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.

Changing National Landscape
Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the national education landscape has shifted dramatically. The spread of COVID-19 in tribal communities has highlighted and exacerbated existing inequities for Native students. Tribal nations acted quickly to save lives, shuttering classroom to limit community transmission.

As we enter the third year of the pandemic, students continue to feel the impact of long-term virtual education as schools faced the daunting challenge of safely reopening for assessments and in-person instruction. At the national level, the Biden Administration prioritized reopening K-8 classrooms due to the disproportionate academic and social growth experienced over the shift to virtual education beginning in the spring of 2020.

Bureau of Indian Education Operations
Each year, 185 K-12 schools and 37 tribal colleges receive funding for operational support through the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) annual appropriations. According to the FY 2020 BIE Greenbook, nearly 47,000 Native students enroll in K-12 BIE operated and tribally controlled schools, while just over 8,000 Native students attend tribal colleges and universities (TCUs).

Historically, Bureau-funded schools have relied disproportionately on the BIE to provide core funding for school operations. However, additional streams of funding across federal agencies have created diversified sources of funding for TCUs. As a result, 83 percent of school operations in FY 2022 funds K-12 education.¹

NIEA Recommendations
Provide Separate Set-Asides for K-12 Bureau-Funded Schools and TCU COVID-19 Relief
Native students and the institutions that serve them have been on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic since it began. Full funding for all Native-serving institutions is essential to ensuring that Native students have access to resources to recover and thrive after the pandemic. Our schools must have access to separate set-asides that support the unique needs of students throughout our education systems.

¹ As of the date of this publication, a Continuing Resolution is providing funding, generally, at prior year amounts. This fact sheet assumes a full year Continuing Resolution.
Prioritize Funding for K-12 Education in any future COVID-19 Relief for BIE School Operations

Many Bureau-funded schools remained shuttered for much of 2020 and 2021. As a result, most students only experienced education virtually during that time period. While broadband challenges proved difficult for students from kindergarten to graduate school, our youngest students struggled the most to adapt to this new method of education.

Many of our schools lack the basic funding, resources, and infrastructure for safe and healthy environments – a situation highlighted throughout the pandemic. Even our newest facilities are undergoing major renovations to heating and air, plumbing, and other systems to ensure the safety of students, staff, and faculty in the building.

Ensure Access to Full Funding for K-12 Bureau-Funded Schools

- $1.5 billion in direct funding to Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) funded schools, as defined in 25 U.S.C. § 2021(3) to meet the health, safety, and educational needs of students due to the impacts of COVID-19.
- $1 billion to address deferred maintenance and failing infrastructure in BIE schools, as defined in 25 U.S.C. § 2021(3).²

Ensure Access to Full Funding for Tribal Colleges and Universities

- Establish a $24 million Tribal College and University (TCU) IT Service Fund within the USDA-Rural Utilities Service Program
- $500 million for TCU Deferred Maintenance & Rehabilitation
- Increase TCU portion of HBCU and Minority Serving Institutions (MSI) Education Stabilization Fund to 10 percent.

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² This figure is in addition to the long overdue and critical $4.5 billion necessary to modernize schools prior to the onset of the pandemic.