



United South and Eastern Tribes, Inc.

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March 13, 2015

Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
SD-428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Indian Country Priorities for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

Dear Members of the Senate HELP Committee:

On behalf of the United South and Eastern Tribes, Inc. (USET)¹, we respectfully request your support for language in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) that would support important Native education priorities, including Tribal self-determination in education, Native language immersion programs, and improved consultation and coordination between Tribal, state, and federal agencies. Additionally, we request support for the Department of Education's recommendations regarding the permanent authorization of the State Tribal Education Partnership (STEP) and the need for improved Tribal consultation.

- 1. Tribal Self-Determination.** Current federal law unfairly prohibits Tribal participation in education by excluding Tribes and their education agencies (TEAs) from eligibility to receive funds and operate federal ESEA title programs. ESEA reauthorization should include a project that would allow Tribes, acting through TEAs, to operate ESEA title programs in public or Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools that service Native students on Indian reservations.
- 2. Language Immersion.** ESEA reauthorization should include language strengthening Tribal sovereignty by amending Title VII to create a program that supports Native immersion schools. Such a program would provide Native students fair and equal access to learning their cultures and languages by providing full-day immersion learning.

¹ USET member Tribes include: Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas, Aroostook Band of Micmac Indians of Maine, Catawba Indian Nation of South Carolina, Cayuga Nation of New York, Chitimacha Tribe of Louisiana, Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians of North Carolina, Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians of Maine, Jena Band of Choctaw Indians of Louisiana, Mashantucket Pequot Indian Tribe of Connecticut, Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe of Massachusetts, Miccosukee Tribe of Florida, Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, Mohegan Tribe of Connecticut, Narragansett Indian Tribe of Rhode Island, Oneida Nation of New York, Passamaquoddy Tribe at Indian Township of Maine, Passamaquoddy Tribe at Pleasant Point of Maine, Penobscot Indian Nation of Maine, Poarch Band of Creek Indians of Alabama, Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe of New York, Seminole Tribe of Florida, Seneca Nation of New York, Shinnecock Indian Nation of New York, Tunica-Biloxi Tribe of Louisiana, and the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah) of Massachusetts.

- 3. Department of Education Recommendations.** We hope that you will support the Department of Education's recommendations that STEP be permanently authorized, as we have seen tremendous success in the STEP pilot projects. We also hope you will support the Department's recommendations regarding improved Tribal consultation.

We commend the U.S. Senate for moving forward with the ESEA reauthorization. We ask that you honor our Tribes, Native communities, and the rich history of Native education legislation by providing equal educational opportunities for our students. Thank you for your efforts to bring Native children closer to the front of America's agenda, as they are this country's most vulnerable population. Should you have questions or require additional information please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Liz Malerba, USET Director of Policy and Legislative Affairs, at (202)-624-3550 or by e-mail at Lmalerba@usetinc.org.

Sincerely,



Brian Patterson
President



Kitcki A. Carroll
Executive Director

CC: USET member Tribes
Wanda Janes, USET Deputy Director
Liz Malerba, USET Director of Policy and Legislative Affairs
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