

National Indian Education Association National Native Education Agenda Executive Summary

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 new Administration on these matters.

1. Strengthen the governance of Native education at the Department of Education by taking the following actions:
 - Elevate the position of the Director of Indian education to an 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;
 - Facilitate the coordination of states, tribal governments and communities, neighboring areas, and the federal government working together in developing the educational standards and related assessments through the newly created Assistant Secretary's office;
 - Actively utilize the National Advisory Council on Indian Education (NACIE) to promote policies on Indian education within the Department of Education; and

- Develop a memorandum of understanding with the Department of Interior to collaborate and coordinate strategies on improving academic achievement for Native students.
2. Support the maintenance and survival of Native American languages in accordance with various federal statutes and to take the following actions:
 - Develop a Native American language grant program at the Department of Education that supports Native language revitalization programs and academic achievement. Research demonstrates that Native children perform better academically when they are taught in a manner that is consistent with their traditions, languages, and cultures;
 - Promote and support the development of public, BIE funded, and charter schools based upon culturally based education and Native language instruction;
 - Promote and support teaching strategies that integrate Native traditional and cultural concepts and knowledge into the curricula; and
 - Fund research focused on the benefits of culturally relevant curriculum and Native language immersion efforts.
 3. Issue an Executive Order on Indian Education that promotes interagency collaboration, the use of research based practices in Indian education, and the use of Native language instruction and culturally based education in public and federally funded schools.
 4. Convene a White House Conference on the needs of Native youth to develop strategies that implement sound cultural appropriate approaches related to the development of Native children which includes their social, emotional, mental, and physical health. The national graduation rate for American Indian high school students was 49.3 percent in the 2003–04 school year and Native teenagers suffer from poverty, suicide, teen birth, and substance abuse at rates higher than the national average. Given the current status and situation of Native children, the wellbeing of Native children should be an important national priority.
 5. Address teacher and school leadership quality and recruitment efforts for Native communities through increased support for Native educators’ professional development programs, and provide assistance to schools serving Native students through the Technical Assistance Centers for Indian Education, previously funded by the Department of Education.
 6. Improve funding for Indian education programs at the Departments of Education, Interior, and Health and Human Services by taking the following actions:
 - Establish a Native Education Budget Task Force to review data and make recommendations to the Administration’s budget for upcoming fiscal years;
 - Forward fund impact aid and tribal colleges; and
 - Fund BIE school construction, Indian Head Start and Early Head Start, tribal education departments, the Johnson O’Malley program at BIE, and Title VII of NCLB.
 7. Increase resources and expertise at the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) to assist tribes and Indian schools that are seeking to develop their own standards and definition of Adequate Yearly Progress and interagency coordination and collaboration to allow BIE schools gain access to the expertise and technical assistance available at the Department of Education.

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 by incorporating into the curriculum their rich cultural heritage, language, traditions, and native ways of knowing, while simultaneously preparing them for successful futures in contemporary Western society.