



## Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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**WASHINGTON, D.C.** - Improving Indian student academic achievement through Native language and culture in Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools will be the focus of the upcoming Office of Indian Education Programs (OIEP) Journeying Home: Language and Culture Preservation Conference. The event, with the theme "Creating Our Future From Our Past," will be held March 3-6 in Minneapolis, Minn., at the Hilton Minneapolis and Towers hotel. Experts from the field of Indian education will present information and insights on how using Native language and culture in the classroom can help Indian students improve their academic proficiency.

In his introduction to the conference program, OIEP Director William Mehojah, Jr., noted "Native languages and cultures are not only a means to achieving higher academic achievement, but also a means to better connect Native students to their own past and to help prepare them for a future in which education and learning are more important than ever. We know that individuals who are strongly rooted in their past...are often best equipped to face the future."

Conference attendees will be presented with a wide range of cultural, linguistic, social and education perspectives through speakers and workshops specifically designed to aid Indian educators in the development of curricula and teaching materials, and improving teaching skills, that incorporate Native language and culture.

A special feature of the conference will be the cultural "Knowledge Bowl," an academic competition between 11 BIA schools that will take place March 4-5. The Knowledge Bowl will pit schools from Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin against one another to answer questions about American Indian history, culture and language in a quiz bowl format. Participating schools are: Bug-O-Nay-Ge-Shig School, Cass Lake, Minn.; Circle of Life School, White Earth, Minn.; Crazy Horse School, Wanblee, S.D.; Flandreau Indian School, Flandreau, S.D.; Fond du Lac Ojibwe School, Hayward, Wisc.; Nay-Ah-Shing School, Onamia, Minn.; St. Francis Indian School, St. Francis, S.D.; Standing Rock High School, Ft. Yates, N.D.; Takini School, Howes, S.D., and Tiospaye Topa School, Ridgeview, S.D.

OIEP designed Journeying Home as a series of four conferences that would further the use and understanding of Native language and culture to improve student academic achievement. The 2002 Journeying Home conference, held in Portland, Ore., focused on language acquisition. This year's event is intended to strengthen BIA funded schools in the areas of language and cultural preservation and revitalization.

The mission of the Office of Indian Education Programs is to provide Indian students with quality educational opportunities from early childhood through life in accordance with tribal needs for cultural and economic well-being and in keeping with the wide diversity of Indian tribes and Alaska Native villages as distinct cultural and governmental entities, as well as to consider each student's spiritual, mental, physical and cultural aspects within the context of his or her family and tribe or village.

Note to Editors: The agenda for the 2003 Journeying Home: Language and Culture Preservation Conference may be viewed via the Department's web site at [www.doi.gov](http://www.doi.gov).

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