



National Indian Education Association

Pass S. 1948 and H.R. 4214 – The Native Language Immersion Student Achievement Act

MODERNIZE ESEA Title VII

Key Points

- Become a co-sponsor of S. 1948 and H.R. 4214 – the *Native Language Immersion Student Achievement Act* – to create a grant program for language immersion schools within Title VII – the Indian, Native Hawaiian, and Alaska Native Education Act – of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).
- Sign a Dear Colleague Letter affirming support for the legislation.
- Move quickly to pass S. 1948 and H.R. 4214, legislation that recognizes the academic benefits of Native language immersion education models and Native communities' need to advance such schools in order to create equal educational opportunities.
- Honor patriotic use of Native languages and affirm tribal sovereignty by developing educational venues and effectively managing federal resources consistent with self-determination policies.

BACKGROUND

The Indian, Native Hawaiian, and Alaska Native Education Act (ESEA Title VII) created a comprehensive plan for the educational future of tribal nations and Native communities, including urban-based citizens. S. 1948 and H.R. 4214 would amend ESEA Title VII by establishing Part D to create a grant program that supports Native language immersion schools – the purpose being modernization of ESEA Title VII to ensure that Native students have equal access to their culture and languages. Although ESEA Title VII aims to protect the cultural and linguistic heritage of Native students in education systems, it needs updating to provide Native students full-day immersion learning in order to strengthen their language and improve academic outcomes.

Prior to enactment of ESEA Title VII, federal Native education policy mirrored that of outdated assimilation standards. While Title VII's successes have been reduced through changing presidential prerogatives, budget challenges, and inadequate institutional commitment for full implementation, the Act remains a relevant and impactful progression in addressing the persistent crisis in Native education. Today, through its formula grants, national activities, discretionary programs, and other activities, Title VII reaches over 500,000 Native students annually.

Unfortunately, the current iteration of the ESEA – the No Child Left Behind Act – badly damaged the purpose of Title VII by eliminating meaningful culture-based education models and circumventing congressional intent mandated in prior self-determination policy. By passing the *Native Language Immersion Student Achievement Act*, Congress would recapture Title VII's original intent and strengthen Native education by including a means for Native students to learn and protect their often endangered languages.

BILL SUMMARY

S.1948– *The Native Language Immersion Student Achievement Act* – is bipartisan legislation sponsored by Senate Committee on Indian Affairs (SCIA) Chairman Jon Tester (D- MT) and Republican lead Co-Sponsor

Lisa Murkowski (R-AK). In the House of Representatives, Native American Caucus Co-Chairs Tom Cole (R-OK) and Betty McCollum (D-MN) introduced the legislative counterpart, H.R. 4214, shortly after the introduction of the Senate version. S. 1948 and H.R. 4214 would amend ESEA Title VII by establishing Part D to create a grant program to support Native language immersion schools.

In addition, S. 1948 and H.R. 4214 accomplish the following:

- Establish a grant program to support schools using Native languages as the primary language of instruction for all curricula taught at the school in order to improve student outcomes.
- Authorize the Secretary of Education to award grants to eligible entities – schools or private, tribal, or nonprofit organizations – to develop and maintain or improve and expand programs that support schools using Native languages as the primary language of instruction, applicable to prekindergarten through postsecondary programs.
- Further integrate federal policy for Native immersion schools as established in the Native American Languages Act (Public Law 101-477).

TRIBAL PRIORITIES

Native languages are in danger of disappearing. In many cases, they are spoken nowhere else in the world except in shrinking pockets within tribal communities throughout America. These endangered languages are considered national treasures by many and often mark the names of iconic American symbols such as rivers, lakes, towns, cities, parks, and schools. Native languages were deployed successfully as a secret military weapon in World War I and, more notably, World War II by turning the tide in the Pacific theatre.

Congress has recognized the historic and patriotic contributions of Native peoples and their languages by passing the Navajo Code Talker Recognition Act and the Native American Code Talker Recognition Act. By supporting and passing the *Native Language Immersion Student Achievement Act*, Congress would substantiate previous acts by honoring patriots through recognizing the exceptional military contributions they provided through the use of their languages, ensuring that Native languages are sustained for future generations, and Native students have access to equal educational opportunities.

TRIBAL SUPPORT

There is broad support for the *Native Language Immersion Student Achievement Act*. The National Indian Education Association, National Congress of American Indians, Great Plains Tribal Chairman's Association, Alaska Federation of Natives, Montana Wyoming Tribal Leaders Council, United Tribes of North Dakota, and the National Alliance to Save Native Languages all called for the introduction of legislation to create a grant program that would support Native Language Immersion schools. After SCIA Chairman Tester introduced S. 1948, the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, Eight Northern Pueblos, Inc., Navajo Nation, and 'Aha Pūnana Leo immersion non-profit organization, among others, endorsed S. 1948. Numerous tribes and organizations have also signed on to support the legislation, representing well over two million American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians.

PASS S. 1948 and H.R. 4214

We request that you enthusiastically support S. 1948 and H.R. 4214 – the bipartisan *Native Language Immersion Student Achievement Act* – by becoming co-sponsors, signing letters of support, and passing this crucial legislation. Native languages are integral to the sacred heritage of both America, Indian Country, and Native communities. Restoring Native languages to an elevated place in Native education not only honors the sacrifices of our previous generations, but ensures that Native students have access to learn their sacred culture and languages thereby increasing academic outcomes.

For more information or a link to immersion research literature review, please contact Clint J. Bowers, NIEA Policy Associate, at 202-544-7290 or cbowers@niea.org.