Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

Media Contact: Lovett 202-343-7445
For Immediate Release: September 12, 1974
Print PDF

A "bill of rights" for students attending Bureau of Indian Affairs schools has become a part of the Code of Federal Regulations, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Morris Thompson announced today.

"This new part of the Code," Commissioner Thompson said, "is like our Constitutional Bill of Rights in that it is simple, brief and to the point. It provides a sound base for local school communities --parents, students and staff -- to develop regulations and programs which accord with the law, are respectful of individual rights and promote a spirit of responsibility."

Included in the rights listed in the regulations are: Right to an education, freedom from unreasonable search, reasonable privacy, a safe and secure environment, freedom of religion and culture, freedom of speech and expression, the right to peaceably assemble and to petition the redress of grievances and the right to due process and disciplinary actions which could involve suspension for expulsion.

The essential elements involved in due process are also spelled out in the regulations.

The regulations are applicable, in addition to the Bureau schools, to schools operated by Indian tribal groups which are funded under contract by the Bureau. In 1974 there were 13 such schools.

“The consideration of students’ rights is a fairly recent phenomenon in the United States," Commissioner Thompson said. “Years ago it was accepted that school officials exercised a rather autocratic authority. Our increased consciousness of the rights of minority groups has changed this -- and I think it is for the better. We cannot effectively teach democracy in a dictatorial school setting. Maintaining needed discipline within a framework of freedom is a challenge, but one that we must and will meet.”