Chapter 13

Embracing the Dream of an Education:
Motivation, Challenges, and Determination on American Indian Reservations

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ABSTRACT

Students have not changed much over the years. Their desire to learn, be productive, and to share with others to make a better life for themselves, their family, and the community have pretty much stayed the same. What has changed is the vehicle being used. Technologies such as personal computers and the internet have been around since the 1980s; however, they did not come into common use until the late 1990s. As personal computers became a burgeoning industry in the 1990s everything has changed in the world, or has it? Many take for granted that access to the internet and computers are part of who we are and where the world has taken us. This is the reality for many, but not for all, and not even for everyone in the United States. Included is an exploration of the situation on rural American Indian reservations and the challenges and external barriers to accessing needed technologies to be successful. A call to action is included for change and the strategies and practices that could aid in building infrastructures and access to information on rural American Indian Reservations.

INTRODUCTION

The dream of a higher education is something that should be available to anyone who wants to pursue a higher education degree (Benham et al. 2022). Worldwide there are significant and polarizing issues to obtaining a degree in higher education including where you live, what access you have to a higher education, poverty, personal finances, political influences, censorship of information, and what type of degree you want to pursue (Bischoff, 2022; USDA, 2022; Lembani et al 2019; Koricich, 2018). Where you live is a key issue to accessing information with a dearth of access issues attributed to external barri-

ers found in rural areas. These issues include the lack of a digital infrastructure and access to high-speed internet connections (broadband) along with the related advanced telecommunications needs depending on where students live or work (Fregni, 2020); Vogels, 2021). Issues with reliable and dependable access to the internet directly affect enthusiasm and motivation and it is contagious. Students with disabilities have even more challenges obtaining a higher education on remote American Indian reservations as the lack of reliable internet connectivity places students at a dire and isolating disadvantage (Running Bear, 2021). Momentum can start to wane after a student enrolls in an online course at a college or university and discovers during the first week of class there are internet issues, and they lacked the ability to connect to retrieve or upload their assignments and communicate with their instructors. Research at the Pew Research Center (2021) on digital divide issues found that while overall technology ownership and access to the internet has increased nationwide, rural residents still experience a deficit in accessing reliable internet connectivity.

Figure 1. Technology ownership in rural America vs. urban and suburban areas
Source: Pew Research Center (2021)

Despite growth, rural Americans have consistently lower levels of technology ownership than urbanites and lower broadband adoption than suburbanites

% of U.S. adults who say they have or own the following
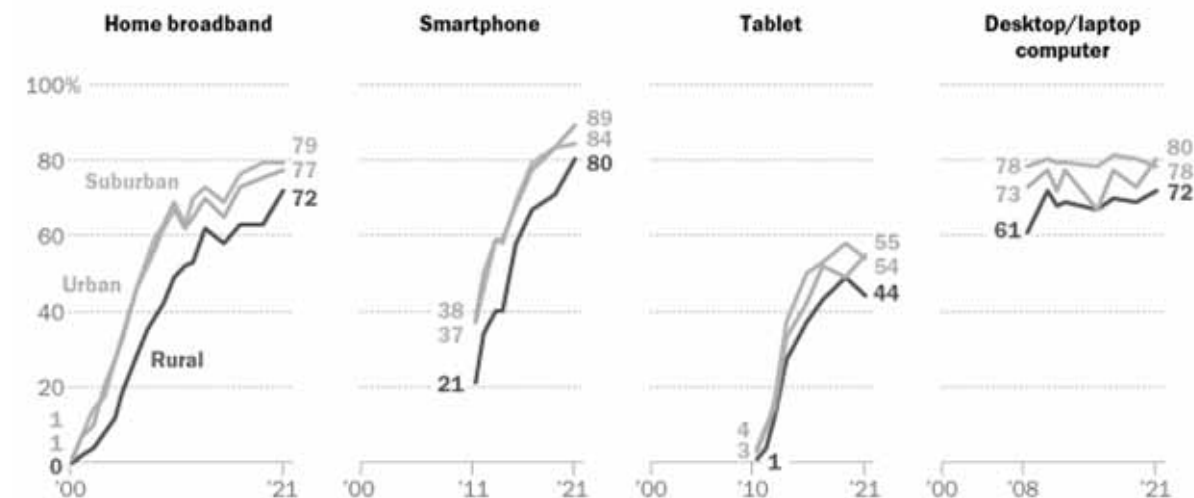
Source: Survey conducted Jan. 25-Feb. 8, 2021.

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Many of these issues in rural areas are due to location-based challenges. Rurality or rural dwellers can be viewed and weighed in many different contexts – for the purpose of this chapter, the term *rurality* is used and defined as a community that is distant from a large city or metropolitan area or someone who is experiencing rural living (Nelson et al., 2021). People living in rurality may have different viewpoints,

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