

Statement of the Tribal Education Nation-building Gathering

Friday, December 16, 2016

Rapid City, SD

Preamble:

After fifty years of aspirations for Tribally-controlled education of Native People, education leaders of the northern Great Plains are very concerned today that Tribal self-determination of life-long learning will never be realized with the current education systems. It is time to not only reflect on the original visions for indigenous education, but to immediately develop and implement platforms for change and advocacy by Native educators and their supporters.

This was the purpose of the Black Hills gathering convened by Lionel Bordeaux (Sicangu Lakota), president of Sinte Gleska University and past president of the National Indian Education Association. In attendance were former NIEA presidents, tribal college and school leaders, and representatives of several Native organizations. They shared perspectives about the need for a grass-roots change in direction for Indian education. This change must be pursued now with the transition of control in the federal government.

The day-long discussions led to a commitment by the group to reaffirm the transformative nature of tribally-controlled, culturally-rooted education. Through this statement, leaders of Indian Country will be asked to recommit to the vision of the founders of the tribally-controlled education movement. Future education of Native People must be accessible, culturally-competent, and place-based. The following principles are offered to Indian Country:

We believe education and cultural integrity are the foundation of individual and community well-being. This occurs through restoration of indigenous practices that affirm healthy and productive tribal citizenship. Our individual citizenship and our status as sovereign nations are entwined.

Our sovereign status as nations is rooted in our inherent rights given to us by the Creator. Our inherent rights include the right to an education derived from an indigenous framework. Our inherent rights include the right to our languages, to our homelands, to our spirituality and to our lifelong well-being.

Education is woven into all aspects of our status as indigenous people and is a resource promoting our self-determination. This includes everything including family and social systems, infrastructure such as housing and transportation, health, economic development, and political systems.

Socialization of our children is the process by which we imprint our children with their place-based tribal identities. It is our right to control the educational environments that contribute to socialization.

Recommendations:

- 1) Advocate for a national think tank to provide forums for experienced leaders and elders to share history, wisdom, prayers, and advice with a broader audience, especially emerging educators and future leaders.
- 2) Encourage our national Indian education organizations to work more closely together toward shared improvement of education experiences in all situations including rural, urban, reservation, and incarcerated youth.
- 3) Create media resources that can be used to share our stories and teachings so we can draw strength from our knowledge, our alliances, and our collective experiences.
- 4) Recognize that our approach to education is derived from our spirituality, our human rights, our kinships, and our connections to all living things that depend on the land, air, and water for life.