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Funding Opportunity Part of Bureau of Indian Education's implementation of American Indian Education Study Group's "Blueprint for Reform;" Sovereignty in Indian Education grants will promote tribal self-determination in education through tribal control of BIE-funded schools

WASHINGTON, D.C. – As part of the Obama Administration's historic commitment to ensure that all students attending Bureau of Indian Education-funded schools receive an effective education delivered to them by tribes, U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell and Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Kevin K. Washburn today announced that the BIE will fund $2.5 million in Sovereignty in Indian Education competitive grants. The purpose of these grants is to provide funding to federally recognized tribes and their tribal education departments to promote tribal control and operation of BIE-funded schools on their reservations.

In 2013, Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan convened the American Indian Education Study Group to propose a comprehensive reform plan to ensure that all students attending BIE-funded schools receive a quality education. Based on listening sessions held throughout Indian Country, the Study Group issued a Blueprint for Reform on June 13, 2014. The Blueprint recommends that BIE support tribal nations in their efforts to assume control over BIE-funded schools.

"We believe strongly that American Indian children deserve an academically rigorous, culturally appropriate education. Beyond providing the skills to succeed economically, honoring tribal cultures and languages is vital to the longevity of tribal traditions, identity and self-confidence," said Secretary Jewell. "Increasing tribal control over BIE schools recognizes the sovereign status of tribes, provides them with greater discretion in determining what their children should learn and helps increase accountability throughout the BIE-funded school system. This grant program is one small step towards an important process of supporting more effective and relevant education for American Indian children, with more to come."

"The American Indian Education Study Group made serious recommendations for improving how federal education services and resources are delivered in Indian Country, and the Sovereignty in Indian Education grant program responds to their concerns," said Assistant Secretary Washburn.

"With greater tribal control of schools, tribes have more power to infuse schools with tribal cultural values and native languages, both of which can engage children better and help them to succeed."

The purpose of the Sovereignty in Indian Education grants is to support tribal capacity to fully manage and operate tribally controlled, BIE-funded schools in their communities. Grant funds will support development of a tribal school reform plan with the goals of improved educational outcomes for students and improved efficiencies and effectiveness in operating the schools.

Furthermore, by unifying a collective body of tribes, this initiative will build a collaborative network to

support tribal control and stronger partnerships with BIE-funded schools.

Tribal control of federally funded government programs often improves local service delivery because tribal governments understand the needs of their communities and are more likely to be held accountable for results by their constituents. The Department of the Interior fully supports tribes' sovereign right to determine the structure of their own tribal governments and school systems, and seeks to strengthen that support by facilitating the sharing of information on efficient and successful school structures.

"As tribal control of education is a vital part of self-determination and self-governance, the Bureau of Indian Education is strongly committed to ensuring that tribal sovereignty over education is encouraged, supported and strengthened wherever and whenever possible," said BIE Director Dr. Charles M. "Monty" Roessel. "Sovereignty in Indian Education grants will assist those tribes seeking to assume operational control over the BIE-funded schools that serve them and those working to develop and build their tribal school systems around BIE schools."

As part of the program, BIE will provide tribes with technical assistance in planning and implementing assessment and implementation plans and in strengthening tribally controlled school processes. It also will provide a forum for tribes to work collaboratively with each other to gain insights and develop or share tribal and BIE problem-solving strategies.

Grant awards will range from $100,000 to $200,000 per fiscal year depending on the number of schools involved, number of students, complexity of creating a new tribally managed school system and a tribe's technical approach. Eligible applicants include tribal education departments that have three or more BIE-funded schools on their reservations. The deadline for applications is Sept. 12, 2014.

In addition to today's grant funding announcement, BIE will hold two pre-grant training workshops on Aug. 4 in Rapid City, S.D., and Aug. 6 in Phoenix, Ariz. View details about Sovereignty in Indian Education grants.