

# Carol Juneau Presentation

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Website for Report – “Striving to Achieve: Helping Native Students Succeed”

[www.ncsl.org/print/statetribe/NAEdSummit907.pdf](http://www.ncsl.org/print/statetribe/NAEdSummit907.pdf)

Information on Indian Education for All as well as reports and data on Indian Education in Montana can be found at

<http://opi.mt.gov/Programs/IndianEd/Index.html>

### *“Education: The Best Thing We can do for Our children”*

*Graduating from high school is essential for every American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian student. Policies at all levels should reflect our expectation that every student will graduate with the skills necessary for success. When Indian students succeed, our families succeed, and our tribal communities are strengthened.*

Good Morning. It is great to be a part of this Forum on Dropout Prevention This is important work that you do and thank you for letting me be a part.

Today I will focus on the issue of the importance of policy in providing educational services to American Indian, Alaska Native students.

I am currently a State Senator in Montana and am finishing my legislative career this year. I served 8 years in the House and 4 years in the Senate. In these 12 years, I have always had the education of Indian children as one of my top priorities.

Let me tell you a little about myself. I was born and raised on the Fort Berthold Reservation in North Dakota, but have lived most my adult life in Browning, which is on the Blackfeet Reservation in

Montana. I was in California on relocation for a number of years in the 1960's. Some of you might be old enough to remember the relocation era of the 50's and 60's - it was an interesting time and one of the reasons for the large urban Indian population in our major urban centers.

The BIA put us in hotels for temporary housing until we got an apartment and gave us what was called our "subsistence" check of \$35.00 each week. We would take that \$35.00 - head to San Francisco and blow most of it on the weekend and barely make it through the week.

I married a Blackfeet guy – so that is why I ended up in Browning Montana, which is the center of the Blackfeet Reservation.

I come from two cultures – one set of my grandparents were Mandan and Hidatsa. Their names were Old Dog and Many Dances. My other set of grandparents were Norwegian– named Bartell and Severson. So, like many Indian people today, I have a heritage that is mixed....

Then I married Stan Juneau who is Blackfeet from his father and mother, Haida-tingit from his maternal grandmother, Oneida from his paternal grandmother, and a little English and French as well. So, my children and grandchildren have all kinds of histories and stories they can relate to. In fact, their family history makes for a good math problem in teaching fractions – trying to figure out what their degree of Indian blood is in each of their tribes. This can also be tied to tribal government lessons on enrollment.

I started my educational career at a tribal alternative school called the Blackfeet Community Free School in Browning in 1974...fresh from college. We were in this old, old building that had 3 floors - ( it used to be the old commodity house). We centered a lot of our classroom time around art, which the students seemed to really enjoy. We had some local artists as teachers who were great with the students! I didn't know too much about educating students back then, but the need to provide alternative educational services to students who had left the traditional school has stayed with me to this day; it is a time I look back to with fond memories.

I was always a good student in school. In fact I come from a family of 10 and we all were pretty good students I think. When you get older you reflect back on why this happened. Why didn't we drop out – what made us stay in school? We had a big family and the younger ones of us were raised by only by our mother while living on public support.

I don't think dropping out was an option.

I credit my mother with lots of it. She raised a whole big bunch of us and did a pretty good job. I think it was that she was there every day; she was the consistent person in our life, something that kids need.

I really do believe that Education is the best thing we can do for our children. In fact, I believe that education is the best thing we can do for our tribal communities, whether they be on or off reservation.

As I thought of my presentation, I thought it might be good to start with a few questions about Native American kids.

- How many of you know of a student who may be having trouble in school today?
- A student who missed some classes recently?
- A student who doesn't like school?
- A student who was suspended or expelled?
- A student who lives with her single mother?
- A student who is struggling with drug and alcohol issues or has a family struggling with drug or alcohol issues?
- A student who can't read well?
- A student who dropped out of school?
- A student who lives in poverty?
- A student who is pregnant or perhaps a young parent already?

I think we all know many of these students. What makes it important to me and to all of us is that these students are our relatives, they are our children, our grandchildren, our nieces, our nephews, our cousins. *(let me see your hands if you were thinking about one of your relatives when I was reading this list?)* For many of us it is a family issue – we know it –we live it.

These are the Indian children who we must help be successful in school. Our educational systems cannot fail so many of our students any longer – we cannot wait – ----we need to close this achievement gap, stop this high dropout rate, and give our children and grandchildren and our future generations the opportunities that a quality education will bring to them.

We often reflect back on the Meriam Report of 1928 and quote the Kennedy Subcommittee Report of 1969 when we want to talk about the history of Indian Education.. let me share with you a message from one of our Presidents as he gave his message to congress on the Goals and Programs for American Indians..He said

*There are 600,000 Indians in American today...the most striking fact about the American Indians today is their tragic plight.. the unemployment rate among Indians is nearly 40%...Fifty percent of school children, double the national average, dropout before completing high school.. Indian literacy rates are among the lowest in the nation, the rates of sickness and poverty are among the highest.*

*He ended with... “No enlightened Nation, no responsible government, no progressive people can sit idly by and permit this shocking situation to continue.”*

*This was said 41 years ago by President Johnson.....we haven't come too far in these 41 years, have we ---as a enlightened nation, as a responsible government or as a progressive people when we still have a 50% high school completion rate of American Indian students.*

We must help make the change that is needed in state policy, national policy, tribal policy and school board policy. Without policy at all these levels and adequate resources to support these policies, we cannot progress. We can talk about the issues and lack of support for students, but until we impact the decision makers, it will always be a struggle. Money does matter in providing the educational opportunities for Indian children and we must work to get this money allocated.

We must tell our story of the challenges and issues facing Native children in our schools. We must remember that many of these policy makers in our states, who we are trying to influence, do not know these issues as many have few or perhaps no Indian children in the schools they represent and we have to provide them with sound factual data and strategies that they can support. We have to make Indian students “visible”

I have found that in order for things to happen, we have to have “friends” sitting in the decision making seats whether it be local, state or federal seats. These people can be Indian or not, but they have to be strong advocates for Indian education and their voices need to be heard.

We can't do this by ourselves. We do not have enough political power on our own. We have to reach out to many groups who will stand with us on our issues... It isn't enough to have Indians in these seats – In fact, they may not be the best advocates as some may not be familiar the issues. We have to have knowledgeable, passionate advocates!

So – I encourage you to become those advocates –

When you get an opportunity to speak up – do so. Ask your friends to speak up, sit up in front – make yourself visible, show up! go to the meetings, and keep going back. We are easily forgotten when it comes time to allocate the money or set the policy, so don't let them forget you.

As an example---the Federal Government is in the process of reauthorizing the Elementary and secondary Education Act – this was called No Child Left Behind previously. This is the most important piece of federal legislation impacting Indian children and provides many services such as Title I, Title VII, Impact Aid.... Now is the time to tell your congressional delegation what you think about it. – what works that should continue, what should be changed, what new programs should be considered. In fact, President Obama and Secretary Duncan have developed a “Blue Print for Reform” that outlines their plan for reauthorization.. This is available on line. Take some time to review this. Let's get it right in the reauthorization process – let's not wait to react after it is passed.

We have new leadership in D. C. This new leadership will influence educational policy for some time to come with a new Elementary and Secondary Education Act and national policy.

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan made the following statement:

*"Whether it's fighting poverty, strengthening the economy or promoting opportunity, education is the common thread,"..... "It is the civil rights issue of our generation and it is the one sure path to a more equal, fair and just society...."*

I certainly agree that education is a path that will create a more just society for our Indian communities. Education was called the Great Equalizer by Horace Mann. It does provide opportunities to move out of poverty, it does provide opportunities to build our communities to make them safer for our families - we should expect this for our Indian children.

If our civil rights in education were fair and just, we should expect that our schools are safe and welcoming for our children, that they are equipped with great teachers, good facilities, and excellent resources and that we celebrate the graduation of our Indian students with the same equity as their non-Indian peers every spring – this is not the case.

We have seen lots of change in education in the past decade under No Child Left Behind, now we see a new administration with changes looming ahead...

One such effort that we need to pay attention to that will impact every classroom is the Common Core Standards. These are being driven by the National Governor's Association and the Chief School Officers Organization as well as Secretary Duncan. All but two states have signed on and probably will adopt these common standards within the next few months. One of the concerns driving these standards was the need to be globally competitive... These standards are quite intensive and look more like curriculum than standards. There is probably some good and some bad with these. I have some concerns that these standards may further expand the achievement gap as they put additional demands for achievement on our students and teachers. We will need to make sure someone is monitoring this as they move forward.

Sometimes, things that sound good that we all rally around may not be that helpful. We have worked towards high expectations for students and while this is a good philosophy, we have watched schools adding additional credits for graduation in response to high expectations. When I went to high school it was 16 credits; now, I think it is around 24 or more for some high schools. I am not certain if more credits translate into quality. I do think it has added to the high school dropout rate. If we have a student who is struggling with getting two years of math, now they need 3 or 4 years... Or, when a student fails freshman English and many do, they have to double up in the sophomore year to try to catch up. I've seen students taking 3 English classes at the same time - this is a good recipe for failure! But, we continue to do this to our kids.

If we want our basketball team to win, we don't make the basketball goal any higher, if we want the football team to win, we don't make the field longer. We provide good coaches, good equipment, and have lots and lots of practice to build a winning team. This strategy might be something we should extend to our academic programs.

As I said, Money does matter – it takes money to do the work necessary and I have found that money is the bottom line many times and often have heard the excuse “budgets are tight – there is no money.” Well, if you think about it, most schools are funded by their states and the federal government based on enrollments. If you lose kids, you lose money. If you keep kids in school, you keep money.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, we spent about \$9,391 per student in 2005-06. I think the amount per student is higher in rural schools and Indian communities that receive more federal funding. Let's use \$10,000 per student...

If a school has 50 kids drop out of school each year, this means about \$500,000 loss each year. If that school could keep 25 of these kids from dropping out that means they would have \$250,000 more to provide the services those 25 kids might need to stay in school. I know it is a little more complicated than this, but I figure if we can keep kids in school, it should translate into more money for our schools and in the long run, be better for the students and our community.

In my role these past 12 years, I have been involved in state level policy. In this capacity I serve with a group called the National Caucus of Native American State Legislators. There are about 78 Indian State Legislators from 16 states and a number of us get together and work on common interests. One of these interests is education. I am currently the Chair of the Education Committee. Our Caucus recently produced a report called “Striving to Achieve: Helping Native American Students Succeed.”

We had an excellent researcher who worked with our Caucus, named Christopher Lohse – some of you may have had an opportunity to hear some of his presentations – he is one of only a few people I know who can make statistics and data exciting. For those of you who struggled through

math classes and statistics class, Chris would make a believer out of you. If you ever want someone to help you put together an excellent presentation on achievement issues, the first person I would recommend would be Chris.

Anyway, I want to share some of the data that Chris put together for our Caucus as well as some of the policy recommendations:

(all the slides follow)

Let me share some of the exciting work being done in Montana....

- In Montana, we now have 9 American Indians serving in the Montana Legislature---3 in the Senate and 6 in the House ... There is equity in the number of Indian Legislators in the Montana Legislature.
- We now have two Indians serving on the Montana Board of Public Education that oversees the K-12 School Systems in the state.
- We have an Indian serving on the Montana Board of Regents.
- The state provides \$3,000 per what we call a non-beneficiary student to our 7 tribal colleges. A non-beneficiary student is those who do not qualify for the federal tribal college assistance act.

- In fact, in Montana we have an Indian woman who is the Superintendent of Public Instruction for the state and an Indian woman who is the Director of the Department of Public Health and Human Services.

We have been hard at work implementing what we call “Indian Education for All”... Our state Constitution includes the following language:

“The State recognizes the distinct and unique cultural heritage of the American Indian and is committed in its educational goals to the preservation of their cultural integrity.”

It took many years and lots of work for anything really to happen.. In fact, we went to court on this issue and won! The court decision which was part of the total school funding lawsuit was especially strong in relation to this constitutional provision.

Funding was finally made available in 2005 for schools and for curriculum work. Indian Education for all is for all students in Montana, it is not just for Indian students. It is not a standalone curriculum, but is integrated across the curriculum with content on American Indians and Montana Indians – their history, culture, and contributions. I do believe that there is a strong connection to Indian student achievement and Indian Education for all, when Indian students see themselves reflected in the school and the curriculum, I do believe they are more likely to feel a connection to that school and do better.

In addition, since 2005, we have state funding of \$200.00 per Indian student in every public school in Montana that is designed to be used for closing the achievement gap for American Indian Students.

We have an Indian Education Division within the State Office of Public Instruction with 8 staff that oversees the Indian Education for All programs and also works on the achievement of American Indian students. They develop curriculum, provide professional development models, and help the schools fulfill the promise of our constitution.

#### Current funding

Indian Education for All:

\$2.9 million per year ---- \$20.40 per student x 142,000 all students

Closing the Achievement Gap for American Indian Students:

\$3.3 million per year - \$200 x 16,567 Indians

Montana also has implemented a student information system for all students – it is called “Achievement in Montana “ or AIM.

This system will streamline the reporting of student-related data from school districts to the Office of Public Instruction, including enrollment, demographic data, eligibility for state and federal education programs, registration for the statewide assessments, and special education planning and reporting.

*I have great hopes that things will get better for our students—*

*In order for you to do your work, you need to be able to depend on your leadership to support you and to provide resources. If you don't have that leadership now, we have to create the leadership that will do so. Let's elect tribal leaders who will have education as a priority, let's elect state legislators who will be strong advocates and vote for the funding needed, let's elect members of congress who will do the right thing for education... Let's elect school board members who will keep our kids in school.*

*I would like to again share President Johnson's statement of 41 years ago and hope that you will take this home with you as you continue your important work.*

*“No enlightened Nation, no responsible government, no progressive people can sit idly by and permit this shocking situation to continue.”*

*Thank you so much for letting me speak, you do good work ---you are needed.*