

Tribal Education Departments National Assembly



P.O. Box 18000
Boulder, CO 80308
Info@tedna.org

Officers and Directors FY 2015

Quinton Roman Nose, Executive Director
Dr. Wayne Johnson, *Muscogee Creek Nation*, President
Dr. Gloria Sly, *Cherokee Nation*, Vice-President
Sally Brownfield, *Squaxin Island Tribe*, Secretary
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Kerry Venegas, *Hoopa Valley Tribe*

House Committee on Appropriations **Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies**

Testimony Requesting FY 2016 Funding for Tribal Education Departments **March 25, 2015**

Chairman Calvert, Ranking Member McCollum, and Members of the Committee, my name is Quinton Roman Nose and I am the Executive Director of the Tribal Education Departments National Assembly (“TEDNA”). TEDNA is a national non-profit membership organization for Tribal education agencies/departments (“TEAs”), which are executive branch agencies of American Indian and Alaska Native tribal governments responsible for Tribal education matters. There are an estimated 200 TEAs, located in 32 states, serving over 700,000 American Indian and Alaska Native (“Native American”) students. First and foremost, I would like to offer my sincerest gratitude for appropriating funds for Fiscal-Year 2015 to support TEAs. This appropriation is greatly appreciated, and TEAs will make substantial progress because of this support. However, more funding is needed in order to keep these programs moving forward. TEDNA once again respectfully requests \$2 million to support TEAs in the Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill for Fiscal-Year 2016 to conduct much needed Indian education activities.

AUTHORIZATION FOR FUNDING

Federal funding for TEAs is authorized in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, Title X, Section 1140 (25 U.S.C. § 2020).

JUSTIFICATION FOR FUNDING

Federal education policy is failing Native American students. Native American students drop out of high school at a higher rate and score lower on achievement tests than any other student group. The national dropout rate of Native American students is double that of their non-Indian

peers. Likewise, the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights (“OCR”) Data Collection: Data Snapshot (March 21, 2014) recently recognized that Native American elementary and secondary students in public schools are disproportionately suspended and expelled. OCR also found that Native American kindergarten students are among those held back a year at nearly twice the rate of white kindergarten students, and that 9% of Native American ninth grade students repeat ninth grade.

In achievement, Native American 8th grade students are 18% more likely to read or perform in mathematics at a “below basic” level. Only a quarter of Native American high school graduates taking the ACT score at the “college-ready” level in math and only about one-third score at the “college-ready” level in reading. Although new data released on March 16 by the U.S. Department of Education indicates that graduation rates for Native American students have increased in recent years, Native Americans continue to have the lowest graduation rates of all ethnic and racial groups.¹

At the same time, Tribal government involvement in the education of Native American students has been severely restricted until recently. Since 1988, Congress has authorized funding specifically to build Tribal capacity to directly serve Native students in BIE schools. Funds were appropriated for the first time last year, but these TEAs need continued funding in order to fulfill critical needs of Native American students. Last year’s appropriation provided Tribal government programs with crucial funds to move forward. However, these programs are just getting started, and a comparable appropriation is needed in order to guarantee continued success. A similar authorization for tribal capacity building aimed at *public schools* on Indian reservations has been funded since Fiscal-Year 2012, resulting in the Department of Education’s pioneering State-Tribal Education Partnership Program (“STEP”). Though very important, STEP only addresses one aspect of the existing need. While the corresponding funding opportunity for BIE schools is constrained by lack of resources, our Native American students in BIE schools have continued to be underserved.

TEAs are in a unique position to halt and reverse the negative outcomes for Native students. TEAs have already proven that they are capable of improving Native American student outcomes. For example, the Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma, one of the STEP grantees, has a science, technology, and math program, among many other education programs, that serves approximately 250 Chickasaw students. Ninety percent of senior students participating in the program enroll in college. Through the STEP grant, Chickasaw has already put in place the framework to improve student outcomes and attendance. For example, before the co-governance model was in place, several Native American students were falling through the cracks and being expelled. Now, the Chickasaw Nation has stepped in to move expelled students into other alternative high school programs. Through this process, Local Education Agencies (“LEAs”) now understand that this is exactly the type of situation that the Chickasaw Nation TEA can address before the expulsion stage so intervention services can be provided, such as counseling, to students that are at risk. Thus, the STEP Program put in place a process allowing the TEAs

¹ U.S. Department of Education, Achievement Gap Narrows as High School Graduation Rates for Minority Students Improve Faster than Rest of Nation (March 16, 2015), available at: <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/achievement-gap-narrows-high-school-graduation-rates-minority-students-improve-faster-rest-nation>.

and LEAs to proactively flag at risk students and provide the necessary intervention services.

The work of the Nez Perce Tribe's TEA is another good example. The most current research indicates that Native American academic achievement must include effective teaching strategies. Also, researchers studying the achievement of Native American students have found a connection between low achievement and low cultural relevance. The Nez Perce Tribe, another STEP grantee, has made a large in-road to providing teacher training on the integration of cultural pedagogy, tribal education standards, and common core standards. In addition, technical assistance is provided by the Nez Perce TEA to their partner LEA's on use of the Native Star Culture and Language Indicators. These indicators address culturally-responsive school leadership, community engagement, and infusion of culture and language into the school's curriculum and instruction.

The State of Idaho's State Education Agency ("SEA") acknowledged that it does not have the expertise to provide training or technical assistance in meeting the unique educational and cultural needs of Native American students. Nez Perce's STEP grant has provided a platform for the Tribe's TEA and the local LEAs and SEA to work together to improve Native American student performance in this manner vis-à-vis the three federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act programs (Title I, Part A; Title II, Part A; and School Improvement Grants). Nez Perce also has a family engagement piece to their STEP grant that recognizes the role of the family as the first educator and organizes the parents and school staff to work together to assess parent involvement programs, policies, and practices. The end goal is to improve the educational experience and college/career readiness of the students.

A final example is The Hoopa Valley Tribe of California, which 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.

These examples of success from the STEP pilot program and other programs demonstrate the positive impact Tribal involvement has on Native American students. The success of these programs shows why tribes need to be more involved in Native American education. If once again appropriated by this Subcommittee, these funds would be used to *facilitate tribal control* in all matters relating to Native American education on reservations. More specifically, there are three areas of particular focus. First, TEAs can use this funding to support early education initiatives and develop culturally relevant curriculum and assessments. Second, increased tribal participation will include TEAs providing coordination, administrative support services, and technical assistance to schools and education programs on Indian reservations. This would include maintaining and sharing electronic data regarding Native American students, and implementing programs to increase graduation rates and post-secondary school readiness. This would also foster much-needed cooperation and coordination with entities carrying out education on Indian reservations. Third, this appropriation would fund the development and enforcement of tribal educational codes, including tribal educational policies and tribal standards applicable to curriculum, personnel, students, facilities, and support programs. As Congress has already recognized, these three areas are core educational functions that are most appropriately left to

Tribes.

TEDNA also supports the President's approach to transform the BIE into an agency that functions to facilitate and support Tribes in their endeavor to deliver a proficient and culturally meaningful education to Native American students. Such reform is timely, as the BIE-funded system is one of the lowest-achieving school systems in the nation. Moreover, Tribal governments, acting through their TEAs, should have a central role in a reformed BIE school system. TEDNA, therefore, supports the President's FY16 budget request for the Bureau of Indian Education. Frankly, it's long overdue, but it is a step in the right direction. Not only will the FY16 request finally replace two schools that have languished on the school construction priority list since 2004, but it also provides funding to replace individual buildings and plan and design additional schools in FY17 (+58M over FY15 enacted). The FY16 request also ensures that tribes, principals, and teachers have high-speed Internet, sufficient funding to pay for instructional programs, operational costs, and day-to-day maintenance and repairs, including:

- Facilities Improvement and Repair (for major repairs such as replacing a roof): \$68M (increased by \$18M over FY15 enacted);
- Tribal Grant School Support Costs: \$75M (increased by \$13M over FY15 enacted);
- Facilities Operations and Maintenance (for minor repairs and day to day maintenance): \$125M (increased by \$20M over FY15 enacted);
- Education Information Technology: \$41M (increased by 34M over FY15 enacted); and
- Indian Student Equalization Program Formula Funds: \$392M (\$5M increase over FY15 enacted).

This funding ensures that principals and teachers at all BIE-funded schools have the resources and support they need to provide 21st-century education. We must invest in education — it is the only way we will break the cycle of poverty on the many reservations that have BIE-funded schools. Investment in TEAs is sound federal policy as direct Tribal involvement in education eliminates undue bureaucratic barriers and streamlines administration. Thus, this Subcommittee is presented with a unique opportunity to increase tribal involvement and leverage the expertise of TEAs in educating Native students.

REQUEST

TEDNA respectfully requests \$2 million for TEAs in the Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill for Fiscal-Year 2016. TEDNA also supports the President's FY16 budget and plan to overhaul of the BIE to serve as a capacity builder and service provider to support Tribes in educating their youth, and we urge Congress to appropriate the requested funds for Fiscal-Year 2016 for that purpose.