

Steps Toward Education Sovereignty: New Tribal Education Funding

Report of the
Briefing and Planning Convening
on June 17, 2021

What word comes to mind when you hear
"**education sovereignty**"?



Introduction

On June 17, 2021, the All Pueblo Council of Governors and the Tribal Education Alliance (TEA) convened a virtual briefing and planning session with tribal educators. Over 70 participants from each of New Mexico's 23 Nations, Tribes and Pueblos joined the meeting. This report presents and summarizes their contributions. Using online polls and virtual whiteboards, participants shared their views and engaged in planning exercises.

With some initial new state funding for Indigenous education as a backdrop, tribal educators reflected on their vision of education sovereignty and what it would take to advance tribal self-determination of education.

Both participants and organizers noted the insufficiency of state education grants for Tribes and illustrated the depth and breadth of educational needs. The Tribal Remedy Framework (TRF) proposes large-scale, permanent state investments in Indigenous education to build the capacity of tribal education institutions, infrastructure and programs. The TRF is a comprehensive plan created collectively by tribal leaders, community members and Indigenous education experts. It has been endorsed by all 23 Nations, Tribes and Pueblos. The investments and recurring state funding championed by the TRF place tribal communities at the center of education planning and programming. To advance this shift toward greater education sovereignty, the TEA announced that it will continue its advocacy for funding equity for Indigenous education.

This report presents the perspectives and ideas shared by convening participants. It does this in the form of qualitative and quantitative summaries, mindful that these reflect not research findings but meeting contributions made by tribal education directors, tribal librarians and tribal language professionals representing Tribes from across New Mexico. We thank all tribal educators for their active participation.

1. Vision for Education

Education shapes individuals and their communities. What would an education system look like that produced an ideal tribal citizen? To begin exploring this fundamental question, participants offered their definitions of an ideal tribal citizen, thus envisioning the outcome of education. Several Tribes have experience with grounding education planning in their vision of an ideal graduate or citizen. In this convening, tribal education directors, tribal librarians and tribal language professionals were assigned to three separate breakout groups to reflect on their vision, goals and needs.

Participants articulated their visions in different ways, but the values and expectations they shared illustrated a strong common theme. All three groups painted a picture of a tribal citizen who is:

- grounded in values;
- balanced, centered and confident;
- educated and knowledgeable, especially about tradition, culture and language; and
- engaged in their community.

While the Education Directors' group emphasized responsible leadership, the Language Programs' group stressed the importance of speaking the tribal language. Across all groups, participants envisioned citizens that have benefited from a balanced education and are grounded in tribal values, tradition and culture. Their hopes point to an education system that creates well-rounded, confident and ethically-minded individuals who can help lift up their tribal communities.

Guided by such a vision, tribal educators can begin to reimagine education in ways that match their aspirations for tribal citizens.

What is your vision of an ideal citizen of your community?

	Education Directors	Librarians	Language Programs
Grounded in values	Understands and demonstrates shared cultural values of community	Someone who is engaged in all aspects of basic core values (e.g. A:shiwi/Zuni values), such as respect, helping/assistance, honesty, trust, etc. and who educates others to do the same	Maintains values, has respect for others
	Shares family, culture and traditional values		Be connected to the spirit world, and loving, caring and respectful
	Full of values, principles and ethics		Core Values: Those are the core values...voices from the community to establish the foundation of education, which goes beyond K-12
	Great ethical values in work & community		To be open to share the language and culture and treat all members equally
	"Ideal Citizen" is someone who is evolved from their tribal teachings, philosophies and grounded		
Balanced, centered & confident individual	Centered and hopeful	A person who is balanced in mind, body and spirit, reaffirming tribal core values, bringing their special gifts to the table to share with the world	Holistically rooted
	Ideal citizen is someone who has good sense of identity and pride in their community	Well rounded: versed in language, history, government, tradition, values, and well read in tribal literature	To be able to identify in both worlds (Native & Western)
	Demonstrates self-sufficiency and values-based behavior	Confident in their knowledge of self, tribal history, culture and language and able to communicate in many ways with many audiences	Be healthy
	Kind and generous and helpful	Willing to accept constructive criticism and move forward	Promote positivity
	Integrity and honor	A person who is respectful, motivated and willing to learn	Role model
	Trustworthy and there is no favoritism (equal)	Sharing their knowledge	Be role models of Native Language and Culture even as young children
	Communicative, accountable, open-minded, flexible (Pueblo of Pojoaque)		A strong willed individual who has supports and guidance available to them within the community, who also has strong cultural connection
	Responsible, compassionate, respectful, humble, involved, leader, informative, caring, educated, positive, loving		
	Resilient, pro-active, ethical and involved in understanding culture and identity		
	Ideal citizen has cultural knowledge including language, sets good example for community, has good moral and cultural values		

	Education Directors	Librarians	Language Programs
Educated and knowledgeable, esp. about tradition, culture & language	Educated, independent individual	Someone who is knowledgeable about tradition and the past and has an eye toward the future	Value language and culture
	Empowered and knowledgeable of their communities history	A person who is traditionally involved while balancing the Western World	Perpetuate Native languages
	Knows history, values, morals, and is interested in the community future	Someone who see beyond taboo but can still respect the traditional life	Language
	Adaptable individual grounded in their language, culture, and identity	A mature individual that knows his or her culture and is highly respected in the pueblo.	Making language a priority and making more language teachers for different stages of learning
	An ideal citizen will be someone who has a good education to advocate for our Pueblo and at the same time be a fluent speaker of the language	Knows personal and family history	Speak my language to perpetuate and revitalize my language
	Has respect for culture and language even if they don't speak or understand	Literate in several languages including tribal language	Being able to speak and understand your Native language
	Good education in knowledge of cultural or western education to help community	Knows how to conduct research	Be proud and not ashamed to speak/know your first language
	To be highly educated or knowledgeable culturally and in whatever their interest may be	Knows where to find information, i.e. tribal library or any library or research center	Speak language, practice traditions
	Firmly committed to community wellness, knowledgeable about culture and traditions, educated in Indigenous ways and Western education		Strong, well versed in our Native Language and Cultures first.
	Sees and holds culture and education in high esteem		Promote Native Language and Culture to others in community
	Proud and promotes agricultural activities		
Engaged in their community	An ideal citizen will be someone who is involved in the community and is a stakeholder for the community	A person who is involved in the community in various aspects	An active participant in the community working toward the betterment of our people
	Responsible, involved and contributing member and respectful	A person that is involved not only in culture but overall community	Is a participating community member
	Respect and contributing member	Involved in their community	Connection to place and community
	Responsible and accountable	A well balanced person that is involved in the community, is knowledgeable, helpful, and generous with what they know	Sense of community
	Love and respect to community	One who works for the progression or development of a community, contributes, respectful, demonstrate core values, gives input	Lifting up tribal communities
	Knows the peoples' needs and involved with the people	A person who's compassionate for their community	One with the willingness to share knowledge

	Education Directors	Librarians	Language Programs
	Someone that can contribute to the sustainability of the community while balancing culture and traditions	A person who feels loved and supported by their community in their life journey	Sharing traditional knowledge and values
	Positive leader, respectful, educated and a strong supporter for the community		
	Leader and very positive		
	Culturally adept individual and in public service		
	Servitude		
	Obeys the laws and customs of the community		
	Is in good standing		

2. Goals for education

Knowing what tribal education seeks to accomplish, and setting long and short-term goals, is key to developing educational infrastructure, programs and services. Each of the groups articulated goals specific to their own roles and functions: Education Directors aim to increase capacity, staffing and facilities; Tribal Librarians want their libraries to function as intergenerational community resource centers, emphasizing learning outside conventional classroom settings; and Language Programs strive for community-centered language teaching that engages all tribal members.

All groups also shared broader aspirations for tribal education, with five common goals rising to the top:

- Self-determined and community-based education
- Balanced and integrated education
- Language and cultural competency
- Student success and college, career and community readiness
- Equity in education

The pursuit of greater tribal ownership over education is connected to the goal of a more balanced and integrated approach to programming and service provision. Educators anticipate that this can yield greater student success, including college, career and community readiness. Moreover, many participants stated that equity in education must be an overarching goal, reflecting demands made by education advocates across the state, especially in the wake of the *Yazzie/Martinez* court ruling.

What are your Tribe's/Library's/Program's education goals?

	Education Directors	Librarians	Language Programs
Building capacity and lifting up role of Tribal Ed., Library or Language Programs	Well trained education staff members	Being able to serve as a resource hub for all, not only students: providing information, relevant resources, access to archives for life long learning and academic success all around	Preserve and maintain Indigenous Languages
	To build capacity and partnerships to address all aspects of education which includes mental health, food security, housing, employment and training, language, etc.	To be a positive and supportive space to all learners all ages all kinds of students and provide as many free and up to date resources as possible	Having a language emersion program in yours schools, library, and community centers where community members have access to learning and improving their language education
	Build capacity by hiring more staff to offer a variety of educational support programming. Really listen to the client and provide them supportive options for achieving their life goals	Providing new ideas, concepts, ways of learning, beyond what schools are teaching	Ability for families to learn the language together, so it goes beyond the classroom and into the community and homes
	More building space	To be a connector through all levels of learning	Establish stand-alone language programs apart from general education programs through District schools.
	Have classrooms in the Pueblo to teach the language	To be available at all times as a resource person.	Reoccurring dollars
	Technical growth	Provide language learning sessions to all tribal community members of all ages	
		To teach the community to be life-long users of the library	
		Teaching community how to use and utilize technology to their advantage and to enhance their lives.	
		To advocate and educate about the importance of libraries in tribal communities	
		To collaborate more with education departments on shared goals and visions	
		To increase educational endeavors of librarianship by having more degreed librarians	
		To teach about librarianship and help bring in the next generation of indigenous librarians	
Self-determined and community-based education	Self determined education for our children	To take over our education	Tribal education
	Education that reflects the values and community priorities that sustain the future of the Pueblo		Remain focused on tribal education

	Education Directors	Librarians	Language Programs
	Attaining state education status to exercise tribal sovereignty which will empower the nation to have governance for implementation of a culturally relevant curriculum, assessment for improved student outcomes.		Reframing/redefining Indigenous education
			Reframe overall message of education. Native education is Education first and foremost. It is not just White-man education that is important.
			Align education to community needs and teachings
			Align our own traditional knowledge to our own educational needs based on community needs
			Tribal Self Determination: Standards/ Assessments
			Assessments as defined by the tribal communities and not western based.
			Do away with state standards
			Native Teacher pipeline
			Create our own community education pipeline to create teachers/ staff for local school systems
Balanced and integrated education	Support students in finding the balance of two worlds	Teach people to be independent thinkers	Supporting the whole child
	Social and emotional well-being	To be a life-long learner	Support the physical, emotional, spiritual, social, and mental health of our children through the teaching of tradition and language and inclusion of family and community.
	Overall health and well-being	Learning and education is for anyone at any age	Establish an integrated system, expand programs for life and careers, and utilize Elder wisdom/knowledge through language
	Promote wellness	Learning can be self-paced	To incorporate Native teachings and for our children to have access to mental wellness.
	To promote life long learners	To bring awareness to individuals that learning takes place anywhere and at any time	Lifelong learning
	Life long learning	To be a healthy contributing citizen no matter what my gifts	Lifelong learning
	To be a critical thinker	To bring my knowledge I learned back to my community	Resilience

	Education Directors	Librarians	Language Programs
	Cherish personal life/desire for knowledge in all forms		
Language and cultural competency	To have all tribal members speak the language	Provide teachings to the youth through cultural and language based center/s	<i>[see first category]</i>
	Language maintenance and revitalization	Education can include traditional and cultural knowledge	
	Language revitalization	To value and accept the role in traditional knowledge transfer and archive that knowledge for future generations.	
	Language	Learn as much as I can about my own community and ways	
	Language		
	Traditional language as an art		
	Tradition		
	Culture		
	Relevant curriculum. Our stories and perspectives and traditions.		
	Evolving curriculum		
Student success	Student success		Our children to finish schools
	Student achievement		
	95% graduation rate		
	Establish a higher standard of learning		
	Educational success in western education without compromising traditional ways		
	Catching school aged kids that fall through the cracks in the public school system		
	Growing parent investment in a child's success		
College, career and community readiness	Quality education that supports and promotes college readiness	Assist students to grow to be great leaders in our community by providing support to them	
	Being college & career ready	Learn new skills so community members are not relying on the Casino and other handouts.	
	To have high school seniors state their plans when they graduate ... not "i don't know"	Someone who can receive a higher education and bring that knowledge back to their Pueblo by living and working there.	

	Education Directors	Librarians	Language Programs
	To encourage all students to seek opportunities in and out of the community	To ensure overall student success using the Core Values so that students can return to their communities and be active community contributors	
	To be able to have students to graduate from high school, to be able to pursue higher education or other vocational schools		
	Have a full understanding and connection between educational attainment and self sustainability		
	Prepare our students to be successful as adult learners. Whether it be in Higher Education or the workforce		
	Providing scholarship support. No student loan debt for higher ed students		
Education equity	Every member is provided an opportunity to obtain an equal education that will lead to life-long learning		Education equity
	Access to a quality education		Equity
	Safe space learning		Equity and parity
	To have more funding for Higher Education with full access of resources		For our children to have access to all schools, not based on income

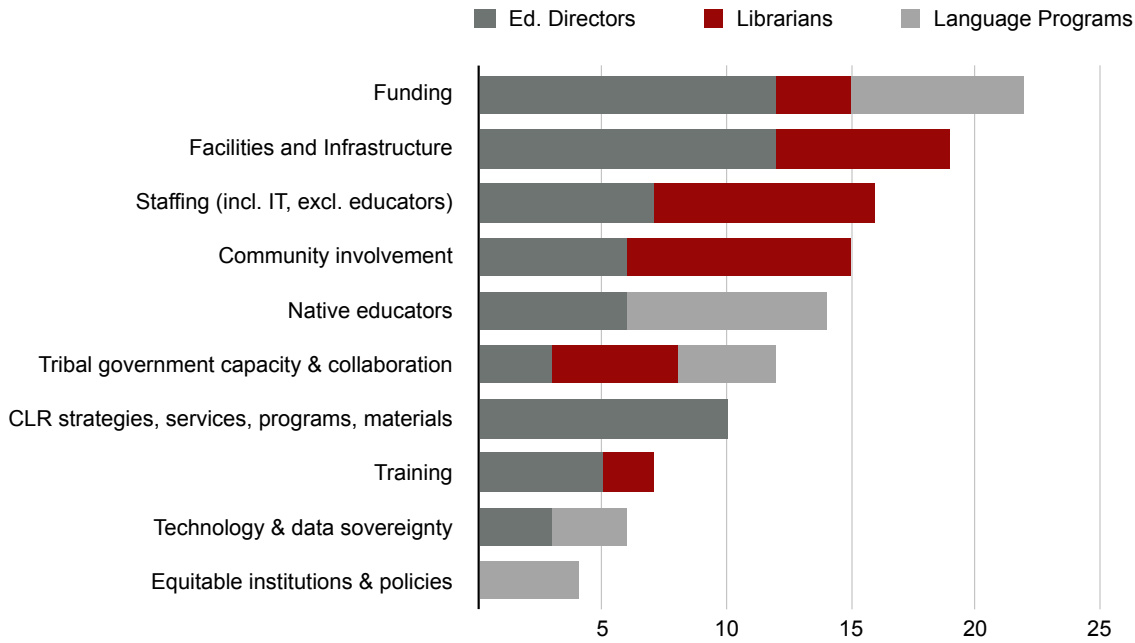
3. Education Needs

Discussing the education needs of tribal communities, participants identified funding as the top need, followed by facilities and infrastructure, along with staffing. These priority needs reflect the funding and capacity building requests put forward by tribal education advocates, including as part of the Tribal Remedy Framework bills during the last three legislative sessions.

The specific needs of the three types of tribal education stakeholders indicated some variation:

- Education Directors focused on funding, facilities and infrastructure, particularly to enable them to provide culturally and linguistically relevant programs, services and materials.
- Librarians saw a great need for staffing, but also for more support from tribal governments and communities. This reflects that libraries are not always included in education planning and that their educational programs are not always recognized as an integral part of the tribal education ecosystem. Competitive state funding processes, particularly the capital outlay process (which requires Tribes to choose between funding for libraries, and, e.g., water & sewer systems) have fueled divisions between tribal stakeholders that impede collaborative and integrated planning.
- Language Programs emphasized the need for more funding and teachers. They pointed out that the shortage of language teachers could be rectified if the state guaranteed the equitable treatment of language teachers.

What are your Tribe's/Library's/Program's education needs?



Reference data

	Ed. Directors	Librarians	Language Programs	Total
Funding	12	3	7	22
Facilities and Infrastructure	12	7		19
Staffing (incl. IT, excl. educators)	7	9		16
Community	6	9		15
Native educators	6		8	14
Tribal government capacity & collaboration	3	5	4	12
CLR strategies, services, programs, materials	10			10
Training	5	2		7
Technology & data sovereignty	3		3	6
Equitable institutions & policies			4	4

Note: This was an open-ended question and participants could describe more than one need.

4. Technical Assistance Needs

When asked about the type of assistance most needed, participants coalesced around the top priority of IT support and internet access. This reflects the recent court order in response to the Yazzie plaintiff's Technology Motion. The court found tribal access to technology woefully inadequate and ordered the state to rectify this injustice.

Assistance with obtaining funding and managing grants was flagged as a second priority. This confirms that current funding is wholly insufficient, and that the appropriation requests contained in the TRF bills must be met going forward. The TRF seeks to secure permanent, recurring funding, not small, one-off grants. The dire need for technical assistance with grant writing and management illustrates how inaccessible, cumbersome and inappropriate the grant model is. Yet even this year's new tribal education funding comes in the form of small grants, which are ill-matched to tribal capacity constraints and needs.

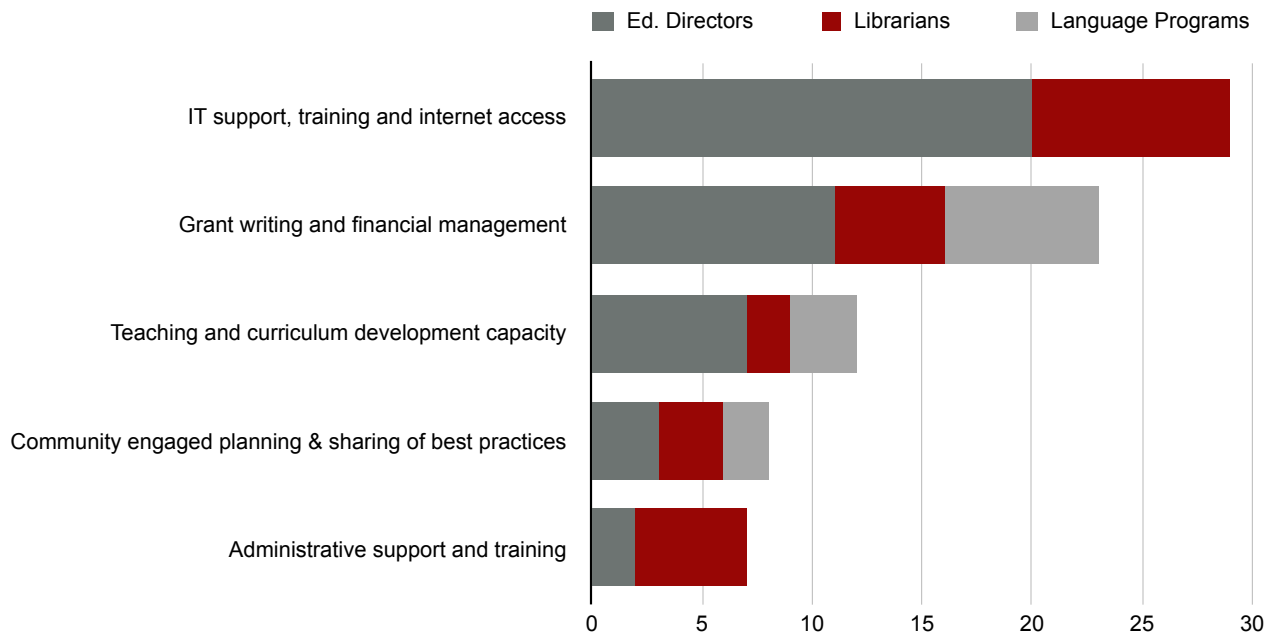
Participants also expressed a need for assistance with curriculum and materials development. The TRF bills included a proposal for establishing two Indigenous curriculum and materials development centers, yet the state's Public Education Department opted to use its curriculum budget for non-Native contractors.

Conclusion

The contributions made by over 70 participants confirm the basic tenets of the Tribal Remedy Framework:

- A collective aspiration to obtain more ownership over the education of Native students;
- A goal of expanding community-based education in order to ensure that education is balanced, relevant, and culturally and linguistically responsive;
- A deep need for greater capacity, infrastructure, technology and sustainable funding to develop and deliver the quality education programs and support services Native children are entitled to;
- An urgent need for basic supports and assistance, without which it is difficult to take up the modest funding opportunities available now; and
- The as-yet unfulfilled promise of equity in education.

What technical assistance would be helpful?



Reference data

	Ed. Directors	Librarians	Language Programs	Total
IT support, training and internet access	20	9		29
Grant writing and financial management	11	5	7	23
Teaching and curriculum development capacity	7	2	3	12
Community engaged planning & sharing of best practices	3	3	2	8
Administrative support and training	2	5		7

Note: This was an open-ended question and participants could describe more than one need.