

## **Position Statement Children's Academic Success Depends on More Than What Happens in The Classroom**

To address the foundational needs of Indigenous children and families in achieving learning readiness by ensuring family system stability through advocacy for housing justice, poverty alleviation, and access to essential resources.

### **Position Focus Areas:**

#### **1. Holistic Learning Readiness:**

- o Advocate for the understanding that learning readiness goes beyond preschool preparation by the family, a current aspect of school readiness not included in school enrollment protocols. The significance of food security, stable housing, safety, and effective parenting for child development is supported by services provided to families through multiple agencies and an array of bureaucratic levels for Indigenous families.
- o Action: The New Mexico PED has community school models that could receive support to expand services in high-need areas of the state. Additionally, charter schools may have resources to provide health, food, and mental health services, like those received by community schools. The policy must align with the needs of our families and children in NM.

#### **2. Poverty and Housing Justice:**

- o Focus on reducing child poverty rates by tackling homelessness, addressing the high mobility in shelters, and improving limited household income within Indigenous communities.
- o Support the SIHJC's mission to promote housing justice for both on- and off-reservation Indigenous citizens.
- o Action: The New Mexico Indian Affairs Department will create a housing department that serves as a central hub for addressing housing issues and includes data profiling children's health determinants. Funding for Indian Education within the PED could partner with the IAD to engage tribal nations, their communities, and families in finding solutions. The IEA statute and the Yazzie Martinez lawsuit would encourage an innovative approach to tribal consultation for solutions and redefine the significance of the Indian Policies and Procedures – IPP process for schools to connect with tribal governments on behalf of the children.

#### **3. Post-COVID-19 Impact Mitigation:**

- o Integrate research such as the Annie E. Casey Foundation's KIDS COUNT Data Book 2024 to address challenges worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. The NMPED has data, and each school system features dashboards that contain academic and student information. These dashboards could provide a detailed reference point for needs by county, school district, tribal nation, and school.
- o Advocate for policies and programs that reflect post-pandemic realities affecting children and families.
- o Work to stabilize family systems by addressing systemic barriers to food, shelter, healthcare, and parenting resources.

- o Develop culturally competent strategies to engage Indigenous families and communities in long-term solutions as advisory school and equity councils required by federal funding agents and NMPED.
  - o Action: The state would have data to prioritize where essential resources could be allocated. Moving beyond a one-size-fits-all model, funding should not be based solely on attendance counts. More processes must be engaged to support children, allowing their families to stay in school.
- 4. School as Shelter:**
- o Acknowledge the role of schools as safe havens for many children and advocate for supportive school environments to alleviate the effects of family instability. Promote collaboration among schools, housing agencies, and social services to meet the immediate needs of children experiencing family instability.
  - o Action: Charter schools and those willing to become community schools could be funded based on their ability to serve as community hubs for families and children. The Governor’s 100% NM initiative could be structured to enable charter schools to receive services at a single location. Consider the demographics and cross-jurisdiction policies that limit families from accessing services. Work on localizing services in partnership with Governing Councils, other community schools, and local community and tribal departments. IAD’s housing department would collaborate with NMPED-IED to monitor performance, ensure compliance, and evaluate effectiveness, including tribal considerations collaboration.

**Desired Outcomes:**

1. Enhanced stability and learning readiness among Indigenous children through housing justice and poverty reduction efforts.
2. Stronger collaboration between education systems, housing advocates, and social services supports children’s academic and developmental success.
3. Empower Indian Affairs and the Indian Education Bureau to advance tribal consultation, strengthen government-to-government partnerships, ensure educational requirements for community involvement, and comply with the corrective actions of the Yazzie Martinez lawsuit.
4. Reduced rates of child homelessness, poverty, and family instability in Indigenous communities.