged 16 to 24 were out of school and did not have a high school diploma or an alternative credential such as a General Education Development (GED) certificate; for Indians, that figure was 15 percent, and for Hispanics it was 23.5 percent.⁴ The Administration has proposed a High School Intervention Initiative as part of its FY2006 budget request. The purpose of this Initiative is to improve achievement at the high school level and particularly to reduce achievement gaps among student subgroups, including Indian students and their peers from other racial/ethnic groups.

Completion of academic high school work is an indicator of students’ preparation to enter the workforce or to pursue postsecondary education. The National Commission on Excellence in Education recommended, in 1983, that a core academic track for high school include four years of English, three years of social studies, three years of science, three years of mathematics, and two years of a foreign language. An increasing number of organizations, including Achieve and the National Governors Association, have recently called for all high school students to complete such core academic coursework. The percentage of Indian students who have completed that coursework increased from 3 percent in 1982 to 26 percent in 2002. However, data for 2002 show that a lower percentage of Indian high school graduates were likely to complete such courses than any other racial/ethnic group.⁵

Taking advanced academic courses is another indicator of Indian preparation for the workforce or postsecondary education. American Indian and Alaska Native students are less likely to attend schools offering advanced academic coursework than any other racial or ethnic group. In 2000, 53 percent of Indian students attended schools that offered at least two advanced courses in mathematics, English, science, or foreign languages, while the national figure was 58 percent.⁶ Indian students are also less likely than other groups to take these advanced courses. Approximately 29 percent of Indian students graduating in 2000 had taken advanced mathematics courses (compared to a national average of 45 percent) and 43 percent had taken advanced science courses (compared to a national figure of 63 percent.)⁷ The data indicate that, in general, these

⁴ Census, October CPS, 1990-2003.

⁵ High School & Beyond Longitudinal Study of 1980 Sophomores (HS&B-So:80); National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88/90), “First-Follow up 1990”, and NAEP High School Transcript Studies, selected years 1982 to 2000.

⁶ Condition of Education 2005, table 25-1, based on 2000 High School Transcript Study (HSTS), previously unpublished tabulation (November 2004).

⁷ Condition of Education 2005, tables 22-1 and 22-2, based on 2000 High School Transcript Study (HSTS).

types of courses are offered less frequently in small and rural schools, the types of schools in which Indian students are disproportionately enrolled.⁸

Performance on Advanced Placement (AP) and college entrance examinations is another indicator of secondary student achievement. The number of 12th-grade Indian students taking AP examinations increased by 25 percent between 1999 and 2003. Although this was a large increase, it was the smallest rate of increase of any racial/ethnic group. In terms of achievement in AP examinations, Indian students consistently score below the national average.⁹ However, data from college entrance examinations in 2003 show that, while average SAT scores for Indian students on the Verbal and Mathematics sections have remained below the national averages, Indians have performed better than Hispanics and blacks. Average scores on the American College Testing (ACT) exam show a similar trend; although Indian students' average score is lower than the national average, they perform better than their African-American peers.¹⁰

The number of Indian high school students who expect to receive at least a bachelor's degree or a professional degree has increased over the last twenty years or so. According to the latest follow-up of the High School and Beyond Longitudinal Study of 1980 Sophomores, and the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS), the percentage of American Indian 10th grade students who expected to complete at least a bachelor's degree in 1980 was 31 percent; in 2002, this number had increased to 76 percent.¹¹

Indicators of Educational Risk

American Indian students are more likely to receive special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) than students from all but one other racial/ethnic group. In 2002, 11.4 percent of all American Indian/Alaska Native individuals between the ages of 3 and 21 who were enrolled in elementary and secondary schools received such special education services.¹²

Indian students often have higher rates of absenteeism, suspension, and expulsion than their peers. Data from the 2003 NAEP assessment showed that Indian 8th-graders were more likely to incur longer absences from school than any other racial/ethnic group. Survey respondents reported that 30 percent of Indian students were absent from school for three or more days in the preceding month.¹³ Indian students are also more likely to be suspended or expelled from school than their white, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander counterparts.¹⁴

⁸ Condition of Education 2005, table 25-1, based on 2000 High School Transcript Study (HSTS), previously unpublished tabulation (November 2004).

⁹ College Board, Advanced Placement Program, National Summary Report, 1999–2003.

¹⁰ College Entrance Examination Board, College Bound Seniors Report, 1996-2003; American College Testing Program, ACT National Scores Reports, 1997-2003.

¹¹ Condition of Education 2005, table 15-1, based on High School & Beyond Longitudinal Study of 1980 Sophomores (HS&B-So:80); and Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS:2002) Base Year.

¹² OSEP, 1998-2003 data.

¹³ NAEP 2003 Reading Assessment.

¹⁴ OCR Elementary and Secondary School Survey (E&S) 2000.

American Indian/ Alaska Native students have high rates of alcohol, tobacco, and drug use, and are more likely to be involved in violent incidents on school grounds. The National Survey on Drug Use and Health showed that Indian students are more likely than any other racial/ethnic group to smoke cigarettes or use marijuana. According to the Survey, 20 percent of Indian children aged 12 to 17 reported using alcohol in the preceding month; 26 percent reported smoking cigarettes in the preceding month; and 16 percent reported using marijuana in the preceding month.¹⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) data from 2003 show that Indian high school students were more likely than any other racial/ethnic group to report being threatened or injured with a weapon or engaging in a physical fight. In addition, 13 percent of Indian high school students also reported carrying a weapon to school, a larger proportion than any other group.¹⁶

The recent, tragic shooting incident at the Red Lake High School provides stark evidence of the impact of school violence on communities, including tribal communities. Although the Red Lake incident had significant similarities to earlier non-Indian school shooting incidents, Red Lake is an isolated rural community without the resources necessary to cope with a violent tragedy of this magnitude. The Department has provided both funds and technical assistance to the Red Lake School District to address immediate needs related to safety concerns at the school, and to provide educational services to homebound students. To date, Department staff have made three visits to the district to assist in recovery efforts. Our Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools (OSDFS), in particular, has been working with other agencies providing services and support to the Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians Tribal Council and Red Lake Public School, and has also worked closely with the Minnesota Department of Education and other Federal agencies to coordinate available funding resources, training opportunities, and technical assistance. We will continue to work with the Tribal Council and the school district to assist them in identifying their long-term needs, and potential resources.

Postsecondary Attainment

The Department has collected data on postsecondary educational attainment since 1976, and we are fortunate to have information on the postsecondary attainment of American Indian and Alaska Native students since that time.

The number of Indian students enrolling in colleges and universities has more than doubled in the last 25 years or so. In 1976, 35,000 Indian students enrolled in 4-year colleges and universities; in 2002, that number was 84,600. (See Figure 7.) Approximately 13,000 of American Indian college students were enrolled in the 32

¹⁵ US HHS, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Office of Applied Studies, National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2002 and 2003.

¹⁶ US HHS, CDC, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS), "Youth Risk and Behavior Survey" (YRBS), 2003.

tribally controlled colleges across the country.¹⁷ However, Indian individuals aged 18 to 24 were less likely to be enrolled in colleges or universities than any other major group.¹⁸

The number of degrees awarded to Indian students also increased dramatically between 1976 and 2002. The number of associate's degrees awarded to American Indians/Alaska Natives was 2,498 for 1976; in 2002, 7,470 were awarded. For bachelor's degrees, that figure was 3,326 in 1976 and 9,803 for 2002; and 967 master's degrees were awarded to American Indians/Alaska Natives in 1976 and 2,841 in 2002.¹⁹ (See Figure 8.)

Upcoming Reports

The Department is making a serious effort to produce up-to-date, high-quality data about Indian students. We have been working to collect and release data on this population so that we know how Indian students are doing and can adjust policies and provide resources to address the needs that the data show are most critical.

The Department is scheduled to publish four new documents on American Indian and Alaska Native Students by the end of the year. The upcoming report, "Status and Trends in the Education of American Indians and Alaska Natives" will contain an overview of demographic characteristics of Indian students and further analyses of Indian student performance along a number of key indicators. In the fall of 2005, the Department expects to release a report on the demographic and family characteristics and early mental and physical development of 9-month old American Indian and Alaska Native children participating in the ECLS-B study.

Two other reports, one on postsecondary education and Indian students and another consisting of a special analysis of decennial census data on the Indian population are planned for release later in the year.

In 2006, the Department will also release special NAEP reports that will provide information about the educational experiences of American Indian/Alaska Native students and the role of Indian culture in their education.

NCLB and Indian Education

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) holds great promise for improving the education and academic achievement of American Indian and Alaska Native students. Its emphasis on stronger accountability for all students and the use of disaggregated data ensure that schools address the needs of all of their students, including

¹⁷ Digest of Ed. Statistics 2004, based on IPEDS, Fall Enrollment survey, 2002.

¹⁸ NCES, Digest of Ed Statistics 2004, based on Higher Ed General Information Survey (HEGIS), "Fall Enrollment in Colleges and Universities" surveys; and Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) "Fall Enrollment" surveys, 1976-99, and Spring 2001-Spring 2003 surveys.

¹⁹ NCES HEGIS, "Degrees and other formal awards conferred" surveys, 1976-77, and IPEDS "Completions Survey" 2003.

those of Indian students. The Act's emphasis on teacher quality will require that all students, including Indian students, are taught by highly qualified teachers who are certified, hold a bachelor's degree, and have demonstrated knowledge of the subject they teach.

President Bush's Executive Order 13336, which recognizes the unique educational and culturally related academic needs of American Indian and Alaska Native students, will assist us in implementing NCLB. My office has taken a lead role in the implementation of that Order. The Department, in partnership with the Department of the Interior, convened a National Conference on Indian Education on the No Child Left Behind Act in April of this year that brought together representatives from Federal agencies, State educational agencies, tribal educational agencies, and local officials. At the conference, we discussed how to implement NCLB in a manner that is consistent with tribal traditions, languages, and cultures, and identified five key areas for further work and development:

1. Closing the achievement gap and appropriate assessment of Indian students.
2. Training and developing American Indian and Alaska Native teachers.
3. Promoting continuity of tribal traditions, language, and culture.
4. Scientifically based research on Indian education, and the training of American Indian and Alaska Native researchers.
5. Local, tribal, State, and Federal collaboration.

The Department's work in the immediate future will focus on developing strategies, resources, and technical assistance in these areas for agencies that serve Indian children.

Conclusion

There are significant achievement gaps between the American Indian and Alaska Native student population and the general population, although Indian students have made great progress in recent decades and score higher than other major ethnic and racial groups on some indicators. The Indian student population continues to be subject to significant risk factors that threaten their ability to improve their academic achievement and their general wellbeing. Strategies to improve their education will need to take into account these risk factors, as well as the challenges of educating a linguistically and culturally diverse population in rural and remote areas.

Our efforts to collect quality data on the Indian population, however, have yielded a number of useful data sources that can be used to hold educational agencies that serve these students, and us, accountable for the performance of Indian students across the Nation.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee. My colleagues and I will be happy to respond to any questions you may have.

Figure 1
 NAEP 2003 Reading Assessment, 4th grade
 Percentage of Students Attaining Basic Level or Above

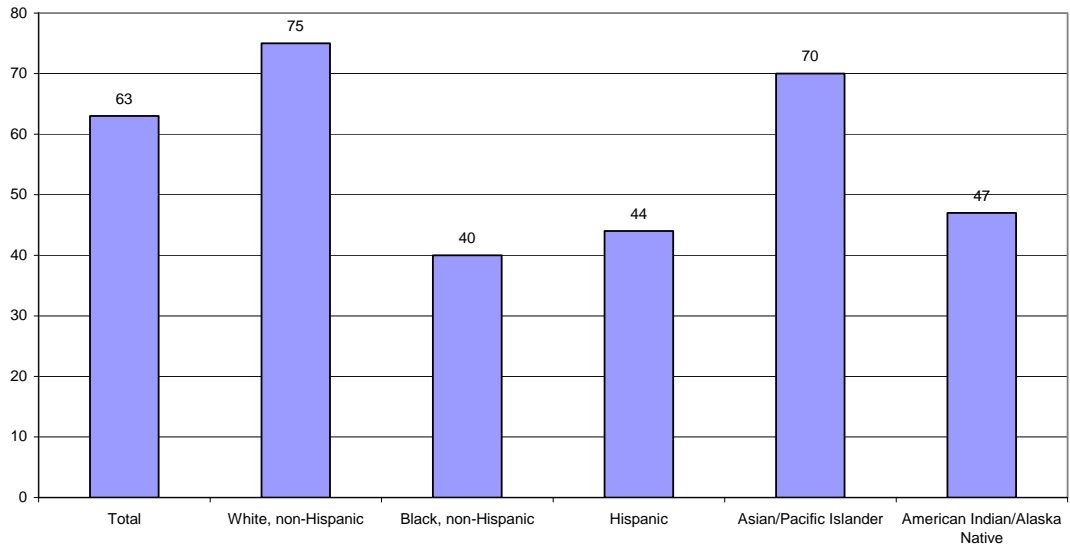
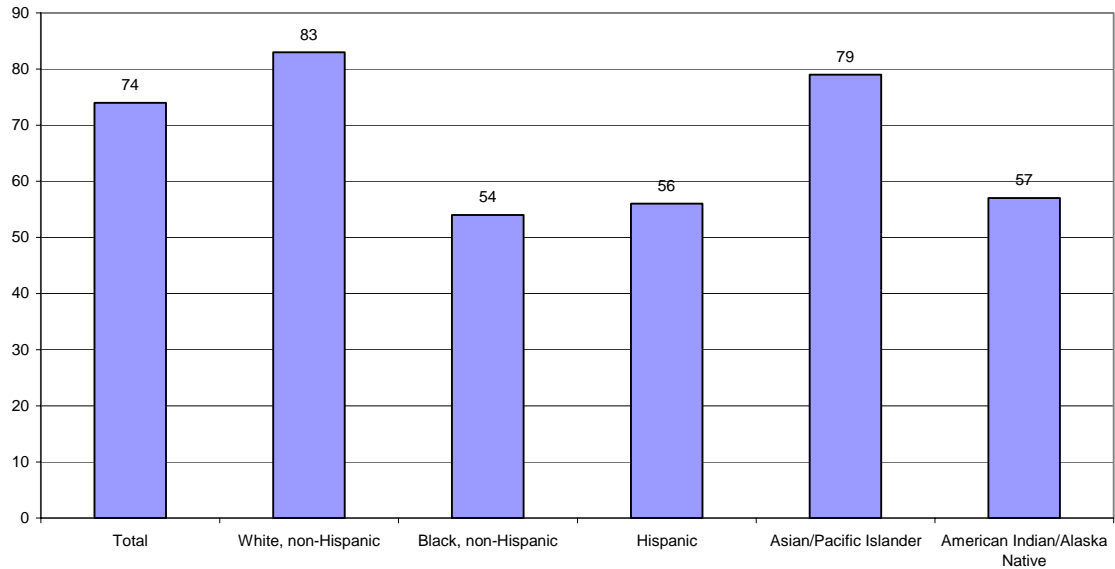


Figure 2
 NAEP 2003 Reading Assessment, 8th grade
 Percentage of Students Attaining Basic Level or Above



Note: Accommodations were permitted.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2003 Reading Assessment.

Figure 3
 NAEP 2003 Mathematics Assessment, 4th grade
 Percentage of Students Attaining Basic Level or Above

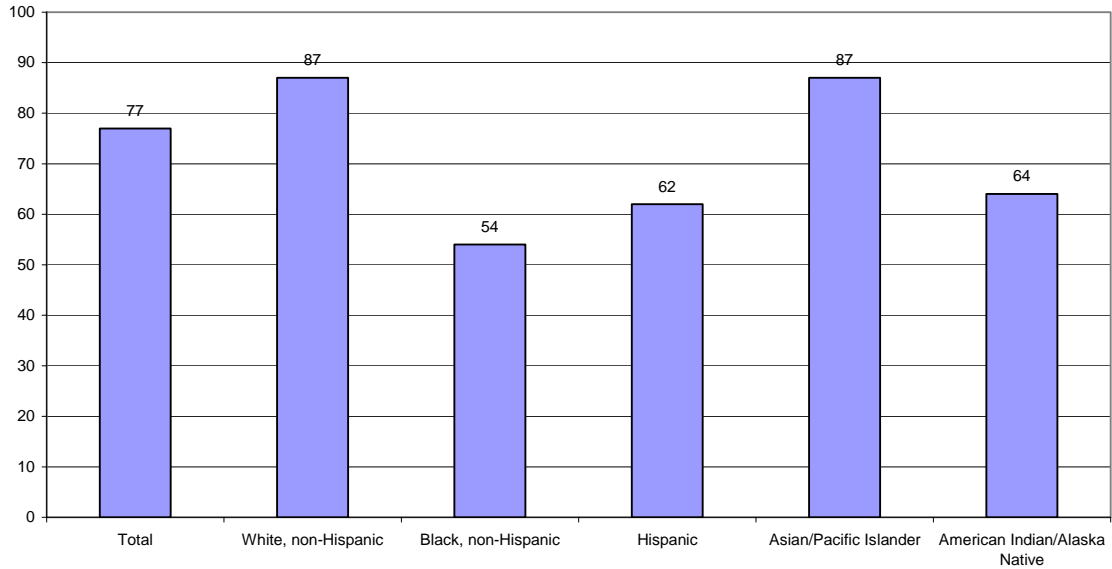
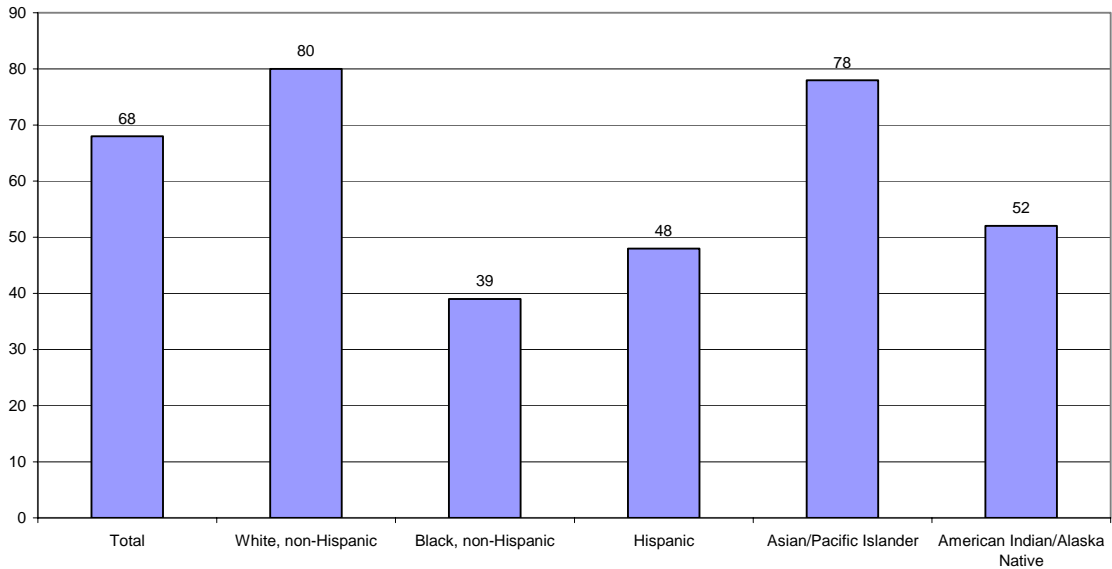


Figure 4
 NAEP 2003 Reading Mathematics 8th grade
 Percentage of Students Attaining Basic Level or Above



Note: Accommodations were permitted.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2003 Mathematics Assessment.

Figure 5
 NAEP 2000 Science Assessment, 4th grade
 Percentage of Students Attaining Basic Level or Above

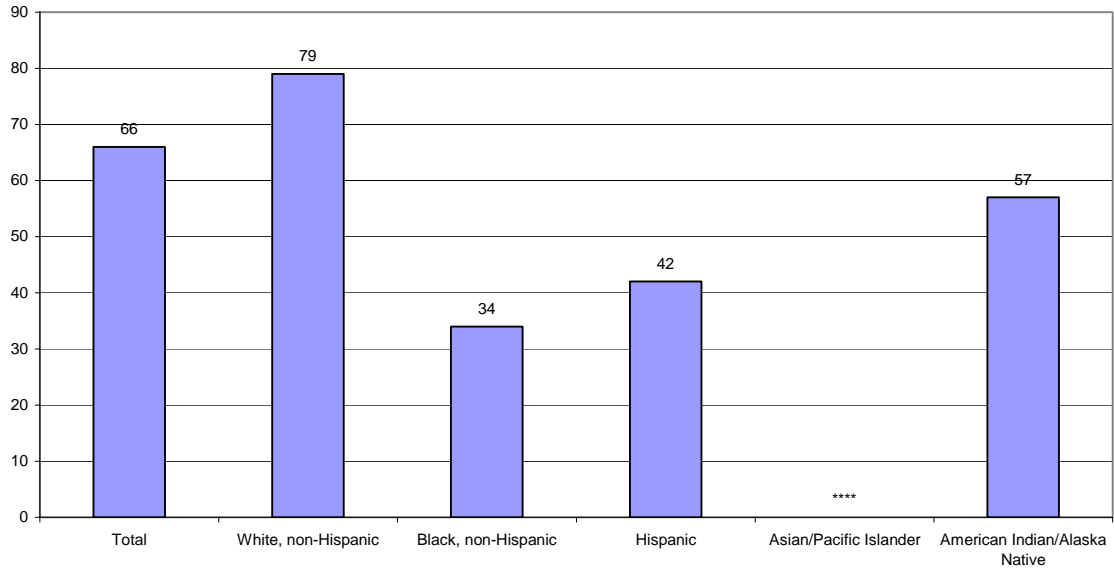
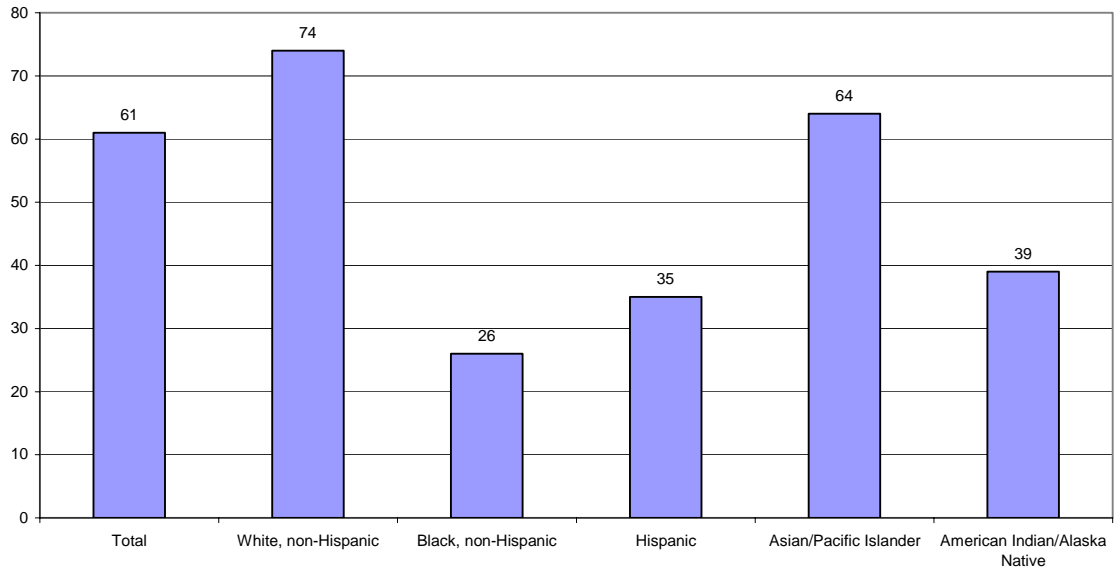


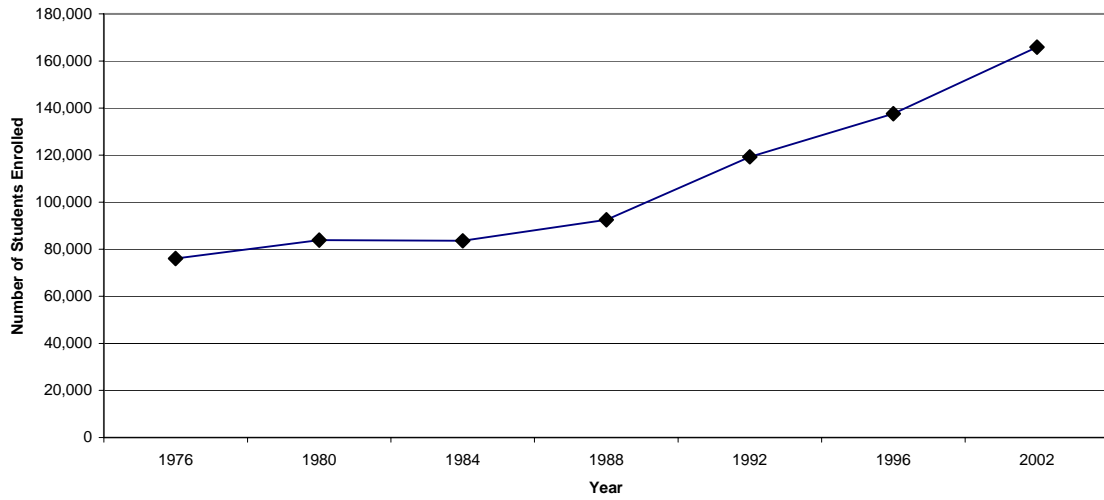
Figure 6
 NAEP 2000 Science Assessment, 8th grade
 Percentage of Students Attaining Basic Level or Above



Note: Accommodations were permitted.

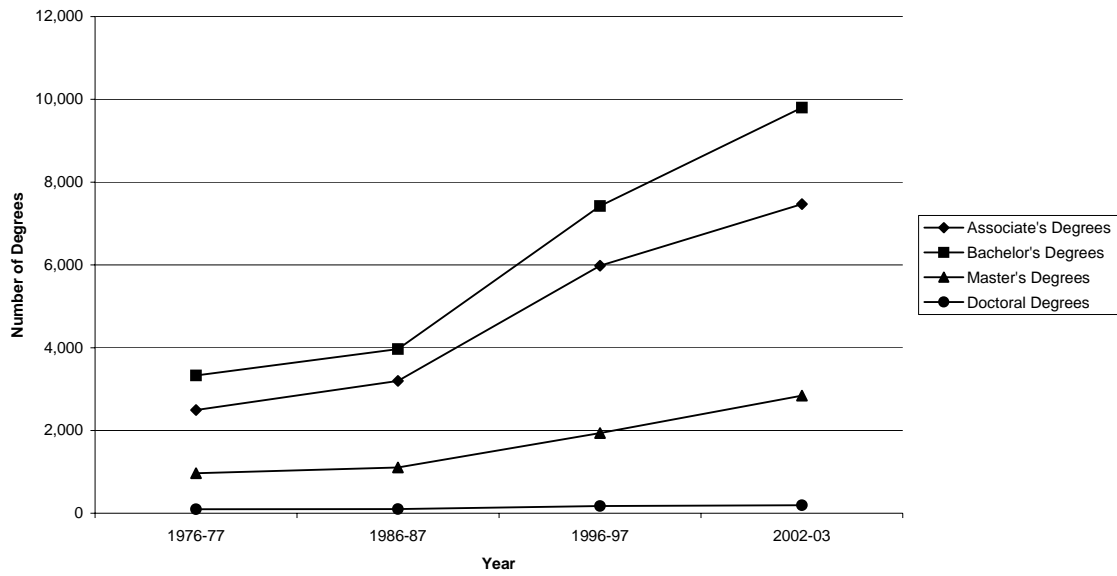
Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2003 Reading Assessment.

Figure 7
American Indian/Alaska Native Enrollment in Public and Private Degree-Granting Institutions
Selected Years, 1976 to 2002



Source: US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Digest of Education Statistics 2004, based on Higher Ed General Information Survey (HEGIS), "Fall Enrollment in Colleges and Universities" surveys; and Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) "Fall Enrollment" surveys, 1976-99, and Spring 2001-Spring 2003 surveys.

Figure 8
Number of Degrees Awarded to American Indians/Alaska Natives, by Level of Degree: Selected
Years, 1976-2002



Source: US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Higher Education General Information Survey (HEGIS), "Degrees and Other Formal Awards Conferred" surveys, 1976-77 through 1986-87; and 1988-89 through 2002-03 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), "Completions Survey," (IPEDS-C:89-03), and Fall 2000 through 2003.