Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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For Immediate Release: March 7, 1973
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A six-month study of the school construction needs of public school districts serving Indian students is currently underway, Marvin L. Franklin, Assistant to the Secretary for Indian Affairs, announced today.

The National Indian Training and Research Center (NITRC) of Tempe, Arizona, is conducting the study under a contract with the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

"We expect more than 400 school districts serving Indian students in 23 states will be involved in the six-month study," Franklin said. "The NITRC study will not be limited to major impact districts --those with more than 50 percent Indian enrollment --but will encompass all areas where Indian students form a significant part of the school population."

Many of the public school districts serving Indians have no adequate tax base to replace obsolete or inadequate facilities because of surrounding Indian-owned, tax-exempt lands and the general poverty of the areas. In an effort to develop legislation that will provide assistance to these schools on a realistic and uniform basis, the Bureau was asked by the House Appropriations Committee to conduct an in-depth study and suggest solutions to the problems.

"We consider this study of the school situation as very significant since more than 68 percent of the nearly 205,000 Indian students are enrolled in public schools," Franklin said.

Preliminary research conducted in 80 major impact school districts shows that Indians are the fastest-growing segment of the school population in the United States. Enrollment at many of the schools has doubled over the past five years. The rapid population increase has combined with the deterioration of outdated school buildings to create a serious backlog for construction aid.

In a preliminary study, the Gallup-McKinley District in New Mexico where Zuni and Navajo children are educated was found to have the greatest need of any single district. At the state level, Arizona was found to have the greatest overall need.

Limited construction aid has been provided for some public school districts with large Indian enrollment under Federal legislation known as Public Law 815. Congress has also approved specific funding for a few schools in critical need. The report of the House committee on Appropriations requesting the Bureau to make the study said the problem has intensified each year and has ~ now reached a point where the committee can no longer provide funds for construction of these schools without a comprehensive study of their needs.