

Utah failing to educate Indian kids, report says

By [Stephen Speckman](#)

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Utah is lagging behind several other states in its efforts to educate American Indians, according to a report from the Utah American Indian/Alaska Native Education State Plan Advisory Committee.

The advisory committee's study concluded that Utah is behind Idaho, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Montana and Minnesota, which have all mandated that their education systems change their social studies core curriculum and counseling programs.

Forrest Cuch, director of the state Division of Indian Affairs, will present the plan Wednesday to the legislative education interim committee. A group of 65 tribal leaders, tribal educators, state and federal education officials compiled the document.

"They don't know how to educate Indian children," Cuch said of Utah's schools. "We have generally failed our kids over the past 50 years."

One goal, Cuch said, is to integrate more education that includes American Indian history and a sensitivity to Indian culture.

Cuch met Friday with Richard Kendell, deputy to Gov. Mike Leavitt for higher education, public education and economic development.

"I agree that Native American kids are not being well served," Kendell said. "They drop out in disproportionate numbers, and their achievement levels in school are not very good."

Cuch gave Kendell a copy of the report and asked for the governor's assistance with funding education programs that target Indian students. "You've got to address their needs," Kendell added. "We'll be making a budget come December, and we'll give consideration to this request as well as a bunch of others."

The plan finds that "Indian people are still suffering from and have not healed from the North American conquest, nor the violent struggle to settle Utah, predominantly by members of the LDS Mormon faith."

In order to educate Utah's American Indian children, it's important for those youths to understand their past, "begin to heal" and start believing in themselves, according to the report.

Another finding is that Utah's tribal communities continue to blame failed economic and educational systems on or near reservations for many problems within tribes. But the plan says the blame game between schools, American Indian parents and their children needs to stop.

"We have learned that for American Indians in the state of Utah," the plan says, "social dysfunctions are real and have a major impact on education and what happens in schools."

Among possible solutions, it says some tribes, which have their own sovereign rights, are willing to enter into agreements with the government to clarify expectations between the state, tribes and school districts.

Cuch said that Utah's failings have meant that American Indian children are falling through the cracks in greater numbers. They're dropping out of school and turning to self-destructive behaviors that involve drugs and alcohol at an alarming rate, he said.

"We've got to sit down and solve this problem," Cuch said. "It's costing all of us taxpayers."

In rural school systems in particular, Indian youths do not see a nurturing attitude.

The report says, "American Indian students in the state of Utah are intelligent and just as capable as any other student."

It adds, however, that many American Indian children enter school lacking English proficiency.

The report goes on to say a lack of "accurate and culturally relevant curriculum" perpetuates stereotypes and contributes to low self-esteem among Indian students. Administrators, counselors and teachers, the group said, should have to demonstrate cultural competency related to American Indians as a graduation requirement.

Utah slammed on Indian education

Panel says state lags behind others, must make changes
Deseret Morning News (Monday, September 15, 2003)

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