Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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(Prewitt, N.M.) – In an Earth Day celebratory event on the Navajo Nation reservation, Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs David W. Anderson today praised the Baca/Dlo'ay azhi Community School, a Bureau of Indian Affairs operated day school located in Prewitt, N.M., for being designated the first Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEEDTM) certified building in the state and the BIA school system by the U.S. Green Building Council. The school, which opened on August 28, 2003 as a replacement facility for the BIA's Baca Day School and Thoreau Boarding School, serves 419 students in grades K-6 from the Prewitt, Haystack and Thoreau communities on the Navajo reservation.

"I want to congratulate the Baca/Dlo'ay azhi Community School on its designation as the first LEEDTM certified BIA school and as the first 'green' building in the state of New Mexico," Anderson said. "Baca has set a new standard for future BIA replacement schools: to provide a healthy, environmentally friendly and culturally sensitive setting for BIA students to learn in."

Anderson was joined by Baca principal Jacque Mangham in accepting the LEEDTM certification plaque from John Harzfeld, chairman of the USGBC, a national coalition of building industry leaders that promotes environmentally responsible design, construction and maintenance for private, public and commercial buildings.

Participants at the certification ceremony also included Lt. Col. Dana Hurst, commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Albuquerque District; representatives from the Navajo Nation; and students and school officials. Also represented were the local firms Dyron Murphy Architects PC, Bradbury Stamm Construction Inc., Environmental Dynamics Inc. and Southwest Commissioning Services LLC, all of whom collaborated on the project with the Corps and the BIA's Office of Facilities Management and Construction.

LEEDTM certification is the distinction given to buildings that are built using Sustainable Design Concepts as defined by the USGBC. As a LEEDTM certified building, Baca/Dlo'ay azhi Community School provides better indoor air quality by limiting sources of construction contaminants, isolating dust and other pollutants, and incorporating a Green Housekeeping Program. Due to its 'greening' design and construction, Baca also will see a reduction in its utility expenses and a reduction in building water use that will help with local water conservation efforts.

The Baca/Dlo'ay azhi Community School project is unique for several reasons. First, it was the first collaborative effort between the Department of the Interior and the Army Corps of Engineers. Second, the design, construction and operation of the Baca School building minimized negative environmental impacts and energy demands. Third, the school is a lesson in sustainable design while embodying elements sacred to Navajo culture. Finally, as a project that consolidated two existing schools into one unified school, Baca enjoyed a strong commitment by the school board and surrounding communities. A portion of one of the older schools will be preserved for a community center.

In terms of design alone, the Baca/Dlo'ay azhi Community School incorporates a number of elements that honor the Navajo culture. For example, the building's main entrance faces east to greet the

morning sun, symbolizing the beginning of life. Its four wings, which surround a central core, represent the four directions of north, south, east and west and are painted to coincide with sacred colors attributed by the Navajo people to each direction.

In 2000, the OFMC adopted the USGBC's Sustainable Design Concepts under the LEEDTM rating system for all future BIA replacement schools.

The Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs oversees the BIA, the 180-year old agency that provides services to individual American Indians and Alaska Natives from the federally recognized tribes, and the BIA school system. The school system serves approximately 48,000 American Indian children in 184 elementary and secondary day and boarding schools located on or near 63 reservations in 23 states. The BIA directly operates one-third of these schools and the remaining two-thirds are tribally operated under BIA contracts or grants.
