



EDUCATION SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT HIGHLIGHT

Prepared For:

**Navajo Nation
Leadership, and School
Leaders**

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1. The Sub Education Committee of the Tribal Interior Budget Council met in Tulsa, Oklahoma, on August 4, 2025
2. Sub-Education Committee Pre-Meeting with BIE and Chairs of the Tribal Interior Budget Committee on July 29, 2025.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM AUGUST 2025 EDUCATION SUBCOMMITTEE

The Tribal Interior Budget Council (TIBC) Education Subcommittee convened on August 4, 2025, in Tulsa, Oklahoma, to address critical funding challenges facing Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools and Johnson O'Malley (JOM) programs. The meeting revealed significant concerns about chronic underfunding, workforce shortages, and operational challenges that directly impact educational outcomes for Native American students across Indian Country, with particular implications for Navajo Nation schools.

Key Findings:

- Flat funding continues for the third consecutive year despite increased operational costs
- Severe staffing crisis with 150 BIE positions lost since January 2025, only 12 replaced
- JOM funding inadequacy, with per-pupil funding dropping from \$81 to approximately \$45
- Hiring freeze impacts threaten educational service delivery
- Construction and facility needs remain critically underfunded



Meeting Overview:

Leadership Present

- Adhoc Co-Chair: Derrick Lesley
- Federal Co-Chairs: Tony Dearman (BIE Director), Sharon Pinto (Deputy Director)
- All Subcommittee members
- Opening Prayer: Navajo Nation VP Richelle Montoya

Key Participants

- Bureau of Indian Education leadership
- National Indian Education Association (NIEA)
- American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC)
- Division of Facilities Management and Construction (DFMC)
- Tribal education leaders from multiple regions



ADDRESSING CRITICAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDIAN EDUCATION ADVANCEMENT

The TIBC Education Subcommittee meeting brought together tribal and federal leaders to address funding gaps and operational challenges, while charting strategic pathways forward for Indian education. Despite significant resource constraints—including funding disparities, workforce needs, and infrastructure requirements—the meeting demonstrated strong collective advocacy and commitment to securing necessary resources for student success. The comprehensive data and action items provided a clear roadmap for advancing critical priorities, creating opportunities to strengthen and transform educational services for Native students across Indian Country.

Critical Budget Issues

1. Funding Status and Disparities

- Current Budget Reality
 - FY 2024-2025: Budget has been flatlined since FY 2023
 - Fixed costs: Not funded in FY 2024 or FY 2025, creating cumulative shortfalls
 - Per-pupil disparities:
 - BIE schools: \$7,500 per pupil
 - Department of Defense schools: \$25,000 per pupil
 - National average (public schools): \$17,700 per pupil
- FY 2026 Budget Outlook:

The proposed FY 2026 budget presents alarming challenges:

 - Presidential request: \$2.7 billion (a \$1.2 billion reduction from FY 2025's \$3.9 billion)
 - House and Senate marks: Funding at or above 2024-2025 levels (flat funding)
 - NIEA advocacy targets:
 - \$104 million increase for Operation of Indian Education Programs
 - \$61 million increase for Education Construction
 - \$7 million increase for JOM

2. Workforce Crisis

- Staffing Losses (Since January 2025)
 - Total positions lost: 150 employees
 - Current breakdown:
 - Title 25 (school employees): 2,548 filled positions, lost 132
 - Title 5 (administrative): 555 filled positions, lost 18
 - 18 staff on administrative leave
 - 31 staff deferred resignation
- Hiring Freeze Impact

The federal hiring freeze implemented on January 20, 2025, with extension through July 15, 2025, presents critical challenges:

 - Exemption status: BIE seeking exemption for education positions
 - Special education services: At risk due to the inability to fill vacant positions
 - Compliance concerns: Inability to hire creates legal compliance issues
 - Temporary solutions: Considering contract employees as a stopgap measure



Critical Budget Issues

Cont.

3. Johnson O'Malley Program Crisis

- Student Count and Funding
 - Current enrollment: 317,102 students (up from 45,000 baseline)
 - Per-pupil funding decline:
 - 2018: \$81 per student
 - 2025: Approximately \$45 per student (with flat funding)
 - Historical context: Funding has not kept pace with enrollment growth
- New Requirements
 - Annual student count submission required by September 15
 - 40% response rate on current student count submissions
 - Three contractors lost funding due to the non-submission of data
 - Funding is now tied directly to actual student counts served

4. Facility and Construction Challenges

- DFMC Capacity Issues
 - Staffing: 23 of 43 positions vacant
 - Project oversight: Limited to projects over \$5 million
 - Processing delays: Significant backlogs in project approvals
 - School replacement needs:
 - 120 Tribal Contract Schools identified
 - 80 schools need complete replacement
 - No comprehensive updated assessment available
- Construction Costs
 - Current estimate: \$1,100-\$1,400 per square foot for BIE school construction
 - Great American Outdoors Act: Requires reauthorization in 2025
 - Critical funding source for BIE facility improvements at risk

Educational Program Updates

Executive Order 14191: Expanding Educational Opportunities

- Focus: Expanding educational opportunities without diverting BIE funds
- Approach: Using Title I set-aside funds for additional opportunities
- Target: Lower-performing schools based on graduation rates
- Partnerships: Considering collaborations with TCUs, Haskell, and SIPI
- CTE Development: Working with BIA to build Career Technical Education tracks

School Conversion Support

- Development of a guidebook for Bureau-operated schools transitioning to Tribal Contract Schools
- Technical assistance for transition planning
- Focus on maintaining educational quality during conversions

Pay Parity Initiative

- Data collection: 49% of schools submitted salary data
- Purpose: Documenting actual costs to support funding requests
- Challenge: Need greater participation for accurate representation
- Goal: Achieve teacher and staff pay parity with state counterparts

NEXT STEPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Action Items and Resolutions

Immediate Actions Required

- Draft exemption letter for BIE hiring freeze
 - Lead: Education Subcommittee
 - Timeline: Immediate
 - Target: OPM and Congressional leadership
- JOM funding analysis
 - Calculate ideal per-pupil funding adjusted for inflation
 - Document historical underfunding patterns
 - Develop an advocacy strategy for increased appropriations
- BIE shortfall documentation
 - Compile a comprehensive list of unfunded fixed costs
 - Document impact on educational outcomes
 - Prepare briefing materials for Congressional testimony
- Facility assessment update
 - Complete cost estimates for school replacement and repair
 - Update priority lists with current status
 - Document completion rates and project timelines

Strategic Recommendations

- Congressional Advocacy
 - Engage the delegation on the hiring freeze exemption
 - Push for mandatory funding for the 105 L and all BIE funding
 - Advocate for GAOA reauthorization with increased BIE set-aside
 - Pay Parity for all BIE teachers and staff
- Data Collection Enhancement
 - Increase participation in salary surveys
 - Improve JOM student count reporting compliance
 - Develop standardized metrics for facility conditions
 - Determine the Scholarship formula used for Adult Education
- Partnership Development
 - Strengthen collaboration with state education agencies
 - Explore innovative funding mechanisms
 - Develop regional consortiums for shared services

