

The Gila River Indian Community located in Arizona hereby submits the following comments regarding the following portions of the ESSA for consideration.

1. 200.13 Long-term goals and measurement of interim progress

(c) English Language Proficiency

The Community does not support the establishment of a timeline for English language proficiency. The placement of artificial timelines interferes with the process of language acquisition. Instituting timelines also serves to encourage premature exiting from native language instruction.

3. 200.18 Annual Meaningful Differentiation of School Performance

(a) Although the Community agrees that there should be standards and accountability is an important aspect of high quality education, we are concerned that the needs and realities in Native American Communities are being disregarded in the name of uniformity. Indian communities like Gila River are engaged in a fight to improve education for all our students. The failure of the Bureau of Indian Education is a living example of a violation of trust between the United States Government and Indian Communities across the nation. After so many years of relative indifference to the academic achievement of our students and a total lack of accountability within the BIE system, these new regulations do not address the plight of our children, communities and schools.

We believe separate accountability measures should be adopted for tribes who are beginning to assume control of their local schools. The system should begin with the development of supports for Tribal Education Departments, training of local school boards, and comprehensive staff development. Additionally, the system should include serious attention to the affective domain of schooling.

A focus on the whole child is essential to the new beginning of the educational reality at Gila River and at other native communities across the country.

4. 200.19 Identification of Schools

(a) We believe schools located on Indian Lands should be supported and monitored by the US Department of Education directly honoring the government to government relationship and not left to the whims of state politics. A systematic approach to develop and support educational programs on Indian Reservations is a federal trust responsibility and should be carried out by the federal governments in collaboration with tribal governments.

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