

**Testimony of  
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Good morning Chairman Kline, Ranking Member Scott, and Members of the Committee. My name is William Mendoza, and I am the Director of the White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education at the U.S. Department of Education (ED). I appreciate the opportunity to testify today to provide an overview of the work of the Initiative.

Coincidentally, yesterday Secretary Duncan participated in a Native youth roundtable at the Denver Indian Center and the Denver Indian Family Resource Center as part of the Administration's Generation Indigenus (Gen-I) Initiative. Secretary Duncan has visited Indian Country 11 times, and much of the work I will outline is informed by what he and our staff have heard through conversations and consultations.

**Framework and Challenges: Strengthening Native Youth Opportunity and Outcomes**

Throughout this Administration, we have worked to implement a policy of self-determination and strengthen and honor the government-to-government relationship with Tribal Nations. ED understands that the best solutions for American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) students come from working with those who know these students best, the Tribes. In fulfillment of this goal, ED has taken unprecedented steps to increase collaboration with tribal governments. Since 2010, ED has held over 35 national consultations with Tribes and tribal communities around the country. During these consultations Tribal officials have shared their ideas about their education challenges and needs.

In 2013, President Obama signed Executive Order 13647, establishing the White House Council on Native American Affairs (Council) and designating the Secretary of the Interior as Chair. In 2014, under Secretary Sally Jewell's leadership, the Council created four interagency subgroups in the following areas: economic development and infrastructure; education; energy; and environment and climate change. The work of the Council serves as a foundation for informing the annual White House Tribal Nation's Conference. The Council's subgroups hold regular meetings to discuss current initiatives and to support interagency solutions to tribal issues. The White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education, located within the Department of Education, also works to expand education opportunities and improve educational outcomes for all AI/AN students.

In June 2014, the President and the First Lady traveled to the Standing Rock Sioux Tribal Nation in Cannon Ball, North Dakota. On their return to Washington, the President challenged his Cabinet and senior advisors to make improving the lives and opportunities of Native youth a top priority.

In December 2014, during the White House Tribal Nations Conference, the President announced the Gen-I Initiative, a comprehensive initiative designed to address the education, physical and mental health, and social service needs of Native youth. Through Gen-I, the Administration is working hard to address issues of importance to Native Americans, including Native youth. For example, it has launched a targeted Native youth engagement program, announced new demonstration grant priority for Native

Youth Community Projects through ED, and continued Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) reform efforts. This initiative complements the President’s “My Brother’s Keeper” initiative, which works to ensure that all young people can reach their full potential.

### **State of Indian Education**

It is important to note that only about eight percent of Indian students attend schools operated by the BIE or by Indian Tribes or tribal organizations. The vast majority of Indian students – more than 90 percent – attend public schools operated by their local school districts, on and off reservations and tribal lands, and served by programs funded by ED.

We are encouraged that there has been some positive progress among Indian students. For example, the graduation rate for American Indian students has increased by more than four percentage points over two years, the largest increase for any group of students. Specifically, the graduation rate for American Indian students increased from 65 percent in 2010-11 to 69.7 percent in 2012-13. Unfortunately, it is much lower than the national rate of 81 percent. Clearly, there is still much work to be done and much more progress that needs to be made.

As highlighted in the 2014 White House Native Youth Report, we have learned that in early learning Native kindergarten students are held back at nearly twice the rate of white kindergarten students. Twenty-two percent of American Indian and Alaska Natives aged 25 and older have not finished high school. And at the highest levels of education, only 39 percent of Native students who enrolled in a four-year institution in the fall of 2004 completed a bachelor’s degree by 2010, as compared to 62 percent of white students. Suicide is the second leading cause of death—2.5 times the national rate—for Native youth in the 15 to 24 year old age group. These are not acceptable outcomes for the Nation.

### **ED Programs and Initiatives that Support AI/AN Students**

Within the programs that benefit all students in the Nation that the Congress has provided through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), and the formula and competitive programs specifically focused on Native American students in that Act, ED has taken meaningful steps to elevate Native American education within ED-administered grant programs. Some examples include:

- ED recently finalized its supplemental priorities, which can be used with all of ED’s competitive grants to target or incentivize certain types of activities or projects. The Secretary included a specific priority for projects that intend to serve students from federally-recognized Tribes.
- ED published a notice inviting applications for the Native Youth Community Projects (NYCP) initiative. The NYCP will fund culturally-relevant strategies designed to improve college-and-career readiness for children and youth in tribal communities. These grants allow Tribes to play a meaningful role in identifying barriers and opportunities, and designing effective, culturally-relevant strategies to improve outcomes for all students. In addition, the partnerships in the program will help Tribes build stronger relationships with both public and BIE schools.
- ED published a notice inviting applications for the State Tribal Education Partnership (STEP) program designed to further collaboration between tribal education agencies (TEAs), state educational agencies (SEAs), and local educational agencies (LEAs). The STEP program is

intended to build the capacity of Tribes as they develop and enhance their roles, responsibilities and accountability in the education of their youth. As a result of cooperative agreements between TEAs and SEAs, current grantees are having a meaningful impact in priority areas such as data sharing, professional development at the SEA and LEA levels, culturally appropriate resource development, parent engagement, and integration of Native culture into state standards and local curriculum. In addition to engaging in meaningful consultation with Tribes, ED worked closely with the BIE in the development of the STEP grant opportunity.

- In response to student climate concerns raised by tribal leaders, educators and Native youth in consultation and listening sessions, the White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education and the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) have conducted a series of listening sessions at which schools and communities identified ways to improve school climate, discussed recent research, and highlighted communities that are proactively supporting Native American students. The listening sessions included hearing from Native youth on bullying, disproportionate discipline, stereotypes, and harmful imagery and symbolism, among other topics. The Listening Tour included sessions in Milwaukee, WI; Anchorage, AK; Lacrosse, WI; Troy, NY; Seattle, WA; Los Angeles, CA; Oklahoma City, OK; East Lansing, MI; and Tulsa, OK.
- The ConnectED Initiative, under President Obama's "Plan for Connecting All Schools to the Digital Age," will connect 99 percent of America's students, including AI/AN students, to the digital age through next-generation broadband and high-speed wireless in their schools/libraries within the next five years. As part of the ConnectED Initiative, ED will work with States and school districts to encourage better use of existing funding through the ESEA to strategically invest in professional development to help teachers use technology effectively. Most importantly, this initiative will level the playing field for rural students by expanding on the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program's current efforts to attract broadband investment in rural communities. This expansion will help to connect underserved communities and create more anchor institutions.
- In November of 2012, the Department of Health and Human Service's Administration for Native Americans, the BIE and the White House Initiative for American Indian and Alaska Native Education signed a memorandum of agreement (MOA) to collaborate on programming, resource development and policy across our agencies. The MOA encourages programs and projects supported by any of the MOA partners to include instruction in and preservation of Native American languages. Through the Native Languages Work Group, the agencies conduct, annually, an interagency Native American Languages Summit to: provide updates from Federal offices on current efforts; provide support to Native American communities seeking to revitalize Native American languages; share successes from the field in two areas identified as challenges (integrating Native language immersion in schools and developing assessments); and discover through small group discussions ways to further support Native American communities teaching their Native languages in an effort to improve accountability for educational progress.
- The emerging "collective impact" movement is demonstrating that with public and private support and technical assistance, schools, communities, cities, and regions can take more comprehensive, outcome-focused approaches to improving the lives of young people. These

strategies can help improve outcomes for all disadvantaged youth and help to remove barriers to opportunity. For example, through the Promise Zones Initiative, the Administration is partnering closely with hard-hit urban, rural, and tribal communities to create jobs, increase economic activity, improve educational opportunities, and reduce violent crime. Each Promise Zone has developed evidence-based plans for revitalization, grounded in partnerships between local government, business, and community leaders. On April 28, 2015, the Administration announced the next round of urban, rural, and tribal communities that have received a Promise Zone designation. The Second Round Promise Zones competition included the designation of the Pine Ridge Promise Zone on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, SD. In 2012, Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma also received designation.

- As part of our efforts to involve Tribes in the education of their students, ED recently issued a letter designating tribal education agencies and other tribal organizations as eligible to receive Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) Filing Status Information from State Education Agencies in certain circumstances. (<http://ifap.ed.gov/dpclatters/GEN1412.html>)
- Tribal Colleges are included in the President's College Value and Affordability agenda and previous Budget proposals, including America's College Promise. This proposed grant program is for States to make community college free for responsible students, enabling them to earn a certificate, an associate's degree, or up to two years' worth of credits towards a bachelor's degree without paying any tuition and fees. President Obama's America's College Promise proposal is a historic and exciting opportunity for our nation that will benefit nearly nine million students by making higher education more affordable and improving the quality of education across America's 1,100 plus community colleges. Our budget invests \$60 billion in mandatory funding over ten years into this bold, new partnership with states to help them end tuition for responsible students in high-quality community college programs.
- ED recognizes the importance of technical assistance to all entities who educate AI/AN students. As a response to tribal consultation, ED's Office of Indian Education allocated approximately \$993,000 in Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 to four of ED's Regional Comprehensive Centers and to one Content Comprehensive Center to provide technical assistance and other support that can help improve outcomes for AI/AN students. Over the course of the Centers' five-year grant cycle, this support will amount to nearly \$5 million for technical assistance services, including working with States and school districts to help them gain a better understanding of the issues and challenges facing AI/AN students; building cultural competency of their staff; and improving the delivery of instruction and support that are culturally appropriate for AI/AN students.

The five Comprehensive Centers that receive this technical assistance funding (Northwest Comprehensive Center, South Central Comprehensive Center, North Central Comprehensive Center, West Comprehensive Center, and the Center on Standards and Assessment Implementation) are engaging in many meaningful activities that will help outcomes for AI/AN students. They bring together a diverse array of stakeholders including Tribes, tribal communities, tribal education department staff, school administrators, Indian education program staff, and parents to address the unique academic and culturally related needs of AI/AN students. These Comprehensive Centers are helping ensure that States have the capacity to lead and support their districts and schools in improving outcomes for AI/AN students.

- The President's FY16 Early Education proposal supports a birth through age five continuum of learning. This includes a \$75 billion investment in Preschool for All to provide high-quality preschool to all four-year-olds from low and moderate income families with a ½ percent set-aside for the BIE; and \$750 million for Preschool Development Grants, a \$500 million increase, that would also expand eligibility to include BIE, tribal educational agencies, territories, and the Outlying Areas to strengthen their capacity to provide high-quality preschool to four-year-old children from families at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

### Fiscal Year 2016 Budget Request

The President's FY 2016 Budget request reflects the Administration's commitment under the Gen-I Initiative and continued efforts by Federal agencies to work collaboratively with Tribes to implement education reforms and focus on Native youth engagement. The 2016 Budget will support this work through over \$1 billion in new and increased investments, including: (1) \$34.2 million at DOI to extend broadband internet and computer access to all BIE-funded schools and dormitories; (2) \$10 million at HUD and \$8 million at DOI to address teacher housing needs; (3) \$50 million at HHS to provide youth-focused behavioral, mental health, and substance abuse services, with an additional \$3.5 million for a community Native language coordination initiative to help ensure high quality language instruction, appropriate and culturally responsive curricula, professional development, and additional services; and (4) \$53 million for Native Youth Community Projects at ED to support community-driven, comprehensive strategies to improve college and career-readiness of Native youth.

The ED request includes new and continued funding, including:

- \$100.4 million for Title VII formula grants to school districts and Indian Tribes to address the unique educational and culturally related academic needs of Indian students through activities such as after-school programs, tutoring, and dropout prevention. These funds support enrichment programs that benefit more than 475,000 Indian students nationwide. Under the Administration's proposal to reauthorize the ESEA, more Tribes would be able to access these funds and grantees would have greater flexibility to carry out Native language restoration and Native language immersion programs.
- \$68 million for competitive grants to improve the quality of education for Indian students and prepare and train individuals to serve as teachers and school administrators in schools that serve Indian students. These funds support a significant expansion of Native Youth Community Projects (NYCP) to support community-driven strategies to improve college- and career-readiness of Native youth. This initiative was funded for the first time in FY 2015.
- \$5.7 million for national activities to support Native American schools, including research into effective practices for improving outcomes of Indian students, data collection on the educational status of Indian students, technical assistance on implementing successful programs, logistical support for ED's tribal consultations to ensure that Tribes continue to have a voice in the development of policies that impact Native Americans, and grants to tribal educational agencies. The Administration's national activities request includes \$2 million to continue awards made in FY 2015 to strengthen the role of tribal educational agencies through the STEP grants.

- \$35 million and \$34 million, respectively, for Native Hawaiian and Alaska Native student education programs, which support projects that will help improve the educational achievement of Native Hawaiian and Alaska Native students.
- \$1.2 billion for the Impact Aid program, which provides assistance to school districts impacted by Federal activities, including school districts serving students living on tribal lands. This program gives districts flexibility in the use of these funds, while requiring them to consult with parents of Indian students and Tribes about the education of their children.
- \$25.7 million for tribally controlled colleges and universities, \$12.8 million for Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian-serving institutions, and \$3.1 million for Native American-serving non-tribal institutions to help these institutions improve and build their capacity to serve students. With these and other investments, the Administration hopes to improve the college access and college completion rates of all young people, including Native American, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students.
- \$7.7 million for tribally controlled postsecondary career and technical institutions to provide high-quality career and technical education to Native Americans, including by training teachers, purchasing equipment, and providing services to students.
- \$41.2 million for Indian Tribes to provide vocational rehabilitation services for Native Americans with disabilities that live on or near reservations. The request would enable ED to provide support for about 83 tribal vocational rehabilitation projects, including 12 new awards and 71 continuation awards. These funds help Tribes build their capacity to provide culturally relevant services that help Native Americans with disabilities prepare for and engage in gainful employment, particularly those with the most significant disabilities.

### **Strengthening the Relationship between DOI and ED**

Secretary Duncan and Secretary Jewell have worked together to strengthen the relationship between their agencies, especially regarding the BIE, and have participated in several events held to highlight the importance of education, including roundtable discussions with educators and school visits at Wind River Indian Reservation in Wyoming and the Beatrice Rafferty School on the Passamaquoddy Tribal Reservation in Maine.

As a part of the work stemming from the White House Council on Native American Affairs and the White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education, Secretary Jewell and Secretary Duncan convened an American Indian Education Study Group in 2013 to diagnose and take action on the systemic challenges facing the BIE and to propose a comprehensive reform plan to ensure that all students attending BIE-funded schools receive a world-class education.

DOI and ED are also working together through various initiatives to strengthen technical assistance between the two agencies and among BIE-funded schools. ED has helped conduct technical assistance sessions for BIE, bringing together experts from the field and sharing lessons from other organizations that have undertaken efforts similar to BIE's reform. During listening sessions and consultations, some

school officials at tribally controlled grant schools have asked that they be allowed to spend carryover funding on a variety of activities including: teacher bonuses, complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act, computers, and several activities that are not currently permitted under the ESEA or the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, including information technology infrastructure (e.g., broadband) and major repairs to school facilities. As a result, DOI and ED collaborated on guidance to tribally controlled schools regarding how they may use existing Federal funds to improve school facilities, fund family literacy programs, and purchase technology and technological upgrades. DOI and ED also conducted a webinar for tribally controlled schools to provide for dialogue and answer questions about this guidance. The letter (<http://www.bie.edu/cs/groups/xbie/documents/text/idc1-029076.pdf>) and guidance (<http://www.bie.edu/cs/groups/xbie/documents/text/idc1-029077.pdf>) were posted to the BIE site in January.

Additionally, in response to the BIE's request for additional support for technical assistance, ED's Office of State Support (OSS) has identified dedicated personnel to administer technical assistance to the BIE. OSS is organized specifically to provide high quality performance management and support to SEAs in administering and leveraging the grant programs, focusing on the SEAs' quality of implementation while continually reducing the burden of ED's necessary stewardship and compliance role.

Furthermore, ED provides regular technical assistance to the BIE, which is coordinated by ED's Risk Management Service (RMS). ED meets with the BIE quarterly to oversee the implementation of a department-wide corrective action plan developed to improve BIE's administration of its ESEA and IDEA Part B programs to maximize the effectiveness of those programs in providing needed services to students attending BIE-funded schools.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would be pleased to respond to any questions.