

**Jeffrey Mike, School Board President
PINON COMMUNITY SCHOOL, INC. (PCS)
Pinon, Arizona**

CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY

**Submitted to the United States Congress:
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Interior, Environment and Related Agencies**

Regarding

FY15 Budget Request for the Bureau of Indian Education, Department of the Interior

April 3, 2014

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Request Summary: My name is Jeffrey Mike, Board President of Pinon Community School (PCS) on the Navajo Reservation in Pinon, Arizona. I will present our testimony on behalf of the PCS School Board. I wish to note the following specific, critical areas of funding need for PCS which are not included in the Bureau of Indian Education FY15 (BIE) funding. The noted funding requests are essential: for our students to achieve academic success; to address the real educational issues facing our and other Native American communities; and, for us to operate our school safely and responsibly. These are areas which should be included in the BIE budget:

1. Fully fund PCS actual transportation costs given the terrible condition of the dirt roads servicing PCS. Funding needed is \$250,000.
2. Fund a pilot project to develop an alternative school for forgotten young people in our community not served by present educational programs. Funding needed is \$15 million.
3. Funding to convert our, uninhabitable housing to useful school buildings to further our educational mission. Funding needed is \$10 million.
4. Prohibit any reduction in the Weighted Student Unit (WSU).
5. Fully fund the Indian School Equalization Program account at \$431 million.
6. In addition to the specific requests above, provide \$109 million in facilities operations and \$76 million in facilities maintenance as recommended by the National Congress of American Indians in its Budget Requests.
7. Fully fund the Tribal Grant Support Costs at \$70 million.

Background: Our school has educated and housed generations of Navajo school children. We were one of the first contract schools and continue to operate a Kindergarten educational program and a dormitory program for students in grades 1-12 pursuant to a P.L. 100-297 Grant. The dormitory serves as a feeder to the Pinon Unified School District, part of the Arizona public school system. Our students may also enroll at Hopi High School, Chinle High

School, Jeehdeeza' Academy, Black Mesa Community School, and Cottonwood Day School. Pinon Community School also provides academic services to Kindergarten students. There are 55 students currently enrolled in our academic program, and 110 students are housed in campus dormitories. PCS is part of the Navajo Nation and is located in Pinon, Arizona. PCS is governed by an all-Navajo School Board. PCS has always and continues to endeavor to create a safe, comfortable homeliving environment for our students and the best possible academic environment for our Kindergarten students. Our mission is made difficult by the chronic underfunding of our programs, deficient funding for transportation and the absence of funding for other programs of which our community has dire need. However, we will not give up in our attempt to meet the educational needs of our community's young people. A fuller description of the seven issues described above, follows:

I. Fully Fund our Actual Transportation Needs. Almost all of the roads serving PCS are poorly maintained dirt roads that are frequently impassible, especially during the winter and spring months. Our buses must be 4-wheel drive and even so equipped regularly get stuck in the mud and mire. This creates an extremely arduous and dangerous scenario for our Kindergarten and other students. Some of our students are picked up at 5:30 in the morning and dropped off again at their homes at 5:00 in the evening. No other group of students in the United States is subjected to this kind of shameful treatment. Due to the underfunding of our actual needs, we cannot procure sufficient buses, towing vehicles or safety vehicles as needed for these conditions. Operating an educational and homeliving program under these conditions is sometimes harrowing and always frustrating. Of course, there is the larger problem of the pathetic infrastructure resulting from years of BIA roads department neglect and under-construction. While greater funding for BIA road development cannot be part of my present request, it is essential to a full resolution of this problem. We immediately need an additional \$250,000 to address our transportation need shortfall.

II. Funding for Pilot Alternative School. There are a large number of high school age young adults (the Forgotten Population) on the streets of the Pinon community because they have either dropped out; been expelled, suspended or otherwise rejected by other high schools in the geographic area; and, there are no alternatives for this sector of our population. This Forgotten Population appear to have a connection with the increasing problems in the Pinon community with gangs, drugs, drug trading, shootings, domestic violence, break-ins and other criminal and social disorders. This Forgotten Population appears related to a growing community dysfunction which is causing increasing general concern and fear. Many of the above problems arise from the community's failure to meet the needs of this Forgotten Population. There are no coordinated efforts of agencies or entities serving Pinon to effectively respond to this group. Mr. Joe Benally, Principal at Pinon Community School, has examined this issue and feels a holistic intervention program for this group of Forgotten Youth is needed. The intervention program would focus on the group's:

1. Social skills;
2. Mental health;
3. Physical health;
4. Spiritual health; and
5. Academic achievement.

The concept is to develop an Alternative School that would include online courses, teachers on site (at the Pinon Community School), counseling technicians available with the possibility of residential opportunities. The program would be focused on the needs of this group, the Forgotten Population, and would be based on Navajo language, culture, counseling, traditional boundaries and principles, with the following objectives:

1. Personal growth and development;
2. Acquisition of essential life skills;
3. Development of a sense of responsibility and accountability (K'é);
4. Acquisition of academic fundamentals necessary to sustain one's self and family;
5. Placement in meaningful jobs; and
6. Other skills and teachings that would enable these young people to have a real opportunity for a responsible life and a healthy family of their own; all of which would be based on a firm foundation of Navajo culture and tradition.

Pinon Community School may have facilities available that could be segregated for this Alternative School and provide the basic infrastructure for an Alternative School.

Funding is needed to initiate this pilot program. We are requesting a special funding of \$15 million to initiate this pilot program with the strong belief that we can develop a response to this nationwide problem. Development of our model could be an answer for a great many Native American communities facing this same problem.

III. Conversion of Uninhabitable Housing. There is crumbling housing surrounding the PCS campus. It cannot be inhabited and it cannot reasonably be repaired and remodeled; however, in conversations with agency personnel, the agency personnel have noted that the foundations could be salvaged and the buildings converted into useful school buildings which could house, among other things, the alternative school program noted above. It is estimated that renovation of this former housing would require approximately \$10 million and could not only remove a safety hazard and an eye sore, but also provide the needed infrastructure for the above-described alternative school and other PCS programs.

IV. Prohibit Reduction in Weighted Student Unit. We have been informed that there will be an arbitrary reduction in the Weighted Student Unit (WSU) in the next funding cycle. Any reduction in our already deficient funding for Native American education would have disastrous and tragic consequences. The United States Trust responsibility to educate Native American children should not be mere lip service. The schools, which are supposed to be fully funded through the BIE, are being choked out of existence. There can be no reduction in the WSU.

V. Fully fund ISEP. The FY15 budget request proposes only a \$2.1 million increase in ISEP formula funds, which is still \$5 million less than what the ISEP received in FY 2013—this is a critical program for us and we must make up the ground we have lost in recent years. The proposed funding level is only \$386.6 million, but the National Congress of American Indians has recognized this program needs \$431 million in funding to meet schools' needs. The ISEP funds we currently receive are already pressed to offset non-academic costs

under the School Operations accounts which are seriously underfunded (i.e., student transportation, maintenance, administrative functions). Please restore funds to ISEP at the level of \$431 million.

VI. Fund Facilities Maintenance and Facilities Operations. Facilities Maintenance funds are intended to provide for the preventative, routine, and unscheduled maintenance for all school buildings, equipment, utility systems, and ground structures. Current funding levels fall far short of funding these needed activities. Our staff performs heroically in trying to maintain a safe, clean, physical environment, but it is impossible under the current funding limitations. Funding for facilities maintenance in the amount of \$76 million is essential to keep our aging facilities in a habitable condition. We have a similar issue with our facilities operations funding. It has been chronically underfunded at approximately 50% of need. These costs, electricity, fuel, heating, communications, garbage collection, water, sewer are essential, fixed needs. It is unconscionable to expect our programs to exist on 50% of the need of these essential expenses. We request funding for facilities operations in the reasonable amount of \$109 million.

VII. Full Funding for Administrative Costs. Tribal Grant Support Costs (TGSC), formerly known as Administrative Costs Grants, are funds provided to tribally-operated schools to cover the administrative or indirect costs associated with the operation of a school. These costs include payroll, accounting, insurance, background checks, and other legal, reporting and record-keeping requirements, including the preparation of required annual audits. Currently, 126 of the 183 BIE funded schools are operated by tribes or tribal school boards, with another three BIE-operated schools considering converting to grant status in FY15.

Again, this need has been chronically underfunded at approximately 64% of need. No other business is expected to operate on 64% of its need.

We urge that Congress fix the inequity between TGSC and CSC funding by fully funding TGSC at \$73 million for the indirect cost requirements of current tribally-controlled schools, and provide \$2 million in start-up funds for newly converting schools.

Conclusion

In the Native American Education Improvement Act of 2001, this Congress stated that PCS and other BIE schools were the “sole responsibility” of the federal government and that the federal government would provide schools of the “highest quality.” These high-sounding phrases are shamefully hollow and not supported by action. We request the above action and bring an end to hollow promises.

Respectfully submitted,
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