

HB 118 // Early Childhood Department & Tribal Agreements (Rep. Lente)

Strengthening tribal self-determination in early childhood education

Language and culture shape our children's early development and frame their understanding of themselves and the world. Indigenous children and their families have endured more than 130 years of forced assimilation intended to destroy their languages and cultures. This threat remains even today: Once a Native child enrolls in a program that omits or suppresses tribal languages and cultures, the child will struggle to retain their Indigenous identity and sense of belonging.

Only by exercising their right to self-determination can Tribes prevent the assimilation of their youngest children. **HB 118 ensures that Tribes can develop and deliver their own early childhood education and care programs, with state funding but without state interference.** It does so by providing for intergovernmental agreements between Tribes and the Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD).

HB 118 strengthens tribal self-determination in early childhood education by making it easier for tribal programs to receive state funding. Currently, Tribes rely on limited private and federal funds because state funding is conditional on compliance with state-imposed standards. This poses obstacles for successful Indigenous early childhood education programs such as Native language immersion.

HB 118 will increase Native children's access to culturally and linguistically relevant early childhood education. It will enable Tribes to receive state funding for their own early childhood education programs, using Indigenous education standards.

HB 118 proposes to:

- Allow ECECD to enter into intergovernmental agreements with Tribes, similar to federal self-determination contracts.
- Enable Tribes to receive state funding for self-determined early childhood education programs such as Native language immersion, using their own culturally and linguistically relevant standards.

Appropriation: \$1.4 million for tribal early childhood education. Included in ECECD's budget.

"In education, discrimination and racial bias are forces of institutional racism that begin at pre-school. At stake are Indigenous Peoples' most precious assets — children and cultural integrity. Educational justice transforms all forms and levels of education to prepare our children with cultural integrity, dignity, and respect."

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