



**NATIONAL
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EDUCATION
ASSOCIATION**

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National Indian Education Association
National Native Education Agenda
A Transition Paper for the Department of Education

The National Indian Education Association (NIEA), established in 1970, is a membership-based organization, with a mission to “support traditional Native cultures and values, to enable Native learners to become contributing members of their communities, to promote Native control of educational institutions, and to improve educational opportunities and resources for American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians throughout the United States.”

Many aspects of the education of American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians are deeply rooted in federal law and policy. Education is an essential component of tribal sovereignty, the federal trust responsibility, and Native self-determination principles recognized under the U.S. Constitution, treaties, statutes, executive orders, and court decisions. The new Administration must embrace this foundation and build on it to effectuate positive changes for the future of America's indigenous tribes, communities, and children.

The education of Native Americans lags far behind that of the rest of the country. Nearly 90 percent of the 620,000 Native American students attend public schools with their non-Native peers. Approximately 7 percent of Native students attend schools administered by the Department of Interior, Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), a system of 184 schools for educating American Indian students spread over 23 states. The federally supported Indian education system includes 48,000 students, 29 tribal colleges, universities and post- secondary schools.

American Indians have the lowest level of educational attainment of any racial or ethnic group in the United States. The national graduation rate for American Indian high school students was 49.3 percent in the 2003–04 school year, compared to 76.2 percent for white students (EPE Research Center 2007). Further, only 13.3 percent of Native Americans have an undergraduate college degree, relative to the national average of 24.4 percent.

NIEA sets forth below its highest priorities for Native education policy, program, and funding changes, and affirms its commitment to working in partnership with the Department of Education on these matters.

1. **Reaffirm the Original Intent of the Title VII Program through the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (currently the No Child Left Behind Act).**
Increase the academic achievement of Native students through effective and meaningful education programs and approaches in the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) through provisions that provide for meaningful tribal



involvement in setting the educational priorities for Indian students and the inclusion of Native language and cultural instruction. Current research demonstrates that cultural education can be successfully integrated into the classroom in a manner that would provide Native students with instruction in the core subject areas based upon cultural values and beliefs. Math, reading, language arts, history, science, physical education, music, cultural arts and other subjects may be taught in curricula instilled in Native traditional and cultural concepts and knowledge. Additionally, NIEA promotes coordination of programs across Titles I and VII to foster better programming to meet the unique cultural, language, and educational needs of Indian students

2. Elevate the position for the Director of Indian Education at the Department of Education to Assistant Secretary.

When the Department of Education was created, the current Director of Indian Education position was the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Indian Education. This position formally changed in 1981 to Director of Indian Education Programs and under the Bush Administration was demoted from a SES position to a GS position. The Assistant Secretary should review and monitor all of the education programs within the Department of Education that Native students access, in addition to the Title VII programs. The Assistant Secretary should also facilitate the coordination of states, tribal governments and communities, neighboring areas, and the federal government working together in developing educational standards and related assessments.

3. Develop a Native language grant program at the Department of Education that supports Native language immersion schools and Native language classes.

Titles III, Subparts A and B, as well as Title VII currently allow for Native language instruction; however, these provisions should be strengthened so that schools can access resources to support programs that utilize Native languages. The purpose of this program is to foster academic achievement through Native American language instruction. Studies have shown that, while Native American children and youth have exhibited stagnant educational achievement Native language immersion has demonstrated remarkable promise in educational achievement. National studies on language learning and educational achievement indicate the more language learning, the higher the academic achievement. Native language immersion programs provide a proven method to enable Native students to achieve academically in the areas of math, reading, and science as well as in other content areas. The Department of Education should also allow for assessments in Native languages where students receive their instruction in a Native language.

4. Promote and support approaches that recognize Native languages as a first or second language and pedagogy that incorporates traditional cultural characteristics and involves teaching strategies that incorporates Native cultures and histories.

Native students learn best when research based practices that are proven to work on Native students are supported and made available by the Department of Education for implementation by school districts. Research demonstrates that Native children



perform better academically when they are taught in a manner that is consistent with their traditions, languages, and cultures.

5. Address teacher and school leadership quality and recruitment efforts for Native communities.

NIEA supports an increased effort to hire and retain qualified and culturally sensitive educators through tribal teaching training grants and increased funding for loan forgiveness programs in Indian Country. Additionally, increased support for Native teacher professional development programs, and support for professional development service programs in schools with a significant population of Native students is encouraged to improve teacher recruitment.

6. Facilitate states, tribal governments and communities, and the federal government to work together in developing the educational standards and related assessments.

NIEA seeks stronger emphasis in encouraging states, tribal governments and communities, neighboring areas, and the federal government to work together in developing the educational standards and related assessments under Title I. The Department of Education should seek inclusion of tribal input in the development of the various state, local educational agency, and school plans and assessments that consider the cultural and educational needs of Native students. ESEA/NCLB should be strengthened to provide resources for collaboration among tribes, states, and the federal government to allow for increased opportunities in the development of standards that recognize the cultural backgrounds of Native students.

7. Disallow the equalization of Impact Aid funding, utilized by states like Alaska, Kansas, and New Mexico that allows for Impact Aid funding to be considered a local revenue source and deducted from state aid.

Federal “Impact Aid” funds are provided to school systems located on or near federal lands to make up for the loss of property taxes due to the tax-exempt status of those lands. For Indian tribes, whose lands are held in trust by the United States, such funds are critical to the success of the local public school systems. New Mexico has taken advantage of a loophole in the law which allows a State to reduce state funding to federally impacted school districts if the majority of the school districts in the state are funded within 25% of each other on a per student basis (20 U.S.C. 7709). This formula does not include the top 5% or the bottom 5% of schools by per student funding, which further skews the outcome. In New Mexico’s case, equality under this formula is achieved by effectively taking money from school systems which serve Indians and other federally impacted communities and redistributing the funds to all school systems. Under this redistribution system, school systems which serve Indian populations are deprived of critically needed funds, especially for school construction and renovation where the Indian schools greatly lag behind the non-Indian schools. NIEA urges the Department of Education to disallow the “equalization” formula and allow the Impact Aid funds to be used as Congress originally intended. Additionally, forward funding should be applied to Impact Aid

8. Actively utilize the National Advisory Council on Indian Education (NACIE) to promote policies on Indian Education within the Department of Education.



NACIE was established in 1972 under the Indian Education Act and is a fifteen member board whose members are appointed by the President. NACIE's mission is to provide recommendations to the Department of Education on ways to improve educational opportunities for American Indians and Alaska Natives. NACIE has not been consistently consulted under the Bush Administration.

9. **Establish a Tribally College or University (TCU) specific student support services program within the U.S. Department of Education.**

Student support services program should be established to strengthen the capacity of TCUs to provide high quality, culturally integrated programs, address changing student demographics, and ensure the ongoing engagement of students. These programs would coordinate with TCU-HEA Title III-A and address longstanding deficiencies in BIA Scholarship funding. Additionally, the program would include a comprehensive technical assistance program on key issues, such as student assessment, accreditation, retention, and remediation, leadership development, and best practices and information sharing aimed at developing "Model Institutions of Excellence"

NIEA encourages the new Administration to adopt these policies and believes with good faith collaboration that we can provide our children with an education that honors their Native identity while simultaneously preparing for successful futures by providing the opportunity to incorporate into the curriculum their rich cultural heritage, language, traditions, and native ways of knowing.