

Project Abstract

Project Title: Literacy Instruction for Tribal Education (LITE)

Applicant: The National Fund for Excellence in American Indian Education (NFEAIE)

Project Overview and Populations Served: This project serves approximately 6,000 K–3 students from Tribal Nations attending Bureau of Indian Education (BIE)–funded schools in New Mexico and Arizona. This project will build the capacity of Tribes, and BIE and Tribal schools, to implement evidence-based instructional strategies informed by the Science of Reading. The project will improve literacy instruction through the implementation of high-quality instructional materials (HQIM), high-impact tutoring (HIT), and professional development delivered through the unifying lens of instructional coherence. The project will provide tools for **BIE, rural** and other schools to implement this strategy. It is in response to the Absolute Priority (Promoting Evidence-Based Literacy), Competitive Preference Priority 1 (Returning Education to the States), and Competitive Preference Priority 2 (Education Choice – High-Impact Tutoring). We are applying as a **Tribal Organization** and **501(c)(3)** in partnership with Bureau of Indian Education (**BIE**), acting as the **LEA/SEA**, as a **rural applicant**.

Research Questions and Study Design:

The evaluation has five key research questions:

1. Does the LITE intervention improve K–3 literacy outcomes for high-need students in BIE schools?
2. Is the LITE intervention implemented with fidelity?
3. Does the impact of the LITE intervention differ across school settings?
4. Is the LITE intervention mediated by core program components?
5. What is the impact of the LITE intervention when implemented with fidelity?

The study uses a blocked cluster randomized controlled trial design with a sample of 60 schools (30 treatment, 30 control). The sample includes approximately 150 teachers and 6,000 students across two states. We measure the impact of the intervention on phonological awareness, reading comprehension, and students' reading self-concept. We control for student demographics and school characteristics in the impact model. The evaluation also consists of an implementation evaluation, and cost study to measure implementation fidelity, program costs, and treatment-control contrast.

Theoretical and Conceptual Background: Grounded in the Instructional Coherence Framework and the Science of Reading, LITE integrates HQIM and aligned HIT to test whether coherence amplifies literacy outcomes in rural Tribal contexts. By combining these elements into a unified instructional system, the model tests whether coherence can be scaled to improve student outcomes in rural and Tribal contexts.

Primary and Partner Activities: The National Fund will lead project management, Tribal and BIE engagement, and dissemination. TNTP will provide technical assistance, professional learning, and training for HIT implementation. The BIE will support implementation by working directly with schools to improve literacy instruction, align curriculum, and ensure strategies are responsive to local Tribal contexts and community priorities. WestEd will conduct the impact and implementation evaluations, provide real-time implementation progress monitoring, and disseminate evaluation results.

Goals and Expected Outcomes: The project aims to:

- Strengthen literacy achievement for high-need Tribal students in grades K–3;
- Build Tribal and local educator capacity to implement HQIM and HIT alignment;
- Rigorously evaluate the effectiveness of the LITE intervention; and
- Develop a ready to use, scalable, instructional model for BIE and Tribal schools nationwide.

Contributions to Research, Policy, and Practice: Findings will: inform federal and Tribal policy on effective literacy interventions in Tribal contexts; contribute to the research base on the impact of instructional coherence, high-quality materials, and HIT; and yield replicable and scalable strategies to support improved instruction in Tribal and rural communities.