

National Indian Education Association

Priorities for Improving the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) for Native American Students

Strengthen the Governance of Native American Education at the Department of Education and in Indian Country

The ESEA should reflect the modern federal policy of respecting tribal sovereignty and the self-determination of Native peoples, and the protection of Native American¹ languages. Greater Native American control over the education of Native American students will lead to better results and healthier Native American communities.

- Respect the sovereign status of Indian tribes by elevating the authority of Tribal Education Departments and agencies (TEDs) throughout various titles in ESEA that impact Indian Country, provide TEDs the same access to federal funding and education planning resources as State Education Agencies (SEAs) and Local Education Agencies (LEAs).
- Require federal agencies and states to collaborate with Indian tribes to ensure adequate planning and support for Native American learners and Native American education providers. Require Department of Education (DoE) and Department of the Interior (DoI) to collaborate in order to provide greater DoE financial and technical support for DoI Indian schools, including the opportunity to utilize alternative measurement assessments and the development of tribal Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) or other annual measurements of standards.
- Restore the position of Director of Indian Education, now a Title VII grant manager position, to Assistant Secretary for Indian Education, with authority to engage in various titles of the ESEA that impact Native American education. The Assistant Secretary should also be authorized to facilitate DoE and DoI collaboration and to implement the role of TEDs within various titles.

Support Instruction of Native American Languages

The ESEA should reflect the policy mandates of the Native American Languages Act (NALA), which encourages Native American languages as a medium of instruction to increase overall Native American student achievement.

- Title I should (1) include schools using a Native language as the medium of instruction similar to those of Puerto Rico; (2) allow for alternative measurement assessments, AYP standards, and teacher qualifications relative to the teaching of Native American students based on their unique linguistic, cultural, and political status considerations, including federal assistance and recognition of meeting tribal AYP standards as an alternative to meeting state AYP standards for schools serving Native American students; (3) authorize the credentialing of Native language teachers under the definition of highly qualified and upon

¹“Native American” is defined in the Native American Languages Act (NALA) as “an Indian, Native Hawaiian, or Native American Pacific Islander.” P.L. 101-477 (October 30, 1990).

recommendation by a tribal government or other Native American governing entity; (4) accommodate limited Native language proficient students in Native language medium schools (Sec. 1111) similar to Limited English Proficient (LEP) accommodations.

- Authorize a formula grant program in Title VII to support immersion schools, including tribally-operated, private, and Bureau-funded schools.
- Establish a Part D in Title VII that authorizes early childhood immersion infant-kindergarten learning centers.
- Title III amendments should include provisions and funding to support Native language instruction and remove barriers to full-fledged instruction in Native languages, acknowledging that most Native American learners enter school with limited English proficiency, even if they are English only speakers.
- Restore Culturally Based Education (CBE) Technical Assistance and Resource Centers (technical assistance centers) that would provide regional support to Title VII programs, advance Culturally Based Education best practices, and promote teaching strategies that integrate Native American traditional and cultural concepts into the curricula.
- Provide funding preference to Tribal Colleges and Universities, the Hawaiian Language College and the School of Hawaiian Knowledge to develop Native American language resources and skills for community members, which would provide greater support for learning and using Native American languages in local schools, similar to the support for district language needs of young immigrant school community members.

Improve Support for Teachers of Native American Students

The ESEA should authorize greater support of teachers of Native American students, utilizing the particular expertise of the tribal colleges, universities, and the Hawaiian Language College and the School of Hawaiian Knowledge. Tribal Colleges and Universities should be the primary training campuses for both Indian educators and non-Indians who are working with Native American learners.

- Require set-asides for the training, recruitment and retention of teachers of Native American students.
- Tribal Colleges and Universities, the Hawaiian Language College, and the School of Hawaiian Knowledge should be supported through Title II and VII provisions so they can play a central role in developing a critical mass of educators for Native American learners.
- Authorize a tribal “Teacher Preparation Initiative” geared towards educators working or interested in working at Native American schools or where there are significant numbers of Native American students enrolled.

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