

August 18, 2021

Dear Secretary Cardona:

The National Association of Federally Impacted Schools (NAFIS) and the NAFIS subgroups – Federal Lands Impacted Schools Association, Military Impacted Schools Association, National Indian Impacted Schools Association and Mid-to-Low LOT Schools – request that Impact Aid school construction funding be included in the FY 22 budget reconciliation. We also request that if funding is made available, the regulations prohibiting teacher housing projects be waived for competitive grant applications. Funding for Impact Aid construction is included in the Reopen and Rebuild America’s Schools Act, which provides \$100 billion in direct grants and \$30 billion in bonds for K-12 public school facilities (including \$500 million for the Impact Aid construction program), and the Impact Aid Infrastructure Act, which provides \$1 billion in funding through the Impact Aid construction program. We support both of these bills.

School districts that receive funding under the Impact Aid construction program educate some of our nation’s most vulnerable children, including large numbers of Native American and military-connected students. These students need access to safe, modern school buildings. Increased funding for the program will assist federally impacted school districts in both addressing health and safety concerns and making needed updates to support remote, hybrid and in-person teaching and learning, giving students the opportunity to reach their full potential in these uncertain times.

Federally impacted school districts face the unique challenge of limited local tax revenue (and in turn, limited or non-existent bonding capacity) due to the presence of nontaxable Federal property, such as Indian Trust, Treaty, and Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act lands, military installations and other Federal property. Many of these school districts are educating students in facilities with health and safety code violations, or that are more than 100 years old. All students deserve equitable access to a quality education which requires a safe and healthy learning environment. This is only possible with a significant investment in federally impacted school infrastructure.

One significant teacher quality issue for school districts located on Indian lands is housing for teachers. These districts, many of which are located entirely on Indian land, are geographically very large and remote. Teachers from outside the Tribe are often prohibited from owning land, and rental properties do not exist. Many teachers must therefore commute to work at least 60 miles from the nearest town, often on unpaved dirt roads and (depending on the time of the year) during treacherous weather. Because of these circumstances, teachers often go elsewhere for employment, creating an additional disadvantage for school districts located on Indian lands in attracting teachers and providing a high quality education for students.

To recruit and retain highly qualified teachers, many Indian lands school districts must provide district-owned housing for teachers. This housing is expensive to build and maintain, and very challenging to finance due to the limited bonding capacity available in these communities. Under current Impact Aid construction regulations, districts are prohibited from applying for competitive funding for teacher housing projects. If funding is provided through the Impact Aid construction program in the reconciliation package, we

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encourage the U.S. Department of Education to change those regulations and permit teacher housing projects to be funded through these competitive grants.

By supporting school infrastructure in federally impacted school districts, President Biden can help bring federally impacted school buildings into the 21st century and provide our students a safe and supportive learning environment.

Sincerely,



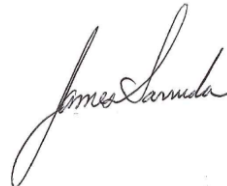
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