



DEPARTMENT OF DINÉ EDUCATION THE NAVAJO NATION

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TO: New Mexico Legislative Education Study Committee

Greetings from the Navajo Nation. We appreciate the invitation to meet with you today to talk about our education initiatives. I understand the Committee would like to know about education initiatives we are working on at the present time as well challenges that we face. Steps toward Navajo Education Reform is imperative to the future of the Navajo Nation. As we take control of our education system, we will be able to provide the assistance to schools. We have relied on the federal government too long since the Treaty of 1868 and now we realize that we have to stand up for our rights and use our sovereignty to make changes to improve education for our Dine' people. This major step will set up the foundation to build a stronger Diné Education system to increase Diné accountability efforts towards improved student learning.

The Navajo Sovereignty in Education Act of 2005 was passed by the Navajo Nation Council is all about education reform. We stand firm in turning around failing schools through this act that outlined the Nation's goal to establish our own standards, our own accountability system and to have full oversight over all educational institutions within our Nation. The Act also calls for establishing a state like department of education. A lot of research has gone into this effort during the last 14 years and the move toward building a State Education Agency is becoming for feasible. The integration of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act will reinforce the Navajo Nation's operational oversight of its own school system focused on these goals:

- An improved graduation rate and increased attendance rate across Navajo Nation's highly mobile Navajo student population.
- An improved system of tracking highly effective teachers and principals to assist in improving student performance.
- A unification of curriculum to avoid uninterrupted student learning and a student tracking system to gauge, detect, and resolve causes of student dropout.
- A culturally responsive curriculum to increase student's fluency and awareness of Navajo language, culture, government, history, and character development in all subject areas.

The Navajo Nation received initial approval from the U. S. Department of Education and Department of Interior on our Dine' School Accountability Plan on September 27, 2016. Our plan was approved in 3 phased approach. The first phase was to write our plan to meet all federal requirements as prescribed Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The second phase was to include the Dine Content standards and assessment as an additional academic indicator. The third phase is fully implementing the accountability plan. We have work diligently on our plan to ensure that it meets all federal requirements with the aim to improve the quality of education for our Navajo students who attend Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) funded schools on the Navajo Nation. We have 66 BIE funded schools on the Navajo Nation with an enrollment of 15,000 students.

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Dr. Tommy Lewis, Superintendent of Schools

The Navajo Nation is eager to develop a system of accountability that is consistent with "Every Student Success Act" (ESSA). The Navajo Nation intension is to build an accountability system that preserves our culture, language, history, government, and character development while providing challenging academic standards in math, language arts, and science for our Navajo students.

Last year we were granted an extension of DSAP Phase I to the end of the school year 2018, which is the end of May 2019. Our extension of DSAP Phase 1 was because we did not receive the criterion reference (PARCC) data from the Bureau of Indian Education until March 2018. Access to the data is the fundamental basis for the Navajo Nation to address the school improvement initiatives as prescribed in ESEA Title 1 Part A and B. As such, the implementation of DSAP Phase 1 was delayed until school year 2018-2019. These include school improvement initiatives, setting the parameters for the DSAP academic indicators, building a student level database, and setting the data security requirements for the Navajo Education Information System. We need assistance in building broadband capacity.

Since BIE has given the CRT data to the Navajo Nation, we have been diligently doing our statistical analysis on the data. All schools need improvement. The Navajo Nation stands ready to assist these schools. Lastly, DODE is requesting technical assistance for the BIE and U.S. Department of Education, start building tribal capacity to assume data that supports our interventions developed by the Navajo Nation.


We, as a people, have not delegated our authority or waved our sovereignty in education. We stand ready to deliver a unique quality education to our Diné children with the full credence, honor, and dignity embedded in the vision of Chief Manuelito for the Diné people. Every Student Succeeds Act supports the position to give tribes control over the education of their children. As such, we maintain our position for full implementation of DSAP

We received support letters from the New Mexico Governor Honorable Michell Lujan Grisham and Utah Governor Honorable Gary Herbert. DSAP details a plan for an accountability system that addresses the needs of the Navajo students. We strongly believe in the quality of our professional Diné people to fully implement an education system outlined in DSAP. We strongly believe that our children require a strong Diné foundation coupled with professional skills to survive in modern day society.

We need New Mexico State Administrative Funding to Assist Tribal Education Departments in establishing an "Office of Public School Compliance" to help manage the additional responsibilities of managing, monitoring and providing technical assistance to public schools. ESSA was a very powerful move to bring tribes to the table. Unfortunately, tribes do not have the resources to meet with LEAs and we need that added support. We need the NMPED to secure funding to assist tribes in building this capacity. We need to hire at least four to five FTEs to establish a new office under the Department of Diné Education. If NMPED can fulfill this opportunity, then we can truly fulfill the obligation of the Yazzie/Martinez lawsuit. This will be a true demonstration of NMPED's commitment to our Navajo children.

NMPED must support Navajo Nation's move to State Education Agency: Navajo Nation is proceeding to empower all our schools by not imposing multi-state demands upon our LEAs. Our LEAs have suffered enough with minimal funding, strict standards, low retention of teachers, high student dropout. Our nation is in need of pushing forward our Dine School Accountability Plan (DSAP). We need NMPED to provide resources to help stand up our DODE to be a functioning SEA. The State Tribal Education Partnership (STEP) grant was very minimal in piloting State like functions.

Sincerely,


Dr. Tommy Lewis,
Superintendent of Schools