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Cultivated Ground:

Effective Teaching Practices for Native Students
in a Public High School

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Effective Teaching Practices for Native Students in a Public High School

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About the Researchers

Both researchers were, at the time of this project, Masters of Education candidates at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

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Anna was born and raised in the Mohawk Valley, a rural area of Upstate New York. She is a member of the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe. After attending her local public high school, she attended Dartmouth College and earned her B.A. in Psychology and Native American Studies. Anna is graduating HGSE with an M.Ed in Human Development and Psychology and hopes to pursue her Psy.D. in the future. Niá:wen!

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Brittany is from a small town in southeastern Massachusetts, where she has lived since she was three years old. She attended the local regional public high school. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Suffolk University in 2012. She went on to attend the Harvard Graduate School of Education and receive her Master's in Education in 2013 with the purpose of creating more equitable education for all students. She is now attending law school at the Syracuse University College of Law.

ABSTRACT

In the spring of 2013, the authors participated in a class at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education that connects students - who act as consultants - to native communities who want students to work on specific projects. Dr. Dawn Mackety of the National Indian Education Association submitted a project request to this class. This project was to assess the effective teaching practices being used in one or more superiorly performing United States public high schools that had a high number of American Indian/Alaskan Native students. Research on effective teaching practices for American Indian/Alaskan Native students has occurred primarily in tribally owned or charter schools and have identified culturally based education and language-based curriculum as effective for native students. In a similar vein, research in these schools and public schools has also identified culturally responsive teaching as effective for this population as well. We identified schools using testing data and demographic and socioeconomic variables; we only considered schools whose native students performed very well on state assessments. As part of the literature review, we conducted a phone interview with administrators, teachers and students at a public high school in Alaska. Using a case study research design, we visited a public high school in southern North Carolina. We interviewed administrators, staff, teachers, and students, conducted classroom observations, and visited the Indian Education Resource Center. A number of factors were cited by members of the school community as essential to the academic success of the native students; many of these fit under the arc of culturally responsive teaching. This research confirms the data in the literature that the inclusion of cultural curriculum is an element that is associated with positive academic outcomes for American Indian/Alaskan Native students.

Introduction

Project Request

This project is the result of a research proposal prepared for the Harvard University Native American Program and the Native American Nation Building Course by Dr. Dawn Mackety, Director of Research, Data, and Policy at the National Indian Education Association (National Indian Education Association, 2013). The research proposal serves as an expansion upon previous work creating a compilation of promising teaching practices for American Indian/Alaskan Native students done by Dr. Mackety and other researchers (The Regional Educational Laboratory, 2011). This project also follows the work of previous graduate students who did a case study of best practices in charter schools serving American Indian/Alaskan Native students (Ewing & Ferrick, 2012).

Client: National Indian Education Association

This research took place in accordance with the NIEA's mission to advance excellence for Native students utilizing advocacy, research, and capacity-building. The NIEA is a non-profit organization that strives to fill the gaps for the 90% of Native students going to school outside the umbrella of the Bureau of Indian Education. The NIEA's mission is to "advance comprehensive educational opportunities for American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians throughout the United States," (National Indian Education Association, 2013).

Context

Dr. Mackety outlined the need for further study into the effective teaching practices taking place in public schools that are serving AI/AN students. Native students currently represent approximately .7% of the K-12th grade public school population, some 378,000

students during the 2010-2011 school years (National Indian Education Association, 2013). This figure is likely underestimated; students of more than one race are identified as multiracial and only students that identify as AI/AN *alone* are marked as AI/AN, beginning in 2006-2007 (National Indian Education Association, 2013).

AI/AN students have disproportionate rates of academic failure. According to the 2009 National Status Dropout Rate data, Native dropout rates between the ages of 16-24 are at 15% compared to the general population's dropout rate of 8% (National Indian Education Association, 2013). Graduation rates further illustrate this achievement gap, as AI/AN students from ages 16-24 graduate at a rate of 84% compared to 90% of all students (National Indian Education Association, 2013). The number of AI/AN students currently enrolled in public school and the disproportionate number of AI/AN students struggling academically illustrate the need for further research and action.

Thus, Dr. Mackety's requested a project "to identify promising practices for the effective teaching of Native students, and provide case study examples of how they are being used successfully in classrooms," (Mackety, personal communication, 2012). In her project request, Dr. Mackety noted that the research on the effective teaching of native students focuses on Culturally Based Education (CBE) as a means of fostering academic success (Mackety, personal communication, 2012). CBE has been found most often in tribally owned charter schools serving native students (Ewing & Ferrick, 2012). The literature is silent on whether CBE exists within public schools. Additionally, current literature has a dearth of recommendations for teachers working with native students on best pedagogical strategies (Demmert, 2001). We therefore asked the following research question; what are the effective teaching practices being utilized in public schools that are successfully serving their native students?

Effective Teaching Practices

American Indian/Alaska Native students have a complex history with the United States' public school system. American Indian students still maintain a presence in America's public schools. In fact, the majority of Native American youth still attend public schools, with only 49,152 students attending tribally owned charter schools (National Indian Education Association, 2013). In addition, 31% of these AI/AN students attended a public school that was ranked as high-poverty, compared to 6% of white students in 2010-2011 (National Indian Education Association, 2013). In the past decade, the federal government has become increasingly aware of this achievement and opportunity gap for AI/AN students in public schools.

In 2001, the No Child Left Behind initiative was incorporated into the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). This included a provision called Title VII. Essentially, Title VII set out to narrow the achievement gap between American Indian/Alaska Native/Hawaiian students and recognize the "special educational and culturally related academic needs of Indian students," (20 U.S.C. § 7402(a)). Title VII provided federal financial support to districts, schools funded under the Bureau of Indian Education, and other tribally owned schools. Under Title VII, schools receiving funding has to incorporate culturally relevant education into their curriculum (20 U.S.C. § 7402(a)). Most public schools serving native students receive Title VII funding, as most public schools receive federal funding (Tyack & Cuban, 1997). However, the reality remains that 40% of Native students during the 2008-09 school year attended a school that did not meet AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) standards laid out under the 2001 reauthorization of ESEA, compared to 33% of White students (National Indian Education Association, 2013).

The most recent research on AI/AN education has revolved around culturally based education (CBE). Culturally based education is strongly advocated by researchers studying the

school achievement of native students; they have found a connection between low achievement and low cultural relevance for native students (Demmert, 2001). This has also been hypothesized and studied for non-white students in general with similar results (Warikoo & Carter, 2009; Hilliard, 2003). Agbo (2001) argues that culturally based education is not enough, and that in order for native students to achieve academically, educators need to focus on where the curriculum comes to life, namely in the classroom. This is especially relevant in public school classrooms, in which only 16% of teachers interacting with AI/AN youth are native themselves (National Indian Education Association, 2013). Cultural mismatch between teachers and students may contribute to academic underperformance of non-white students (Warikoo & Carter, 2009). Culture in education is thus seen as an important factor in the academic success of native students, as their own subgroup and as part of the larger group of non-white students in the United States. The exact nature of this relationship remains unclear for both groups (Lipka, 2002).

The effectiveness of these measures was also outlined in a case study project highlighting charter schools serving AI/AN students (Ewing & Ferrick, 2012). These models for native student education are particularly pertinent to tribally owned, private, or charter schools that are characterized by relative flexibility, autonomy, and cultural homogeneity in their schools. This allows them to base their curriculum in both culture and language. A significant portion of the research done specifically with native students has been devoted to the use of indigenous languages in the classroom. There is ample evidence that bilingual or immersion language education is beneficial in public school settings (Demmert, 2001). Teaching indigenous language in school is one part of the CBE paradigm. Research has highlighted the importance of language immersion education as well as culture-based curriculum for this population (Lipka,

2002; Yazzie; 1999, Demmert, 2001; & Redmond & Wiethaus, 2009). The research on native students and educational outcomes and performance has found CBE and language-based practices to be effective (Demmert, 2001; Lipka, 2002). There remains, however, a gap in knowledge about the effective teaching practices for native students within public schools.

Some effective teaching practices that have been identified for AI/AN students in schooling generally thus far are; small group settings and a collaborative environment, curriculum relevancy, high expectations and high standards, and respect for students' backgrounds. Lippit (1993) highlighted the Santa Fe Indian School and found that small-group learning was an important inclusion in the classroom. In a survey of South Dakota teachers, numerous responded that they found "one-on-one and small group settings" as effective means of interaction with their Native students (Sorkness & Kelting-Gibson, 2006, p. 10). Sorkness & Kelting-Gibson (2006) found that their survey respondents noted the importance of relating in-class learning to the real world, finding support for the CRS position that teachers should provide learning that is applicable to the community context of students (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). High expectations and high standards for student success are recurring themes in the literature on student success in general, and especially for non-white students in the United States (Warikoo & Carter, 2009; Gay, 2013; Rist, 1970; Anyon, 1980). In reporting on the Native American Magnet School in Buffalo, NY, Hollowell & Jeffries (2004) found that teachers saw holding high expectations as key to their native students' success. Finally, teachers and students alike reported that having respect for native students and their cultures constitute effective teaching for this population (Prater, G., & et al, 1995; Sorkness & Kelting-Gibson, 2006).

These effective teaching practices fit well within the culturally responsive schooling model as described by Castagno and Brayboy (2008). This model requires "a shift in teaching

methods, curricular materials, teacher dispositions, and school-community relations,” (p. 2). The model requires teachers to act as mediators for students by navigating public school education by teaching in ways that make sense to students and utilizing the cultural backgrounds of students to inform curriculum and pedagogy (Castagno and Brayboy, 2008). “Being culturally responsive is more than being respectful, empathetic, or sensitive. Accompanying actions, such as having high expectations for students and ensuring that these expectations are realized, are what make a difference (Gay, 2000),” (Klump and McNeir, 2005, p. 3). In culturally responsive teaching, teachers are positioned as dynamic and active participants who take on the role of learner and advocate for their students. The AI/AN culturally responsive model also advocates the presence of native teachers within the school, and emphasizes the critical need for community, parental, and tribal buy-in (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009).

There is strong evidence that minorities in public school classrooms face discrimination, racism, low expectations, and teacher bias, which may negatively impact their academic achievement (Duncan-Andrade, 2008; Perry, 2003; MacLeod, 2008). Castagno & Brayboy note that this racism is inexorably tied to culturally responsive schooling, indicating its necessity (2008). Culturally responsive teaching (CRT), or culturally responsive education, is a movement spanning almost a century, and the theories upon which its pedagogy are based seem to be readily applicable to public school settings, particularly in schools serving a multi ethnic or multicultural student body with diverse needs. Empirical support suggests CRT may enable tangible results for students’ academic performance (Bui & Fagan, 2013; Moore, 2010; O’Connor, 1997). The central tenets of culturally responsive teaching are as follows; high expectations and standards for all students, acceptance of different cultural funds of knowledge in the classroom and school, inclusion of material from the cultures of the students in the

classroom, encouragement of cultural inclusion on all levels, curriculum that is made relevant to the lived experiences of students, and fostering critical discussion of social and economic and racial inequality (Gay, 2013). In CRT, no two classrooms' curriculum should look the same; teachers should create and adjust curriculum according to individual classrooms of students (Gay, 2013).

Klump and McNeir (2005) also elude to the reality that culturally responsive teaching and culturally based education engages other teaching practices in the course of its implementation, and cannot then be entirely separated from these practices. This reflects one type of pedagogical theory that suggests that education and culture are not separate entities but are embedded within each other (Stevens, 2008; Gay, 2013; Warikoo & Carter, 2009; Zhou, 2008). Both culturally based education and culturally responsive schooling have been advocated by scholars researching the best practices in educating American Indian/Alaskan Native students. We entered into this project with these themes and findings in mind. Certainly, this literature review is a simplistic portrait of the rich academic research on the effective teaching practices of Native American students. However, although there were numerous studies detailing the perspectives of teachers and students on what constituted teaching practices (Sorkness & Kelting-Gibson, 2006), there were a lack of case studies profiling public schools performing successfully and illustrating the effective teaching practices their teachers were utilizing with Native students. We approached our research project within the positivist framework of asking, *what teaching practices have been effective in promoting Native students' academic success?*

Method

This qualitative research study was conducted during the months of January to May of 2013. The researchers were recruited through a class at the Harvard University Native American Program and performed all research and materials development in exchange for the equivalent of one graduate-level course credit at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Participants

The participants in this project include students, teachers, staff, and administrators at the two schools included; Early College High School in Robeson County, North Carolina and Mt. Edgecumbe High School in Sitka, Alaska.

At Early College High School we spoke to the following individuals; the Superintendent, the Assistant Superintendent of Instruction & Curriculum, the Assistant Superintendent of Instruction & Support, the Principal, the Youth Development Counselor, the guidance counselor, four teachers, seven students, the Cultural Enrichment Specialist at the Robeson County Indian Education Resource Center, and a local community member.

We interviewed individuals at Mt. Edgecumbe high school via phone. We spoke to the following individuals; the Superintendent, the Academic Principal, two teachers, and two students.

Most of these individuals were of varying percentages of American Indian/Alaskan Native. At Early College High School, everyone we spoke to was American Indian to some degree except for the four teachers we spoke with. Of the individuals we did speak to, most were Lumbee. One student was Tuscarora. However, other teachers at ECHS whom we did not get to speak with are of American Indian descent. At Mt. Edgecumbe, one of the teachers and the two administrators were not, to our knowledge, of Alaskan Native descent. The two students were

fully Alaskan Native, both members of the Yup'ik Corporation. One teacher identified as Alaskan Native.

For more details on the two schools included in this project, please see the school profiles that follow.

Materials

Materials in this project were based upon a qualitative research design. Interviews were semi-structured and all interview questions were developed by the researchers after literature review and collaboration. We would like to acknowledge again the assistance of Eve Ewing, one of the authors of “For this place, for these people: An exploration of best practices among Charter Schools Serving Native Students” (Ewing & Ferrick, 2012), who provided us with her notes and guidance prior to the site visit and phone interview. We would also like to acknowledge the advice from our teaching staff, project director, and classmates. The input of all of these individuals was instrumental in guiding the development of our interview questions.

Design

As mentioned above, this project was a qualitative design. We conducted extensive research using the National Center for Education Statistics database (National, 2013), state department of education websites including but not limited to the use of school report cards, and a database designed for parents to compare schools, School Digger (Schooldigger, 2013). We selected school candidates using a number of criteria including; state achievement test scores, state rankings, demographics, location, student-teacher ratio, and reputation. The demographic criteria we used were race/ethnicity (American Indian/Alaskan Native) and percent who qualify

for free/reduced price lunch. When conducting these searches we were looking for schools that fit a certain set of criteria.

Schools we identified to contact had to have a high percentage of American Indian/Alaskan Native students so that these students made up the majority of the student body. Schools had to be public high schools. We preferred if schools showed a diversity of socioeconomic status which we identified via the demographic of percent who qualified for free or reduced price lunches. We also made use of the testing data which has become available since the 2001 enactment of the No Child Left Behind portion of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. We looked for schools that had high test scores in all of their tested areas; high being 80% or more of students scored proficient. However, the 80% proficiency benchmark was very flexible. We also looked for schools who were consistently improving overtime. For instance, some schools we identified began with 60% proficiency in 2001 but continued to improve each year. Additionally, we looked at test scores that aggregated by subgroup specifically to determine whether American Indian/Alaskan Native students were scoring equivocally on tests, as we were interested in schools with equitable subgroup performance. We only considered schools in which American Indian/Alaskan Native and other minority students were scoring comparably to the rest of the student body.

We conducted continual literature searches and reviews about effective teaching practices for minority students in general and specifically for American Indian/Alaskan Native students. Using school websites, we attempted to determine whether the schools we were considering were making use of practices identified in the literature. If schools did not obviously possess these, we did not discard them. It was simply useful to have as much information as possible.

After identifying, contacting, and confirming schools for a site visit or phone interview we did extensive research on those schools. This information was primarily gleaned from the school or district websites which we felt would give us the most accurate and up to date information.

We also conducted research on the tribes located around the area of the school. Again, we attempted to use tribally owned website domains if possible in order to get accurate information that would reflect the beliefs of the American Indian/Alaskan Native communities present in the schools. If using sources that were not tribally-run, we did our best to use sources that were reliable and accurate. Anna's background in Native American Studies at her undergraduate institution was useful in this respect.

All of the interviews we conducted were semi-structured. The questions remained similar across all groups; administrators, teachers, students, staff. During the course of the interviews, we remained consciously open to the direction in which the conversation flowed. We felt that this created a space in which educators and students could express authentic experiences, rather than answer questions that could easily be arbitrary. We also followed the rule outlined by Irving Seidman that qualitative semi-structured interviews should be very little of you and very much of your participants (Seidman, 1997). Occasionally we did have logistical questions to which we could not find answers in our preparatory research. We generally asked these of the administrators (Superintendents or Principals). Finally, on the site visit, we made an effort to make note of and observe the environment around us in the style of the type of portraiture research that is conducted by individuals like Dr. Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot with the purpose of being able to create a feeling for our readers (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman, 2002).

Other procedures that occurred between school identification and the site visit and phone interview are described in the following Procedure section.

Procedure

After identifying schools using the criteria and databases detailed above, we contacted chosen schools via e-mail. Depending on the information available, we contacted Superintendents or Principals and often both. Due to a low response rate, we contacted most schools more than once if we did not hear from them within a week. Our project manager, Dr. Dawn Mackety, also called and/or emailed schools to assist in us making contact. Early College High School and Mt. Edgecumbe High School were the two schools that fit our desired profile and expressed timely interest in participating in the project. Due to time constraints we were unable to do a site visit to Mt. Edgecumbe.

Early College High School Site Visit

We conducted the site visit at Early College during the week of March 18th, 2013 over a three day period. One day was designated to travel. The first day was designated to visiting the high school. The second day was designed to visit the county's Indian Education Resource Center and familiarize ourselves with the community via our community contact, Dr. Bobby Brayboy. Dr. Brayboy is a guidance counselor at one of the Robeson County public schools. Upon arriving in Robeson County, we drove around the area to familiarize ourselves. On the next day, we proceeded to the district offices to speak with the two Assistant Superintendents. After approximately an hour interview, we travelled to Early College High School at Robeson County. We spoke with the Principal, then the Youth Development Counselor, then the Guidance Counselor, and finally, the students. We went to lunch with the two Assistant Superintendents

and the Principal. We also spoke briefly with the Superintendent of the district. After lunch we returned to the school to speak with teachers and do some classroom observation. We observed hallway interactions, two English classrooms, one Math classroom, and one Gym classroom. We were able to speak with three of the five teachers present in these classrooms. After the end of the school day we went briefly to a Staff Development session occurring for all of the teachers that was directed by a liaison for the North Carolina New Schools Project of which Early College High School is a part.

On the second day we arrived early at the Indian Education Resource Center. We spoke with the Cultural Enrichment Specialist and Dr. Brayboy. They led us around a museum at the Indian Education Resource Center. Then we spoke with both for about an hour. After that, Dr. Brayboy brought us to a museum at the University of North Carolina Pembroke next door. We then spent the remainder of the day with Dr. Brayboy, who introduced us to prominent community members, showed us the whole of the county, and gave us his perspective on life and the state of education in the county.

Mt. Edgecumbe Phone Interview

We conducted a phone interview with Mt. Edgecumbe High School the week of March 25th, 2013. Leading up to this interview the Superintendent requested a copy of our potential questions which was sent several days prior to the scheduled interview. Overall, the interview took place over the course of about two hours. The two administrators, the two teachers, and the students were all on the line when the school called us. We first introduced our project goal and purpose to the group. For the sake of schedules, we asked questions first of the teachers, then of the students, and finally of the administrators.

Limitations

One limitation of this method of project design is that it is a continuation of the qualitative procedures and study designs that are indicative of this area of research as a whole. Our literature review reflects the limited number of quantitative research studies testing effective teaching practices for native students

Second, we had difficulty identifying public schools with high percentages of native students or schools with strong culturally based education programs and/or directors of Indian Education. This is in contrast to findings about tribal charter schools (Ewing & Ferrick, 2012).

Third, contacting and recruiting schools throughout the course of this project posed a particular problem. This is likely reflective of the fact those schools with many native students are disproportionately under-resourced (National Indian Education Association, 2013). In addition, our time restrictions may have posed a problem for some potential schools.

Finally, the subsequent literature review on effective teaching practices is a summary. The following accounts of our site visit and phone interview are case studies. This means that this project has limited generalizability; what works for one school or community may not be applicable to another. However, it is our hope that the stories of the success of public school educators may serve to help others and contribute, however modestly, to the work of improving the conditions of Native education in public schools.

Phone Interview: Mt. Edgecumbe High School

Mt. Edgecumbe is a public boarding high school in Sitka, Alaska. Every year, Mt. Edgecumbe has approximately 140 open seats and over 300 students apply (Mt. Edgecumbe, 2013). It supports grades 9 through 12 with over 400 students currently enrolled (Mt.

Edgecumbe, 2013). Seventy-seven percent of the student body identifies as Alaskan Native (Schooldigger.com, 2013). The rest of the racial/ethnic composition of the study body is as follows: 1% African American; 0.8% Asian; 1.5% Hispanic; approximately 11% two or more races; and 9% white (Schooldigger.com, 2013). Additionally, the school makes an effort to accept students from all over the state, and currently enrolls students from over 100 Alaskan communities (Mt. Edgecumbe, 2013). The student teacher ratio is approximately seventeen students to one teacher (Schooldigger.com, 2013) Most of these teachers have a Master's degree or higher (Mt. Edgecumbe, 2013). About fifty-four percent of the student body qualifies for free or reduced price lunch, implying that there is a diversity of student socioeconomic status (Schooldigger.com, 2013).

Currently, Mt. Edgecumbe is rated in the top ten percent of Alaskan public high schools (Schooldigger.com, 2013). In 2012, students scored between eighty and one-hundred percent proficiency on all tested subjects except science. Eighty-six percent of students were proficient in Language Arts and seventy-six percent were proficient in math (Mt. Edgecumbe, 2013). These scores surpass Alaska state targets (see Appendix B for complete report card). In science, students reached sixty percent proficiency which was equal to the state performance (Schooldigger.com, 2013). Finally, according to the 2011-2012 school report card available on the website, the graduation rate for Alaskan Native students is 98.4%. The attendance rate for Alaskan Native students is 96%. Last year, the dropout rate was 0.5% (this equates to two students dropping out) (Mt. Edgecumbe, 2013).

Taken together, these cursory qualities create a snapshot of a public high school that, on the surface, appears to be practicing effective teaching practices for native students and gleaming results.

“If I could narrow it down to one word... it’s all about relationships.”

– Academic Principal

School Vision

Mt. Edgecumbe characterizes itself as preparing future leaders of Alaska. It’s identified purpose is “to provide a challenging, unique education in a residential setting that values rich cultural diversities and traditions, inspiring Alaskan students to become successful, responsible, global citizens.” It’s vision includes high expectations for all students, providing innovative opportunities, giving students an outlet to determine what they are good at, prepare students who “a changing world,” form relationships, develop an appreciation for their own and others’ cultures and becomes “ethical leaders” (Mt. Edgecumbe, 2013). Inherent in this mission and vision are the effective teaching practices often cited in the literature; small group settings and a collaborative environment, relevancy of curriculum, high expectations and high standards for student success, respect within an overarching structure of culturally responsive teaching (Sorkness & Kelting-Gibson, 2006).

Structure

As mentioned above, Mt. Edgecumbe is a public high school and a boarding school. Students must apply for admission. Due to the unique history of Mt. Edgecumbe, the current official governing body of the school is the Alaska State Board of Education. Running the school is a Superintendent, under who is the Academic Principal (Mt. Edgecumbe, 2013). A number of teachers at the school are all or some percentage Alaskan Native (Mt. Edgecumbe Academic Principal, personal communication, March 28, 2013). The school charges \$250 per year for each student and this covers the costs of travel (the school provides transportation for students to and

from whom for summer and Christmas), available college courses at the nearby university, and other costs. It does not include food, room and board, or other similar expenses (Mt. Edgecumbe, 2013).

Additionally, Mt. Edgecumbe is located next to the University of Alaska Southeast and has a partnership with the university. High school students can take college courses for transferable college credits there (Mt. Edgecumbe Academic Principal, personal communication, March 28, 2013). In addition, the Mt. Edgecumbe school day is constructed in a truck block system with 4 80-minute classes a day, five days a week.

Tribal Context

As previously noted, MEHS students constitute a diverse population of Alaskan Native students, representing over hundred Alaska Native communities. Of course, Alaska Native is a broad, umbrella term referring to the indigenous people of what is now known as Alaska. This term encompasses eleven distinct AI cultures: Athabascan, Unangax and Alutiiq; Yup'ik and Cup'ik; Eyak, Tlingit, and Tsimshian; and the Uniapiaq and St. Lawrence Island Yup'ik. Each of these cultures encompasses numerous tribes and communities, as well as distinct language dialects (Alaskanative.net, 2013). Mt. Edgecumbe reports that it enrolls many of its students from communities in the Bush. The Bush is a general term referring to the large portion of Alaska where the majority of Alaska Natives reside, largely inaccessible by traditional roadways or ferries, and only accessible by plane or dogsled. Over half of the students at Mt. Edgecumbe identify as being a member of the Yup'ik people, although their community and backgrounds are extremely diverse.

Sitka, where Mount Edgecumbe is located, is a small city of 9,000 in the Southeastern region of Alaska; the land of the Eyak, Tlingit, and Tsimshian cultures. Today, Sitka is the

headquarters of the Sitka Tribe of Alaska, a federally recognized government comprised of approximately 4,000 members of Tlingit, Haida, Aleut, and Tsimpsian heritage residing in the Sheet-Ka region of Southeastern Alaska (Sitkatribе.org, 2013).

The Interview

On a rainy Cambridge afternoon, two administrators, two teachers, and two students from Mt. Edgecumbe called us for our scheduled phone interview. We all began with brief introductions. The Superintendent, the Academic Principal, a science teacher, an english teacher, a male senior, and a female senior were all on the call. Due to the time difference between Alaska and Massachusetts, Mt. Edgecumbe was just beginning its school day. For the sake of convenience, we began the interview with the teachers.

The two administrators we spoke with provided us with numerous important facts that were not easily ascertained from our preparatory research on the school. First, the admissions process of Mt. Edgecumbe tries to consider a holistic view of the student. The application includes a student statement, parent statement, two assessments by past educators of the student, transcripts, test scores, and consideration of geography and socioeconomic status. In building their student body, the school tries to create a diversity of race/ethnicity; geography; socioeconomic status and home life; academic ability; and more. The racial diversity of Mt. Edgecumbe is similar to that of other high schools in Alaska.

The credit structure of the school allows for eight or more credits to be used at the students' discretion. Mt. Edgecumbe has a partnership with the University Of Alaska Southeast (UAS) which is located directly adjacent to the Mt. Edgecumbe campus. Many students use these flexible eight credits to take courses at UAS. Some students also use these eight extra credits to take more elective courses to determine what they want to do after high school graduation. The

Academic Principal stated that there are many supports within the school to ensure that students do not “crash and burn” in the new boarding school environment.

Teachers

The curriculum of Mt. Edgecumbe High School has eight adopted cultural standards. Both teachers specified the importance of clear expectations for students; making sure that students know what they need to do in order to do well, “we try to tie the things we talk about in class [to the students’ real lives].” The curriculum of the school does not include a class for students’ native languages, but there is space for students to speak their language, respect from the teachers for students’ native language, and a lively desire from the students to maintain their fluency with one another. Teachers reported that they made an effort to learn parts of their students’ native languages. Additionally, five of the twenty-eight teachers are Alaska Natives themselves, providing students with some teachers already acquainted with their culture. At the time of our interview, about half of the Alaskan Native student population identified as Yup’ik. Recently, the student council has proposed having elders from different tribes come to the school so that the students can continue to engage with these valuable sources of personal history and culture. These elements suggested to us that the culture of the students is something that the teachers support and that, partly due to this culture of acceptance, the students are able to maintain crucial connections to their home communities.

“We use the word we”

- Teacher

When speaking with the teachers, both expressed that the students were their favorite part of Mt. Edgecumbe. It was apparent that they held their students in high esteem. Teachers intentionally try to create classroom environments where children feel safe but also challenged. The English teacher told us that one of her well-known catchphrases was, “you’re ok where you are, but not ok to stay there.” She also told us that a poster on her wall stated: “It’s Okay To Make Mistakes.” The science teacher told us that his catchphrase was, “no judging.” The former suggests high expectations of all students and the latter suggests an atmosphere of acceptance and room to grow. In fact, both teachers stressed that, “the idea is safety [in the classroom].”

Student- teacher relationships appeared to be a cornerstone of Mt. Edgecumbe. The school policy purposely fosters a sense of family between students, teachers, and staff. These relationships are especially important due to the structure of Mt. Edgecumbe. There is often some culture shock and considerable acclimation needed for students when they first arrive, and strong student-teacher relationships mediate this adjustment. Mt. Edgecumbe has an extended family program where about ten students are matched with a teacher. Throughout that student’s years at the school, their teacher mentor is responsible for fostering a close relationship with them. This includes home visits where students go to the teachers’ homes for dinner and other activities. From what we heard from students and teachers, the program appears to be effective. Both teachers said that “Mt. Edgecumbe is my family.” The teachers enjoy this opportunity to take an especially active role in the lives of the students. It was common throughout the interview to hear both teachers make statements reminiscent of this one; “we’re not going anywhere, we are invested.” The extended family program and these relationships, said both teachers, allow teachers and students to get to know each other “as people.”

“We take on a larger responsibility... a larger role... the more invested you are in their [Students’] lives, the more successful you are in the classroom.”

- Teacher

Next, the teachers emphasized cultural sensitivity when interacting with Alaskan Native students. Both mentioned that when they began teaching at Mt. Edgecumbe, they had to make an effort to learn the best ways to communicate with their native students. The science teacher stressed that it was important for him to show an express interest in his students’ culture, including learning to say “hello” in Yup’ik. He said that although it wasn’t required, “boy they love it when you try to speak their language”.

Furthermore, both teachers noted the importance of non-verbal communication in these cultures and their process of learning how to interact well. Through their years of experience, the teachers found that “proximity” considerations are necessary when teaching these native students. Essentially, the teacher circulating around the classroom elicited more engagement from the Alaskan Native students. During this part of the discussion, the Academic Principal jumped in to say that, as an administrator, he had also had to make adjustments in response to the culture of the native students. He said that, when asking a native student a question, you often had to “multiply your wait time by five” and realizing that “you’re not gonna get snap answers.” In addition, teachers mentioned that they had learned to recognize that native students are often reserved during opportunities for class participation and that finding alternative ways for them to be involved had been fruitful. Specifically, both teachers noted that they utilized whiteboards that the students had at their desks so that students could hold up their answers without being required to speak out or put themselves on the spot. The female teacher noted that this allowed

her to see who wasn't "getting it" so she could provide them extra help, without the cost of embarrassment for the student.

Throughout the interview, the teachers spoke about the "shared collective cultural experience" that is cultivated by the unique school culture. A large part of this is the cultural sensitivity discussed above. Another is the sense of family; "we're connected to each other," "we're all kind of family." While talking to all of the individuals during the interview, it was extremely common to hear "we" and "us", which also suggested a tight knit community. Added to this is the "very low teacher turnover" which, the teacher stated, helped to create a consistent community for the students. The teachers specified that this strong school culture and support network was instrumental in engaging all of the students for the optimal level of learning.

Students

For the two students at Mt. Edgecumbe that we spoke with, their home communities continued to hold critical importance in their personal and academic success. Both mentioned that support from their families, home tribal communities, and tribal corporations were instrumental in keeping them in school and encouraging their aspirations. Both of the students we spoke with were seniors and looking forward to their futures; one was going on to the University of Alaska Anchorage to study mechanical engineering and the other was going to the University of Alaska Fairbanks for criminal justice and aspired to be a state trooper. These two students told us that they wanted to go to Mt. Edgecumbe because they had family members or friends who were alumni and because there is "a lot of history embedded in the school." Mt. Edgecumbe, it would appear from this brief interview, is well known to native communities in Alaska and a reputable school. Part of this may be cultivated; Mt. Edgecumbe actively contacts and recruits native students across Alaska via alumni and student conferences.

“Teachers are so eager to spend time with you and learn about your culture”

- Student

The curriculum of the school allows students to maintain their connections to their culture. Much of this maintenance is student-driven, “most cultures, they have other people here,” but Mt. Edgecumbe creates space in the school for this type of development. This atmosphere is so strong that the students we spoke to observed, “I feel closer to it [my culture] here because there are students who speak the language.” Both of the students and one of the teachers said that before coming to Mt. Edgecumbe, they had begun to lose their native language [Yupik] and the vitality of native cultures at the school allowed them to reinvigorate their use and knowledge. One student warmly reflected that walking down the dormitory hallway; he could hear students in different rooms speaking their native language together. This atmosphere is buoyed by the culture room at the school where students do various cultural activities including making culturally traditional items and cooking meals from their home cultures. The students said that participation in the culture room was robust. Both students reported that they felt “comfortable” expressing their individual cultural heritages at Mt. Edgecumbe.

Echoing the statements of their teachers, the students said that thought they had “built a [closer] relationship” with the teachers at Mt. Edgecumbe than they would have had they gone to a different high school. The commitment of the teachers is evident; “teachers here put in so much time and effort.” The female student we spoke with said that she “felt comfortable being myself” within the classroom and had “grown really close” to all of her teachers through her four years at Mt. Edgecumbe. The male student we spoke with said that he felt the teachers had prepared him not just for college, but for life in general, saying: “it’s more of a life preparatory school.”

Finally, even though Mt. Edgecumbe already requires a considerable amount of involvement from its teachers, students told us that the teachers often come in early and spend this time talking one-on-one with their students.

Both students, as Alaskan Natives, said that “they [the teachers] do a good job of communicating with us.” When asked what they, as students, thought teachers in general should know about working with native students, many of the practices that the teachers had mentioned earlier came up again. Teachers, said the students, should exercise cultural sensitivity by making an effort to learn about students’ native cultures, understanding the different types of communication practiced in native cultures, practicing patience when teachers may not understand how native students are used to communicating, and respecting students’ cultures. For Mt. Edgecumbe specifically, the students said that it was important that teachers give the new students time to adjust and make an extra effort to make new students feel comfortable. In their mutual experience, the students said that the teachers had built up close relationships with them over time via one-on-one communication and that *trust* was an integral part of that. As seniors, they both thought that they could “trust teachers with talking about anything.”

The students also expressed pride about graduating from Mt. Edgecumbe; a pride which has been fueled by the support of their tribal corporations and families. The female student reported that her tribal corporation provided her with a scholarship, and she felt immensely supported. She stated: “People encourage me to stick it out here... people at home keep me motivated... and they remind me all the time.... I think of the *pride* I’ll have at my graduation, I think of the endless opportunities here.” Both students emphasized the crucial elements of their school and home support, particularly when their school is some distance from their home communities. Part of this pride also came from the reputation of Mt. Edgecumbe. One of the students told us that tribal leaders came out of this school and that she didn’t “think anybody ever regret[ted] coming here.” Both of these

students were familiar with alumni and noted that the alumni were proud to have graduated from Mt. Edgecumbe.

Finally, both students we spoke with expressed the importance of the support they had received throughout their secondary education from their families, local communities, and tribal corporations. This support seemed to be primarily emotional in the sense of keeping them [the students] in school; “it does take a lot of support to come here.. it does take a lot of community and family support” and “people at home keep me motivated... and they remind me all the time.”

Administrators: Superintendent & Academic Principal

Again, echoing the teachers and students, the administrators we spoke with said that working with native students required certain types of practices for teaching to be effective. They said that during their time at Mt. Edgecumbe they had come to recognize the different types of or traditions of communication that were necessary to understand if they were to communicate effectively with their native students. Being aware of their students’ native cultures had allowed them to nurture a “connection to the community that you’re working in.” The school makes an effort to foster involvement in the school community as well as the general, wider community. The Academic Principal said that effective teaching for these students was “about relationships.” The Superintendent followed this statement with, “[you] develop some pretty deep relationships” and “when you get to know them [the native students] there is a bond . . . a respect.”

The administrators expressed a deep sense of pride in the students. They both expressed very high opinions of the students at Mt. Edgecumbe. The Superintendent said that the students at Mt. Edgecumbe were unique; he said that they were highly respectful and willing to challenge themselves. The Academic Principal, who is responsible for discipline at Mt. Edgecumbe, said he was lucky at this school to have a lot of “latitude” in dealing with discipline. In other words,

discipline was at his discretion and there was room for flexibility. He said that it was rare that they had to expel a student and rare that they chose to suspend one. However, the students at Mt. Edgecumbe are not miraculously well-behaved; both administrators said that “the school structure encourages them” to become this type of student. In describing the atmosphere, the Academic Principal said simply: “you can be a good person here.”

“We have normal kids... but it’s a culture of positivity”

- Teacher

Themes

To preface this section, we encourage the community of educators serving native students to glean their own personal conclusions from this interview. These themes are all positive. This is partly because our aim is to review these communities from a positivist, not a deficit, view. It is further because our impression of the school from this brief interview is positive. First, relationships were continually cited as both a cornerstone of Mt. Edgecumbe and a positive aspect of it. Within this interview, this discussion was mainly around student-teacher relationships. All three groups mentioned student-teacher relationships as a boon to student performance. Second, school culture - which is an abstract term for a concrete reality - was a prominent theme. School culture is an umbrella term for all of themes evident in this interview that combine to create a general atmosphere for staff and students at a given school. To some extent, school cultures are cultivated by staff. The school culture of Mt. Edgecumbe includes acceptance (“no judging”) of academic ability and culture, high expectations, and high standards. The latter two elements are also research-supported effective teaching practices for all students. The opportunity to take college classes and proximity to a college classes reinforces high expectations and high standards. Third, though Mt. Edgecumbe does not practice Culturally

Based Education, culture is welcomed and warmly accepted in the classroom by teachers and in the school by administrators, and there is a strong presence of Alaskan Natives on the staff.

Fourth, there was a tradition of pride in the school; all three groups mentioned their pride in working for or being a student at Mt. Edgecumbe. The students in particular talked about this feeling of pride at length. Fifth, the importance of native communities should not be ignored in this context. These communities were still instrumental in the educational success according to these students despite their being many miles away from home. In summary, to echo the quote from an administrator presented at the beginning of this section; “if I could narrow it down to one word . . . it’s all about relationships.”

The Case of Early College High School

Robeson County, North Carolina

School Overview

Early College High School at Robeson County (RCECHS) is a small public high school in the town of Lumberton, in a rural area of southern North Carolina. The school came into being as part of the North Carolina New Schools project, a statewide initiative started in 2003 that aims to “accelerate systemic, sustainable innovation in schools across the state,” (North Carolina New Schools). In 2005, North Carolina Governor Mike Easley launched the “Learn and Earn: Early College High School” Initiative. This initiative sought to improve student performance and outcomes by placing high schools on college campuses and offering students the opportunity to earn up to the equivalent of an associate’s degree. RCECHS itself was the result of these initiatives as well as a year of development and planning by motivated individuals in Robeson

County school district leadership. It is now completing its sixth year in operation (The Public Schools of Robeson County, 2013).

RCECHS is currently functioning at capacity with 200 students enrolled. The school recently received recognition as a National Blue Ribbon school, and the students consistently pass state exams at rates above both the district and the state average (Schooldigger.com, 2013). In 2011-2012 attendance at RCECHS was 96%, teacher retention was 100%, and the graduation rate was 93.5% (The Public Schools of Robeson County, 2013). In addition, 25-33% of RCECHS' students attained an associate's degree in the 2010-2011 school years. The student body at RCECHS reflects the diversity of their surrounding community. As of the 2010-2011 school years, around 14% of students identified as African American, approximately 14% identified as Hispanic, 31% White, and about 39% of the student body as American Indian (Schooldigger.com, 2013). As of 2010-2011, approximately 76% of these students qualified for free or reduced price lunch. Although admissions are selective, the students "are a representation of the Robeson County School System," (The Public Schools of Robeson County, 2013, please see Appendix B for school profile).

School Vision and Mission

"RCECHS will empower student with the intrinsic motivation, work ethics, and social competencies to become leaders of tomorrow. We believe every child can be globally competitive in the 21st century when given the opportunity and support in a rigorous educational environment," (The Public Schools of Robeson County, 2013). RCECHS' vision statement reflects its impetus to foster highly motivated students who have shown potential in middle school yet are "typically underrepresented in postsecondary education." Its mission is simple:

“To be a quality-driven school with focus on rigor, relevance, and relationships, which will ensure student success now and in the future,” (The Public Schools of Robeson County, 2013).

Leadership and Structure

Due to its location on Robeson County Community College’s Campus, RCECHS has a campus-like atmosphere, with no centralized buildings. Classes take place in three mobile units and one brick building, and the central administration offices are housed in a mobile unit across the parking lot. At the most basic level, RCECHS consists of one principle, one school counselor, one Youth Specialist working within the Indian Education Program, and 11 teachers,. It thus has a student to teacher ratio of 18:1.

The admissions process for RCECHS consists of a student and parent profile, report card and academic record filled out by the school counselor, two recommendations, and a student interview. The admissions process is designed so that the student body is representative of the larger community and enrolls students from throughout the district. Within the rubric, a preference is given to students who would be first-generation college students, may not live with their parents, are eligible for a free lunch, and have shown academic competency in middle school (Student Handbook).

Student Life

Once admitted and matriculated into RCECHS, each student is immediately paired with an Advisor who will remain with them until graduation, and will develop an individual college or career plan, aided by the School Counselor, College Liaison, and the Advisement Teacher (Student Handbook). For the first two years, students take primarily high school level courses. In their junior year, they are required to take the COMPASS exam in order to begin taking college-

level courses during their 11-13th years. Due to the vastly different schedules individual students may have, particularly during their later years, the school day looks different across grades. Freshmen and sophomores follow more traditional public school schedules. Generally, the school day is divided into four classes an hour and a half each with a half hour lunch for these grades. Juniors and seniors are often on a different schedule due their college classes.

Tribal Context: The Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina

The Lumbee people are able to trace their tribal history back to beyond 1703; the tribe can connect its historical members to members of the Cheraw tribe consistently between 1703 and the 1800s. Sometime in the 1800s, the Cheraw began to be called the “Lumbee” in this area of North Carolina. The Lumbee Tribe was recognized by the state of North Carolina in 1885. They have continuously applied for federal recognition since the federal Lumbee Act of 1956 which recognized the tribe but did not extend full federal recognition. Organization of the tribe was historically based on the family unit. Large extended family networks were a major part of everyday life with the oldest family member(s) acting as the head of the family. Elders would come together to make decisions for the tribe in times of discord. Today, the Lumbee Tribe has a tribal government and constitution with three main branches; executive, legislative, and judicial. The seat of the tribal government is located in Pembroke, North Carolina which is part of Robeson County. Membership is determined by the ability to provide proof of lineage to historical tribal members and continuous tribal involvement (Lumbee Tribe, 2013).

Today the Lumbee tribe has over 55,000 enrolled members. Members primarily live in the Robeson, Hoke, Cumberland, and Scotland counties of North Carolina. Of these counties, the majority reside in Robeson County. The Lumbee are now quite multiracial; many are a combination of Lumbee, Caucasian, and African American descent. The tribe maintains a

number of programs addressing different social issues from elder services to energy to education. Educational initiatives revolve around fostering community involvement and volunteerism (Lumbee Tribe, 2013).

Traditionally the Lumbee have maintained a large store of herbal medical practices and they maintain this knowledge today. These medicines are still practiced today. The Lumbee have a history of tribal control of their educational institutions, as well as community self-governance. Church affiliations were and are a significant part of everyday life in this community. A major contemporary symbol of Lumbee culture is a pinecone patchwork customarily worn by women (Lumbee Tribe, 2013). The Lumbee no longer have knowledge of their tribal language; although they are known for having a distinct southern dialect (Pbs.org, 2005).

Our journey at Early College High School proved that the Lumbee community and identity remains quite vibrant and relevant for every member.

The Site Visit

We visited RCECHS on a Monday morning and spent the whole school day and into the late afternoon talking with students, staff, teachers, and administrators.

The School Campus: Observations

As mentioned above, most of the RCECHS classes are held in mobile units. The administrative offices are in mobile units on the far side of the college parking lot. One walks across the parking lot to mobile units where classes are held. Directly in front of you is a rather formidable statue of an eagle, RCECHS' symbol. Behind that a rather statuesque tree. To the right are two mobile units where RCECHS classes are held. To the left a brick building where the rest of the classes are held. Each mobile unit holds one or two classes. The brick building

holds five or more. All of these were well lit and clean. As one looks past these mobile units and the RCECHS brick building, one sees many more of the buildings belonging to the community college.

Students Arriving and Leaving School : Observations

We arrived early to the RCECHS campus to observe students and staff arriving at the school. Since RCECHS is part of the Robeson County Community College, mornings are quite hectic - as they admittedly are at most schools. It was hard to tell older high school students from community college students in many instances. From what we saw, students seem to arrive rather early to campus. Buses shuttle in some students as they do at other schools.

Perhaps the most interesting part of the morning arrivals is that students of apparently all ages walk in and out of the administrative offices on campus. This takes some effort since the administrative offices are in mobile units that students must reach by walking from the classroom mobile units across a parking lot. Though difficult to know for sure, these students all looked fairly chipper and happy for 8 o'clock in the morning which suggested to us that they were not in the administrative offices for disciplinary purposes but for social or academic ones.

The Administrators

After observing students arriving at the high school campus, we drove over to the District offices which are in an adjacent town to Pembroke. These offices are located in a brick building and another white building directly beside each other. Finding them was slightly difficult at first, since it was unclear which building held whose offices. We entered the white building and ambled around a little before the Assistant Superintendent of Instruction & Support, who we will refer to as LT, flagged us down. LT is also the Assistant Superintendent who oversees RCECHS.

We walked with LT into the office of the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum & Instruction, who we will refer to as EL. EL's office was official in appearance but also welcoming. Most of her office was furnished in cherry wood. She sat behind her desk while LT and we sat in chair to the side and front of her desk.

It was evident upon entering the room that EL and LT had a surprisingly warm and friendly relationship. They hugged when we three filed in and exchanged good-natured jokes with each other, occasionally at the others expense, throughout the interview. During the course of our sixty or so minute conversation, a parent of a student from another school in the district called EL. She spoke with this parent for a few minutes and then asked LT to speak with the parent as well. While one was on the phone, the other continued his/her conversation with us.

The two administrators were able to tell us some essential information about structural aspects of the school. RCECHS intentionally tries to accept first generation college students and students of all academic abilities. Some students graduate in four years with an associate's degree, but most take five years. Around half of the student population successfully graduates with an associate's degree. The majority of the student population goes on to a four year college. Since its beginning in 2005, RCECHS gets a great many applicants. For the academic year 2013-2014, the school was interviewing 116 students. In the last few years, it has been common to have approximately 100 students waitlisted each year. The dropout rate from RCECHS is about 7% each year and most of this 7% returns to their neighborhood high schools. Both administrators seemed to believe that the small school and class sizes were vital in the success of the students at RCECHS. The small class sizes allowed kids to know teachers personally. If all of the schools in the district had the same resources, both administrators thought they could do just as well as the students at RCECHS.

“There seems to be something . . . when the kids get in that atmosphere”

- Assistant Superintendent of Instruction & Support

According to the two Assistant Superintendents, teachers are trained in accordance with Common Core standards. EL told us that she was deeply involved in the planning phases of RCECHS and the structure of RCECHS is designed to be similar to that of magnet schools. RCECHS is able to exercise greater discrepancy than the average public school in hiring teachers and attempts to purposely select teachers that are open to change. They should approach their curriculum in a way that is individualized. In terms of teacher-student relationships, the two administrators agreed that the teachers know the background of their students.

“The key would be relationships . . . that those teachers form with those students”

- Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum & Instruction

The Principal

After talking with the two assistant superintendents, we returned to the RCECHS campus to meet with on-site administrators (the principal, the guidance counselor), students, teachers, and do some classroom observation.

The administration’s mobile unit was well marked by a wooden sign and accessible via a wooden ramp. It was full with filing cabinets and other academic accoutrements but also clean and organized. The walls were painted in a subdued mint color that added to this feeling. It was also well lit. One gets the distinctive feeling, which continues throughout our visit, that RCECHS has limited space but that they are using it effectively. These offices are colorful, bright, and welcoming in every way.

The principal's office was welcoming as well. The furniture is also an impressive shade of cherry wood but here the bookshelves are full to overflowing, the desk strewn with papers and notes, and a copy of a book on North Carolina's public school laws cracked open on a side table. "Every day holds the possibility of a miracle" is painted in scrawling gold script on one wall. There is also the occasional motivational poster referencing the goals of RCECHS on a filing cabinet or two. The relationships between the principal and her staff are also evident; in general they appear warm but professional.

The Assistant Superintendent of Instruction & Support said of the RCECHS Principal, "we are extremely proud [of the work that she had done here]" because all of the students at RCECHS had passed North Carolina's state exam the previous year. Additionally, all of the students that had attended RCECHS graduated with a diploma the previous year.

When we sat down to talk with the principal, she came around from behind her desk to sit with us in the chairs that were in front of it, saying that otherwise it was too formal for her taste. The principal told us that RCECHS incorporates the mentor program because of the social aspect of the school. Moving high schools can be a challenging adjustment for some kids and the mentor program, as well as support from teachers and staff, is important in easing this adjustment. She also noted that the district leadership was flexible around changes in curriculum and Common Core training standards in the sense that they allowed time for staff, teachers, and students to adjust to new standards. RCECHS also has a partnership with the nearby Fayetteville University; the university gives scholarships to RCECHS students.

"Our teachers don't stand up for 90 minutes and lecture"

– RCECHS Principal

The principal also told us that, not only are teachers trained with Common Core Standards, but that the North Carolina New Schools program also trains teachers to adhere to their instructional practices. A large part of the teacher education and practice structure of RCECHS entails a great deal of collaboration between teachers and limited lecture classroom pedagogy.

Staff

The principal then led us down the hall about five steps to a larger conference-style room at the back of the mobile unit. In this room were a few computers along one wall, a number of filing cabinets, and in the middle a sturdy mahogany table with numerous chairs around it. Here we met with the youth development specialist and the guidance counselor.

Our first interview was with the Youth Development Specialist (YDS). The YDS works under Title VII in Robeson County to facilitate and foster native student success in the public school system through duties such as home visitations, monitoring attendance, and organizing NASA and AISES club meetings, to name a few (The Publics Schools of Robeson County, 2013). She described dividing her time between two schools in the district.

She spoke of the RECHS students' high involvement in the cultural events and clubs that were sponsored by the Indian Education Resource Center, particularly academic clubs for native students such as the Native American Student Association (NASA) and the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES). Thirty RCECHS students are members of AISES. The importance of these culture-based extra-curricular activities and after school programs was emphasized when she commented, "We don't have cultural stuff in our regular curriculum."

Another key point that the YDS impressed upon us was that native students were all different as individuals, but that they also differed from students of other backgrounds. She

rejected any comparison between the native students of Robeson County and students of other districts, saying “we’re just different.. it’s really individual.” Finally, the YDS repeatedly indicated that she held RCECHS students in high regard, saying that “these kids are far different than other kids, because they are mature.... You can depend on them.... These kids are really ready for college.” The YDS emphasized that the school provided its students with a high level of responsibility, and they rose to meet this challenge. This conversation emphasized the importance of the Indian Education Program to the Lumbee students, and the preparedness of RCECHS students.

Next, we spoke to the school counselor, who sat down with us shortly after our conversation with the YDS. The school counselor described her position as someone who works closely with the students and frequently receives calls or emails from them outside the normal workday hours. She remarked: “I don’t have a typical day” and told us that as an educator, she never expected the day to end at 3:00pm.

In discussing the students and their relationships with their teachers, the school counselor spoke about her desire to come back to the community where she grew up to work with RCECHS students because “these are students who might just need a little extra support to make it.” It became clear in our discussion that she prioritized the supportive role teachers, staff, and parents can take in furthering the students’ education. She saw relationships as key to the success of students, and said, “When a student knows that you care about them, they want to make you proud.” She said that she advised teachers and staff alike to cultivate their relationships with their students to create positive rapport and so that “they [students] believe there’s someone who can give them the right advice.”

She also underscored the influence of the parents on RCECHS students, and saw this as a significant influence on student success. She observed, “The parents of these students, I think if I say *care* it’ll be an understatement... if there’s an opportunity, they want their kids to get it...” She noted that parents called her and the school frequently to monitor their students’ progress and inquire into opportunities for their children.

Finally, the school counselor spoke to us about tribal involvement in RCECHS’ students’ academic life. She shared, “I would like to see the tribe being more involved”, and noted she wished the tribal leaders would go out to the local schools and see what the students needed from their tribe and leadership. She suggested that greater advertising and promotion of scholarship and volunteer opportunities as well as higher community involvement would improve students’ relationship with the tribal leadership.

Implicit in both of these conversations was a sense of pride and community that the counselor and YDS had in RCECHS and specifically in its students.

Students

Chairs were set up around the perimeter of the conference room and the principal then led in seven students. The guidance counselor also remained in the room throughout the student interview. Students filed in and sat where they wanted to, with two students arriving a few minutes later from class. We sat facing a semi-circle of seven students, five girls and two boys, two advanced seniors (grade 13), two seniors, one junior, one sophomore, and one freshman. All in all, the interview with the students lasted over an hour and a half, interrupted only by the occasional administrator. We concluded in order to allow the students to attend their next class. In the course of the interview, the students spoke to us openly about their struggles, aspirations, accomplishments, and community.

The students each provided us with their own unique reason for pursuing an education at RCECHS. One student said that he applied to RCECHS because it would be “a challenge”, while another said it was the smaller school size that appealed to them. Most of the students responded by saying that it was the academic opportunities that drew them to the school. One student, a male junior, M, said that he “wanted to give back, to be able to help my community... free college classes is a once in a lifetime opportunity.” Another student said she wanted to be able to provide for her family. J, an advanced senior student, responded: “I’m from a low income home, the opportunities I guess you could say were meager... I decided I would be geared towards academics.... I could find a career with academics.” All seven students showed an awareness and appreciation for the opportunities provided with RCECHS, particularly the challenging curriculum and ability to take college courses.

We were also able to speak with the students at length about their teachers at RCECHS, although the students also brought up the school culture in the course of the conversation. Several students spoke to the fact that their teachers all made an effort to get to know them, called them by name, are approachable, and have very casual and close relationships with them. One student recalled that his teacher would check in on him daily, asking about his homework and other courses in the hallway as they passed. Another student agreed that teachers monitor students, pushing them to do better, and to do their best. The students also noted that teachers were willing to expend extra effort to assist students with academic concerns, including the adjustment to college courses at the community college. One student remembered that after beginning his college courses junior year, he was still able to return to his RCECHS teachers to request extra help for his assignments. Students also spoke to the fact that this supportive relationship was not relegated to academic concerns. M remembered that when he considered

dropping out of RCECHS because he felt he “didn’t belong” after his friends left RCECHS, the teachers came together to encourage M to stay in the program and take advantage of his opportunities. This teacher support created what J referred to as “almost kinda a cultivated ground... which basically inspires us to succeed academically.” To summarize, one student said that their relationships with teachers are, “more like our family.”

This familial atmosphere was mentioned repeatedly throughout the interview as the students described the culture of their school and their relationships within it. In RCECHS, students told us that the mentor program implemented in the school made them feel like “they don’t throw you out there... they kind of weave you into the system.” Four of the students told us that the mentor program eased their transition into RCECHS and helped them navigate the new terrain and transition into college classes. Students felt that the focus on college and preparedness allowed them to learn “how to talk” and how to act “the right way” to succeed in college and beyond. Students expressed that this code switching benefited them and provided them with useful skills beyond high school. Students related an incredible pride in their Lumbee dialect and told us unequivocally that they fought to identify as an educated native person. One student said forcefully, “I am educated”, which he differentiated from the stereotype of ‘acting white’ by becoming educated (MacLeod, 2008).

This code switching and straddling of identities at RCECHS is also in a setting of student and staff diversity. Every student we spoke to spoke warmly and positively about the diversity at their school, saying “I really love it” and “it brings you to a whole other level”. One student noted that it prepared them to understand different backgrounds and accommodate for that, and that this experience would prepare them for a future in which they would be interacting with people different than themselves.

Students also spoke to the support they felt outside of school, from their families as well as the community in general, particularly their local churches. Reiterating the school counselor's earlier perspective that RCECHS parents were actively involved in their children's schooling, students said their parents acted as emotional and academic supports and motivators. However, students also said that they themselves were self-motivated. One female student, a freshman - S - said that "my parents have never had to push me, I push myself... but they let me know they're there for me, they support me." Students' also reiterated that their personal backgrounds served as motivation in their pursuit of education. J remarked that: "My parents were more of a motivator... my education is the only thing no one can take away from me [as a native]." Students shared that their history as Lumbee people also motivated them, particularly when they felt that they are faced with academic or personal obstacles on their path to upward mobility.

Local churches were identified by the students as serving as something like clans for the Lumbee the Lumbee tribe. Students expressed deep appreciation for religion and their churches. R, a junior, asserted "it's a really good part of our lives", which was met with agreement and emphatic support by the other six. M said his church even hands out packets with school supplies at the beginning of the year for each student, and other students added that their churches provided academic scholarships. They said that the school recognized the achievements of students in the congregation, like high school and even kindergarten graduation. Students also said that the sense of community at RCECHS was maintained by the commonality of spirituality between most students, regardless of background or ethnicity.

Students again echoed the school counselor's concerns about tribal involvement in students' education. One student said simply: "We are not a top priority." They expressed that they did not receive a lot of support from the tribe, and that the tribe did not prioritize education

over federal recognition. One student, M, concluded: “I don’t need the federal recognition, it’s just a name. I don’t need someone to tell me I’m Indian, I know I’m Indian. I wish they would care more about my education.” This concern seemed to be relegated to tribal leadership, as students related that they felt supported on an individual level by Lumbee community members in general.

In contrast, students seemed to feel supported by the Indian Education Resource Center, although they had varying degrees of involvement in its programs. They remembered attending the cultural enrichment summer camps and cultural programs in elementary and middle school. For example, a student was able become involved in Upward Bound through the center. Students expressed that that the center remained in touch with them and attempted to provide them with information about scholarship opportunities; one student remarked “they care a lot”.

Each student had high aspirations for their future that they felt RCECHS had helped prepare them for. Every student we spoke to reported that they were interested in a helping profession of some kind – a nurse, a physician, a dentist, a minister, etc. These high aspirations were fueled and fostered by the RCECHS teachers, staff, and even fellow students. Students showed immense pride in their school, particularly their recognition as a National Blue Ribbon School. These students also conveyed a tremendous pride in themselves. They stated that they felt proud of their hard work, their determination, drive, and ability to overcome obstacles. One student remarked that he was proud of himself as an individual, coming from what he referred to as a stereotypical Native American home, to have the ability to “fight educationally”.

Classroom Observations

After lunch off-campus, we returned to RCECHS to observe some classrooms and meet with a few teachers. Lunch is a little nontraditional at RCECHS; there is no on-campus cafeteria so lunch is structured very much like it is in college. Students have the option to order a “hot-lunch” which is delivered from one of the other high schools in the district. Otherwise, students can bring their own lunches. There is a designated period during the day for lunch and students can eat in a myriad of locations around the small campus. For this reason, we decided not to observe the formal lunch period.

We had a chance to see inside almost every classroom on campus and observe four classes. In all of these classes we observed students of different ethnicities sitting and interacting with one another, suggesting that racial integration is a reality at RCECHS. In general, the walls of RCECHS are relatively sparse, especially in the mobile units. However, there are academic and motivational posters on the wall; most appeared handmade by teachers or students. In one freshman English class, the teacher had decorated her walls with some handmade polka dots and a number of posters reminding students of certain literary analysis tools, homework, and school events. In a math class, the teacher had hung posters related to the goals and mission of RCECHS. In a sophomore English class, there were posters made by students in relation to literature that they had read and analyzed the previous week. The gym class was fit into one entire mobile unit, with treadmills on each side and desks in the center. Strewn around the walls were numerous motivational signs and team pride posters of North Carolina professional sports. Notably, on a visit to the ladies’ room in the main brick building, there was absolutely no graffiti.

While standing in the hallway in between class periods, the relationships between students, teachers, and administrators was evident. As we walked into the brick building with the principal, all of the students said friendly but polite hellos to her. Teachers stood in the hallway

chatting with each other occasionally, but most often with students. What we heard of these conversations were sometimes academically related but seemed to most often be friendly in nature. It is in these moments that the impressively positive and supportive relationships between teachers and students were most evident. Students and teachers exchanged good-natured jokes with each other, sometimes at the expense of one or the other. Importantly, the respect that each had for the other was apparent in every interaction we saw.

We also had the chance to talk briefly with some teachers during this time and it was obvious from our conversations with them that they were very knowledgeable about new advances in pedagogy. They referenced new material they had read, learned, or taken classes on to improve their pedagogy. They also mentioned “hot-button” education topics that gave us the sense that were invested in the field.

The first class we observed was a freshmen English classroom of Ms. AB. This classroom, like all of them, was well lit. Students’ desks were set up in groups but all students were still able to see the board. The teacher had made some colorful decorations for her classroom herself and a few of these adorned the walls. The white board had reminders about assignments and school events in one corner. Most of the board was taken up with notes from the teacher about what they were doing in class that day. At the beginning of the class one student was late. Prior to this the teacher had begun asking where the student was, followed by engagement with the principal about where he might be. He turned up a few minutes later. The teacher briefly but sternly asked him why he was late and he responded that he had been talking to another teacher. She asked him to let her know when he would be late in situations like that again. This was a very brief interaction but it appeared to be effective.

During class, students worked in small groups to discuss *Romeo and Juliet*. The teacher allowed students to discuss in small groups for set period of time and then asked questions of groups and individual students. Sometimes the teacher would ask specific questions to certain students and other times she would call on students who had raised their hands. At one point, a student raised his hand to answer a question, providing an incomplete answer. The teacher then provided him with scaffolding, reminding him about themes they had discussed earlier in the week. The student seemed to think for a few minutes while other students engaged with the teacher and then answered the question (correctly) again. During this time, the teacher sat at the empty desks in the student groups to engage with the students on an individual basis.

The class (the teacher and students) told us about a project they had done earlier in the week where small groups of students had to re-write brief sections of *Romeo & Juliet* in contemporary language. Two students volunteered to present their skit to us. After doing the skit, the teacher asked them to explain why they had written the skit the way they did. The students explained to us that they - a group of two African-American female students - had purposely written the language to be “how my people speak.” This impressed on us the level of acceptance and inclusion that culturally relevant aspects of student life are accorded in RCECHS and especially in this classroom.

Another assignment we were told about by students involved research on school violence that was tied into their reading of *Romeo & Juliet*. This demonstrated the space for connections between real life and school work in the classroom.

All of the students we saw at RCECHS had full backpacks. The students were relatively casual with their teachers, they sometimes raised their hands but they primarily just caught the

teacher's eye and then spoke. Flexibility in assignments and schedule was obvious; we heard one student discussing if and why he had turning in an assignment late.

This teacher made an effort to incorporate technology into her classroom at every opportunity and various projects that the students were assigned involved technology. Presentation skills were also a large part of this classroom's curriculum, as were research skills like proposals and annotated bibliographies. The teacher told us that her purpose in providing work like the kind we have detailed above was purposeful; she wanted to help her freshman students prepare for college.

The second classroom we visited was a sophomore English class of Mr. EF. In this classroom there were bookshelves stuffed to overflowing lining one wall. Another teacher also had a desk in the back corner and told us that the two teachers shared one classroom due to space considerations. Along one wall were posters that students had made the previous week about "the negative aspects of ambition" in *Macbeth*. Students were in linear groups of two facing the board.

Students were taking the COMPASS test later in the week, so this lesson revolved around preparing students for that test. Each student had a test preparation book. The teacher gave us the sense that testing was part of the curriculum but it was not *the* curriculum. When discussing testing strategies, he encouraged critical thinking in students, telling them to "think about the process." After a brief introductory lecture, the teacher assigned students to work on certain sections in the preparation book. He then circulated around the room, checking in with groups of students and answering questions.

Control over students in this classroom was relatively lax. Drinks and snacks were being consumed by all of the students and backpacks and books seemed to be randomly strewn about.

These lax rules did not appear to impact the students' ability to work. They were decidedly concentrated on the task at hand, even though that task was test preparation. Notably, there was no graffiti on any of the desks we saw in this classroom or in any other.

The third class we visited was the math class of Ms. G. The desks in this classroom were also grouped into four or five. As with other classes, student interaction seemed to be seamless and integrated across gender and racial lines. After an introductory lecture to the day's lesson, each group was given a math problem on a poster. Students at each desk group did one line of the math problem and then the groups rotated and did the next line of the math problem at the next desk group. Each desk group had a different math problem, but they were all of the same type. This strategy is part of the North Carolina New Schools protocol.

The final class we visited was the gym class of Mr. M. This teacher was slightly younger than some of the other teachers and he mentioned to us that he was working on his master's degree. Placed prominently in the front of the classroom was a sign that said the class' goal was to "create lifelong health-related fitness." Along one wall were elliptical machines and along the other were treadmills. Half the class exercised on machines while the other half sat at desks doing an assignment with the teacher on NCAA brackets. The walls were cluttering with colorful North Carolina state team signs or inspirational/motivational signs. Homework for the class was listed on the board, as were lists of "high scorers" on the machines.

What impressed us was that the students looked quite happy to be in this class - sometimes a rare thing in gym class. It was clear in the way students transitioned from activity to activity that there were clear expectations about what to do in the class. No time was wasted. At every moment students were engaged in activity; they never appeared to be attempting to avoid certain activities.

Teachers

Teachers, as all educators know, are extraordinarily busy on a day to day basis. For this reason, much of our conversation with them comprised of brief conversations in between pedagogy, hallway passing, and after-school hours. We had the chance to speak with three teachers, one male (Mr. EF) and two female (Ms. AB and Ms. YS) for varying lengths of time from five to twenty minutes. Some themes emerged through these conversations: the importance of trust in student-teacher relationships; the high level of investment that the teachers at RCECHS put into their students; the consistent enforcement of high expectations and high standards; and culturally responsive teaching practices. The prominence of school culture also came up repeatedly in these interviews.

Teacher-student trust was seen and heard during our time at RCECHS. During our interviews with the teachers, students were constantly in and out of the classroom asking questions of the teachers or simply interacting with them. This seemed to be welcomed by the teachers. Students would walk by the door and wave to the teachers and often have brief jocular exchanges with them. Mr. EF and Ms. YS told us that teacher-student relationships are “about trust.” Mr. EF told us that he thought trust was the most important aspect of teaching native students. Ms. YS told us that the level of trust her students had in her contributed to the quality of work that they did in school; “they’ll do anything for you if they like you, if they can tell that you care about them.”

All of teachers also spoke about their commitment to their students’ success, as well as their commitment to building strong relationships with their students. Ms. AB told us that she has a Twitter account which she uses to keep in touch with her students that she thought was essential in her ability to form relationships with them; “I’m really careful with what I put on

there, but it's so the kids can get to see more about me." Both Mr. EF and Ms. YS spoke at length about how they acted for an advocate for the students when they struggled, and about being available as a resource 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for them. An example of this is when Ms. YS told us a story about a student texting her on a Sunday afternoon about questions he had on class material. Ms. YS welcomed these interactions, as did all of the teachers we spoke with.

High expectations and high standards were evident in the ways that the teachers spoke about the students and their curriculum construction. While discussing a conference she attended, Ms. AB mentioned off-handedly that she always returned to class and told her students about things she had learned while at the conference. This suggests that she has high expectations about the type of information and complexity of concepts that her students are capable of understanding, as well as a high level of respect for her students' intelligence and ability. Mr. EF and Ms. YS talked at length about intentionally teaching students' cultural and social capital (these are also the terms that they used). This involved teaching kids how to code-switch, i.e., act differently according to the context in which they were in, both implicitly and explicitly and how to access different sources of information using different rules of interaction, based on context. Mr. EF exemplified the high expectations and high standards that permeate RCECHS when he said, "What's good for one group of kids is good for another. The higher the bar the better the result."

The way that the teachers described their pedagogy aligned with those of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2013). Ms. AB admitted that teaching to such a diverse student body was a challenge but that it was also "fun to incorporate [in the classroom]." All three teachers said that the students at RCECHS are accepting of each other's diverse backgrounds. Ms. YS told us about her efforts to understand the homes and families of her students when she first

began working in the county by visiting the different neighborhoods and trying to experience them authentically. Mr. EF said that he differentiated between his students based upon their backgrounds. Mr. EF and Ms. YS agreed that the flexibility afforded to teachers at RCECHS allowed them to account for individual students' growth during the school year. This suggests that diversity is not viewed as a roadblock to academic learning but a boon. Ms. AB also told us that she intentionally included material from the cultural backgrounds of her students, including Native American, African American, Chinese, and Hispanic literature. Ms. YS said she did the same in her classroom. Even during the limited time we had RCECHS, the responsiveness of the teachers to the cultural backgrounds of the students surprised and made an impression upon us.

Finally, the teachers talked at length about the importance of the school culture of RCECHS. First, the structural element of small schools was mentioned by Ms. YS as an important part of effective schools; "small schools are the way to go." Mr. EF and Ms. YS both agreed that it was the environment of RCECHS that fostered student success and that any students placed in that environment would do comparably. Ms. AB told us that, "a lot of these kids think they are smarter than other kids but they're not . . . it's the environment." Ms. YS cited the level of acceptance of diversity in cultures in RCECHS as essential in creating the best school culture. Ms. YS summarized this theme when she said, "it's the culture, the environment [that makes the students do well]."

Indian Education Resource Center

On the morning of our second day, we visited the Indian Education Resource Center, a yellow brick building located in Pembroke in front of the Pembroke High School and adjacent to the University North Carolina of Pembroke. Inside, the floors were a warm hardwood and the

walls painted a cheery green. The occasional bulletin board with pictures and work by students decorate the walls. The offices were organized and clean.

We sat down with the Cultural Enrichment Specialist for a brief interview following our tour of the facilities. The CES is a Lumbee man who has been working for the Indian Education Program at the Indian Education Resource Center for over twenty years. He told us about the Lumbee people's relationship to education and told us "our people have always put a big emphasis on education." He identified the myriad of ways the IERC serves the Lumbee community, including facilitating national leadership conferences, science conferences, the Upward bound program, NASA and AISES conferences, and the Unity Program. The CES also told us that the RCECHS students were highly involved in the IERC, volunteering for a mentor program and often travelling to conferences. He remarked of the students in his community, "They ask to participate in Indian Education". It was clear during our conversation with the CES that the IERC provided a valuable service for the Lumbee students in Robeson County and acted as a resource for the Lumbee community.

The Cultural Enrichment Specialist and a Lumbee community member - also a guidance counselor at one of the local elementary schools - showed us around the Lumbee museum at the center. There were photos of historical tribal members, newspaper articles, and numerous artifacts. Both individuals shared an amazing amount of Lumbee tribal history in the community with us. During this tour, we were able to gain an understanding of the tight-knit nature of the Lumbee community and the historical significance of Robeson County for the Lumbee people.

Themes

During the course of this site visit, some structural and pedagogical themes that appeared to contribute to the native students' academic success became evident. These themes should be

prefaced with the recognition that determining contributing factors to student success is a continuing challenge for the United States educational system (Tyack & Cuban, 1997). These are themes that we either observed or were told about by the individuals we spoke with, and it is most likely a complex combination of factors that combine to create the academic results seen at RCECHS.

Structural themes included: small class sizes, small school size, the ability to take college classes, having teachers who are native themselves, a low teacher turnover rate, and an active Indian Education Resource Center. Small class size, school size, and low teacher turnover rates were mentioned by administrators and teachers as elements they believed to be integral to the students' success. The option to take college classes was mentioned by students and the Youth Development Specialist as something that increased their self-confidence and contributed to their academic ability. Furthermore, Lumbee students at RCECHS have both teachers and staff that are Lumbee themselves, which may contribute to increased cultural match between the home and school environments. In addition, students and the school guidance counselor spoke positively about the activity of the Indian Education Resource Center, noting that it had been a resource for the students that were meaningful to their educational success. However, staff members and students said that they wished the leadership of the Lumbee tribe were more involved in the educational lives of the students. Though these structural themes certainly emerged in observations and discussions, we focused our observation on the non-structural elements of effective teaching practices.

We came away from RCECHS with the sense that culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2013), though not formally trained by the district, was essential in the success of the school. We observed numerous practices outlined by CRT, including: relationships, acceptance, cultural

respect and inclusion, high expectations and high standards, and fostering of constructive students relationships across racial and ethnic categories (Gay, 2013). Everyone we spoke with referenced the strong student-teacher relationships that existed and the sense of family and community that existed at the school. Students and teachers spoke about their acceptance and respect of the diverse communities represented at the school, as well as inclusion of cultural themes in the curriculum. Both of these elements were also observed while we were at the school. Everyone we spoke to at RCECHS held the students to high standards and had high expectations of them. Indeed, this is built into the framework of a Early College High School due to the focus on collegiate success. Students we spoke to reflected back high expectations for themselves, especially through their aspirations for the future and the pride they have in themselves.

Family and community support were mentioned by the Youth Development Specialist, the guidance counselor, and the students as part of their academic success. Parental involvement, especially as a motivational factor, was mentioned by the guidance counselor and students. Both also talked about the Indian Education Resource Center. Students also cited the role their church communities had played in their education.

All of these themes are tributaries into the larger school culture. If one element were lost, the school culture would likely be very different. In some ways, the staff and teachers of RCECHS purposely create their school culture. In other ways, the school culture grows out of this intentionality to create something new. In our observation, the school culture of RCECHS has truly acted as a cultivated ground for students, leading to tremendous academic achievement.

Analysis and Discussion: Tilling the Soil

Challenges to Replication

In summarizing our research results and the impressive records of Mt. Edgecumbe High School and Early College High School at Robeson County (RCECHS), it is prudent to review the limitations and challenges to replication. It is primarily the unique contexts of the high schools we examined produce singular challenges to replication.

First, RCECHS benefits from its political context and support at the both the district and state levels. RCECHS emerged in part from the diligent work of the Assistant Superintendents who were instrumental in its creation. In addition, RCECHS is part of the North Carolina New Schools Project (NCNSP) which provides supports for innovative education models, including the Early College High School model. The teachers at RCECHS also use the Common Core Standards adopted by North Carolina, as well as the North Carolina New Schools Protocols for classroom instruction. Therefore, RCECHS benefits from the support of the state and district.

Tribal context is also critical to consider. The Lumbee people are distinctive in their historical grounding in their county, their status as a state-recognized tribe, as well as their early loss of their traditional language. This loss of language is an important limitation, as language classes and language revitalization may be a significant priority in other tribal contexts.

Furthermore, the multiracial and multiethnic environment of RCECHS may be considered a challenge to replication. The strong presence of a supportive Lumbee community and Lumbee teachers, administrators, and fellow students undoubtedly changes the school dynamic. Certainly, the Indian Education Program was found to play an important role in facilitating cultural and community engagement and supporting students in their academics. These types of supports likely do not exist in every school context.

In regards to the Mt. Edgecumbe High School phone interview, we caution against viewing the results as a complete case study, as we were unable to directly observe the school. Also, via the case study model, comparison between schools is difficult and discouraged. Mt. Edgecumbe is also undoubtedly a unique high school. In its political context, Mt. Edgecumbe is a former Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding school that was transformed into a state-run public boarding school in the 1980s (Mt. Edgecumbe High School, 2010). Unlike RCECHS, it is not a part of a recent initiative, but instead is the newest iteration of a longstanding boarding school tradition. In addition, Alaska does not use Common Core Standards statewide. Mt. Edgecumbe's student body has greater racial homogeneity than RCECHS, although its Alaska Native population reflects a large diversity in terms of tribal culture, community, and geographic homeland. As with RCECHS, the strong native community and support, as well as the presence of Alaska Native teachers and staff, must be considered when conducting analysis.

Finally, both Mt. Edgecumbe and RCECHS occupy a particular niche in education, that of the non-traditional public high school. Although they lack the tribal control of a charter or tribally owned school, they also may provide more flexibility and services than a traditional public school. It is unclear if their impressive results are generalizable beyond the model of an early college or boarding school. Both schools lack the presence of culturally based education or language instruction, albeit for different reasons. Additionally, the fact that these native students are succeeding in schools that do not utilize CBE should not be taken as evidence against CBE. Indeed, the challenges to replication illustrate that these two schools took a unique approach to foster native academic success in a public school environment that may be useful to educators countrywide.

Analysis: What works for native students?

A considerable amount of research has been done on the academic successes of American Indian/Alaskan Native students and what factors are critical for academic success. Most of this research has found that culturally based education and culturally responsive teaching are associated with better academic outcomes (Gay, 2013; Shevalier & McKenzie, 2012; Sorkness & Kelting-Gibson, 2006). The purpose of this project was to do a case study of a public high school, to determine what practices teachers were using that were effective for native students. Our introduction to effective teaching practices of native students began with Mt. Edgecumbe High School in Alaska. Our case study of RCECHS confirmed some of our themes gleaned from the literature, but also surprised us in many ways.

There are certainly elements of these schools that contribute to the academic success of their native students that do not have to do with teaching practices and are thus beyond the scope of this work. These include structural themes like small class sizes, small school sizes, low teacher turnover rates, having teachers who are native themselves, and partnerships with community or state colleges. All of these were things we either heard or saw during our time with Mt. Edgecumbe and RCEC High Schools. Having native teachers has been shown to bolster native students' educational attainment, (Lipka, 2002) while the other structural themes have been shown to bolster the educational attainment of all students in general (Tyack & Cuban, 1997; Gay, 2013). They are each undoubtedly important contributors to native student success but for the purposes of this study, we will focus on pedagogy. In the course of our project, we found that Mt. Edgecumbe and RCECHS applied teaching practices that fit within the broader culturally responsive teaching and culturally based education paradigms. The flexibility allowed teachers and administrators at RCECHS, and even at Mt. Edgecumbe, likely contribute to the presence of culturally responsive practices like these.

We saw evidence of culturally based (CBE) and culturally responsive teaching (CRT) approaches during the brief talk we had with the members of Mt. Edgecumbe and during our site visit at Robeson Early College. These two approaches were outlined earlier in this work. High expectations and high standards have been detailed in both school profiles and interviews. At RCECHS, all three teachers we spoke to included assignments and materials that came from diverse authors and sources. Cultural inclusion was encouraged at RCECHS, evident in the student presentations for *Romeo & Juliet*, and at Mt. Edgecumbe, evident in teachers making an effort to learn native languages. The teachers we spoke with at RCECHS mentioned making the effort to connect lessons with tangible real-world experiences. An example of this at RCECHS is the freshman English assignment that connected school violence to Shakespeare. Finally, at RCECHS, it was implicit in our discussion with Mr. EF and Ms. YS that they engaged their students in critical conversations about inequity when they told us that they both implicitly and explicitly taught their students “code-switching” to provide them with “social/cultural capital.” The latter two themes just mentioned are cited in culturally responsive and culturally based literature as essential ways that teachers can promote constructive conversations, about racial, social and economic inequality, and relationships between students of all backgrounds (Gay, 2013; Klump & McNeir, 2005). In essence, though neither CRT nor CBE is formally taught to teachers, it seems that the majority of the pedagogical practices we observed or were told about aligned with, at the least, the tenets of CRT and CBE.

Two other elements, strong student-teacher relationships and family/community support, are not included under the arc of CRT for non-white students in general, but are included under the umbrella of CRT for AI/AN students (Gay, 2013; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008) were cited as essential components of native students’ academic success. At RCECHS, it was obvious that

culturally responsive/based methods occurred in the context of impressively strong student-teacher relationships. These relationships were characterized by trust, respect, involvement, and pride on both sides. In both schools we spoke to, family and community support and engagement with students' academic lives were mentioned as integral to the native students' success. This includes tribal support and engagement with students. Again, notably, Castagno & Brayboy (2008) did note that culturally responsive pedagogy may be especially effective for American Indian/Alaskan Native students when student-teacher relationships and family/community support and engagement are present. This divergence between the non-white students and AI/AN students literature should not be bypassed; it may be an important point of divergence between CRT/CBE for non-white students in general and CRT/CBE for AI/AN students. It is also possible that the literature on non-white students generally has missed this essential component of academic success.

Most American Indian/Alaskan Native students attend public schools (National Indian Education Association., 2013). Therefore, research on what works for native students who attend public schools is desperately needed. Even though both RCECHS and Mt. Edgecumbe are non-traditionally structured public schools, the teaching practices we saw and heard within them are obviously crucial foundational elements for student success. To conclude, the teaching practices that contributed the most to native students' success in this case study were; family and community support and engagement, vibrant student-teacher relationships, and culturally responsive teaching practices including high expectations and standards, acceptance, and the use of culturally relevant material in the curriculum. None of these themes which we heard or observed exist in isolation. Pedagogy abides within circles of analysis that all intertwine together

until unwinding them is nearly impossible. Any number of the themes we heard and saw therefore have the potential to be potently beneficial for native students.

Conclusion: Creating Cultivated Ground

*“In a sense, everything in education relates to culture –
to its acquisition, its transmission, and its invention.”*

(Gay, 2013, p. 62)

It is our hope that this brief portrait of a public school serving Native students effectively may be useful to other educators seeking to improve the lives and educations of their Native students. Although the limitations of the research have been clearly outlined, it is clear that at the very least, best teaching practices for all students can and should involve culturally responsive, and when possible, culturally based, schooling. Despite the preponderance of evidence in favor of education that is culturally responsive, it has yet to be widely implemented in the United States (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008).

The overlap between the literature on effective teaching practices for Native students and effective teaching practices for other racial or cultural minority students is substantial, and numerous scholars have advocated that students of all kinds benefit from effective teaching practices that are tailored to their students’ needs (Hilberg & Tharp, 2002; Klump & McNeir, 2005). We take heart at this analysis, as at the very least it seems all students benefit from and indeed are entitled to an education that affords them cultural responsiveness. It is our recommendation that more research be done in the future on culturally responsive schooling and evaluating its effectiveness in classrooms across the United States, with diverse populations, in different contexts. It is our hope that all public schools will adopt one of the culturally responsive

schooling models available as the minimal appropriate and necessary method to teach an increasingly diverse body of American students.

Furthermore, we recommend that due attention is paid in the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogical practices, especially to the importance of teacher affect and attitude, as well as preparation. This follows the call by Castagno & Brayboy for better teacher preparation in order to prevent CRS from falling into “meaningless generalizations” (2008, p. 942). The teachers highlighted here exemplified the affective qualities outlined by Yazzie (1995). Indeed, it is these qualities, including warmth and respect, that are the most difficult to prescribe and enumerate in a school setting, which does not mean they should be ignored. This leads us to recommend that research on teacher preparation in schools like the ones outlined here be included as part and parcel of future research on school success, in order to gain more insight into the genesis of effective teaching practices.

Finally, we suggest further research be undertaken to evaluate public schools effectively educating Native students. Specifically, we suggest a cross-analysis of the commonalities between schools (whether charter, private, public) that are successfully promoting Native student academic success, in order to gain further insight into the needs of Native students in all contexts.

It is our belief that it is our responsibility to promote and implement the teaching practices that have been found to be successful with American Indian and Alaskan Native students as a critical part of the larger effort to improve the public school educational outcomes for all students across the country.

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Appendix A

Mt Edgecumbe School District District & School Report Card for the 2011-2012 School Year

School: Mt Edgecumbe High School School Enrollment: 421
 Grades: 9 - 12 Title I Program: Schoolwide
 Title I School? No Accreditation: Not Applicable

A Title I school receives federal money to support low-achieving students. A Schoolwide Title I Program uses the money to improve the education for all students. A Targeted Assistance Title I Program uses the money to provide help for students who need it most.

Assessment Results for Adequate Yearly Progress	Percent of Students* Proficient or Advanced in Language Arts <i>State Target: 82.88%</i>	Percent of Students* Proficient or Advanced in Mathematics <i>State Target: 74.57%</i>	Percentage of All Students Tested <i>NCLB Target: 95%</i>
ALL STUDENTS	87%	77%	99%
African American	N/A	N/A	N/A
Alaska Native/American Indian	86%	76%	99%
Asian/Pacific Islander	N/A	N/A	N/A
Caucasian	N/A	N/A	N/A
Hispanic	N/A	N/A	N/A
Multi-Ethnic	N/A	N/A	N/A
Economically Disadvantaged	85%	74%	99%
Students with Disabilities**	N/A	N/A	N/A
Limited English Proficiency**	74%	68%	100%

* Assessment results reported for students enrolled in district for a full academic year (FAY).

** Proficiency results include former students with disabilities or former LEP students for two years to monitor academic progress for AYP determination only.

Number of newly arrived LEP students exempted from taking the Language Arts test:	0
District Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Status	
Met AYP: <u>Yes</u> AYP Level*: <u>Not Applicable</u>	
* District AYP Level 1 = Alert; Levels 2 and 3 = Improvement Status, Level 4 = Corrective Action AYP level designation is based on assessment results from spring of 2011-2012 school year, and is applied to 2012-2013 school year.	
<i>Districts at Level 2 or above must develop an improvement plan. Parents are invited to participate in the planning process and are encouraged to contact the superintendent's office or the school principal to find out how to participate in upgrading the quality of the district's educational program.</i>	

School Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Status			
Met AYP: <u>Yes</u>		AYP Level*: <u>N/A</u>	
		Years @ Level 5: <u>N/A</u>	
Key for School Improvement Levels			<i>Title I schools in Level 2 or above must develop and implement a school improvement plan each year. Schools at Levels 4 & 5 must also develop corrective action and restructuring plans. Parents are encouraged to contact the principal or district office for information on how to participate in these planning processes.</i>
AYP Level	Status	Description	
2	Improvement (I)	2 nd year not meeting AYP	
3	Improvement (I)	3 rd year not meeting AYP	
4	Corrective Action (CA)	4 th year not meeting AYP	
5	Restructuring (R)	5 th year not meeting AYP	

Appendix B



HIGH STUDENT PERFORMANCE

Performance of Students in Each Course on the ABCs End-of-Course Tests

Percentage of Students' Scores At or Above Grade Level

	English I	Algebra I	Algebra II	Biology	Physical Science	Civics & Econ.	US History
Our School	>95%	>95%	---	>95%	---	---	---
District	70.6%	75.6%	---	81.7%	---	---	---
State	82.9%	78.7%	---	83.0%	---	---	---

N/A = Fewer than five students

* Algebra II, Physical Science, Civics & Econ. and US History were eliminated from the ABCs effective 2011-12.

Performance of Each Student Group on the the ABCs End-of-Course Tests

Percentage of Passing Scores on the End-of-Course Tests Grouped by Gender, Ethnicity, and Other Factors.

	Male	Female	White	Black	Hispanic	Amer. Indian	Asian	Pacific Islander	Two or More Races	E.D.	N.E.D.	L.E.P.	Migrant Students	Students with Disabilities
Our School	>95%	>95%	>95%	>95%	>95%	>95%	N/A	N/A	N/A	>95%	>95%	N/A	N/A	N/A
# of tests taken	49	74	42	22	12	45	N/A	N/A	N/A	88	35	N/A	N/A	N/A
District	71.6%	79.2%	88.3%	70.0%	79.4%	73.0%	62.5%	N/A	79.2%	72.4%	85.6%	61.8%	87.5%	33.7%
State	78.5%	84.4%	89.0%	68.6%	75.1%	75.9%	87.3%	82.5%	84.8%	71.8%	90.9%	49.9%	66.2%	41.5%

E.D. = Economically Disadvantaged N.E.D. = Not Economically Disadvantaged L.E.P. = Limited English Proficiency

N/A = Fewer than five students

School Attendance

The average percentage of students who attend school daily.

Our School	98%
District	94%
State	95%

For information about the ABCs of Public Education and Education and Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs), visit <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/>

PSRC Early College at RCC

Shelia Gasque, Principal
 Shelia Gasque, Prior Principal
 5160 Fayetteville Road
 Lumberton, NC 28360

(910) 737-5232
 Grades 9-12
 Regular School
 Traditional Calendar

Public Schools of Robeson County

SCHOOL PROFILE

School Size

The total number of students in this school and the average number of students in schools with similar grade ranges at the district and state levels.

OUR SCHOOL	DISTRICT	STATE
185	955	829

Average Course Size

The average number of students enrolled in the courses listed at the time of testing.
 * Algebra II, Physical Science, Civics & Econ. and US History were eliminated from the ABCs effective 2011-12.

	OUR SCHOOL	DISTRICT	STATE
English I	15	16	18
Algebra I	20	15	20
Algebra II	---	---	---
Biology	12	15	18
Physical Science	---	---	---
Civics & Econ	---	---	---
US History	---	---	---

SAFE, ORDERLY AND CARING SCHOOLS

School Safety

The number of acts of crime or violence reported below includes all acts occurring in school, at a bus stop, on a school bus, on school grounds, or during off-campus, school-sponsored activities.

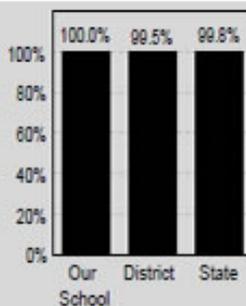
Out of 185 students in our school, there were a total of 0 act[s] of crime or violence.

The number of acts of crime or violence reported per 100 students:

OUR SCHOOL	0
DISTRICT	2.26
STATE	1.4

Access to Technology

Percentage of classrooms connected to the Internet



Keeping you informed

More information about your school is available on the NC School Report Cards website at: <http://www.ncreportcards.org>

HIGH STUDENT PERFORMANCE, CONTINUED

School Performance

Each year, schools in North Carolina may receive several designations based on their performance on the state's ABCs tests. These designations are awarded on the basis of the percentage of students performing at grade level and on whether students have learned as much as they are expected to learn in one year. The designations earned by your school are displayed below, followed by a brief description of each designation.

Our School's Designation(s): Honor School of Excellence, High Growth

DESIGNATION	PERFORMANCE: STUDENTS PERFORMING AT GRADE LEVEL	GROWTH: LEARNING ACHIEVED IN ONE YEAR			PERCENT OF SCHOOLS WITH DESIGNATION	
		High Growth	Expected Growth	Expected Growth Not Achieved	DISTRICT	STATE
HONOR SCHOOL OF EXCELLENCE	At least 90% of students at grade level and the school met all AMO targets	✓			14%	20%
SCHOOL OF EXCELLENCE	At least 90% of students at grade level				0%	2%
SCHOOL OF DISTINCTION	At least 80% of students at grade level				14%	30%
SCHOOL OF PROGRESS	At least 60% of students at grade level				71%	27%
NO RECOGNITION	60 to 100% of students at grade level				0%	19%
PRIORITY SCHOOL	50 to 60% of students at grade level, OR Less than 50% of students at grade level				0%	2%
LOW PERFORMING	Less than 50% of students at grade level				0%	0%

Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs)

Per No Child Left Behind, North Carolina set AMOs in reading and mathematics based on 2010-11 data.

In any group where the percentage of students at a grade level is greater than 95% or less than 5%, the actual values are not displayed because of federal privacy regulations. In these cases the results are shown as >95% or <5% for the group.

Our school met 5 out of 5 performance targets.

QUALITY TEACHERS

	Total Number of Classroom Teachers*	Fully Licensed Teachers	Classes Taught by Highly Qualified Teachers	Teachers with Advanced Degrees	National Board Certified Teachers*	Years of Teaching Experience			Teacher Turnover Rate
						0-3 years	4-10 years	10+ years	
Our School	11	92%	100%	33%	1	8%	23%	60%	18%
District	64	88%	89%	24%	4	20%	27%	54%	12%
State	54	94%	96%	27%	10	18%	28%	55%	14%

* The total number of teachers in this school and the average number of teachers in schools with similar grade ranges at the district and state level.



PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF NORTH CAROLINA

State Board of Education | Department of Public Instruction