

PRESS RELEASE

The National Indian Education Association Statement on President Obama's Final State of the Union Address



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Washington, D.C.: Last night, President Obama delivered his final State of the Union address. In addition to calls for increased funding for medical research, the need for criminal justice reform, and calls to strengthen America by rejecting radical rhetoric, President Obama touched on the importance of education. President Obama stated, "We agree that real opportunity requires every American to get the education and training they need to land a good-paying job." While highlighting that national high school graduation rates have increased, President Obama also called for increased access to STEM (science, education, engineering, and mathematics) classes for students for job readiness and that we should, "recruit and support more great teachers for our kids." Obama also noted that college must be made "affordable" highlighting his commitment to making two years of community college available at no cost to students.

Unfortunately, Native students did not share in the successes that were highlighted by President Obama. While the Administration's victory in raising the high school graduation rate to 82 percent in 2013-14, the highest graduation rate since states adopted a revised standard for calculating graduation rates five years ago, is admirable, the President failed to note that American Indian and Alaskan Native students are the only ethnic group whose rates remained flat. Native students had a graduation rate of 69.9 percent during the same time period, well below the national

average. Even fewer of our students enroll in and graduate from college.

Additionally, as President Obama reiterated the need for the nation to find innovative solutions to energy and environmental challenges, he highlighted the importance of education in reaching these goals. While the number of underrepresented minorities earning STEM degrees and entering STEM careers has increased in recent years, significant gaps remain. National assessments in mathematics and science for Native students remain the lowest of any racial/ethnic group illustrating that academic performance and preparedness gaps still persist. Despite small increases in national assessments, very few Native students reached grade-level proficiency in math, reading and science on the 2013 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP). There is a need for a consistent commitment from federal, state and local level institutions to provide effective programming to educate students on relevant STEM curriculum. As tribes and tribal communities move into the 21st century, developing the capacity to control their own economy, schools and educational institutions must develop STEM programming which makes connections to traditional understanding and natural processes making STEM relevant and accessible for today's Native students.

As we begin to implement the recently passed Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), tribes and Native education advocates must work collaboratively with state and local educational agencies to provide Native youth with the support and resources they need in order to be successful.

About The National Indian Education Association (NIEA)

The National Indian Education Association (NIEA) advances comprehensive educational opportunities for all Native students. Serving as the critical link between Native communities and the diverse array of institutions that serve our students, NIEA holds all accountable for improving achievement. Through advocacy, capacity-building, and education, NIEA supports Native students, and their communities to succeed. Learn more at NIEA.org.

