

## State Coordinators' Handbook

### Section K. Strengthening Services for Native American Students Experiencing Homelessness:

#### The Power of Relationships

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## **Section K. Strengthening Services for Native American Students Experiencing Homelessness: The Power of Relationships**

### **K.1 Introduction/Purpose**

The purpose of this document is to build the capacity of State Educational Agencies (SEAs) and Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) to provide appropriate and effective services for Native American children in homeless situations. The information provided here is intended to guide State Coordinators toward a deeper appreciation and understanding of the unique features of homelessness experienced by Native American families, children and youth. The optimal outcome is for readers to develop a plan to identify key partners who can assist with building collaborative networks to improve educational services for Native American students experiencing homelessness in their respective states.

The need for a deep understanding of Native American cultures is of critical importance in strengthening services. However, because of the great diversity among various Native American tribal communities, producing a “guide” or “handbook” that honors the integrity of each culture is challenging. For this reason, this document will serve more as a needs assessment tool, with a series of questions that will lead State Coordinators to explore the demographics, resources, existing partnerships, and opportunities for enhanced collaboration that are unique to their respective states.

In addition to the Critical Questions for Needs Assessment section, the document also features information on past and current efforts to address the many challenges related to the education of Native American students. These efforts include a series of federal initiatives as well as information about state specific efforts to address the educational needs of Native American students, including state laws, grant projects, and various collaborative efforts by states or communities that have formed coalitions on behalf of Native American children and youth. Links to examples of already established, successful initiatives are provided.

Finally, this document features a selection of links to national, state, and local resources. While not exhaustive, these lists do represent, in general, the types of organizations, projects, or resources that can be explored by State Coordinators seeking to learn of existing partnerships and collaborative opportunities to address the educational

stability of Native American students experiencing homelessness. It must be noted that while the topic of homelessness in general may be included in discussions among these collaborative groups, the McKinney-Vento Act may not always be specifically addressed in these discussions. State Coordinators are urged to look for opportunities to bring McKinney-Vento into the dialogue as new partnerships or collaborative efforts are explored. Please note: the terms American Indian (AI), American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN), Indian and Native American (NA) will be used interchangeably.

## **K.2 Some notes on context**

State Coordinators are urged to consider the following points as they seek strategies to improve services for highly mobile Native American children:

- 480,000 American Indian and Alaska Native students are educated in public school systems.
- Approximately 42,000 American Indian students are enrolled in a school system operated by the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE).
- BIE schools were created by the federal government expressly to serve Indian children of elementary and secondary school age in reservation communities. Currently, two-thirds of the 183 BIE schools and dormitories are tribally controlled and operated.
- BIE schools operate in 23 states: WA, OR, CA, NV, ID, MT, WY, AZ, NM, ND, SD, OK, MN, IA, LA, MS, WI, MI, NC, FL, ME, UT, and KS.
- BIE maintains a list of tribes located in each state
- States in which Native American students comprise the largest proportions of the total student populations include Alaska (23%), Oklahoma (19%), South Dakota (12%), Montana (11%), New Mexico (10%), and North Dakota (9%).
- Existing organizations in these states need to be invited to collaborate as Native American students are identified as McKinney-Vento eligible and as appropriate services are identified and provided.
- There are 566 federally-recognized Indian tribes in the United States; each tribe has its own unique set of customs, values, traditions, cultural features and is affiliated to an indigenous

language family. It should be noted that federal recognition represents official acknowledgement by the United States of the political status of the tribe as a government.

- Given the significant diversity among the various tribes, State Coordinators are encouraged to avoid stereotypes and/or any assumptions without verifying the uniqueness of the individual tribal communities in their state.
- Historical trauma is a topic of interest to researchers, educators, and others in exploring the impact of this shared experience in the lives of Native American children and families.
- There are substantial gaps in our knowledge about Native American student achievement compared to our knowledge of the achievement of other racial/ethnic groups. Data collection efforts often are compromised by the small sample size of Native American students in many school settings.
- The 2007 National Indian Education Study indicated that American Indian and Alaska Native students scored significantly lower than their peers in both fourth and eighth grades.
- American Indian and Alaska Native students face some of the highest dropout rates in the country.
- The NAEP – NIES 2011 data summaries are available for review [here](#); it is noted that only twelve states had samples of American Indian/Alaska Native students large enough to report results separately at the state level.
- There is wide variance among states in the collection data specific to Native American students; State Coordinators are encouraged to work with SEA data specialists to determine availability of data for these students.
- Appendix K-1 Sampling of Key Organizations has a useful list of organizations that address Native American education issues.
- Appendix K-2 Resource Documents/Suggested Reading provides a reference list of research articles and information about serving Native American students.

### **K.3 Federal and state partners in Indian Education**

Indian tribes are deeply invested in improving education and believe that strengthening tribal control over education is the key to the success of Native American students. Tribal

involvement is increasing in the operation of BIE schools, and BIE's federal employees are encouraged to work with tribal school boards selected from the Indian communities where schools are located.

Tribal Educational Agencies (TEAs), sometimes referred to as Tribal Education Departments (TEDs), or Education Divisions, are increasing in number and are addressing issues in American Indian education. TEAs are responsible for many of the functions for which an SEA would be responsible, including the establishment of educational policies and regulations, collection and analysis of education data, and other functions related to curriculum and assessment of progress for Indian students. Currently serving thousands of tribal students nationwide in BIE, tribal, and public schools, TEAs are increasing their efforts to strengthen the education provided to their tribal communities and students by partnering with federal and state governments. Congress has authorized funding for TEAs under the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) of the Department of Interior, and in the U.S. Department of Education's budget; however, such funding is generally described as inadequate relative to need. It should be noted that a current grant initiative administered by the U.S. Department of Education, the State Tribal Education Partnership (STEP), supports an increased role for TEAs in public education, promotes collaboration between TEAs and SEAs, and encourages more meaningful participation in public education on tribally controlled land. [2012 STEP grants](#) were awarded in Oklahoma, New Mexico, Oregon, and Idaho.

The U.S. Department of Education is committed to strengthening educational services in Native American communities. The Office of Indian Education (OIE), housed within the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE), states that its mission is:

*to support the efforts of local educational agencies, Indian tribes and organizations, postsecondary institutions, and other entities to meet the unique educational and culturally related academic needs of American Indians and Alaska Natives so that these students can achieve to the same challenging state standards as all students.*

Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended, authorizes the Indian, Native Hawaiian, and Alaska Native Education Programs (Parts A-C, respectively). Furthermore, Title VIII of the ESEA, the Impact Aid program, authorizes direct payments to

public school districts to offset the loss of traditional property taxes due to the presence of federal activity, including the presence of federally recognized native lands. Since public schools cannot draw tax revenue from Indian land or sales made on Indian land, many of the Indian impacted school districts are highly dependent on these Federal education resources to operate.

Office of Indian Education grant initiatives include the Indian Education Formula Grants, Demonstration Grants for Indian Children, Indian Professional Development Grants, and the State Tribal Education Partnership (STEP) awards noted earlier. Information about current competitions and past awards can be accessed on the [OIE/OESE webpage](#).

The U.S. Department of the Interior and the U.S. Department of Education jointly host Tribal Consultation Meetings, convened quarterly in various locations across the United States to address Indian Education issues. Resulting from the White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education, Tribal Consultations are predicated on the government-to-government relationship between tribes and the Department of Education. By providing tribal leaders and education stakeholders a forum for discussion, these meetings target closing the achievement gap between Indian and non-Indian students, decreasing drop-out rates, and preserving and revitalizing Native languages. Full transcripts of these meetings are available on the [OIE/\(OESE\) website](#).

It should be noted that twenty-four states have an SEA contact person designated for the State Department of Indian Education. These contacts have primary oversight over Indian Education programs in their respective state. The Office of Indian Education maintains an updated list of these contacts at which can be accessed [here](#).

#### **K.4 Legislation enacted to address Native American Education**

Over a period of years, the U.S. Congress has enacted federal legislation addressing the education of Native American students. Landmark federal legislation and Executive Orders addressing the education of Native American students are listed in the following chart:

**Table K-1 Landmark federal legislation and Executive Orders addressing the education of Native American students**

Year	Legislation Enacted
2011	President’s Executive Order on Improving American Indian and Alaska Native Education Opportunities and Strengthening Tribal colleges and Universities, No. 93512
2004	President’s Executive Order on American Indian and Alaska Native Education, No. 13336
2000	President’s Executive Order on Indian Education
1996	Native American Educational Assistance (Amends Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act)
1994 1972	Indian Education Assistance Act
1992 1990	Native American Languages Act
1988 1974 1972	Indian Education Act
1988 1975	Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act
1988	Tribally Controlled Schools Act
1978	National Indian Child Welfare Act
1965	Head Start Act
1958 1934	Johnson O’Malley Act

In addition to federal activity, many states have also enacted legislation to further address Indian Education issues. A source of state-specific information is available from the Native American Rights Fund’s publication, [Compilation of State Indian Education Laws](#), which contains information about the education laws of 39 states.

Some noteworthy examples of state specific legislation include: Montana’s Indian Education for All Act, requiring that all of Montana’s children learn the histories and cultures of the 12 tribes and seven reservations across the state; South Dakota’s Indian Education Act, establishing the Office of Indian Education, the Indian Education Advisory Council, and the American Indian Language Revitalization Program; and New Mexico’s Indian Education Act,

ensuring equitable and culturally relevant learning environments, maintenance of native languages, collaboration with other states and entities, and establishing an Indian Education Advisory Council.

Other examples of state specific legislation are found in the [Compilation of State Indian Education Laws](#).

Other significant state, regional, and/or local initiatives are worthy of note. While not necessarily required by law, groups have collaborated to engage in dialogue targeting improving educational opportunities for Native American students, in some cases securing grant or similar funding to implement programs to strengthen education for this student population.

A noteworthy example of such a coalition is the [Wyoming Tribal Children's TRIAD](#), a partnership composed of over two dozen entities, including tribal governments and programs, community organizations working with families and children, along with schools and education-related associations. Launched in 2009 through the cooperation of the Wyoming Department of Education and the Arapaho and Shoshone Tribal Councils, the TRIAD Partnership seeks to improve school enrollment, attendance, and achievement rates among Tribal children, thus helping them to succeed in school and life.

State Coordinators are encouraged to look for similar examples of interagency collaboration, especially in states with significant numbers of Native American students, and work toward ensuring that the McKinney-Vento Act is part of the conversation. One example of collaboration through the McKinney-Vento Act is in the Browning, Montana, school district, which established a McKinney-Vento Committee that includes representatives from agencies and service providers for the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. Additionally, the Gallup, New Mexico, McKinney-Vento program coordinates with the Southwest Indian Foundation. Caseworkers from the foundation provide services for Native American families who have lost their housing and refer the families with school-aged children to the local homeless liaison in the school district to ensure that the children receive services through the McKinney-Vento program.

## K.5 Critical questions for Needs Assessment

The following clusters of questions are offered to support State Coordinators in their efforts to assess the demographics, existing programs and resources, issues, and collaborative opportunities in their respective states.

1. Does my SEA have a designated State Education Agency Indian Education contact person for my state? Yes. Check list [here](#).
2. Is there a “program” within my SEA that addresses Indian Education issues? Is there any information on the SEA website about this program? Some SEAs and some LEAs have appointed a Title VII contact person, who may or may not also serve as the Indian Education contact. This person might be able to answer many of the questions in this needs assessment process. You are encouraged to make this connection as early as possible in your efforts to gather your state-specific information.
3. How many tribes are located in my state? How many of the tribes are federally recognized? Where are they located? Are there any apparent cultural differences between and among the tribes in my state? What do I need to know about the impact of this tribal diversity in my state? Whom do I ask?
4. How many Native American children of school age reside in my state? Do these children attend public schools, state-chartered charter schools, BIE schools, reservation schools, or tribally operated schools? How many of the students arrive in my state for purposes of attending boarding schools? Is there evidence of high mobility among these students resulting in frequent changes in school enrollment?
5. Is there any available data on levels of poverty, homelessness, dropout, child welfare, or juvenile justice involvement relative to Native American students in my state? What conversations about the educational and related needs of Native American students are taking place? How do we know what the needs of the students in our state and communities are?
6. What unique issues related to child welfare and foster care, including kinship care, are there for Native American students in my state, and how do these issues impact the McKinney-Vento eligibility determination of children awaiting foster care placement?

7. What types of services are available to Indian children experiencing homelessness that go beyond state and local community services (e.g., The Indian Health Act)? What supports are lacking?
8. Are there any Tribal Education Agencies (TEAs) in my state? If so, what is the current level of communication and collaboration between the TEA and SEA?
9. Are there any BIE schools in my state? Where are they located? What types of schools (boarding, day school, reservation school, contract/grant school, etc.) are they? What networking opportunities should I consider pursuing in support of Native American students experiencing homelessness or high mobility?
10. Is my state the site for an Education Line Office (ELO) supported by BIE? If so, what communication exists between SEA and ELO? Between ELO and LEAs? Are there any joint training opportunities that would be of mutual benefit regarding the implementation of McKinney-Vento in communities with high numbers of Native American students?
11. Is there a high level of mobility of Native American students between public schools and BIE or tribally operated schools? What kinds of circumstances trigger movement? What kind of communication exists with tribes surrounding this movement? Note that Title VII Coordinator, in states and/or LEAs that have one, may be in touch with native families as they move.
12. Has my state legislature enacted any specific laws that impact the education of Native American students? What do these laws require? (Note: The Native American Rights Fund has compiled the education laws of 39 states in their document, [Compilation of State Indian Education Laws](#).)
13. What projects, initiatives, coalitions, or collaborative efforts have resulted from these laws in my state?
14. Is there a statewide Indian Education Advisory Council, or similar group, whether established by law or by communities coming together around common goals? Most states have established Commissions or Committees on Indian Affairs. This [link](#) provides information and further links to specific legislative or executive initiatives.

15. Are there any statewide, regional or local coalitions, projects, or other efforts that would offer an opportunity to bring McKinney-Vento into the discussion and build a more collaborative network to serve Native American students experiencing homelessness?
16. Are there any federal grant projects being implemented in my state, either statewide or local, involving higher education or K-12 (e.g., STEP Awards, demonstrations grants, etc.)? Are there any reports, proceedings, or other documents available that describe the work of the project?
17. Has any existing group created a directory of organizations or service providers in my state that would provide contact information for potential collaboration?
18. Are there colleges, universities, or community colleges in my state that may be involved in education initiatives for Native American students? (Note USDE 2012 Indian Education Professional Development Grant Awards: AZ, CA, MT, OR, SD, WI, WY.) Further information is available [here](#).
19. What types of statewide or local agencies in my state provide services to Native American students and/or their families? What opportunities exist for increased coordination between and among agencies as families move between public schools, BIE schools, and/or tribal/reservation schools?
20. What services are currently available for Native American students? Within the SEA or LEA (such as Title I and Title VII)? Through BIE/ELOs, or local tribal services? Other local community agencies?
21. Based on the analysis of data I am gathering, what districts or regions in my state are most heavily impacted by Native American students experiencing homelessness? What additional technical assistance and training can I offer from the state level to help districts meet the unique needs of the students? Whom should I involve in these trainings?
22. Is educational support provided through BIE or tribal governments for students attending public schools?
23. What organizations and individuals should be invited to join a coalition to develop a plan to ensure that Indian children are best served by all systems, including the statutory supports of McKinney-Vento?

## **K.6 Recommendations for moving the dialogue forward**

The information and needs assessment questions in this document are offered to guide the State Coordinator toward a deeper understanding of the unique challenges of providing appropriate and effective educational services to Native American students who are experiencing homelessness. The reader is urged to think critically about how and where to obtain the most accurate information available about the current status of education for Native American students and how to build a strong collaborative network representing all stakeholders with interest in improving educational opportunity for this often under-served student population. In summary, some suggested next steps might include:

1. Make connections with your SEA Indian Education Coordinator and other key stakeholders at the state level to become familiar with the unique circumstances and needs of Indian children experiencing homelessness; determine what resources are available to these children and their families and how to refer families to needed resources.
2. Create a task force comprised of SEA, LEA, and Indian service agencies to address the needs of Indian children and youth; increase everyone's awareness of educational challenges that are faced by Indian children and youth experiencing homelessness.
3. Invite Indian educators, administrators, tribal leaders, and service providers to participate in McKinney-Vento trainings; provide trainings that will benefit SEAs and LEAs in addressing the needs of Indian children experiencing homelessness.
4. Consider ways to plan joint trainings in which agenda and content are shared among SEA, LEA, and tribal representatives for purposes of deeper understanding of respective issues and concerns.
5. Request meetings with your SEA data specialist to determine the adequacy of data collection specific to Native American students; brainstorm additional data elements that might be collected relative to homelessness for this student group.
6. Establish regular contact with another State Coordinator whose state demographics are similar to yours for purposes of sharing ideas and promising practices in addressing these challenges.

## Appendix K-1. A Sampling of Key Organizations

The importance of developing, strengthening, and maintaining strong partnerships cannot be overstated. State Coordinators are urged to familiarize themselves with the various national and state level organizations that address the education of Native American students and to consider strategies for outreach to build new partnerships on behalf of Native American students experiencing homelessness. The following list provides links to existing organizations that address Native American education issues. State Coordinators are encouraged to visit specific tribal websites located in their respective states.

[Bureau of Indian Education](#)

[United South and Eastern Tribes, Inc.](#)

[Office of Indian Education at US  
Department of Education](#)

[American Indian Higher Education  
Consortium](#)

[National Indian Education Association](#)

[National Indian Head Start Directors  
Association](#)

[National Congress of American Indians](#)

[American Indian Graduate Center](#)

[National Advisory Council on Indian  
Education](#)

[National Johnson O'Malley Association](#)

[Native American Rights Fund](#)

[Alaska Federation of Natives](#)

[National Indian Child Welfare Association](#)  
(Indian Child Welfare Act)

[Native Hawaiian Education Association](#)  
[www.nhea.net](http://www.nhea.net)

[Indian Health Services](#) (Medical programs)

[Native Hawaiian Education Council](#)

National Center for Education Statistics  
([National Indian Education Study](#))

[Tribal Education Departments National  
Assembly](#)

[American Indian Education Foundation](#)

## Appendix K-2. Resource Documents/Suggested Reading

- Demmert, W., Grissmer, D., Towner, J. (2006). A review and analysis of the research on Native American Students. *Journal of American Indian Education*, (45)3, 5-23. Retrieved from [http://jaie.asu.edu/v45/45\\_3\\_%202006%20%20Demmert%20et%20al.pdf](http://jaie.asu.edu/v45/45_3_%202006%20%20Demmert%20et%20al.pdf) .
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