

U.S. Department of Education
Statement of Darla Marburger,
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education
Hearing on the Status of Indian Education
Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
May 25, 2006

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. My name is Darla Marburger, and I am Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. I am here with my colleagues, Cathie Carothers, the Acting Director of the Office of Indian Education, and Thomas Corwin, the Director of the Division of Elementary, Secondary, and Vocational Analysis, Budget Service.

Your request for the Department to testify on the matter of Indian education is very timely. Earlier this week, the Department's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) released the first report of the National Indian Education Study (NIES). This report contains important new information on the educational progress of Indian students, both federally recognized and not, relative to that of students in general and of other major student populations.

The National Indian Education Study

The NIES is a two-part study designed to provide information on the condition of American Indian and Alaska Native students. This information can then be used by

educational agencies, schools, and parents to develop education programs that enable American Indian and Alaska Native students to meet the same challenging academic standards as all other students in this country. The first part of the study reports the results from the Department's oversampling of American Indian students in the 2005 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which was intended to generate adequate representation of Indian students in the NAEP. Although previous administrations of the NAEP have included American Indian and Alaska Native students in the sample of students assessed, an expanded sample provides more reliable data for this population.

This study provides us with the most reliable and complete data on Indian students' performance at the national level in reading and mathematics to date. It includes data from the national level NAEP, plus regional-level comparisons and State-level results for seven States. The national-level NAEP included a nationally representative sample of students from public schools, private schools, Department of Defense schools, and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools. I would like to note that the study expanded significantly the number of Indian students attending BIA schools who were included in the sample, compared to the number included in previous administrations of NAEP.

The second part of the study consists of an in-depth survey that gathered information from American Indian and Alaska Native students and their teachers about demographic factors, school culture and climate, the use of traditional language and culture in the home, and teacher qualifications. We expect to publish the report on that survey this coming fall.

Racial/Ethnic Subgroup Comparisons for the 2005 NAEP in Reading and Mathematics

Data from the 2005 NAEP reading and math assessments show a consistent pattern of achievement results for American Indian and Alaska Native students: while comparisons between Indian students and all other students show that Indian students tend to score lower than students in general, comparisons among racial/ethnic subgroups show that Indian students generally achieved at a level comparable to that of Hispanic students and somewhat above the level for African-American students. The performance of all three of these groups continues to trail that of white and Asian-American/Pacific Islander students. Our data also show a small increase in the reading and mathematics achievement of Indian students between the 2003 and 2005 NAEP, although most of the improvements are not statistically significant.

For example, results from the NAEP 4th-grade reading assessment show that 48 percent of American Indian/Alaska Native students achieved a performance level of basic or above, compared to 76 percent for white students, 42 percent for black students, 46 percent for Hispanic students, and 73 percent for Asian/Pacific Islander students. The 8th-grade reading scores reflect a similar pattern. The percentages of students scoring at the basic level or above were 59 percent for Indian students, 82 percent for white students, 52 percent for black students, 56 percent for Hispanic students, and 80 percent for Asian/Pacific Islander students.

The new NAEP data also allow us to measure the achievement of Indian students over time. For example, the average “scale score” for Indians in 4th-grade reading was 202 in 2003 and 204 in 2005, and in 8th-grade reading it was 246 in 2003 and 249 in 2005. In the 2005 NAEP, 48 percent of Indian 4th-grade students achieved a performance

level of basic or above in reading (compared to 47 percent in 2003), and 59 percent of Indian 8th-graders did so (versus 57 percent in 2003). While we find it encouraging that the data show a small improvement in Indian students' reading achievement between 2003 and 2005, these changes were not statistically significant.

In the 4th-grade mathematics assessment, 68 percent of Indian students performed at the basic level or above, compared to 90 percent of white students, 60 percent of black students, 68 percent of Hispanic students, and 90 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander students. In the 8th-grade assessment, 53 percent of Indian students performed at the basic level or above, and the comparable numbers for white, black, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander students were 80 percent, 42 percent, 52 percent, and 81 percent, respectively.

Indian students' average mathematics scale scores also increased slightly between the 2003 and 2005 administrations. The average scale score for Indian 4th-graders was 223 in 2003 and 226 in 2005; for 8th-graders, it was 263 in 2003 and 264 in 2005. In the 2003 NAEP, 64 percent of Indian 4th-grade students achieved a performance level of basic or above in mathematics, and 52 percent of Indian 8th-grade students achieved at that level. The increase in 4th-grade scale scores was statistically significant, but the increase in 8th-grade scores was not.

Students Eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch

Other analyses document the continued achievement gap between Indian students and other students. The 2005 NAEP reading data show that among students who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, Indian students scored lower on average than all other students who are eligible for this benefit. While 40 percent of the 4th-grade Indian

students who were eligible for free or reduced price lunch scored at the basic level or above, 46 percent of all other students who were eligible met that threshold. Results from the 4th-grade mathematics assessment showed a similar picture; 62 percent of Indian 4th-graders who were eligible for free or reduced price lunch but 67 percent of all other students who were eligible scored at the basic level or above.

Performance by Location

The study compared Indian student performance in three different types of location: central-city, urban-fringe or large-town, and rural or small-town. Those data show that, at grade 4, Indian students in central-city locations and urban-fringe or large-town locations scored higher in reading, on average, than their Indian counterparts in rural or small-town locations. Fifty-one percent of Indian students scored at the basic level or above in central-city locations, compared to 58 percent in urban-fringe or large-town locations, and 42 percent in rural or small-town locations. In the 8th grade, there were no significant differences in the performance of Indian students across locations.

The mathematics assessments showed similar results. Seventy-three percent of Indian 4th-graders in central city locations, 72 percent in urban-fringe or large-town locations, and 65 percent in rural or small-town locations scored at or above the basic level in mathematics. In 8th grade, the numbers were 61 percent in central-city locations, 61 percent in urban-fringe or large-town locations, and 48 percent in rural or small-town locations.

The location comparisons showed a different pattern for non-Indian students. Reading performance was higher in urban-fringe or large-town locations and rural or

small-town locations than in central-cities for all other students in both 4th grade and 8th grade in reading and mathematics.

Parental Education and NAEP Performance

The study also examined the performance of students with different levels of parental education. These comparisons generally showed that Indian 8th-graders whose parents attained some education after high school had higher average scores than Indian students whose parents had less education. However, comparisons of Indian students and all other students in those parental education categories showed that, across parental levels, Indian students generally scored lower than all other students. The percentage of Indian students who scored at the basic level or above in 8th-grade reading was 49 percent for those whose parents had attained less than a high school education, 53 percent for those whose parents graduated from high school, 68 percent for those whose parents received some education after high school, and 68 percent for those whose parents graduated from college. For all other students, the proportions for those categories were 54 percent, 64 percent, 78 percent, and 82 percent. Eighth-grade mathematics results showed a similar trend.

Regional and State-Level NAEP Data

The study also provides comparisons in Indian student performance across five national regions, as well as a picture of Indian student achievement at the State level for States with the highest concentrations of Indian residents. While NAEP does not generally report data on Indian students on the State-level assessments or in regional comparisons, the study tested a sufficient number of Indian students in public schools and BIA schools to provide data on their academic achievement in five regions and in the

seven States in which Indian students are at least 5 percent of the State's student population. Almost 50 percent of Indian students in the Nation reside in those seven States: Alaska, Arizona, Montana, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, and South Dakota. The next NIES, to be carried out in 2007, will provide State-level data for more States.

These data allow comparisons across the five regions and seven States as well as comparisons against the performance of Indian students at the national level. For example, they show that Indian students in the North Central region had a higher average score than Indian students in the Nation in both 4th- and 8th-grade reading, and that Indian students in Oklahoma had a higher average score than Indian students in the Nation in both 4th-grade and 8th-grade reading.

Part II Report

The report on Part 2 of the study, which the Department plans to release in the fall, will provide analysis of answers to surveys of Indian 4th- and 8th-grade students and their teachers. The student surveys included questions about the extent to which students use a traditional language at home, their academic goals, and their access to books and print materials. The teacher surveys asked questions about teaching experience and qualifications (for example, type of teaching certificate they hold, their college major and minor, and their graduate education), how teachers acquired knowledge and skills specific to teaching Indian students, and whether teachers speak and understand the traditional language of the community in which they teach. In addition, a school-level questionnaire requested information on the Federal funds that participating schools receive, whether local tribal representatives participated in school activities, whether the

school curriculum incorporated Indian perspectives, whether Indian students received instruction about their native cultures, and the proportion of teachers and school staff in the school who were Indian.

Department of Education Support
for Improving the Educational Achievement of Indian Students

The 2005 NAEP data that I have described show that Indian student academic achievement generally increased slightly between 2003 and 2005. Although other statistics that the Department has obtained and reported to this Committee (such as statistics on postsecondary enrollment and attainment of the Indian population) show more significant improvement, the clear message is that more needs to be done. The No Child Left Behind Act and other Department initiatives and programs provide a framework and support for raising the level of Indian student achievement and closing the gap with other students. We are committed to improving services for Indian students, and we back up our commitment with resources and assistance to the field. The President's fiscal year 2007 budget provided approximately \$1 billion in direct support specifically for the education of Indians and Alaska Natives, in addition to significant funds that are provided to Indian students who receive services through broader Federal programs, such as ESEA Title I Grants to Local Educational Agencies and IDEA State Grants.

Indian students will also benefit from our American Competitiveness Initiative (ACI). Our activities under that initiative will include a focus on improving student achievement in mathematics and science. Through the Math Now proposals in the President's budget, we will invest both in identifying the best research on proven strategies to teach mathematics and in implementing proven and research-based

instructional programs for students. The initiative will not only help all students, including Indian students, to achieve to high academic standards, but will also give elementary and middle school students the academic foundation necessary to succeed in rigorous math and science classes, such as Advanced Placement courses, in high school.

The ACI would also expand the Advanced Placement (AP) program. Currently, nearly forty percent of high schools offer no AP classes, and rural schools, which Indian students are much more likely than other students to attend, are less likely than schools in other locations to offer advanced courses in high school. We plan to expand incentives for training teachers and encouraging students, particularly in high-poverty schools, to take Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses in math, science, and critical foreign languages.

Technical Assistance Activities

The Department also continues to provide technical assistance to the field to ensure that Indian students receive high-quality educational services. One of our challenges in this area is working with different agencies and stakeholders that play a role in educating Indian students. One of our strategies has been to work with a group of chief State school officers from States with the highest populations of Indian students. The purpose of the working group, co-chaired by the State superintendents from South Dakota and Montana, is to strengthen partnerships among these officers, the U.S. Department of Education, tribal education leaders, local school officials, national Indian organizations, institutions of higher education, and other stakeholders. Meetings are open to all chief State school officers and tribal leaders, and focus on enhancing collaboration

and communication on implementing the No Child Left Behind Act as it pertains to Indian students and their communities.

This coming fall, the Department and the Council of Chief State School Officers will hold a two-day symposium to discuss the findings of the two NIES reports. Attendees will include State superintendents of 15 States with the largest Indian student populations, Indian education coordinators from State departments of education, tribal leaders, and representatives from educational foundations (such as Gates and Lumina). Attendees will be asked to use the findings and data from the reports to develop State plans for improving the academic achievement of Indian students.

This week the Department also unveiled a website that incorporates data collected by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) on American Indians. This website will draw on data from many NCES data collections and studies, such as the Common Core of Data (CCD), the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS), and the NIES. In preparation for that event, we held a training session for Indian education researchers on how to access and use NCES data sets last year, and we will conduct another session later this year.

Conclusion

The NIES shows that achievement gaps between the Indian student population and the general population persist, although Indian students have made progress and, in some cases, outperform their peers from other ethnic or racial groups. The data we have obtained from the NIES also provide us an unprecedented picture about the difference in performance within different groups of Indian students. The availability of these data is the result of deliberate and strategic investments in data collection and studies, and this

information will allow us to better target policy and technical assistance to help ensure that all Indian students receive the educational services and resources they need so they can reach State standards. We are looking forward to the release of the next NIES report, which will provide us information on the contexts in which Indian students are educated. We expect to learn more about how we can provide the field with further help to ensure that no Indian child is left behind.

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss these recently released data on American Indian and Alaska Native students. I will be happy to answer any questions that you may have.