ALASKA: System Involvement

In this profile, we examine the systems that directly impact the lifecourse of Native youth in Alaska—systems that displace, control, and/or attempt to correct a social ill. Below, existing data reflecting the experiences of Native youth in child welfare, juvenile justice, and school correctional systems are shared.

To determine their degree of system involvement, statewide population data for American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) youth under age 18 were retrieved from the 2010 Census. If Native youth are 10% of the under 18 population in a state, then we would expect them to represent approximately 10% of those youth involved in juvenile justice and foster care systems. Where the percentages are greater or smaller, we observe disproportionality.

In 2010, Native youth comprised 5% of the total state population and 17.7% of the population under age 18. (1)

**Child Welfare Systems**

The child welfare system profoundly touches the lives of Native youth at disproportionate levels—both nationally and within the state of Alaska. Native youth are extremely overrepresented in Alaska’s foster system, making up 51% of all youth currently in care. Among those Native foster youth, 50% were adopted, 46% reunified. (2)

1 in 2 youth (51%) in Alaska’s foster care system are AI/AN.

1 in 2 Native foster youth (50%) were adopted to new families in 2013.

Less than 1 in 2 Native foster youth (46%) were reunited with their families in 2013.

The visual representation of the disparity of Native youth system involvement is stark. From entering to exiting, Native youth in Alaska were 3 times more likely than their counterparts—virtually all of whom were underrepresented by contrast—to be in the grasp of the child welfare system. (3) To respond to these disparities, the state’s Court Improvement Plan, Alaska Native Family Preservation Program, and several other initiatives were launched, in addition to Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) violation claims filed in state courts. (4)

**Alaska Disproportionality Index, 2012**

![Alaska Disproportionality Index, 2012](chart)

Source: NCJFCJ, 2014.

**Racial Disproportionality Index**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entries</th>
<th>In Care</th>
<th>Exits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American/Black (a)</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian/White (b)</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino (c)</td>
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<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander (d)</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaska Native (e)</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Juvenile Justice Systems

In Alaska, Native juvenile offending was **two times higher** than what we would expect given their representation in the state youth population, at **35%** in 2013. (5) The top three offending categories were technical violations, property crimes, and person crimes—whereas there were zero drug or status offenses in 2013. (6)

In Alaska, **70%** of all Native juvenile offenders were committed to facilities as wards of the state, whereas **55%** of non-Natives were committed. (7) This means there is a **15 percentage point disparity** in commitment rates between Native and non-Native juvenile offenders. When we analyzed the courts’ rulings for the same crimes, some concerning findings emerged. For example, where the level of offending was **identical** for public order crimes, **100%** of Native juvenile offenders were committed versus **67%** of non-Native offenders. (8) These data highlight the need to address both disproportionate rates of offending among Native youth—to get at the **root causes of delinquent behaviors**—as well as the **disparate treatment** of Native youth once they have entered the juvenile justice system.

School Disciplinary Systems

While juvenile justice and child welfare systems were rather apparent choices for a profile on system involvement, school discipline has increasingly become a site or a system for funneling youth—particularly students of color, with disabilities, and special learning needs—into the hands of law enforcement through what has been referred to as the **“school-to-prison pipeline.”** This pipeline is enabled through out-of-school suspensions and expulsions. These systems of punishment remove youth from learning contexts and increase the likelihood that they will fall behind and/or drop out.

The out-of-school suspension rate for Native youth is **1.6 times** what we would expect given the percentage of Native youth in school in Alaska (38% vs. **24%**). (9) However, when we look to the suspension of Native students with disabilities, Alaska’s rates are **lower** than US averages. (10) Last but not least, the expulsion rates of Native students are **3 percentage points less** than what would be proportionate (21% v. **24%**). (11) As such, there are areas where other states can both learn from, and help instruct, the ways students experience disciplinary systems in Alaska.

References

(6) Ibid.
(7) Ibid.
(8) Ibid.
(10) Ibid.