

2025 HOUSE EDUCATION

HB 1536

2025 HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Education Committee Coteau AB Room, State Capitol

HB 1536
2/12/2025

A BILL for an Act to provide an appropriation to the department of public instruction to implement a Native American history curriculum; and to provide for a legislative management report.

11:18 a.m. Chairman Heinert called the hearing to order.

Members Present: Chairman Heinert, Vice Chairman Schreiber- Beck, Representatives, Conmy, Hager, Hatlestad, Hauck, Heilman, Jonas, Longmuir, Maki, Marchall, Morton, Novak, Osowski

Discussion Topics:

- Teacher training on Native American history
- Continued education on Native American history

11:18 a.m. Representative Davis introduced the bill and submitted testimony. #37270

11:28 a.m. Robert Bird-Horse, Teacher, Mandan High School, testified in favor and submitted testimony. #37393

11:34 a.m. Lorraine Davis, Administrator, NATIVE Inc., testified in favor and submitted testimony. #37287

11:36 a.m. Hayden Person, student, testified in favor.

11:42 a.m. Representative Finley-DeVile, testified in favor and submitted testimony. #36978

11:44 a.m. Nathan Davis, ND Indian Affairs Commission, testified in favor.

11:48 a.m. Yawash Dawi, ND Resident, testified in favor.

11:52 a.m. Carel Two-Eagles, ND Resident, testified in favor.

11:55 a.m. Andrew Alexis Varvel, ND Resident, testified in opposition and submitted testimony. #37294

12:02 a.m. Lucy Fredricks, Director of Indian and Multicultural Education, DPI, answered questions from the committee.

Additional written testimony:

Barbara Dunn, ND Resident, submitted testimony in favor. #37233

Erika Red-Tomahawk, Tribal-State Policy Coordinator, North Dakota Native Vote, submitted testimony in favor. #37281

12:06 Chairman Heinert adjourned the hearing.

Addison Randazzo for Leah Kuball, Committee Clerk

Testimony of Representative Finley-DeVile

In support of House Bill 1536

Chairman Heinert and members of the House Education Committee, my name is Representative Lisa Finley-DeVile. I represent District 4A, which includes, MHA Nation. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, as a cosponsor I thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of HB 1536, which appropriates funding to the Department of Public Instruction for the development and implementation of a Native American history curriculum in North Dakota's K-12 education system. This initiative is critical to ensuring that students across the state receive a comprehensive, accurate, and culturally relevant understanding of Native American history, culture, and contributions.

As a life-long learner, I believe that this bill represents a critical step toward fostering greater understanding and respect for the history, culture, and contributions of Native American communities, which will strengthen relationships across the state.

The bill's allocation of \$1.5 million for curriculum development, teacher training, and procurement of educational materials is a strategic investment in the future of our students and communities. By involving tribal leaders and cultural experts in the creation of the curriculum, this initiative will ensure that it is both accurate and culturally relevant.

Importantly, this curriculum will not only benefit Native American students but will also help non-Native students better understand and appreciate the rich cultural heritage of North Dakota's tribes. This understanding will serve as a bridge, building stronger, more respectful relationships between the state's diverse groups and creating a more unified community.

In addition, HB 1536's provisions for oversight and support ensure that the curriculum will be implemented effectively across all schools in the state, with particular attention to rural and underfunded areas. The establishment of a Native American Curriculum Advisory Committee will aid in ensuring that the curriculum is continuously reviewed and updated to maintain accuracy and relevance.

HB 1536 is a historic opportunity to strengthen the relationship between North Dakota's Native American communities and the broader population. It represents a commitment to reconciliation, understanding, and the shared goal of building a more inclusive future for all learners.

I ask that you give House Bill 1536 a do pass recommendation. Thank you for your time and consideration of this important issue.

I am writing in support of HB 1536. I grew up in a different part of the country where this history wasn't taught in public school and I wish it had been because the history of the people who were here before my ancestors is always relevant. It's surprising to me that, in a place with even more Native American presence than the one I grew up in, this history wasn't already an established subject for all North Dakota kids to learn. I definitely support it and hope that the legislature will vote to pass HB 1536.

*I don't believe my testimony was successfully submitted and so am sending it again just in case. Apologies if it is already there and I am duplicating. Thank you - BD



North Dakota House of Representatives

STATE CAPITOL
600 EAST BOULEVARD
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Representative Jayme Davis

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COMMITTEES:

Human Services
Political Subdivisions

February 11, 2025

Chairman Heinert, Vice Chair Schreiber-Beck, and Members of the Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to introduce House Bill 1536, a bill that builds upon the work this legislature began with Senate Bill 2304 in 2019. Senate Bill 2304 established the requirement that Native American history be included in North Dakota's K-12 curriculum. It was an important and necessary step in ensuring that our students receive a complete and accurate education. However, as we often see in policy, passing a requirement is only the first step. Implementation requires resources, support, and follow-through. That is what House Bill 1536 seeks to accomplish.

We recognize that our teachers and schools have limited capacity to take on new curriculum mandates without proper support. Teachers must be trained in how to teach Native American history accurately and effectively. Schools must have access to high-quality, state-approved materials that reflect the history, culture, and contributions of North Dakota's Native nations. Without this, Senate Bill 2304 is simply a directive without the infrastructure to make it successful.

House Bill 1536 appropriates \$1.5 million to the Department of Public Instruction to ensure that this curriculum is not just a line in the law but a reality in our classrooms. This funding will be used to:

- Develop and refine curriculum materials in collaboration with tribal leaders, educators, and curriculum experts to ensure accuracy and cultural integrity.
- Provide teacher training so that educators feel prepared and confident in presenting Native American history in an engaging and meaningful way.
- Supply educational resources—textbooks, digital materials, and multimedia tools—to schools across the state, ensuring all districts, including rural and underfunded schools, have what they need to succeed.
- Establish oversight and evaluation mechanisms to ensure the curriculum is implemented consistently and effectively across North Dakota.

This is not about adding new mandates or burdens on schools and teachers. This is about fulfilling the promise we made in 2019—ensuring that when we ask our schools to teach Native American history, they have the tools, training, and resources to do it well. It is essential that all students, Native and non-Native, learn about the history, governance, and contributions of the Indigenous nations who are the first peoples of this land. By providing proper curriculum and training, we eliminate misinformation and gaps in knowledge that have persisted for far too long.

Second, this is about improving educational outcomes. Research shows that when students see their own heritage reflected in the curriculum, they perform better, have higher engagement in school, and are more likely to graduate. This benefits our entire education system and strengthens our workforce by increasing student success.

Third, this is about honoring our commitment as a state. North Dakota is home to five federally recognized tribes, and many Native American students are educated in our public school system. These students deserve an education that recognizes and values their history. But more than that, all North Dakotans benefit from a more complete and accurate education that fosters understanding and unity.

I want to emphasize that this bill is not about rewriting history—it is about teaching the full history. The passage of Senate Bill 2304 in 2019 was bipartisan, passing the Senate with a vote of 44-0 and the House with 76 votes in favor. That overwhelming support showed that North Dakota recognizes the importance of including Native American history in our education system.

Now, we have a responsibility to make good on that decision by giving schools what they need to implement it effectively. It's important that we back our good governance. We have a law on the books, and we must ensure that it is properly funded and executed.

Additionally, this bill is about educational freedom and excellence. It ensures that local schools are not left scrambling to figure out how to comply with the law but are instead given the resources they need to implement this curriculum successfully. It supports teachers by equipping them with the best materials and training available, ensuring they are set up for success rather than being left to navigate this on their own.

Finally, this bill is a smart investment. I know I don't need to tell you but will say it for the record - when we invest in education, we invest in North Dakota's future. Providing a more complete education strengthens our state's workforce, improves community relations, and ensures that our students graduate better informed, better prepared, and better equipped to contribute to society.

Chairman Heinert, Vice Chair Schreiber-Beck, and members of the committee, House Bill 1536 is the natural and necessary next step in fulfilling the intent of Senate Bill 2304. This is about following through on the commitment we made in 2019. This is about supporting teachers, improving education, and ensuring that our students receive the full and accurate history they deserve.

I urge you to vote in favor of HB 1536 so that we can move forward together in strengthening North Dakota's education system.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.



North Dakota Native Vote
919 S 7th Street
Suite 603
Bismarck, ND 58504

February 11, 2025

Testimony of Erika Red Tomahawk,
Tribal-State Policy Coordinator, North Dakota Native Vote
In Support for HB 1536

Dear Chairman Heinert, Vice-Chairman Schreiber-Beck, and members of the Education Committee,

My name is Erika Red Tomahawk, and I am writing on behalf of North Dakota Native Vote, an organization founded in 2018 with the mission of counteracting the systematic disparities that have long plagued Native American communities in North Dakota. Our work is centered on empowering our communities, amplifying our voices, and addressing the inequalities we continue to face.

For far too long, Native American communities - both on and off-reservation - have been subjected to discrimination, marginalization, and unethical treatment. These behaviors are not a result of our own actions or choices; rather, they stem from a lack of education - specifically, a lack of understanding about the local tribes, cultures, and social presence that have existed long before the founding of North Dakota as a state.

We have been here for centuries, long before the borders of this state were drawn, and yet we continue to face the same challenges and injustices. It is disheartening to see that the deep-rooted misconceptions about Native Americans still persist, perpetuated by a lack of awareness and understanding. This lack of knowledge continues to fuel discrimination and perpetuate negative stereotypes.

This is why HB 1536 - a bill that seeks to implement a Native American history curriculum in K-12 public schools - is an essential step forward. The inclusion of a Native American history curriculum will not only serve to educate students on the rich history, culture, and contributions of Native American communities, but will also foster an environment of inclusion, respect, and understanding. By equipping the next generation with knowledge about our shared history, we can work to eradicate the harmful biases that have persisted for far too long.

The benefits of such a curriculum are manifold:

- Cultural Awareness and Respect
- Empowerment and Pride
- Building an Inclusive Society
- Addressing Systemic Inequalities
- Improving Community Relationships



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An accurate representation of Native American history in our schools will do more than just inform students - it will actively shape a more inclusive, equitable, and informed society. It will empower future generations to understand and respect the rich diversity that exists within our state, and help ensure that the painful history of marginalization and exclusion does not continue to be repeated.

In closing, I strongly urge the Education Committee to support **HB 1536**, by giving it a **“Do Pass” recommendation**. By doing so, you are taking a step toward a more inclusive and just North Dakota - one where Native American history is acknowledged, celebrated, and taught to all students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kind regards,
Erika Red Tomahawk



Native Community Development, Inc. dba NATIVE, Inc. serving urban Indians and other disproportionate populations in North Dakota.

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February 12, 2025

HB 1536 House Education

Mr. Chairman Heinert and Members of the Committee,

My name is Lorraine Davis, Founder and CEO of NATIVE, Inc. serving Native Americans and other underserved populations living in urban areas of North Dakota with community-based services and educational cultural programming.

I am here today in **support of HB 1536—Implementing Native American History Curriculum.**

Some states have integrated education about Native Americans into their curriculum. California has taken steps to broaden its curriculum and add a Native American studies class (Jones)¹. Washington requires Indigenous history to be taught with the help of American Indians (Janzer)². Oregon also started teaching Native history in early 2020, with a curriculum developed in part by the state's nine federally recognized Native American tribes (Brown)³. Indigenous tribes have recently sued the state of Montana for failing to follow its own laws' requirements to teach Native history (McCullough)⁴. The importance of these states' and tribes' efforts cannot be overstated. The framework they have provided can serve as an aid to all schools in the country, and their willingness to take action has proven that this is a problem that can be addressed. I recommend our state develop and adopt a curriculum based on the perspectives of the five tribal nations of ND, Native American scholars, and elders for the state to implement into ND public schools.

Thank you for your time. I stand for any questions.

¹ Jones, Carolyn. "Native Americans Push Schools to Include Their Story in California History Classes." EdSource, EdSource, 26 July 2018, edsources.org/2018/native-americans-push-schools-to-include-their-story-in-california-history-classes/600669.

² Janzer, Cinnamon. "States Move to Add Native American History to Education Curriculum." U.S. News & World Report, U.S. News & World Report L.P., 19 Nov. 2019, www.usnews.com/news/best-states/articles/2019-11-29/states-move-to-add-native-american-history-to-education-curriculum.

³ Brown, Jordyn. "Schools Start Teaching Lessons from Oregon's Native American Tribes." The Register-Guard, Gannett Co., Inc., 16 Jan. 2020, www.registerguard.com/news/20200116/schools-start-teaching-lessons-from-oregons-native-american-tribes.

⁴ McCullough, Carson. "Tribes Sue Montana over Lack of Native American History Taught in Public Schools." CNS, Courthouse News Service, 22 July 2021, www.courthousenews.com/tribes-sue-montana-over-lack-of-native-american-history-taught-in-public-schools/.

House Education Committee

House Bill 1536

Andrew Alexis Varvel

Written Testimony

February 11, 2025

10:30AM

Chairman Heinert & Members of the Committee:

My name is Andrew Alexis Varvel. I live in Bismarck.

My opposition to HB 1527, HB 1536, and HB 1569 comes from the same place. This is a defense of local control, aversion to legislative micromanagement, and a principle that teachers should have considerable latitude to interpret statewide educational guidelines.

I am passionate about the history of this region, and this includes the history of this region before the Homestead Act and subsequent settlement. I want the history of the tribes of North Dakota to be told – tribal history both before and after settlement.

My problem with this bill is that it politicizes the curriculum of Native American history. One thing we need to understand about tribes is that they are, more than anything else, political entities. And fundamentally political entities. These tribes are nations.

Let's turn it around. Should educators in North Dakota teach Mexican history as developed by representatives of Mexico and Mexican political leaders?

Should educators teach German history as developed by representatives of Germany and German political leaders?

Hopefully not. This legislation calls for curriculum development – first and foremost – by representatives of federally recognized tribes in North Dakota. It mandates a Native American curriculum advisory committee consisting foremost of tribal leaders. And it is unclear from this bill's language if the cultural experts and educators must be tribal members as well. *As if nobody who is not a tribal member has anything to contribute to the curriculum.*

The language in this bill is very prescriptive and very political.

I will put it this way – I don't want Ward Churchill's falsehoods about “smallpox blankets” to be part of this curriculum. I don't want the fictional speech attributed to Four Bears by the notoriously racist historian Annie Heloise Abel to be part of this curriculum.

On the other hand, I have carefully documented how the federal government withheld smallpox vaccine from the Mandan and Arikara peoples. There are hints from the historical record that people up here knew they were getting deprived of vaccine too.

What the people of North Dakota don't need is a unified standard curriculum that says, “This is our story and we are telling it to you.”

I do not feel that this bill is about mutual respect.

I know very well that some people will get mad at me for taking this stand, claiming I am somehow opposed to teaching Indian history.

Four years ago, I opposed the original language of Senate Bill 2304 and then I supported it once the language got cleaned up.

Once that bill got to the House side, I spoke in favor of that bill in interlinear Lakota and English. Afterwards, I got falsely accused to ***opposing*** that bill in Lakota. That nearly cost me a friendship.

Some Indians seem to be outraged that I learn local languages at all.

But remember this – when I oppose this legislation, I am being sincere. I am not going to be a false friend and falsely claim to support something when I don't. I will be open and honest, and explain to you ***why*** I am expressing my opposition. I am not hiding.

It breaks my heart that this bill's language is something I cannot in all honesty support. I wish the language could have been better.

If this bill is truly important enough to salvage, then by all means, send it to a subcommittee so this bill can be salvaged.

But otherwise, please give this legislation a **DO NOT PASS**.

Thank you.

Testimony of Robert Bird Horse II
In support of House Bill 1536

Chairman Heinert and members of the House Education Committee, my name is Robert Bird Horse II. I am an enrolled member of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, and I spent my K-12 years in the Bismarck Public School system, when there was only one version of history taught. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of HB 1536 and the proposed funding to the Department of Public Instruction for the creation of a K-12 Native American history curriculum. I stand before you today with over a decade of experience in the field of education, five of those years instructing students in my Native American Studies class at Mandan High School.

Through my experience, I can attest that there is a great need for a statewide initiative for Native American History curriculum development, teacher training, and educational resources. In a state like North Dakota, rich with Native American history and culture it is vital that we accurately recognize the tribes that have been here for centuries. Minnesota's "Indigenous Education for All" and the Oceti Sakowin standards in South Dakota have given ownership of history and curriculum back to the tribes, ensuring that the information is historically and culturally accurate. HB 1536 will help establish a new perspective of Native history in North Dakota, one that empowers both native and non-native students with our tribally centered stories, traditions, values, and history.

Working within the public school system, my colleagues recognize the value and support the need for teacher training and professional development in Native history. This is an area in which educators would benefit from knowing exactly how to integrate Native American history and culture into their curriculum.

Securing adequate funding to develop this curriculum is critical to ensure effective development and implementation. Today's technology offers us a unique opportunity to enhance the delivery of this curriculum and create an upstream solution for rural schools that struggle with lower budgets and limited resources; it will enable teachers to create interactive lessons through access to contemporary indigenous voices, virtual field trips and storytelling to engage learners in innovative ways while building cultural bridges.

I also support the measures outlined in HB 1536 that demonstrate a commitment to transparency, accountability, and collaboration. It takes the collective effort of a community, including educators, families, leaders, and neighbors to shape a child's future and ensure that all learners have the knowledge and support to thrive. Additionally, the regular reporting requirements to legislative management provides essential oversight to

ensure that progress is tracked, feedback is gathered, and the program is refined to meet the needs of students and teachers.

House bill 1536 presents a meaningful step toward honoring the history of Native Americans in North Dakota and ensures all students receive a well-rounded education. I respectfully ask the committee to give this bill a do pass recommendation. Thank you for your time and consideration.

2025 HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Education Committee Coteau AB Room, State Capitol

HB 1536
2/12/2025

A BILL for an Act to provide an appropriation to the department of public instruction to implement a Native American history curriculum; and to provide for a legislative management report.

2:29 p.m. Chairman Heinert called the hearing to order.

Members Present: Chairman Heinert, Vice Chairman Schreiber- Beck, Representatives, Conmy, Hager, Hatlestad, Hauck, Heilman, Jonas, Longmuir, Maki, Marchall, Morton, Novak, Osowski

Discussion Topics:

- Committee action

2:29 p.m. Representative Hager moved Do Pass.

2:30 p.m. Representative Schreiber-Beck seconded the motion.

Representatives	Vote
Representative Pat D. Heinert	N
Representative Cynthia Schreiber-Beck	Y
Representative Liz Conmy	Y
Representative LaurieBeth Hager	Y
Representative Patrick R. Hatlestad	N
Representative Dori Hauck	A
Representative Matthew Heilman	N
Representative Jim Jonas	Y
Representative Donald W. Longmuir	N
Representative Roger A. Maki	N
Representative Andrew Marschall	N
Representative Desiree Morton	N
Representative Anna S. Novak	Y
Representative Doug Osowski	Y

Motion Failed: 6-7-1

2:34 p.m. Representative Heilman moved Do Not Pass.

2:34 p.m. Representative Morton seconded the motion.

Representatives	Vote
Representative Pat D. Heinert	Y
Representative Cynthia Schreiber-Beck	N

Representative Liz Conmy	N
Representative LaurieBeth Hager	N
Representative Patrick R. Hatlestad	Y
Representative Dori Hauck	Y
Representative Matthew Heilman	Y
Representative Jim Jonas	N
Representative Donald W. Longmuir	Y
Representative Roger A. Maki	Y
Representative Andrew Marschall	Y
Representative Desiree Morton	Y
Representative Anna S. Novak	N
Representative Doug Osowski	N

Motion Carried: 8-6-0

Bill Carrier: Representative Heilman

2:40 p.m. Chairman Heinert closed the hearing.

Addison Randazzo for Leah Kuball, Committee Clerk

REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE
HB 1536 ([25.1020.02000](#))

Education Committee (Rep. Heinert, Chairman) recommends **DO NOT PASS** (8 YEAS, 6 NAYS, 0 ABSENT OR EXCUSED AND NOT VOTING). HB 1536 was placed on the Eleventh order on the calendar.