

Native Language Immersion Student Achievement Act (S.1419)

Strengthening Communities + Supporting Academic Success + Respecting Cultural Sovereignty

This legislation authorizes a Department of Education operated grant program for pre-kindergarten through post-secondary schools seeking to develop or expand full immersion programs that utilize a Native American language as the primary medium of instruction. The grants will support the revitalization and maintenance of tribal languages while promoting improved educational outcomes for our Native youth and strengthening tribal communities.

Why Should We Fund a Native Immersion Program?

Native Languages Are Endangered: All of the approximately 148 remaining Native languages will go silent within the next 50 to 100 years if tribal communities cannot access the resources necessary to pass them on to future generations. The loss of these languages would deal a significant blow to our shared American and global heritage.

Native Language Immersion Leads to Smarter Kids: Decades of research shows that bilingual kids develop unique cognitive skills that translate to improved communication, critical thinking, and math abilities. Students who participate in language learning and immersion classes tend to do better on the SAT/ACT and graduate from high school at higher rates than their peers.

Native Languages Encourage Student and Community Resilience: Native immersion programs teach Native kids that tribal languages are *valuable* and *valid* tools for engaging with the world. This increases their self-esteem and self-efficacy while also reducing the negative impact of the stereotype threats they often face in academic environments. In addition, language programs bring together tribal members from multiple generations that allow students to form bonds with their tribal community and cultural mentors. When at-risk youth have at least one role-model, research has shown that they are more likely to stay out of trouble and become productive members of their communities.

Native Language Immersion Funding Is Difficult to Secure: Current Federal funding comes with many strings and requires tribes to navigate cumbersome bureaucratic channels. Private funding is often equally as difficult to come by as foundations have actually decreased their charitable support targeting Native communities since 2000. These realities force many tribes to make tough choices between patching leaky school roofs and saving their cultural legacies.

Bill Basics

- The grant program will be housed in the Department of Education to ensure management and oversight is conducted by grant administrators with expertise in the areas Native and language education best-practices.
- This bill offers a streamlined application, administration, and reporting process compared to Native language grant programs authorized through other agencies. It seeks to limit overhead costs and reduce the resource demands on tribal and school administrators seeking immersion funding.
- Tribes, tribal organizations, Tribal Colleges and Universities, and public, charter, and private schools are all eligible to apply.
- Individual grant levels and lengths are flexible – the Education Secretary will be able to consider the needs of each grantee when making these decisions. Total grant costs equals \$5,000,000 per year for five years.
- Applicants may use awarded funds to establish a new immersion program or to expand/improve an existing one. Specific authorized activities include: curriculum development, teacher and administrator training, and immersion assessment creation.
- Grantees will contribute to a growing catalog of immersion student outcomes that will allow for future improvements in Native language education practices.

If you have any questions, please contact Sierra Howlett (202-224-6278)