



## The Tribal Nations Education Committee

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### Position on Education

The mission of the TNEC is to strengthen, protect, and advance the overall educational experience and opportunities for all American Indian students, families, and communities of Minnesota. The TNEC is formally endorsed by both the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe (MCT) Tribal Executive Committee and the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council (MIAC). The committee's work is deeply steeped in the knowledge that 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, and therefore the relationship between tribes and states must be government-to-government. Prior to the establishment of the Tribal Nations Education Committee (TNEC), the Tribal Nations of Minnesota were acutely aware that the state was not consulting with them in an authentic government-to-government manner. The TNEC was established to remedy this blatant lack of communication, cooperation, and consultation between the State of Minnesota and the 11 Tribal Nations on issues related to education. A respectful relationship is now established, and the committee continues to foster strong partnerships with state agencies to allow for meaningful consultation.

The TNEC requests that State agencies work in close consultation with the committee to identify and implement strategies to improve the educational outcomes for all American Indian students within Minnesota-based education programs. 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, however the committee requests that the State intentionally prioritize all policy and budget proposals 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 (MDE) shows the graduation rate for American Indian students increased from 58.64% in 2021 to 61.3% in 2022. The committee acknowledges that this improvement, while modest, is a step in the right direction, but it's notable that all other student groups graduated at higher rates, with white peers graduating at

88.4%. The academic achievement gap currently sits at 27%, and the committee firmly finds this to be unacceptable.

## Early Learning

There is convincing evidence that high quality early learning experiences that include culturally relevant curriculum and teaching methods provide American Indian children with the tools needed to be successful when they begin kindergarten. Research clearly articulates the many benefits of these programs, including improved academic outcomes, a reduced likelihood of grade retention, and increased high school graduation rates. Thoughtful and intentionally designed early learning programs aid Native children in developing foundational cognitive skills, social-emotional competence, and help establish patterns of engagement in school and learning. Support for these programs is an investment in the future success of American Indian students, and their importance cannot be underscored enough.

### **To ensure that all American Indian children have access to high 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.
- Provide extended year funding for Head Start and Early Head Start.
- Provide funding to expand access to Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) within all tribal communities.
- Provide funding to expand access to Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) within all tribal communities.
- Increase 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.
- Appropriate additional funding, including IEFA funds, to further develop infrastructure with funding specifically for the design and construction of new early learning facilities supporting PreK to kindergarten transition programs, parent engagement, and family onboarding into American Indian education programs.

## Pre-K – Grade 12

The Indian Education Act of 1988 is legislation intended to provide for American Indian education programs specially designed to meet the unique educational and 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.

- Fully commit to the creation and implementation of Indigenous Education For All (IEFA) through policy and annual financial commitments, until all American Indian Students are performing at or better than their non-Native peers.
  - IEFA must be specific to the 11 Tribal Nations of Minnesota and the collective history of American Indians in Minnesota, and must include curriculum and instruction specific to American Indian history, government, culture, science, the arts, and other contributions of American Indians for all students in all Minnesota schools.
- Coordinate efforts to increase support for 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.
- Provide Historical Trauma/Trauma Informed Training and Tribal State Relations Training as Professional Development for ALL district staff.

**The TNEC requests all professional boards and associations:**

- Be inclusive of Tribal Schools in membership, training 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:**

- Require MDE to conduct an annual American Indian Education Summit on relevant issues facing American Indian Education in the State of Minnesota, for key stakeholders, including but not limited to tribal administrators, Tribal Colleges, school administrators, educators, American Indian Education staff, parents and students, on relevant issues facing American Indian Education in the State of Minnesota.
- Require MDE to conduct annual regional meetings on closing the achievement gap for American Indian students with a focus on identifying the extent and nature of the gap, and strategies to close it.
- Continue using the state definition of American Indian student.
- Require ALL MDE departments to utilize the state definition of AI Students, specifically the Special Education Department of Minnesota Department of Education;
- Require MDE to clarify to districts the MDE Report Card differences between State and Federal counts and how that affects American Indian resources, programming and planning.
- Recognize American Indian as the primary default for students choosing American Indian as one of the “two or more” category.
- Adjust and maintain an equitable level of funding commensurate with the cost of inflation. The current cap is \$3,230 per pupil state equalization funding for BIE schools.

- Return the Office of American Indian Education to pre-2012 staffing levels and commit to increasing the division’s fiscal capacity 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, American 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.
- Support the ongoing evaluation of the World’s Best Workforce (WBWF) and American Indian Education Aid (AIEA) programs for best practices and identify exemplars that can and should be celebrated and shared.

## Higher Education

Higher education is a necessity and is no longer an option. 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 teachers in our public school systems by:**

- Submitting 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.
- 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 of the 11 Tribal Nations of Minnesota, for all students entering the teaching field.
- 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 2025.
- Require licensed teachers to enroll in continuing education courses in these content areas every five years in order to maintain their teaching licensure.
- Require licensed teachers to complete a minimum of 8 hours in continuing education courses in these content areas for every license renewal cycle.
- 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 and 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.

### **The TNEC requests that the State of Minnesota:**

- Appropriate funding for a comprehensive report on best replicable practices of programs that are creating successful speakers of Ojibwe and Dakota languages.
- 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.
- Commit to ongoing funding for tribal, community-based programs that will strengthen Native language revitalization and reclamation.

## Accomplishments

The Tribal Nations of Minnesota and the State continue to foster respectful relationships that allow for meaningful consultation on all issues that impact the American Indian student, family, and community experience.

Through dedicated advocacy and exercising our sovereignty we have seen many successes, including but not limited to the following:

- Clarified the use of the state count of American Indian students throughout state statute, specifically making clear the use of this defined term in sections 124D.81, subdivision 1, and 124D.73. (2023)
- Ensured within statute that American Indian students have a right to wear tribal regalia or objects of cultural significance, such as eagle feathers, at graduation ceremonies. (2023)
- Ensured that students are permitted to carry loose tobacco in medicine pouches or otherwise to conduct ceremonial use of said tobacco on school grounds. (2023)
- Worked to codify that the more accurate state count of American Indian students be used to formulate American Indian Education Aid. (2023)
- Advocated for a change to MDE's requirements to provide technical assistance, to include providing an annual report of American Indian student data using the state count of American Indian students. (2023)
- Extended online learning to students attending Tribal Contract Schools. (2023)
- Advocated for a Tribal Early Learning package, ensuring \$4.5M per year for grants to Tribal Nations and urban tribal programs to focus on early childhood family engagement and education programs and outreach. (2023)
- Advocated for tribal relations training for school leaders, leading to \$250,000 annually to create a new program, modeled after state training, for school leaders to better consult and engage American Indian students and families and Tribal Nations. (2023)
- Advocated for \$1.15M per year of additional funding for the Minnesota Indian Teacher Training Program (MITTP) which created a special revenue account to provide flexibility. (2023)
- Funding for districts and schools to create and offer language instruction in Dakota and Anishinaabe languages or other indigenous languages. (2023)
- Clarifying the intended recipients of American Indian Education Aid, ensuring that aid may only be used for non-Native students to participate in programs after American Indian students' unique cultural and academic needs are met, and student accountability factors meet or exceed non-Native peers. This funding is used for programming under section 124D.74, subdivision 1. (2023)
- Tribal Head Start allocation set-aside of 10.72 percent of total Head Start annual allocation for Tribal Head Start programs. (2023)
- Supported 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. (2023)
- Successfully advocated for the implementation of Indigenous Education for All (IEFA). (2023)
- As a result of the committee's advocacy, in 2015 the competitive Success for the Future grant program was eliminated and replaced with the American Indian Education Aid program.

- AIEA is a formula aid program that provides funding on a per-pupil basis to public school districts, charter schools, and BIE schools with 20 or more American Indian students, reaching nearly 95% of American Indian students in Minnesota.
- In 2023, the AIEA formula was amended, increasing the minimum funding from \$20k to \$40k. Additionally, the minimum per pupil amount for each student beyond 20 increased from \$358 to \$400.
- The committee provided extensive counsel to the Minnesota Department of Education on their updated American Indian Education Aid program guide as well.
- Established the Tribal Nations Education Committee (2008)
- Improved reporting processes for MIAC quarterly meetings.
- Secured \$150,000.00 from MDE for committee capacity building.
- Filled an executive support position to coordinate committee activities, operations, and priorities.
- Ensured that the Minnesota Department of Education created a designated budget for Indigenous Education for All curriculum.
- MDE and the 10 of the Tribal Nations have entered into a Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) for Indigenous Education for All curriculum resources.
- Ensured that MDE's Academic Standards Committees would have four dedicated seats for Tribal Nation's Education Committee members.
- Codified the relationship between the Minnesota Department of Education and the Tribal Nations Education Committee within state statute with the inclusion of the following language: *The commissioner shall seek consultation with the TNEC on all issues relating to American Indian Education.*
- Advocated for and ensured the implementation of an American Indian student data sharing agreement between the 11 Tribal Nations and MDE.
- 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.
  - MDE has added 5 staff to the Office of Indian Education.
  - MDE has 8 more staffing positions to fill before it is at their 2004 capacity.
- An increased appropriation for the Minnesota Indian Scholarship Program.
- Expanded the Minnesota Indian Teacher Training Program by increasing scholarships.
- Advocated for the MITTP funding cycle to be extended to five years to allow for carryover and more seamless funding for both returning students and summer school students.
- The Tribal Nations Education Committee successfully developed a 5-year strategic plan.
- 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.
- Advocated for MDE to open up state education grant applications to BIE schools.
- Provided Tribal Consultations to 10 Schools Districts not within 50 miles of a MN Tribal Community.

- BIE school board membership requests were accepted by the Minnesota Schools Board Association as non-voting members.
- Presented at MIEA.
- Consulted on the reinterpretation of the Achievement & Integration funding in regards to American Indian student count.
- The Office of Indian Education now reports directly to the Minnesota Commissioner of Education.

*Revised: March 11, 2024*

### *Committee Members*

Vondalee Carr, Bois Forte Band of Chippewa | Maria Burnett, Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa | Laurie Harper, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe | Jesse Kodet, Lower Sioux Indian Community | Niiyo Gonzales, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe | Billie Annette, Minnesota Chippewa Tribe | Paul Dressen, Prairie Island Indian Community | Glenda Martin, Red Lake Nation | Carrissa Pickit, Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community | Carrie Trutna, Upper Sioux Community | Dana Goodwin, White Earth Nation | Zhawin Gonzalez, Twin Cities Metro | Beth Tepper, Twin Cities Metro