

Institute for Public Policy
and Economic Analysis

The Institute of Public Policy and Economic Analysis at Eastern Washington University will convey university expertise and will sponsor research in social, economic and public policy questions to the region it serves – the Inland Pacific Northwest.

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*Educational Experiences
and Aspirations of
American Indian
High-School Students
in the Spokane Area*

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With this latest monograph from the Institute for Public Policy & Economic Analysis, I welcome you to Eastern Washington University. I hope this research will broaden your understanding of the Inland Northwest. Efforts like the Institute monograph series are manifestations of this university's commitment to serve the region. I applaud the initiative of my predecessor and of the current Board of Trustees to launch this Institute.

Teaching remains our core mission at Eastern Washington University.

Increasingly, teaching and reearch are interwoven. Our faculty members keep professionally current when publishing in peer-reviewed journals. These achievements, in turn, allow them to better convey the evolving knowledge base of our academic disciplines.

Our students receive an enhanced education if their classroom experience is informed by the content and enthusiasm of their professor's research. Increasingly, we ask students to conduct research projects of their own. Whether conducting their own projects or assisting professors, our students acquire a richer learning experience through research.

Research for academic journals is not the only area our faculty members target, however. Our university asks its faculty to engage the communities and region from which we draw our students. This research provides a greater sense of place and a commitment by our faculty to it. It also translates academic methods and findings into a broader, and ultimately moe relevant, arena: the lives of citizens of the Inland Northwest.

The overarching goal of the Institute for Public Policy & Economic Analysis is to serve the region by translating knowledge. It does this through a variety of activities, including this series, annual economic forecasts, contract research and the Community Indicators Initiative. I invite you to explore its web site to learn more.

I come to Eastern with great hope that, together with our faculty, staff and partners, I can further anch or our institution to the daily course of life throughout the Inland Northwest. Our collective future depends on an educated and informed citizenry. Helping our region reach higher levels of knowledge is something this university can and will do.

My office and that of the Institute director welcome all comments on how we might better serve.

Rodolfo Arévalo, PhD
President

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1. Executive Summary

This monograph presents findings from a study designed to explore the most important influences determining American Indian/Alaska Native students' decisions to attend college. Researchers from the Institute of Public Policy and Economic Analysis at Eastern Washington University collected data from American Indian K-12 students and their parents in the Spokane School District and surrounding districts of the state of Washington to study this phenomenon. The issue is important since American Indians have the highest dropout rates among all racial/ethnic groups attending Spokane Public Schools and have lowest college attendance rates in the region.

To this end, researchers developed a questionnaire designed to examine the educational experiences and aspirations of American Indian middle and high school students attending schools within the Spokane School

District and the surrounding area in the state of Washington. The questionnaire was administered to American Indian students and parents at the annual Native American Christmas dinner held at the Northern Quest Casino in Airways Height, Washington in December 2006.

Key findings from the survey show that parents and students both have high expectations of educational attainment. Overall, parents have high expectations of the level of education they would like their children to attain: 30 percent of the parents say they would like to see their children earn a Bachelor's degree and 50 percent of them would like their children obtain graduate or advanced professional degrees. Students' expectations of their own educational achievement seemed to correspond very well to their perceived parental expectations, with 95 percent of the students expressing a desire to get

at least an undergraduate degree. Findings also reveal almost half of the students plan to attend to a university in the state of Washington (while only 17 percent named an out of state college), with Eastern Washington University and Gonzaga University as the most frequently cited universities.

In addition, the survey revealed an ability by students to preserve a strong sense of American Indian identity, although most of them live in the predominately white environment of Spokane and many come from biracial/multiracial families. Students in the study who reported a strong American Indian identity often participated in cultural activities such as Pow Wows. Parents in the study indicated, however, they would also like for schools to adequately represent American Indian/Alaska Native history and cultures in the curriculum as another means for students to learn of their American Indian culture.

Yet, the opportunity for a college education

may not seem as promising, in light of the high dropout rates, low WASL scores, and low college attendance rates among the local American Indian population. Despite parents' and students' overall positive attitudes toward education expressed in the survey, it appears that our educational system at both the secondary and postsecondary level struggles to help American Indian students realize their dream of attending college.

Given these findings, school officials, parents and leaders in the American Indian communities need to work together through community forums where ideas and concerns are shared. Widening the channels of communication and developing ameliorative strategies is critical to the academic success of American Indian children attending Spokane area public schools as well as expanding the educational opportunities for attending college.

2. Introduction

This monograph presents findings from a study designed to explore the most important influences determining an American Indians' decision to attend college. The study was funded by the Institute for Public Policy and Economic Analysis at Eastern Washington University. The authors collected data from American Indian¹ students and parents from the Spokane School District and the surrounding area of the State of Washington to study this phenomenon. The research findings can help the Spokane School District, surrounding school districts, as well as regional colleges and universities to develop strategies on how best to serve this underrepresented group in higher education. This issue is important since American Indians have the highest dropout rates among all racial/ethnic groups attending Spokane Public Schools and have lowest college attendance rates in the region. Researching this disturbing trend, developing ameliorative strategies, and widening the channels of communication between the various stakeholders on this issue are crucial to the success of the American Indian student.

American Indian/Alaska Natives at Mainstream U.S. College and Universities

It is well-documented that college success for American Indian/Alaska Natives is a constant struggle, with this group having the lowest college enrollment (i.e. less than one percent of totals)² and graduation rates at mainstream U.S. colleges and universities, earning 0.8 percent of all associate, Bachelors, and advanced degrees conferred. (U.S. Department of Education, as cited in the Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, 2007-2008). Although significant progress has been

made in college enrollment and graduation rates, especially within the tribal college system, retention of American Indian/Alaska Natives is equally disturbing, with college retention rates reported as low as 15%. (Astin, 1982; Larimore & McClellan, 2005; Falk and Aitken, 1984; Tijerina & Biemer, 1988; Wright, 1985; Benjamin, Chambers, & Reiterman, 1993; Pavel & Padilla, 1993; Tierney, 1992).

The factors determining whether or not American Indian/Alaska Natives students decide to attend college are diverse as they are complex. Various studies of American Indian/Alaska Native college students have generated substantial research suggesting factors such as pre-college academic preparation, family support, involved and supportive faculty, institutional commitment, and maintenance of an active presence in home communities and cultural ceremonies are crucial elements impacting these students' ability and/or desire to attend and persist in college (Brown, 1995; Patton & Eddington, 1973; Lin, 1990; Reyhner & Dodd, 1995; Huffman, Sill, & Brokenleg, 1986; Barnhardt, 1994; Davis, 1992). Other institutional roles in promoting attendance and persistence include providing sufficient fiscal resources for child and family care and retention programs designed specifically for American Indian/Alaska Natives (Almeida, 1999; Day, Blue, and Raymond, 1998; Tate and Schwartz, 1993). In all, the research shows that assisting in the successful transition from high school to college, dealing with instances of campus hostility, creating an environment for cultural expression, and taking into account the unique academic, social, cultural and psychological needs of these students have all been found as attractive features for American Indian/Alaska Native students to attend,

stay or leave college. (Spaights, Dixon, & Nickolai, 1985; Osborne, 1985; Cibik & Chambers, 1991; Jenkins, 1999; Lin, LaCounte, & Eder, 1988; Wright, 1985; Belgarde, 1992; Cross, 1993; Carney, 1999; Brown and Robinson Kurpius, 1997; James, 1992).

Factors Influencing College Attendance among K-12 American Indian/Alaska Native Students

Among the myriad studies reporting most significant factors influencing American Indian students' decision to go to college are those contributing to high dropout rates among American Indians at the K-12 level.

Coladarci (1983) reported the results of a study of high school dropouts and found that American Indian students believe poor teacher/student relationships, expressed as teachers not caring about them, irrelevant curriculum to a American Indian, and lack of parental support to be the significant reasons why they dropped out. Another study by Swisher, Hoish, and Pavel (1991) reported that American Indian students in grades 7-12 from the state of New Mexico dropped out of school because of reasons such as expulsion, lack of interest, school transfers, inability to adjust to school and parental request.

Of all the factors listed, academic preparation at the K-12 level is argued to be among the most powerful, regardless of race or ethnicity. Rendon (1997) claims, "By the time students reach the twelfth grade it is too late to...increase the numbers of students who are ready for college. In fact, it could be said that students begin to drop out of college in grade school (p. 7)." In his analysis of the Department of Education's longitudinal data on high school senior cohorts, Adelman (1997) asserts that those students who finish bachelor's degrees are those

"who were best prepared, regardless of race, regardless of financial aid (p. 41)." Data from the National Center of Educational Statistics suggests that students who lack the appropriate math and reading skills by the eighth grade are unlikely to acquire them by the end of high school – regardless of race or ethnicity (NCES, 1997).

Another key factor is the impact of parental influence. As mentioned in the study above, parents play a critical role in a student's decision to leave school but they can also have a positive influence on their decision to stay in school. For example, a study of American Indian/Alaska Native children in the Alaska public school system by McLean (1997) reported that American Indian/Alaska Native parents want their children to learn their "traditional ways" (e.g. hunting, fishing, gathering, etc) but also learn "western ways" by going to college and learn skill sets such as computer technology, record keeping, and money management. Several American Indian/Alaska Native parents reported that children need to know how to live in "two worlds." Parental influences have a powerful impact on a child's decision to persist through school but also on how the child's perceives school itself. In this case study, parents believe that public schools are places where their children should receive Indigenous and mainstream educations, therefore being better prepared for college as well as remaining well-steeped in traditional knowledge germane to American Indian/Alaska Native people.

Educational Statistics on American Indians in the State of Washington

Statistics on high school-to-college continuation rates in the state of Washington show a downward trend consistent with statistics nationwide. For instance,

recent data show that between 1998 to 2003, American Indians experienced a 14% decline (from 52% to 38%) in the number of students making the transition from high school to college, the most substantial decline among all racial/ethnic groups in the state of Washington. Among American Indian students at community and technical colleges in Washington, 58% show “substantial progress” (those who attend four or more quarters or graduate – over a two year period), while 14% are “early leavers” (those who attend one quarter, and do not subsequently return within the following two years) (HECB, 2006). Both statistics are among the lowest among all racial/ethnic groups. Transfer rates for American Indians from community colleges to public four-year institutions are near the bottom of racial and ethnic groups, at 32%, ahead of African Americans who are at 25%. Other data show similar results, with American Indians among the lowest in the state of Washington in terms of college graduation rates, and number and percentages of bachelor’s degrees awarded at four-year public and private institutions.

Equally disturbing are the outcome statistics for American Indians attending Washington public high schools. For instance, the 2005-2006 10th grade WASL scores show that, as ranked by race/ethnicity, American Indians are among the lowest in meeting standards of reading, mathematics, writing, and science, although they surpass African Americans and Hispanics in mathematics and science (HECB, 2006).

Significance of the Study

These data reveal troubling trends of the college preparedness by American Indians in the state of Washington. To understand college readiness, it is also

vital to understand the significant influences guiding American Indian students’ decision to attend college. For those American Indians in the state of Washington, it is even more critical to investigate the motivational sources to attend college, given that recent statistics offer little reason for optimism. To this end, we conducted a study examining the most important influences determining an American Indians’ decision to attend college. Specifically, researchers collected data from American Indian students and parents from the Spokane School District and surrounding school districts of the State of Washington to gain insights into these factors.

3. Methodology

Questionnaire Development

The questionnaire was derived from a national questionnaire entitled, the “Educational Longitudinal Study” from the National Center of Educational Statistics. The questionnaire was designed to examine the educational experiences and aspirations of American Indian middle and high school students attending schools within the Spokane School District and the surrounding area in the State of Washington. A central theme of the study is to understand how family and culture influence students’ educational goals. To this end, the questionnaire was divided into two sections: 1) a student questionnaire; and 2) a parent questionnaire. Both questionnaires were designed specifically to examine the influence of family (i.e. parental expectations) and culture (i.e. tribal and cultural identification) on the educational aspirations of the students under study.

Researchers received approval from Dr. Nancy Stowell,

Associate Superintendent for Teaching and Learning Services for Spokane Public Schools to survey the American Indian students within the Spokane Public School District. In addition, they were granted approval from the Institutional Review Board of Eastern Washington University prior to proceeding with the project.

Upon receiving approval from the Spokane School District and the Institutional Review Board of Eastern Washington University, the researchers contacted various local American Indian organizations to determine the best means of administering the questionnaire to a large group of American Indian students and parents. After consulting several American Indian leaders within Spokane, it appeared that a relatively high response rate could be obtained at the annual American Indian Christmas dinner held at the Northern Quest Casino in Airways Height, Washington. The dinner is organized by the American Indian Center in Spokane, Washington, which provides general services such as clothing, meals, and job information to the low-income and homeless American Indians of Spokane. We obtained approval from the Director of the American Indian Center to gain access to the Christmas dinner to conduct the survey.

Data Collection – Native American Christmas Dinner

The Native American Christmas dinner occurred in two phases to accommodate all the guests. With the help of four research assistants, we administered the questionnaires at the dinner. At the beginning of each dinner, one of the researchers addressed the entire audience and explained the purpose of the study to the dinner patrons. The questionnaires were distributed to willing participants: student questionnaires were

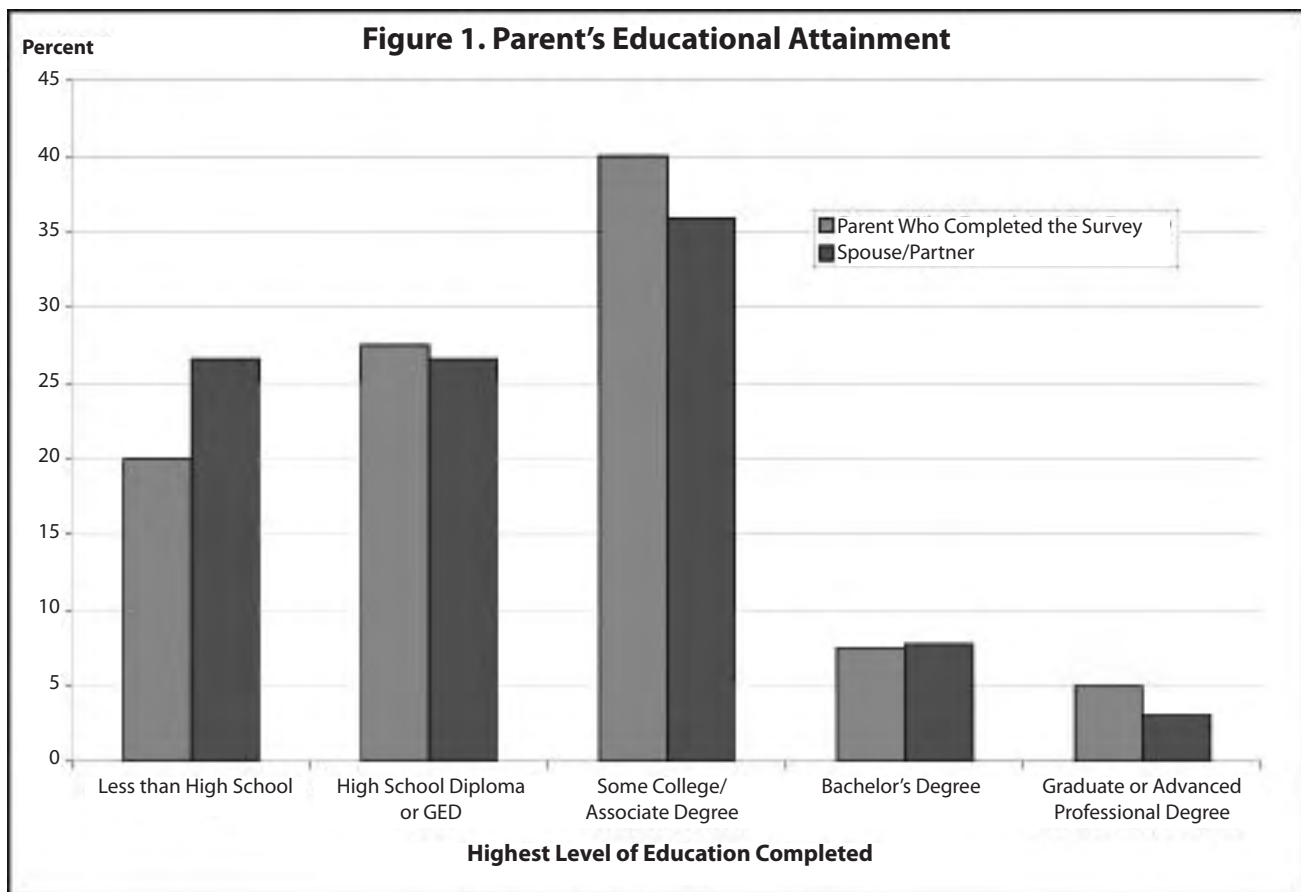
given to middle and high school students and parent questionnaires were given to American Indian parents. The research faculty and student assistants sought to distribute and collect completed student and parent questionnaires from individual families. After the removal of subjects who did not meet the study criteria, a total of 50 student questionnaires and 85 parent questionnaires were included in the analysis.

It should be noted, as incentive for participation in the study, the authors provided twenty \$50 gift certificates a door prizes for those willing to fill out the questionnaires. All participants willing to fill out student and parent questionnaires were given a consent form to sign and then received a raffle ticket upon completion of the questionnaire. The raffle tickets were then placed in a general pool whereupon an announcement of the winners of the gift certificates was made at the end of each dinner.

4. Summary of Statistical Results

Background Information on Parents and Students

Parental educational attainment since it is one of the strongest predictors of students' educational achievement (Kao and Thompson, 2003). Among the parents who completed the survey, 20 percent of them have less than a high school education, 27.5 percent are high school graduates or GED holders and 40 percent have completed some college or received an associate degree. Only 7.5 percent of the respondents hold a bachelor's degree and 5 percent have graduate or advanced professional degrees. The educational attainment of their spouses is slightly lower – 26.6 percent of them have less than high school education, another 26.6 percent are high school graduates or GED



holders, 35.9 percent have some college education or received an associate degree, 7.8 percent of them hold a bachelor's degree and 3.1 percent of them have graduate or advanced professional degrees.

We also obtained statistics from the 2000 Census on the educational attainment of American Indians in Spokane County. The educational attainment distribution of the parent sample is quite similar to these data. The Census 2000 statistics in Table 1 show that among American Indian men³, close to 20 percent of them had less than high school education, while less than 16 percent of them have bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau 2000). Among American Indian women, about 18 percent had less than high school education, while only 17 percent had bachelor's degree or higher.

In the survey, we did not include questions on family income. According to the 2000 Census statistics on Spokane County, the median income for American Indian headed families in 1999 was \$31,448, compared to \$46,463 for the county's general population. In other words, the median income for American Indian families was only 67.7 percent of the general population's.

Table 1. Educational Attainment of American Indians in Spokane County: Census 2000

Educational Attainment	American Indians (%)		Total Population (%)	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Less than High School	18.9	18.0	10.9	10.9
High School Diploma or GED	25.6	25.3	26.1	27.4
Some College/ Associate Degree	40.0	40.1	36.1	38.4
Bachelor's Degree	10.5	11.9	16.9	15.8
Graduate or Advanced Professional Degree	5.0	4.8	10.0	7.6
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%
POPULATION SIZE	2675	3079	128,293	138,536

Not surprisingly, 85.5 percent of the parents and their children in the study lived in the City of Spokane and nearby communities (such as Medical Lake, Cheney, etc) at the time of the survey. The majority has lived in their place of residence for only a short period of time 57 percent of the parents have lived in the location for 5 years or less, 19 percent for 6 to 10 years, and 24 percent for more than 10 years. In addition, 45 percent of the parents grew up in urban areas, 24.2 grew up in rural areas, and 30.6 percent of them grew up in both rural and urban areas. The students were about evenly distributed by gender 48 percent of the students were male and 52 percent were female. 46 percent of the students were in 7th and 8th grades, 54 percent of them were in 9th to 12th grades. Almost all of them (96 percent) were attending public schools. The majority of the students (57.4 percent) grew up in an urban setting, 23.4 percent of them grew up in a rural setting, and 19.1 percent of them grew up in both rural and urban setting.

Students and Parents' Cultural Background

While at least one of the parents had to be American Indian for a family to be included in this study, 54.5 percent of the families in this study had both parents identified as American Indian⁴. Overall, 84.4 percent of the mothers and 64.4 percent of the fathers were American Indian. Of the mothers who were American Indian⁵, close to 35 percent of them belong to the Spokane Tribe, while the rest were affiliated with Colville, Coeur d'Alene, Kalispel, Sioux and other tribes. Tribal affiliations among fathers who were identified as American Indian were more dispersed in comparison. Moreover, 82.4 percent of the parents indicated that

their cultural identity was "very important" to them.

To explain why they chose to identify themselves that way, many respondents wrote comments such as "Because I am proud to be Native American," "Because I am proud of my heritage," "Because it's what I am and I'm proud of it" and "I am very proud to be Native and teach my children to be proud as well." Others wrote, "We are the first people of this land and they can't break our spirit," "I feel our ancestors sacrificed and died for the present generation to exist. I feel it's important to identity by clan and tribal affiliation."

In addition, a few mentioned the importance of cultural identity for the next generations: "[Culture is] very important for my children's future," "We need to keep us and our family heritage alive," and "Because I want my kids to know my heritage and where my family's from." On the other hand, some of the parents who didn't consider their cultural identity very important explained, "I don't think it should matter how you identify yourself," "I don't really think of my race," "Because in some aspect of my life it matters and at some others not so much," "I grew up in the city. Never lived on reservation," and "I am not all white or all Indian. I am a mixed blood."

Table 2. Self-Identification: Comparison between Parents and Students

	Parent's Cultural Identity		Student's Cultural Identity	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
By my tribal affiliation	28	34.1	14	28.6
Native American/ American Indian	42	51.2	26	53.1
As American	8	9.8	2	4.1
As Multicultural	4	4.9	7	14.3
TOTAL	82	100	49	100

As Table 2 shows, more than half of the parents and the students (51.2 percent and 53.1 percent respectively) identified themselves broadly as “Native American/American Indian.” By comparison, the students were slightly less likely than their parents to identify themselves by their tribal affiliation (28.6 percent compared to 34.1 percent). Among the 17 students who indicated their tribal affiliation in the questionnaire, 5 of them belonged to the Spokane Tribe and another 5 them were affiliated with the Colville Tribe. The rest belonged to the following tribes: Coeur d’Alene, Nez Perce, Yakima, Gros Ventre, Oglala Sioux and Karuk/Cree. In addition, 4.1 percent of the students identified themselves simply as “American” and 14.3 percent of them identified themselves as “multicultural.” Among the multicultural

individuals, they described their cultural backgrounds as “Indian and African American,” “Indian, White, and Black,” “Native American, African American, and Caucasian,” and “Native and Sicilian.”

Sixty-four percent of the students considered their chosen self-identity as “very important” to them, another 30 percent considered their identity as “somewhat important” and only 6 percent of them considered their identity as “not important” to them. In response to the question “In what ways do you practice your culture?” an overwhelming majority of the students (91.3 percent) wrote about participating in Pow Wows. However, only 34.8 percent of the students identified other activities besides Pow Wows as their ways of practicing their culture.

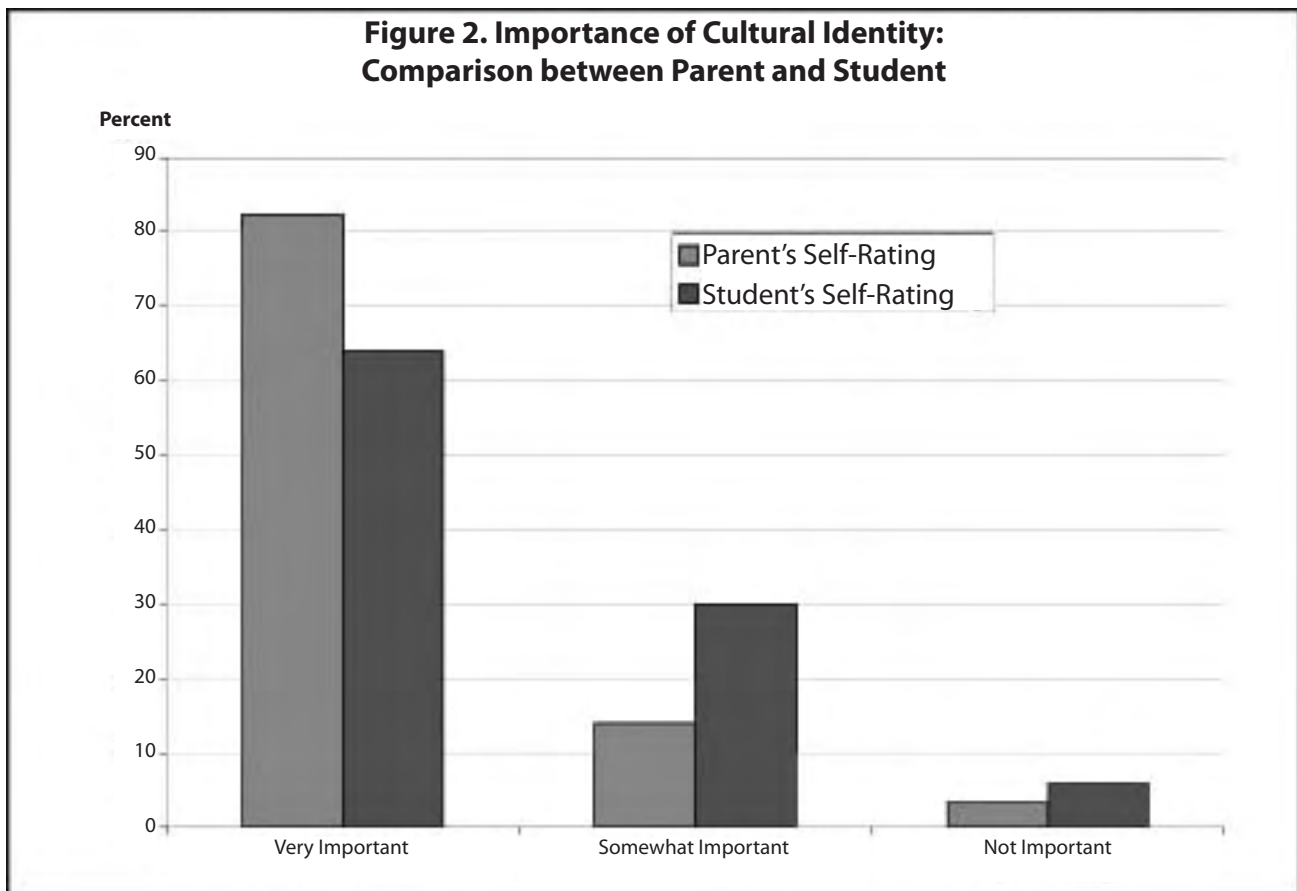


Table 3 shows that close to 40 percent of the parents indicated that they socialized mostly with American Indians. By comparison, 17.6 percent of them socialized mostly with White Americans, 10.6 percent socialized mostly with African Americans, 11.8 percent with Hispanic Americans, 4.7 percent with Asian Americans, and 16.5 percent with others. The students' social networks are more racially diverse in comparison. Only 34 percent of them socialize mostly with American Indians exclusively, while more than half of them (52 percent) indicated that the friends whom they mostly socialized with were from different racial backgrounds (including American Indians). In addition, 14 percent of them socialize mostly with White Americans.

The racial demographics of the schools in the Spokane area have probably contributed to the racial composition of students' friendship networks: American Indians made up of only 3.8 percent of the grades 7-12 student population in the Spokane School District (and only 2.6 percent in Spokane County) in the 2004-2005 school year (Office of Superintendent Public Instruction 2006a). Moreover, these results resonate with students' responses to the question about social interactions in school: 85.7 of the students agreed with the statement that "students make friends with students of other racial and ethnic groups" in school (30.6 percent strongly agree and 55.1 percent agree with the statement).

Table 3. Social Network of Parent and Student

In general, you mainly socialize with:	Parent's Response	
	Frequency	Percent
American Indians	33	38.8
White Americans	15	17.6
Black Americans	9	10.6
Hispanic Americans	10	11.8
Asian Americans	4	4.7
Others	14	16.5
TOTAL	85	100.0

What are the cultural identities of your friends with whom you socialize mostly?	Student's Response	
	Frequency	Percent
American Indians	17	34.0
Whites	7	14.0
Friends from Different Races	26	52.0
TOTAL	50	100.0

Level of Satisfaction toward School

Students were asked to evaluate different aspects of their school life. Although the majority of students were pleased, it deserves attention that a sizable minority did not seem to be satisfied with their teachers. As Table 4 shows, more than two-thirds of the students stated that they agreed (47.7 percent) or strongly agreed (18.2 percent) that teachers were interested in students. On the other hand, 29.5 percent of the students disagreed and 4.5 percent of the students strongly disagreed that their teachers were interested in them. Similarly, while more than two-thirds of the students agreed that the teaching they received was good (31.3 percent strongly agreed and 39.6 percent agreed), one-third of them did not think so (25 percent disagreed and 4.2 percent strongly disagreed). Moreover, close to a quarter of the students agreed that they often felt "put down" by teachers (6.4 percent strongly agreed and 19.1 percent strongly disagreed).

Table 4. Student's Evaluation of Teachers

a. How much do you agree or disagree that the teaching is good?		
	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	15	31.3
Agree	19	39.6
Disagree	12	25.0
Strongly Disagree	2	4.2
TOTAL	48	100

b. How much do you agree or disagree that teachers are interested in students?		
	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	8	18.2
Agree	21	47.7
Disagree	13	29.5
Strongly Disagree	2	4.5
TOTAL	44	100

c. How much do you agree or disagree that "when I work hard on schoolwork, my teachers praise me"?		
	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	7	14.9
Agree	23	48.9
Disagree	12	25.5
Strongly Disagree	5	10.6
TOTAL	47	100

d. How much do you agree or disagree that "In class I often feel 'put down' by my teachers"?		
	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	3	6.4
Agree	9	19.1
Disagree	17	36.2
Strongly Disagree	18	38.3
TOTAL	47	100

Table 5 shows that a significant proportion reported negative experiences, even though the majority of students seemed to have mostly positive interactions with other students at school.

Table 5. Student's Evaluation of School

a. How much do you agree or disagree that "in class I often feel 'put down' by other students"?		
	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	4	8.9
Agree	13	28.9
Disagree	13	28.9
Strongly Disagree	15	33.3
TOTAL	45	100

b. How much do you agree or disagree that "I don't feel safe at my school"?		
	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	6	13.3
Agree	7	15.6
Disagree	15	33.3
Strongly Disagree	17	37.8
TOTAL	45	100

c. How much do you agree or disagree that "disruptions by others get in the way of my learning"?		
	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	6	13.3
Agree	18	40.0
Disagree	14	31.1
Strongly Disagree	7	15.6
TOTAL	45	100

d. How much do you agree or disagree that fights occur between different racial/ethnic groups?		
	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	6	12.8
Agree	13	27.7
Disagree	16	34.0
Strongly Disagree	13	27.7
TOTAL	47	100

Close to 40 percent of the students the students agreed that they often felt "put down" by other students (8.9 percent strongly agreed and 37.8 percent agreed). About 30 percent of the students agreed that they did not feel safe at school (13.3 percent strongly agreed and 15.6 agreed). In addition, more than half of the students indicated that disruptions by others got in the

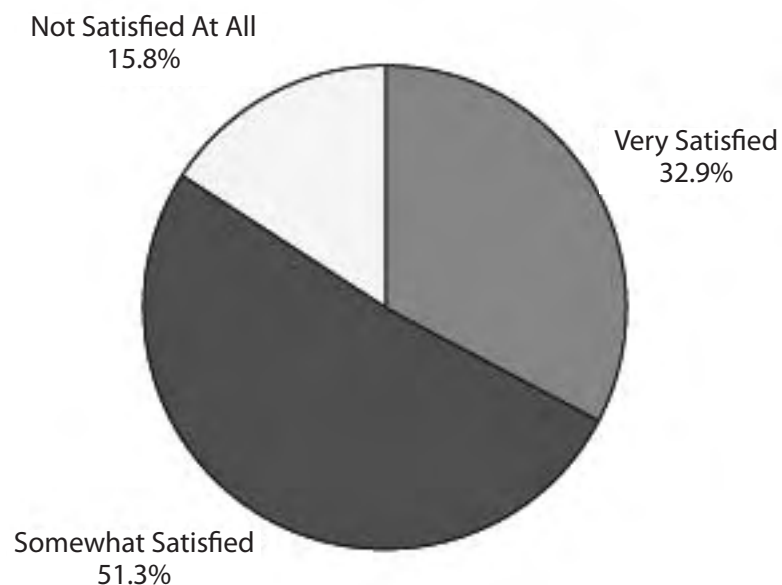
way of their learning (13.3 percent strongly agreed and 40 percent agreed). Moreover, close to 40 percent of students believed that fights often occurred between different racial and ethnic groups at school. Thus, racial conflicts do appear to be a problem in school, even though close to 90 percent of students indicated that students made friends with students of other racial groups, as mentioned in the previous section.

As Figure 3 illustrates, the majority of the parents seemed to be at least somewhat satisfied with their children’s education: 32.9 percent the parents indicated that they were very satisfied with the education their children have received up to now, while 51.3 percent of them were somewhat satisfied. Only 15.8 percent of the parents were not at all satisfied with the education of

their children.

A few parents suggested that racial prejudice was a problem in schools. For example, one parent wrote, “too much prejudice and too many white people get all the awards.” One commented there was a “lack of cultural awareness, insensitivity to culture, stereotype.” Another wrote, “Spokane School District 81 is very prejudiced and the white students are bullies and the district does nothing about this but I guess it’s something I must live with.” A few others wanted to see more cultural education in school. For example, one parent wrote, “I believe it could be better – I wish urban Indians have access to learn our language in school.” Other parents commented that there is “no culture education offered in Spokane public schools” and “[There is] not enough culture in school.”

Figure 3. How Satisfied Are You With the Education Your Child Has Received Up to Now?



Parental Engagement in Children’s Life

Parents were asked if they had participated in parent-teacher organizations. As Table 6 illustrates, the majority – 61.5 percent – of the parents indicated that they were involved with parent-teacher organizations in some way (attend meetings, act as a volunteer, etc.) during the school year. Only 38.5 percent of the parents indicated that they were not members of a parent-teacher organization and did not take part in any parent-teacher organization activities.

Furthermore, responses from parents also show a high level of involvement with their children’s life. Almost half of the parents (49.3 percent) expressed that they “always” checked whether their children had completed all homework and 37 percent said that they “usually” did. By comparison, 11 percent said that they seldom checked whether their children completed their homework and 2.7 percent said that they never did that. In addition, an overwhelming majority of the parents discussed their children’s report cards with them – 73.3 percent of them “always” and 18.7 percent “usually” did so. Similarly, almost all of the parents “always” (80.3 percent) and “usually” (14.5 percent) enforced curfews for their children on school nights and knew where their children were when they were not at home or in school.

Table 6. Parental Involvement with Children

a. How often do you check that your child has completed all homework?

	Frequency	Percent
Never	2	2.7
Seldom	8	11.0
Usually	27	37.0
Always	36	49.3
TOTAL	73	100

b. How often do you discuss your child’s report card with him/her?

	Frequency	Percent
Never	2	2.7
Seldom	4	5.3
Usually	14	18.7
Always	55	73.3
TOTAL	75	100

c. How often do you know where you child is when he or she is not at home or in school?

	Frequency	Percent
Never	2	2.6
Seldom	2	2.6
Usually	11	14.5
Always	61	80.3
TOTAL	76	100

d. How often do you make and enforce curfews for your child on school nights?

	Frequency	Percent
Never	2	2.6
Seldom	2	2.6
Usually	11	14.5
Always	61	80.3
TOTAL	76	100

5. Educational Aspirations –

Parents and Children’s Views

Overall, parents have high expectations of the level of education they would like their children to attain. Table 7 shows that 30 percent of the parents say they would like to see their children earn a Bachelor’s degree and 50 percent of them would like their children obtain graduate or advanced professional degrees. Another 12.5 percent indicated that they wanted their children to “go all the way” or “as far as they want.” Only 7.5 percent of the parents expressed that they hope to see their children go as far as completing high school.

In the survey, we asked the students what they thought their parents’ educational aspirations of them were. Most students were aware of the high expectations of their parents: 41.7 percent believed that the parents wanted them to obtain graduate or advanced professional degrees and another 14.6 percent of them indicated that their parents expected them to go as far as obtaining a bachelor’s degree. 18.8 percent thought that their parents expected them to finish a two-year degree at the community college. Only 6.3 percent of the students thought that their parents expected them to only finish high school. Interestingly, 18.8 percent of students answered “I don’t know.”

Students’ expectations of their own educational achievement seemed to correspond very well with their perceived parental expectations. Almost 95 percent of the students expressed a desire to get at least an undergraduate degree, as 76.9 percent of the students indicated that they would like to obtain a bachelor’s degree and 17.9 percent wanted to obtain a graduate or advanced professional degree. A very small proportion

– 5.1 percent – of the students wanted to complete high school only. This local estimate of students planning to go on to college is higher than the statistics from a national sample of American Indian 8th graders in which three-quarters of the students reported a goal of going to college (U.S. Department of Education, 2006. p. 20).

Students were asked where they plan to attend college. Almost half of the students (48.9 percent) identified a university in the state of Washington while only 17 percent named an out of state college. Local universities such as Eastern Washington University and Gonzaga University were the most frequently named colleges. On the other hand, 29.8 percent of the students answered “I don’t know” when asked where they planned to attend college.

Table 7. Educational Aspiration for Students: Comparison between Parents and Students

Parent’s Expectation	Frequency	Percent
High School	6	7.5
Bachelor’s Degree	24	30.0
Graduate or Advanced Professional Degree	40	50.0
All the way, as far as they want, etc.	10	12.5
TOTAL	80	100

Perceived Parent’s Expectation	Frequency	Percent
High School	3	6.3
Two-Year Degree at Community College	9	18.8
Bachelor’s Degree	7	14.6
Graduate or Advanced Professional Degree	20	41.7
Don’t Know	9	18.8
TOTAL	48	100

Student’s Own Expectation	Frequency	Percent
High School	2	5.1
Bachelor’s Degree	30	76.9
Graduate or Advanced Professional Degree	7	17.9
TOTAL	39	100

6. Discussion & Implications

The results from the survey show that students and their parents both have high expectations on educational attainment. Sharing their parents' wishes, most students aspire to pursue at least a college education, and many hope to go further than that. Yet, the opportunity for a college education may not seem as promising if we examine the data on high school dropout rates, WASL statistics, and college attendance rates of the local American Indian population. In the Spokane School District, the one-year high school dropout rate for American Indian students in the 2004-2005 school year was 16.0 percent, much higher than the overall dropout rate of 9.1 percent for the district (Office of Superintendent Public Instruction 2006b, Appendix A-1, p. 16, Appendix A-3, p. 24). Among all American Indian 10th graders who took the WASL in 2005-2006 school year, only 16.1 percent met the standards for all three subjects – Reading, Writing and Math, while 28.6 percent of them failed to meet the standards in all three tests (Office of Superintendent Public Instruction, 2007).

Moreover, 2000 Census data show a disparity in college attendance rates between American Indians⁶ and the overall young adult population. Only 10.2 percent of American Indian men between 18 and 24 years of age in Spokane County were enrolled in college or graduate school, compared to the overall college attendance rate of 33.2 percent for men in the same age group. Only 21.4 percent of the American Indian women between 18 and 24 were enrolled in college or graduate school compared to the overall college

attendance rate of 40.9 percent for women in the same age group (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Despite students' and parents' overall positive attitudes towards school expressed in the survey, it seems that our educational system struggles to help students realize their dream of attending college.

Further research is necessary to pinpoint the factors that contribute to the disparity between the stated educational aspirations and reported performance in educational outcomes in the local communities. In particular, we need to examine closely the educational experiences of American Indian students in public schools and identify the obstacles that prevent them from reaching their full potential. For instance, research on minority education has shown that teachers' lack of understanding about students' cultural backgrounds can lead to students' alienation and disengagement from school (Freng & Moore, 2006). At the same time, minority students' unfamiliarity of white middle-class cultures can also put them at a disadvantaged position in the educational system (MacLeod, 1995).

Students can benefit from the insights of American Indian students who share similar experiences and have overcome the obstacles. In future research, we should examine the experience of American Indian students in local universities to identify strategies for overcoming these obstacles and for the successful transition from high school to college. Once known, these insights should be passed to high school students, their families, high school counselors, teachers and other various stakeholders in the educational pipeline.

The survey results indicate that parents are actively involved in their children's education. Undoubtedly, parental support is essential to children's academic success. However, the socioeconomic status of parents also has a large impact on children's educational outcomes (Kao and Thompson, 2003). For instance, parents with lower level of formal education might not be able to offer as much assistance to their children with their schoolwork. In addition, they might not have good access to information about schools, teachers, college application, college financial aid programs, etc., and therefore, they cannot navigate the educational system and advocate for their children as effectively as those with higher levels of formal education (Lareau, 2000).

Given the willingness of American Indian parents to be actively engaged in their children's education and their high expectations on their children's educational attainment, teachers and school officials need to help build stronger communication channels with the parents. Similarly, students may have only an adequate understanding of educational opportunities available to them. For example, students may not have as much opportunity to learn about universities outside of the Spokane area through family members or others in their social networks. Therefore, it is important for the American Indian community to build relationships with universities outside of the area while maintaining existing partnerships with local institutions of higher education.

Another important observation from the survey is that students are able to preserve a strong sense of American Indian identity, although most of them live in the predominately white environment of Spokane and many come from biracial/multiracial families. Students in the study who reported a strong American Indian identity often participated in cultural activities such as Pow Wows. At the same time, students found a balance in maintaining their American Indian ties while building interracial friendship networks. Nevertheless, the opportunities for students to learn about their American Indian culture could move beyond major events such as the Pow Wows. For example, some parents pointed out, American Indian history and cultures are not adequately represented in schools' curriculum. As discussed earlier, American Indian students' retention of cultural heritage has positive affects on their educational outcomes. School officials, parents and leaders in the American Indian communities need to work together to expand the educational opportunities for students to gain more in-depth understanding of their cultures within the local area public school systems.

7. Questions for Future Research

As a result of this study, future research should explore in greater depth the differences in the educational aspirations between American Indian/Alaska Native students attending rural (i.e. on Indian reservation) and urban schools. Do rural and urban American Indian/Alaska Natives have the same or different motivations to attend college? If so, what are they? What is the educational experience for American Indian/Alaska Native students attending schools on Indian reservations versus urban public schools? How does this experience influence their decision to go to college? These questions and several others on this issue are in need of further investigation if school districts are to find better ways of serving their American Indian/Alaska Native students.

8. Conclusion

The findings of the study reveal high educational expectations by American Indian children and parents of those children. Yet, statistics show low rates of success of the WASL, of college attendance and of high school completion in Spokane area public schools. Parental aspirations do not appear to be enough to narrow the academic gap between American Indian children and the other racial/ethnic groups. The survey data also suggest that even the ability to preserve a strong sense of American Indian identity while attending Spokane area public schools, albeit positive, has not translated into being adequately prepared to handle the rigors of college.

It is apparent that further collaborative research is needed to better inform Spokane area public schools and regional colleges and universities on more effective practices to help American Indian students succeed at both the K-12 and postsecondary levels. It is evident that both American Indian parents and school districts share the same vision of academic success for these children. Beyond further research, we suggest that both parties strategize together, through community forums and other similar venues, so that the Spokane School District motto, "Excellence for Everyone," can be actualized.

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Appendix A

PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Are you a parent of middle or high school students?

- Yes
 No

2. Please select one or more of the following choices to best describe the student's biological parents. MARK ALL THAT APPLY.

	Mother	Father
a. Native American/American Indian Please specify tribal affiliation: _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. African American	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Hispanic/Latino	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. White American	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. Where do you currently live? _____.

How many years have you lived in your current residence _____.

4. In general, do you socialize mainly with (Please check one only):

- American Indians
 White Americans
 Black Americans
 Hispanic Americans
 Asian Americans
 Others

5. Did you grow up in

- an urban (city) setting
 or rural (Indian reservation or small town) setting
 or both? Where?

6. How do you identify yourself culturally (check one)?

- by my tribal affiliation _____ (name of tribe)
 as Native American/American Indian
 as American
 Multicultural: _____ (name cultures)

7. How important is this identity to you (check one)?

- Not important
 Somewhat important
 Very important

8. Why do you identify this way? (Answer on first instinct)

9. What type of school did you attend (check one or more attended schools)?
 Public School
 Private School
 BIA School
 Boarding School
 Charter School
 Other
10. What is the highest level of education that you completed?

11. What is the highest level of education that your spouse/partner completed?

12. How satisfied are you with the education that your child has received up to now?
 Very satisfied
 Somewhat satisfied
 Not satisfied at all
 Explain _____

13. In this school year, do you or your spouse/partner do any of these following?
- | | Yes | No |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Belong to the school's parent-teacher organization | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. Attend meetings of parent-teacher organization | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Take part in the activities of the parent-teacher organization | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. Act as a volunteer | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
14. How often do you...(Mark one response on each line)
- | | Never | Seldom | Usually | Always |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Check that your child has completed all homework? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. Discuss your child's report card with him/her? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Know where your child is when he/she is not at home or in school? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. Make and enforce curfews for your child on school nights? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
15. How far in school do you want your child to go? For example, a high school diploma; college degree (e.g. Bachelors', Masters', or Doctoral degree); or professional degree (e.g. Law degree)?

Appendix B

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

16. What grade are you in? _____
17. How old are you? _____
18. What is your gender? Male Female
19. What is your current GPA? _____
20. Did you grow up in
 an urban (city) setting
 or rural (Indian reservation or small town) setting
 or both? Where?

21. What type of school did you attend (check one or more attended schools)?
 Public School
 Private School
 BIA School
 Boarding School
 Charter School
 Other
22. How do you identify yourself culturally (check one)?
 by my tribal affiliation _____ (name of tribe)
 as Native American/American Indian
 as American
 Multicultural: _____ (name cultures)
23. How important is this identity to you (check one)?
 Not important
 Somewhat important
 Very important
24. In what ways do you practice your culture?
(For example, do you participate in traditional ceremonies, POW WOW, or not?)

25. What are the cultural identities of your friends? In other words, who do you socialize with mostly?
- American Indians
 - White Americans
 - Black Americans
 - Hispanic Americans
 - Asian Americans
 - Others

26. What is the highest level of education that you would like to achieve?

27. If you plan to attend college, what college would you like to attend?

Name of college: _____

- No plans to attend college
- I don't know

28. If you plan to attend college, which major would you like to pursue?

Major: _____

- I don't know

29. How far in school do you think your mother and father want you to go?

	Mother	Father
a. Less than high school graduation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. High school graduation or GED only	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Attend or complete a 2-year school course in a community or vocational school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Obtain a Bachelor's degree	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Obtain a Master's degree or equivalent	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Obtain a Ph.D. (Doctoral), M.D. (Medical Doctor), or other advanced degree (for example, Law degree)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. I don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

30. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about your current school and teachers?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a. Students make friends with students of other racial and ethnic groups	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. The teaching is good	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Teachers are interested in students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. When I work hard on schoolwork, my teachers praise me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. In class I often feel "put down" by my teachers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. In class I often feel "put down" by other students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. I don't feel safe at my school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h. Disruptions by others get in the way of my learning.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i. Fights often occur between different racial/ethnic groups	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix C

Subject Recruitment Statement

We, at Eastern Washington University, are currently conducting a research study on the educational experiences and aspirations of Native American middle and high school students attending schools within the Spokane School District and the surrounding area. To this end, we wish to administer brief questionnaires to Native American middle and high school students and parents. This means we would like Native American students currently in the 6th grade up to high school seniors and parents to completely fill out this brief one-page, two-sided questionnaire. The information you give us in this questionnaire is very important to us. It will help us understand how family and culture influence students' educational goals.

You are free to refuse to complete the questionnaire. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. You may withdraw from this survey at any point. It will not affect your relationship with Eastern Washington University in any way. Please feel free to ask any of us in the research team if you have any questions. You will receive a ticket to enter a raffle for \$50 Wal-Mart gift certificates when you return the questionnaires. Thank you very much for your participation.

Endnotes

1. There is no consensus with regard to appropriate terminology used in reference to members of this group: American Indian/Alaska Natives, American Indians, or Native Americans. For the purposes of this monograph, the term American Indian/Alaska Natives is used when referring to Natives generally and American Indians or Native Americans is used when referring to members of specific tribes in the lower 48 states.
2. Eastern Washington University's American Indian/Alaska Native student enrollment is twice the national average at 2%.
3. These statistics were tabulated for individuals who identified themselves as "American Indian alone or in any other combination."
4. Percentage was based on the total number of cases in which the racial backgrounds of both parents were identified.
5. Percentage was based on the total number of cases in which tribal affiliation was actually given. Tribal affiliation was missing in 19 out of the 65 cases in which the mother was identified as American Indian and in 12 out of the 47 cases in which the father was identified as American Indian.
6. Statistics included individuals who identified themselves as "American Indian alone" and those who identified themselves as "American Indian" in combination of one or more races.



EASTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

start something **big**



Our Mission

Eastern Washington University's mission is to prepare broadly educated, technologically proficient and highly productive citizens to obtain meaningful careers, to enjoy enriched lives and to make contributions to a culturally diverse society. The University's foundation is based on career preparation, underpinned by a strong liberal arts education.

Tradition, Connections, Opportunity

In 1882 the Benjamin P. Cheney Academy opened its doors to more than 200 students. More than a century later, the Academy has evolved into Eastern Washington University. The regional, comprehensive public University is a driving force for the culture, economy and vitality of the Inland Northwest region, with programs also offered in Spokane, Bellevue, Everett, Kent, Seattle, Shoreline, Tacoma, Vancouver and Yakima.

Eastern offers students the opportunity to study one-of-a-kind, in-demand disciplines such as biotechnology, cybersecurity, forensic science, entrepreneurship, children's studies, dental hygiene and urban planning. In addition, Eastern is the only regional university in the state to offer a doctorate in physical therapy.

Eastern enhances its strong commitment to teaching and learning by vigorously pursuing grants, extramural funding and student-faculty research collaborations. For the most recent fiscal year, the University secured a total of \$13.8 million in grants and extramural funding.

A focus on personal attention, faculty excellence and community collaboration allows Eastern to accomplish its mission of preparing well-rounded students ready to hit the ground running in their chosen career fields. Eastern will give you the chance to start something big!

Accreditations

The University is accredited by the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges and many discipline-specific associations, such as the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business, the National Association of Schools of Music, the Computing Sciences Accreditation Board, the National Council of Accreditation of Teacher Education, the Planning Accreditation Board and many more.