

New Mexico Partnership with BIE Boosts DC Numbers

NMPED Efforts Help Incorporate Tribal Schools into the State-Level Matching System

The New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) faced a question experienced by many States – how best to incorporate students not included in the State’s statewide student information system (SSIS) into their direct certification matching process. However, while most States prioritize efforts, solutions, and improvements associated with private and parochial LEAs, or non-public charter schools, NMPED directed its attention towards the large student population attending the 36 Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools participating in the State’s National School Lunch Program. (NSLP). As Felix Griego, Data/Fiscal Manager with the Coordinated School Health and Wellness Bureau explained, the BIE schools were an obvious target – not only do BIE schools represent a large number of students outside the reach of their SSIS, but also a population residing in areas of high poverty and areas which NMPED believed experience a high rate of SNAP participation.

The Problem: Because BIE school student data is not included in the State’s SSIS, the benefits of NMPED’s statewide match could not be employed. Additionally, concerns associated with the ability of individual BIE schools to format student data into an excel or csv file brought questions about the effectiveness of implementing a local-level initiated upload process as an alternative. Therefore, NMPED’s process was limited to providing BIE schools listing of student-age SNAP recipients residing in their neighboring zip codes, and requesting that school staff review the lengthy lists to locate students as “matches.” NMPED recognized that this manual process was cumbersome and inefficient, and most likely was resulting in eligible students not receiving NSLP benefits in a timely manner (or not at all).

The Solution: Understanding that BIE student data is housed collectively in the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Native American Student Information System (NASIS), NMPED identified that the coordinated receipt of this data would allow for a State-level match of all students attending BIE schools in New Mexico.

Making the Move: With a goal of improving the efficiency of the match process for BIE students, NMPED contacted the BIA Southwest Regional Office and developed a cooperative partnership with the Office’s NASIS support staff. NMPED and BIA staff discussed the availability of student data and output reports, and how best to capture and provide the attributes necessary for NMPED’s process. Once decided, the stakeholders established a Memorandum of Understanding for the data sharing partnership, and began the sharing of NASIS student-level data in April 2015 (with a planned scheduled of three files provided per school year).

The Results: NMPED reported that the initial upload of the NASIS data from the 36 BIE schools accounted for approximately 7,000 student records – from which over 5,000 matches were found – representing over a 70% match rate. Even more impressive was that the match rate for the BIE schools using the previous manual process topped out at approximately 40%, with several schools experiencing an even lower rate.

Additionally, with the newly-established direct certification success, NMPED quickly assisted the BIE schools with an application to participate under the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). Whereas previously only one BIE school participated in CEP, now 35 schools operate under this opportunity.

Words of Advice: NMPED emphasized the importance of communication with its BIA partners, and providing information on the opportunities and benefits of the direct certification process with Tribal leaders. Specifically, NMPED emphasized with Tribal leaders the ability to participate in CEP due to improved direct certification rates, and the benefits CEP has for the community members and their schools – demonstrating the positive outcomes of CEP for other BIE schools and LEA’s that have chosen CEP around the country. NMPED added that State staff should also be very cognizant of Tribes’ interest in safeguarding their members’ data and securing their privacy, and therefore full explanation should be provided regarding the use of the student data.