

Obama Administration Announces New Resources to Help Ensure Opportunity for Native Students

[The U.S. Department of Education](#) announced today new resources aimed at closing the achievement gap so that all native students – whether in tribal or traditional public schools – have the opportunity to succeed.

The announcement builds on work by the Obama Administration to improve the lives of American Indian and Alaska Native children and is a key element of his [Generation Indigenous “Gen I” Initiative](#) to help Native American youth. There are more than 450,000 native students in America’s public schools.

Today, the Obama Administration is announcing:

- Approval of the first phase of the Navajo Nation’s alternative accountability system, which provides the tribe with the authority to implement uniform standards, aligned assessments, an alternative measurements of student success across its schools in multiple states; and
- A Dear Colleague Letter to states and districts on tribal consultations; and
- Two new rounds of federal grants totaling nearly \$25 million to support native youth and educators.

“All American-Indian and Alaska-Native students should have the support, opportunities, and education that honor their identity and their unique experiences, while providing them with the knowledge and skills to attain their greatest aspirations,” U.S. Secretary of Education John B. King Jr. said. “For the Navajo, this alternative accountability system will give the tribe even more autonomy to run its schools while also helping to ensure that students are thriving.”

Navajo Nation Agreement

The Department of Education, in partnership with the Department of the Interior, has approved the first phase of the Navajo Nation’s request to implement an alternative system of accountability for schools. The new system will unite 66 [Bureau of Indian Education](#) (BIE)-funded schools in New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah and will allow the tribe to take greater control of the education of its students under a single system of standards, assessments, and accountability.

The approval applies retroactively to the 2015-16 school year, as well as the current school year. It also permits the Navajo to:

- Adopt and implement the same set of college-and-career-ready content standards in reading/language, arts, and mathematics in all its schools, rather than implementing the standards and assessments of each individual state where schools are located;
- Select and administer an assessment that will be comparable across Navajo schools in New Mexico, Utah, and Arizona;
- Set and use its own high school graduation rate targets and attendance for elementary and middle schools in its accountability system.

This approval continues the Administration's work to support Indian tribal self-government and sovereignty, honor tribal treaty and other rights, and strive to meet the responsibilities that arise from the unique relationship between the federal and tribal governments.

"Today marks an important milestone for the Navajo Nation and this Administration's efforts to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for Native youth," Interior Secretary Sally Jewell said. "The alternative accountability system launched today provides a plan to replace a cumbersome multi-state system and promote unified and rigorous standards, curriculum, and student assessments that reflect the academic and cultural values of the Navajo community. Recognizing the Navajo Nation's right to govern tribally-controlled schools is another step in the President's Generation Indigenous initiative to reform the Bureau of Indian Education system, raise student achievement, and advance tribal self-determination and support tribal sovereignty."

The agreement will be signed by King, Jewell and Navajo leaders in a formal ceremony on Tuesday in Washington, D.C.

Tribal consultation guidance

The Education Department sent a [Dear Colleague Letter](#) to states outlining the responsibility of certain districts to consult with tribal stakeholders as part of implementing the Every Student Succeeds Act, which President Obama signed into law in December 2015. For the first time ever, the law includes a new requirement that affected school districts work with tribes on issues affecting native students.

Consultation will create opportunities for districts and tribal leaders to work together on behalf of American Indian and Alaska Native students by gathering input from tribes and tribal organizations and fostering the collaboration that is a critical part of improving academic outcomes for Native students.

Under the law, affected districts with tribal students must collect feedback from tribes and tribal leaders on any plan or application for federal grants and funds. These new consultation requirements take effect for the 2017-18 school year.

Over the last seven years, American Indian and Alaska Native students and communities have made progress in reinvigorating efforts to preserve and restore Native languages, in building tribal capacity to influence and control educational decisions for Native students, and in beginning to raise awareness about school climate issues that are unique to Indian country. ESSA supports this work with a focus on tribal sovereignty and consultation; restoration and preservation of native languages; and climate and suicide prevention.

New grants

The Education Department today named the 20 recipients of \$6.7 million in federal grants from the [Indian Professional Development Program](#) to help improve education for native students and

to promote high-quality educators to teach in tribal-run schools or schools with large populations of native students.

Grantees include Salish Kootenai College in Montana, which proposes to recruit, enroll, educate, certify, and assist in the employment of 30 Native American teacher candidates in elementary or early childhood P-3 education. Washington State University will implement a culturally responsive project providing support and training for 10 native participants who serve as teachers or administrators in tribal communities in the region. At Elmira College in New York, the institution will prepare indigenous teacher education students to become highly qualified indigenous teachers who will then support and promote the academic success of their students and contribute to nation-building efforts of their nations.

The full list of grantees:

Name	State	FY 16 Funding
ABOR/Northern Arizona University	AZ	\$230,630
AZ Board of Regents, U of AZ	AZ	\$158,361
The CSU, Chico Research Foundation	CA	\$249,757
Regents of the University of Idaho	ID	\$948,647
Fond du Lac Tribal College	MN	\$999,314
Blackfeet Community College	MT	\$214,691
Montana State University	MT	\$252,012
Salish Kootenai College	MT	\$770,020
Stone Child College	MT	\$547,425
University of North Carolina Pembroke	NC	\$583,423
Sitting Bull College	ND	\$798,026
University of Mary	ND	\$981,075
Board of Regents, University of Nebraska, University of Nebraska- Lincoln	NE	\$529,781

The Regents of the University of New Mexico	NM	\$247,892
Elmira College	NY	\$500,365
American Indian Resource Center, Inc.	OK	\$541,033
Portland State University	OR	\$873,113
University of Oregon	OR	\$221,634
Washington State University	WA	\$245,930

Through the \$18.2 million [Native Youth Community Projects](#) grants, community-led projects will help American Indian and Alaska Native students become college-and career-ready. Each grant will support a coordinated, focused approach chosen by a community partnership that includes a tribe, local schools, and other organizations. For example, the program allows tribes to identify culturally-appropriate, community-specific supports for college and career readiness—whether it's early learning, language immersion or mental health services.

The Department is awarding grants to 32 recipients in 13 states that will impact more than 30 tribes and 48 schools.

Grantees include the Tunica-Biloxi Tribe of Louisiana, which will partner with local tribes, organizations, and Tulane University to reduce drop-out rates, improve academic performance, and school completion rates among Tunica-Biloxi tribal students. The Pine Ridge Chamber of Commerce in South Dakota plans to increase the percentage of Oglala Lakota youth who successfully transition from high school to jobs or higher education through participating in life skills training designed to promote healing from trauma as well as increased self-sufficiency. Lower Kuskokwim School District. The Chickasaw Nation in Oklahoma will provide wrap-around educational and family services model for native youth that will provide social and emotional learning supports and college and career readiness through ACT, PSAT, and Advanced Placement courses.

Name	State	FY16 funding
Alaska Gateway School District	AK	\$859,407
Annette Island School District	AK	\$224,016

Goldbelt Heritage Foundation	AK	\$998,696
Chugach School District	AK	\$542,078
Kake City School District	AK	\$194,708
Kenaitze Indian Tribe	AK	\$231,507
Kodiak Island Borough School District	AK	\$999,554
Lower Kuskokwim School District	AK	\$968,052
Northwest Arctic Borough School District	AK	\$983,293
Yukon Flats School District	AK	\$999,665
Gila River Indian Community	AZ	\$975,772
Quechan Indian Tribe	AZ	\$272,367
Pinoleville Pomo Nation	CA	\$823,422
Karuk Tribe	CA	\$252,012
San Diego County Superintendent of Schools	CA	\$250,679
Coeur d'Alene Tribe	ID	\$583,423
Sabine Parish School Board	LA	\$825,125
Tunica-Biloxi Tribe of Louisiana	LA	\$569,425
Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe	MA	\$231,123
Salish Kootenai College	MT	\$890,143
Stone Child College	MT	\$551,282

Turtle Mountain Community College	ND	\$259,028
American Indian Science and Engineering Society	NM	\$182,445
The Chickasaw Nation	OK	\$999,314
Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma	OK	\$329,042
Citizen Potawatomi Nation	OK	\$117,411
Stilwell Public Schools	OK	\$542,865
Jefferson County School District 509-J	OR	\$257,162
Little Wound School District	SD	\$910,020
Pine Ridge Area Chamber of Commerce	SD	\$249,757
Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate	SD	\$999,539
San Juan School District, UT	UT	\$998,775

Improving Educational Outcomes for Native Communities

The Obama Administration is committed to finding solutions to the pressing problems that confront Native youth, with an emphasis on education, economic development, and health.

According to recent Education Department statistics, the [graduation rate for American Indian students has increased by more than four percentage points over two years](#), outpacing the growth for all students. The graduation rate for American Indian students increased from 65 percent in 2010-11 to 69.7 percent in 2012-13. Despite these gains, the graduation rate for American Indian students is lower than the national rate of 81 percent.

A [2014 White House Native Youth Report](#) cites Bureau of Indian Education schools fare even worse, with a graduation rate of 53 percent in 2011-12. To address the critical educational needs of these students, the Obama Administration's [Blueprint for Reform](#), an initiative of the White House Council on Native American Affairs chaired by Jewell, is restructuring Interior's BIE from a provider of education to a capacity-builder and education service-provider to tribes.

In addition to reforming the BIE into a service-provider to tribal schools, the Obama Administration is supporting other efforts to improve educational opportunities for Native communities, through initiatives such as:

- **National Tribal Youth Network:** supports leadership development and provides peer support through an interactive online portal.
- **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) Completion Initiative**
Guidance: [permits states to share FAFSA completion rates with tribes](#) to help Native American students apply for college financial aid as part of [President Obama's FAFSA Completion Initiative](#).