

Testimony of
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On the Reauthorization of the
Elementary and Secondary Education Act
Indian Education

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Committee on Indian Affairs
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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee on Indian Affairs:

Thank you for inviting me to testify today. My name is John W. Tippeconnic III, Ph.D. I am Professor of Education at Penn State University and also the Director of the American Indian Leadership Program. I am a member of the Comanche Tribe and I am also part Cherokee. I have been an active participant in Indian education for over 30 years - as a classroom teacher, administrator, and now as a professor. I attended BIA, public, and mission schools and worked at a tribally controlled institution.

It is an honor to be here to address the education of American Indians and Alaska Natives in this country, especially in the context of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). I trust this Committee has the best interest of Indian country in mind and will provide the necessary leadership and action to ensure that the Indian education provisions of the ESEA continue to provide educational opportunities for the approximately 600,000 Indian youth and adults in education programs throughout this country.

We have made progress in the education of American Indians and Alaska Natives since 1969 when the Senate Special Subcommittee on Indian Education, known as the “Kennedy Report” recommended a comprehensive piece of legislation be enacted by Congress to meet the educational needs of Indian students. The Indian Education Act of 1972, along with other legislation, other initiatives, and the hard and dedicated work of many people, including Indian people, helped to bring about this overall progress. Today there are many Indian students doing well in school. We also know there are:

- more parents involved in the education of their children
- there are more Indian teachers, administrators, counselors, professors and

other educators

- more of the curriculum reflects tribal cultures, languages and histories
- there is a growing body of Indian education research, and
- there is more tribal control of education - with over 30 tribal colleges and over 110 tribally controlled schools.

There are more success stories today and we have a better understanding of what works in the education of American Indians and Alaska Natives. Often that knowledge base exists in practice and in the minds and experiences of educators. As I will mention later, we need to get more of the success stories documented as best practices and research findings.

However, as we all know, we are not where we want to be in Indian education. There continues to be far too many students who are not doing well in school. As documented in the Indian Nations at Risk Report (1991), the White House Conference on Indian Education Report (1992), the Comprehensive Policy Statement on Indian Education (1997), the Executive Order on American Indian and Alaska Native Education (1998), and the National Center for Education Statistics reports, we continue to have high drop out rates, low academic achievement, the lack of parental involvement, the lack of relevant cultural education, alcohol and substance abuse problems, the need for more Indian teachers, administrators, counselors, professors, and other educators. Much remains to be done before we can claim widespread success across Indian country. Thus, it is critical that the Indian education provisions of ESEA be reauthorized so that progress will continue in the future.

I will start my discussion by emphasizing to the Committee that the education of

American Indians and Alaska Natives takes place in a very difficult and complex environment today. Providing quality education is not easy and continues to present difficult challenges when you consider the diversity among tribes and the roles and responsibilities of local, state, tribal and national governments. The complexity is further compounded by the historical, political, economic, health, and social factors that also influence how Indian students learn and how they are taught in schools. All this points to the need to address Indian education from comprehensive and collaborative strategies that are based on research, best practices, consultation and respect and acknowledgement of the Federal responsibility in Indian education and the federal policy of tribal self-determination in Indian education.

Comprehensive Approach

I suggest that the reauthorization of ESEA/Title IX maintain and strengthen its comprehensive broad based approach to meeting the wide array of educational needs of American Indians and Alaska Natives by providing opportunities at all levels of education - from early childhood to graduate school, including adult education. This comprehensive approach has been the strength of Title IX from the beginning when the Indian Education Act was passed in 1972. This comprehensive approach provided opportunities and the necessary flexibility for students, schools, tribes, Indian organizations and institutions, and colleges and universities to provide services to meet local educational needs. In my opinion, a fundamental change in ESEA/Title IX will occur if programs, as being proposed, are eliminated from the law. It is a shame that, in recent years, budget requests and appropriations did not support the comprehensive vision of the authorizing committees in Congress. A lack of appropriated funds does not mean that needs do not

exist in Indian education. A comprehensive approach is necessary to continue our success in Indian education.

Research is Essential

I strongly recommend that research be emphasized and promoted in the reauthorization of ESEA/Title IX. Research is critical today given the national emphasis on accountability, quality, results, standards and student assessment. More importantly, research is essential to the improvement of teaching and student learning, including student academic achievement. We must keep and strengthen the “National Research Activities” section of the law. We do this by moving beyond evaluations, the collection and analyses of baseline data and the identification of effective approaches. These activities are important and they should continue in a collaborative fashion between NCES, OERI, OIE and other federal agencies. However, both quantitative and qualitative applied research efforts, with academic rigor, are needed that focus on research questions that address teaching and student learning issues. This type of research will not only inform practice but, hopefully, will impact policy and appropriations. The research forums currently being held as a result of the Presidential Executive Order 13096 on American Indian and Alaska Native Education will be helpful in determining the important research questions to ask and answer in the near future.

It is encouraging to note that there is a great deal of interest in Indian education research with more American Indian and Alaska Natives conducting research. The National Indian Education Association (NIEA), the American Educational Research Association (AERA), the Comprehensive Policy Statement on Indian Education (Red Book), and the Presidential Executive Order 13096 on American Indian and Alaska Native

Education all promote research. The Comprehensive Federal Indian Education Policy Statement makes a number of suggestions that are worthy of consideration for inclusion in the reauthorization of ESEA. Among them are:

- the establishment of a national center for Indian education research
- building tribal capacity to conduct and be involved in educational research (Indian people should be doing more of the research)
- ensuring research protocol is respected, and
- accurate and reliable data are used in the research process.

Parent Involvement

Without question, parent involvement has been strength of Title IX. Parent committees have given parents a voice with authority in the operation of Indian education programs and have provided the entry point for many parents to be involved in the education of their children. However, we know that parent involvement continues to be a challenge for most programs in at least three ways: 1) getting more parents involved in the parent committees, 2) getting the regular classroom teachers involved with the parent committees and with parents in general, and 3) getting parents to be involved in the daily school activities of their children.

If the formula grant program to LEAs requires a comprehensive program approach to meeting the needs of Indian children (including impacting Title I and regular classroom teachers) then it only makes sense that the parent committee's role and responsibility also be comprehensive and go beyond the formula grant supplemental program. I think there should be some language in the reauthorization that requires LEAs to coordinate parent committees with other governance bodies and facilitate parent committee involvement

with regular classroom teachers. After all, regular classroom teachers have the responsibility to teach all their students so the LEA and state standards are achieved.

Other Formula Grant Concerns

A strength and weakness of the formula grant program has been the supplemental approach at the school level. A strength is that an Indian education presence has been established at the LEA level that addresses the culturally related academic needs of American Indian students. A lot of good things are happening with students, parents, and Indian professionals in schools and I am not recommending that the supplemental approach be changed. However, the impact on the total school and students seems to vary by site. A weakness of the program and of the legislation is that the active involvement of the regular classroom teacher is missing. As I already mentioned, it is critical that regular classroom teachers be more actively involved in the formula grant programs.

Provide Higher Education Support

An initial strength of the program that in time became a weakness was providing opportunities for colleges and universities to prepare American Indians and Alaska Natives to become educators, including teachers, administrators, counselors and to become professionals in the fields of medicine, psychology, law, engineering, business administration, natural resources, education and related fields. The strengths and weaknesses of the programs are, unfortunately, directly related to funding. Although there are more American Indians and Alaska Natives attending universities and colleges today (approximately 130,000), the need for American Indian and Alaska Native teachers, administrators, counselors, and other professionals is well documented in the literature.

The current provisions in the law in Subpart 2 “Special Programs and Projects to Improve Educational Opportunities” are adequate and should remain. I am pleased that the Department of Education ran a competition this year for demonstration and professional development grants. I also recommend that the “Fellowship Program for Indian Students” remain part of the Title IX reauthorization. The Fellowship Program provides students a choice of colleges and universities to earn a degree plus a choice of being a part of an institutional funded program or an individual fellowship. Also, fellowships develop Indian professionals outside of education.

Strengthen Tribal Involvement and Capacity

I strongly recommend that the section providing “Grants to Tribes for Education Administrative Planning and Development” be retained and strengthened in the reauthorization. Tribes are key partners in the education of their tribal members. This is especially true given the federal responsibility in Indian education, the government-to-government relationship, and the federal policy of tribal self-determination. Any comprehensive, collaborative or partnership effort in Indian education must involve tribes. The lack of funding and/or shifting this responsibility to the Department of Interior are not valid reasons to do away with this provision. Rather, efforts should be made to obtain funding to support, implement and to help build tribal capacities in education, especially tribal departments of education.

Adult Education

I also recommend that the section, “Special Programs Relating to Adult Education

for Indians” be retained in the reauthorization. In my opinion, when funds were available, adult education was one of the more successful programs of Title IX. The 1993 NACIE Annual Report indicated there were 27 adult education awards that served 5,079 students. In 1990 the high school graduation rate for American Indians was 66 percent, compared to 75 percent for the general population. This means a significant number of students did not complete high school. Adult education or the GED becomes a viable option for these students. There is still a need in adult education, only funding is lacking.

Other Suggestions

- Retain the provisions for the National Advisory Council on Indian Education (NACIE).
- Encourage the use of technology in the formula grant program to LEAs.
- Ensure the Comprehensive Regional Assistance Centers provide technical assistance to Indian education grantees.

Conclusion

We have seen progress in the education of American Indians and Alaska Native over the past 27 years. Progress will continue and will be greatly facilitated if the ESEA continues to provide Indian education opportunities using a comprehensive approach - from early childhood education to graduate school, including adult education. This will result in even greater progress in the future with more American Indians assuming leadership roles in education. Thank you.