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March 6, 2026

Honorable Jesse Gabriel, Chair
Assembly Committee on Budget
1021 O Street, Suite 8230
Sacramento, CA 95814

Honorable David Tangipa, Vice Chair
Assembly Committee on Budget
1021 O Street, Suite 8230
Sacramento, CA 95814

Honorable David Alvarez, Chair
Assembly Committee on Budget
Subcommittee No. 3
1021 O Street, Suite 8230
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: FY 2026-27 Budget Request for the Establishment of the Department of American Indian Education and Tribal Liaison at the California Department of Education

Dear Chair Gabriel, Vice Chair Tangipa, and Chair Alvarez,

I respectfully request your consideration of up to \$1.6 million General Fund in the 2026–27 state budget to establish a Department of American Indian Education and a Tribal Liaison position within the California Department of Education (CDE) to support American Indian students and strengthen government-to-government consultation with Tribal Nations.

California is home to the largest population of American Indian students in the United States, with more than 355,000 American Indian and Alaska Native students enrolled in the state's K–12 public schools. These students are not simply an ethnic subgroup; they are citizens of sovereign Tribal Nations, whose educational rights arise from Tribal sovereignty, treaties, and federal Indian law.

California law recognizes the unique educational needs of American Indian students. Education Code sections 33370–33391 establish the state's policy to meet the unique academic and culturally related needs of American Indian pupils.

However, the current American Indian Education program within CDE has limited staffing and capacity, and primarily supports 23 American Indian Education Centers, leaving little ability to carry out the full statutory mandate or provide statewide coordination and technical assistance.

While the existing American Indian Education and TUPE programs provide important services, the TUPE funding source is derived from tobacco tax revenues and is limited to tobacco-use prevention activities, which cannot support broader statewide responsibilities such as Tribal consultation, policy coordination, or implementation of Education Code sections 33370–33391. This limitation underscores the need for dedicated programming and subsequent funding to address sovereignty-related educational obligations.

The proposed Department of American Indian Education would centralize and coordinate CDE's work related to American Indian students, ensuring the state fully implements Education Code sections 33370–33391 and aligns its policies with Tribal sovereignty and government-to-government consultation requirements.

This proposal would also establish a Tribal Liaison within CDE's executive leadership to serve as the Department's primary point of contact with federally recognized Tribal governments and Tribal education departments. This position would coordinate consultation, strengthen partnerships with Tribal Nations, and help ensure California meets its federal consultation obligations under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which requires states to engage in timely and meaningful consultation with Tribal governments when developing or revising the State Plan as a condition of receiving Title I funding.

The requested funding would support the staffing and infrastructure necessary to carry out these responsibilities, including a Tribal Liaison, an Education Administrator, program consultants focused on literacy, early learning, student wellness, and American Indian Education Center coordination, as well as analytical and administrative support staff. Funding would also support operational costs associated with statewide consultation, technical assistance to local educational agencies, and program oversight.

Additionally, the proposal includes \$500,000 annually to support regional implementation of the Native American Studies Model Curriculum, including professional development for educators and collaboration with Tribal Nations to develop and update place-based instructional materials.

California's education system has long treated American Indian students as an ethnic or cultural subgroup, despite federal and state law recognizing them as citizens of sovereign Tribal Nations. Establishing a dedicated department grounded in Tribal sovereignty will strengthen government-to-government relationships,

improve coordination with Tribal Nations, and support better educational opportunities and outcomes for Native students statewide.

Thank you for your consideration of this request and for your continued commitment to supporting California's diverse student population. If you require any further information or would like to discuss this project in more detail, please do not hesitate to contact Taylor Martin in my office at (916) 319-2779.

Sincerely,



HEATHER HADWICK
Assemblymember, District 1



JAMES RAMOS
Assemblymember, District 45

Cc: Members, Assembly Budget Committee
Members, Assembly Budget Subcommittee #3 on Education Finance
Christian Griffith, Assembly Budget Committee
Nicole Vazquez, Assembly Budget Committee
Shy Forbes, Assembly Budget Committee
Erin Gabel, Assembly Budget Committee
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