

# National Indian Education Study 2015

A Closer Look



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The National Indian Education Study (NIES) is designed to describe the condition of education for American Indian and Alaska Native students in the United States. NIES is conducted under the direction of the National Center for Education Statistics through the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) on behalf of the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Indian Education (OIE). NIES is authorized under Executive Order 13592, Improving American Indian and Alaska Native Educational Opportunities and Strengthening Tribal Colleges and Universities. Issued in 2011, Executive Order 13592 is the most recent authorization of Executive Order 13336, American Indian and Alaska Native Education (2004).

This study provides information on the academic performance of fourth- and eighth-grade American Indian/Alaska Native students in mathematics and reading, and on their educational experiences. From 2005 to 2011, NIES results were reported every 2 years. After 2011, the NIES reporting cycle was changed to every 4 years.

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NAEP is a congressionally authorized project of the National Center for Education Statistics within the Institute of Education Sciences of the U.S. Department of Education. The Commissioner of Education Statistics is responsible for carrying out the NAEP project. The National Assessment Governing Board oversees and sets policy for NAEP.

NAEP is an integral part of our nation’s evaluation of the condition and progress of education. Only information related to academic achievement and relevant variables is collected. The privacy of individual students and their families is protected, and the identities of participating schools are not released.

# About This Report

The National Indian Education Study (NIES) is administered as part of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). This study allows more in-depth reporting on the achievement and experiences of American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) students in grades 4 and 8. The NIES program provides tribal leaders, educators, policymakers, and researchers with reliable and accurate data regarding the education of AI/AN youth. This information not only provides a snapshot of present conditions, it potentially raises a number of questions lending themselves to future research and lines of inquiry.

This report focuses primarily on two major concerns that have been raised throughout the first decade of the NIES:

- What contextual factors are associated with higher- and lower-performing AI/AN students?
- How do AI/AN students *see themselves* in terms of their Native languages,<sup>1</sup> culture, and aspirations for the future?

Both of these major themes are aimed at examining AI/AN student performance beyond what has been previously reported—average scores in mathematics and reading. Although average scores provide a measure for comparing AI/AN students to other racial/ethnic groups or examining trends, emphasizing a singular score may lead to simplistic interpretations. Just like any other identifiable student group, AI/AN students are not all the same; they represent a vast array of characteristics (e.g., linguistic, geographic, economic).



<sup>1</sup> Native languages may also be referred to as Heritage, Indigenous, Treasure, and/or Amerindian languages.

## Organization of the Report

The *Introduction* includes information on sampling, participation, reporting, and the school types reported in the tables and figures throughout this report, as well as guidance about making comparisons and interpreting results.

*Performance Beyond the Average Score* is divided into two subsections aligned with the two major themes mentioned previously:

- The first subsection examines whether a number of individual and contextual factors are associated with higher versus lower performance among AI/AN students on NAEP mathematics and reading assessments. With one exception, these factors were assessed via student self-reports. The exception is a teacher-reported question about providing time daily for students to read books of their own choosing (see table 4). All but one of the student self-report questions used in the first subsection are drawn from the NAEP student questionnaire. The remaining survey question, involving whether schools have materials about AI/AN people, is drawn from the NIES student questionnaire.
- The second subsection explores a set of composite variables (i.e., variables built upon multiple discrete student survey questions) related to exposure to Native languages, AI/AN cultural knowledge, interest in reading about cultures (both their own and others), engagement at school, and perceptions about effort in school. Where feasible, this subsection shows differences in NAEP mathematics and reading scores across groups that varied in their responses to items included in the composites. This subsection closes with some selected findings from the combination of two composites, suggesting possible avenues for future research about how AI/AN students see themselves in relationship to their Native languages, culture, and hopes for the future.

### **Explore Additional Results**

*This report presents selected results from the NAEP and NIES 2015 survey questionnaires. Complete 2015 NIES survey results and performance data for AI/AN students are available in the NAEP Data Explorer at <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata>. Copies of the most recent NIES report (*The National Indian Education Study: 2015*), as well as reports from 2005, 2007, 2009, and 2011, may be downloaded from <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/nies/>.*

# Introduction

Since 2005, the National Indian Education Study (NIES) has provided educators, policymakers, and the public with information about the educational experiences and the academic performance of fourth- and eighth-grade American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) students in the United States.

## Participation in NIES 2015

AI/AN students make up about 1 percent of students in elementary and secondary schools nationally. In 2015, about 8,500 AI/AN fourth-graders and 8,200 eighth-graders responded to the NIES survey. To maximize student sample sizes, all fourth- and eighth-grade AI/AN students in the sampled schools were selected for participation in the NIES survey. This means that, in addition to the fourth- and eighth-grade AI/AN students who were assessed in mathematics or reading, AI/AN students in the sampled schools who participated in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) science assessment were also selected to participate in the NIES survey. Including the students assessed in science increased the NIES survey sample by roughly 800 AI/AN fourth-graders and 1,000 AI/AN eighth-graders without having to sample additional schools (table 1). Nonetheless, the NIES questionnaires were designed to collect information about AI/AN students' experiences in mathematics and reading/language arts, not science. Therefore, all students participating in the NIES survey completed the same grade-specific questionnaire regardless of the NAEP subject area in which they were assessed. Furthermore, questionnaires were administered to participating students' mathematics and reading/language arts teachers to collect information specific to instructional practices in those subject areas. There was no separate questionnaire administered to science teachers.

**Table 1. Number of participating schools with AI/AN students and number of participating AI/AN students, by grade and type of school: 2015**

Type of school	Grade 4				Grade 8			
	Schools in NIES survey	Students			Schools in NIES survey	Students		
		NIES survey <sup>1</sup>	Mathematics assessment	Reading assessment		NIES survey <sup>1</sup>	Mathematics assessment	Reading assessment
<b>Overall</b>	<b>1,600</b>	<b>8,500</b>	<b>3,900</b>	<b>3,900</b>	<b>1,500</b>	<b>8,200</b>	<b>3,600</b>	<b>3,600</b>
Public	1,500	6,800	3,100	3,000	1,400	6,600	2,900	2,900
BIE	100	1,700	800	800	100	1,500	700	700
Private	10	‡	‡	‡	10	‡	‡	‡
DoDEA	30	‡	‡	‡	20	‡	‡	‡

‡ Reporting standards not met. Sample size insufficient to permit a reliable estimate.

<sup>1</sup> Some fourth- and eighth-grade AI/AN students assessed in science in 2015 completed the NIES student survey questionnaires.

NOTE: AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native. BIE = Bureau of Indian Education. DoDEA = Department of Defense Education Activity (overseas and domestic schools). NIES = National Indian Education Study. For public and BIE schools, the number of schools and the number of students are rounded to the nearest hundred. The number of private and Department of Defense schools are rounded to the nearest 10. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2015 National Indian Education Study.

Students were identified as AI/AN based on school records and were sampled along with other students participating in the NAEP 2015 subject-area assessments. Students were assessed in either mathematics or reading, not both.

To obtain large enough samples to report reliable results for AI/AN students, schools with higher proportions of AI/AN students in selected states were oversampled. That is, the AI/AN students were selected for the NAEP assessments at a higher rate than they would be otherwise. All Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools having grades 4 and/or 8 were also selected. There were 100 schools that participated in 2015 NIES that contributed both fourth- and eighth-grade AI/AN students to the sample; 69 of those were BIE schools.

## Reporting Results

This report highlights selected results based almost exclusively on survey question responses from AI/AN students, with one exception: the teacher question in table 4 about providing time daily for students to read books of their own choosing. Survey question results are always reported as percentages of students (e.g., the percentage of students whose teachers reported on a particular factor). Students completed the survey questionnaire voluntarily, and their responses were kept confidential. The privacy of individual students and their families is protected. Similarly, NAEP performance results are not reported for individual students.

Because AI/AN students' experiences may vary depending on the types of schools they attend, results for survey questions are reported for three mutually exclusive categories of schools as well as for an overall category:

- low density public schools (where less than 25 percent of all the students in the school were AI/AN);
- high density public schools (where 25 percent or more of all the students in the school were AI/AN);
- BIE schools; and
- all AI/AN students (includes all AI/AN students sampled throughout the nation in public, private, BIE, and Department of Defense schools).



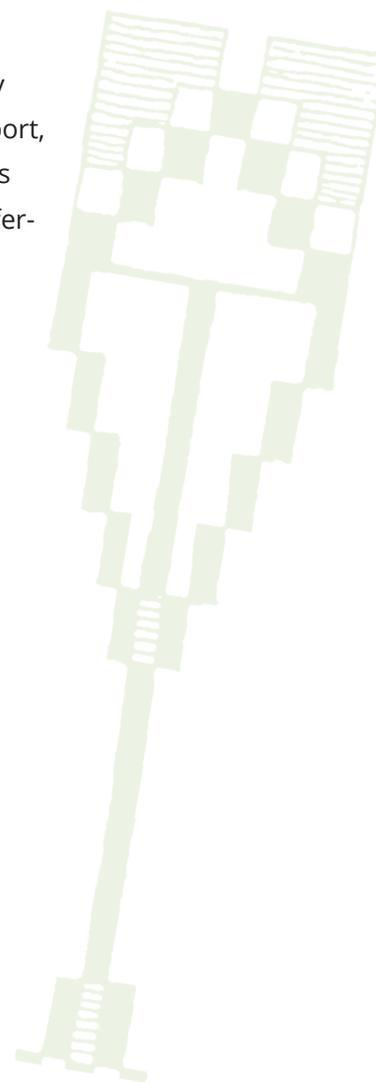
Fifty-nine percent of AI/AN fourth-graders who participated in the 2015 NAEP assessment attended low density public schools, 33 percent attended high density public schools, and 8 percent attended BIE schools. Similarly, 57 percent of AI/AN eighth-graders attended low density public schools, 36 percent attended high density public schools, and 7 percent attended BIE schools.

## Making Comparisons

NAEP uses widely accepted statistical standards when making statistical comparisons. Findings are reported based on a statistical significance level of .05, i.e., no more than a 5 percent probability that differences could be attributed to chance. Only those differences found to be statistically significant are identified as such by explicit statements in the text.

Please note that there are multiple possible comparisons within the data. Tables and figures with more than two groups may simply present results without marking statistical significance with an asterisk. Only those differences that are found to be statistically significant are discussed in the accompanying text in terms of being “higher” or “lower” or “more likely.” Not all statistically significant differences are discussed.

It is important to note that a relationship between a variable (e.g., a response to a survey question) and a measure of educational achievement, like the ones presented in this report, does not imply that a variable causes differences in educational achievement. The results presented in this report are descriptive and readers are cautioned not to draw causal inferences based solely on the results presented here.



# Performance Beyond the Average Score

AI/AN students are a diverse group. They attend schools with various percentages of AI/AN students and levels of available resources. AI/AN students come from multiple tribal backgrounds and represent a variety of Native languages. The following subsections of this report will speak to this diversity and examine academic performance via:

- descriptions of AI/AN students based on analyses of Native students performing at or above the 75th percentile and below the 25th percentile (referred to subsequently as “higher-performing” and “lower-performing” AI/AN students, respectively), relative to other AI/AN students in either mathematics or reading;<sup>2</sup> and
- closer examination of results derived from the combination of multiple related survey questions (i.e., composite variables) centered around Native language exposure, knowledge and interest in Native cultures, and academic engagement and expectations.

## Factors Associated With Higher- and Lower-Performing AI/AN Students

The results presented in this section provide some selected factors that are associated with higher performance and that may point the way for additional research. Note that some variables are applicable to both fourth and eighth grades and to both mathematics and reading, while others are grade and/or subject specific. The displays in this section show percentages in stacked pairs. Percentages that are statistically different from one another are indicated by an asterisk (\*). Other pairs may be numerically different from one another, but those differences are not statistically significant.

### Is the availability of computers and books at home and school related to higher vs. lower performance by AI/AN students?

Variables related to the availability of resources in school and at home showed fairly consistent patterns across both grades and subjects. Compared to their lower-performing peers, higher-performing AI/AN students were more likely to have:

- a school library, media center, or resource center that contained materials about AI/AN people;
- more than 25 books in their homes; and
- a computer at home that they can use (table 2).

<sup>2</sup> Please note that “higher-performing” and “lower-performing” refer to performance in specified subject areas (i.e., mathematics or reading) and does not reflect general academic performance.

**Table 2. Percentage of fourth- and eighth-grade AI/AN students in NAEP mathematics and reading, by performance level and selected factors: 2015**

Factor and performance level	Mathematics		Reading	
	Grade 4	Grade 8	Grade 4	Grade 8
<b>School has materials about AI/AN people</b>				
Higher-performing AI/AN students	80*	83*	77*	88*
Lower-performing AI/AN students	59	70	60	67
<b>Home has more than 25 books</b>				
Higher-performing AI/AN students	67*	68*	70*	70*
Lower-performing AI/AN students	37	27	41	32
<b>Home has computer that student can use</b>				
Higher-performing AI/AN students	78*	85*	78*	82*
Lower-performing AI/AN students	62	67	62	60

\* Significantly different ( $p < .05$ ) from corresponding result for lower-performing AI/AN students. Significance tests were performed using unrounded numbers.

NOTE: AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native. Only selected response options are shown for each factor; not all response options are shown.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2015 National Indian Education Study.



## Is school attendance or specific reading activities related to higher vs. lower performance by AI/AN students?

Some specific variables showed measurable differences between higher- and lower-performing students, but not at all subject/grade combinations. For example, compared to their lower-performing counterparts, higher-performing AI/AN students were more likely to report:

- perfect attendance in the last month for grade 4 mathematics and reading, and
- reading more than 20 pages a day for school and homework for grade 4 mathematics (table 3).

**Table 3. Percentage of fourth- and eighth-grade AI/AN students in NAEP mathematics and reading, by performance level and selected factors: 2015**

Factor and performance level	Mathematics		Reading	
	Grade 4	Grade 8	Grade 4	Grade 8
<b>Perfect school attendance in the last month</b>				
Higher-performing AI/AN students	48*	39	50*	38
Lower-performing AI/AN students	32	30	37	26
<b>Read more than 20 pages for school and homework each day</b>				
Higher-performing AI/AN students	41*	24	36	23
Lower-performing AI/AN students	26	18	24	14

\* Significantly different ( $p < .05$ ) from corresponding result for lower-performing AI/AN students. Significance tests were performed using unrounded numbers.

NOTE: AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native. Only selected response options are shown for each factor; not all response options are shown.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2015 National Indian Education Study.

In addition, in reading, compared to their lower-performing peers, higher-performing fourth-grade AI/AN students were more likely to have:

- teachers who provided time to read a student-chosen book “daily,” and
- teachers who asked them to read a book of their own choosing “always” (table 4).

**Table 4. Percentage of fourth- and eighth-grade AI/AN students in NAEP reading, by performance level and selected factors: 2015**

Factor and performance level	Reading	
	Grade 4	Grade 8
<b>Teacher provides time daily for student to read books of their own choosing</b>		
Higher-performing AI/AN students	87*	41
Lower-performing AI/AN students	69	33
<b>Teacher always asks student to read a book of their own choosing</b>		
Higher-performing AI/AN students	47*	†
Lower-performing AI/AN students	30	†

† Not applicable. Question was not included in the survey at this grade.

\* Significantly different ( $p < .05$ ) from corresponding result for lower-performing AI/AN students. Significance tests were performed using unrounded numbers.

NOTE: AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native. Only selected response options are shown for each factor; not all response options are shown.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2015 National Indian Education Study.

## Are perceptions of self-efficacy related to higher vs. lower mathematics performance by AI/AN students?

The variables in this subsection are subject/grade specific and appear to show an association between performance and perceptions/engagement.

In mathematics, compared to their lower-performing peers, higher-performing AI/AN students were more likely to report that they:

- feel they can “always” do a good job on mathematics assignments at grade 4, and
- “always” understand what their teachers asked them to do in mathematics at grade 8 (table 5).

**Table 5. Percentage of fourth- and eighth-grade AI/AN students in NAEP mathematics, by performance level and selected factors: 2015**

Factor and performance level	Mathematics	
	Grade 4	Grade 8
<b>Always feel they can do a good job on mathematics assignments</b>		
Higher-performing AI/AN students	46*	†
Lower-performing AI/AN students	24	†
<b>Always understand what mathematics teachers ask them to do</b>		
Higher-performing AI/AN students	†	51*
Lower-performing AI/AN students	†	19

† Not applicable. Question was not included in the survey at this grade.

\* Significantly different ( $p < .05$ ) from corresponding result for lower-performing AI/AN students. Significance tests were performed using unrounded numbers.

NOTE: AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native. Only selected response options are shown for each factor; not all response options are shown.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2015 National Indian Education Study.



## Are attitudes about reading related to higher vs. lower reading performance by AI/AN students?

In reading, compared to their lower-performing counterparts, higher-performing AI/AN students were more likely to report that:

- reading was one of their favorite activities at grade 4, and
- they “strongly agreed” that they learned a lot when they read books and that reading was enjoyable to them at grade 8 (table 6).

**Table 6. Percentage of fourth- and eighth-grade AI/AN students in NAEP reading, by performance level and selected factors: 2015**

Factor and performance level	Reading	
	Grade 4	Grade 8
<b>Reading is a favorite activity</b>		
Higher-performing AI/AN students	47*	24*
Lower-performing AI/AN students	27	5
<b>Learned a lot when reading books</b>		
Higher-performing AI/AN students	†	20*
Lower-performing AI/AN students	†	6
<b>Reading is enjoyable</b>		
Higher-performing AI/AN students	†	34*
Lower-performing AI/AN students	†	7

† Not applicable. Question was not included in the survey at this grade.

\* Significantly different ( $p < .05$ ) from corresponding result for lower-performing AI/AN students. Significance tests were performed using unrounded numbers.

NOTE: AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native. Only selected response options are shown for each factor; not all response options are shown. For the factor “Reading is a favorite activity,” fourth-graders responded to a question for which the response option shown is “a lot like me,” while eighth-graders responded to a question for which the response option shown is “strongly agree.”

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2015 National Indian Education Study.

## A Closer Look at Composites

To help make sense of complex situations, we often combine results to create “composites.” A familiar example would be a student’s grade point average (GPA)—a single number used to represent the combination of many grades across all the student’s classes such as English, algebra, civics, art, and physical education.

Similarly, the composite variables presented here are the combined results across multiple conceptually-related NAEP survey questions. By combining results from multiple related questions, we can better understand the frequency or prevalence of factors beyond that which we would be able to observe from responses to a single question.

Each composite is made up of 3 or 4 survey questions. Only those students who responded to *all* questions that make up each of the composites are included in the analyses presented here. See the “Technical Notes” for more information about the construction of the composite variables.

This section of the report presents five composite variables:

- Interest in Reading About Cultures,
- Engagement at School,
- Perceptions About Effort in School (grade 8 only),
- Exposure to Native Languages, and
- Cultural Knowledge (grade 8 only).

This section will first begin with an examination of the extent to which AI/AN students are interested in reading about cultures (both their own and those different from themselves). Next, this section will touch upon students’ views about their engagement at school and their beliefs about how their efforts in school will affect their success in the future. Finally, this section will examine students’ exposure to their Native languages and the extent of their cultural knowledge. Readers should note that performance results are provided for the first three variables, but not for the last two. The first three have established psychological literature linking them to performance in academic subjects. Interest, engagement, and perceptions of value of education are theoretically connected to performance, and, therefore, our analyses present related correlations to average scores. The following section describing Native language and instruction does not include correlations to performance. Relating Native language instruction and cultural knowledge to performance outcomes in core subject areas was not performed as part of these analyses.

Please note that given the multiple possible comparisons within these data, statistical significance is not marked in the displays in this section.



## Between 25–30 percent of AI/AN students are very interested in reading about cultures

*Interest in Reading About Cultures* is composed of three survey questions in which students were asked to indicate the extent to which the statements outlined below described a person like them:

- When my teacher talks about American Indian or Alaska Native history or culture, I try to read more about it.
- I enjoy reading about American Indian or Alaska Native people.
- I enjoy reading about people who have different traditions and cultures (ways of life, customs) than I have.

Across all school density categories, the percentages of AI/AN students who indicated that these survey statements described a person “a lot like” them ranged from 23 to 25 percent at grade 4 and from 26 to 33 percent at grade 8 (table 7). There were no statistical differences revealed across all school density categories at grade 4, and there was no statistical difference between BIE and low density schools at grade 8.

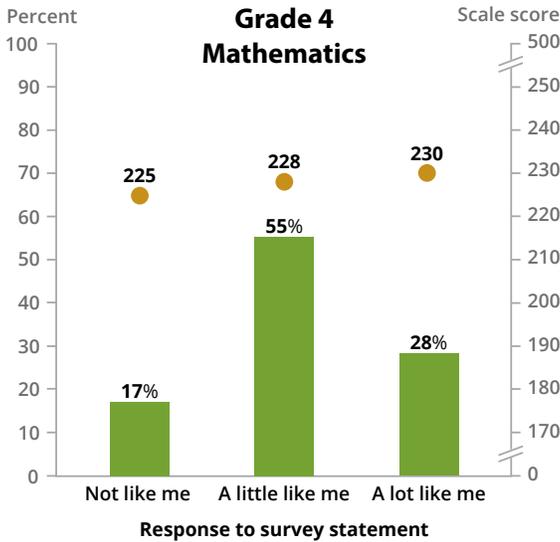
**Table 7. Percentage distribution of fourth- and eighth-grade AI/AN students who reported on the extent to which survey statements about reading about cultures described a person like them, by grade and school type/density: 2015**

Extent to which survey statements about reading about cultures described a person like the student	Grade 4				Grade 8			
	All AI/AN students	Low density public schools	High density public schools	BIE schools	All AI/AN students	Low density public schools	High density public schools	BIE schools
Not like me	19	18	22	20	18	18	21	13
A little like me	56	57	55	56	51	49	53	57
A lot like me	25	25	23	24	30	33	26	30

NOTE: AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native. BIE = Bureau of Indian Education. School density indicates the proportion of AI/AN students enrolled. Low density public schools have less than 25 percent AI/AN students; high density public schools have 25 percent or more. All AI/AN students includes all AI/AN students sampled throughout the nation in public, private, BIE, and Department of Defense schools. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2015 National Indian Education Study.

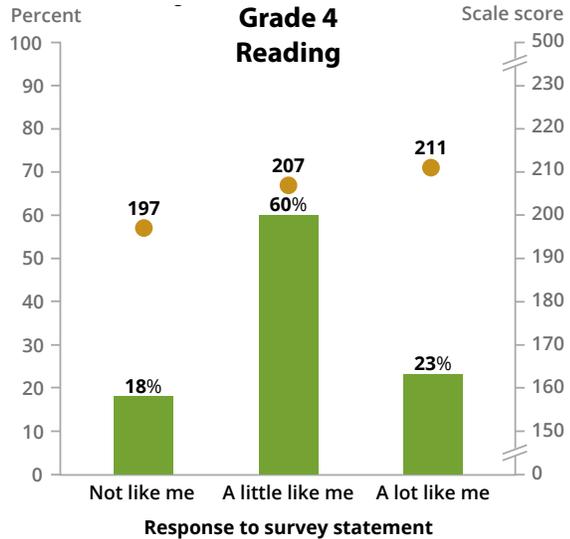
Not surprisingly, this composite, which focused on interest in reading, yielded no statistically significant differences in average scores across response categories in mathematics (figures 1 and 3). This was also true of grade 8 reading scores (figure 4); however, at grade 4 reading, AI/AN students in the “not like me” category scored lower than students in both the “a little like me” and “a lot like me” composite categories (figure 2).

**Figure 1. Percentages and average scores in NAEP mathematics for fourth-grade AI/AN students who reported on the extent to which survey statements about reading about cultures described a person like them: 2015**



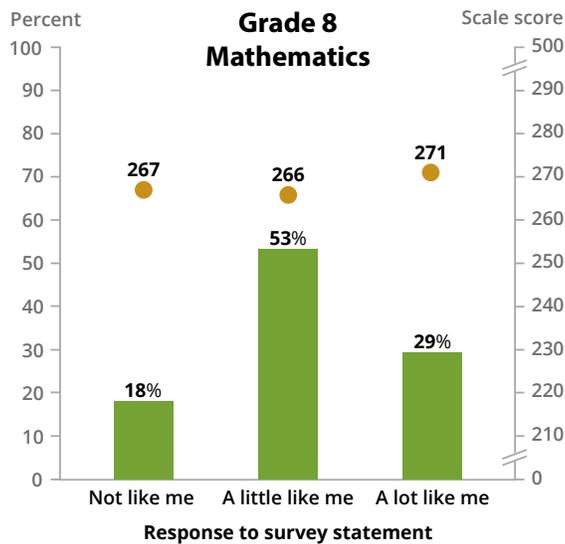
NOTE: AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2015 National Indian Education Study.

**Figure 2. Percentages and average scores in NAEP reading for fourth-grade AI/AN students who reported on the extent to which survey statements about reading about cultures described a person like them: 2015**



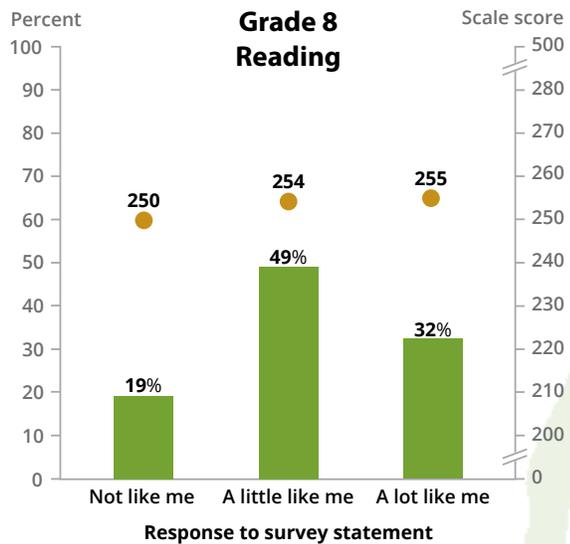
NOTE: AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2015 National Indian Education Study.

**Figure 3. Percentages and average scores in NAEP mathematics for eighth-grade AI/AN students who reported on the extent to which survey statements about reading about cultures described a person like them: 2015**



NOTE: AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2015 National Indian Education Study.

**Figure 4. Percentages and average scores in NAEP reading for eighth-grade AI/AN students who reported on the extent to which survey statements about reading about cultures described a person like them: 2015**



NOTE: AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2015 National Indian Education Study.

## AI/AN students are engaged in their schoolwork

The second composite, *Engagement at School*, provides a more direct look at what would be considered non-cognitive factors that are potentially related to academic performance.

Specifically, this composite is made up of AI/AN students' responses to four survey questions by which students indicated the degree to which

- they put a lot of effort into their schoolwork,
- they desired to be one of the best students in their class,
- they enjoyed being challenged in their classes, and
- they felt they belonged at school.

Their composite score, then, reflects their self-view about their academic motivation and overall comfort in their school.

Approximately 62 percent of AI/AN fourth-graders and 48 percent of eighth-graders indicated that the statements described a person “a lot like” them (table 8). Similar to the previous composite, percentages by school density category fall closer together, with no measurable differences between AI/AN fourth-graders in BIE and high density public schools indicating “a lot like me,” and no measurable differences for “a lot like me” across all three school types at grade 8. Readers should note, though, that students attending low density public schools at grade 4 were more likely to indicate “a lot like me” compared to their peers attending high density public schools or BIE schools.

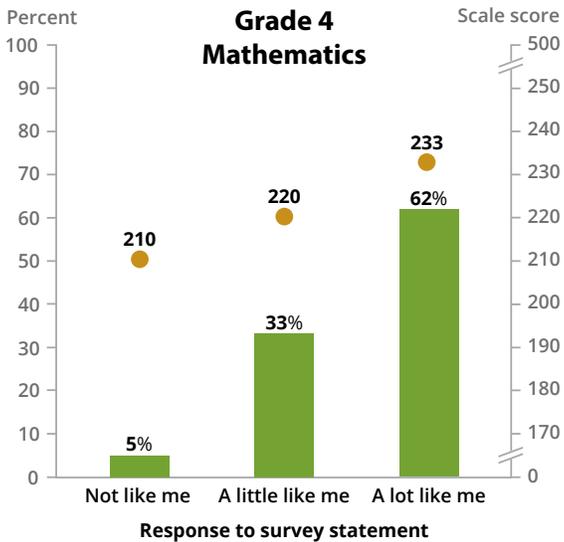
**Table 8. Percentage distribution of fourth- and eighth-grade AI/AN students who reported on the extent to which survey statements about engagement at school described a person like them, by grade and school type/density: 2015**

Extent to which survey statements about engagement at school described a person like the student	Grade 4				Grade 8			
	All AI/AN students	Low density public schools	High density public schools	BIE schools	All AI/AN students	Low density public schools	High density public schools	BIE schools
Not like me	5	4	7	7	13	12	15	13
A little like me	33	30	35	36	39	38	41	42
A lot like me	62	65	58	57	48	49	44	45

NOTE: AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native. BIE = Bureau of Indian Education. School density indicates the proportion of AI/AN students enrolled. Low density public schools have less than 25 percent AI/AN students; high density public schools have 25 percent or more. All AI/AN students includes all AI/AN students sampled throughout the nation in public, private, BIE, and Department of Defense schools. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2015 National Indian Education Study.

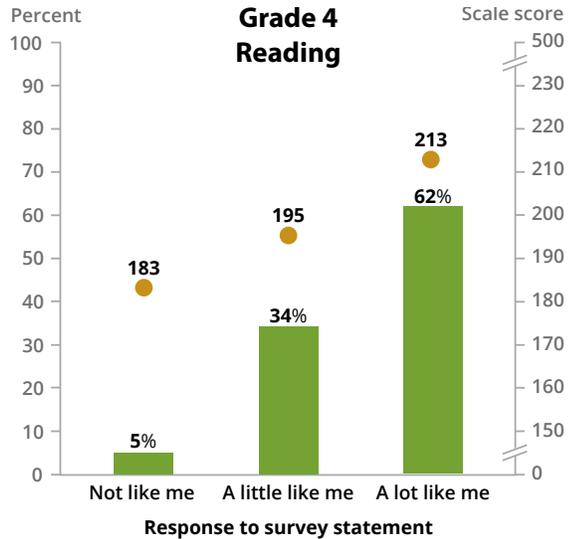
AI/AN fourth-graders who self-reported being the most engaged in school scored higher than their less-engaged peers, following a step-wise pattern (figures 5 and 6). Their scores averaged 213 on the NAEP reading assessment, compared to a score of 195 for students who reported that the description was “a little like me” and a score of 183 for students who reported that the description was “not like me.” The same performance pattern was evident at the other grade/subject combinations as well (figures 7 and 8).

**Figure 5.** Percentages and average scores in NAEP mathematics for fourth-grade AI/AN students who reported on the extent to which survey statements about engagement at school described a person like them: 2015



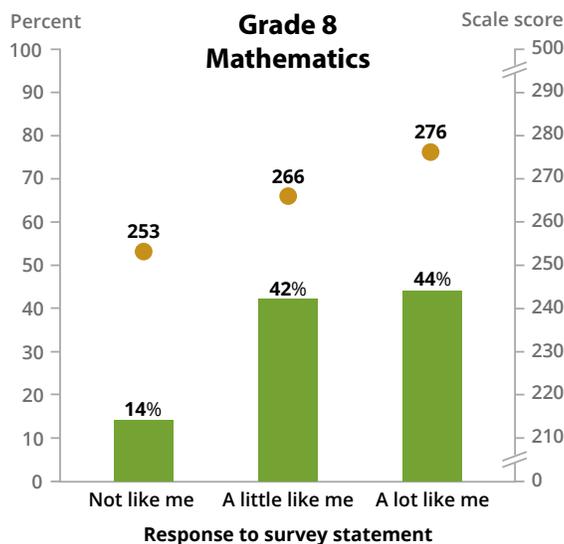
NOTE: AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2015 National Indian Education Study.

**Figure 6.** Percentages and average scores in NAEP reading for fourth-grade AI/AN students who reported on the extent to which survey statements about engagement at school described a person like them: 2015



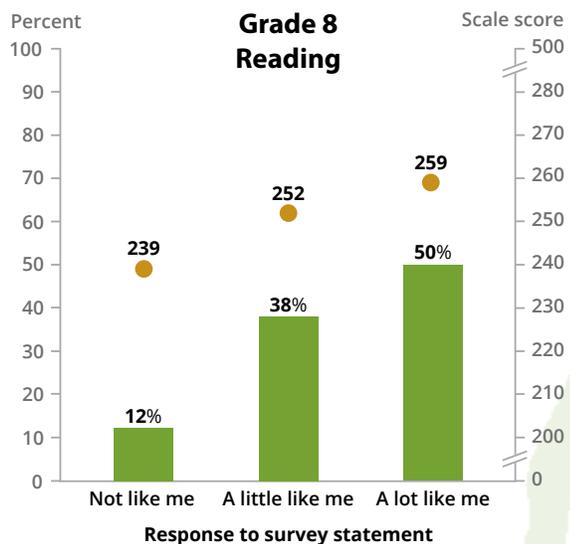
NOTE: AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2015 National Indian Education Study.

**Figure 7.** Percentages and average scores in NAEP mathematics for eighth-grade AI/AN students who reported on the extent to which survey statements about engagement at school described a person like them: 2015



NOTE: AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2015 National Indian Education Study.

**Figure 8.** Percentages and average scores in NAEP reading for eighth-grade AI/AN students who reported on the extent to which survey statements about engagement at school described a person like them: 2015



NOTE: AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2015 National Indian Education Study.

## AI/AN eighth-graders expect their academic efforts to positively affect their future

The third composite, *Perceptions About Effort in School* (grade 8 only), is constructed from four related survey questions. All of the questions point toward the future and invite students to make a connection between their current work and their aspirations.

In the first three questions, eighth-graders indicated the extent to which they agreed that if they put in enough effort,

- they would succeed in school,
- get into college, and
- get a good job.

In the final question making up this composite, students were asked the extent to which

- the things they were learning in school would prepare them for the lives they wanted to lead in the future.

Across school types, representing a wide range of socioeconomic and geographic differences, the percentages reflecting the expectations and aspirations of AI/AN grade 8 students are not measurably different. Approximately 95 percent of these students believe that their schooling will bolster their chances for a successful future (table 9).

**Table 9. Percentage distribution of eighth-grade AI/AN students who reported on the extent to which they agreed with survey statements about effort in school, by school type/density: 2015**

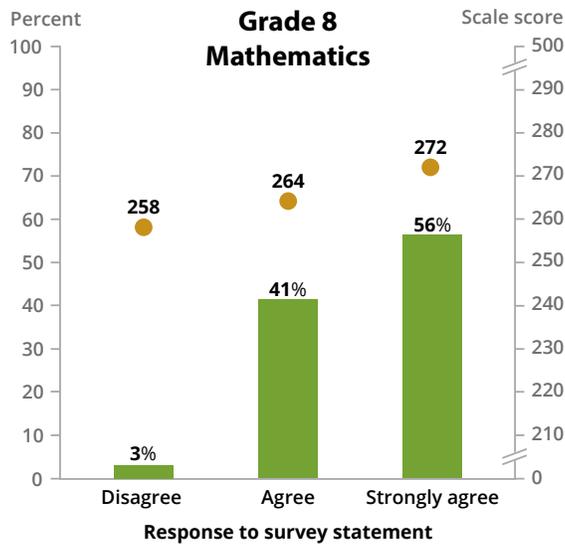
Extent to which the student agreed with survey statements about effort in school	Grade 8			
	All AI/AN students	Low density public schools	High density public schools	BIE schools
Disagree	4	3	4	4
Agree	39	39	39	37
Strongly agree	58	58	57	59

NOTE: AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native. BIE = Bureau of Indian Education. School density indicates the proportion of AI/AN students enrolled. Low density public schools have less than 25 percent AI/AN students; high density public schools have 25 percent or more. All AI/AN students includes all AI/AN students sampled throughout the nation in public, private, BIE, and Department of Defense schools. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2015 National Indian Education Study.

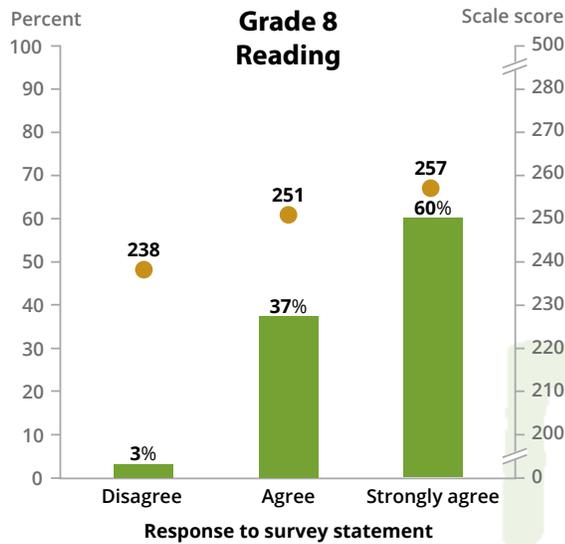
In grade 8 mathematics, AI/AN students in the “strongly agree” category scored higher than the “agree” category (figure 9). Grade 8 AI/AN students who “strongly agree[d]” with the idea that their current academic efforts and the content they were learning would result in successful futures scored higher on the NAEP reading assessment than did their peers who “disagree[d]” that their academic efforts would lead to success in the future (figure 10).

**Figure 9.** Percentages and average scores in NAEP mathematics for eighth-grade AI/AN students who reported on the extent to which they agreed with survey statements about effort in school: 2015



NOTE: AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2015 National Indian Education Study.

**Figure 10.** Percentages and average scores in NAEP reading for eighth-grade AI/AN students who reported on the extent to which they agreed with survey statements about effort in school: 2015



NOTE: AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2015 National Indian Education Study.



## About one-half of AI/AN students reported never being exposed to their Native languages

The fourth composite variable, *Exposure to Native Languages*, is composed of three survey questions that asked AI/AN students how often they are exposed to their AI or AN language(s) via

- members of their family,
- people in their school talking to one another, and
- their attendance in classes in their school taught in their Native languages.

Taking into consideration their responses across all three survey questions, 47 percent of grade 4 AI/AN students and 52 percent of grade 8 AI/AN students indicated that they were “never” exposed to AI or AN languages (table 10). Not surprisingly, students in schools with larger proportions of AI/AN students were more likely to be exposed to Native language(s) than were their peers in schools with smaller proportions of AI/AN students. At both grades, students attending BIE schools were more likely to indicate being exposed to their Native language(s) “sometimes” or “often” compared to their peers attending low density or high density public schools.

**Table 10. Percentage distribution of fourth- and eighth-grade AI/AN students who reported on the frequency of their exposure to Native languages, by grade and school type/density: 2015**

Frequency of student exposure to Native languages	Grade 4				Grade 8			
	All AI/AN students	Low density public schools	High density public schools	BIE schools	All AI/AN students	Low density public schools	High density public schools	BIE schools
Never	47	55	38	10	52	64	40	4
Sometimes	48	43	54	63	44	35	55	68
Often	6	2	8	27	4	1	5	28

NOTE: AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native. BIE = Bureau of Indian Education. School density indicates the proportion of AI/AN students enrolled. Low density public schools have less than 25 percent AI/AN students; high density public schools have 25 percent or more. All AI/AN students includes all AI/AN students sampled throughout the nation in public, private, BIE, and Department of Defense schools. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. For the purposes of analysis, “Once or twice a month” and “Once or twice a week” were collapsed into “Sometimes,” and the option reflecting the schools not offering classes was mapped into the “Never” category.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2015 National Indian Education Study.



## Sixteen percent of AI/AN eighth-graders report having a lot of cultural knowledge

The fifth composite variable, *Cultural Knowledge* (grade 8 only), is made up of three survey questions. Eighth-grade AI/AN students were asked how much they knew about

- their AI or AN history,
- their AI or AN traditions and culture, and
- current issues important to AI or AN people.

Overall, about 40 percent of AI/AN eighth-graders reported having “some” cultural knowledge, with 13 percent reporting they knew “nothing” of their culture or current issues. Again, cultural knowledge was more prevalent at schools with higher percentages of AI/AN students in their populations (table 11). Eighth-graders attending BIE schools were more likely to indicate having “some” or “a lot” of cultural knowledge compared to their peers attending low density or high density public schools.

**Table 11. Percentage distribution of eighth-grade AI/AN students who reported on the amount of their cultural knowledge, by school type/density: 2015**

Amount of student cultural knowledge	Grade 8			
	All AI/AN students	Low density public schools	High density public schools	BIE schools
Nothing	13	18	10	2
A little	31	33	32	15
Some	40	37	40	49
A lot	16	12	17	34

NOTE: AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native. BIE = Bureau of Indian Education. School density indicates the proportion of AI/AN students enrolled. Low density public schools have less than 25 percent AI/AN students; high density public schools have 25 percent or more. All AI/AN students includes all AI/AN students sampled throughout the nation in public, private, BIE, and Department of Defense schools. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2015 National Indian Education Study.



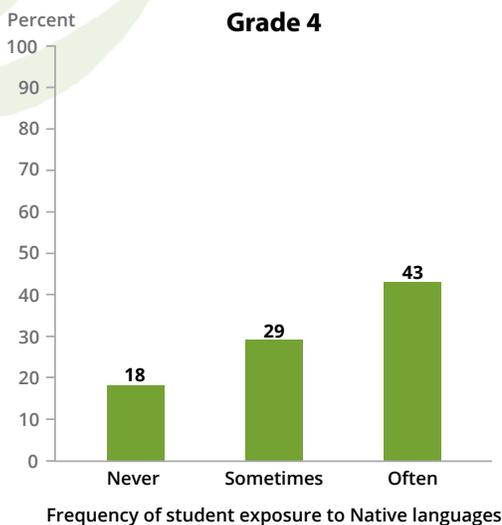
## The interplay between composites

Further analyses of the composites are possible by combining the results from two of them. Selected findings are presented below that suggest some possible avenues for future research.

### GRADE 4

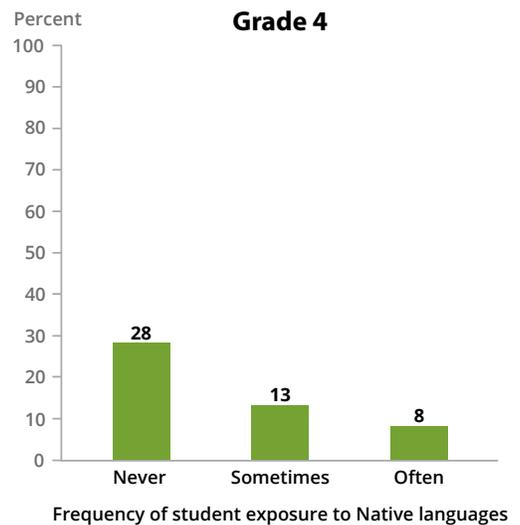
- AI/AN fourth-graders who indicated they were exposed to their Native languages “often” were more likely to express a high level<sup>3</sup> of interest in reading about cultures compared to their peers who said they were exposed to their Native languages to a lesser degree (i.e., “sometimes” or “never”) (figure 11a). For AI/AN students who reported being exposed to Native languages “often,” 43 percent of these students also reported having the highest level of interest in reading about cultures; for students who reported being exposed to Native languages “sometimes,” 29 percent of these students also reported having the highest level of interest in reading about cultures; and for the students who reported being exposed to Native languages “never,” 18 percent of these students also reported having the highest level of interest in reading about cultures.
- Conversely, AI/AN fourth-graders who reported “never” being exposed to their Native languages were more likely to express a low level of interest in reading about cultures (figure 11b).

**Figure 11a.** Percentage of fourth-grade AI/AN students who had the highest level of interest in reading about cultures, by exposure to Native languages: 2015



NOTE: AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2015 National Indian Education Study.

**Figure 11b.** Percentage of fourth-grade AI/AN students who had the lowest level of interest in reading about cultures, by exposure to Native languages: 2015



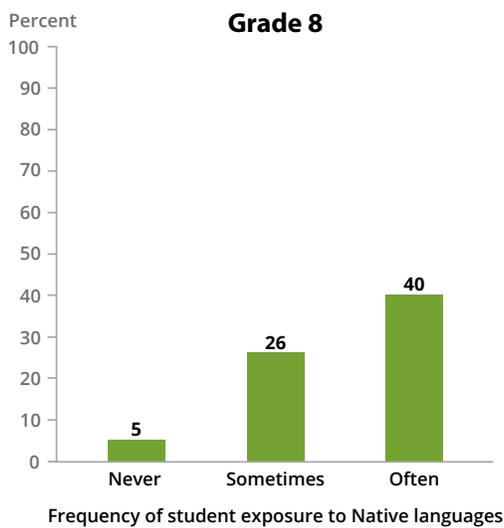
NOTE: AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2015 National Indian Education Study.

<sup>3</sup> Students indicated the array of statements was “a lot like me.”

**GRADE 8**

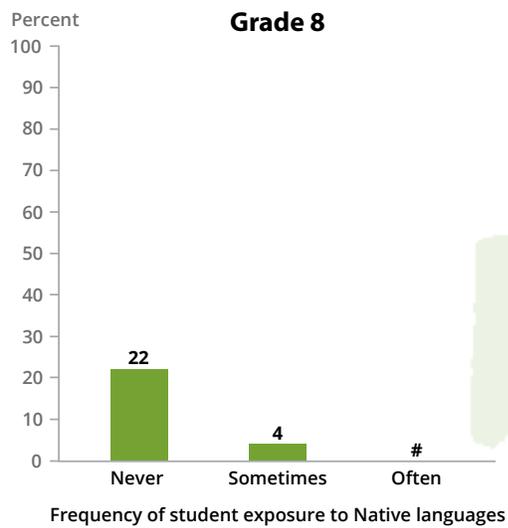
- AI/AN eighth-grade students who said they were exposed to their Native languages “often” were more likely to express a high level of cultural knowledge in comparison with their counterparts who said they were exposed to their Native languages less often (i.e., “sometimes” or “never”) (figure 12a).
- In contrast, AI/AN eighth-graders who indicated they were “never” exposed to their Native languages were more likely to have a low level of cultural knowledge (figure 12b).

**Figure 12a.** Percentage of eighth-grade AI/AN students who had the highest level of cultural knowledge, by exposure to Native languages: 2015



NOTE: AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2015 National Indian Education Study.

**Figure 12b.** Percentage of eighth-grade AI/AN students who had the lowest level of cultural knowledge, by exposure to Native languages: 2015



# Rounds to zero.  
 NOTE: AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2015 National Indian Education Study.



# Supplemental Resources

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# Technical Notes

## Percentiles

Examining performance of students at selected percentiles can indicate when the overall picture for students diverges by lower- or higher-scoring students (table TN-1). A percentile indicates the percentage of students whose scores fell at or below a particular score on the NAEP scale.

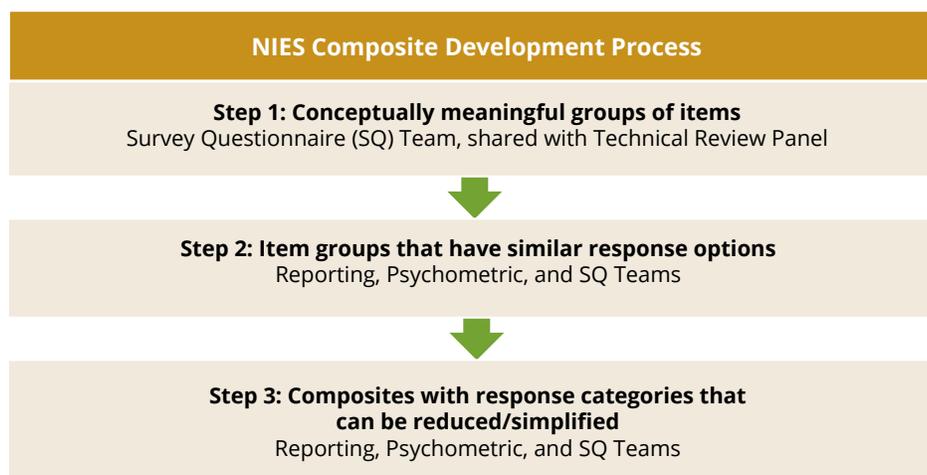
**Table TN-1. Average scores in NAEP mathematics and reading at selected percentiles for fourth- and eighth-grade AI/AN students: 2015**

Grade and subject	25th percentile	75th percentile
Grade 4 mathematics	209	247
Grade 8 mathematics	243	292
Grade 4 reading	181	234
Grade 8 reading	229	278

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2015 National Indian Education Study.

## Composite Variables

The composite variables discussed in this report are made up of multiple conceptually-related questions from the NIES student survey questionnaires. The construction of the NIES composites was guided by a diverse team of experienced AI/AN educators, psychometricians, and experts in survey questionnaire development, psychological statistics, and research methods. The team brought technical/statistical knowledge to the task, as well as direct classroom experience with AI/AN students. The NIES composites were guided by the concept of *meaningful grouping*, i.e., the NIES composites are constructed from a *group* of related survey questions. The NIES composite development process was a lengthy process, involving multiple review stages that worked systematically through the questionnaires making evaluations as outlined in the chart below.



Composite scores were tabulated by assigning a higher numeric value to responses representing a higher frequency or extent (e.g., “almost every day” or “a lot like me”) and a lower numeric value to responses that reflected a lower frequency or extent (e.g., “never” or “not like me”). Individual response values were then added together to get an overall composite value. For example, in the composite *Interest in Reading About Cultures*, student responses were assigned numeric values as follows:

- “This is not like me” = 1
- “This is a little like me” = 2
- “This is a lot like me” = 3

So, if a student responded “This is a lot like me” to all three of the questions that make up this composite, their “sum score” (or accumulated values assigned to their responses) would be 9 (i.e., numeric value of 3 x 3 questions). On the other end of the spectrum, a student who responded “This is not like me” to all three questions would have a sum score of 3 for *Interest in Reading About Cultures* (numeric value of 1 x 3 questions). The chart below shows how students with various sum scores were assigned to the final three overall composite categories (table TN-2). Only those students who responded to all of the questions within the given composite were included in the final analyses. Even so, missing data ranged from only 1 to 4 percent across all subject/grade/composite permutations so that the analyses presented here provide a valid representation of AI/AN student responses.

**Table TN-2. Sum scores for the composite variable *Interest in Reading About Cultures*, by composite category: 2015**

Interest in reading about cultures	
Composite category	Sum score
This is not like me	3
	4
This is a little like me	5
	6
	7
This is a lot like me	8
	9

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2015 National Indian Education Study.

All of the NIES survey questionnaires may be accessed at <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/nies/questionnaire.aspx>.

The exact wording of the survey prompts for each of the composites is outlined on the following pages.

## Interest in Reading About Cultures

Here are some sentences about reading. Fill in **one** oval on each line to show whether the sentence describes a person like you.

- |  | This is<br>not like<br>me. | This is a<br>little like<br>me. | This is a<br>lot like<br>me. |
|--|----------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| a. When my teacher talks about American Indian or Alaska Native history or culture, I try to read more about it. | Ⓐ                          | Ⓑ                               | Ⓒ                            |
| b. I enjoy reading about American Indian or Alaska Native people.  | Ⓐ                          | Ⓑ                               | Ⓒ                            |
| c. I enjoy reading about people who have different traditions and cultures (ways of life, customs) than I have.  | Ⓐ                          | Ⓑ                               | Ⓒ                            |

## Engagement at School

Here are some sentences about your school. Fill in **one** oval on each line to show whether the sentence describes a person like you.

- |   | This is<br>not like<br>me. | This is a<br>little like<br>me. | This is a<br>lot like<br>me. |
|---|----------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| a. I put a lot of effort into my schoolwork.          | Ⓐ                          | Ⓑ                               | Ⓒ                            |
| b. I want to be one of the best students in my class. | Ⓐ                          | Ⓑ                               | Ⓒ                            |
| c. I enjoy being challenged in my classes.            | Ⓐ                          | Ⓑ                               | Ⓒ                            |
| d. I feel that I belong at school.                    | Ⓐ                          | Ⓑ                               | Ⓒ                            |

## Perceptions About Effort in School (grade 8 only)

How much do you agree with each of the following statements? Fill in **one** oval on each line.

- |  | Strongly<br>disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly<br>agree |
|--|----------------------|----------|-------|-------------------|
| a. If I put in enough effort, I will succeed in school.          | Ⓐ                    | Ⓑ        | Ⓒ     | Ⓓ                 |
| b. If I put in enough effort in school, I will get into college. | Ⓐ                    | Ⓑ        | Ⓒ     | Ⓓ                 |
| c. If I put in enough effort in school, I will get a good job.   | Ⓐ                    | Ⓑ        | Ⓒ     | Ⓓ                 |

How much are the things you are learning in school preparing you for the life you want to lead?

- Ⓐ Not at all
- Ⓑ A little
- Ⓒ A fair amount
- Ⓓ Very much

These questions about connections between school and the future were only presented to grade 8 AI/AN students.

### Exposure to Native Languages

How often do members of your family talk to each other in your American Indian or Alaska Native language?

- Ⓐ Never or hardly ever
- Ⓑ Once or twice a month
- Ⓒ Once or twice a week
- Ⓓ Every day or almost every day

How often do people in your school talk to each other in your American Indian or Alaska Native language?

- Ⓐ Never or hardly ever
- Ⓑ Once or twice a month
- Ⓒ Once or twice a week
- Ⓓ Every day or almost every day

How often do you attend classes **in school** that are taught in an American Indian or Alaska Native language?

- Ⓐ My school does not offer classes that are taught in an American Indian or Alaska Native language.
- Ⓑ Never or hardly ever
- Ⓒ Once or twice a month
- Ⓓ Once or twice a week
- Ⓔ Every day or almost every day

For the purposes of analysis, “Once or twice a month” and “Once or twice a week” were collapsed into “Sometimes,” and the option reflecting the schools not offering classes was mapped into the “Never” category.

## Cultural Knowledge (grade 8 only)

How much do you know about each of the following? Fill in **one** oval on each line.

	Nothing	A little	Some	A lot
a. Your American Indian or Alaska Native history	<input type="radio"/> A	<input type="radio"/> B	<input type="radio"/> C	<input type="radio"/> D
b. Your American Indian or Alaska Native traditions and culture (way of life, customs)	<input type="radio"/> A	<input type="radio"/> B	<input type="radio"/> C	<input type="radio"/> D
c. Issues today that are important to American Indian or Alaska Native people	<input type="radio"/> A	<input type="radio"/> B	<input type="radio"/> C	<input type="radio"/> D

While grade 4 students were asked about their knowledge of their tribe or group, they were not asked multiple questions that would enable the construction of a composite.



# Acknowledgments

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) conducted the National Indian Education Study (NIES) for the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Indian Education (OIE). The study was designed in consultation with a Technical Review Panel composed of American Indian and Alaska Native educators and researchers from across the country.

NIES is directed by NCES and carried out by Educational Testing Service, Pearson Educational Measurement, American Institutes for Research, Westat, and Fulcrum. Additional support in the development of this report was provided by CRP, Inc.

This report would not have been possible without the participation of thousands of students, teachers, and principals across the country, and the support of various education agencies, communities, and parents.

## 2015 National Indian Education Study Technical Review Panel

**Doreen E. Brown**

Yup'ik  
Anchorage School District

**Robert B. Cook**

Oglala Sioux Tribe (Lakota)  
Native Alliance Teach for America

**Dr. Steven Andrew Culpepper**

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

**Dr. Susan C. Faircloth, Chair**

Coharie Tribe  
Colorado State University

**Dr. Chris Gordon**

Anishinaabe  
Joseph K. Lumsden Bahweting  
Anishinaabe School

**Dr. Jameson D. Lopez**

Quechan and Cocopah  
University of Arizona

**Jeremy MacDonald**

Chippewa-Cree/Blackfeet  
Box Elder School

**Dr. Hollie J. Mackey**

Northern Cheyenne  
University of Oklahoma

**Jeanette Muskett-Miller**

Navajo  
Central Consolidated School District

**Debora Norris**

Navajo  
Arizona School Facilities Board

**Sedelta Oosahwee**

Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation  
(MHA Nation), and Cherokee  
National Education Association

**Dr. Martin J. Reinhardt**

Anishinaabe Ojibway (Sault Ste. Marie Tribe  
of Chippewa Indians)  
Center for Native American Studies  
Northern Michigan University

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## National Indian Education Study 2015: A Closer Look

May 2019

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Susan Faircloth, as chair, is cited as author on behalf of and representative of the contributions of the entire Technical Review Panel.

### CONTENT CONTACT

James Deaton  
202-245-7140  
[James.Deaton@ed.gov](mailto:James.Deaton@ed.gov)

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