The National Indian Education Association (NIEA) is the nation’s largest and most inclusive organization advocating for comprehensive culture-based educational opportunities for American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians.

Federal Trust Responsibility
Rooted in treaties, the Constitution, and decades of legal precedent, Congress has a direct fiduciary responsibility to provide federal funding that supports Native students. Federal laws that limit taxing and bonding authority in tribal communities have elevated this direct responsibility to provide resources for Native education. Native students must have access to the funding and services necessary to thrive.

Native Education
Ninety-three percent of the 650,000 American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students in schools across the United States attend public schools. The remaining seven percent, nearly 48,000 students, are enrolled in Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) or tribally run schools, primarily in rural areas and on reservations.

Many Native students to not have access to high-quality culture-based education options that provide opportunities to thrive. Safe and healthy classrooms that center language and culture are essential to equity in education for Native students across the nation. From early childhood through postsecondary education, Native students must have access to programs and resources that provide them the best chance at success.

Appropriations Request
NIEA partners with tribes, Native communities, and allies to ensure funding and increase allocations for Native education throughout the country. The majority of Native students attend school in rural or reservation communities that depend on federal funding to deliver culturally relevant programs that ensure an excellent education for our students. BIE and rural schools also report deterioration of facilities in schools with Native students, demonstrating the need to build new schools that provide a safe place to learn.

Fiscal Year 2021
NIEA’s priorities for the coming year are fully described in our 2021 Budget Document. NIEA urges Congress to pass an appropriations bill that fully funds the Bureau of Indian Education and other programs that serve Native students to ensure that educational services and programs in Native communities remain uninterrupted.

The priorities below are items NIEA has identified as critically important for consideration of FY 2021 funding. They are not a complete list, but they are worth highlighting as important:

$430 million in construction for BIE schools. An increase of $191.7 million above FY 2018 enacted.
- The Department of the Interior's Office of Inspector General (OIG) estimated the cost of fixing the dilapidated BIE schools and concluded that more than $430 million would be needed to fix the problems already identified. NIEA asks for $430 million based on the OIG report as a significant down payment.

$500 million in funding for construction of public schools that primarily serve Native students. No such funds currently exist.
- With 93 percent of Native students in public schools and more than 40 percent of Native students in rural communities with limited capacity for bonding, investing in Indian Country via schools will help prepare Native students for the 21st century economy.
$198 million for Indian Education Formula Grants (Title VI, Subpart 1 of ESSA). An increase of $17.3 million above FY 2020 enacted.

- Through grants for the unique culturally-relevant academic needs of Native students, funds under this program are used for academic enrichment, professional development, basic cultural awareness, and instruction to help Native students achieve.

$2 billion in funding for the Impact Aid Program (Title VII, Part A of ESSA). An increase of $514 million above FY 2020 enacted.

- The Impact Aid Program provides support to public school districts for the loss of traditional property taxes due to federally owned properties, including non-taxable Indian land.

$10 million for National Activities and Native Language Immersion Programs (Title VI, Subpart 3 of ESSA). An increase of $2.6 million above FY 2020 enacted.

- Native language funding is critical to tribes and Native communities across the country, as recognized by the authorization of Native language immersion funding in ESSA. Research supporting Native language funding is clear and investment in the National Activities fund will support Native languages for generations to come.

$42 million for the Alaska Native Education Equity Assistance Program. An increase of $6.0 million above FY 2020 enacted.

- Alaska does not receive any BIE funding; this funding is the only specific source of support for Alaska Native students and can be used for professional development and other programs designed to close the achievement gaps between Alaska Native students and their non-Native peers.

$42 million in funding for the Native Hawaiian Education Program. An increase of $6.1 million above FY 2020 enacted.

- This program funds culturally based programs that enhance the quality of education for Native Hawaiians to fulfill the trust relationship that Congress recognized in creating the program and funding it.

Provide $35 million to develop assessments and $20 million each year for assessment maintenance under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The BIE currently receives approximately $1.8 million annually through Title I-B of ESSA to support effective assessments.

- The BIE is required to define academic standards and develop a high-quality assessments system under ESSA to be in compliance with current law.

“Whoever controls the education of our children controls our future”

Wilma Mankiller, Chief of the Cherokee Nation (1985-1995)

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