

*INDIAN EDUCATION IN
COLORADO*

INTRODUCTION

Due to the critical nature and pivotal role that the field of education has played throughout the history of the United States, the TREC deemed it essential to examine the complex history and current state of both K-12 Indian Education and Native American Higher Education in Colorado. The resulting reports from this examination are included in this section of the TREC final report.

The purposes of both of these reports are to provide an extensive historical overview, highlighting both the national context as well as specific experiences and conditions within Colorado. Both reports emphasize the importance of addressing historical injustices, tackling systemic barriers, and fostering an inclusive and supportive educational environment for AI/AN students.

The “Overview of the History of Colorado K-12 Indian Education” situates the history of Indian Education within a broader context, emphasizing the longstanding challenges faced by AI/AN students. The report provides a detailed account of the histories of various tribes in Colorado particularly the Utes, Cheyenne, and Arapaho. A significant portion of the report is also dedicated to the history of boarding schools within the state. Finally, the report highlights the significant legislative changes that have occurred since 1972 and the opportunities for improvement that are now available to address the unique needs of AI/AN students and to ensure the preservation of AI/AN cultural heritage.

Colorado, where the violent displacement of Indigenous populations has been largely ignored for over a century, has a long-documented history of oppression and marginalization of AI/AN communities. The majority of Colorado residents have attended or are currently enrolled in schools that either completely ignore or only briefly touch upon the history of

Colorado's original inhabitants, often presenting inaccurate or inadequate information. Despite some limited efforts over the past fifty years, particularly in the last decade, these unfortunate circumstances persist and have serious negative implications for the well-being of AI/AN children.

The second report entitled, "History of Native American Higher Education in Colorado", traces the history of higher education for AI/AN students and underscores the historical trauma and systemic issues that have historically impeded the educational progress of these students. Much of the history of higher education in the US has its origins in stolen land. This is particularly true in Colorado where, due to the absence of Tribal Colleges & Universities (TCUs) in the state, all Native college/university students attend private or state public institutions. This report extensively examines Colorado State University (CSU) as the only land grant institution in Colorado and Fort Lewis College, the only Colorado higher ed institution contracted to serve AI/AN students. The report concludes by identifying ongoing challenges and opportunities for improvement calling for continued collaboration between tribes, state agencies and educational institutions to address historical injustices and to better serve the unique needs of Native students.

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