



National Indian Education Association

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The Federal Trust Responsibility to Native Education Support the Strengthening of Native Languages

Esther Martinez Native American Languages Preservation Act

- The survival of Native languages is fundamental to the success of Native communities and survival of traditional Native cultures.
- Immersion programs have proven to be the best model for creating fluent speakers and successful Native leaders.
- Grants provided under Esther Martinez have empowered Native communities to establish immersion programs that are successfully revitalizing Native languages and improving Native economies.
- Support and co-sponsor S. 1163 and H.R. 2174 bipartisan legislation that reauthorizes the Esther Martinez Native American Languages Preservation Act.

Background

According to UNESCO, 74 Native languages stand to disappear within the next decade. Equally alarming, scholars project that without immediate and persistent action, only 20 Native languages will be spoken by 2050. This impending crisis is the result of federal policies—enacted particularly through government boarding schools—that sought to break cultural transmission among generations and destroy Native cultures.

The Esther Martinez Initiative funds immersion programs that are successfully passing on Native languages to American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students. Native language revitalization is a critical priority because language preservation goes to the heart of Native identity. In many ways, language is culture. Learning and understanding traditional languages helps Native students thrive. As a result, immersion programs ensure that a student's language will be carried forward for generations to come.

Program Successes

- Creates a curriculum rooted in the Native language – based on traditional values and beliefs – while determining valid indicators of academic progress to accurately assess the student's achievement levels in all subject areas.
- Creates nine levels of curriculum (K-8) in four disciplines: the Native language, mathematics, science, and social studies.
- Assembles professionally published children's books in the Native language.
- Devises Native language assessment tools that gauge student mastery of oral fluency, grammar, vocabulary, and listening comprehension.
- Trains Native language teachers to use the immersion curriculum developed by the tribe and/or school.
- Develops intergenerational programs where families learn the Native language with their children and use the language regularly at home.

Summary of the Act

In 2006, the Esther Martinez Native American Language Preservation Act was signed into law to support language immersion programs, language survival schools, and language restoration programs.

- Native American language nests are site-based educational programs that provide instruction and childcare through the use of a Native language for at least ten children under the age of seven for at least an average of 500 hours. Additionally, the programs provide classes in a Native language for parents (or legal guardians) of the enrolled students, so that the family can speak the Native language at home.
- Native language survival schools are site-based educational programs for school-age students that provide an average of at least 500 hours of instruction through one or more Native languages for at least 15 students for whom a Native language survival school is their principal place of instruction. The survival school must work toward a goal of all students achieving fluency in a Native language as well as achieving academic proficiency in mathematics, reading (or language arts), and science.
- Native American language restoration programs are educational programs that: (1) operate at least one Native American language program; (2) provide training programs for teachers of Native languages; (3) develop curricula for the programs; (4) work toward a goal of increasing proficiency and fluency in at least one Native language; and (5) provide instruction in at least one Native language.

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