

## Policy Brief

# Coordinated Educational Supports for Tribal Communities

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Technical assistance is a strategy widely used to support community development and improvement efforts. For New Mexico's 23 sovereign tribal governments, two tribal education technical assistance centers (TETACs) were codified in Laws 2023, Chapter 72 (House Bill 280) to support tribal education departments and tribal communities. The law requires the Higher Education Department (HED) to establish the centers in geographically distinct regions of the state and focus on Native American students' education and success by partnering with local education agencies (LEAs) and tribal colleges and universities (TCUs). Additionally, the law requires HED to partner with the Public Education Department (PED) and the Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD) to develop culturally relevant curriculum and instructional materials; foster career pathways for Native American educators; and foster education policy and capacity building for tribal communities.

The ongoing support for Native American student education and success appears to be producing positive academic results. Native American students in grades three through eight demonstrated the strongest literacy growth since 2022, according to PED assessment results for the 2024-2025 school year (SY25). In addition to academic accomplishments, enrollment in public college and universities for Native American students has increased by 7 percent over the last two years, coupled with a 13 percent increase in bachelor's degree recipients, according to HED.

This brief will focus on the development of one technical assistance center. It includes insights into the selection process, proposed location and programming of the center, and a national perspective on technical assistance for education agencies.

## National Technical Assistance Center Effectiveness

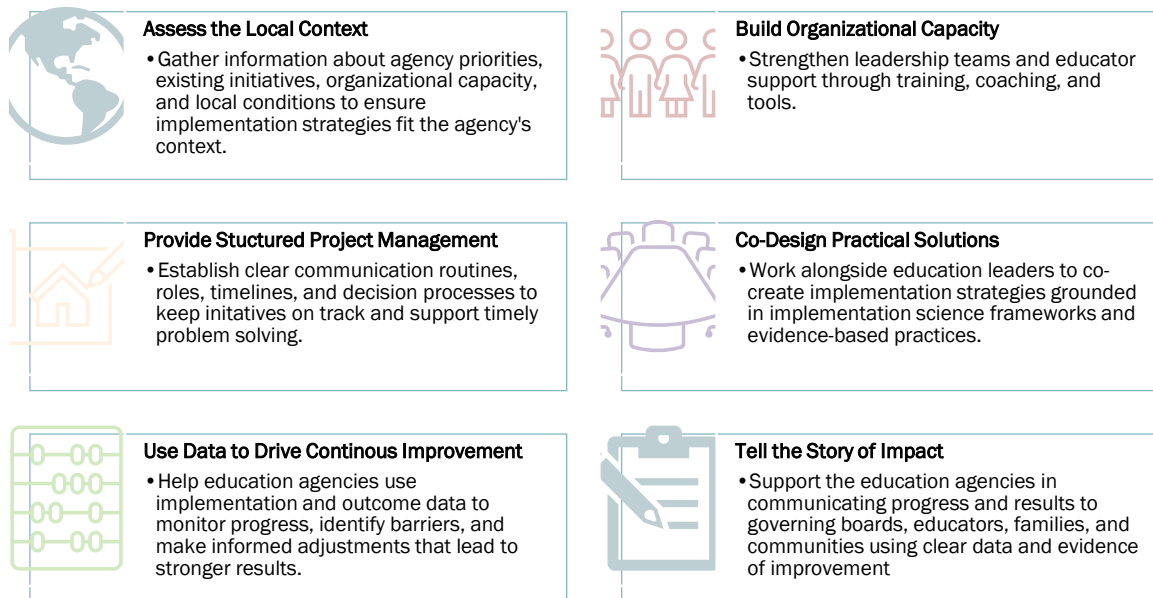
Between 2012 and 2018, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) invested \$350 million in 22 Comprehensive Technical Assistance Centers operating across the nation. The objective of each center was to build the capacity of state education agencies (SEAs) to support their LEAs in improving student outcomes, especially low-performing districts and schools. Technical assistance often includes a combination of coaching, consulting, modeling, facilitation, professional development, site visits, and referrals; and because of its broad definition, each comprehensive center carried out the concept of *capacity building* at their own discretion. A 2019 Institute of Education Sciences (IES) evaluation cited four domains for capacity building: knowledge and skills or human capacity building; organizational capacity building; policy development capacity; and policy implementation capacity.

The provisions of HB280 require tribal education departments to rely on LEAs to strengthen their ability to improve and address academic achievement for Native American students. The IES evaluation highlights that effective educational improvement depends on long-term technical assistance, stakeholder engagement, organizational learning, and adaptable implementation. Many of New Mexico's pueblos, tribes, and nations are confronted with rurality, educator shortages, linguistic diversity, and persistent achievement gaps; therefore, LEAs and tribal education departments may prioritize building internal capacity that withstands leadership and policy changes. This local system of knowledge and organizational capacity would enable staff and community to adopt policies that address local needs and challenges. Tribes, pueblos, and nations can benefit from an approach that prioritizes evidence-based practices as well as a local system to sustain and adapt over time.

### Key Takeaways

- RFPs for Tribal Education Technical Assistance Centers are still being considered (*Pages 1 and 3*).
- UNM's Native American Budget and Policy Institute has been selected as the first site (*Page 3*).
- Results from a national evaluation indicate effective implementation was observed within three years of capacity development (*Pages 2-3*).

**Figure 1: Implementation Science in Education**



## Frameworks

Education agencies often work across multiple levels and make decisions to adopt new initiatives such as curricula, student support programs, technology protocols, and more; thus, a strong implementation approach can improve student experience and increase confidence in staff and leaders during these changes. Implementation science seeks to understand and evaluate approaches in different contexts and settings to achieve positive outcomes (see **Figure 1: Implementation Science in Education**). The integration of research and practice allows organizations across education agencies, and other human service sectors, to enhance the adoption and use of evidence-based programs, practices, and policies.

The National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning, a national federal resource center that develops and promotes evidence-based practices for early childhood programs, established an example of evidence-based guidelines for connecting tribal cultural skills, values, and beliefs to state and tribal early learning guidelines. The center's [Making it Work Guidelines](#) was designed in 2017 to accomplish an early learning program that teaches children ages three through five their culture, language, and traditions. The connection of traditional cultural values alongside early childhood development and school readiness goals are accomplished through three steps: 1) making the connection; 2) making it happen; and 3) making it real. This iterative process determines a cultural skill that supports early childhood development and school readiness by planning activities to teach the cultural skill, value, or belief; to engage with families and community members; and to document and assess progress in the selected cultural skills. This tailored approach to language and cultural development ensures Early Head Start Programs are delivering lesson plans and using strategies that align with traditional skills, values, and beliefs, while also promoting language development.

## Evaluation

A 2019 federal ED [report](#) examined various technical assistance approaches and conceptual frameworks and found many common approaches to delivery and design. However, implementation and services provided to LEAs were not evaluated and more data is needed to support the impact of technical assistance at the local level. The State Implementation and Scaling-up of Evidence-based Practices Center (SISEP), a national technical assistance center funded by the Office of Special Education within ED, aims to increase the capacity of evidence-based implementation for educational services related to students with disabilities. In 2024, the center

partnered with five SEAs, each serving an average of 1.1 million students, for an evaluation on four core components of technical assistance at the local, state, and regional level (see **Table 1: Summary of Intensive TA Practices**).

**The evaluation indicated effective implementation was observed within three years of capacity development**, and the highest number of intensive practices were recorded at the state level with 94 percent of recipients indicating their technical assistance highly relevant. Furthermore, a participatory approach to technical assistance is essential to effective and sustainable capacity development.

**Intentional modeling and structuring can improve content knowledge and experience for implementation strategies.** For educational settings, the specific education practices being implemented and the supporting infrastructure may complicate technical assistance. For example, providers at the state level need to have knowledge of the SEA’s role and functions within their level to provide effective technical assistance. It is also important for providers to understand the types of additional assistance LEAs are receiving to avoid duplicating assistance and administrative burdens.

**Table 1: Summary of Intensive TA Practices**

Core Component	Descriptor
Technical Assistance Providers	State Liaison
	Senior Leadership
Dosage	Monthly
	Weekly
	Ongoing
Technical Assistance Competencies	Relationship Development
	Team Development
	Assessing Needs and assets
	Understanding Context
	Facilitation and co-design
	Communication and brokering
	Cultivating leadership
	Tailoring of capacity building supports
	Conducting improvement cycles
	Technical Assistance Mechanisms
	Performance feedback
	Training
	Assessments and data usage
	Scaffolding
	Resource Sharing

Source: SISEP, 2024

## Tribal Technical Education Technical Assistance Centers

New Mexico continues to create an education system to serve all students by providing the support and resources needed for each student to achieve their educational goals. In state law, the primary focus of the state’s TETACs is to build capacity among LEAs, public and tribal higher education institutions, state agencies, and tribally-operated education departments and governments for Native American student success and support.

### Tribally Determined Priorities and Needs

**HED selected the University of New Mexico’s (UNM) Native American Budget and Policy Institute’s framework for tribal education as a TETAC.** The UNM Native American Budget and Policy Institute (NABPI) is a research and policy center serving New Mexico’s 23 pueblos, nations, and tribes that focuses on research, budget, and policy analysis for tribally-determined priorities and needs. The institution works with a wide variety of local, national, and international experts on tribal and indigenous health, sovereignty, justice, education, and policy. The institute’s focus on rural and urban Indigenous communities allows intentional partnerships, technical assistance, and mentorship.

**Table 2: Timeline of RFP Application**

Action	Responsible Party	Due Dates
Issue RFP	Agency	06/17/25
Acknowledgement of Receipt Form	Potential TETACs	06/18/25
Deadline to submit written questions	Potential TETACs	06/23/25
Response to Written Questions	Project/Procurement Manager	07/01/25
Submission of Proposal	Potential TETACs	07/07/25
Proposal Evaluation	Evaluation Committee	07/08/25
Selection of Finalists	Evaluation Committee	07/11/25
Oral Presentation(s)	Finalist TETACs	TBD
Best and Final Offers	Finalist TETACs	07/22/25
Finalize Contractual Agreements	Agency/Finalist TETACs	07/28/25
Contract Awards	Agency/Finalist TETACs	08/08/25
Protest Deadline	Agency	+15 days

Source: HED

Note: Timeline based on FY25

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**NABPI's mission empowers Native Americans and their communities through research in prenatal cancer, access to digital technology, and early childhood education and care research.** Additionally, the Tribal Data Initiative at NABPI provides data and data resources to inform policy and assist tribal leaders, policymakers, and the public in understanding the needs and challenges of New Mexico's 23 pueblos, nations, and tribes. Data topics include population demographics, health, education, and economic well-being.

**HED has selected one location, but complications with the request for proposal (RFP) process may complicate application screening.** HED led a multi-agency effort to develop Laws 2023, Chapter 72 (House Bill 280) to improve Native American student success from early childhood through higher education. Additional provisions in the bill allowed building capacity for programs, capital outlay projects, and expanded funding. While the centers are administratively attached to HED, tribal education experts and academic researchers will carry out the implementation. The RFPs for TETACs enlist a two-month screening process that includes an evaluation and presentation (see **Table 2: Timeline of Application**).

## Future Considerations

New Mexico served 40.4 thousand students affiliated with tribal nations across the state in SY25. PED's [Tribal Education Status Report](#) (TESR) indicated challenges in teacher recruitment and retention for certified bilingual and Indigenous educators, thus limiting student access to high-quality instruction and equitable assessments that honor students' cultural identities. Tribal education technical assistance centers (TETACs) are established to direct school districts, charter schools, and state agencies to bridge these gaps by assembling the components of instruction, teacher quality, and improvement among school districts and charters schools serving tribal students. The benefits of improving tribal education resources and capacity are important considerations for tribal sovereignty, cultural knowledge, and language preservation. The provisions of HB280 draw on the strengths of HED, PED, and ECECD, to improve services and practices for tribal communities. This collaboration is important for delivering a culturally responsive and community-driven education and will require monitoring to ensure both tribal education technical assistance centers are supporting culturally informed partnerships.

### State-Tribal Collaboration Act

The State-Tribal Collaboration Act (Laws 2009, Chapter 15) requires every state agency to develop and implement a policy that promotes effective communication between New Mexico's state agencies and the state's tribes, pueblos, and nations. The act directed each state agency to develop transparent government-to-government policy promoting cultural competency, intentional collaboration on policies and agreements that impact tribal communities, and establishing effective networks of communication through tribal liaisons and a government-to-government forum on matters of tribal consultation, education, health, community, and economic development. The act also requires training for state agency managers and employees who have ongoing communication with tribes, pueblos, and nations.

The provisions of the act aimed to stabilize the state's relationship with tribes, pueblos, and nations by coordinating resources to address shared priorities and provide higher quality services to New Mexico's tribal communities. A core principal in building and maintaining a successful and effective government-to-government relationship is a mutual understanding of issues and solutions, or programs and services; that provide a basis for collaboration and communication.

The Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC) conducted a qualitative review in 2024 to understand the fundamental principles and practical implications of tribal education sovereignty. In this report, LESG staff defined tribal education sovereignty as the mechanism of control for curricula, education systems, and education policies that empower tribal communities to preserve and strengthen their cultural heritage. The promotion of tribal education sovereignty allows tribal education leaders to identify gaps in language preservation efforts, culturally responsive teaching, and community-driven educational initiatives and share the insights with local school districts and charter schools, state agencies, and public and tribal higher education institutions.