

School System, Parents Faulted For Student Failures

Study Shows Educational Problems Among Tribal Youth Despite Positive Community Outlook On Learning

by John Svicarovich

● The majority of tribal children enjoy school, believe in the value of formal education, and have a positive self-image. Yet their academic performance is declining, and they are dropping out of high school at a rate approaching 50 percent.

● Both tribal members and education officials agree that the public school system isn't doing enough to help prepare tribal children for jobs and careers on the reservation.

● Although many tribal adults give the school system low marks in educating tribal youngsters, there is evidence to suggest that parents themselves aren't doing enough to help educate their children.

These are some of the key findings of the Confederated Tribes' educational needs assessment study completed November 1 and endorsed by Tribal Council November 7.

The Council's unanimous approval of the 81-page study report culminates seven months of research in which a representative sample of 180 tribal members — 91 adults and 89 students — were asked for their views on a number of tribal education issues.

Survey interviews, conducted primarily by tribal members, sought to learn more about the community's educational priorities, its assessment of the local public school system, its view of tribal education programs, and its preferences in Indian culture education.

The study also included in-depth interviews with tribal and nontribal education officials, as well as a close look at records on the performance of tribal children in the local schools.

The study was designed and carried out by Quill Point, a Portland consulting firm, under the oversight of a special Education Needs Assessment Committee appointed by General Manager Ken Smith and chaired by Municipal Manager Rudy Clements.

VIEWS OF TRIBAL ADULTS

Among tribal adults, the study found agreement that basic skills — reading, language,

and math — should be the top learning priority for tribal children in the public schools.

The importance of that tribal community view is underlined by the study's finding that tribal children as a group are experiencing significant academic problems in the public schools, including low grades that have been on a downward trend the past few years.

The study also found that in achievement test scores on basic skills, tribal elementary children are behind their nonIndian peers as well as the national average for their grade level. And they appear to fall farther behind each succeeding year in school.

The study also found these views among tribal adults:

● They believe formal education is very important for tribal youngsters. They also believe in the importance of adult education, although most of them aren't sure what adult courses they would like to see offered.

● They think Indian culture

is important for tribal children to learn, but not in the schools.

● Especially among the elders, they believe Indian language is the most important Indian culture subject for tribal children to learn. They believe it should be taught to children at all grade levels.

● Generally, they are either indifferent or negative about the performance of the public schools. However, there is no common view of what should be done to improve the situation.

● If the tribal government were ever to operate its own school system, they believe such an arrangement would have more advantages than disadvantages for tribal members.

● For students who are not doing well in the Madras schools, tribal adults favor an alternative school program located on the reservation and run jointly by the school district and tribal government.

● Adult tribal members do not believe the school district is doing an adequate job of prepar-

ing tribal children for jobs and careers in the reservation community. The majority of tribal and nontribal education officials who were interviewed agree with this view.

● Judging from their comments, most tribal parents do not choose to help their children make plans for what they will do when they finish high school.

● Tribal parents say they expect their children to do well in school, but at least a third of them never help their children with school concerns. Fathers tend to be less involved with their children's schooling than mothers.

● Adult tribal members are unhappy with the way the Minors' Trust Fund is being used. They feel tribal youngsters too often make unwise purchases with their trust money, rather than spending it for education.

VIEWS OF TRIBAL STUDENTS

The study found that most tribal students at all grade levels like school and plan to graduate; half of them plan to attend college.

However, the comments of tribal children show that a larger

share of them grow unhappy with school in the upper grades.

School records examined in the study show that a significant share of tribal students become more uncomfortable with school in the seventh grade and above.

Dropout rates for tribal students are four to six times higher than for nonIndian students. The past few years, dropout rates for tribal high school students have been increasing at a rate which is now approaching 50 percent.

Furthermore, tribal students in junior and senior high school have a higher rate of disciplinary problems than their nonIndian classmates, and absenteeism continues to be high, although it has improved in recent years.

Despite these difficulties, the majority of tribal students have a positive self-image and positive expectations of themselves academically.

The study also found that tribal students:

● Feel accepted in the Madras schools, but don't feel very involved in school social activities.

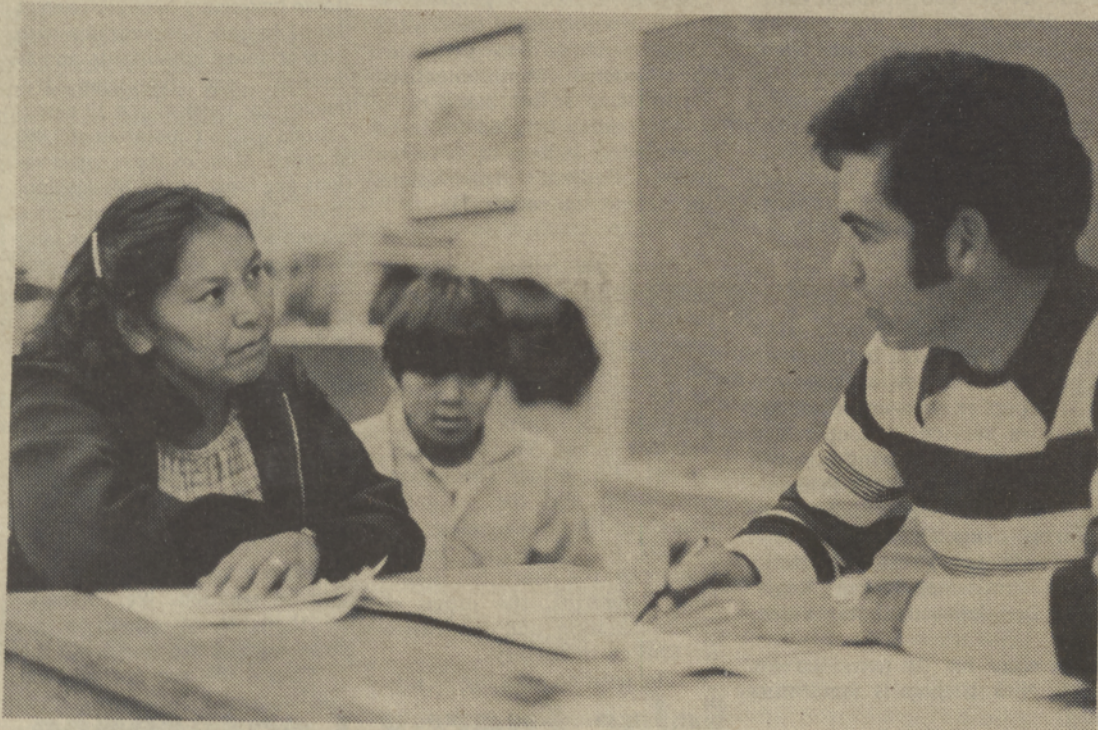
● Feel their teachers, for the most part, care about them accept them, and expect them to do well. (However, a number of them at the upper grade levels feel that their teachers relate better to nonIndian students and expect nonIndian students to perform better than Indian students.)

● Don't know very much about job and career opportunities on the reservation.

● Seldom seek out school personnel for career guidance.

Now that the findings and conclusions of the study have been approved by Tribal Council, the Needs Assessment Committee will begin to develop program recommendations to address concerns expressed by tribal members.

Besides Rudy Clements, Committee members include Charles Calica, director of the Tribal Education Department; Mike Clements, chairman of the Tribal Education Committee; Marlin Reimer, BIA education specialist; Lyle Rhoan, chairman of the JOM Committee; Dacotah Soules, director of the Early Childhood Education Program; Fabian Sutterlee, chairman of the Title IV Program Parent Advisory Committee; and Darrell Wright, superintendent of School District 509-J.



SUCCESS STORY—Positive communication between parents and teachers is rare but Lucille Teeman, mother of successful junior high student Annette Holliday, had a friendly chat with social studies teacher Gene Harrison on parent conference day November 9.

Spilyay Photo by CDS

Teaching Your Preschool Child, Part One

(This eight-part series was prepared by Betsy Sullivan, Reading Specialist for the Redmond School District. It contains many practical ideas for working with your preschooler to prepare him for school.)

One of the most enjoyable times of the day can be when you read aloud to your child. You don't have to be an expert, as there is no "best" way to read. The more you read and enjoy the stories yourself, the more your child will get pleasure from books. You don't even need to devote a great deal of time to it, but read a few minutes every day. Remember also that grandparents, aunts and uncles, older brothers and sisters and the baby sitter can all share in this reading aloud to the child.

Books are really important. They help the child learn about things, places, people and animals. He hears many words,

some new and strange, and begins to think about sounds and rhymes. Some of the stories the child hears may make him feel happy or sad and helps him to understand the feelings of others and his own feelings. A child, who has been read many books, develops a pleasure in books and usually develops readiness for school.

When reading to your child have her sit close to you or on your lap. Discuss the pictures and what the book might be about. Ask questions such as "What do you think will happen next? Why do you think that happened?" Relate the pictures and story events to your child's

previous experiences. "Who do you know with the same kind of puppy? Has anything like that ever happened to you? What was it?"

There are many places from which you can borrow books. The Public Libraries or your own school library. Take your child with you when you go to the library. Let her pick out the ones she wants as well as some of your favorites.

Books are valuable, so a child should learn how to take care of them. Have a special place for you and the child to keep the books so that they do not get colored or scribbled by smaller brothers and sisters.

Most children like to have some books of their very own, which they can have read to them over and over. Many supermarkets or dime stores have inexpensive books. Bazaars often have used books for sale. A

variety of reading and interest levels will be represented.

Books that are fun and ones that the child asks you to read over and over until it becomes a favorite will lead the child to a lifetime of enjoyment.

Attention Junior and Senior High Students and Parents

School District 509J has made a change in the attendance policies. The new attendance policy, which came into effect as of last spring, has several areas that people should be aware of which may affect them. Where absences are un-excused, teachers are not required to provide make-up work. Make-up work for unexcused absences may be secured through a petition proc-

ess. All absences which are not related to sickness, sickness in one's family, or a family emergency should be pre-arranged. Absences for hunting and fishing, which on occasion have been excused in the past, will now be unexcused. Absences for which there is a high degree of educational value and which are pre-arranged can be excused with the pre-arrangement and administrative approval.