

National Indian Education Association
National Native Education Agenda
A Transition Paper for the White House

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. Establish a Native Education Budget Task Force to review and make recommendations to the Administration’s budget for Native education programs.**

The Indian Education Budget Task Force will consist of representatives of the Department of Education and Department of the Interior and will consist mainly of expert Tribal representation similar to the BIA Tribal Budget Advisory Group and the Indian Health Care Budget Advisory Board. The Native Education Budget Task Force will assist in data collection and make recommendations to the Departments of

Education and Interior for upcoming fiscal years for programs impacting the education of Native 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. **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 culture based education in public and federally funded schools.**

A new Executive Order should be implemented within the first 100 days that provides national guidelines to improve the way federal agencies coordinate dozens of Indian education programs and specifically promotes the use of languages and culturally based education as a means of academic achievement. Research on the use of culturally based education and academic achievement for Native students should be included in the Executive Order and promotion of the use of research based practices proven to be effective for Native students should be included in the Executive Order.

4. **Convene a White House Conference on the Needs of Native Youth.**

NIEA supports a White Conference 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. National organizations involved with Native American children are working collaboratively to develop strategies that promote educators and school communities working within tribal and Indian communities to assist in the development of local partnerships, given their responsibility to provide educational services, daily contact with Native American students, and relationships with parents and families.

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 them the opportunity to incorporate into the curriculum their rich cultural heritage, language, traditions, and native ways of knowing.