

# Heritage Language Learners and American Indian and Alaska Native Students



## The Importance of Teaching Heritage Languages <sup>11</sup>

Most Head Start Region XI parents say that it is *somewhat* or *very important* that their child learns a Native language.

Historical conditions such as forced cultural and linguistic assimilation continue to result in language loss in Native communities.<sup>6,12</sup> Promoting Heritage languages for Native American/Alaska Indian (AI/AN) students is important for whole child development. A student's heritage language enhances English language development, academic achievement, and social and emotional wellbeing.\* This infographic highlights the importance of promoting and elevating the Heritage languages\*\* of AI/AN multilingual learners (MLs).\*\*\*

## AI/AN Students Who Are Multilingual Learners (MLs) <sup>2,3,7</sup>

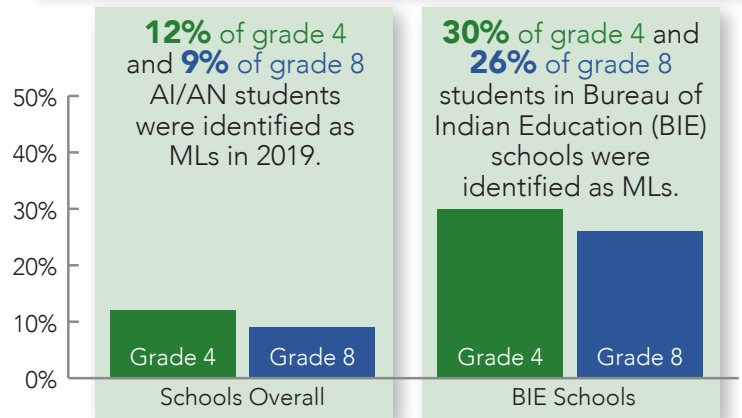
**1%** of K–12 students are AI/AN.

Up to **9%** of K–12 AI/AN students are classified as MLs.

For most AI/AN students, English is the dominant language.

## Rights of Children and Tribes <sup>1,10,9</sup>

- **Native American Languages Act (NALA) (1990)**
  - Recognizes the unique status of Native American languages and cultures
  - Acknowledges responsibility to ensure the survival of Native American languages and cultures
- **Esther Martinez Native American Languages Preservation Act (2006)**
  - Provides funding for language and culture initiatives
    - ◆ Language nests
    - ◆ Language survival schools
    - ◆ Restoration programs
    - ◆ Immersion programs
    - ◆ Language and culture camps
- **Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (2015)**
  - Ensures AI/AN students gain knowledge and understanding of their languages and cultures
  - Encourages establishment of language immersion programs



Standard language support services may not be appropriate for AI/AN students.

## SPOTLIGHT

### Native American and Alaska Native Children in School (NAM) Program <sup>4,5</sup>

U.S. Department of Education awards discretionary grants through the NAM program. The program seeks to improve academic outcomes for AI/AN students by providing funding for programs that support language instruction educational programs, including AI/AN language and culture revitalization.

\*American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) refers to a person having origins in any Indigenous people in the current United States and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment.

\*\*Heritage language is the language a person regards as their native, home, and/or ancestral language. This covers indigenous languages (e.g. Navajo) and immigrant languages (e.g. Spanish in the U.S.) (Baker, 2000). [https://ncecla.ed.gov/files/rcd/BE021775/Glossary\\_of\\_Terms.pdf](https://ncecla.ed.gov/files/rcd/BE021775/Glossary_of_Terms.pdf). This infographic uses Heritage language and Native language interchangeably.

\*\*\*The term *multilingual learner(s)* refers to the student population defined as English learner(s) in section 8101(20) of the [Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by Every Student Succeeds Act](#). In this infographic, multilingual learner(s) is used in place of English learner(s).

## Challenges to Establishing Heritage Language Programs <sup>7,12</sup>

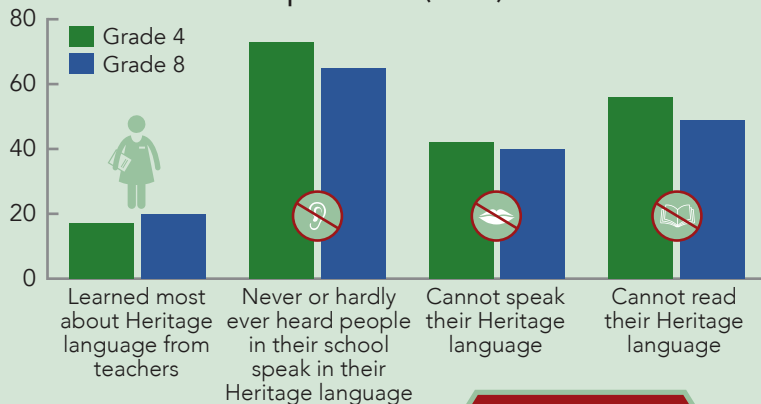
Teacher language proficiency

Approximately **90%** of AI/AN students in grades 4 and 8 have teachers with little or no Heritage language speaking capability.

On average, **52%** of teachers of AI/AN students in grades 4 and 8 reported receiving some training to work with AI/AN MLs.

## Language Experiences of AI/AN Students in School <sup>7,12</sup>

AI/AN Students' School Language Experiences (2019)

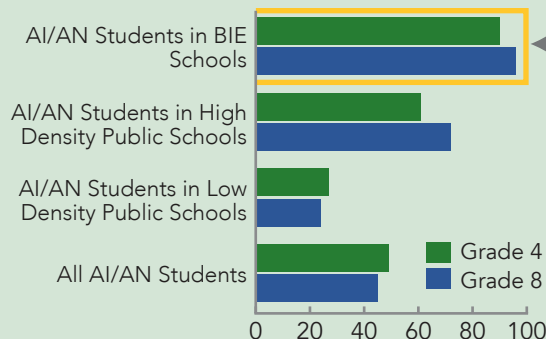


On average, **41%** of AI/AN students in grades 4 and 8 reported that they could not speak their Heritage language.

On average, **52%** of AI/AN students in grades 4 and 8 reported that they could not read their Heritage language.

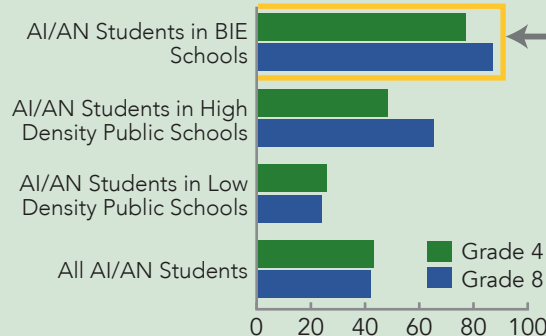
## Culture Education Experiences of AI/AN Students in School <sup>7,12</sup>

Instruction About AI/AN Cultures Through Oral Language (2019)



Overall, fewer than **50%** of AI/AN students in grades 4 and 8 receive instruction in school about their culture through oral and written language.

Instruction About AI/AN Cultures Through Written Language (2019)



In **BIE schools**, a higher percentage of students receive instruction about their culture through oral and written language.

About **97%** of students in grades 4 and 8 receive cultural instruction through oral language.



About **82%** of students in grades 4 and 8 receive cultural instruction through written language.



## Promising Practices and Strategies to Support AI/AN Students' Language Education <sup>8,12</sup>

- **Culturally responsive instructional approaches**
  - Modeling
  - Direct instruction
  - Fostering language and literacy in all content areas
  - Using culturally specific communication styles
  - Learning environments reflective of students' unique cultural and linguistic identities
  - Keeping expectations high
  - Awarding credits for coursework in Heritage languages
- **Focus on biliteracy**
  - Supporting students' English language development and academic success through language immersion and Indigenous language development
- **Family and community engagement**
  - Working with community members and subject matter experts
  - Consulting and collaborating with tribal leadership and elders on research, policy, and Native language instruction
- **Teacher training and professional development**
  - Providing professional learning on culturally and linguistically responsive initiatives
  - Raising awareness of the impact that language loss and language shift have on AI/AN student performance



## Features of Successful Heritage/Native Language Programs From NAM<sup>4</sup>

Grand View School,  
Tahlequah, Oklahoma  
*Cherokee language*

After-school programs focusing on instruction and immersion in Heritage language and culture



Farmington Municipal  
Schools, New Mexico  
*Diné [Navajo] language*

- Early childhood Heritage language and culture education
- 50/50 dual language programs
- No-cost Heritage language instruction for parents

Lower Kuskokwim School  
District, Alaska  
*Yup'ik language*

Development of culturally responsive, valid, and reliable Heritage/Native language assessment systems



### Sources:

<sup>1</sup> L. 101–477, title I, §101, Oct. 30, 1990, 104 Stat. 1153: *Native American Languages Act of 1990*. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/101st-congress/senate-bill/2167>

<sup>2</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD). (n.d.). State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary and Secondary Education, 1998-99 through 2018-19; and National Elementary and Secondary Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity Projection Model, 1972 through 2029. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d20/tables/dt20\\_203.60.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d20/tables/dt20_203.60.asp)

<sup>3</sup> National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.). State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary and Secondary Education, 2008-09 through 2018-19. ED Facts file 141, Data Group 678. [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d20/tables/dt20\\_204.27.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d20/tables/dt20_204.27.asp)

<sup>4</sup> Office of English Language Acquisition. *Native American and Alaska Native Children in School Program*. U.S. Department of Education. <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/naancs/index.html>

<sup>5</sup> Office of English Language Acquisition. (2022). *Native American and Alaska Native Children in School (NAM) Program 2018 cohort*. U.S. Department of Education. [https://ncela.ed.gov/files/NAM2018ReportSY2020\\_20220617\\_508.pdf](https://ncela.ed.gov/files/NAM2018ReportSY2020_20220617_508.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest at Education Northwest. (2021, May). *Understanding the needs and experiences of Alaska Native English learner students*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/regions/northwest/pdf/ak-native-el-infographic.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Rampey, B. D., Faircloth, S. C., Whorton, R. P., & Deaton, J. (2021). *National Indian education study 2019* (NCES 2021-018). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics.

<sup>8</sup> Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest. (2021, November). *Culturally responsive practices to support American Indian English learners' success*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/southwest/infographics/relsw-infographic-aicrp.aspx>

<sup>9</sup> S.256 –116th Congress (2019-2020): *Esther Martinez Native American Languages Preservation Act*. (2019, December 20). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/256>

<sup>10</sup> S.1177–114th Congress (2014-2015): *Every Student Succeeds Act*. (2015, December 10). <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/114/s1177>

<sup>11</sup> The American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey. (2015). *Native language use in Region XI Head Start households*. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Office of Planning, Research & Evaluation. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/glance-native-language-use-region-xi-head-start-households>

<sup>12</sup> Umansky, I., Porter, L., Moreno, E., & Pierson, A. (2021). *Alaska Native students as English learner students: Examining patterns in identification, classification, service provision, and reclassification* (REL 2021–088). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest. [https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/regions/northwest/pdf/REL\\_2021088.pdf](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/regions/northwest/pdf/REL_2021088.pdf)