



NATIONAL INDIAN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

November 1, 2021

## National Indian Education Association statement on House Build Back Better Bill

In September of this year, the House of Representatives committed at least \$20.5 billion to Indian Country in resources through the budget reconciliation package with input from the National Indian Education Association (NIEA) and other tribal organizations. We are pleased to see that the version of the budget reconciliation bill released, October 28<sup>th</sup> by the House Rules committee includes \$200 million for language preservation. We appreciate Congress's recognition of the critical importance language serves in our communities.

We are, however, disheartened learn that the same bill stripped all K-12 school construction money included in the September agreement. This includes long overdue dollars for the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) funded schools and Impact Aid construction. This is simply unacceptable and is yet another broken promise to sovereign Nations. The United States government has a federal trust responsibility to each and every one of the 574 federally recognized tribes.

The current deferred maintenance backlog for BIE facilities now stands at \$823.3 million. Teacher housing has its own \$102.1 million deferred maintenance backlog. Of the 86 schools classified by the agency as "poor," 73 currently do not have funding for major replacement or repair. The damage to our communities from decades of negligence by the United States government was highlighted in a recent [article](#).

The numbers above are largely related to ensuring the buildings are safe and up to code. It does not mean the school is modern, technologically advanced, inspiring, or culturally appropriate. Also of note, maintenance will never truly go away. Once a replacement school is built, it needs care over time. In addition to deferred maintenance, the cost to replace the 73 schools in "poor" condition with no funding is at least \$4.5 billion at an average cost per school of \$62.2 million

NIEA demands that Congress to restore funding for BIE and Impact Aid school construction in any final reconciliation language sent to the White House. It is the duty and moral responsibility of our elected officials to ensure that Native children are learning in an environment that is safe and on parity with their non-Native peers.

### Next Steps

The coming days will be critical to have your voice heard. NIEA is asking you, our members, friends, and relatives to contact your Representatives and Senators today! This communication ensures Congress understands that it is their duty and moral responsibility to provide resources for Native children to learn in an environment that is safe and on parity with their non-Native peers.