

Section II

Language Policy

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Native American Language Policy Group Abstract**

Recommendations:

1. Native American children must be exposed to a stimulating language, cultural, and learning environment.
2. Native children must be provided with equal schooling opportunities early in the educational process, in order to learn their Native languages as well as learning English and other languages.
3. Proficiency in two or more languages must be promoted for all Native American students.
4. Students must have an early access to teachers who are proficient Native language speakers.
5. Native American tribes, parents, schools, and universities must form partnerships for Native language development.
6. Opportunities for the economic development of individuals and tribes in collaboration with businesses and scientific, artistic, commercial, and industrial enterprises must be encouraged, initiated, expanded, and supported.
7. Procedures for the identification of students with special needs, including the gifted and talented, must reflect Native American tribal linguistic, social, and cultural values and practices.
8. For the use and survival of indigenous languages and cultures, it is essential to encourage access to modern telecommunications technology.

Strategies:

1. Encourage local initiatives to carry out policies in support of indigenous languages and cultures.
2. Build national and regional Native consortiums.
3. Propose legislative recommendations to appropriate House and Senate legislators and committees.
4. Submit recommendations to Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), U.S. Department of Education, and other agencies that support Indian education.
5. Encourage partnerships between organizations interested in supporting Native education, language and culture (e.g., National Advisory Council for Indian Education, National Indian Education Association, and so forth).
6. Capitalize on America 2000 and Improving America's Schools Act requirements to develop local education plans with tribal/state agencies that coordinate federal programs serving schools and tribes.
7. Encourage the reorganization of colleges of education involved in teacher preparation and recruitment.
8. Support successful language renewal and development projects.
9. Require research funding to include the development and promotion of assessment instruments and procedures consistent with tribal and cultural values.

Native American Language Policy Group Summary

After a brief discussion, the policy group¹ agreed to focus on the following priorities:

- Foundations of current Native American language policies
- Sources of funding for Native American language programs
- Guiding principles for language development and schooling
- Policy recommendations
- Strategies for carrying out recommendations

I. Foundations of Current Native American Language Policies

Bob Arnold provided a summary of national and international policies affecting Native American languages, as well as policies under consideration (but not yet adopted) by the United Nations. These included:

1. *Lau v. Nichols* (414 U.S. 563 [1974]) — A decision by the U.S. Supreme Court holding that public schools have an obligation to provide appropriate instruction for children who are limited in English, so as to overcome language barriers and ensure equal access to the curriculum.

2. Native American Languages Act of 1990 (P.L. 101-477) — A federal law declaring that Native Americans have a right to use their own languages and that it is U.S. government policy to preserve, protect, and promote the development of Native American languages. Further, the Act calls upon federal agencies, states, and other institutions to take appropriate steps to carry out this policy.

3. Native American Languages Act of 1992 (P.L. 102-524) — A federal law establishing a program of grants to tribes and other Native American organizations to support a wide range of activities aimed at ensuring the survival and continued vitality of Native American languages.

4. Bilingual Education Act, as reauthorized by Title VII of the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (P.L. 103-382) — A federal law whose provisions recognize the special situation of endangered Native American languages and give wide latitude to schools and tribal organizations in planning and carrying out bilingual education programs funded under the Act. It further authorizes priority consideration for development and production of high-quality instructional materials for Native American students.

5. International Labor Convention No. 169 — A United Nations Declaration, not yet ratified by the United States, which declares, in part:

¹Policy group facilitators were Bob Arnold, Democratic staff, Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs, and William Demmert, Western Washington State University. Policy group participants included Keith Carreiro, Kathy Crum, Lorene Legah, Daniel Nez Martin, Joe Martin, Teresa McCarty, Bill Palcich, Verma M. Pastor, Anita Bradley Pfeiffer, Dang T. Pham, Katie Stevens, Hector Tahu, Alice Tracy, Philbert Watahomigie, Sr., and Amelia G. Watson.

Children belonging to the peoples concerned shall, wherever practicable, be taught to read and write in their own indigenous language or in the language most commonly used by the group to which they belong. When this is not practicable, the competent authorities shall undertake consultations with these peoples with a view to the adoption of measures to achieve this objective.

Adequate measures shall be taken to ensure that these people have the opportunity to attain fluency in the national language or in one of the official languages of the country.

Measures shall be taken to preserve and promote the development and practice of the indigenous languages of the peoples concerned. [Article 28]

6. Draft Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples — A United Nations proposal, not yet passed or ratified, which declares, in part:

Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons. . . . States shall take effective measures whenever any right of indigenous peoples may be threatened to ensure this right is protected and also to ensure that they can understand and be understood in political, legal and administrative proceedings, where necessary through the provision of interpretation or by other appropriate means. [quoted in *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, Spring 1994, p. 66]

II. Sources of Funding for Native American Language Programs

William Demmert provided an overview of existing legislation and programs available for language and cultural programs. These included:

1. Competitive grants specifically authorized for Native American language programs, awarded by the following federal agencies:

- Administration for Native Americans (under the Native American Languages Act of 1992)
- Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs (under Title VII, Improving America's Schools Act)
- National Park Service (Keepers of the Treasures program)
- National Endowment for the Humanities (as well as humanities councils in various states)

2. Grants available for a wide range of educational programs, which may include Native American language programs, from the following federal sources:

- Bureau of Indian Affairs educational funding under the Snyder Act and the Johnson-O'Malley Act
- Department of Education funding for schools with students residing on Indian lands, under Impact Aid (P.L. 81-874)
- Department of Education formula grants to tribes and local school districts under Title IX of the Improving America's Schools Act
- Department of Education funding for programs to help disadvantaged students under Title I of the Improving America's Schools Act

3. Provisions of Goals 2000: Educate America Act (P.L. 103-227) requiring that states receiving federal funds for school reform develop comprehensive plans for meeting the needs of all students, including Native American students. The law also requires coordination with programs funded under the Improving America's Schools Act and with school reform plans by local school districts.

III. Guiding Principles for Language Development and Schooling

Policy makers at all levels must hear Native people: their voices, their beliefs, and their being. Local and regional autonomy must be central to building an effective consensus, thereby ensuring the full vision of a participatory democracy at all levels of policy, programs, and practice. The following guiding principles, to be effective, must be planned in accordance with the school and community contexts in which they operate:

1. Native American children (American Indian, Native Alaskan, and Native Hawaiian) must be exposed early in their lives to a stimulating Native language, cultural, and learning environment that is consistent with the best tribal and early childhood practices available (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1976; *Indian nations*, 1991).

2. Native children must be provided with equal schooling opportunities early in the educational process for learning their Native languages as well as for learning English and other languages (*Indian nations*, 1991; *White House conference*, 1992).

3. Proficiency in two or more languages must be promoted for all Native students. Learning more than one language enhances cognitive development, social growth, and the ability to communicate and promote understanding among diverse peoples and cultures (Northwest Regional Education Laboratory, 1990; Hakuta et al., 1993).

4. Students must have early access to teachers that are proficient Native American language speakers, who are capable of expanding the domains of tribal languages into content areas such as mathematics, sciences, social studies, art, and vocational applications (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1990; *Indian nations*, 1991).

5. Native American tribes, parents of young children, schools, and universities must form partnerships to provide the best home and school environments possible for young children to acquire and develop Native American language skills (*Indian nations*, 1991; Goals 2000, 1994).

IV. Policy Recommendations

1. Educational opportunities and economic development for individual and tribal efforts with business, scientific, artistic, commercial, and industrial enterprises must not only be initiated and encouraged but expanded and supported. This should be done through mentoring, accounting and pricing systems, investment strategies, attracting businesses, marketing, and apprenticeships.

2. Partnerships between businesses/industries and colleges/ universities must be created to ensure that Native American professional capacities are built to support Native tribal and community self-sufficiency and to help society in general. This recommendation applies to engineers, business people, scientists, medical professionals, artisans, technicians, crafts people, and university and school personnel.

3. In order to provide high-quality services and to avoid harmful labeling and placement, special services involving diagnosis, therapy, treatment, or remediation must take into account the language and cognitive basis of the Native American environment. Procedures for the identification of special-needs students, including the gifted and talented, must appropriately reflect Native American tribal, linguistic, social, and cultural values and practices.

4. To promote the use and survival of indigenous languages and cultures, it is essential to encourage their access to modern telecommunications technology; legislation shaping the new media must include provisions for the preservation and promotion of Native American languages.

5. The spiritual perspective of Native American languages must be an assumption held constant and common to language learning and teaching.

6. The Working Group in the Draft Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples should strengthen provisions relating to indigenous languages — the rights not only to use these languages but to help ensure their survival.

7. Given the imperiled condition of more than 100 Native American languages in the United States, the U.S. Department of Education should ensure that Title VII, Section 7122 of the Improving America's Schools Act is construed to provide applicants wide latitude to achieve their language-preservation goals.

8. The United States should promptly review International Labor Convention No. 169 in order that it may be ratified as a formal statement of national policy.

9. The Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs and the National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education should develop a directory of federal programs that support Native American language preservation.

10. Indigenous American Indian, Native Alaskan, and Native Hawaiian languages must be recognized as legitimate areas for academic study and for meeting general language requirements by public schools, colleges, and universities.

V. Strategies for Carrying Out Recommendations

1. Encourage local initiatives to carry out policies and programs in support of indigenous languages and cultures.

Stabilizing Indigenous Languages

2. Build national and regional Native consortiums.
3. Propose legislative action to appropriate House and Senate members and committees.
4. Submit recommendations to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Department of Education, Department of Health and Human Services, and other agencies that support Indian education and language and culture programs.
5. Encourage partnerships between the National Advisory Council for Indian Education, National Indian Education Association, National Indian School Boards Association, Native American Language Issues Institute, National Tribal Chairman's Association, American Indian Language Development Institute, and other organizations interested in supporting Native American education, language, and cultural priorities.
6. Capitalize on Goals 2000 and Improving America's Schools Act requirements for coordinating tribal, state, and local education plans with federal programs serving Native American students.
7. Encourage the reorganization of colleges of education involved in teacher preparation to incorporate instructional strategies, content, and technology that directly promote Native American languages and cultures, and to actively recruit and retain Native speakers in programs of teacher preparation.
8. Support successful language renewal and development projects that are consistent with the values, priorities, and language needs of Native communities.
9. Require research funding to include the development and promotion of assessment instruments and procedures which incorporate and coincide with tribal languages and cultural values.
10. Transmit the report of this Roundtable to the National Advisory Commission on Indian Education, the National Indian Education Association, the Native American Language Issues Institute, and other national Native organizations.

References

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