

HB 60 // Native American Language Certificate Salaries (Rep. Lente)

Securing Salary Parity for Native Language and Culture Teachers

Native languages are at the heart of Indigenous communities and identities, yet they are highly endangered. It is vital that Native children can learn and practice their own languages. But the 2018 *Yazzie/Martinez* court ruling found that many Native students do not receive instruction that affirms their cultural identity and responds to their language needs.

Native language and culture teachers, also known as 520 certificate holders, step into this gap by providing the culturally and linguistically relevant instruction that Native students need. **But they are not treated fairly: Native language teachers often get paid much less than other teachers.**

Native language teachers bring a wealth of experience and unique expertise, grounded in Indigenous teachings, practices, and traditions. This expertise cannot be measured with the yardstick of a university degree. Paying Indigenous language teachers less than other teachers, which is common practice in school districts, constitutes inequitable treatment.

"This is a critical generation of Native children, the last to prevent the deterioration of our Native languages. Without language, how long can a culture survive without unravelling? We need a different paradigm to win this race against time."

Dr. Christine Sims, Acoma Pueblo
Director, American Indian Language Policy Research
and Teacher Training Center, UNM

HB 60 will end this unfair treatment and ensure equitable pay for Native language and culture teachers. As New Mexico seeks to address teacher shortages through salary increases, this bill aims to attract more Native language teachers and prevent a widening of the teacher pay gap.

HB 60 will improve access to Native language and culture education and ensure tribal authority for setting the standards for such education. The cultural survival of Tribes depends on sustaining and revitalizing Native languages.

HB 60 proposes to:

- Set a minimum salary for Native language teachers equal to that of a level two licensed teacher.
- Clarify that Tribes and Pueblos determine the criteria for certifying Native language and culture teachers, not PED. This ensures respect for tribal sovereignty.

Appropriation: \$1.25 million for salary increases, aligned with PED's budget.