

Office of the Secretary

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***Secretary Norton Joins Ground Blessing Ceremony
for Santa Fe Indian School***

One of 12 New Indian Schools to be Built

WASHINGTON - Interior Secretary Gale Norton and Assistant Secretary Neal McCaleb today joined a ground blessing ceremony for a \$38 million classroom and dormitory complex in Santa Fe, New Mexico, emphasizing President Bush's Indian Education Initiative and commitment to nationwide educational reform.

The Santa Fe Indian School project is funded by \$23 million in President Bush's 2002 budget. The new dormitory will be built with \$15 million proposed in his 2003 budget. When completed, the school, which has 550 students, will serve about 1,200 children from 26 tribes, including the 19 New Mexico Pueblos, Jicarilla and Mescalero Apache Tribes, and Navajo Nation.

Other BIA schools receiving replacement buildings from the President's 2002 budget include the Wingate Elementary School in New Mexico; Polacca Day School and Holbrook Dormitory (Navajo Nation) in Arizona; Ojibwa Indian School on the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation in Belcourt, North Dakota; and Paschal Sherman Indian School on the Colville Indian Reservation in Omak, Washington.

"The President cares deeply about our children's education and is committed to closing the achievement gap so that no child will be left behind," Norton told Pueblo and tribal leaders during the ceremony at historic Santa Fe Indian School.

"That means improving the quality of education in all Bureau of Indian Affairs' schools, working with parents, teachers, and school boards across Indian Country, and building educational excellence through higher standards, higher expectations, and greater accountability."

Norton spent two days visiting and conferring with Indian leaders in New Mexico. The Santa Fe Indian School is one of 12 BIA schools that will be receiving new buildings during the next few years to replace aging structures that pose a health and safety threat and make learning difficult.

The old school site and 24 original buildings, which qualify for the National Register of Historic Places, will be preserved and given to the All Indian Pueblo Council of New Mexico when the new school is finished.

Founded in 1889, Santa Fe Indian School went from one of the weakest schools in the BIA system to one of the best. Norton noted that the principles that guide President Bush's Indian Education Initiative -- a strong sense of community, commitment to local control, and belief in the pursuit of excellence -- helped make the Santa Fe Indian School a model of academic achievement for other BIA schools.

President Bush's initiative provides the tools to carry out this systemwide reform, Norton said, offering Indian parents, tribal leaders, school boards, and educators the means to work with Interior and the BIA to build educational excellence. These tools include increased budget support, curricula reform, access to information technology, and new education laws, such as the President's No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

These mandates promote higher academic standards, increased parental involvement, and local control; expanded flexibility in using federal education funds; and program consolidation and streamlining. They also require greater accountability for student progress and academic achievement, offers funding for what works, and expands parental options for children in failing schools.

Providing safe, adequately equipped and maintained schools is an important part of the initiative. The President's 2002 budget provided \$293 million for BIA school construction, including \$123 million for new buildings at Santa Fe and five other BIA schools and \$61 million for major repair projects at 10 more. His 2003 budget calls for another \$293 million for BIA school construction, with \$120 million for new buildings at Sante Fe and five other schools.

On May 15, Norton visited the Isleta Elementary School and the To'Hajilee-He School to promote the Family and Child Education Program. The Bureau of Indian Affairs developed FACE in 1990 as an American Indian initiative to increase parental understanding and involvement in early childhood education. Last year more than 3,000 families participated in the FACE Program.

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