Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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New regulations for a program affecting 100,000 Indian children in 435 public school districts and 23 states were published in the Federal Register August 21, 1974. "These regulations reflect the vast changes and development in the Indian community of the past several years," said Commissioner Morris Thompson of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

The new regulations govern the Bureau's program of financial assistance to meet special educational needs of Indian children not in Federal schools. It is commonly referred to as the Johnson-O'Malley program, after the Congressmen who introduced the authorizing legislation in 1934.

The revised regulations give the local Indian community the major role in determining how the funds should be used. In the past this was primarily the responsibility of school officials. This change accords with the Administration's policy of Indian self-determination.

Funding for the program in fiscal year 1975 is expected to be almost $28 million. These funds may be used for needed supplemental programs, not part of the ordinary school program, or in exceptional circumstances for operational expenditures of the school district. Some school districts need this operational assistance because the tax base, including state and other Federal aid, is not adequate for meeting minimum state educational standards. School costs are also frequently greater in isolated rural areas.

It is expected that at least 80 percent of the funds will be used in 1975 to supplement the regular school program to meet the special needs of Indian students. Hiring Indian teacher aides for the primary grades to help young

Indian students adjust to the school situation would be an example of such use. Provision of a tutorial program, a course in Indian culture Of a program of teaching English as a second language are other examples. Local Indian education committees determine the needs and the programs.

"There was maximum involvement of Indian, people in the development of these regulations," Commissioner Thompson said. "They are responsive to the Indian people we serve and we are confident that the end result will be better programs for Indian children."

Other changes from the old regulations, last revised in 1957, include:

Eligibility for assistance is broadened somewhat, but is still limited to Indians living on or near reservations; Funds may be used for pre-school children and other educational programs conducted outside the normal school setting; Eligibility requirements for school districts seeking funds for operational expenditures have been tightened; Provision is made for more equitable funding between states and within states, and Program and fiscal accountability requirements have been greatly strengthened.