



NATIONAL INDIAN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

National Indian Education Association

House Committee on Education and Labor Statement for the Record

In Support of Trauma-Informed Education Practices in Native Communities

On behalf of the National Indian Education Association (NIEA), the most inclusive national organization advocating for culturally relevant educational opportunities for American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians, we write today to highlight the importance of implementing trauma-informed practices throughout our education systems.

Native students serve as the foundation of NIEA's work, from early childhood to postsecondary education. Despite the vibrant cultures, traditions, and languages of Native communities, our students continue to bear the burden of historical events that began centuries ago. Federal policies developed an education system that removed Native children from their homes and communities to boarding schools that prohibited the practice of traditional lifestyles and mandated the acceptance of mainstream Christian and English ways. In the words of Carlisle Boarding School founder Robert Pratt, these schools endeavored to "kill the Indian and save the man." Such practices persisted until the 1970s, creating generations of Native families traumatized by the very education systems that promised opportunity to their peers. Today, Native youth continue to experience the impacts of these policies through historical and childhood trauma. Our students still attend classrooms where, a generation ago, their parents were punished for their languages, traditions, and cultures.

Historical trauma now manifests through nationwide performance metrics. For example, Native students are disciplined and held back more frequently than their peers. Native youth also make up a disproportionate amount of those in juvenile facilities. These trends continue through graduation, as only 72 percent of Native students graduate from high school compared to the national average of 85 percent. These barriers have led to the lowest college participation rates in the nation, at 19 percent. From there, approximately 39 percent of Native students who enroll in a four-year, post-secondary institution actually graduate, the lowest rate of any group in the United States.

Congressional action and support for trauma-informed education practices in schools that serve Native students is critical to reversing centuries of federal policies that resulted in the genocide of Native cultures, traditions, and languages. Native students must have access to educators that have the professional training and experience to create safe classrooms where our youth can thrive. In addition, funding and programs that support Native language instruction, assessments, and preservation are critical ensuring that Native students are able to learn and speak their languages for generations to come. Curriculum and education practices

should value and encourage the expression of Native languages and cultures in the classroom. Finally, tribes, policymakers, and schools must have access to data that accurately measures student progress to ensure that programs fully serve the unique needs of Native students.

NIEA looks forward to working with legislators to address educational disparities through trauma-informed education practices for the only students that the federal government has a direct responsibility to educate— Native students. If you have any questions, please contact NIEA Legislative Analyst Adrienne Elliott at aelliott@niea.org.