



Perhaps one of the greatest measurements of success for the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians is found right on the reservation in the story of the tribe's Education Department.

Recent statistical data demonstrates a climb in academic achievement for Santa Ynez Chumash tribal students. Santa Ynez Chumash students have reached a 97% high school graduation rate, which exceeds the California state rate of 84%.

Up until the 1980s, fewer than a handful of Santa Ynez Chumash tribal members had attended college. But those numbers have increased significantly over the years. Today, nearly 100 tribal students are currently attending colleges, universities and trade schools all across the country at institutions such as UC Berkeley, UCLA, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo and the Culinary Institute of America.

Even more inspiring is the fact that the number of tribal students who graduated from college has tripled in eight years. Over the years, Santa Ynez Chumash tribal students have received Bachelor's degrees, Master's Degrees, Doctor of Philosophy degrees and Juris Doctor degrees.

The Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians Education Department first began in the early 1990s as an ad hoc program organized by tribal elder Richard Gomez. Dunn, a local college-prep private school for grades 6-12, stepped up to the plate by offering tutoring for tribal children. That first year, three tribal students signed up for the program.

Those early days were just the beginning of academic achievement for tribal students. Since then, the Education Department has experienced extraordinary growth and now provides academic planning and support, opportunities for learning and assistance for career transitions for tribal students – youth and adults.

In 2009, Dr. Niki Sandoval was named Education Director, a move that helped the department advance even further. She grew up on the reservation, graduated from Santa Ynez High School and took an academic path that resulted in a Bachelor of Arts degree from Pepperdine University, a master's degree from George Washington University and a Ph.D. from the University of California at Santa Barbara. Dr. Sandoval is perfectly positioned to serve her tribal community.

The Education Committee – which is comprised of seven elected tribal members – works with Dr. Sandoval to guide strategic educational investments in the tribe's community members.

