



National Indian Head Start Directors Association

Standing Strong and Preserving the Identity of AI/AN Children and Families

Importance of American Indian Alaska Native Head Start

AIAN Head Start programs provide a model of success that can be strengthened, expanded, and drawn upon as our country seeks to expand access to early childhood education, improve outcomes for Native youth across the board, and increase Tribes' ability to design and administer early childhood education funds and programs.

History of AIAN Head Start

The launch of Head Start in 1965 included 34 AIAN programs throughout the nation. In 1969 Head Start was transferred from the Office of Economic Opportunity to the Office of Child Development and a special unit was created to fund Indian Head Start programs. During the mid-seventies the unit was enlarged to include Migrant programs until 1983 when Indian grantees were organized into a branch by themselves, now referred to as Region XI. Currently AIAN Head Start and Early Head Start serves 22,894 children in 154 programs across 26 states. Seventy five percent of AIAN HS/EHS child development staff are native, and 45 percent of staff are current or former Head Start parents.

AIAN Head Start is Vital

AIAN Head Start is critical because native children remain the most at-risk population in the United States. They face serious disparities in education, health, and safety. Fifty-eight percent of 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old native children do not attend any form of preschool. AIAN high school graduation rates are the lowest of any racial or ethnic group at 67 percent, compared with the national average of 80 percent. Over one in three AIAN children live in poverty. Native youth are also 2.5 times more likely to experience trauma than non-natives. Indian reservations suffer from depression-era economics, with terrible crime and health statistics to match. Unemployment rates for American Indians and Alaska Natives are around 12.4 percent overall, compared with 5.9 percent nationally.

AIAN Head Start is the most important and successful federal program focused on these dire circumstances, principally by addressing health, education, family, and community needs in a holistic manner that is akin to traditional native learning styles and cultural practices. AIAN Head Start's family- and community-centered model is one of the most effective of the few programs providing resources to address the particular needs of young native children. AIAN Head Start plays a critical role in providing native children with a strong foundation for life-long academic achievement and personal resiliency.



Head Start Works

Region XI Children's Growth and Development

Region XI Head Start serves children and families in programs operated by federally recognized AI/AN tribes.

What is Region XI Head Start?

The information below is from the AI/AN Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES) 2015, a descriptive study of the children, families, and programs in Region XI.

Language, Literacy, and Math Skills

Region XI Head Start children make gains in language, literacy, and math skills across the program year, although they lag behind other children of the same age nationally.

Over the course of the program year, children make progress toward national norms, gaining between 1.2 and 2.6 standard score points in English receptive and expressive vocabulary, letter-word knowledge, and early math.



Social Skills and Approaches to Learning

On average, teachers report improvement in Region XI children's social skills and approaches to learning skills during the program year.

According to teacher reports, Region XI Head Start children demonstrate better social skills on average by the spring of the Head Start year than they did in the fall.

Children also show more positive approaches to learning skills (such as attention, persistence, and ability to work independently) in the spring than in the fall.



Executive Function Skills

Region XI children improve their performance on a measure of executive function over the Head Start program year.

Children's performance on an executive function measure improves from 41% in the fall to 54% in the spring.





Two times a month the classrooms from the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe, Early Childhood Education Program (WA) visit the longhouse for singing, drumming and dancing practice.

Language and Culture Preservation

In the late 1860's, the federal government began a program to "civilize" American Indians, with education as the principal weapon in what became a campaign to wipeout native culture and identity. By 1900 thousands of native youth were taken – often forcibly – to nearly 150 boarding schools where they were forbidden to speak their native languages, were made to use non-native names, and denied their traditional clothing and hair.

This effort did great damage to the continuation of native beliefs, cultures, and languages. Native languages are in retreat, but the native spirit has endured. Much of the harm is being undone by native peoples through culturally based education programs. AIAN Head Start is on the frontline in the

preservation of native language and culture, which have been proven to be key elements in native student confidence and success in later years. AIAN Head Start programs have taken a variety of steps to address challenges and opportunities for integrating language and culture, including:

- To successfully transmit their language some programs have developed innovative ways to support teachers, including providing tools to help teachers integrate words, greetings, and phrases into everyday classroom activities.
- Elders are involved in the classroom, working with young children using traditional cultural practices. They speak the tribal language, sing tribal songs, and tell traditional stories.
- Some programs have made efforts to engage parents in tribal language-learning activities to combat resistance to learning a second language.
- The Head Start Program Performance Standards provide for the full integration of tribal language and culture in Head Start classrooms, in the curricula, and in program systems and services. Many tribes implement a culturally and linguistically responsive curriculum. Some even operate full immersion classrooms. Still, other programs have constructed culturally appropriate environments to highlight the tribe's cultural traditions.

Eighty-one percent of children in Region XI Head Start programs participate in community and cultural activities at least once per month, with an average of two community activities per month. These activities included listening to elders tell stories; participating in traditional ways, such as carving, harvesting, collecting, hunting, and fishing; dancing, singing, or drumming; working on traditional arts and crafts; participating in traditional ceremonies; and playing American Indian or Alaska Native games. (FALL 2015 AI/AN FACES PARENT SURVEY)

The Federal Government has a Trust Responsibility to Indian Peoples

The Constitution of the United States, treaties, federal statutes, Executive orders, Supreme Court doctrine and other agreements define the federal government's trust obligation to protect the interests of Indian peoples. They also set forth federal recognition of Indian tribes as sovereign nations with inherent powers for self-governance. The federal government has committed to dealing with tribal governments on a government-to-government basis, which manifests itself in many ways including direct and meaningful consultation between federal agencies and federally recognized tribes on legislation, regulatory policy, and other actions that may significantly impact tribal communities.

Specific Set Asides for AIAN Head Start

The Head Start Act provides set asides for AIAN Head Start. Funds that are specifically designated for AIAN Head Start programs are essential to their stability. Tribal programs have traditionally had difficulty securing funds that pass through the states, and ensuring that funds flow directly from the federal government to the tribes is vital to AIAN Head Start's success. In 2018, AIAN Head Start received \$260 million, roughly 3% of total Head Start funding.