

**FIELD HEARING – INDIAN EDUCATION**  
**AUGUST 6, 2010**

On behalf of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe; and most important, the youth of Standing Rock, thank you for your interest and concern. Our students are often the “invisible minority.” This is evidenced in the numerous reports on Indian Education citing our lowest academic achievement rates, lowest graduation rates, lowest attendance rates, high drop-out rates, and lack of student and school safety.

The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe spans across the North and South Dakota borders. We have nine schools that serve our students. These schools are Tribal Grant, Public, and Private. Our students are very transient and will often transfer several times, not only within a school year, but throughout the duration of their education. Ninety percent (90%) of our students qualify for free and reduced lunch. We are plagued with numerous social problems that significantly impact all aspects of our students’ lives.

Our Tribe has been working closely, not only with our Tribal Grant schools, but all our schools to promote and facilitate academic excellence and assist our schools in addressing their many challenges. On behalf of our students and schools we offer the following recommendations:

- **DIRECT FUNDING TO TRIBES FOR SCHOOLS SERVING OUR STUDENTS**

Provide Tribes, through their Tribal Education Departments, the same access to federal funds and education planning resources as State Education Agencies. The funding stream should have provisions for a ‘set aside’ for Tribes. Often times, the funds allocated to states for populations that are poverty based or low performing get “re-shuffled” and redistributed thus only a fraction of the funding that is needed or is deserved actually makes it way to our reservation schools. Politics and big schools win over legislatures and state budgetary decisions and tribes lose out.

Last May when ARRA funds were distributed to the schools in North Dakota, the State elected not to utilize the Title I funding formula. As a result, not only our schools, but all schools with a high Native American student population received only a fraction of the funding. The Standing Rock Community School funding was reduced by \$930,439! (See Attachment One.)

- **INSTRUCTION OF NATIVE LANGUAGES & CULTURE**

Our Tribe and our schools have acknowledged the necessity of including our native language and culture as an integral part of the school curriculum. Not only will the instruction enhance our students’ self-concept, but the instruction is a vehicle to improve academic achievement. Schools that make culture and language a priority have proven success. With the stringent requirements in the current system in place,

culture and language programs are the programs and content areas that are being cut out of our students' curriculum while these are the proven direct link to success in our students.

Although, we have acknowledged the critical necessity to provide instruction of our native language and culture, our Tribe and our schools do not have the resources to fully implement language and culture programs. Funding is necessary for teachers' salaries, curriculum development, curriculum, and materials.

- **STUDENT AND SCHOOL SAFETY**

The risk factors for our students are many. With our social problems and high crime rate, our students are many times challenged with a constant threat to their safety and well-being. The Youth Risk Behavior Surveys that are administered by our States and the Bureau of Indian Education indicate the many at-risk behaviors that our students are associated or involved with. Our suicide rate is three times greater than the national average. Although the statistics are alarming, our Tribe and our schools can only offer band aid approaches to begin to address our many needs. Schools need resources for prevention/intervention programs, school resource officers, counselors, and/or social workers.

Two Tribal Grant Schools on our Reservation – Little Eagle Day School and Rock Creek Grant School are in dire need of funding for school construction and major repair and improvements. The Rock Creek Grant School was originally built in 1912. Both schools have numerous safety deficiencies. Security measures common to schools across America – security fencing, central alarm and intercom systems, classroom doors equipped with interior locks, and window coverings to increase student safety are non-existent.

- **TRIBAL DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION**

The federal government must re-affirm and acknowledge Tribal Departments of Education through policy and funding. Public Law 95-561 included provisions for Tribal Departments of Education; however, funding was never made available to Tribes. The merits of the Tribal Departments of Education in student success and academic excellence are numerous. Not only can we assist with government to government relations with state and local education agencies, but we can directly assist schools with school improvement and accountability. We can also assist with the development of academic standards, curriculum, assessments, staff development and other local education initiatives.

Many Tribes, including Standing Rock, have Tribal Departments of Education; however, the tribes do not have funding to sustain the departments. Funding is necessary for staff and capacity building.

In conclusion, our Tribe is and will continue to work with our schools to facilitate student success and academic excellence. Our challenges are many. We ask to have the capacity and resources necessary to offer programs that are meaningful and truly gauge our students' capabilities, potentials and competency levels. There is nothing wrong with our students - it is the system that has failed and continues to fail our students. With adequate resources and funding, our Tribe and schools can ensure student success and academic excellence which will significantly impact our graduation rate, drop-out rate, and enhance our students' self-concept and provide them with hope and desire for a bright future. *In full recognition of tribal sovereignty and in keeping with our treaties, we ask that you work with us so our children will be visible and that they **will** have all the opportunities and privileges afforded all other students.*