

March 25, 2013

Testimony of Ms. Suzanne Acuna
School Board Member
Blackwater Community School
Coolidge, Arizona

Good Morning. My name is Suzanne Acuna. I am a school board member of the Blackwater Community School located on the Gila River Indian Community. Thank you for allowing me to testify at this important hearing on the Department of the Interior's budget submission for Indian education.

I first want to address those parts of the Indian Affairs budget request that we fully support and then discuss those with which we have questions and concerns.

First, we fully support the Bureau's request for school construction to complete the Education Facilities Replacement Construction priorities list published in the Federal Register on March 24, 2004 as well as the Bureau's Replacement Facility Construction request for \$11,935,000. Blackwater is one of 42 schools in poor condition that requires replacement. Our school was constructed in 1939 for no more than one hundred students. Due to increased enrollment we now have more than 70% of our students attending school in portable classrooms. We also have a portable kitchen\cafeteria because the old food service area was too small for our student population. In 2008 the Bureau of Indian Education conducted a space analysis to determine if our school was undersized. They determined our school needed more than 13,000 additional square feet of space and also required a multi-purpose facility. Since the 2008 space analysis was conducted our enrollment has increased by 60% and our need has increased to more than 25,000 square feet. We are still waiting for the new multi-purpose facility as well as new classrooms and other education space. We also support the request to increase Facilities Improvement and Repair and recommend it be increased due to the need of more than \$377 million in the current backlog. As long as there aren't sufficient resources to reduce deferred maintenance the condition of the schools will continue to deteriorate. We also recommend the minor improvement and repair account be increased beyond the \$25 million. This account addresses critical items such as HVAC systems, roofs, and electrical needs. Our school currently needs roof replacement on three buildings that will cost more than \$50,000. Older buildings such as those at most schools in poor condition require constant repair. We recommend the minor improvement and repair account be increased by \$5 million dollars.

In the Bureau of Indian Education budget we support the request for Tribal Grant Support Costs that will fully fund the administrative support costs for tribes. For too long tribes and schools have operated without sufficient costs to meet the

requirements to administer their programs. This has too often resulted in audit findings that could have been prevented if schools received adequate resources to administer their program. We urge Congress to provide the amount requested.

We strongly support the increase in Education IT. Since schools were connected fifteen years ago as a presidential initiative, Access Native America, BIE schools have not been provided adequate support to improve connectivity to the Internet nor provided funding to train staff or procure up to date hardware and software. This funding is critical especially now given the new requirement to test students on line.

We support the request to increase Facilities Operations and Maintenance by \$10 million dollars. While we realize budgets overall in the government are constrained even if Congress increases these two accounts it is not sufficient. If a school does not have sufficient resources to make repairs or to pay utilities, the funds must come from another account that too often means ISEP, transportation or other direct school operations accounts. These accounts are all linked and schools must use them as one to operate their schools. Due to the significant shortfall in these two accounts we recommend they be increased over the next three years by \$10 million dollars each year.

We note there isn't an increase in the Indian School Equalization account. This account forms the foundation for school operations. Over the past four years this account actually decreased by five million dollars and if Congress appropriates funding at the BIE requested amount, will result in less than a \$700K increase over the past five years. While inflation is low there are increased costs to schools to pay for salaries to recruit and maintain high quality staff which is especially critical to rural isolated schools; increased costs for new materials and training to implement the Common Core curriculum; and in our case, costs to provide for increased enrollment that due to the rolling average used by the BIE, hurts schools that have spikes in enrollment. If schools are to implement the No Child Left Behind requirements it is critical to have sufficient resources to do so. At the same time the BIE has requested significant increases for the Education Program Enhancement account.

From reading the budget justification for this account it is difficult to determine how the funding will be used. It contains a laundry list of activities without clear goals or measures. This fund so far seems to have been used more as a BIE slush fund as few schools have received any benefit, while at the same time too many schools are not making Adequate Yearly Progress. More than 65% of BIE schools are failing according to the BIE's GPRA report and now this agency wants to turn over these schools to tribes with inadequate funding. If schools are to be successful more resources need to be directed to improve schools. As an example this year schools were contacted in March to apply for Education Program Enhancement funds to provide professional development to their staff. The school year is almost over and students are already taking standardized tests. It is too late to make a difference in student learning this school year. No wonder schools are failing when the BIE manages these funds in such an irresponsible manner. The BIE has not had a clear

strategic plan for the past four years to support student learning and now that they have failed, have decided to turn over schools to tribes. At the same time the Bureau wants to use millions of dollars to reorganize its bureaucracy and has requested an increase of \$2.5 million dollars in Education Program Management. These funds if focused appropriately could increase student achievement and have a positive impact on native children's lives. We request Congress move the Education Program Enhancement and Education Program Adjustment funds to ISEP. This would result in a \$27 million dollar increase to ISEP and provide an opportunity for schools to conduct meaningful professional development, attract high quality staff, and improve achievement scores. The BIE has forgotten their mission is to provide a high quality education for native children and instead has focused on establishing a large bureaucracy and as history has demonstrated, will have little impact on student learning.

For the past twenty-five years the BIE has implemented high quality early childhood\family literacy program-the Family and Child Education program (FACE). FACE is a dual generation program that provides adult education programs as well as high quality early education experiences for three and four year old children and their parents, usually a mother, to assure strong educational outcomes and upward economic mobility. The program also includes home visiting and an intensive parent engagement component. FACE focuses on children and parents because the latest research shows that early childhood education alone is not sufficient to assure children's education success-that a mother's education and economic status is critical to a child's success in school and later through life.

It is the only BIE program that has been evaluated over the past twenty-five years **by the BIE itself** and has a record to demonstrate its effectiveness. According to the Bureau of Indian Education funded independent evaluator, Research and Training Associates, children who attend FACE preschool enter below the national percentile rank, but leave on a level playing field with children nationally, and children who attend FACE have high levels of kindergarten readiness due to the program's direct, significant, and meaningful impacts on preschool attendance, books and literacy resources in the home, and increased literacy activity overall. Parents who attend FACE are more engaged than those who do not participate in FACE. Increased parent engagement still holds steady when children enter 3rd grade. The program also helps adults earn their GED and become employed. Over 300 parents became employed in 2013 as a result of attending FACE.

Each program was funded at \$250K twenty five years ago and today, the program receives \$289,000, and that funding level only started last year. The increase of 15% is not sufficient to maintain a high quality early childhood\family literacy program. As a comparison the federally funded Head Start program receives over \$9000 per child compared to FACE funding of \$3400 per child. If the Consumer Price Index were used to determine funding levels, each site would receive \$455,000 based on the last twenty years of CPI data.

While Congress appropriated funds for the FACE program requested by BIE, it has not allocated those appropriated funds. As a result BIE currently has a carryover of 7 million dollars in that account. Now the BIE wants to start another early childhood

program with that funding. While we support early childhood programs in all communities we request the funds Congress appropriated for FACE be allocated appropriately, to the FACE programs. Flat funding for 25 years endangers the quality and effectiveness of this high quality program. The BIE last year conducted a cursory evaluation of the FACE program. They only evaluated two programs in close proximity to Albuquerque and tried to extrapolate those results to the entire program. We believe if a review of the program is to be reliable BIE needs to conduct a comprehensive review, publish their results, and hold consultation sessions throughout the country with tribes and tribally controlled schools on their results. Without doing this, the BIE's review will not be viewed as valid. In summary, we request Congress require the BIE to use Congressionally appropriated funds for the purpose for which they were requested and appropriated-to fund the FACE program adequately. If the BIE wants to start new early childhood programs they should request a separate appropriation for that purpose. By doing this, each FACE site would immediately receive \$350,000. This would help FACE maintain its high quality program.

Thank you for allowing me to provide testimony at this hearing.