



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF INDIAN EDUCATION
Washington, D.C. 20240

April 9, 2020

Dear School Leaders,

The U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) is actively involved in supporting the federal response to COVID-19 and continues to collaborate with federal agencies including the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services, Education and Agriculture, as well as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

As you work with your Public Health Officials (PHO) and in coordination with tribal, local and state officials, the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) wants to ensure your local needs are met as the COVID-19 situation evolves. This is particularly true as states and tribes make the local determination to extend their school closure periods or close their schools for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year.

BIE supports decisions that are based on local conditions and in coordination with local PHOs, tribal communities, and your BIE chain of command and BIE School Operations Division. Please continue to follow your tribal, local and state leaders in their decisions to extend temporary school site closures or close school sites for the remainder of the school year, as applicable. Extended learning opportunities will continue to be offered in Bureau Operated Schools although the physical sites may be closed. As you know, Bureau-funded Tribally Controlled Schools have the flexibility to close under their own auspices. Schools may continue to provide lunches based on their local determination and needs of the community. Bureau Operated School-level staff will continue to use the March 18 Employee Guidance Memorandum – COVID-19 Telework Status and the March 31 Guidance on the Use of Weather and Safety Leave, and Telework until subsequent guidance is provided by BIE Human Resources and/or DOI.

Additionally, on March 27, the Department of Education approved BIE's request to waive statewide assessment, accountability, and reporting requirements in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) for the 2019-2020 school year due to widespread closures related to COVID-19. This waiver of statewide assessment, accountability, and reporting requirements extends to all BIE-funded schools for the 2019-2020 school year. As a result, tribal governing bodies and school boards will not need to seek individual waivers of the BIE's assessments and accountability system under Section 8204 of the ESEA for requirements applicable to this school year. The waiver also ensures BIE-funded schools will not have to provide assessments this school year. BIE will continue to provide guidance to its schools regarding the BIE ESEA waiver and additional flexibilities as they become available.

Please know there is no higher priority than protecting the safety of our students, employees and communities. For Indian Affairs COVID-19 information as well as access to BIE-specific information including BIE's academic waiver authority, please refer to:
<https://www.bia.gov/coronavirus>

Once again, we continue to monitor this situation closely in coordination with our national, state, and local partners and stakeholders. For inquiries or concerns, please utilize your BIE chain of command for field support and contact crisisalert@bie.edu if you need direct support from BIE Central Office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tony L. Dearman", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Tony L. Dearman
Director