



NATIONAL INDIAN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

**Written Testimony of the National Indian Education Association  
for the House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on  
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies**  
*March 22, 2023*

On behalf of the National Indian Education Association (NIEA), the oldest and most inclusive organization advancing educational opportunities for American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians, we appreciate this opportunity to provide testimony on Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 funding within the Department of Education (ED) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and the Substance use And Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

Founded in 1969, NIEA works to achieve educational equity and excellence so that all Native students are provided with a high-quality and culture-based education. Grounded in treaties, federal law, and decades of legal precedent, Congress must uphold the promises and fiduciary responsibility to Tribal Nations by providing Native students with high-quality culture-based education opportunities, both in and out of the classroom.

While the FY 2023 omnibus highlighted investments in Native-serving institutions and programs that support Native languages, robust funding for childcare, and access to mental health services it is critical that this subcommittee and Congress continue this trajectory by providing increases at least to maintain rate with inflation for key programs for Native youth. Due to the underinvested, rural, and remote nature of Native communities, Native students do not have the access to high-quality culture-based education options and resources critical to economic success. The following funding levels would guarantee that Native students and their

families are delivered education opportunities that provide a safe and healthy environment that promote success in our communities for generations:

## **I. Department of Education**

The Department of Education prioritizes programs that serve the ninety-three percent of American Indian (AI), Alaska Native (AN), and Native Hawaiian (NH) students attending public schools. It is imperative that ED continues to foster educational excellence and ensure access to high-quality education improvement of our nation's education system.<sup>1</sup> The enactment of the Indian Education Act and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) work to fulfill the federal government's role in the federal trust responsibility by supporting the educational and cultural needs of Native children.

NIEA requests \$211 million for Indian Education Formula Grants (ESSA Title VI, Part A, subpart 1). Funds under this program are essential for Native students in public schools and are used for academic enrichment, professional development, tutoring, testing and literacy support. NIEA also requests \$76.6 million for subpart 2, Special Programs for Indian Children in FY 2024. This would support and address the systemic Native teacher shortage by providing training for teachers and administrators in schools with high proportions of Native students. This funding would also provide support for demonstration grant programs aimed at increasing graduation rates for Native students. While there has been considerable improvement in high school retention and dropout rate, AI/AN high school students have the highest rate at 9.6% compared to their non-native peers.<sup>2</sup> This funding will also implement community-driven strategies that expand educational choice.

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<sup>1</sup> NCES, Common Core of Data, "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey", 2020-21 v.1a.

<sup>2</sup> Bouchrika, Imed. 2021. "High School Dropout Rate Is Decreasing but Race, Income & Disability Issues Persist." Research.com. December 7, 2021. <https://research.com/education/high-school-dropout-rate>.

NIEA also requests \$13.2 million for subpart 3, National Activities, this program helps build tribal capacity and improve the educational status, needs of Native children, and provide Native language immersion schools and programs which are essential to Native communities. Increase in funding to support the State-Tribal Education Partnership grant will assist tribes in developing Tribal Educational Agencies (TEAs) and help existing TEAs build capacity. We also request that \$5 million go towards the Native Language Immersion Program Set aside within this request. Native languages have been in decline for decades due to the “civilization process” of the Indian Boarding School policy. This set-aside will not only go above and beyond the 20 percent set-aside to engage in immersion instruction but gives the federal government to mend those efforts of erasure reclaiming Native peoples culture and identity through the practice of language and engage in immersion instruction.

NIEA urges this subcommittee to increase the amount of funding for the Native Hawaiian Education and Alaska Native Education Equity Assistance Programs (Title VI, Parts B and C) to \$47.9 million each for FY 2024. The \$3.1 million increase to the Native Hawaiian Education program would support the continued education-related services to the Native Hawaiian population and address outcome by tailoring support to the unique educational and cultural needs of these students. Similarly, the Alaska Native Education Equity Assistance Program is the only specific source of support for Alaska Native students since they do not have Bureau of Indian Education schools. Funding supports community engagement and the development and use of culturally-relevant educational resources.

## **II. Department of Health and Human Services**

ACF is committed to working alongside Native communities to improve the economic and social well-being of children, families, and their communities. These programs provide

Native communities with high-quality early care; promote the vitality of Native languages; and foster family economic security. NIEA requests \$13,938,400 for the Head Start program. \Direct funding under this program supports, in part, the 150 Indian Head Start programs which have provided social and community support such as tribal language revitalization programs.<sup>3</sup>

Another critical funding stream that supports Native children and families is the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG). NIEA requests \$9.58 billion (about \$29 per person in the US) for FY 2024. The need for childcare is critical to Native families Increasing this grant would expand the opportunity for tribal communities to have high-quality early childhood education and care.

NIEA supports \$93.6 million for the Native American programs under ACF This program funds the Administration for Native Americans (ANA) and houses grants and projects that support the social development, cultural preservation, and economic self-sufficiency. Community based projects such as the Native Languages – Preservation and Maintenance and Esther Martinez Immersion; Native Youth Initiative for Leadership, Empowerment and Development support not only supports the social and economic drive of Native people but supports the needs and intergenerational advancement for Native communities.

SAMHSA has delivered resources to ensure that Native communities have access to prevention, treatment, and recovery services that reflect both science and traditional cultural practices. The efforts made by SAMHSA to upholding the federal government’s historical and legal relationship with Native communities by providing these services.

NIEA urges the subcommittee to increase funding for the Circles of Care program under Children and Family programs to \$8 million for FY 2024. The Circles of Care program allows

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<sup>3</sup>[National American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start Collaboration Office | ECLKC” n.d.\)](#)

Tribal Nations and tribal organizations to develop community-based, and culturally and linguistic systems of care. Increased funding will ensure there are culturally competent services that support children and their families available within Indian Country.

In addition, NIEA requests \$37.6 million for the Project Linking Actions to Unmet Needs in Children Health (LAUNCH) under the Children and Family programs. This program promotes the well-being of young children. Symptoms of historical trauma – including substance abuse, poverty, and disproportionate representation in the child welfare systems are prevalent in Native communities. The Indigenous Project LAUNCH allows Native communities to thrive in safe, and supportive environments and incorporate traditional, cultural practices.

NIEA requests \$50 million for the Tribal Behavioral Health Grants for FY 2024. This would address both the high incidence of substance use and suicide amongst Native communities. Suicide continues to be the leading cause of death among American Indian and Alaska Native youth and young adults ages 10-24.<sup>4</sup> The need to incorporate culturally sensitive treatment protocols for both suicide and substance abuse are crucial factors in mitigating increased statistics. The implementation of effective, promising strategies, through increased funding will support the well-being of Native youth.

### **III. Conclusion**

FY 2024 appropriations can ensure equity in access to high-quality education options that will prepare Native students to thrive in the classrooms and beyond. NIEA urges the committee and the rest of Congress to consider the above recommendations, uphold the treaty, and trust responsibilities by funding critical programs that impact the unique needs of the only students that the federal government is solely responsible for educating.

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<sup>4</sup>“Fatal Injury and Violence Data | WISQARS | Injury Center | CDC.” 2022. [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov). June 17, 2022. <http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/fatal.html>.