



**TNEC**  
**Tribal Nations Education Committee**

### **Position on Education**

Education for American Indians is a treaty right.

The Commerce Clause of the United States Constitution affirms that tribes are sovereign entities that are not subordinate to states, therefore the relationship between tribes and states must be government-to-government. The Tribal Nations Education Committee (TNEC) was established to remedy the lack of government-to-government communication, cooperation and consultation between the State of Minnesota and tribal nations related to education.

It is the mission of the TNEC to strengthen, protect and advance the overall education experience and opportunities for all American Indian students, families and communities of Minnesota. The TNEC is formally endorsed by both the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe Tribal Executive Committee and the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council.

Tribal nations and the State of Minnesota must continue to work towards strengthening and advancing the educational experiences for all American Indian students, educators, families and communities of Minnesota. The TNEC acknowledges the wide range of current investments and budget proposals that aim to benefit young children and families, the TNEC requests specific priority across all policy and budget proposal for American Indian students and educators.

The State of Minnesota has one of the lowest graduation rates for American Indian students in the Nation. Recent data released by the Minnesota Department of Education shows the graduation rate for American Indian students has increased less than 10% since 2010, but other student groups have increased their rates at a much quicker pace, which has only widened the academic achievement gap. This is unacceptable. The TNEC requests State agencies to work in close consultation with us to identify and implement strategies to improve the educational outcomes for all American Indian students within all Minnesota-based education programs.

#### **Tribal Nation Education Committee Members:**

**Geraldine Kozlowski** – Grand Portage; **Mary Otto** – White Earth, **Billie Annette** –, MCT; **Jennifer Johnson** – Fond du Lac; **Dorothy Robinson** – Leech Lake; **Billie Mason** – Bois Forte; **Beth Tepper** – Shakopee; **Shelly Diaz** – Mille Lacs; **Paul Dressen** – Prairie Island; **Earl Pendleton** – Lower Sioux; **Marisa Anywaush** – Upper Sioux; **Michael Stillday** – Red Lake; **David Isham** – Twin Cities Metro; **Edye Howes** - Greater Minnesota

## **Early Learning**

Support for Early Learning programs is an investment. Research shows the benefits of birth to age 5 programs. There is convincing evidence that high quality early learning experiences give American Indian children the tools to be ready to learn when they begin kindergarten. It is the framework for children to develop strong foundational cognitive skills, develop social emotional competence and establish patterns of engagement in school and learning.

In order to ensure that all American Indian children have access to quality early learning programming, the Minnesota Legislature must:

- Continue a tribal set-aside for early learning scholarships.
- Designate state appropriated funds to increase slots for tribal Head Start and Early Head Start programs.
- Expand access to Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) funds to reach all tribal communities.
- Expand access to Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) funds to reach all tribal communities.
- Recommend increasing the universe of service providers to include tribal referral networks.
- Appropriate additional funding to recruit and retain high quality early childhood teachers in high need areas.

## **Pre-K through Grade 12**

The American Indian Education Act of 1988 is legislation intended to provide for American Indian education programs specially designed to meet unique educational or culturally related academic needs of American Indian children. The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) must inform and hold all school districts within the State accountable to these laws.

The TNEC requests the Minnesota Department of Education and school districts to:

- Remove barriers for participation in extracurricular activities such as transportation and fees.
- Implement "American Indian Education for All", including curriculum and instruction of American Indian history, government, culture, science, arts and other contributions of American Indians in all Minnesota schools for all students.
- Coordinate efforts to increase support American Indian students and communities.
- Provide increased training and technical assistance to American Indian communities.
- Coordinate technical assistance efforts within MDE to ensure American Indian students meet all state proficiency standards.

The TNEC requests all professional boards and associations:

- Be inclusive of Tribal Schools in membership, trainings and resources.
- Require school administrators, including but not limited to Superintendents, Principals, Counselors and School Board Members, to earn clock hours in Tribal Sovereignty, Tribal Communities and Tribal students in order to better meet the needs of American Indian students.

The TNEC requests the State of Minnesota to:

- Continue the new cap of \$3,230 per pupil state equalization funding for BIE schools.
- Increase the personnel and fiscal capacity of the Minnesota Office of Indian Education in order to:
  - Provide increased technical assistance and guidance to Early Childhood Programs and K-12 public, charter, and Bureau of Indian Education-funded schools.
  - Continue to provide training and support to Indian Home/School Liaisons, Indian Education professionals, program staff, and American Indian Parent Advisory Committees.
  - Provide additional cultural competence training activities to administrators, school boards,

school staff, support staff and American Parent Advisory Committees.

### **Higher Education**

Higher education is no longer an option, it is a necessity. The TNEC is committed to making a full range of higher education options available and easily accessible for all American Indian students in Minnesota.

The TNEC requests that the State of Minnesota:

- Initiate action to increase the drastically underrepresented number of American Indian school teachers in our public school systems by:
  - Providing incentive aid to school districts to encourage recruitment, employment, and retention of American Indian K-12 certified, licensed teachers, principals and superintendents.
  - Adequately and equitably fund the Minnesota Indian Teacher Training Program.
- Support the Commissioner of MDE and the Commissioner of the Office of Higher Education to ensure that colleges and universities have complied with the request to modify teacher training programs to include curriculum with specific content regarding tribal sovereignty, history and culture for all students entering the teaching field.
- Support a tuition and fee waiver for all American Indian students attending Minnesota State Colleges and Universities and University of Minnesota institutions in order to increase access.
- Support equalization funds for Minnesota Tribal Colleges in order to stabilize core institutional funding.
- Support research to better serve the diverse demographic needs of American Indian students that are eligible for the Minnesota Indian Scholarship program.

The TNEC requests the Minnesota State Colleges & University System (MNSCU), the University of Minnesota, Minnesota's Private Colleges, and Tribal Colleges to:

- Identify, develop and implement strategies to address the issue of historically low retention of American Indian students.
- Submit an annual report to tribes on the status of these and other efforts related to the outcomes of American Indian students in higher education systems prior to July 31 each year.
- Modify teacher training programs to include curriculum with specific content regarding tribal sovereignty, history and culture for all students entering the field of education by 2020.
- Require licensed teachers to enroll in continuing education courses in these content areas every five years in order to maintain their teaching licensure.
- Require all Minnesota Indian Teacher Training Programs (MITTP) to include specific and integrated instruction to better prepare teachers to meet the needs of American Indian students. TNEC recommends that MITTP funding be straight scholarship, non-need based and continue to expand further with using funds for recruitment and retention of students.
- Support collaborations between Minnesota Tribal Colleges and other higher education institutions (articulations agreements, two-plus-two programs, etc.).

### **Language Revitalization & Immersion**

Education and Language Revitalization are essential within our communities and are key to improving the lives of our people. Research indicates that American Indian students achieve at higher rates when taught through comprehensive, full-day language immersion programs that incorporate environment,

culture and language and in traditional schools which imbed environment, culture and language.


The TNEC requests that the State of Minnesota:

- Continue to support Native language revitalization efforts funded through the Minnesota Legacy Amendment.
- Commit financial resources to support current Native language programs, immersion models, curriculum development and program development.
- Increase support for future community-based, Tribal-based and Tribal College-based programs that will strengthen the Native language revitalization movement.

### **Accomplishments**

Tribes know their unique needs best. Minnesota Tribal Nations were acutely aware that Minnesota was not consulting with them through a true government-to-government relationship. As a result, they took action by creating and authorizing their own independent education committee to work directly with state agencies. As a result, Tribal Nations are once again recognized within the Minnesota Department of Education and cited in state statute. A respectful relationship between Tribes and the State is now growing. The TNEC submits its Position on Education to the State annually and continues to build relationships with State agencies which allow for meaningful consultation with results. The following are some of the accomplishments either initiated and/or supported by Minnesota Tribal Nations as a result of exercising their sovereignty:

- The establishment of the Tribal Nations Education Committee (TNEC)
- MDE will hold an Indian Education Summit each year for key stakeholders, to include but not limited to tribal administrators, Tribal Colleges, school administrators, educators, Indian Education staff parents and students, on relevant issues facing Indian Education in the State of Minnesota.
- The relationship between MDE and the TNEC is codified in state statute with the following language: The commissioner shall seek consultation with the TNEC on all issues relating to American Indian education.
- The Office of Indian Education was reinstated in 2012 with the hiring of an Indian Education Director, and the position became permanent per state statute.
- The Minnesota Legislature has funded all-day every-day kindergarten programs across the state, thus making kindergarten available for all Minnesota children.
- The Minnesota Legislature supported Governor Dayton's proposed funding for School Bullying Prevention.
- An increased appropriation for the Minnesota Indian Scholarship Program.
- Developed a 5 year strategic plan.
- As a result of the 2015 special session, the competitive Success for the Future grant program was eliminated and replaced with a formula aid program that provides funding on a per-pupil basis to 136 public school districts, charter schools, and BIE schools, serving nearly 95% of our American Indian students in Minnesota. The formula now provides a minimum funding floor of \$20,000 to any school district that enrolls at least 20 American Indian students as well as \$358 for every American Indian student enrolled over 20. The funding and program has essentially quadrupled with a biennial appropriation of over \$17.6 million and an expansion of eligible districts and schools from 32 to 136.
- In addition to this change, the \$1500 per pupil cap on state equalization funding for BIE schools was lifted and a new cap of \$3,230 was established, more than doubling the per pupil equalization funding the state provides.



Revised February 2017