Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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WASHINGTON – Assistant Secretary Kevin K. Washburn today announced that he has named Dr. Charles M. "Monty" Roessel as Director of the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE). Roessel, an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation, had served as the acting director since February 2013.

The announcement came today as Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell, Assistant Secretary Washburn and Director Roessel were in Laguna, New Mexico to tour a Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) tribally controlled grant school located on the Pueblo of Laguna reservation.

The visit to the Laguna Elementary School and a subsequent roundtable with principals from other local tribally controlled grant schools and BIE-operated schools will help inform the work of Interior's American Indian Education Study Group, a group that is working to improve educational outcomes for American Indian students attending BIE-funded schools.

"The BIE plays a major role in the education of thousands of American Indian students across Indian Country," Washburn said. "As acting director, Dr. Charles M. Roessel has proven to be an effective steward of our Indian education programs, bringing to the Bureau extensive experience in school leadership and administration, and an understanding of what's needed at the local school level. He is a strong and effective member of my senior management team."

Before joining the BIE's headquarters staff in Washington, D.C. in 2012, Roessel had served since October 2011 as the Bureau's Associate Deputy Director for Navajo Schools, where he was responsible for overseeing 66 BIE-funded schools on the Navajo Nation reservation in Arizona, New Mexico and Utah. He became the associate deputy director after having served since 2007 as superintendent of Rough Rock Community School, a BIE-funded, tribally operated K-12 boarding school near Chinle, Ariz., on the Navajo Nation reservation.

From 2010 to 2011, Roessel had served as chair of the Department of the Interior's No Child Left Behind Negotiated Rule Making Committee and on the Sovereignty in Navajo Education Reauthorization Task Force with the Navajo Education Department of Diné Education.

"I want to thank Assistant Secretary Washburn for his confidence in me for this important post," Roessel said. "I am looking forward to working with Assistant Secretary Washburn and his team to ensure that the Bureau of Indian Education continues to fulfill its two-fold mission of providing our students with a quality education while respecting tribal cultures, languages and traditions."

As Director of the Bureau of Indian Education, Roessel reports to the Assistant Secretary and oversees three associate deputy directors who are responsible for education line offices serving 183 BIE-funded elementary and secondary day and boarding schools and peripheral dormitories located on 64 reservations in 23 states. These facilities provide schooling for more than 40,000 American Indian and Alaska Native students from the country's federally recognized tribes.

The Bureau also serves post-secondary students through higher education scholarships and support

funding to 27 tribal colleges and universities and two tribal technical colleges. It also directly operates two post-secondary institutions: Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, Kan., and the Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute in Albuquerque, N.M.

Roessel has been a prominent figure in Indian education for many years. The Rough Rock Community School, at which he served for more than a dozen years from 1998 to 2011, had been the first American Indian-operated, and the first Navajo-operated, school when it opened in 1966 within what was then the Bureau of Indian Affairs school system. Today that system is administered by the BIE, established in 2006. During his tenure as superintendent at Rough Rock, Roessel helped to oversee a major school replacement and improvement project funded under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 and carried out by the Indian Affairs Office of Facilities, Environmental and Cultural Resources. The official opening of the replacement school and facilities was held on August 15, 2011.

Roessel started at Rough Rock in August 1998 as the director of community services, developing programs for teacher recruitment and student enrollment in addition to coaching baseball and teaching photography to students. In July 2000, he became the school's executive director, where he served until he was named superintendent in 2007.

Before working for the Rough Rock Community School, Roessel served from September 1997 to December 2000 as director of the Navajo Nation Round Rock Chapter AmeriCorps program where he developed partnerships to improve education and housing within the Round Rock chapter community.

Roessel also has worked as a photographer, writer and editor for various publications and projects including vice-president and editor of the Navajo Nation Today newspaper (1990-1992), which he also co-owned; managing editor of the Navajo Times Today (1985-1987); a photojournalist with the Greeley (Colo.) Tribune (1985) and a photographer/writer with the Navajo View of Navajo Life Project (1984).

In addition, he has worked since 1987 as an author and photographer on various projects, and has written extensively about Navajo life and culture. He also served on the Visual Task Force board for the first annual gathering of minority journalists associations, including the Native American Journalists Association (NAJA), known as the UNITY conference.

Roessel holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Photo-Communication/Industrial Arts from the University of Northern Colorado-Greeley (1984), a Master of Arts degree in Journalism from Prescott (Ariz.) College (1995) and a Doctorate of Education degree in Educational Administration and Supervision from Arizona State University in Tempe (2007).