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Preface

The War for Indian children will be won in the classroom.
—Wilma Mankiller

This edition of the *Journal of American Indian Education* brings to a close a special three-part series featuring perspectives and commentaries about the condition and future of Native education as we move into a new century and millennium. In the previous two editions, our contributors asserted the necessity of Native authority and control in education but cautioned that there are formidable pitfalls associated with change and adaptation in a context of colonization. In order to properly frame the issues, these authors—elders, leaders and academics—also provided historical overviews, experiential reflections, as well as their own vision of the future.

The contributors to this final edition lead us into an examination of policy and national trends in education and their implications in practice. While the previous contributors warned of the lingering effects of colonization, the present contributors warn us further that what is sought for the nation's educational progress in terms of policy, standards and accountability may be inappropriate and could weaken the responsive potential of education in Native communities. In their respective analyses, the authors also provide considerable contextual detail in support of their views. As such, their writings represent a veritable "snapshot of the present," rendering to the

reader the most salient issues and perspectives about the state of American Indian/Alaska Native education in the year 2000.

The perspectives offered in this edition suggest further that there are major social and systemic obstacles barring achievement of equality of the results and benefits of education for Native youth and communities. As the authors reveal the multiple dimensions and interactions of these obstacles, they further reinforce a significant theme threaded through the two previous special editions—the critical need for connecting education to language and culture and linking the school to the community's purposes.

Kevin Gover, Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, opens and sets the theme for this issue with a rare and moving statement, presented on the Occasion of the Ceremony Acknowledging the 175th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. While apologizing for years of disservice to American Indians, he asserts the agency's moral responsibility "of putting things right." He proposes that a healing process begin and that the BIA, with the year 2000 as a temporal benchmark, work to reinvent itself as an instrument of Native prosperity.

John Tippeconnic, and David Beaulieu, respectively the former and current Directors of the Office of Indian Education follow with their reflections on matters related to Federal Indian policy and the changing face of American education. Beaulieu takes the position that our national concentration on school improvement and the relationship of schooling to improved employment opportunities for all learners may be too narrow a policy focus for American Indian and Alaska Native education. Rather, in keeping with the original purpose of The American Indian Education Act, school reform strategies

must focus on objectives and approaches that recognize and address the linguistic and socio-cultural uniqueness of American Indian and Alaska Native learners.

Beaulieu also says that Indian parents, communities and tribes must define their purposes and goals, providing clear direction to guide education and assert the criteria for evaluating success from a tribal and community perspective. Native communities and tribes must partner with schools, creating a holistic and community-owned approach to educating their young

In addition to rendering some personal reflections about his own experience in education, John Tippeconnic outlines the issues and progress in four areas he deems critical to American Indian Education: Tribal control, Focus and Priority, Language and Culture, and Research. All of these areas are rendered particularly complex because of the roles and responsibilities of Indian education at the various levels of responsibility—state, federal and tribal. The complexity of Indian education is further compounded by the importance and often-misunderstood legal concepts of treaty rights, sovereignty and government-to-government relationships that exist among Indian tribes and the federal government. The greatest challenge, he emphasizes, is to sustain a strong presence in Indian education—to make the education of American Indians and Alaska Natives a priority at *all* levels. Since Indian Education is so political, unity among Indian educators and tribal leadership is essential. Tribal leadership is needed that talks, promotes and acts on Indian Education issues constantly and persistently.

In a provocative and forthright analysis of the 1998 Standards of the California State Board of Education, Jack Forbes confronts the assimilationist, melting pot ideology embedded in the push for standards and accountability in American education. At the

heart of the issue is what he refers to as the “theft of America,” the way that such standards define “America” and “Americans.” Forbes argues that much of the reaction against multiculturalism and bilingualism is helping to fuel the rapid push for so-called “standards” in the schools. Such standards underlie a collectivized approach to education, leading to a process of nationalization, which has a denigrating and exclusionary effect not only on American Indians but all other racial and ethnic groups, and women, as well.

In the final selection in this volume, Dean Chavers links the past failure in Indian Education to 125 years of damage wrought by “enforced segregation” between school and community. The expectations of Indian parents, he says, are not synchronous with the realities enacted in many schools serving Native youth. Many Indian schools continue to use curriculum belonging to a past era. A key to improvement is changing the culture of the schools and substantially increasing the numbers of well-trained Indian teachers and administrators.

As we present this final volume of our special issue, we pause to reflect on the original purpose which was to share the wisdom and insight of recognized native and non-Native elder leaders and scholars in the field of Native education as a commemorative of our entry into a new century and millennium.

When considered as a collective statement, the insights presented in these volumes both inspire and caution us. We are told that the present juncture in time represents both great opportunity as well as potential for irreversible loss of those elements of Native life and being that we hold most sacred. Since colonization of the American continent, Native people have withstood threats of annihilation and the constant

pressure of assimilation. In spite of this, we continue to survive for the purposes our creator meant for us. However, in adapting many of the colonizer's forms of institutions as our own under the rubric of self-determination—including formal schooling—we run the risk of reinforcing rather than deconstructing the very processes of assimilation set upon us.

Education has become a critical element in our journey. Although the formal aspects of it have served as the colonizers primary instrument of oppression and assimilation, we now have the unprecedented opportunity to adapt and blend this form of education with our own time-honored ways of teaching and learning. However, this must be accomplished with the greatest care and vigilance to honor and integrate our languages, cultures, values, and traditions with the learning and opportunities necessary for full participation in the larger society.

We honor and thank those who have spoken to us on the pages of these special editions. Each in his/her own unique way has provided a pathway for the future. It is now our task to relay this collective wisdom forward while adapting it to our intentions and actions now. A postcolonial era for Native people is dawning in the morning sky of this new millennium. As we exercise our sacred trust, acknowledging and applying the wisdom our elders and leaders have shared with us here, we and the generations that follow us will live with integrity, beauty, and enlightenment.