Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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For Immediate Release: December 10, 2009
Print PDF

Washington, D.C. – Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs Larry Echo Hawk welcomed representatives of several federal agencies and non-profit organizations who are at the forefront of combating alcohol and substance abuse and domestic violence to a conference on creating safe schools held December 8 by the Bureau of Indian Education. The Safe School Summit kicked off a BIE initiative to establish partnerships with law enforcement, security, and health and safety agencies to ensure BIE-funded schools are safe and secure learning environments for their students. The meeting was held at the main Interior Department building.

“Children cannot get a good education if they feel they cannot be safe in their schools,” Echo Hawk said. “We must find ways to prevent student violence against themselves and others while ensuring they receive a quality education and a chance at prosperity.”

The BIE has been focused on addressing a variety of health and safety factors that can impede a student’s learning ability. In coordination with the Indian Affairs Office of Facilities, Environmental and Cultural Resources Management, it has replaced or repaired a significant number of existing school structures. Working with Interior’s Law Enforcement, Security and Emergency Management personnel, BIE has installed school safety features and equipment and developed and implemented school emergency preparedness plans. The BIE also provides training for faculty and staff to identify threats to student safety and offers programs that support parents and students in learning healthy and positive life management skills.

While the BIE has ongoing partnerships with public and private educational organizations that support its academic mission, today Bureau officials reached out to federal law enforcement, health and safety agencies on ways of improving school safety. “This meeting is a cornerstone event where the BIE is seeking to establish public and private sector partnerships in order to share knowledge and best practices for creating safe learning environments for BIE students,” said acting BIE Director Kevin Skenandore.

The event was attended by representatives of federal offices and agencies responsible for health and safety, security and law enforcement matters that affect, directly or indirectly, Indian Country including the White House Office of Drug Control Policy, the Department of Education’s Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, the Department of State, the Department of Justice’s Office of Tribal Services and Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), the FBI, the U.S. Marshal’s Service, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Department of Homeland Security, the U.S. Secret Service, the Federal Communications Commission, the Indian Health Service, and the Administration for Native Americans. Also present were representatives of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, Crimestoppers USA, and the Ripken Foundation’s Badges for Baseball program.

Joining Assistant Secretary Echo Hawk from the Interior Department were Deputy Assistant Secretary for Law Enforcement, Security and Emergency Management Larry R. Parkinson, Policy Advisor to the Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs Wizipan Garriott, OFECRM Director John “Jack” Rever and members of the BIE senior management team. Also in attendance were representatives of the Interior

Department’s Office of the Inspector General and Emergency Management Council, as well as the Indian Affairs Office of Homeland Security and the Bureau of Indian Affairs Office of Justice Services.

Tribal education officials present were Oglala Sioux Tribe Education Director Dayna Brave Eagle, Pine Ridge (S.D.) High School Superintendent Linda Hunter, Navajo Nation Department of Diné Education Superintendent Andrew Tah and Pueblo of Jemez Education Director Kevin Shendo.

The BIE is responsible for ensuring the implementation of federal education laws, including the No Child Left Behind Act, in 183 BIE-funded elementary and secondary schools and residential programs located on 64 reservations in 23 states serving approximately 42,000 American Indian and Alaska Native students and employing over 5,000 teachers, administrators and support personnel. The BIE also provides resources and technical assistance to 124 tribally administered BIE-funded schools and 26 tribal colleges and universities, and directly operates two post secondary institutions: Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, Kan., and the Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute in Albuquerque, N.M.