

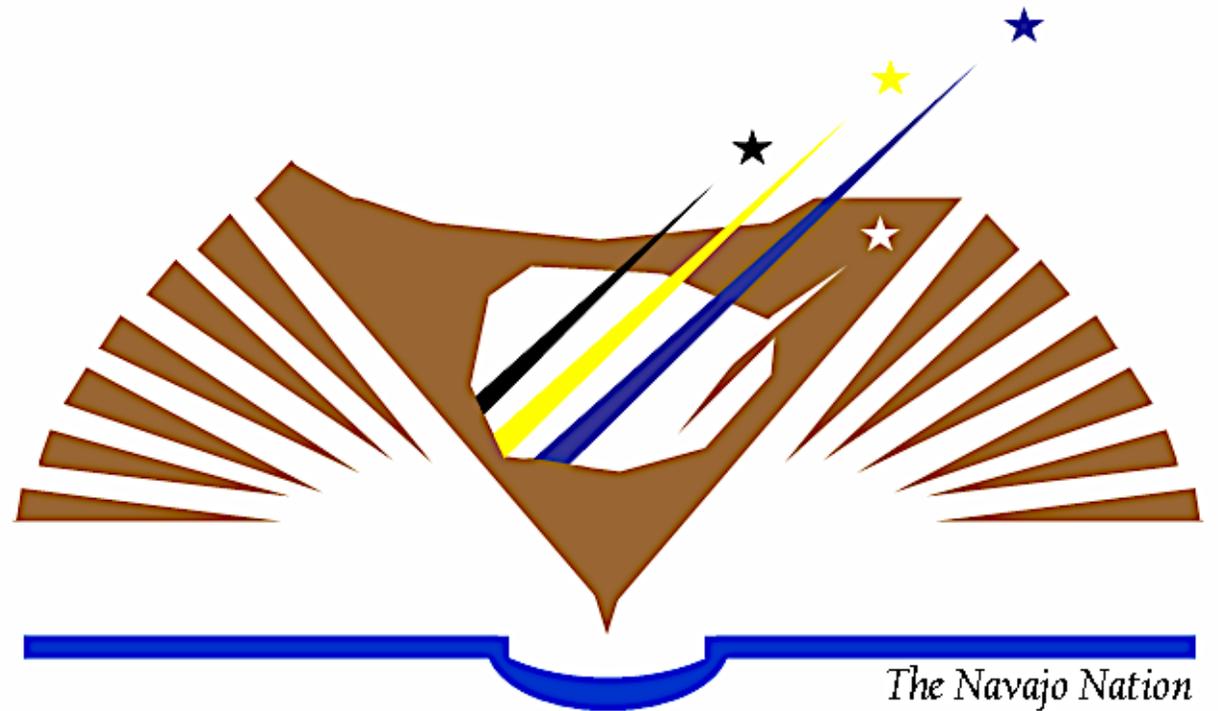
Addressing the Yazzie/Martinez Case: DODE's Position

Patricia Gonnig, Acting Superintendent of
Schools

Navajo Nation Department of Diné
Education (DODE)

DODE Mission & Vision:

- Promote and foster lifelong learning for the Navajo People, and to protect the cultural integrity and sovereignty of the Navajo Nation.



DODE Demographics, I

- DODE primarily oversees its tribally controlled grant/contract schools but works collaboratively in consultation with all LEAs (public, BIE, charter, parochial, private, etc.).
- In 2020-2021, DODE served 75,414 students attending all schools located on and near the Navajo Nation (public, BIE, charter, parochial, private, tribally controlled etc.).
- In the New Mexico portion of the Navajo Nation, there are two public school districts with 24 schools and two separate charter schools on the Navajo Nation with an enrollment of 5,904 and 74 students, respectively.

DODE Demographics, II

- For New Mexico public schools near the NN, there are 27,550 (SY 2020-21) students and most enroll a significant number of Navajo students:



SY 2020-21 Instruction during COVID-19



On September 3, 2020, the Navajo Nation Board of Education passed Resolution NNBESE-664-2020, which directed all schools located on the Navajo Nation to provide virtual or online learning options only, without face-to-face instruction, until the Navajo Nation deemed it safe to return to face-to-face instruction.



For SY 20-21, Majority of schools serving Navajo students were closed to in-person instruction and deferred to hybrid instruction with part in-person learning.



Since the Covid-19 pandemic closed schools, PED has not provided technical support or training for at-risk students' parents/caregivers to help their students use their devices to meet academic expectations due to online learning.

The Digital Divide, I

Action(s):

- DODE received 28 Verizon Cradlepoints from PED, which were used at employee housing for student use.
- Wi-Fi hotspots are an excellent resource for students and families, but for some Navajo families...
- NMPED donated 2,517 Google Chromebooks, which were distributed primarily to our NM schools. Nearly all students received 1:1 devices
- DODE also distributed 700 T-Mobile Wi-Fi hotspots to our NM schools.

Concern(s):

- However, the Verizon Cradlepoint contract ended in April 2021. When service was discontinued, approximately 196 Navajo students and families who depend on this service lost Wi-Fi connection.
- They are temporary solutions to the lack of internet infrastructure., service providers and affordable internet services that impede Navajo students' access to stable and high-speed internet.
- Intermittent service or no service hindered the use and purpose of these devices, especially for rural families and those in adverse geographical conditions, such as canyons.
- However, there remains a large emphasis on service and connectivity as many families live in isolated conditions.

DODE continues to encourage all its schools to seek grant and other funding source opportunities to assist in their efforts to bring better connectivity to students, especially in rural areas

The Digital Divide, II

Action(s):

- NN is a recipient of a GEER grant from NMPED for \$620,314
- DODE has been seeking funding opportunities to support all students.
- As schools begin to open, there are more variables worth exploring.
- DODE conducted a survey on the technology needs of Navajo students' shortly after schools were closed. They survey is separate from PED's Hotspot Mapping Tool project.
- Virtual learning option is important for many families, as seen through various OERS surveys, however,

Concern(s):

- Funds have not been expended yet to assist over 100 students in the eastern region of the Navajo Nation through mobile busses and Mi-Fi connections. Grant awards system need to be more efficient.
- All opportunities aiding the Nation need to address middle- and last-mile projects. These initiatives will make a tremendous impact to connecting schools.
- The need for better tele-health services to support tracking COVID cases, mental health issues, and other socioeconomic factors. DODE is not equipped with a data dashboard to support this need.
- The Hotspot Mapping Tool does not accurately reflect the areas within Navajo Nation without Wi-Fi coverage nor does it accurately account for all Navajo students without internet due to their lack of physical addresses. Collaboration is needed to accurately depict the needs.
- Approximately 728 Navajo students attending New Mexico public schools across the Navajo Nation need financial assistance to pay for monthly-internet subscriptions.

Latest...

- On July 6, 2021, Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez signed Resolution CJN-36-21, recently passed by the 24th Navajo Nation Council on June 25, which advises schools across the Navajo Nation to reopen for in-person instruction once they submit an approved safety plan to DODE. Schools operating on the Navajo Nation are required to complete their own comprehensive and detailed COVID-19 policies and procedures to regulate safe practices to prepare administrators, staff, and students to return to the premises for in-person instruction.



The reopening plans must:

- comply with Navajo Nation Board of Education and Navajo Nation Council resolutions
- Navajo Nation PHEOs and executive orders.
- Accompanying attestation form submitted prior to reopening for in-person services.

Immediate Challenges

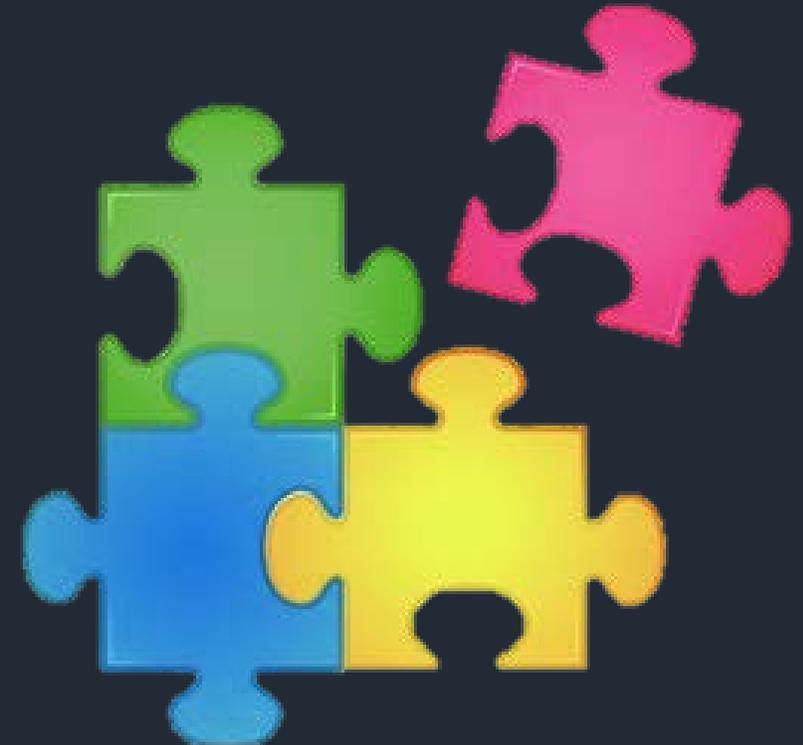
- There is a pressing need for IT infrastructure for rural Navajo communities and families who are extremely isolated due to their remote geographical locations.
- CradlePoint subscriptions expired in April 2021 and have not been renewed.
- NN issued PHEOs during the height of the pandemic in SY 2020-21, partnerships with SEAs, such as NMPED and their LEAs, become critical. The NN initiated tribal consultations with the NMPED LEAs to plea with them to follow the NN issued PHEOs including NN legislation for online only learning. NMPED deferred tribal consultations to NMPED LEAs. They did not facilitate.
- As schools prepare for a safe reopening of schools for the impending school year 2021-2022, as of July 30, 2021, NMPED LEAs have not submitted their reopening plans, readiness assessment and attestation forms to Department of Diné Education.

Education Needs and Goals, I

- Meaningful consultation between NMPED and Navajo Nation is essential to improved outcomes for Navajo students when addressing the inequities as highlighted in the Yazzie/Martinez case. Most immediately, the priorities are:
 - Online distance learning and remote education require access to a reliable network connection. Subsidies are temporary. There is a need to invest in infrastructure.
 - As schools reopen, collaboration is needed to identify student support services such as social/emotional wellness and data sharing to monitor student skills as part of LEAs response to student learning loss.
 - Community-based resources including libraries and extended school year and family wrap-around services.

Education Needs and Goals, II

- Tribal consultation with the Navajo Nation to develop a linguistically and culturally responsive set of remedies as identified in the Tribal Remedy Framework.
- State adoption of Navajo Language & Culture standards and curriculum and assessments.
- Teacher professional development to teach these standards.
- Recurring funding to DODE to develop and implement, monitor and analyze the proficiency assessments and data to make recommendations.
- Investment in tribal libraries and early childhood centers.
- Tuition waivers for Navajo students to create a pipeline of qualified educators, administrators for a culturally responsive education system.



Questions/Comments?

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THE NAVAJO NATION

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