Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

BIE maintains the goal for in-person learning for the K-12 schools

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WASHINGTON – The Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) announced in August that BIE-operated K-12 day-school operations across the United States will have a uniform start date of September 16 for the 2020-2021 school year. Bureau operated residential facilities, including Off Reservation Boarding Schools (ORBS) and dormitories will only provide day-school instruction. This will avoid students traveling outside the commuting area and these students enrolled will be provided distance learning opportunities for their continuity of education. The BIE implements federal Indian education programs for roughly 46,000 students at 183 schools across the U.S.

"The health and safety of our students and staff is our top priority. COVID-19 is challenging tribal governments, BIE-funded schools, and all Indian Country communities on a scale not experienced in decades," said **BIE Director Tony Dearman**. "We are continuing our strong collaboration with tribes, states, local health officials and our federal partners for a safe school reopening, and our *Return To Learn!* plan provides the guidance needed for both in-classroom and online learning. In addition, the ORBS and dormitories will provide day-school instruction-only, with distance-learning options for students who are not able to attend in person. Our BIE team is fully committed to finding a path forward through these challenging times that provides the educational services our students need while providing support to students and their families as well as staff."

The BIE's School Reopening Task Force is now implementing its *Return To Learn!* plan. The Task Force is utilizing all feedback from tribal consultations, stakeholder survey responses, collaboration with tribes, states, and other federal agencies, to safely reopen based on local conditions. The *Return To Learn!* plan provides guidance on reopening criteria that follows current Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations, provides flexibility for local conditions, and makes recommendations on distance learning platforms.

Schools may continue providing school lunches in the upcoming school year. They will also ensure proper employee safety, enforce food-handling and serving protocols to the maximum extent and highest health standards possible, and operate in accordance with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and CDC guidelines regarding COVID-19.

Visit the Indian Affairs COVID-19 page and the BIE COVID-19 page for more information.

The Bureau of Indian Education implements federal Indian education programs and funds 183 elementary schools, secondary schools and dormitories (of which more than two-thirds are tribally operated) located on 64 reservations in 23 states serving an estimated 46,000 individual students. The BIE also operates two post-secondary schools and administers grants for 29 tribally controlled colleges and universities and two tribal technical colleges.