

# Tribal Education Departments National Assembly



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Trudy Jackson, *Seneca Nation*

**December 19, 2013**

Senator Thomas “Tom” Harkin  
Chairman, Labor, Health and Human  
Services, Education, and Related Agencies  
Washington DC, 20510

Senator Jerry Moran  
Ranking Member, Labor, Health and Human  
Services, Education, and Related Agencies  
Washington DC, 20510

**RE: FY 2014 Tribal Budget Request - Funding for Tribal Education Departments/Agencies**

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Moran:

The Tribal Education Departments National Assembly (“TEDNA”) is a national non-profit membership organization for tribal education agencies/departments (“TEAs”). TEAs are executive branch level agencies of American Indian tribal governments responsible for tribal education matters. TEDNA greatly appreciates inclusion of funding for TEAs in the Subcommittee’s FY14 appropriations report. With recent passage of a budget deal for FY14, we write to emphasize the importance of retaining this funding for education administration and planning as the FY14 appropriations process moves forward. As detailed below, this is a crucial aspect of ensuring the highest quality education for Native children.

## **AUTHORIZATION FOR FUNDING**

Federal funding for TEAs is authorized in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, Title VII, Section 7135 (20 U.S.C. § 7455), and Title X, Section 1140 (25 U.S.C. § 2020). Two million dollars was appropriated for TEAs through the Department of Education (“ED”) for the first time ever in FY 2012 through the State-Tribal Education Partnership (“STEP”) Program in which tribes and states through cooperative agreements combined resources to implement Elementary and Secondary Education Act (“ESEA”) programs in public schools located on Indian reservations. These projects support the type of tribal-state-federal partnerships Indian educators and tribal leaders have long called for as a means to improve AI education. This program, which is now in its second year, should again be funded. Further, TEAs should be appropriated an

additional \$3 million through ED.

### **JUSTIFICATION FOR TED/TEA FUNDING**

American Indian education is in a state of crisis. *The national dropout rate of AI students is double that of their non-Indian peers. In some states the high school dropout rate of AI students is over 50%. AI students drop out of high school at a higher rate and score lower on achievement tests than any other student group. AI 8th grade students are 18% more likely to read or perform in mathematics at a "below basic" level than their non-Indian peers. AI students also have the highest rates of absenteeism, suspension, and expulsion.*

Congress recognized the dire need to change American Indian education policy in 2012, when for the first time in history, Congress appropriated funding for TEAs in the Department of Education. The funding was used to support the State-Tribal Education Partnership Program, known as the STEP program, in which tribes and states through cooperative agreements combine resources to implement ESEA programs in public schools located on Indian reservations. Four tribal-state partnerships were awarded STEP program grants to co-govern education. These projects support the type of tribal-state-federal partnerships Indian educators and tribal leaders have long called for as a means to improve AI education.

TEAs are in a unique position to halt and reverse this negative trend. TEAs will use funding to support more early education initiatives that many TEAs can provide, support more work in the area of tribal-state education cooperative agreements, and to increase the role of TEAs in schools serving AI students. Further, this funding will assist TEAs to become more self-sufficient by providing the means to develop or amend their education codes. Developing and strengthening TEAs could lessen the burden on federal appropriations in the future. This would begin to implement the policy of self-determination in American Indian education and further the United States' trust responsibility to AI students.

TEAs would also coordinate education programs; develop and enforce tribal education codes, policies, and standards; develop culturally relevant curriculum and assessments; and, provide support services and technical assistance to schools and education programs on Indian reservations. This would include maintaining and sharing electronic data regarding AI students, coordinate federal education programs with schools and states, and institute programs to increase graduation rates and post-secondary school readiness.

Investment in TEAs is sound federal policy. TEAs have already proven that they are capable of improving AI student outcomes. For example, the Hoopa Valley Tribe TED of California operates a learning center that works with at risk students. The Hoopa Valley TED identifies K-12 students at risk, pairs the students with mentors, and develops student-learning plans. Students are tutored in target academic areas and coached in life skills. *This program alone has improved student academic performance by two letter grades in core academic areas.* The Rosebud Sioux Tribe TED of South Dakota *decreased student dropout rates by 30%* by operating tutoring services and afterschool math and reading programs. The Pueblo of Jemez TED located in New Mexico works closely with the Walatowa Charter High School, a Jemez Pueblo culture-based, early-college, state-chartered, school located on Pueblo land. *Its graduation rate is 89.4%,*

dramatically higher than the state wide Native American average graduation rate of 49%. The Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma has a science, technology, and math program that serves approximately 250 Chickasaw students. *Ninety percent of senior students participating in the program enroll in college.* Nicki Wilson is a specific example of how a TED can improve the life and education of AI's. Nicki Wilson is a Cherokee Tribal member, who is a recipient of Cherokee Nation financial aid and educational counseling. Nicki went back to college at the age of 50 after recovering from substance abuse issues. She turned to the Cherokee Nation for support. The Nation provided her with academic advisors who shared her cultural background, and provided financial aid and educational support services. Nicki says, "because of Cherokee Nation, I do my best in all my classes and so far have maintained a 3.9 or better. I believe it's because of the support I have been given [by the Nation]." <sup>1</sup> Tribes, alone, however cannot sustain and expand vital education programs. Federal support is needed to assist these and other tribes across the country to implement similar programs to improve AI student outcomes.

**REQUEST**

TEDNA appreciates the Subcommittee's historic support for TEAs and that funding specified in the Subcommittee's FY14 report continue as the appropriations process moves forward for FY14.

Sincerely,



Gloria Sly (Cherokee Nation), President  
Tribal Education Departments National Assembly

*Patricia Whitefoot*

Patricia Whitefoot  
Yakama Nation Indian Education Director



Kerry Venegas, Education Director  
Hoopa Tribal Education Association

*Norma Bixby*

Norma Bixby  
Northern Cheyenne Tribe



Joyce McFarland, Education Manager  
Nez Perce Tribe

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See, *TEDNA TED Report 2011*, <http://www.niea.org/data/files/tedna%202011%20teds%20report.pdf> for more information regarding the work of TEDs/TEAs.