

EDUCATION

Key Points:

- Today's native youth offer the greatest hope for the future of our tribal nations, but need the educational tools necessary to develop to their fullest potential.
- Native students deserve equal educational opportunities that incorporate language and culture into the curriculum.

No resource is more important to the continued success and growth of our nation and Indian Country than our children. It is vital that we all work together to strengthen our human capital in all tribal communities across America. The most effective way to do that is to provide a high-quality, culturally-appropriate education that effectively and equally benefits all of our nation's children—including our Native children. Ensuring equal educational opportunities is not simply a matter of fairness, but even more importantly in today's challenging economic climate, it is an essential strategy for creating jobs and securing the nation's future prosperity especially in tribal communities. Education also drives personal advancement and wellness, which in turn improves social welfare and empowers communities—elements that are essential to protecting and advancing tribal sovereignty and maintaining tribes' cultural vitality.

The federal government provides education to Indian students in two ways, through federally funded Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools or through education assistance to public schools attended by Indian students. Currently 620,000, or 93 percent, of Indian students attend public schools and approximately 45,000, or 7 percent, attend BIE schools. There are 184 BIE-funded schools (including 14 peripheral dormitories) located on 63 reservations in 23 states.

Many challenges exist in reforming the educational system for Native students. For example, the 2011 National Indian Education Study found that Native students continue to score significantly lower than their peers in reading and math in grades four and eight. The severity of the current state of Indian education is perhaps most apparent in the Native high school dropout rate. The graduation rate for American Indian and Alaska Native high school students is 67 percent – the lowest of any racial/ethnic demographic group across all schools.¹ Even worse, the graduation rate for Native students in the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) school system is a staggering 53 percent compared to the national average of 80 percent.² In fact, recent data finds that while the graduation rates continue to rise nationally, with strong gains by the Latino and African American communities, Native American students have experienced only modest improvements since 2000 and have actually seen their graduation rates decline since 2008.

Native students have requested that their tribes have more control over the education of their native students and integrate language and culture into the curriculum of both Bureau of Indian Education and public school systems:

¹ *Indian Students in Public Schools – Cultivating the Next Generation: Hearing on Indian Education Before the S. Comm. On Indian Affairs*, 113th cong. (2014) (testimony of William Mendoza, Exec. Dir., White House Initiative on Am. Indian and Alaska Native Educ.).

² See Marie C. Stester & Robert Stillwell, U.S. DEP'T OF EDUC., NAT'L CTR. FOR EDUC. STAT., PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL FOUR-YEAR ON-TIME GRADUATION RATES AND EVENT DROPOUT RATES: SCHOOL YEARS 2010-11 AND 2011-12 (10) 2014, available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2014/2014391.pdf>.

- Strengthen use of native language programs:
 - Support legislation that will provide for language immersion programs.
 - Reauthorize the Esther Martinez Native American Languages Preservation Act.
 - Allow for tribal certification of native speakers.

- Increase consultation among tribes, the federal government and states.
 - Recognition and capacity building for Tribal Education Agencies.
 - Reauthorization of the State-Tribal Education Partnership Program.
 - Update Department of Education consultation policy to provide for greater input from students and their tribal governments.

- Increase tribal control in Bureau of Indian Education schools
 - Enact the “Blueprint for Reform” to restructure BIE schools.
 - Provide training to tribes to increase capacity of BIE and tribal school personnel.

- Improve school climate for Native American students.
 - Report on the Department of Education school environment listening tour.
 - Recommendations to better meet the unique educational and cultural needs of Native students.
 - Increase funding to ensure that Native students are learning in safe schools that meet the physical and broadband needs for students.