Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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For Immediate Release: June 17, 2015
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WASHINGTON, D.C. – William Mendoza, Director of the White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education at the U.S. Department of Education, and Dr. Charles M. "Monty" Roessel, Director of the Bureau of Indian Education, today announced that the Pine Ridge School in South Dakota has received $218,000 at their request under the U.S. Department of Education's Project School Emergency Response to Violence (SERV) grant program to aid in recovery from student suicides and suicide attempts.

The Pine Ridge School, which serves the Oglala Sioux Tribe on the Pine Ridge Reservation, requested assistance after experiencing a significant increase in the number of counseling referrals, suicide ideations, and suicide attempts between August 2014 and April 2015. Two of the students who committed suicide were high school students and two were middle-school age.

"We are heartbroken about the tragic loss of life and are committed to working with the Pine Ridge community as it heals. These funds will help Pine Ridge School's continued efforts to restore the learning environment in the face of these great tragedies." said Mendoza. "This Administration is committed to supporting tribes in their work to meet the needs of their students. We all must do more to address the challenges across Indian Country."

"Children and youth need help in seeing that their lives have meaning and that they, too, have the power to create promising futures for themselves. No tribe can long endure the loss of its lifeblood, its children and youth, to suicide," said Roessel. "Thanks to the Department of Education and the SERV Program, the Pine Ridge School will be able to begin to help its students and their families onto healthier life paths that lead to more positive outcomes."

In line with the Obama Administration's Generation Indigenous ("Gen-I") initiative to improve the lives of Native youth by removing the barriers for their progress and academic success, the SERV grant will support a culturally appropriate approach to the recovery of Native youth at Pine Ridge School. The grant will enable the Pine Ridge School to hire additional counselors and social workers to help students during the summer school session and the next school year. It also will support implementation of a multi-faceted and holistic approach to healing that is based on Lakota traditional culture and relevant to Pine Ridge School students, who have dealt with the sudden loss of classmates to suicide or know those who have attempted suicide.

Pine Ridge School is a BIE-operated, on-reservation boarding school comprised of a high school and an elementary school, which together serve a total of nearly 800 students from the Oglala Sioux Tribe in grades K-12, and a dormitory which houses approximately 150 students during the school year. The Pine Ridge Reservation is home to the Oglala Sioux Tribe whose 30,000 members living on or near the reservation suffer from continually high rates of poor health, poor infrastructure, lack of opportunity, and higher than average suicide rates in all age groups. Project SERV funds short-term and long-term education-related services for school districts, colleges and universities to help them recover from a violent or traumatic event in which the learning environment has been disrupted.

Project SERV is administered by the Department's Office of Safe and Healthy Students. The Department makes two types of Project SERV awards – Immediate Services and Extended Services. Immediate Services grants provide emergency, short-term assistance to affected school districts, colleges and universities. Extended Services assist school districts, colleges and universities in carrying out the long-term recovery efforts that may be needed following a significant, traumatic event. For more information about the Project SERV program, visit http://www2.ed.gov/programs/dvppserv/index.html.

The Obama Administration is committed to finding solutions to the pressing problems that confront Native youth, with an emphasis on education, economic development, and health. The President's FY 2016 budget proposal calls for increased investments across Indian Country, including a total request of $20.8 billion for a range of federal programs that serve tribes – a $1.5 billion increase over the 2015-enacted level. The budget proposal includes $53 million for fiscal year 2016 – a $50 million increase from this year – to significantly expand the Native Youth Community Projects program.

The BIE oversees 183 elementary and secondary schools, 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. BIE also funds or operates off-reservation boarding schools and peripheral dormitories near reservations for students attending public schools. For more information about the Bureau, visit www.bie.edu.
