



National Indian Education Association

2014 August Recess Advocacy

Action Guide

Dear NIEA Members,

Take action this August! The summer congressional recess is the perfect opportunity to support Native students by engaging your congressional leadership as they return home.

Your members of Congress are spending time in their states and districts between now and September 8, 2014, so join NIEA in our mobilization effort to personally engage all delegates representing Native students and communities. Your local advocacy helps NIEA set the stage for congressional action this fall.

In particular, we are asking NIEA members to reach out to your congressional delegation on FY 2015 funding levels, Native language immersion programs, and Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) reform. With your local work and NIEA's coordinated efforts in DC, we may have the opportunity to move significant language immersion legislation this year. Our combined efforts to increase lawmakers' understanding of culturally-based learning and issues facing our Native students are critically timed since both Congress and the President have increased focus on Native education this year.

Enclosed in this "Action Guide" is information to assist your activities during this extended district work period. The following pages provide information and links to sample draft letters, testimony, informational one-pagers, and the latest news. As you engage your congressional delegations, please send your letters, newspaper articles, and outcomes from meetings to NIEA. We love to hear your stories and we need your local efforts to create results in Washington, DC. Together we can make a difference for our students. To this end, please send details regarding your engagement work to cbowers@niea.org.

Thank you in advance for joining us in this work as we improve educational outcomes for all American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Agoyo', written in a cursive style.

Pamela Agoyo
President

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I. POLICY TALKING POINTS

A. FY 2015 Appropriations: Interior and Environment Bills

Congressional Meeting Talking Points

- Ensure BIE reform has the resources necessary as the budget process moves forward.
- Fund the completion of the remaining schools on the BIE school construction index.
- Fully fund Tribal Grant Support Costs so tribes have the resources necessary to administer education services in tribal grant and contract schools.
- Fund FY 2015 Native-serving programmatic levels at those specified under the House Appropriations Bill.

Background

Despite the near-certainty of a short-term continuing resolution due to 2014 election season politics, NIEA members must ensure Native-serving programs receive the funding levels necessary for effectively serving Native students.

The U.S. House and Senate Appropriations Committees recently released their Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bills. The House version provides more funding for Native-serving programs that, if enacted, would provide a \$162 million increase above the FY 2014 enacted levels. The Senate version maintained existing funding levels for Native education programs. The bills appropriate funding to the Department of the Interior (DOI), Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), BIE, Indian Health Service (IHS), Forest Service, Environmental Protection Agency and other agencies that assist tribes.

The House language provided its largest increase – five percent combined - to the IHS, BIA, and BIE. NIEA and Native education stakeholders have been adamant regarding the need to fully fund administrative cost grants (now called Tribal Grant Support Costs) to ensure that BIE-funded schools have the resources necessary to operate effectively. As such, we were happy to see that the bill includes an increase above the FY 2014 level of \$48.2 million, and the bill would fully fund administrative cost grants at \$72 million in FY 2015 for the operation of Bureau-funded schools. We were also glad to see that the bill would complete the three remaining schools on the 2004 BIA School

Replacement Index, as dilapidated schools and often-dangerous conditions continue to be a pressing issue for Native students. The Senate language neglected to increase the critical funding that would be appropriated under the House language.

In the Appropriations Committee's [press release](#), Interior Subcommittee Chairman Ken Calvert (R-CA) commented that he is pleased that his Subcommittee "continues to place an emphasis on ... addressing a variety of health, education, and safety needs within Indian Country." As the House moves its spending measures forward, Senate Appropriations Chairwoman Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) recently acknowledged that she is considering the potential of an omnibus spending package that would combine appropriations bills for FY 2015 as time is running short. The Senate has yet to pass any FY 2015 spending bills, while the House has moved five.

Take Action

Now is the time for NIEA membership and Native education stakeholders to engage your congressional membership to maintain the House Interior appropriation levels for Native education in congressional budget negotiations that proceed this fall. Please utilize the follow material for your outreach this summer.

Advocacy Material

- [House Appropriations Subcommittee Press Release](#)
- [FY 2015 House Draft Bill](#)
- [FY 2015 House Report Language](#)
- [Senate Appropriations Subcommittee Press Release](#)
- [FY 2015 Senate Draft Bill](#)
- [FY 2015 Senate Report Language](#)
- [NIEA FY 2015 Budget Request](#)
- [NIEA FY 2015 Appropriations Letter](#)

B. Native Language Immersion Education

Congressional Meeting Talking Points

- Become a co-sponsor of S. 2299, S. 1948, and H.R. 4214.
- Sign-on to a congressional dear colleague letter in support of the legislation.
- Pass the language immersion bills in both chambers of Congress.

Background

NIEA and our stakeholders took to Capitol Hill in July to support Native education and language immersion instruction just as the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs reported [S. 1948](#) - the *Native Language Immersion Student Achievement Act* and [S. 2299](#) to reauthorize the *Esther Martinez Native Languages Preservation Act* to the full Senate. Floor consideration has yet to be scheduled.

Take Action

Contact your congressional delegation in order to garner additional support for [S. 1948](#), its House companion bill, [H.R. 4214](#), and [S. 2299](#) to reauthorize the *Esther Martinez Native Languages Preservation Act*. Utilize the material below to support your advocacy with congressional members as

they return home to your communities, and please include our informational documents to strengthen your advocacy.

Advocacy Material

- [S. 2299](#), [S. 1948](#), and [H.R. 4214](#) Bill Text
- [S. 1948](#) and [H.R. 4214](#) Support Letter Templates
- [Sample Resolution Template](#)
- S. 1948/H.R. 4214 Briefing [Paper](#)
- [S. 1948](#), [S. 2299](#) NIEA Support Letters and [NIEA Senate Testimony](#)
- [Native Language Immersion Research Draft](#)

C. Bureau of Indian Education Reform

Congressional Meeting Talking Points

- Support BIE reform by appropriating the necessary funds to successfully administer internal bureaucratic changes.
- Maintain pressure on the Administration and federal agencies to coordinate and consult with tribes and Native communities on local BIE reform.
- Provide meaningful oversight for reform that invites tribal leaders to discuss their local needs and priorities within the BIE education systems.
- Ensure BIE reform results in increased tribal sovereignty over education systems.

Background

Tribal leaders and Native education stakeholders have long requested that the federal government uphold its trust responsibility to Indian education. While there has been some cause for concern regarding the bureaucratic reform, the President's summer announcement on Indian education increased momentum for ensuring tribal authority in education. The proposal to redesign the BIE under the [June 12, 2014 Secretarial Order](#) is based on recommendations from the [American Indian Education Study Group](#) (Study Group), which DOI Secretary Jewell and Secretary of Education Duncan convened to diagnose the systemic issues within BIE schools.

The reform initiative will include a two-phase process to restructure and redesign the BIE over the 2014-15 and 2015-2016 school years. Based on years of tribal advocacy, the Administration now plans to craft the BIE into a school improvement organization focused on providing resources and technical assistance to support tribes in education delivery.

Phase One

- Focus will be on improving the responsiveness of BIE support to schools, including establishing a School Operations Division for teacher and principal recruitment, acquisition and grants, school facilities, and educational technology.
- A new Office of Sovereignty and Indian Education is expected to support tribal sovereignty by building the capacity of tribes to operate high-performing schools and allowing tribes to shape what their children learn about their heritage, language, and culture.

Phase Two

- Focus will be on improving performance of individual schools through School Support Solutions Teams. The teams are expected to work directly and collaboratively with individual

schools and tribes to maximize school performance based on local needs as well as assist with wrap-around services such as prenatal care, early literacy, children's health care, and parent counseling and training.

In working to achieve these phases, the Administration will focus on other key improvement areas outlined in their [Fact Sheet](#) in support of the efforts outlined in the BIE Transformation Blueprint. These consist of:

- Connecting BIE schools and dorms to high-speed internet to support digital learning;
- Issuing waivers giving BIE schools greater flexibility and support to carry out critical school improvements;
- Providing National Board Certification training to existing BIE instructional staff;
- Sharing Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion rates with tribes to help Native students apply for college financial aid;
- Hosting annual Native Language Summits; and
- Holding listening sessions on school climate to ensure Native students receive a nurturing, supportive education that respects their identities and cultures.

Through recent [joint organizational comments](#), the National Congress of American Indians joined NIEA in supporting the recent focus on Indian education. As implementation proceeds, NIEA will make sure that the federal government is working closely with tribes rather than dictating change. Reform must strengthen tribal self-determination and decrease bureaucracy in order to provide tribal students with effective educational services.

Advocacy Material

- [White House Fact Sheet](#)
- [June 12, 2014 DOI Secretarial Order](#)
- [Original BIE Reform Draft](#)
- [BIE Transformation Blueprint](#)
- [Indian Education Study Group Information](#)
- [NIEA/NCAI Joint Comments](#)
- [NIEA Senate Testimony on the BIE](#)

II. Engagement Opportunities

Attend a Town Hall Meeting

Frequently, it is more productive to meet with your representatives in their district than in Washington, DC. Everyone is on home turf, and the hustle and bustle of DC is miles away. As such, congressional members often hold town hall meetings with their constituents. These meetings work like an open forum where voters ask questions about issues important to them. You can locate town halls in your area by contacting the congressional member's local district office. Contact information should be published on their website. Alternatively, you can find your members' contact information by clicking [here](#). NIEA has also created a [select list](#) of Town Hall meetings for your convenience.

Schedule a Personal Meeting

[Contact](#) your congressional office for public office hours to discuss key issues in Native education including funding for Native Education programs, BIE Reform, Native language immersion, and your local concerns with your members. Be prepared to specify the meeting topic. You may also want to suggest a group meeting that includes two or three colleagues. Additional support demonstrates that your concern is shared by other constituents. Utilize our [Congressional Meeting Guidelines](#) to support your advocacy.

Submit a Letter or Opinion Editorial

August is a great time to send a letter or op-ed to your local newspaper or congressional member. These are useful methods to draw attention to important issues affecting Native education. Contact your local newspaper and ask for the editorial page editor for information on submitting op-eds.

Social Media

Social media can also be a great tool to contact your congressional delegation. Try searching for their Facebook or Twitter pages and “follow” them on your personal and/or work accounts. While we still rely primarily on traditional communication strategies, online platforms are an effective way to engage policymakers and the media.

Also follow NIEA on social media. We use these tools to share information, amplify local stories, and connect with coalition partners.

- [NIEA Twitter](#)
- [NIEA Facebook Page](#)

III. Congressional Meeting Guidelines

Meeting with your member of Congress is one of the most common and effective forms of advocacy for Native education. As a voting constituent, your elected representatives are eager to meet with you and hear what you have to say. Please use this sheet to help you prepare for and conduct your meetings.

- Be on time, be prepared, and bring NIEA policy materials. Your time will be limited, so prepare talking points in advance, and bring printed materials to leave behind as a resource for their office.
- Please **take no more than 3 people** to a meeting so that your message is clear and your group stays coordinated and on topic.
- Due to congressional schedules, most meetings are held with young staffers. They are often knowledgeable on their subject issue but may hold little knowledge of Native education. Do not be insulted if you have to brief them on Native issues and the trust responsibility of the federal government.
- Arrive at a member’s office calm, collected, and prepared. Business attire is considered the standard.

- Remember to relate your message to your congressional member by including something that is affecting your congressional district, but **remember to get your point across**.
- If asked something you do not know, simply tell them you will follow up with them - or will have NIEA contact them – to answer the question.
- Regardless of their support for an issue, always leave the office with good demeanor, even if you disagree. Remember, the primary purpose of these meetings is educating congressional offices on Native education.
- Make sure you leave your business card and NIEA policy papers with your congressional member or their staff as you depart from your meeting.
- Invite your congressional members to visit your tribe, Native community, or school. Suggest a tour of a new facility, or invite them to speak at a local meeting. Members of Congress will welcome the opportunity to engage your local communities and Native students.
- Use the meeting as a photo opportunity. Take a picture with your representative at your school or community meeting. Use it in a newsletter or post it to a social media site to increase awareness.
- Be a local resource. Members of Congress frequently establish advisory panels (consisting of parents, teachers, administrators, etc.) to provide them with local viewpoints on education policy initiatives. By serving on these panels, you will be in a good position to offer input.

IV. PROVIDE FEEDBACK TO NIEA

Thank you for your continued support of Native education and our students this August. We hope your local engagement goes great, and we are excited to provide you with these tools. Again, please send your stories and documents to NIEA. For more information or assistance with your outreach, please contact Clint J. Bowers, NIEA Policy Associate, at 202-544-7290 or cbowers@niea.org.