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News Release

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Trump Administration's FY 2026 Budget Proposal Eliminates Funds for Higher Education Scholarships

Students urged to contact members of Congress to request that funds be restored for the Bureau of Indian Education's Higher Education Grant Program in the FY 2026 budget.

On Friday, May 30, 2025, the Trump administration released additional details regarding its federal budget recommendations for FY 2026. Included in the recommendations is a 67% decrease in the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Indian Education's enacted FY 2025 budget. Funds for the BIE's Postsecondary Programs, which include the Higher Education Grant program, were eliminated.

"We have thousands of Navajo students pursuing higher education throughout the country who rely on scholarship funding — they are the future of our Nation. Access to higher education for our students is a top priority. The 25th Navajo Nation Council strongly opposes this proposal and urges our congressional leaders from both parties to stand up for students, families, and the future of our students by rejecting any attempt to eliminate scholarship funding," said Navajo Nation Council Speaker Crystalyne Curley.

"The elimination of the Higher Education Grant program will have a major impact on the Navajo Nation government, as federal funds are used to pay for scholarships and operating and personnel costs of the scholarship office," said Rose Graham, Director of the Office of Navajo Nation Scholarship & Financial Assistance (ONNSFA). "Thousands of scholarships will be lost in addition to 29 full-time jobs and the funds needed to operate the ONNSFA's five agency offices."

In 2024, the ONNSFA awarded \$25.5 million, including \$13.6 million in Federal funds through the Higher Education Grant Program, to 6,426 students.

"Navajo students realize the value of a college education," said Ms. Graham, pointing out that 14,281 students submitted applications for scholarships in 2024. The ONNSFA was able to provide funds to approximately 45 percent of applicants.

"Higher education is vital to the Navajo Nation's future. Workers who hold a college degree are more likely to have good jobs and higher earnings. It is a means for communities and individuals to overcome poverty," Ms. Graham said.

"Without the financial support provided by the Higher Education Grant program, students may have to take on additional student debt or delay college plans," Ms. Graham said. "Students with the most need may have no choice but to drop out of school."

Navajo Nation Council Delegate Dr. Andy Nez said, "Eliminating the Higher Education Grant provides a disservice to our students aiming to accomplish their respective educational goals. On the Navajo Nation, these funds supported students from all backgrounds who have a goal to provide public service as scientists, educators, lawyers, and much more. These disciplines contribute heavily to the Nation, states, and federal entities, all of which contribute to the longevity of living beings."

Additionally, eliminating the Higher Education Grant Program, which was funded at \$55.8 million in 2025, affects all tribes served by the Bureau of Indian Education and organizations such as the Native Forward Scholars Fund, which offer scholarships to graduate students.

In 2023, there were 415,863 enrolled citizens of the Navajo Nation. The 2020 Census Community Survey revealed that 164,574 people live within Navajo Nation boundaries, and of those, 44 percent are under the age of 30. Twenty percent of all Navajo Nation households report less than \$10,000 annual income, and there is an estimated 39.9 percent unemployment rate.

"The high unemployment rate makes it difficult for Navajo students to pursue a college education without financial aid," Ms. Graham said. "Many families are focused on paying for basic needs. Higher education is only possible with support from programs such as the Higher Education Grant program.

Educational attainment rates in 2020 revealed that, among the total population aged 25 and over, approximately 32.4 percent hold some college or an associate's degree, 5.2 percent have a bachelor's degree, and 3.4 percent have a graduate or professional degree.

Ms. Graham expressed hope that lawmakers continue to prioritize education, including the Higher Education Grant program, and consider forward funding scholarships.

"The Trump Administration attempted to eliminate the Higher Education Grant Program three times during its first term," Ms. Graham said. "We were fortunate that lawmakers realized the importance of continued support of higher education and restored funds. We will once more be calling for their aid to restore funds."

Ms. Graham urged students to contact members of Congress to request that funds be restored for the Bureau of Indian Education's Higher Education Grant Program.

"We have students who attend colleges and universities throughout the United States," she said. "They have tremendous power in their voices and in their votes."

NOTE: The FY 2026 Interior Bureau of Indian Education brief may be found here: <https://www.doi.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2025-06/fy26bibbie508.pdf>

Ask Congress to restore funding for the Bureau of Indian Education's Higher Education Grant Program.

Step 1: Find your members of Congress and their contact information.

Visit www.congress.gov/members/find-your-member and type your address into the search box. A list of your representatives and their contact information will appear! Or you can call the Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121 to be connected to your member's office.

Step 2: Prepare for your call.

You will have to give your name, where you live, and explain why restoring funds for the scholarships provided through the Bureau of Indian Education's Higher Education Grant Program is important to you.

Step 3: Make the call.

Calling is the single most effective quick way to have an impact, so give it a try.

More ways to reach your Members of Congress:

- Attend a town hall (virtual or in-person). Town hall meetings are great opportunities to speak directly to your lawmaker and let them know their constituents are engaged on issues you care about. This is an effective way to make your voice heard, although it can be time-consuming.
- Write a letter or email to your member of Congress. Personalized letters or emails can be an effective way to get your member to take notice of your issue.

Engage with your members on social media.

Let members' staff know how important the scholarships provided through the Bureau of Indian Education's Higher Education Grant Program are to you. Engaging with their offices via social media is a great way to demonstrate your investment in restoring funds for the Higher Education Grant Program, while also raising awareness and momentum around this issue. You can also use your social media posts to encourage others to make calls! The most important thing to do right now is to make our voices heard by our elected officials. Call today!

SUMMARY OF BUREAU APPROPRIATIONS

(dollar amounts in thousands)

Comparison of 2026 Request with 2025 CR

	2025 CR ^{1/}	2026 Request
Current		
Operation of Indian Education Programs	1,131,617	867,992
Education Construction	234,725	48,114
Total, Bureau of Indian Education	1,366,342	916,106

^{1/} Resource levels included are estimates. The President reserves his authority under the "Full-Year Continuing Appropriations and Extensions Act, 2025" (P.L. 119-4) to revise spending within the amounts provided by Congress.

HIGHLIGHTS OF BUDGET CHANGES

By Appropriation Activity

APPROPRIATION: Operation of Indian Education Programs

	2024 Actual	2025 Notional ^{1/}	2026 Request
Elementary and Secondary (<i>forward funded</i>)	706,185	706,185	675,228
Elementary and Secondary Programs	174,971	174,971	125,262
Postsecondary Programs (<i>forward funded</i>)	127,407	127,407	22,117
Postsecondary Programs	55,868	55,868	0
Education Management	67,186	67,186	45,385
TOTAL APPROPRIATION	1,131,617	1,131,617	867,992

^{1/} Resource levels included are estimates. The President reserves his authority under the "Full-Year Continuing Appropriations and Extensions Act, 2025" (P.L. 119-4) to revise spending within the amounts provided by Congress.

APPROPRIATION: Education Construction

	2024 Actual	2025 Notional ^{1/}	2026 Request
TOTAL APPROPRIATION	234,725	234,725	48,114

^{1/} Resource levels included are estimates. The President reserves his authority under the "Full-Year Continuing Appropriations and Extensions Act, 2025" (P.L. 119-4) to revise spending within the amounts provided by Congress.