



*Sicangu Oyate Ho, Inc.*

*St. Francis Indian School*

PO BOX 379 • 502 E. WARRIOR DRIVE • ST. FRANCIS, SOUTH DAKOTA 57572

May 8, 2024

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and members of the House Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies thank you for the opportunity to testify today on Indian Education funding. My name is Troy Lunderman, and I am the Human Resources Director for St. Francis Indian School (St. Francis), a Tribal grant school located on the Rosebud Indian Reservation. I am also a proud member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe and have spent my entire profession working with tribal communities, including youth affairs and now, tribal schools.

**Tribal Education Program Requests for FY2025:**

<b>Indian Schools Equalization Program:</b>	<b>\$951.5 Million<sup>1</sup></b>
<b>Education Facilities Operation:</b>	<b>\$109 Million (move to forward funding)</b>
<b>Education Facilities Maintenance:</b>	<b>\$100 Million (move to forward funding)</b>
<b>Student Transportation:</b>	<b>\$75.5 Million</b>
<b>Tribal Grant Support Costs:</b>	<b>\$115 Million (move to forward funding)</b>
<b>BIE School Construction:</b>	<b>\$400 million<sup>2</sup></b>
<b>BIE School Resource Officers</b>	<b>\$93 million</b>

**- 100-297 Tribally Controlled Grant Schools**

St. Francis is a large school with an elementary, middle, and high school across separate campus buildings. St. Francis was a tribal catholic boarding school from 1884 until 1973, until it is transferred, pursuant to P.L. 100-297 to become a Tribally Controlled School (TCS) governed by a Tribal Board of Trustees.

TCS's are the primary provider of education for on-reservation Indian students. Yet, schools operating within the BIE system are woefully underfunded, outdated, and dangerous for students and staff. According to the BIE, in fiscal year (FY) 2023, the federal government funded Indian students at roughly half, \$6,910, of the average state per-pupil funding of \$16,080<sup>3</sup>. However, Indian student funding is dwarfed compared to the only other fully funded federal education system, the Department of Defense Education Agency, which is funded at \$25,000 per student.<sup>4</sup> More than 90% of tribally controlled school funding comes from Congress to meet the federal government's treaty and trust obligations for Indian education, only Congress can solve our funding problem.

<sup>1</sup> This request reintroduces the FY12/13 4.5% sequestration cut to the Indian Student Equalization Program (ISEP) adjusted for inflation (conservatively at 2.5% over 12 years) until FY2025.

<sup>2</sup> The FY 2023 Deferred Maintenance and Repair for Education Construction is estimated at \$804 million for more than 180 schools: 80 BIE schools in "poor" condition. This does not include the estimated backlog of \$2.5 billion in school replacement funding needs. – See FY2025 BIE Greenbook Needs Estimates.

<sup>3</sup> Hanson, Melanie. "U.S. Public Education Spending Statistics" EducationData.org, September 8, 2023, <https://educationdata.org/public-education-spending-statistics>.

<sup>4</sup> *Who Runs the Best U.S. Schools? It May Be the Defense Department.* <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/10/us/schools-pandemic-defense-department.html>. 4/10/2024.0

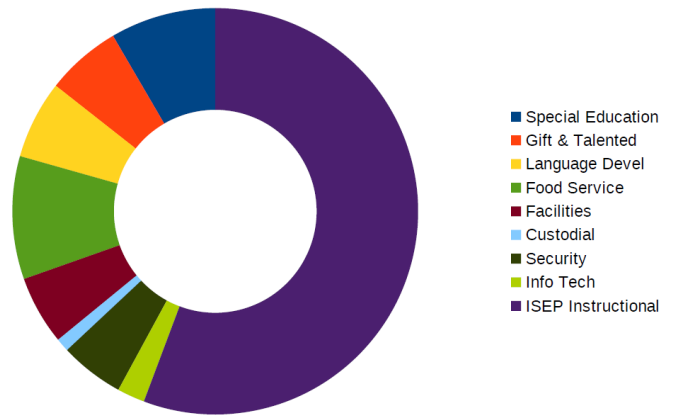
**- Indian School Equalization Program Funding**

All BIE-funded schools receive Indian School Equalization Program (ISEP) formula funds, the largest single source of revenue for tribal schools. ISEP funds are intended for teacher salaries, classroom supplies, textbooks, extracurricular activities, field trips, sports, and related programming. However, according to the BIE, ISEP does not assess the actual cost of school operations. In FY 23, St. Francis received \$9.275 million in ISEP funding, which was woefully inadequate for the intended purpose.

Our teacher salaries are already less than the South Dakota average, which, according to South Dakota Public Broadcasting, is already dead last in the nation. These inadequate funds are further constrained by our need to use ISEP funds for expenditures other than educational programs, like facilities operations and facilities maintenance, student nutrition, and School Resource Officer.

This chart shows how ISEP funds supplemented other unfunded federal programs in FY2023-24.

\$9,275,219			
Special Education	\$781,240	8.42%	
Gift & Talented	\$553,899	5.97%	
Language Devel	\$577,650	6.23%	
Food Service	\$908,044	9.79%	
Facilities	\$509,401	5.49%	
Custodial	\$98,611	1.06%	
Security	\$474,378	5.11%	
Info Tech	\$204,108	2.20%	
ISEP Instructional	\$5,167,888	55.72%	



BIE schools need at least a 50% increase in ISEP funding to bring Indian students' education funding to parity with the national average. Without a significant increase in ISEP funding, Indian students will continue to fall further behind their non-Indian peers attending DoDEA, public and private funded schools.

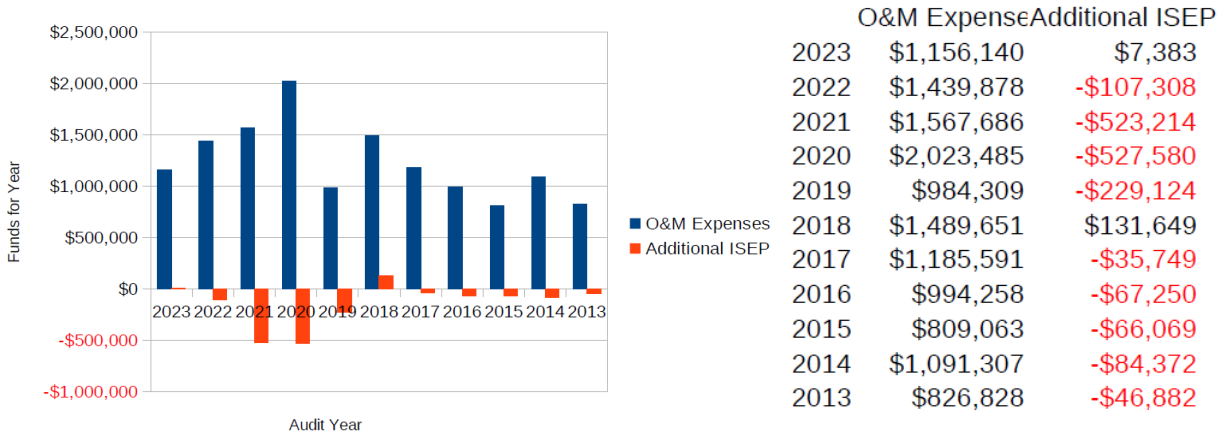
100% of ISEP funds should go to student education. This chart shows the shortfalls that ISEP funding must fill to replace inadequate federal funding, thus consuming critical education funding meant for the education of Indian students.

**- BIE Facilities, Operation, and Maintenance Funding**

According to the BIE, facilities operations and facilities maintenance (O&M), funding is intended for (1) operations, including utilities, water, sewage, basic safety, and cleanliness; (2) basic school maintenance, including upkeep of outdoor lighting, fixing broken windows, and replacing deteriorated floors and surfaces; and (3) unscheduled maintenance.

Each O&M category is a necessary and fundamental element of school operation. Unfortunately, for the last 40 years, O&M funding has been consistently inadequate. To make matters worse, the Department of the Interior (Interior) has not requested it, and Congress has not appropriated full funding to cover essential operational needs.

This chart shows how ISEP funds have supplemented O&M Expenses in FY2023-24.



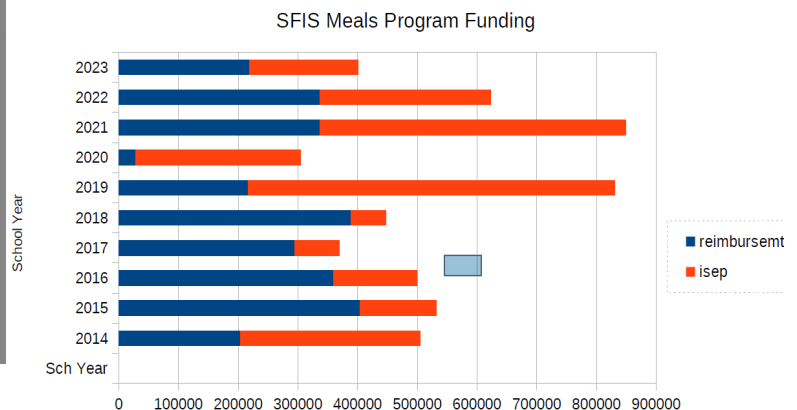
As a result of the lack of funds to perform the basic upkeep of our facilities, they fall into disrepair. Do not forget that these schools are federally-built and federally-owned buildings that tribes operate on behalf of the Federal government's trust responsibility to tribes. In no other scenario would Congress not appropriate enough funds to pay their bills, not in the military or federal agencies, but for over 40 years, Congress has let Native students take the fall for under-appropriating their utilities and operations bills. We need full funding for O&M costs.

**- USDA School Breakfast and Lunch Programs**

Our schools provide no-cost meals to all students under the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). Despite this, we must significantly subsidize our meal program. BIE funding does not pay for child nutrition and school lunch services. In communities like the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, meals at BIE-funded schools are often the only reliable food source for Indian students.

This chart shows how ISEP funds has supplemented un-funded USDA nutrition programs in FY2023-24

Sch Year	Federal Meals	Supplemental ISEP funds
2014	\$204,144	\$300,665
2015	\$403,690	\$128,669
2016	\$359,204	\$140,571
2017	\$294,815	\$74,641
2018	\$389,053	\$57,965
2019	\$216,636	\$614,330
2020	\$28,592	\$276,007
2021	\$336,542	\$512,343
2022	\$336,774	\$286,163
2023	\$218,917	\$182,303



Allowing tribal schools to administer

USDA Nutrition Programs directly would help lower the administrative costs. In the 2014 Farm Bill, Congress instructed USDA to issue a Report on the "Feasibility of Tribal Administration of Federal Nutrition Assistance Programs." The Report showed that over 90 percent of tribes surveyed expressed an interest in directly administering USDA Nutrition Programs. We ask that

direct administration by tribes be authorized to strengthen tribal sovereignty, increase the nutritional quality of the food provided, increase culturally appropriate food, and prioritize local food.

**- School Resource Officers**

On March 20, 2024, I testified at the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs Law Enforcement Hearing listening session and testified how adding school resource officers (SROs) to St. Francis Indian school has helped provide a safe and secure school for our students.

Having an SRO on campus has immediately impacted campus incidents, for example. In the 2022-23 school year, when we did not have an SRO, we had 406 student incidents, which included a wide range of violations, including alcohol, tobacco, weapons possession, violence, disorderly conduct, and harassment. In the 2023-24 school year, as of March 15. Although we have had 169 student incidents, which encompass similar incidents, we have seen a dramatic decrease in overall incidents. It has not even been a year since we have had an SRO at our school, but the impact has been immediate and positive for students, staff, and families.

In addition, student contact with our SRO also helps build that relationship among staff and the school community. SROs also offer life lessons and teachable moments for our students that teachers and academics do not always have the opportunity to catch. For example, when a student is over 18 and gets in trouble on campus, the SRO, who is also a uniformed officer, has the opportunity to teach these youth the consequences of their actions if they take a mistake too far.

These examples offer a teachable moment of respect for law enforcement and could offer a glimpse of an opportunity for students to become law enforcement personnel themselves. There would be a benefit to have more SROs on school campuses with the size of school acreage plus the number of buildings. As grateful as we are to have one at the high school, we need more to attend our elementary and middle school as we have a large campus. We need more SROs; they lead to fewer school incidences, provide confidence for students, teachers, and families, and offer teachable moments for our community.

BIE has revealed that Indian Country needs at least \$93 million to fund School Resource Officers in our schools. Some tribal schools like ours support these positions with ISEP funds, but we can no longer afford to secure the safety of our children while simultaneously providing them with a decent education to advance as adults. We implore this Committee to help fund SROs at BIE-funded schools.

We thank this Committee for its commitment to Indian students and Indian education. - Wopila.