



Closeout Statement on the BIE CARES Act Set Aside Listening Sessions and Public Comment

July 2, 2020

The U.S. Department of Education (ED) and the U.S. Department of the Interior (Interior) Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) would like to thank all of our participants and stakeholders for the interest, participation, and comments on the funds appropriated under the Education Stabilization Fund (ESF) of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act). ED transferred these funds, which are intended to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the Novel Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), to Interior on June 15, 2020.

ED and Interior held joint listening sessions on April 28 and April 30, 2020, and solicited written comment through May 6, 2020, to gather input on how the funds should be prioritized, among other matters. ED and BIE received comments from Tribes, Tribal organizations, Tribal Colleges and Universities, school leaders, communities, Native youth, and other stakeholders. These comments were responsive to the four topics shared in our notice to the public and in our presentation:

1. The needs of BIE-funded schools and their students as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.
2. The types of current physical and mental health needs of students at BIE-funded schools due to the COVID-19 crisis.
3. The best possibilities for prioritizing ESF funding that BIE receives from ED, such as:
 - Internet connectivity for students, teachers, and schools
 - Support for distance learning activities
 - Educational technology for students and teachers, including technology to support accessibility for children with disabilities
 - Teacher/school leader salaries
 - Others
4. How the allocation of the ED ESF funds from ED should be allocated by BIE:
 - For K-12 BIE-funded schools only *or*
 - Split between Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) and K-12 BIE-funded schools.

The comments received provided insights into the conditions and circumstances facing Native youth, including those attending K-12 BIE funded schools and Native youth attending public schools residing on Tribal lands as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. Comments discussed displacement of students and families and concerns around continuity of educational services for general education and students with special needs. In addition, commenters highlighted concerns around the safety of buildings and other structures used for educational services once students return to campuses.

In general, comments were supportive of BIE addressing the physical and mental health needs of students with a portion of the ESF funds. Further, commenters provided general information on ways in which ESF funds could enable students to participate in distance learning activities, by highlighting that many students lack connectivity in homes and lack devices needed to participate in these activities. In addition, comments provided support for the use of CARES Act funds to support the development and execution of distance learning activities including support for educators and school leaders.

The agencies received a number of comments in support of ensuring that TCUs receive a share of the ESF funds, highlighting the need for funding to address a number of issues facing Native students attending these institutions as a result of COVID-19. Some commenters supported the need to support all Native youth, not just BIE K-12 funded schools, and some supported the use of funds to support displaced students. Further, a number of comments suggested that funds be used to support Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian-serving institutions (ANNHIs), as well as non-tribal institutions.

Lastly, the agencies received additional comments that were helpful to consider on the administration and oversight of the funds by both Departments.

Comments were taken into account in the final agreement governing these funds, signed between ED and BIE on June 12, 2020. The transcripts from the April 28 and April 30, 2020, listening sessions and the agreement between ED and BIE are available at:

<https://oese.ed.gov/offices/education-stabilization-fund/bureau-of-indian-education/>.