



COMMITTEE STATEMENT

**Opening Statement of Rep. Burgess Owens (R-UT), Republican Leader
Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education:
“Examining the Policies and Priorities of the Bureau of Indian Education”
May 24, 2022**

(As prepared for delivery)

“BIE has long been plagued by problems and has been on the Government Accountability Office (GAO) high-risk status list since 2017. The report issued 65 recommendations for improving BIE operations and performance, but as of December 2020, 22 of those recommendations remained open.

“The schools funded by BIE frequently fail to provide students with an environment that keeps them safe and healthy. For example, in December 2014, the Minneapolis Star Tribune ran a four-part series on BIE schools focused on the dilapidated state of BIE school buildings and argued that decrepit conditions are common throughout the BIE system and neglected by the federal government. And a 2015 Politico report called BIE schools ‘The Worst Schools in America,’ citing one school on the Navajo reservation that had cracks running down the walls, leaky pipes in the floors, and asbestos in the basement.

“Additionally, while these schools spend more per-pupil than non-BIE public schools, student performance is consistently lower than that of traditional public school students, including that of other Native Americans. The rate of graduation for BIE students is 53 percent, which is far below the national average of all Native Americans, which is 69 percent, and is even worse compared to the national average for all students of 81 percent. It is clear these schools aren’t giving students the education they deserve.

“I know BIE has undertaken multiple efforts to reform and reorganize to better support students, but I also know those reforms seem to have been unsuccessful so far. I look forward to hearing more from our witness about steps BIE is taking to finally address GAO’s recommendations but also steps BIE is taking to address the far more important problem, which is way too few students graduating with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed.”