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Analyzing the History of Native American Education in South Dakota

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Analyzing the History of Native American Education in South Dakota

Before 1978 it was legal for the United States federal government to remove Native American children from their homes and send those children to Indian boarding schools, some located in South Dakota. This was the case until the passage of S. 1214, the Indian Child Welfare Act which outlawed the removal of children based on race, “Declares that it is the policy of Congress to establish minimum Federal standards for the removal of Indian children from their families (extended families) and for the placement of such children in foster or adoptive homes which will reflect Indian culture.”¹ This was 86 years after the first Indian boarding school opened its doors in South Dakota.² After the Pierre Indian School opened in 1891, three main others followed in Flandreau, Rapid City, and Chamberlain as late as 1927.³ Other religion-based missions, orphanages, and day schools opened across the plain; 25 schools or 14% of the national total were located in South Dakota due to the relatively large number of Native Americans living in the territory.⁴ These schools were known for their rules and have well documented abuses around the county. In 2018, Keloland News spoke with the “survivors” of these schools who spoke out against their former teachers, priests and school administrators;

¹ U.S. Congress, Senate, *S.1214 Indian Child Welfare Act* (Washington, D.C., Library of Congress, 1978), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/95th-congress/senate-bill/1214>

² Lance Nixon, “A Dakota Family Remembers: Three Generations of Boarding School.” *The Capital Journal*, December 3, 2015. https://www.capjournal.com/news/a-dakota-family-remembers-three-generations-of-boarding-school/article_87ee46de-9a42-11e5-a764-1b7948fd098c.html (accessed November 18, 2021).

³ “Over 90 Years Serving Lakota Children,” St. Joseph’s Indian School, access November 18, 2021, <https://www.stjo.org/about/history/>.

⁴ “American Indian Boarding Schools by State,” in *Healing Voices Volume 1: A Primer on American Indian and Alaska Native Boarding Schools in the U.S.*, 2nd ed., by Dr. Denise Lajimodiere (Minneapolis, 2020), 8-9. <https://boardingschoolhealing.org/list/>

survivors outlined the horrors that occurred in South Dakota including sexual assaults.⁵ These memories still linger with the survivors and the effects of the practice can still be seen through current Native American students education experience through standards proficiencies in South Dakota.

The history and effects of the boarding schools have been recognized by the South Dakota Board of Education Standards and the South Dakota Department of Education through their publication of the Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings and Standards. These documents explain how Indian boarding schools affected the communities and children who attended the schools. This historical information is included in social studies education in South Dakota, but the information largely stops with the end of the boarding school era in the 1960s.⁶ Information on how communities responded and how Native American children were educated when the schools closed is not answered in these documents. It has been nearly half a century since the boarding school era ended, and yet native American children are still significantly behind other race-based cohorts in South Dakota.

Policymakers and educational leaders universally recognized that South Dakota's education of Native American students is below par though some do believe that progress is trending in the right direction. Albert White Hat, a teacher of 34 years at Sinte Gleska University in Mission, South Dakota, wrote in *Zuya* that Native American education has improved. In 1971, "probably 80% of the high school graduates from the reservation had to attend remedial classes before entering college." White Hat claims that today this rate has decreased.⁷ White Hat's book

⁵ Erika Tordsen, "South Dakota's Boarding School Survivors." *Keloland News*, May 17, 2018.

<https://www.keloland.com/news/south-dakotas-boarding-school-survivors/>

⁶ South Dakota Office of Indian Education, *Oceti Sakowin Project*, Indian Education Advisory Council (Pierre, South Dakota, 2020) <https://indianeducation.sd.gov/ocetisakowin.aspx>.

⁷ Albert White Hat Sr., *Life's Journey—Zuya: Oral Teachings from Rosebud* (Salt Lake City, The University of Utah Press, 2012), 21.

outlined his time growing up on a South Dakota reservation has been incorporated in the South Dakota State University American Indian Studies program. His writings largely focus on information about the boarding school era and little on the current state of Native American education.

To best understand the scope of these issues or lack thereof, this paper's methodology will use the Oglala Lakota County, Sisseton, Eagle Butte, and Todd County school districts to serve as the case studies for majority Native American schools located on Indian Reservations. Based on 2019 census data reported by the South Dakota Department of Education, Oglala Lakota had 1,233 Native American Students or 92.5% of the total enrollment, Todd County had 2,045 or 95.8%, Sisseton had 523 or 53.9%, and Eagle Butte had 320 or 94.4%. Each of these four school districts are on different Indian Reservations. Of the four districts, Sisseton stands out as the lowest percent of Native American enrollment but should be observed because it served is the largest school district with a majority Native American enrollment on the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate Reservation.⁸

The only place in South Dakota that is expected to see an increase in graduation rates for Native American students is Lakota Tech High School in the Oglala Lakota County School District. The new school opened its doors in August 2020 and research has shown that CTE-centered secondary education can increase graduation rates to an average of 93%.⁹ This research, however, does not take into effect the challenges the district and Native American students have faced historically. This school is the first of its kind and many believe that it will be a game-

⁸ South Dakota Department of Education, *Student Enrollment Data: Total 2019 Fall Enrollment, by Ethnicity* (Pierre, S.D., 2019), <https://doe.sd.gov/ofm/enrollment.aspx> (accessed November 18, 2021).

⁹ Travis Dews, "Native Sun News Today: Lakota Tech: First of a Kind." *Native Sun News*, February 25, 2020. <https://www.indianz.com/News/2020/02/25/native-sun-news-today-lakota-tech-first.asp> (accessed November 18, 2021).

changer for Oglala County School District, however, data from the schools was not available at the time of this analysis and is expected to be disrupted from the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is an open secret in South Dakota that teachers and schools are underfunded compared to other states; at first though, one may assume that a lack of funding is the origin of the said educational gaps for Native American students. However, based on the most recent data by the South Dakota Department of Education, this does not appear to be the case. During the 2019-2020 school year the statewide average for per-pupil spending was \$9,770 with \$732 from the federal government and \$9,037 in state and local sources.¹⁰ Todd County saw \$12,312 per-pupil, \$2,443 in federal funds, \$9,869 from state and local sources.¹¹ Similarly, Oglala Lakota County saw \$18,675 in per-pupil funding, \$3,760 in federal funds, and \$14,195 from state and local sources.¹² In South Dakota, a school census is taken each September, funding is allocated per-pupil where this amount is calculated by subtracting local tax revenues from the total per-pupil allocated need.¹³ This is to ensure equity among funding so that a community with high property values, such as those with wind energy farms, are not unnecessarily overfunded. Schools with Native American students are also able to receive funding from the federal government specifically the Bureau of Indian Affairs grant program.¹⁴ Although the majority of Native American schools are receiving larger per-pupil federal funding than the state average, this paper will show that funding alone does not equal academic success.

¹⁰ South Dakota Department of Education, Report Card, *Statewide 2019-2020*. <https://sdschools.sd.gov/#/home>

¹¹ South Dakota Department of Education, Report Card, *Todd County, 2019-2020*. <https://sdschools.sd.gov/#/home>

¹² South Dakota Department of Education, Report Card, *Oglala Lakota County, 2019-2020*. <https://sdschools.sd.gov/#/home>

¹³ South Dakota Legislature, Legislative Research Council, *State Aid to K-12 Education Formula: A Primer* (Pierre, South Dakota, 2020), 2. <https://mylrc.sdlegislature.gov/api/Documents/Attachment/207174.pdf?Year=2020>

¹⁴ U.S. Federal Government, Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, *Awards*, (Washington, D.C., 2020). <https://oese.ed.gov/offices/office-of-indian-education/indian-education-formula-grants/awards/>

South Dakota’s Constitution requires a “Uniform system of free public schools”¹⁵, but a uniform set of educational outcomes is not currently being produced in South Dakota when examining race categorized cohorts. This became the study of South Dakota News Watch in 2019 when the media outlet published a two-part series on educational outcomes of Native American students. This series of stories brought media and legislative attention to the issues currently facing the South Dakota Native American population. According to 2019 data, the graduation rate for Native American students was 54% while all racial backgrounds averaged 85%. Native American students also have the lowest attendance rate at 72% and the highest chronic absenteeism rate at 37%.¹⁶

The information by the Department of Education paints a terrifying image that Native American students in South Dakota statistically are not going to be successful in their educational pursuits. Studies have shown that completing a high school degree is one of the best ways to raise one’s standard of living, not to mention the economic advantages for post-secondary education.¹⁷ For a Native American child attending K-12 education in South Dakota, their path to success is statistically behind other cohorts, but the state of South Dakota has attempted to make changes to this issue. Attempts in the State Legislature, executive branch, and at local school districts have had varying levels of success but the issue persists. These issues are no doubt the result of the reservation system implemented by the federal government and the hangover effects that boarding schools had on Native American communities.

¹⁵ South Dakota Secretary of State, *South Dakota Constitution*, 1889, Article VIII, Section I. <https://sdlegislature.gov/Statutes/Constitution/2030162>

¹⁶ Nick Lowrey, “Native American students left behind by S.D. education system,” *South Dakota News Watch in The Argus Leader*, November 22, 2019. <https://www.argusleader.com/story/news/education/2019/11/22/native-american-students-left-behind-south-dakota-education-system/4269896002/> (accessed April 2, 2021).

¹⁷ South Dakota Board of Regents, *Economic Impact Study* (Pierre, SD, 2021), 19, https://www.sdbor.edu/mediapubs/publications/EconomicImpact21_w.pdf.

This issue has not been studied by historians but several advocacy groups such as NDN Collective¹⁸ and the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition¹⁹ have pushed for policy changes in South Dakota. The evidence used in the paper will rely heavily on the South Dakota Department of Education yearly report cards that outline educational outcomes overall and in cohorts described prior.

During the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic it became clear that education and remote work are part of the future; according to the U.S. Census Bureau approximately 93% of households with school-age children participated in distance learning.²⁰ Internet access in the home and classroom are not new issues, in 1996 South Dakota Governor Bill Janklow understood this when he pushed and implemented a program to connect schools so that students could, “compete in a world economy” going on to say that “they would need the necessary tools and information”.²¹ A large portion of South Dakota’s Native American students and school districts that are predominantly located on South Dakota’s Indian Reservations such as Pine Ridge in Oglala Lakota County, Rosebud in Todd County, Standing Rock in Corson County, and Cheyenne River in Ziebach County and Dewey Country are geographically challenged due to their large area size. The relatively low population density reduces the economic desire of

¹⁸ NDN Collective, “NDN Collective to Open Indigenous-Led, Culture-Based School in Rapid City,” April 7, 2021. <https://ndncollective.org/ndn-collective-to-open-indigenous-led-culture-based-school-in-rapid-city/> (accessed November 18, 2021).

¹⁹ The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition, “Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies in the U.S.,” <https://boardingschoolhealing.org/truthcommission/> (accessed November 18, 2021).

²⁰ U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Census Bureau. “Nearly 93% of Households with School-Age Children Report Some Form of Distance Learning during COVID-19.” October 8, 2021. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2020/08/schooling-during-the-covid-19-pandemic.html> (accessed November 18, 2021).

²¹ South Dakota Governor’s Office of Economic Development, “Broadband in South Dakota” (PowerPoint Presentation, Pierre, South Dakota, 2019), 20. <https://sdgoed.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/State-Broadband-Plan.pdf>.

broadband providers to invest in infrastructure.²² According to South Dakota Governor Kristi Noem this has caused challenges in South Dakota, “Fiber-optic line can cost \$15,000 per mile to lay, and the low number of customers in some rural areas makes it too expensive for companies to justify their investment.”²³

The South Dakota Governor’s Office of Economic Development concurred with this statement in their May 2019 report of broadband access, “The pure economics of building a high-speed broadband infrastructure led to difficult business decisions. The geography of the state lends itself to many miles of open range with sparsely populated areas.”²⁴ South Dakota is 17th largest state in area but that has not stopped 88% of the state’s population from receiving 25/3 MBPS broadband speed; this state average of the population is not concurrent to the above counties mentioned where Native American students need broadband access to connect to class materials.²⁵

SDGOED reports access to broadband by county, not by if the area is classified as an Indian Reservation; fortunately, Todd County, Oglala Lakota County, and Ziebach County lines coincide with Indian Reservation boundaries.²⁶ This allowed for comparison between how the SDGOED reported and the information desired for this analysis. Only 51%-70% of Oglala Lakota County and Todd County have access to broadband while residents of Ziebach County and Dewy County are among the lowest in the state at 12.1% and 1.7% respectively. Corson

²² *Reservations and Tribal Land*, “South Dakota Indian Reservation Economies,” 2010, <http://www.sdibaonline.org/resmap.htm> (accessed April 2, 2021).

²³ Kristi Noem, “2019 State of the State Address” (YouTube video, South Dakota Legislature, House of Representatives, January 8, 2019).

²⁴ South Dakota Governor’s Office of Economic Development, “Broadband in 2020” (PowerPoint Presentation, Pierre, South Dakota, 2019), 10.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁶ “Indian Reservations within the Limits of the United States,” in Office of Indian Affairs, by T.J. Morgan (Washington, D.C.: Office of Indian Affairs, 1982) <https://www.loc.gov/item/2009579467/>.

County which shares the Standing Rock reservation with North Dakota has between 26%-50% broadband access.²⁷

In 2019, 85% of South Dakota homes had a computer and it can be argued that access to databases, online libraries, and informational videos is essential for learning but for students residing in areas without broadband access, this is easier said than done. Oglala Lakota County High School in 2020 opened its first majority in-person learning school. Before this school opened, the district operated out of Oglala Lakota County Virtual High School locations throughout the county. According to Oglala Lakota County School District's website, their students did not have in-person teachers, and instead "Virtual High School students usually attend class by reporting to a designated school or community computer labs or classrooms. They log on to their virtual course, communicate with their teacher, and complete their coursework."²⁸ Without access to broadband at home, students would not have the option to participate in OLCVHS without traveling to a computer site.

Even if school districts located on South Dakota's Indian Reservations can obtain broadband access their ability to recruit and maintain teaching staff and retain those teachers year to year is another hindrance to their ability to create a successful teaching environment. Each year the South Dakota Department of Education creates a report card that tracks the number of teaching staff, teacher turnover, and vacant positions at the start of the year. The studied districts also show significant teacher turnover and in the case of Oglala Lakota extreme teacher vacancy.²⁹

²⁷ South Dakota Governor's Office of Economic Development, "Broadband in 2020" (PowerPoint Presentation, Pierre, South Dakota, 2019), 5 and 12.

²⁸ "Homepage," Oglala Lakota County School District, <https://www.olcsd.com/>.

²⁹ "Instructional Staff Turnover and Vacancy," District totals," in Online Dashboards, by South Dakota Department of Education (Pierre, South Dakota, 2020) <https://doe.sd.gov/data/district.aspx>, (accessed April 3, 2020).

During the 2019-2020 school year Oglala Lakota County School District had a turnover of 22.02 full-time employees (FTEs) out of their total 97.59 FTE with 9.27 FTE positions vacant at the start of the school year. In total South Dakota saw 62.9 FTE positions open at the start of the school year; OLCSD had 14.7% of the vacant positions while they only employ 1.0% of the total 9723 teachers statewide. Other school districts saw similar turnover such as Todd County with a turnover of 22 of 167.06 FTE, Sisseton 12.52 of 72.35 FTE, and Eagle Butte 5.58 of 44.71. On a state-wide average, South Dakota school districts saw 998.94 FTE teacher turnover out of 9723 teachers or 10.17%.³⁰ Based on the same group of school districts mentioned prior they are above the statewide average by small margins but according to 2017 research by The Learning Institute which is a “nonprofit and nonpartisan” group that “connects policymakers and stakeholders at the local, state, and federal levels with the evidence, ideas, and actions needed to strengthen the education system from preschool through college and career readiness” found significant economic impact of teacher turnover. The study shows on average it costs approximately \$9,000 in rural districts when a district must hire due to turnover. That cost can add up quickly when districts have high turnover year after year which then takes money away from other areas such as classroom supplies and educational materials.³¹

According to the SDDOE, “A missed school day is a lost opportunity for students to learn” and issues like chronic absenteeism and low attendance are prevalent in the studied school districts more than at a statewide level.³² Issues of chronic absenteeism or missing more than 10 class days in a year have proven too be detrimental to the students’ ability to learn, “Students

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Linda Darling-Hammond, Leib Sutchter, and Desiree Carver-Thomas, “Why Addressing Teacher Turnover Matters,” Blog Posts, Learning Policy Institute, November 13, 2018, <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/blog/why-addressing-teacher-turnover-matters>.

³² South Dakota, Department of Education, State Report Card, *School Environment*, (Pierre, South Dakota, 2019), <https://sdschools.sd.gov/Nimble/asp/Main.aspx> (accessed April 3, 2021).

with better attendance records tend to score better on standardized tests and are less likely to be held back or drop out of school. Moreover, chronic absenteeism predicts high school dropout over and above test scores, suspensions, and grade retention.”³³

In 2019, South Dakota reported a state chronic absenteeism average of 14% for all students, Native American students placed significantly higher at 37%, Hispanic/Latino at 22%, Black/Africa American at 18%, and White/Caucasian at 9%.³⁴ When examining the individual schools previously mentioned some Native American majority schools do exceed the statewide Native American averages. Eagle Butte saw 53% of the 1232 Native American students and Todd County saw 66% of the 2268 Native American students experiencing chronic absenteeism. At these two districts, the trend of higher rates of chronic absenteeism does not correspond for white students with only 19% of 16 students and 9% of 23 students at the two schools respectively.^{35 36}

The one school that bucked this trend and lowered their rate for all races is Oglala Lakota School District; their average was 8% with a 92.5% Native American student body. Oglala Country School District’s high school did completed education differently due to their virtual school platform. This is most likely the discrepancy between the studies districts. However, the below-average chronic absenteeism rate did not correlate to an increased high school completion rate with the district reporting only 31% compared to 90% statewide.³⁷

³³ Carley Robinson, Monica Lee, Eric Dearing, and Todd Rogers, “Reducing Student Absenteeism in the Early Grades by Targeting Parental Beliefs,” *American Educational Research Journal* 55.6 (2018): 1163-192. Web.

³⁴ South Dakota, Department of Education. Report Card. *Statewide*. Pierre, South Dakota, 2019-2020. <https://sdschools.sd.gov/#/home>

³⁵ South Dakota, Department of Education. Report Card. *Todd County*. Pierre, South Dakota, 2019-2020. <https://sdschools.sd.gov/#/home>.

³⁶ South Dakota, Department of Education. Report Card. *Eagle Butte*. Pierre, South Dakota, 2019-2020. <https://sdschools.sd.gov/#/home>.

³⁷ South Dakota, Department of Education. Report Card. *Oglala Lakota County*. Pierre, South Dakota, 2019-2020. <https://sdschools.sd.gov/#/home>.

The South Dakota State Legislature, Department of Tribal Relations, and multiple Governors have been supportive of improving the educational outcomes and cultural curriculum but in the years since the closure of Indian boarding schools, there has been little policy implemented towards those goals. The legislature has seen reoccurring discussions surrounding the Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings implementation, the Office of Indian Education, and how culture should fit into the education of Native American students. These discussions have brought issues to light and some outside groups have gone around the State Legislature to explore solutions, although relatively recently local school districts have also explored solutions through existing state laws.

In 2007 the Legislature’s adoption of South Dakota Codified Law 1-54-11 established the Office of Indian Education within the Department of Tribal Relation to “support initiatives in order that South Dakota's students and public-school instructional staff become aware of and gain an appreciation of South Dakota's unique American Indian culture.”³⁸ This office was established to address the education shortcomings seen through in the Department of Education’s yearly report card, although there have been significant concerns over the location of the Office of Indian Education within state government. Some state lawmakers argue that it should be moved to the Department of Education because the Department of Tribal Relations does not understand education as well as the Department of Education.³⁹ This was the topic of House Bill 1187 in the 2021 legislative session but was defeated on a vote of eight to two by the State Affairs Committee at the request of the Department of Education. This discussion has occurred

³⁸ SDCL 1-54-11, https://sdlegislature.gov/Statutes/Codified_Laws/2032303.

³⁹ South Dakota Legislature, House, *1187: An Act to Require schools to provide instruction on South Dakota’s travel history, culture, and government*. Representative Bordeaux (Pierre, South Dakota, 2021), <https://mylrc.sdlegislature.gov/api/Documents/214879.pdf>.

in previous legislative sessions and always resulted in the office remaining within the original location and did not advance the goals of the office at all.⁴⁰

Also, in 2007 the Legislature passed additional legislation creating the Office of Indian Education and their goals for creating k-12 curriculum that would be culturally appropriate. South Dakota Codified Law 1-54-12 outlined that the Indian Education Advisory Council, made up of members of tribes within South Dakota, would create the Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings. The content of these standards was not outlined in SDCL 1-52-12, but the intent is clear, to give the Board of Education Standards a program that could be adopted and implemented in schools around the state. The Department of Tribal Relations website outlines this goal in their history of the program, “The curriculum will include examples of how standards from the Common Core, state standards, and Oceti Sakowin standards could be taught together.”⁴¹

Since the finalization of the Oceti Sakowin Essential Understanding and adoption by the State Board of Education Standards in 2011 the understandings have been revised with the latest adopted revision in 2018.⁴² According to South Dakota Codified Law it is the duty of the Office of Indian Education to support the implementation of the understandings into state curriculum, “1-54-15: Demonstrating commitment to the implementation of the Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings and Standards across the curriculum.”⁴³ The Board of Education Standards most has since adopted the understandings but not made them required standards for any part of the k-

⁴⁰ South Dakota Legislature, House Committee on State Affairs. *Vote to defer 1187: An Act to Require schools to provide instruction on South Dakota’s travel history, culture, and government*. Representative Bordeaux (Pierre, South Dakota), <https://sdlegislature.gov/Session/Vote/69987>.

⁴¹ SDCL 1-54-12, https://sdlegislature.gov/Statutes/Codified_Laws/2032304.

⁴² South Dakota Office of Indian Education, *Oceti Sakowin Project*, Indian Education Advisory Council (Pierre, South Dakota, 2020) <https://indianeducation.sd.gov/ocetisakowin.aspx>.

⁴³ South Dakota Legislature, House, *1044: An Act to transfer the Office of Indian Education to the Department of Education*. Representative Bordeaux (Pierre, South Dakota, 2021), <https://mylrc.sdlegislature.gov/api/Documents/210677.pdf>.

12 curriculum.⁴⁴ According to the Board’s list of standards the only section where an educator is required to teach Native American culture or history is under the Social Studies Standards. Out of the 319 standards required from K-12 social studies standards, only 4.H.2.1, 5.H.2.1, 8.H1.6, and 8.H.4.7 relate to Native American culture or history. The Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings are not mentioned in the Social Studies Content Standards.⁴⁵

The lack of inclusion of the understandings in the content standards goes against what NDN Collective, the leading Native American education-focused non-profit, says is critical. Sara Pierce, director of education equity said in 2018, “The discipline data is indicative of the need for more culturally proficient strategies.”⁴⁶ The 2021 House Bill 1187 would have instructed educators to “provide instruction on South Dakota's tribal history, culture, and government”⁴⁷. In summation, the inclusion of these standards in the academic study of students would have improve their education outcomes, according to NDN Collective.

For over eight decades Native American children were removed from their home, taken to distance boarding schools, and communities lost the ability to educate their own children. The Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 was necessary, but it did not come soon enough. Because communities lost the ability to educate their own children, they were unable to establish a robust public education system and today are years behind in education outcomes. This is the hangover that the boarding school era had on South Dakota Indian Reservations.

⁴⁴ South Dakota Department of Education, Board of Education Standards, *March 19, 2018, minutes*. <https://doe.sd.gov/board/packets/031918.aspx>.

⁴⁵ South Dakota Department of Education, Board of Education Standards, South Dakota Social Studies Content Standards. (Adopted August 24, 2015), <https://doe.sd.gov/contentstandards/documents/SDSocialS.pdf>.

⁴⁶ Nick Lowrey, “Native American students left behind by S.D. education system,” *South Dakota News Watch in The Argus Leader*, November 22, 2019. <https://www.argusleader.com/story/news/education/2019/11/22/native-american-students-left-behind-south-dakota-education-system/4269896002/> (accessed April 2, 2021).

⁴⁷ South Dakota Legislature, House of Representatives, HB 1187, *An Act to Require schools to provide instruction on South Dakota’s travel history, culture, and government*.

These are serious issues that are currently affecting thousands of students in South Dakota, yet issues that are decades old persist and some like the lack of access to broadband were highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic. As of 2019, the majority of the population in Corson, Ziebach, and Dewy counties do not have access to broadband, hindering students' education options. This issue has been even more pressing for students in Oglala Lakota who until 2020 did not have a traditional school and relied on a virtual high school.

In some cases, the lack of internet access is moot because of a lack of teacher to make those education materials. There is no doubt that funding allocated for students, is being diverted to teacher recruitment and retention; Oglala Lakota County School District had 14.7% of open positions at the start of the year while they only employ 1% of the total teacher population. However, is not due to a lack of funding; the comparison between our studied schools and the statewide average shows a large increase in funding to these schools.

Lastly, the paper addressed possible solutions that have been presented and in turn, voted down or not seen implementation to their fullest extent. The first being with the Office of Indian Education, which currently resides in the Department of Tribal Relations. Opponents argue that it should be moved to the Department of Education to allow for better communication between school administrators and the departmental leadership. Another solution, that was at one time supported by the State Legislature was the development of the Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings. Proponents and advocacy groups claim that increasing the amount of cultural education in the classroom will increase learning outcomes, but the State Legislature has been hesitant to do so.

In conclusion, the Department of Education has consistently reported that Native American students are among the lowest performing group for educational outcomes not to

mention the high rates of chronic absenteeism. These issues are the results of the boarding school era which is still affecting students to this day. Because there was no local public education system for decades on reservation, they are currently behind the rest of the state simply for lack of experience and access to necessary items like teachers and broadband internet. To solve these issues, the State of South Dakota has invested in broadband statewide, but with 88% of the state connected there is a chance they stop before connecting the most desperate reservation populations. State leaders have shown wavering support for cultural standards in classroom, which many believe are the key to success for Native American students. These issues have not been solved during this paper and it appear that the state government does not have the solutions to solve them. If there is going to be change in Native American educational outcomes there needs to be a better effort by local, tribal, community, and state leaders to address these students before they are further left behind.

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