



NATIONAL INDIAN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

September 16, 2025

Scott Kupor
Director
U.S. Office of Personnel Management
1900 E Street NW
Washington, DC 20415

RE: Hiring Exemption for Indian Education Employees

Dear Director Kupor,

On behalf of the National Indian Education Association and the students, educators, schools, and Tribal Nations we represent, I write to urge the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to provide an office-wide exemption to the federal hiring freeze for the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE).

As you are likely aware, BIE schools and the staff which support them are a unique part of the federal system as one of only two federally operated K-12 education systems and represent the *only* two federally operated institutions of higher education. BIE schools rely entirely on federal personnel policies to function, and while many of these policies are directed at bureaucrats, for the BIE, school employees are caught in the middle. This frustration is threatening the operations of many BIE schools and severely restricting the agency's ability to fulfill its critical mission of providing quality education to Native students nationwide.

Since January 20, 2025, the BIE has experienced significant staff losses without the ability to replenish its workforce:

- The agency has lost 49 employees, including 18 staff who enlisted in the Deferred Resignation Program (DRP), representing an 8.8% reduction in its Title 5 workforce. Title 5 employees include both employees within the BIE administration as well as Haskell Indian Nations University and Southwest Indian Polytechnic Institute.
- The BIE has lost 132 Title 25 personnel, while only 12 new hires have been approved. This constitutes a 5.1% reduction among those directly serving students in the 55 BIE-operated schools. Title 25 employees are those who work directly in BIE K-12 institutions.

Across the country, school turnover is a growing problem, and teacher retention in rural communities is even worse. For the BIE, the ongoing hiring freeze on federal employees has

made maintaining staffing levels almost impossible. The freeze has created staffing gaps that disrupt essential services, hinder recruitment of critical educators and administrators, and undermine BIE's federally mandated trust responsibility to Native communities.

NIEA appreciates OPM and the White House's continued recognition of the unique status of Tribal Nations and the schools that serve them. We strongly appreciate the exemption the BIE received to the second round of DRP within the Department of the Interior (DOI) in acknowledgement of that uniqueness. We also appreciate the individual exemptions that OPM has granted to DOI leadership on behalf of the BIE. However, the process of individual exemptions is slower than is needed to combat the ever-growing teacher crisis in BIE schools. **We believe that an exemption for the BIE would best serve to reduce the administrative burden of applying for individual exemptions for every educator and staff member and most importantly, would ensure we can find quality candidates to fill these critical roles as quickly as possible.**

As the school year is already underway, we hope to swiftly solve this problem. We thank you for your consideration and for your commitment to our Nation's children.



Jason Dropik

Executive Director
National Indian Education

CC:

Doug Burgum
Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington DC 20240