



PRESS RELEASE

Policy Briefing Features Report Documenting Low Financial Literacy of Native Youth; Remarks from Treasury, Congressional Officials

Contact: Joanna Donohoe
(561) 762-8237/joanna@oweesta.org

For Immediate Release
Date: April 26, 2007

Washington, DC/// Native students lack the financial management skills of their peers, according to a report released today by the Native Financial Education Coalition (NFEC). This report, entitled *The Financial Literacy of Native American Youth*, along with policy recommendations to improve financial education opportunities for Native communities were the subject of the 3rd Annual NFEC Policy Briefing at the Washington, DC office of the Mashantucket Pequot Nation. U. S Treasurer Anna Escobedo Cabral and Representative Rick Renzi (R-AZ) were slated to address the briefing.

Native Financial Literacy Report

Dr. Miriam Jorgenson and Dr. Lewis Mandell, who authored the NFEC's report, analyzed the performance of Native students on the bi-annual survey of the Jump\$tart Coalition for Personal Financial Literacy (www.jumpstart.org). They found that Native students' financial literacy scores are consistently among the worst in the overall population of high school seniors. In 2006, Native students' average financial literacy score was only 84 percent of the overall national average; nearly 87 percent of Native students received a "failing" score, compared to 62 percent of all students.

"Strong financial skills form the foundation of a promising future for our youth," explained Elsie Meeks, Executive Director of First Nations Oweesta Corporation and Chair of the NFEC. "The results of the Jump\$tart Coalition's survey place Native youth at the bottom of the scale when it comes to financial literacy. While this is not new information, this report puts in black and white what we have been fighting to change for years. We plan to use the results of this study to formulate a strategy and work together to strengthen the financial skills of Native people across the country."

Merrill Lynch, which sponsored both the report and the source of the data – the Jump\$tart survey – joined in this commitment. "Merrill Lynch understands the importance of investment planning and financial literacy," said Merrill Lynch Vice President Victoria Wright. "We are committed to providing relevant education at both the community and family level. It is our belief that nurturing financial skills at home fosters economic development in the community," added Wright.

Treasury, Congressional Support

Ms. Anna Escobedo Cabral, Treasurer of the United States, delivered the keynote address at the policy briefing. She provided an overview of the efforts of the U.S. Department of the Treasury to address the financial education needs of Native communities. “We are honored to have Treasurer Cabral show such strong leadership in the financial education movement. Her participation underscores the relevancy of these issues to the economic well-being of all Americans,” remarked Ms. Meeks.

Representative Rick Renzi (R-AZ), Co-Chair of the House Native American Caucus and member of the House Financial Services Committee, showed his support as well. His district includes the highest population of Native Americans in the U.S. Congress. He has been a strong advocate for community development efforts, especially housing, for Native communities.

NFEC Policy Recommendations

Also at the briefing, the NFEC released policy recommendations in five priority areas: strong institutional infrastructure (especially Native Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs)), youth financial education, Individual Development Accounts, predatory lending and Earned Income Tax Credit and tax preparation services. Specific recommendations to Federal, state, and tribal policy makers included:

- ❖ Increase funding for the CDFI Fund and for the Native initiative;
- ❖ Provide adequate funding for culturally appropriate youth financial education programs;
- ❖ Support Matched Savings programs like Individual Development Accounts and Children’s Savings Accounts;
- ❖ Enact anti-predatory lending legislation; and
- ❖ Support Native EITC awareness campaigns and Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites

A detailed copy of these policy recommendations and the report on the financial literacy of Native youth can be found at www.nfec.info/policy.

The policy briefing was hosted by the Native Financial Education Coalition, in cooperation with First Nations Oweesta Corporation (www.oweesta.org), First Nations Development Institute (www.firstnations.org), and National Congress of American Indians (www.ncai.org). The Annie E. Casey Foundation (www.aecf.org) and Merrill Lynch (www.ml.com) sponsored the event.

ABOUT THE NATIVE FINANCIAL EDUCATION COALITION

The Native Financial Education Coalition is a group of local, regional, and national organizations and government agencies that have joined together for one purpose: **to promote financial education in Native communities**. For more information, visit: www.nfec.info, or contact Joanna Donohoe at 561-626-9700, cell 561-762-8237 or joanna@oweesta.org.

ABOUT FIRST NATIONS OWEESTA CORPORATION

Oweesta, a certified Native CDFI intermediary, serves as the facilitator and fiscal agent of the Native Financial Education Coalition and provides Native communities with loans, investments, technical assistance, training and community development information. Its mission is to enhance the capacity of Native tribes, communities and people to access, control, create, leverage, utilize and retain financial assets; and to provide access to appropriate financial capital for Native development efforts.

###