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Majorities of Californians Support Teaching Curriculum on Native Peoples in Schools and Tuition Waivers for College-Bound Native American Students

Broad-based Support for Two Education Policy Proposals Focused on Native Americans

Even as the teaching of race and history has become an increasingly divisive issue nationally, there is near consensus among California voters that schools in the state should be required to adopt and teach curriculum on the history and culture of local Native American tribes. According to a recent University of California (UC) Berkeley IGS Poll, four in five voters (80 percent) favor this requirement, while just 11 percent are opposed. Supermajorities across all major regions of the state, as well as all age, income, and race/ethnicity subgroups back the requirement.

The poll also finds greater than two-to-one support for a legislative proposal to provide tuition waivers to Native American residents of California who are admitted into the state's public colleges and universities. Statewide, 63 percent of voters favor this proposal, while 27 percent are opposed. Majorities across all major regions, age, income, and racial and ethnic subgroups favor the proposal.

Both policy questions were included in the August 2023 statewide Berkeley IGS Poll as part of a collaboration with California Native Vote Project (CNVP) and UC Berkeley's Othering and Belonging Institute (OBI). They are part of an effort to understand Californians' views on how government and public education are supporting inclusion, opportunity, and well-being of Native Americans – matters that are often left out of public opinion research.

“The poll's findings are evidence for policymakers that the overwhelming majority of their constituents support teaching about local California Tribes in schools. Raising the consciousness of students about Native peoples is not only good for Native students – it's good for *all* students,” said California Native Vote Project's Executive Director, Chrissie Castro (Diné and Chicana).

Teaching Native History and Culture in Schools

When asked, “Would you support or oppose creating a requirement that California schools adopt and teach curriculum on the history and culture of local Native American tribes?,” 80 percent of respondents said they would support the proposal, of whom 47 percent said, “support strongly.” Support includes 86 percent of Black respondents, 81 percent of Latinxs, 81 percent of whites, and 73 percent of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. Majority support also cuts across partisan identities, with 91 percent of self-identified Democratic voters, 64 percent of Republicans, and 77 percent of independents or other voters backing the requirement.

To require schools to adopt and teach about local Native peoples’ history and culture would build upon legislation passed in 2022. In that year, Governor Gavin Newsom signed AB 1703, the California Indian Education Act, sponsored by Assemblymember James C. Ramos (a Serrano/Cahuilla tribal member). The law “*encourages*” local educational agencies and charter schools to form California Indian Education Task Forces; to begin developing curricular materials on the history, culture, and government of local tribes; and to report progress to the California Department of Education.

While a significant step, AB 1703 stops short of *requiring* that these actions be taken, meaning that uptake is spotty across the state. In some instances, groundbreaking partnerships have developed, such as in the case of the [Palm Springs Unified School District \(PSUSD\) and the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians](#). But without further legislative action, such examples are likely to remain the exception rather than the rule due to AB 1703’s limited advisory nature.

“Palm Springs Unified recognizes the importance of working hand-in-hand with the original stewards of the land – the Agua Caliente Band of Indians. We have successfully partnered with tribal officials to create curricula for our 3rd, 8th, and 11th grade students,” explained Dr. Nicole Crawford, Diversity and Racial Equity Coordinator at PSUSD. “It is important to capture the accurate and authentic history of the tribe, and for schools across our district to honor the tribe and its rich history and present. Other school districts can and should establish relationships with their local tribes to ensure indigenous voices are heard and represented in their schools’ curricula.”

Tuition Waivers for Native American Students

California voters also support ensuring that Native students have access to colleges and universities. Poll respondents were asked whether legislation should be passed “to provide tuition waivers for all American Indian/Alaskan Native residents of California who are admitted into its public colleges and universities.” Overall, 63 percent of California voters said that they would support this proposal, 37 percent “strongly.”

Once again, Black Californians gave the broadest endorsement, with 72 percent supporting. Majorities across all age, income, and race/ethnicity subgroups back the proposal. However, on this question, there was a large gulf in support between Democratic and Republican voters, with 80 percent of self-described Democrats in support, compared to 37 percent of Republicans. Among independent or other party identifiers, a 59 percent majority supports the proposal.

American Indian/Alaska Natives account for 3.6 percent of the population of the state. But as of Fall 2022 (the most recent data available), American Indian and Alaska Native students are just 0.5 percent of students enrolled in the UC system and 0.2 percent of students across the California State University (CSU) system.

Were legislation like this to pass, it would fill holes in current programs such as the University of California system’s Native American Opportunity Plan and the CA Promise Programs. Although both of these are meant to bolster opportunities for Native American students and help increase Native student enrollment across the UC, CSU, and community college systems, the programs contain built-in exclusions. For example, the Native American Opportunity Plan requires that student recipients be enrolled in a federally recognized Native American, American Indian, or Alaska Native tribe, leaving out members of more than 200 tribes that are not federally recognized.

“The State of California owes California tribal members policies to compliment their apology to California tribes – including direct reparations to ensure Native people thrive,” commented Joey Williams, Senior Program Manager at the California Endowment, and member of the Nuwa (Kawaiisu) people of the Kern Valley Indian Community. “Mandating curricula on California Indian history and culture is one way to teach our true history and ensure that California Tribes and American Indian and Alaska Native people are not erased but highlighted as people of the present and future. College tuition is another way to give AIAN people in California an opportunity to improve their quality of life and continue to work for sovereignty and self-determination.”

About the Survey

The findings in this report are based on a Berkeley IGS Poll conducted August 24-29, 2023 among 6,030 California registered voters. The poll was administered online by distributing email invitations to stratified random samples of the state’s registered voters. More information about the Berkeley IGS Poll and its survey methodology can be found by visiting its web site at www.igs.berkeley.edu/research/berkeley-igs-poll.

About the Institute of Governmental Studies

The Institute of Governmental Studies (IGS) is an interdisciplinary organized research unit that pursues a vigorous program of research, education, publication, and public service. A component of the University of California system’s flagship Berkeley campus, IGS is the oldest organized research unit in the UC system and the oldest public policy research center in the state. IGS’s co-directors are Professor Eric Schickler and Associate Professor Cristina Mora.

IGS conducts periodic surveys of public opinion in California on matters of politics and public policy through its *Berkeley IGS Poll*. The poll seeks to provide a broad measure of contemporary public opinion and generate data for subsequent scholarly analysis. The director of the *Berkeley IGS Poll* is Mark DiCamillo. For a complete listing of the press releases and reports issued by the *Berkeley IGS Poll* in recent years go to <https://www.igs.berkeley.edu/research/berkeley-igs-poll>.