

**STATEMENT OF SCOTT J. DAVIS
EXERCISING THE DELEGATED AUTHORITY OF ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR
INDIAN AFFAIRS, UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BEFORE THE UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND
INVESTIGATIONS
AND
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE SUBCOMMITTEE
ON HIGHER EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

**JOINT HEARING ON ENHANCING EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES IN INDIAN
COUNTRY: POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION AT THE BUREAU OF INDIAN
EDUCATION**

JUNE 24, 2025

Chairmen, Ranking Members, and Members of the Subcommittees, thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the U.S. Department of the Interior (Department or DOI) regarding postsecondary education at the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE). My name is Scott Davis, and I am exercising the delegated authority of Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs.

As an enrolled member of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and a descendant of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, I have seen firsthand how postsecondary education contributes to the capacity and resilience of Tribal nations. I have also seen areas for improvement in the postsecondary systems that serve Indian Country. As a graduate of Haskell Indian Nations University (Haskell) and the son of a lifelong educator, I carry the values taught to me in Tribal classrooms. These values emphasize academic achievement and the broader responsibility to serve one's community through building up a Tribe's ability to lead in education delivery. I know we can do more to enhance educational outcomes, so I come to work daily thinking about how we can better support our Indian students across all our education systems, including postsecondary.

Introduction

The BIE currently supports a postsecondary portfolio that includes directly operating two federally operated institutions, Haskell, located in Kansas and the Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI) in New Mexico, as well as providing grant funding for 29 Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) and two Tribal Technical Colleges across the country. These institutions offer academic and vocational programs that are designed to meet the needs of Indian students and the communities they serve. This includes support across 13 states, serving over 13,000 students from more than 250 Tribal Nations annually.

Through this direct education delivery or support to TCUs, BIE prepares Indian students for employment and long-term positive community impact through investments in postsecondary education, career training, and workforce development, with programs designed to address

historically high unemployment rates in Tribal communities while promoting economic self-sufficiency. Many TCUs collaborate with business and industry partners to deliver job training in high-demand fields such as construction, healthcare, energy, and technology, supporting broader self-determination and community development goals.

Tribal and technical colleges often operate in rural and underserved areas, where they function as institutions of higher learning, local employers, workforce training hubs, and cultural anchors. They contribute to professional development across sectors such as healthcare, education, and public service while also helping to preserve Native languages and traditions.

Within the broader landscape of Indian education, these institutions provide pathways to success that align with the unique contexts of Tribal communities. Continued support for this system as part of the federal trust responsibility allows Indian students to pursue higher education in environments that recognize and reflect their identities. It also builds local capacity to meet current and future challenges in Indian Country.

Haskell Indian Nations University

Located in Lawrence, Kansas, Haskell was established through federal legislation to help fulfill the U.S. government's treaty and trust obligations to American Indian and Alaska Native students. Haskell serves students from more than 152 Tribal Nations and up to 36 states, creating a vibrant campus community. The university offers four bachelor's degrees, nine associate degrees, and two certificate programs. Haskell's tuition remains low—\$1,430 for on-campus students and \$480 for off-campus students—and it does not participate in federal student loan programs, allowing most students to graduate with minimal or no debt.

Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute

SIPI, based in Albuquerque, New Mexico, provides academic and workforce training in a culturally supportive environment. It serves students from over 84 Tribal Nations and up to 25 states. SIPI offers 25 academic programs, including degrees and certificates in accounting, business administration, natural resources management, and information technology. Tuition is \$1,770 for on-campus students and \$1,095 for off-campus students. Like Haskell, SIPI does not participate in student loan programs. In addition to classroom instruction, SIPI supports workforce readiness through training programs, community outreach, workshops, seminars, and distance learning. These efforts align with its mission to provide pathways to employment for Native students and to support Tribal workforce development.

Educational Freedom to Support Postsecondary and Career Readiness

Through the BIE, President Trump, Interior Secretary Burgum, and Indian Affairs leadership are dedicated to providing educational choice to our students to help prepare them to enter the workforce and lead successful lives as the next generation of Tribal leaders. That is why President Trump, on January 29, 2025, issued Executive Order 14191 to expand educational freedom and opportunity for families. Section 7 of the EO directed the Secretary of the Interior to review, within 90 days by April 29, 2025, mechanisms that would allow families of students eligible for BIE schools to use their federal funding for educational options of their choice,

including private, faith-based, or public charter schools. BIE subsequently consulted with Indian Tribes and Indian education stakeholders on March 14, 2025, to develop a draft plan for submission to the President by the Order's 90-day deadline.

To ensure timely and meaningful consultation, BIE will hold additional Tribal consultation on July 14-15, 2025, regarding mechanisms outlined in the draft plan for implementation in the 2025-26 school year. Among these mechanisms included in the BIE's draft plan is a proposal to strengthen pathways to postsecondary education and careers after high school. BIE would use educational flexibilities provided by the U.S. Department of Education to use 1003A funds to develop further BIE academic programs in alignment with extended learning opportunities for students. Using the additional flexibilities, BIE hopes to increase access to advanced courses, career and technical education, credit recovery, and high-quality tutoring that will better prepare Indian students for success after high school and in postsecondary institutions like TCUs. Upon completion of the consultations, BIE will incorporate formal feedback from Tribal leaders and Indian education stakeholders to refine the draft plan for implementation by the President's 2025-26 school year deadline.

Improvements in BIE Postsecondary Institutions

While preparing students for post-secondary success is critical, we must do more to support those students once they enter college, particularly in the institutions that BIE directly operates and funds. As an alumnus of Haskell, I know firsthand that improvements are needed locally. I also know firsthand the value that the Haskell experience provided me in helping build me into the leader I am today. I appreciate the Subcommittees' sustained focus and work over the last year reviewing issues at Haskell. Know that our leadership is similarly committed to addressing local issues that have been previously raised. As you may know, the permanent Haskell president recently left his position to explore external opportunities. I worked quickly with BIE leadership to name an interim president to ensure stability at the college in the short term. Mackie Moore has been appointed interim president of Haskell Indian Nations University.

An alumnus of Haskell and current dean of the College of Business, Moore brings more than 20 years of experience in Tribal and higher education leadership, including roles in academic administration, student success, and institutional development. As interim president, he will oversee daily operations and ensure continuity of leadership while the BIE conducts a national search for a permanent president. In the long term, I hope that, under President Trump's recent recommendations for streamlining and improving the federal hiring process, we will have an improved method for attracting top talent to the presidential position.

DOI, Indian Affairs, and the BIE are dedicated to creating a coordinated strategic vision for improvement while also addressing performance issues, where needed, and no position is more important than the college president in hiring a highly qualified individual. I am also aware of the proposals in Congress to provide Haskell with independent, local governance. Leadership in the Department stands ready to review such proposals, as we understand well that educational flexibility and autonomy at the local level may lead to better outcomes for students and support for staff.

Outside of Haskell, the BIE is implementing broader improvements to support postsecondary students. These efforts strengthen academic accountability, enhance financial oversight, and expand student support services. BIE uses data-driven decision-making to ensure that its postsecondary programs remain responsive to the evolving needs of Native students and Tribal communities. These reforms are yielding measurable results. BIE's four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate has increased from just over 51% in 2015 to 75% in 2024, now meeting or exceeding the graduation rates for American Indian and Alaska Native students in nearly every state where BIE schools operate. This steady improvement reflects BIE's growing capacity to deliver targeted academic support and promote student success.

BIE students have also demonstrated meaningful gains in academic proficiency, particularly in math and English Language Arts (ELA). Since 2016, math proficiency has increased by 12% and ELA proficiency by 13%, outpacing Native student performance in states such as New Mexico and Arizona. In 2023, BIE's math proficiency reached 18%, while ELA rose to 25%, exceeding both states' outcomes. These trends are especially notable given national declines in student proficiency during the same period. BIE's sustained progress highlights the impact of instructional improvements and culturally relevant support services.

These improvements are closing achievement gaps and laying a stronger foundation for postsecondary success. Higher graduation rates, increased proficiency in ELA and math, and steady gains across grade levels contribute to better preparation for college, career, and advanced training. Post-secondary aspirations among BIE graduates are becoming more clearly defined. More students now plan to pursue higher education than in the historical trend. Recent data shows that 20% of BIE graduates plan to attend a four-year college, 11% aim for a two-year college, and an increasing number are pursuing employment or vocational training.

While these data highlights are lower than the general population, they illustrate that the range of postsecondary directions BIE students explore are expanding and point to opportunities for continued college and career readiness support by the BIE. As BIE continues to align academic programs and develop local educational freedoms to meet student needs and cultural priorities, BIE outcomes will work to ensure that Indian students are better equipped to pursue varying opportunities. Opportunities and post-secondary goals that reflect not only their personal goals and aspirations but also those that support their communities' needs.

President's FY2026 Budget Request

BIE remains focused on ensuring access to high-quality, culturally relevant education that reflects the diverse needs and priorities of Indian students and Tribal communities. Ongoing investments are being made in critical areas such as school infrastructure, instructional quality, and student support services. While difficult decisions had to be made considering this nation's current debt situation, efficient and effective budget resources would be directed toward strengthening and enhancing college and career readiness pathways. These priorities are rooted in BIE's broader commitment to advance long-term student success.

BIE also remains committed to maintaining educational stability in Tribal communities and ensuring alignment with local needs. The BIE continues to engage regularly with Tribal leaders,

school boards, and community members to guide investment decisions and identify opportunities for collaboration. With the resources entrusted to the agency by Congress, BIE will continue advancing initiatives effectively and efficiently that promote academic excellence while honoring the cultural identities of Indian students.

Workforce Impacts

The BIE supports the educational needs of more than 400,000 American Indian and Alaska Native students nationwide. This includes students across 183 schools in 23 states and two Bureau-operated post-secondary institutions, many of which are in remote and hard-to-staff locations. Recruiting and retaining qualified personnel, especially in specialized areas such as special education, mathematics, and science, remains a persistent challenge, particularly during peak hiring periods when school systems compete for the same talent pool.

At BIE post-secondary institutions, staffing levels have shaped the scope and consistency of academic offerings, student services, and campus operations. When faculty and support roles are adequately staffed, institutions can maintain regular course schedules, reduce disruptions in program delivery, and support student progress toward degree completion.

Staffing levels also influence the availability of key student services such as academic advising, tutoring, and wellness support. These services play an essential role in addressing the needs of a geographically diverse student population, many of whom travel long distances to attend school and rely on comprehensive on-campus resources. In operational areas, adequate staffing supports performing functions such as accreditation reporting, financial aid administration, and facilities maintenance. These roles have contributed to institutional stability and meeting compliance and service requirements.

In recent years, BIE schools and offices have taken steps to improve recruitment, increase internal coordination, and address long-standing vacancies, always prioritizing local education delivery. Therefore, even as DOI and the BIE implemented workforce flexibilities, the Trump Administration ensured that schools were adequately staffed to maintain safety, meet compliance requirements, and support BIE students' academic progress made since BIE improvements were initiated under the first term of President Trump.

Conclusion

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Department regarding postsecondary education at BIE. I look forward to our continued work together to improve postsecondary outcomes for our students and will address any questions you may have.