Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Secretary of the Interior, Manuel Lujan, today announced that Indian schooling will be the top educational priority of the Department. Lujan, who earlier this year toured Indian schools with the Secretary of Education, said that we must place renewed emphasis on ensuring that our Native American students receive a quality education.

Lujan indicated that one of the primary goals of the Interior Department must be to reform the delivery of key social, financial, and natural resources to Native Americans. "We will work closely with elected officials of Indian tribal governments, state and local education agencies and parents to improve the educational programs provided on Indian reservations by BIA and contractor operated schools," stated Lujan.

Lujan plans to tell his colleagues participating in the President's education summit that students who attend bureau-funded schools will continue to have choice in which school they attend, including parochial or public schools. "The Department recognizes the diverse needs and conditions that exist on Indian lands, and we will work with tribal governments to ensure that Indian reservation residents receive the same educational opportunities that all American students have," stated Lujan.

American Indian students in public schools oftentimes score higher in basic skills tests than do Indian students in BIA schools. To help correct this, Lujan has directed the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, Dr. Eddie Brown, to develop a plan to raise the educational achievement levels of Indian students in BIA-funded schools to the national norms by the year 2000.

"We must raise the expectation levels of teachers and principals who work with Indian children, encouraging strong parental involvement beginning in the preschool years. We must also hold ourselves accountable, for educational achievement, to the parents and to the tribes," concluded Lujan.