

American Indian Education Aid Listening Sessions – Summary

In early December, Commissioner Cassellius held three listening sessions to hear feedback about the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) Office of Indian Education implementation of American Indian Education Program and Aid statutes. Commissioner Cassellius and her staff also met with the Tribal Nations Education Committee (TNEC) to hear their feedback. This feedback has been compiled and summarized below for your review. This feedback will inform Commissioner Cassellius and the Office of Indian Education as they work to better align implementation with statutory requirements and the needs of Minnesota’s American Indian students.

Consultation/Role of the Parent Committee

- If the parent committee agrees to how the district is proposing to use the money, they should be approved by MDE as long as it conforms to statutes.
- Members of the parent committees might not know their roles and responsibilities on the parent committee. We need to educate the parents to empower them.
- Training and support from MDE on tribal consultation is needed. What is expected from both parties?
- The consultation process needs to be more positive and focused on students. Some parent committees feel compelled to sign plans.
- Can TNEC provide guidance on what meaningful consultation looks like?
- Review statutes pertaining to parent committees, they might need to be updated.

Supplement Not Supplant

- Expenditures previously covered by Success for the Future grants are being denied due to supplanting even though American Indian Aid was designed to replace Success for the Future.
- Districts are using general funds to cover costs while they wait for plans to be approved but are then those costs are denied for American Indian Education Aid due to supplanting those general funds.

Sharing Best Practices

- Teachers want to integrate culture but they don’t know how and don’t want to overstep.
- The programming being offered by the American Indian Education Aid seems to be occurring before or after school, but MDE should share ways to make it part of the school day.
- Districts want ideas and best practices on how to integrate culture into curriculum. What are some exemplary programs? Where are we seeing successes?
- American Indian Parent Committees and tribal elders are good sources for best practices.

Allowable Uses of Aid

- Districts feel that their applications are being denied for things outside of the law.
- The list of allowable and unallowable uses of aid in the guidance is not found in statute. The statutes could be more clear about what is not allowed
- MDE is requiring proportionate funding if non-native students are participating but that requirement is not found in statute.
- MDE is denying plans for having more than 50 percent of aid dedicated to staff salaries, but that requirement is not in statute.
- MDE is requiring American Indian Education program plan goals to be aligned with the district's World Best Workforce goals, but that is not required in statute.
- Funding should be blended and braided to create complete programs. American Indian programs should not be built in a vacuum.

Calculation of Enrollment

- It's not clear to districts how American Indian enrollment is being calculated. Districts are getting counts back from MDE that are different than the counts the districts have submitted.
- The different identification protocols make this issue confusing, i.e., self-identification vs. multi-race vs. federal 506 forms.

Plan Submission and Approval Timeline

- Districts are turning back money to the state because the plans get approved late and there isn't enough time to spend the money.
- Plans are being denied and sent back multiple times, some plans have been denied four times.
- The current timeline is problematic. Plan submission should occur earlier, perhaps in alignment with federal Title VI applications or in the spring when districts are putting together their budgets.
- Districts would like multiyear plans and funding.
- Districts would like the ability to carry funds forward within and across biennia.

Non-native Participation in American Indian Programs

- Districts need clarification about allowable participation of nonnative American Indian students in programs/activities funded with American Indian Education aid.
- Some American Indian students have reported that separate American Indian programs makes them feel like they are being treated differently than nonnative students.
- There is value in Indian Education for all students and cultural enrichment through curriculum that is shared with everyone.
- TNEC and program leaders have concerns about diluting the program if they allow nonnative students in the program.
- There is a persistent achievement gap for American Indian students. Is there enough money to accelerate the achievement of American Indian students while also involving non-native students?
- Johnson O'Malley funding guidelines allow for participation and benefit of non-native students as long as the costs are *de minimus*.

