

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

My name is Rachel Lopez, and I have been working in school environments in various capacities since 1995. The majority of these schools have been in locations where there were a good percentage of Native students in attendance. I have been very concerned about the discrimination, both subtle and overt, that I have witnessed toward many Native students.

One of the most pervasive forms of this discrimination is the way that course materials are presented. In history classes, Native issues are often given a paragraph at best. Often the information presented in that paragraph is incorrect and disrespectful in nature. There may be a special class offered in some schools, such as "Native American Culture". I find this to be particularly offensive. Native history and culture is as much, if not more, a part of American history and culture as any other group in this country. Why should it be relegated to an elective that the people, who perhaps, are most in need of some education on the subject, will probably never take?

The traditional manner of American education involves lecturing, taking notes, and memorizing facts in order to score well on a test. This educational method becomes more and more outmoded as our general student population becomes more visually oriented and dependent on technology for stimulation. Most students respond more positively, and remember what they learn better, in an environment where there is hands-on learning and encouragement for new ideas and opinions. This atmosphere is not encouraged in the schools I have worked in. There are also many classrooms where the "popular" students are encouraged to participate while others are ignored.

Another form that this discrimination often takes is that the school administration and staff may be so ignorant regarding Native cultural issues that they fail to communicate with their Indian students in a meaningful, respectful way. They may misinterpret the behaviors of their Native students, and often make little effort to encourage them or assist them. Many reading materials offered, or lectures may assume that "everybody" in the class is on the same wavelength; when in fact, they are not.

This is why Indian Education for All is so important to our state. The racism and discrimination so prevalent in our schools will not cease until there is a better understanding and recognition of the fact that unless students from all cultures and background have access to a good education, we are wasting a large portion of our country's most precious resource. If the Native drop out rate is far above that of the non-Native population, it is due to a failure on the part of the educational system, not the students. Indian Education for All is the first small step toward a better understanding and communication between Native and non-Native cultures. Incorporating information regarding Native issues as a part of all class materials will eventually increase tolerance and knowledge for people on both sides of this difficult historical dilemma. That is the ultimate purpose of Indian Education for All. SB 390

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