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Funding will build the capacity of tribal education departments, help increase access to higher education

Media Contact: Nedra Darling, OPA-IA Phone: 202-219-4152
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WASHINGTON – U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell joined Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs Kevin K. Washburn and Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) Director Dr. Charles M. "Monty" Roessel today in announcing important funding to help further the Department of the Interior's goal to transform and improve the quality of education students receive at tribal schools funded by the BIE.

A centerpiece of the transformation includes transferring control of BIE-funded schools from the BIE to the tribe the school serves. Local control will be facilitated through $1.45 million in grants to seven tribal nations who will use the funding to begin restructuring school governance, build capacity for academic success and develop curriculum that is both academically rigorous and culturally relevant to students. The Department received this funding in its FY2015 appropriation from Congress authorized under the Education Amendments Act of 1978 (25 U.S.C. 2020).

"The future of Indian Country rests on ensuring American Indian and Alaska Native children receive a world-class education that honors their cultures, languages and identities as Native people," said Secretary Jewell. "This funding reflects President Obama's commitment to promote tribal self-governance and self-determination, enabling the BIE to more effectively support tribal nations who best understand the unique needs of their communities."

Today's announcement supports the Obama Administration's Generation Indigenous (Gen-I) initiative, which is intended to remove barriers to Native youth success. Today, in conjunction with the funding announcement, the White House is hosting its first-ever Tribal Youth Gathering. The gathering provides Native youth from across the country the opportunity to interact directly with senior Administration officials and the White House Council on Native American Affairs, chaired by Secretary Jewell.

"This funding will help keep students in school and on the path to graduation while furthering the President's commitment to creating opportunities for Native students to receive a great education," said Assistant Secretary Washburn. "It lays the foundation for instilling in all BIE students the belief that they can perform well in school, obtain a degree, and prepare for a promising future."

The governance capacity and curriculum development grants are awarded to the following tribal nations:

- Hopi Tribe, AZ
- Navajo Nation, AZ
- Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, ND
- Pueblo of Acoma, NM
- Santa Clara Indian Pueblo, NM

- Oglala Sioux Tribe, SD
- Rosebud Sioux Tribe, SD

“The Tribal Education Departments National Assembly (TEDNA) applauds Congress and the Department for providing more opportunities for tribal nations to have more control over the education of their tribal members,” said TEDNA Executive Director Quinton Roman Nose. “These Section 2020 grants will help ensure that students attending BIE-funded schools will receive a culturally rich and academically rigorous education.”

Additionally, Interior is awarding $995,000 to the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) to be disbursed among 20 Tribal Colleges and Universities and the two BIE-operated post-secondary schools (Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, Kan., and the Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI) in Albuquerque, N.M.). AIHEC works with more than 45 BIE-funded elementary and secondary schools to create college pathway programs that will help more K-12 BIE students graduate from high school and continue to college.

“As part of our continuing efforts to re-imagine the Bureau of Indian Education as a capacity-builder and service-provider to tribes in the education of their children, the Bureau will work in partnership with tribes and AIHEC to not only improve student performance and strengthen student preparedness for college, but to build a college-going culture throughout the BIE school system,” said Director Monty Roessel. “I want to thank AIHEC for supporting all BIE students by partnering with us to achieve these worthy goals.”

“AIHEC is thrilled to partner with the BIE through this cooperative agreement and support their overall efforts to increase tribal self-determination,” said AIHEC President and CEO Carrie L. Billy. “AIHEC and TCUs are ideally positioned to work with BIE schools to make a significant impact on AI/AN academic performance and participation, yet the benefits of our partnership are far greater – they go right to the core of who we are as Indian people today.”

In 2013, Jewell and U.S. 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 in June 2014. The Blueprint recommends that BIE support tribal nations in their efforts to assume control over BIE-funded schools. To date, tribes are operating two-thirds of BIE-funded schools.

The Department will soon release a summary of the BIE’s progress on the five educational reform goals published in the Blueprint and the strides towards improving the education of students in BIE-funded schools. This report takes stock of the Department’s progress approximately one year after President Obama’s historic trip to Standing Rock Sioux Tribal Nation in Cannonball, N.D. in June 2014. The report affirms that while the BIE is making important progress, more work needs to be done, and the Department remains committed to improving the lives of Native youth across the country by providing students a world-class education at BIE-funded schools.

The BIE oversees 183 elementary and secondary schools, including 14 off-reservation boarding schools and peripheral dormitories located on 64 reservations in 23 states serving more than 48,000 students. Of these, 59 are BIE-operated and 124 are tribally operated under Indian Self Determination and Education Assistance Act contracts or Tribally Controlled Schools Act grants. TEDNA is The Tribal Education Departments National Assembly, Co. (“TEDNA”), is a nonprofit organization.

TEDNA is a membership organization for the Education Departments of American Indian and Alaska Native Tribes. Since 2003, TEDNA serves its member tribal education departments by fostering effective relationships with other governmental and educational agencies, and supporting and encouraging each member nation’s right to define and reach its own educational goals for its students, families, and communities wherever they may be located.

AIHEC is a nonprofit organization that represents the nation's 37 Tribal Colleges and Universities – a unique community of tribally and federally chartered institutions working to strengthen tribal nations and make a lasting difference in the lives of American Indians and Alaska Natives. Since 1973, AIHEC serves its network of member institutions through public policy, advocacy, research, and program initiatives to ensure strong tribal sovereignty through excellence in American Indian higher education.