

Proceedings Submission

Title of the Submission: Project AIMED (American Indian Masters in Education Degree) An Outreach Degree Program for Teachers Working with American Indian Students

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Abstract:

Project AIMED (American Indian Masters in Education Degree) is a project that has targeted four American Indian Communities and will train teachers in these communities to work with American Indian children. The four communities targeted by Project AIMED are the San Carlos Apache, Mescalero Apache, Ysleta Del Sur Pueblo Tiguas and Tortugas Tribe. The project intends to assist teachers in a pre-service training program to work more sensitively with the students within each of these communities.

American Indian populations face many challenges in the educational system. The language, culture and pedagogy of each American Indian tribe play an important role in the American Indian student's attitude toward their education (National Congress of American Indians, 2000). These attitudes have resulted in a failed education system for these students. The American Indian student is more likely to drop out of school, have a poor school performance record, and display behavior difficulties than any other ethnic group in the U.S. (American Indian Education Center). In addition to these problems, the American Indian student is also more likely to be misidentified for special education. Not unlike other ethnic groups, American Indian children are over represented in special education classes.

Grossman in 1998 noted that being from an impoverished background and being from a non-anglo ethnic group almost assures a special education placement for these students. American Indian populations are one of the most impoverished populations and they also have major cultural differences that are subtle to detect. If Grossman's prediction is correct, it is important for teachers to clearly understand the difference between the characteristics of poverty and culture from those characteristics of an individual with a mild disability.

In lieu of these educational issues noted for the American Indian student, Project AIMED will recruit and train ten teachers from each of the targeted tribes. Participants will receive a masters degree in bilingual special education and will be specifically focused to the linguistic and cultural needs of the children in their communities. Since each American Indian group is different in their culture, teachers from each community will sponsor a summer institute that will celebrate the cultural and linguistic attributes of the American Indian children that they teach. Additionally, each participant will be required to enroll in nine semester hours at the American Indian Institute at the University of Arizona. These courses feature nationally recognized speakers and instructors to train teachers about the education of the American Indian student.

Since two of the targeted populations are extremely rural, project staff will hire faculty to go to the reservations to teach courses on the week-ends. These courses will teach generic curriculum required of the degree as well as specific curriculum needed for that community. This outreach component of the project will strengthen the quality of education for the graduate students.

Project AIMED is funded to provide tuition and fees to the selected teachers in the targeted communities. In addition, stipends are provided to cover other expenses that these teachers will endure while in the program. Thus, this project will provide educational enrichment for the students as well as financial support to project participants.

In conclusion Project AIMED, a federally funded project through the Department of Education, is prepared to assist teachers who work with American Indian children. The project is a pre-service program facilitated through UTEP and will recruit and train forty teachers in four targeted communities throughout its four year duration.