Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

Media Contact: Ulsamer -- 343-9431
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Dr. William J. Benham, a Creek Indian, has been named to head up the Bureau of Indian Affairs education programs on the Navajo Reservation. In this capacity, he will serve as one of three Assistant Area Directors for the Bureau's operations in the Navajo area.

Dr. Benham, a native of Holdenville, Okla., is a veteran of the Navajo education program. He joined the Bureau in 1950 and has served as both teacher and principal in various BIA schools for Navajo children. From 1963 until his recent reassignment he was Director of Schools for the Gallup Area Office.

A graduate of East Central State College in Oklahoma, Dr. Benham holds M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Oklahoma.

Increased activity in almost every phase of Bureau operations on the Navajo Reservation brought about the establishment last December of a separate Navajo Area office at Window Rock, Ariz. Following are some recent developments in education on the reservation:

-- The Bureau of Indian Affairs awarded two contracts totaling more than $6.6 million to expand Sanostee School, which will serve 720 Navajo children, and to construction a new school to accommodate more than 500 in the eastern section of the reservation. At Kaibeto a new $5 million Bureau boarding school was dedicated.

-- New methods are being found to meet the unique educational needs of Indian students. Teaching English as a second language to Navajo-speaking youngsters is now a reservation-wide program.

-- The Navajo tribal council underscored the importance of education in tribal development with passage of a resolution reaffirming compulsory education for youths between the ages of 6 and 16. The council called upon parents, educators, and tribal courts to aid them in a campaign which has brought about a record enrollment of 19,827 children in reservation schools alone.