

Why do Native American Males Drop Out?¹

This document offers a quick look at the extant literature regarding drop out rates for Native American students, particularly males. This is a difficult task due to the nature of the topic and the diversity of the population; however, there are a few well designed studies which illuminate the factors which contribute to the problem and its cessation.

Summary

The Theories

For years theorists have been offering ideas for why minority students have difficulties in school, such as the individual perspective, the systems perspective, the idea of cultural discontinuity, and the 'push out' vs. 'pull out' phenomenon. Viewing this systems failure from an ecological perspective will allow for an explanation which will not single out the child as the problem, but focus on what can be done to improve the system through all factors which affect the student.

The Empirical Studies

Much of the data suggests that several factors contribute to a student's decision to leave school. Parental/home factors are amongst the greatest contributors. Beyond that, student motivation (often measured through engagement), the level of security in one's own ethnicity, school systems, the community's economy, and the student's resiliency affect a student's decision to stay in school. The idea of minimizing one's connection to his or her own background is not supported through data. Data underlines the opposite, a firm ethnic identification facilitates educational success.

Article Review

Notes from the Drop Out Conference

(http://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/dropouts/dropouts_gen.php)

Balfanz & Leyters, 2001 recommend the use of promotion rates, or graduation rates, instead of drop out rates as a good indicator of numbers of drop outs, especially if these numbers are constant in a school over several years.

Rumberger, 2001: Offers information about two frameworks which we can be used to understand drop out rates: individual and institutional.

Individual Perspective- examines how an individual's characteristics (values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors) contribute to a decision to leave school. Student engagement is a good predictor of how a student feels about his or her

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relationship with the school. In current research, this is often measured through attendance.

Institutional Perspective- examines what is going on in the institution which is preventing schools from providing students an education.

- Research repeatedly shows that family factors are seen as the single most important factors to influence whether or not a student, of any race or ethnicity, stays in school. These factors include parental support, Socio-economic status (SES), and parent education.
- School factors:
 - o The two major ways through which schools effect turnover are:
 - Directly: explicit policies and decisions which force kids to drop out (such as suspension and attendance policies)
 - Indirectly: general policies and practices that are well intended, but end up increasing drop out rates
 - o Social composition- The economic, cultural, family, and geographic attributes of the people who are part of the school community
 - o Student resources- ratio, quality of teachers
 - o Structural characteristics
 - Safety: physical, and emotional
 - School policies and practices: academic and social climate, discipline policies.
 - Do students think school policies are appropriate, or do they serve all students adequately?
 - Are discipline policies aimed to punish students, or to help them correct transgressions

(Freed & Samson, 2004)

- Some schools in South Western Alaska have a 100% drop out rate.
- Lasting effects of a minority or community who effected by a historic trauma may lead to:
 - o Mistrust of schools
 - o Seeing a success in school as giving in to white culture, and betraying one's own culture²
- shortage of teachers
- lack of interventions/prevention techniques used in schools which are specifically geared towards Native American (or any type of) drop out
- Suggests that students are dropping out so that they can obtain their GED's, or attend Military, or vocational schools.
- A general sense of resentment and lack of understanding between teachers and students "Barrier between the school system and the community"

² Recent work is showing that students who affiliate themselves strongly with the Native American culture are more able to succeed in school. Students who are more secure in their Native American Heritage, and understand what it means, and are secure in their position, may not have the same conflicts as students who are not as secure in their cultural or ethnic identity.

- In an economy which is based mainly on hunting, fishing, and a few tourists, a high school education may not seem applicable to improving quality of life.

(Campbell, 2007)

- Researchers have been working to understand the persistence of high Native American drop out rates since the 1960's.
 - o One of the major reasons (in addition to the previously mentioned reasons): lack of Native American teachers. This leads to a lack of cultural sensitivity (also see Freed and Samson), poor students teacher relationships, lack of respect, and a disconnect between school, culture, and students. PUSH OUT.

(Jeffries, Nix, & Singer, 2002)

02 Urban American Indian Drop puts

- No major difference between male and female drop out rates for Native Americans.
- Drop out rates for Native Americans are frequently ignored in the literature frequently grouped into the 'Other' category
- Reasons for Native American drop outs
 - o Lack of comfort with the school environment
 - o Lack of education (parental or family education or importance placed on education). High parent drop out rates= high student drop out rates... parents who have learned not to trust the system
 - o Need for respect, independence from school
 - o The school's failure to integrate the student's culture: pushed out
- Lack of an understanding as to the background culture of Native Americans.
 - o Lack of student engagement
 - o Dropping out is not a fast, cataclysmic decision for most of these children, but a slow, gradual progression

(Eberhard, 1989)

- Highlights the great discrepancy in the statistics behind Native American drop out rates, including a lack of separation based on tribal affiliation. According to the author, dropping out is based on:
 - o Academics: lower GPA's and lower test scores are more likely to be associated with students who drop out
 - o Mobility: more moves leads in an increased likelihood of drop out
 - o Family factors: such as parental experience in the schools, level education completed, parental income, number of people living in the home
 - o Gender: Males were found by this author to be more likely to drop out
 - o School attended: the location, and culture, of impacts retention rate
 - o Tribal membership: A strong identification to one's tribe support the likelihood that the student will graduate

(Coladarci, 1983)

- Provides data as to why Native American's drop out through perceptions of students who have dropped out.

- 1/3 of students cited the teacher/students relationship as an important reason for dropping out
- Content of academic work/ schooling
 - Does the content of the course work relate to the students' ideals, career aspects, or sense of what it means to be a member of his or her society
- Lack of parental support for school

(St. Germaine, 1995)

- Often for Elementary education, Native American students are in small reservation schools, however in middle school or high school students transfer into a mostly white school
- This source calls into question the applicability of schools cultural competency for natives and all minorities in general
 - Structural:
 - Most schools are larger
 - Teachers and staff are untrained in Multicultural issues, and are seen as uncaring
 - Passive teaching methods tend to 'bore out students'
 - Culturally irrelevant curriculum.
- Diverse community of Native Americans makes it hard to say why they drop out : individual, organizational, structural/economic theoretical
 - The economical section is an important section that examines what is going on in the country, in other parts of the student's life, and the affects of community and parent factors. This study examines at everything which directly and indirectly contributes to a student's outcome. An important piece to an ecological understanding of a student's academic performance.

(Reyhner, 1991)

- The distance between a student's home and school is stressed as an important reason why students may drop out³
- Teacher competency tests may be keeping out teachers who have a higher level of cultural competency, and therefore may be more able to reach these students who are not being served by their schools.

(Swaim, Beauvais, Chavez, & Oetting, 1997)

Effects of Drop Out on Substance Abuse

- Drop outs reported that they are 10% more likely to use alcohol or 15% more likely to use marijuana during their lifetime than others.
- Native Americans are 8.0% more likely to use alcohol and 8.1% more likely to use marijuana than other students.

³ Side note not from text: students may miss the bus, and not have another method of reaching school. Strict attendance policies may push them out of school.

(Wood & Clay, 1996)

Perceived Cultural barriers

- A student's perception of the value of education leads to motivation, which then leads to academic performance
- Perceived structural barriers to mobility reduces motivation for students
- As with many other articles, this one stresses findings that school attachment is highly correlated with attachment to the Native American Culture
- Percent of Native blood is strongly and negatively correlated to grades. The authors argue that the more Native American blood a student has, the more Native American (NA) he or she looks. This causes students to perceive a higher level of discrimination
- Perceived barriers, in addition to Indian/Anglo discontinuities, reduce the academic performances of students.

(DeVoe & Darling-Churchill, 2008)

- More NA drop outs than any other ethnicity/ race except Latinos
- Rates of expulsion 2nd only to black students (Rates of male NA expulsion second only to black males)
- Less sophomores completed high school than any other group; more GED's than any other group, many of the NA students are working towards a high school equivalency or just not doing anything
- When drop out rates for institutionalized males are included, more NA males drop out of school than females
- At 4, NA students score lower scores on standardized tests aimed towards literacy, math, and color identification.
- In '06 27% of Native Americans lived in poverty vs. 13% in the National Population. Furthermore, the poverty rate for Native American families with students under 18 is higher than for any other race of ethnicity
- The Mortality rate for 15-19 year olds is 29/100,000; more than the national average.
- A larger percent of Native American Alaskan native students reported absences from school in the preceding months than any other race or ethnicity 66% vs 36-57%⁴
- This study found that Native Americans have a higher drop out rate than everyone but Hispanics, and found the same results when the data is disaggregated between males and females.

(Stearns & Glennie, 2006):

Pull out VS Push out

- Push out results from the school culture.
- Pull out results from job or family needs.

⁴ A good indicator of lack of school engagement

Retention

(Reyhner, 1991)

- Schools need to respect and build upon what is learned in the home and in the community
- A strong sense of tradition helps students to succeed

(McInerney, Roche, McInerney, & Marsh, 1997)

- Found families to be the biggest influence, positive or negative.

(McInerney, 1995a)

- School motivation leads to an increased desire for seeking excellence in school work, increased self esteem, affiliation to school, improving school concern for students.

(McInerney, 1995b) Navajo motivation in the schools

- Motivation in schools is marked by the ability to work well in two cultures.⁵
- A sense of purpose or sense of self increases student motivation.
- Messages from the community about the importance of school increases student motivation.
- The school should send a message that students can achieve in order to increase student motivation.

⁵ This idea is common for minority or immigrant students.

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