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.
Preparation for Congressional Visits
National Indian Education Association 2022 Hill Day

Overview
NIEA Hill Day provides members, educators, and advocates the opportunity to engage with members of Congress in support of NIEA’s legislative agenda for Native education. Through these conversations, attendees showcase the work that they are doing for American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students and highlight the impact of federal legislation on Native education in their local communities.

Preparing for your Visit
During your meeting, you will not only advocate on behalf of NIEA’s legislative priorities but speak about your work with Native students in your own local community. Legislators look forward to hearing how tribal leaders and Native educators are working to solve the challenges facing Native students in schools across the country. Your personal stories are critical to illustrating the issues that affect Native students.

Before your Visit
- Research your legislator’s responsibilities, legislative priorities, and professional background. Most of this information can be found on the legislator’s website at www.house.gov and www.senate.gov.
- You will likely meet with a staff person in the office of your legislator who works directly with Native education policy issues. Because their busy schedules often prevent them from joining such meetings, your representatives rely on their staffers for policy advice throughout the legislative process.
- Prepare a one-page document describing how your work impacts on Native students and their local communities to leave with the legislator or their staff.
- Please wear business attire and comfortable shoes.

During your Visit
- Please allow plenty of time when you arrive at the relevant House or Senate office building. Security on Capitol Hill has significantly increased since January 6, 2021. It is likely that you will need to be escorted by staff and you should bring only what is necessary for your visit. Information about Regulations and Prohibitions can be found here: (https://www.uscp.gov/visiting-capitol-hill/regulations-prohibitions).
- Congressional schedules are unpredictable, and your meetings may start late. Many offices may be in a temporary location with limited space or in the process of hiring new staff since Hill Day occurs weeks after the new Congress begins.
- If your meeting is a virtual meeting, please treat it as if you were meeting face-to-face. Some offices are still unable to accommodate in-person visits.
- Stick to your talking points.
- Tell your story concisely. Most meetings last only 10-20 minutes, so you must be ready speak and answer questions concisely and timely. Highlight your points with stories of the work you have done with Native students and how legislation affects Native communities, students, and teachers within the legislator’s district. Speak from the heart about why Native education is important for you and your community.
- Ask the legislator or staffer how they will respond or when you can follow up for a response to your policy
- Thank the legislator and staff and give them your business card as you leave.

After your Visit
- Write or call your legislator to thank them for taking their time to meet with you and remind them of any commitments made during your conversation.
- Follow up with materials requested and answers to questions that arose during the meeting.

For additional information, please contact Shanise Ka’alikala, NIEA Legislative Analyst, at skaaikala@niea.org or 202.847.0041. or Christopher Topoleski, NIEA Legislative Director, at ctopoleski@niea.org or 202.878.6285.
Funding for Programs that Impact Native Education

As Congress plans funding for programs that impact Native students in 2023, it is critical that the federal government fulfill its trust responsibility to Native students by fully funding Native education.¹ The following programs have been identified by NIEA as critically important.

$209.9 Million for Indian Education Formula Grants (Title VI, Subpart 1 of ESSA)

Through grants to local educational agencies, this funding supports academic enrichment, professional development, basic cultural awareness, and culture-based instruction for Native students to thrive in the classroom and beyond.

If applicable: In my community, we use funding under Title VI Indian Education Formula Grants to_________.

My students/community/school benefit(s) from these appropriations by______.

NIEA requests $209.9 million to meet the unique, constitutionally recognized obligation to tribes in Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution, and the critical needs of Native students. The Fiscal Year 2021 appropriation was $181.2 million, a level maintained under the current continuing resolution.

$430 Million in Construction for BIE Schools

Schools in the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) serve 48,000 Native students in primarily rural and reservation areas. Due to lack of adequate annual appropriations, school facilities in the BIE system continue defer annual maintenance critical for the ongoing safety and health of students and faculty. 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 problems already identified.

If applicable: In my community, we use BIE school construction funding to_________. My students/community/school benefit(s) from these appropriations by______.

NIEA requests $430 million based on the OIG report as a significant down payment. The Fiscal Year 2021 appropriation was $264.3 million, a level maintained under the current continuing resolution.

$500 Million in Construction for Public Schools that Serve Native Students

Ninety-three percent of Native students attend public schools, and more than forty percent of Native students attend classes in rural communities with limited capacity for bonding. Investing in Indian Country via schools will help prepare Native students for the 21st century economy.

If applicable: In my community, schools need funding for construction and infrastructure development to_______.

My students/community/school would benefit from these appropriations by______.

NIEA requests $500 million for school infrastructure and construction at public schools that serve Native students. Such funds have not yet been allocated at the federal level.

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.
Advancing toward full Federal funding for impact aid (H.R.5255), introduced in the House on September 14, 2021

Impact Aid plays an important role in school districts' efforts to provide Native students with the opportunities they need to meet their full potential. With nearly 93 percent of Native students enrolled in public schools, Impact Aid provides essential funding for schools serving Native students – most of whom have been shortchanged for decades because the program is not fully funded. Additional investments in Impact Aid are critical to help school districts close achievement gaps, expand access to early childhood and afterschool programs, integrate culturally relevant curriculum, modernize decaying infrastructure, and recruit and retain quality school leadership.

The Advancing Toward Impact Aid Full Funding Act introduces a five-year plan to fund Impact Aid by splitting Impact Aid’s $1.1 billion request evenly over five years, across three main categories for funding: Basic Support, Federal Property, and Children with Disabilities. The result is to advance national K-12 school systems to become more equitable and meet educational needs by supporting military families and Native communities that are especially impacted by federally tax-exempt land.

If applicable: In my community, schools need Impact Aid funding to advance our K-12 school systems to become more equitable and meet our children's educational needs. My students/community/school would benefit from these appropriations by ________________

School Climate

Background

Native students learn best in healthy learning environments that provide resources to support the holistic needs of each child. However, echoes of harmful policies that sought to “kill the Indian and save the man” continue in our classrooms today. To combat these effects, Congress must provide oversight of federal agencies that oversee programs that serve Native students. Tribal leaders and policymakers must have accurate data about how such programs are supporting our students, and educators must have the professional training and experience to create safe classrooms where Native students can thrive.

Safe and healthy classrooms that value Native cultures, languages, and histories are critical for Native students to learn and thrive. However, generations of Native students were removed from their families, experiencing the erasure of Native cultures through the American education system. Today, Native youth continue to experience the impacts of such federal policies through historical and childhood trauma.

National Landscape

Historical trauma manifests through nationwide performance metrics. Native students are disciplined and held back more frequently than their peers and suffer higher rates of suicide than non-Native youth. Native youth also make up a disproportionate amount of those in juvenile facilities. These trends continue through graduation, as only 73 percent of Native students graduate from high school compared to the national average of 85 percent. These barriers have led to the lowest college participation rates in the nation, at 19 percent. From there, approximately 39 percent of Native students who enroll in a four-year, post-secondary institution graduate, the lowest rate of any group nationally.

NIEA Recommendations

Congressional action and support for trauma-informed education practices are critical to reversing centuries of federal policies that resulted in the genocide of Native cultures, traditions, and languages.

Talking point: Thank you for your support of The STANDUP Act (S.1543/H.R. 586) which was sent to the President to be signed into law on February 22, 2022. When law, the bill amends the Public Health Service Act to provide best practices on student suicide awareness and prevention training and require school-based student suicide awareness and prevention training policy.
Congressional Oversight: Congress has a unique trust responsibility to Native students, rooted in the U.S. Constitution, treaties, and Supreme Court precedent. When evaluating federal performance and services through the oversight process. It is critical that Congress oversee the Department of Education and Bureau of Indian Education to address historical trauma in schools to promote healing and create safe environments where students can thrive.

Talking point: Please support the Requirements, Expectations, and Standard Procedures for Effective Consultation with Tribes (RESPECT) Act, which codifies for the first time a requirement that federal agencies consult with tribal governments before taking or permitting actions that would significantly impact them (H.R. 3587)

National Boarding School Commission: A Congressional Commission is needed to locate and analyze the records from the 367+ known Indian boarding schools that operated in the U.S. These records are scattered across federal, state, hospital and church archives, private collections, and other unknown repositories, and may take years to fully document. In addition to the search for records, a Commission would also bring together boarding school survivors with a broad cross-section of tribal representatives and experts in education, health, and children and families to fully express and understand the impacts of this federal policy of Indian child removal. This legislation builds upon the Department of the Interior Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative:

Talking point: Native communities have suffered loss of traditional thought and philosophy, culture, language, identity, land, and resources since 1491. The purpose of the act is respected, however over 500 years of broken promises and failures to uphold the trust responsibility will require more than just written policies. For this act to make effective and lasting change, Native communities and the US government MUST communicate, collaborate, and trust to determine the most appropriate ways for healing to begin for Native people. I was encouraged by Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland’s announcement on June 22, 2021 of the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative, and this codification in law of such an initiative will ensure that this investigation and documentation continues under future administrations.

Native Language Preservation: Native languages are fundamental to the First American nations, histories, cultures, and traditions. NIEA supports legislation that will advance critical resources to assess the current national landscape for native language revitalization, uphold the federal trust responsibility, and expand sovereignty in Native language education.

I urge you to support the inclusion of S. 989, the Native American Language Resource Center Act of 2021 and S.1402 the Durbin Feeling Native American Languages Act of 2021 in the upcoming omnibus budget bill. Both bills have been ordered reported by the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs and have bipartisan support.”

Data Sovereignty and Accountability: Federal data systems fail to accurately represent Native students. Tribes, Native communities, and policymakers must have access to data that accurately and appropriately identifies Native students in federal data collections that support accountability.

Talking point – Please support the Strengthen the Civil Rights Data Collection and the Office of Civil Rights through legislation such as the Ending PUSHOUT Act (H.R. 2248).

Professional Development and Training: A healthy classroom requires culturally competent educators equipped to meet the unique needs of Native students. Students’ lives continue when they leave the classroom, and teachers must have the training to address historical and childhood trauma that may impact a student’s education. Culturally competent teachers have the potential to change the trajectory of a student’s life. Teacher shortages are pervasive in schools that serve Native students across the country, and teachers that understand and implement culturally responsive education strategies are even more rare. Native students must have access to educators that have the professional training and experience to create safe classrooms where ouryouth can thrive.

If applicable: In my community, culturally competent teachers are critical to the education of students through________________________, Programs that prepare Native teachers and teachers of Native students impact Native students in my community by______.
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Haaland’s announcement on June 22, 2021 of the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative, and this codification in law provides protections for Native children and families to fully express and understand the impacts of this federal policy of Indian child removal. These records are scattered across the country, and may be found in church archives, private collections, and other unknown repositories, and may take years to fully document. In addition to the search for records, a Commission would also bring together teachers that understand and implement culturally responsive education strategies are even more rare.

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I urge Congressional action and support for trauma training policy that will advance critical understanding of how such programs are supporting our students, and educators must have the professional training and experience to create safe learning environments that support accountability. If applicable: In my community, schools need Impact Aid funding to advance our K-12 education. If we are able to secure Impact Aid, our school district can reallocate funds to meet high school students’ education. Teacher shortages are pervasive in schools that serve Native students across the country, and if we have the opportunity to better support teachers, we can help our students thrive.

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