

The National Fund Lands \$10M from U.S. Dept of Ed to Transform Early Literacy Outcomes in the Bureau of Indian Education

The initiative will involve up to 60 bureau operated and tribally controlled schools across Arizona and New Mexico, reaching thousands of K-3 students.

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, June 1, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [The National Fund for Excellence in American Indian Education](#), the Congressionally chartered foundation partner to the Bureau of Indian Education, today announced it has been awarded a historic \$10 million Education Innovation and Research Mid-Phase grant from the U.S. Department of Education to dramatically improve early literacy outcomes for Native students attending BIE-funded schools.



NATIONAL FUND **THE FOUNDATION *for* THE BUREAU** **OF INDIAN EDUCATION**

The National Fund is the Congressionally Chartered Foundation for the Bureau of Indian Education

The five-year initiative — Literacy Instruction for Tribal Education — will involve up to 60 bureau operated and tribally controlled schools across Arizona and New Mexico, reaching thousands of K-3 students with evidence-based instruction grounded in the science of reading, high-quality instructional materials, and aligned high-impact tutoring. Over the five-year period, the project will:

- Train approximately 150 K-3 teachers in Science of Reading-aligned instruction
- Support school leaders in building sustainable instructional systems
- Deliver aligned high-impact tutoring for students most in need
- Generate rigorous evidence to inform national scale and replication

This award represents one of the largest federal literacy investments ever directed specifically toward schools serving Native students.

“This investment marks a turning point for Native education,” said Heath Clayton, lead executive officer of the National Fund for Excellence in American Indian Education. “For too long, Native students have faced persistent inequities in access to high-quality literacy instruction and evidence-based supports. Through this groundbreaking partnership with the U.S. Department of



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Heath Clayton, Lead Executive Officer, The National Fund

Education, the Bureau of Indian Education, TNTP, WestEd, and tribal leaders, we are building something different - a program to help children become strong readers while honoring tribal culture, language, and identity.”

The initiative introduces an innovative instructional coherence model that intentionally aligns:

- High-quality, science of reading-based curriculum informed by Native culture and language
- Job-embedded professional learning and coaching for educators
- High-impact tutoring using the same instructional materials and learning priorities

Rather than fragmented interventions, the project creates a unified literacy system where classroom instruction and tutoring reinforce one another — a strategy designed to deliver sustained academic gains while building long-term local capacity. “Strong literacy outcomes are essential to long-term student success. This investment strengthens our commitment to ensuring every child in a Bureau of Indian Education school becomes a confident reader,” said Tony Dearman, Director of the Bureau of Indian Education. “Through this partnership, we are expanding evidence-based instruction, aligning tutoring with classroom learning, and equipping educators with high-quality tools and support. Our focus is clear: measurable improvement in early reading proficiency for Native students, delivered in a way that respects tribal culture and builds lasting capacity in our schools.”

The initiative is being implemented in close collaboration with TNTP, a nationally recognized education nonprofit specializing in instructional improvement and learning acceleration, and WestEd, a leading research organization conducting a rigorous independent evaluation designed to meet What Works Clearinghouse standards. “Real progress happens when curriculum, instruction, and supports come together as one coherent learning experience for students,” said Dr. Tequilla Brownie, CEO of TNTP. “Alongside the National Fund and the BIE, TNTP is proud to help build a model that creates a coherent experience for Native learners that accelerates literacy and expands opportunity at scale.”

The work has also been strongly endorsed by national Native education leaders. “For more than 50 years, NIEA has fought to uphold the sovereign right of Native nations to direct the education of their children,” said Jason Dropik, executive director of the National Indian Education Association. “The National Fund’s leadership in convening tribal leaders, educators, and federal partners ensures this effort is not only evidence-based, but community-driven. This is precisely the type of innovation that federal partners should champion.”

In addition to federal funding, the initiative is strengthened by philanthropic partners who

contributed to the required private match, including the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and Native Americans in Philanthropy, underscoring the growing national commitment to advancing Native student success through cross-sector collaboration. "This is about more than a grant," Clayton added. "It's about building a future where Native students have equitable access to excellent education, where tribal communities lead school transformation, and where federal and philanthropic partners work in true partnership to deliver lasting impact."

About the National Fund

Dedicated to strengthening BIE schools through innovation, tribal leadership, and strategic partnerships, the National Fund advances high-impact initiatives in language revitalization, literacy, school leadership, food sovereignty, and student success.

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