

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2014

The Honorable Shaun Donovan  
Director  
Office of Management and Budget  
Executive Office of the President  
Washington, DC 20210

Dear Director Donovan:

We are writing you as Co-Chairs of the Congressional Native American Caucus and Members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies to urge the Administration to prioritize funding for a comprehensive plan to address school construction needs at the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) within the Department of Interior (DOI).

The education of Native American students is a major part of our federal trust responsibility, with the construction and maintenance of schools included as a requirement in many treaties with tribal nations. Yet in a 2011 report, the *No Child Left Behind* School Facilities and Construction Negotiated Rulemaking Committee estimated that 63 of 183 BIE schools were in poor condition, and that bringing them to good or fair condition would cost \$1.3 billion. This widespread neglect of BIE school infrastructure is a source of great concern among tribal leaders, and the Interior Subcommittee has heard testimony describing cracked and condemned buildings, exposed wiring, leaking roofs, and other serious safety hazards within BIE schools. The Bug-O-Nay-Ge-Shig School in Minnesota, for example, is housed in a facility without proper insulation, continually suffers from mold and infestations, and does not meet fire or security standards. Conditions like these are unsafe for students and undermine their ability to learn and succeed in the classroom.

In a report submitted in June to the Secretaries of Interior and Education, the Bureau of Indian Education Study Group made several recommendations, developed in consultation with tribal leaders, for reforming the BIE and improving outcomes for American Indian students. One of their five key recommendations is to reform the BIE budget to support new priorities, the first of which is to “invest in infrastructure to support teaching and learning”. In particular, the Study Group advises DOI to invest in funding to support new school construction and to develop a multiyear facilities plan, similar to that undertaken for Department of Defense schools, to bring all BIE schools up to an acceptable condition.

We strongly support the Study Group’s recommendation for additional funding, and agree with the conclusion that “BIE currently lacks the necessary infrastructure that would undergird any serious effort to reform this set of schools.” The condition of schools communicates to students the value that is placed on them and their education, and many BIE schools are sending the message to Native American students that the nation does not consider it worthwhile to invest in them. Before we can expect to close achievement gaps and improve student outcomes, we must change that message.

We therefore call upon the Administration to make significant investments in Education Construction, including supporting School Replacement, in the FY2016 DOI Budget. We also urge OMB to work closely with the Study Group and DOI to initiate the multiyear facilities repair process starting in FY16, so that we can begin to bring all BIE schools up to a standard that meets our moral and legal obligations to the education of Native American youth.

Thank you for your attention to this important request. If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact Rebecca Taylor (Rep. McCollum) at 202-225-6631 or Stratton Edwards (Rep. Cole) at 202-225-6165.

Sincerely,



Betty McCollum

Member of Congress



Tom Cole

Member of Congress