

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 5, 2015

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman, Senate Committee on Health,
Education, Labor and Pensions
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Kline
Chairman, House Committee on Education
and the Workforce
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Robert Scott
Ranking Member, House Committee on
Education and the Workforce
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, Chairman Kline, and Ranking Member Scott:

As you work to reach a final agreement on reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), we strongly urge you to protect the provisions and critical reforms that have been included in the Every Child Achieves Act, which support tribes, Native students, and schools serving Native students.

The United States has a unique fiduciary relationship and trust responsibility with Indian tribes, as upheld under the Constitution, treaties, laws, and Supreme Court decisions. Under the auspices of this relationship, the federal government has established programs and resources to uphold this trust responsibility and meet the educational needs of American Indians and Alaska Natives residing both on and off their reserved and non-reserved homelands.

Partly through the inability of the federal government to support the integration of wisdom from tribal leaders, Native elders, parents and communities, Native students have become some of this country's most disadvantaged and vulnerable children. Data from the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) reveals that despite recent progress in improving achievement rates among other minorities, results for Native American students have remained nearly flat and gaps among student populations are widening. According to the Department of Education (ED) National Center for Education Statistics, the average graduation rate for Native high school students was only 65 percent in 2011. For white students, the rate was 84 percent.

Fortunately, provisions included in the Every Child Achieves Act would take strong steps to reverse these trends. By strengthening tribal self-determination in education, requiring consultation and partnerships between tribes, states and school districts, as well as supporting proven methods for increasing Native students' academic achievement and other outcomes, the bill strengthens the programs designed to increase academic achievement and preparation for college and careers.

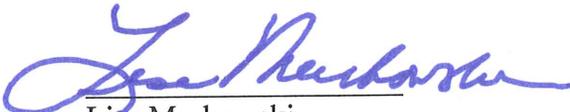
We urge you to maintain the following provisions in the final ESEA reauthorization bill, each of which has broad, bipartisan support. These include:

- Requiring local and state educational agency plans to ensure timely and meaningful consultation and partnership with Indian tribes and tribal organizations on policy and practices affecting American Indian and Alaska Native students;
- Strengthening Title VII Indian Education, Native Hawaiian Education, and Alaska Native Educational Equity programs to improve the academic achievement of Native children and youth by, for example, strengthening the leadership roles of tribes and tribal organizations and improving Indian educator retention;
- Allowing Title IV funds to be used to train school personnel to identify the warning signs of suicide, and to provide programs related to suicide and human trafficking prevention, trauma-informed classroom practices, and conflict resolution;
- Providing support to schools that utilize Native languages as the primary means of instruction in order to maintain, protect, expand and improve programs designed to revitalize Native languages, which have been shown to increase student achievement, graduation rates, and other important outcomes as well as authorizing a study of such schools' best practices;
- Requiring the Secretaries of Education and the Interior to conduct a study for the purpose of improving student data relevant to Native students and schools as well as a study of education in rural or poverty-stricken areas of Indian Country in order to identify barriers to autonomy and limitations in funding sources and flexibility, increase the recruitment and retention of effective educators, and provide strategies for improving student outcomes;
- Expanding eligibility for federal funds to tribes and tribal organizations in order to improve family engagement, early learning, and after-school programs and to the Bureau of Indian Education to compete for additional discretionary grants; and
- Preserving education programs such as in-service training for teachers, fellowships for Native students, as well as gifted and talented programs for Native students.

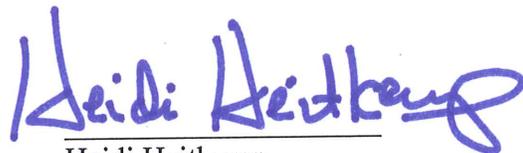
Statistics that illustrate low academic achievement and poor outcomes for many American Indian and Alaska Native children do not reflect the ability of the children. Rather, they reflect the need for these and other improvements that have been included in the Every Child Achieves Act. As such, we hope you will agree that the above provisions are necessary and positive changes, which should be preserved in any reauthorization of the ESEA.

Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,



Lisa Murkowski
United States Senate



Heidi Heitkamp
United States Senate

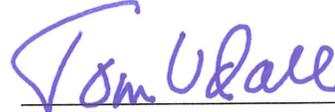

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senate


Al Franken
United States Senate

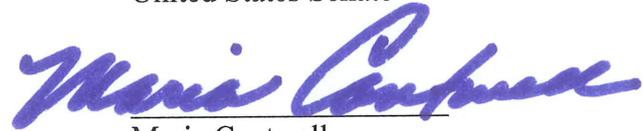

Brian Schatz
United States Senate


Jon Tester
United States Senate

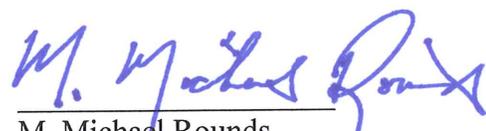

Ron Wyden
United States Senate


Tom Udall
United States Senate

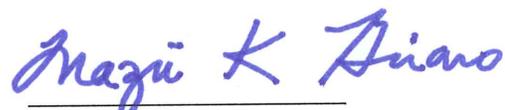

Jeff Merkley
United States Senate


Maria Cantwell
United States Senate

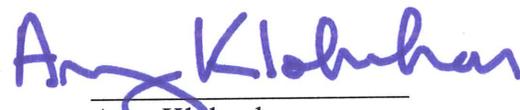

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senate


M. Michael Rounds
United States Senate


Debbie Stabenow
United States Senate


Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senate


John Hoeven
United States Senate


Amy Klobuchar
United States Senate


Martin Heinrich
United States Senate


Steve Daines
United States Senate


Dan Sullivan
United States Senate