Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

Wi-Fi Bus project reaches completion, will provide internet service for school work during long rides

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WASHINGTON – In late 2019 the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) launched an innovative school bus internet connectivity project with the goal of using its 25 longest bus routes to keep students connected to learning. Well before COVID-19 hit the United States, the Bureau had begun to transform the designated school bus fleet into extended classrooms so that students remained connected while traveling, in some cases over 200 miles roundtrip per day, on distant bus routes.

Once schools resume in-person instruction, the internet-enabled buses will serve 19 BIE-operated and tribally administered schools in Arizona, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Michigan, Minnesota and Washington State.

"Connectivity is an Administration priority, as it is in the traditional and cultural sense for tribal communities like my own," **said Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Tara *Katuk* Sweeney** "The Wi-Fi Bus pilot project is another opportunity to help bridge the digital divide in Indian Country."

BIE Director Tony Dearman stated, "This innovative project will benefit hundreds of our students who must travel long distances by bus every day to reach their classrooms and return home."

According to the U.S. Department of Education, about a third of the homes with school-aged children don't have internet due to financial challenges. BIE's Wi-Fi Bus project is a step closer to closing the connectivity issue and inequality ***issues*** already seen in low-income communities, especially in Indian Country

From the work with the National Tribal Broadband Summit, Indian Affairs is very aware that reliable, affordable broadband access is critical to the health and economic well-being of tribal communities. The completion of the Wi-Fi Bus project moves BIE that much closer to achieving one of Summit's goals: that of bridging the connectivity gap in Indian Country.

The Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs advises the Secretary of the Interior on Indian Affairs policy issues, communicates policy to and oversees the programs of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and the BIE, provides leadership in consultations with tribes, and serves as the DOI official for intra- and inter-departmental coordination and liaison within the Executive Branch on Indian matters.

The BIE implements federal Indian education programs and funds 183 elementary schools, secondary schools and dormitories (of which over 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.

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