

# Tribal Education Departments National Assembly



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## **House Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies**

### **Testimony Supporting Funding for Tribal Education Departments March 28, 2012**

The Tribal Education Departments National Assembly (TEDNA) is a national non-profit organization for tribal education departments/agencies (TEDs/TEAs). TEDNA respectfully requests \$2 million for TEDs/TEAs in the Department of Education, National Activities Program fiscal year 2013 appropriations bill. TEDs/TEAs are executive branch level agencies of tribal governments responsible for tribal education matters. There are an estimated 200 TEDs/TEAs located in 32 states that serve over 700,000 American Indian students from cradle-to-grave.

Funding for TEDs/TEAs has been authorized through the U.S. Department of Education since 1994. In the authorization, Congress envisions TEDs/TEAs facilitating tribal control over education; coordinating education programs; developing and enforcing tribal education codes, policies, and standards; and, providing support services and technical assistance to schools and programs. The No Child Left Behind Act retained the TED/TEA appropriations authorizations. The U.S. Department of Education authorization is located in Title VII, Section 7135 (20 U.S.C. Sec. 7455).

In fiscal year 2012, for the first time since its authorization, Congress appropriated \$2 million for TEDs/TEAs in the Department of Education in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2012. This modest amount of TED/TEA funding will have a significant impact on American Indian education. TEDNA is working with the Department of Education and TEDs/TEAs to distribute this funding in the upcoming months. TEDs/TEAs across the country are anxiously awaiting the distribution of this funding to support tribal education initiatives. This same amount was requested in the President's fiscal year 2013 budget proposal. Continued federal support of this vital program is essential in order to break the cycle of educational disparities between native and non-native students.

### **JUSTIFICATION FOR TED/TEA FUNDING**

*In some states the high school dropout rate of American Indian students is over 50%. American Indian students drop out of high school at a higher rate and score lower on achievement tests*

*than any other racial/ethnic group.* The national dropout rate of American Indian students is double that of their Caucasian peers. American Indian students also have the highest rates of absenteeism, suspension, and expulsion. American Indian 8th grade students are 18% more likely to read or perform in mathematics at a "below basic" level than their Caucasian peers.

TEDs/TEAs are uniquely positioned to improve these statistics because they are located at the local level and as a result, are aware of the cultural, social, and economic conditions that affect American Indian students. Many TEDs/TEAs have seen successes already. For example, the Hoopa Valley Tribe of California TED operates a learning center that works with at risk students. The TED identifies K-12 students at risk, pairs the student with a mentor and develops a student learning plan. Students are tutored in target academic areas and coached in life skills. This program alone has improved student academic performance by two letter grades in core academic areas. Further, the Rosebud Sioux Tribe of South Dakota TED decreased the Tribe's dropout rate by 30% by operating tutoring services and afterschool math and reading programs. Tribes alone, however, cannot sustain and expand vital education programs. Federal support is needed to assist other tribes across the country in implementing similar programs.

Currently most TEDs/TEAs operate on extremely small budgets provided annually by tribal funds. They may receive limited federal funding for contract, grant, and program administration. Tribal funding, if any, may be earmarked to meet critical immediate needs such as scholarships or provide student clothing and school supplies. This means that TEDs/TEAs do not have funds for operational expenses and staff to conduct education research and planning, or to develop tribal education initiatives and materials like truancy programs and curricula. These are the core areas of education that tribes need to impact in order to "change the numbers" and close the reported achievement gaps. Tribes will continue to annually fund TEDs/TEAs, but they need federal financial support to move beyond administering scholarships and supplemental education contracts and grants, and to be involved directly in the core areas of education.

The requested \$2 million for TED/TEA appropriations will improve American Indian academic success by providing funding for TEDs/TEAs to directly influence the education of native students, as well as further develop tribal education codes and policies, coordinate federal education programs with the states, as well as develop programs to increase graduation rates, post-secondary school readiness, and develop electronic data regarding American Indian students.

TEDNA respectfully requests your support in providing \$2,000,000 for TEDs/TEAs in the Department of Education in the Labor, HHS, Education, and Related Agencies fiscal year 2013 appropriations bill.