Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

Media Contact: Nedra Darling, OPA-IA Phone: 202-219-4152
For Immediate Release: November 8, 2007
Print PDF

WASHINGTON – Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Carl J. Artman joined Secretary Dirk Kempthorne, Bureau of Indian Education Acting Director Kevin Skenandore and students and faculty from 20 BIE-funded schools for the launching of "BIE READS" at the Department's kick-off event for National American Indian Heritage Month. BIE READS is the Bureau's plan to help BIE school students improve their proficiency in reading and math.

"The BIE READS program will give our students the opportunity to acquire, and master, the reading and comprehension skills they need for success," Artman said. "By nurturing the spirit of reading in all BIE students, we can give them the opportunity to pursue their dreams and the ability to achieve them."

The event provided K-3 students from Chief Leschi School on the Puyallup Indian Reservation in Washington State, the Jemez Day School on the Jemez Indian Reservation in New Mexico, and the Alamo Day School on the Alamo Navajo Indian Reservation in New Mexico, with the opportunity to demonstrate their reading proficiency gained through BIE-funded literacy programs in their schools.

The Interior Department has included $15 million in its Fiscal Year 2008 budget request for Secretary Kempthorne's Improving Indian Education Initiative to improve the academic performance of BIE students and to help BIE schools meet their adequate yearly progress (AYP) goals under the No Child Left Behind Act.

BIE READS is a comprehensive strategic plan for fiscal years 2007-2009 that focuses on improving reading outcomes, math outcomes and educator quality in reading and math, as well as providing support for students to successfully transition to post-secondary opportunities. The plan was developed to ensure that BIE students, teachers and schools receive the maximum benefit possible from BIE-administered literacy programs such as Reading First and the Family and Child Education program (FACE).

The budget request includes funding to enhance elementary reading programs, develop improved math curriculum, provide mentoring and tutoring for high school students and provide educational leadership training for school administrators. It also supports the design of professional development opportunities for teachers to help create effective reading and math instructional strategies.

Artman noted President Bush's October 31 statement proclaiming November 2007 as National American Indian Heritage Month and its language recognizing the contributions American Indians and Alaska Natives have made to the United States.

"One way to encourage a wider appreciation for the histories and contributions of Indian people is through reading," Artman said.

The Bureau oversees or directly operates 184 elementary and secondary day and boarding schools serving 45,000 students living on or near 63 federal Indian reservations in 23 states. Approximately two-thirds of the schools are tribally operated under BIE contracts or grants. The BIE school system is

one of two federally operated schools systems.