



Navajo Nation Council – Office of the Speaker

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December 27, 2011

NEWS RELEASE:

Health, Education & Human Services receives two reports on the Central Consolidated School District

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – The Health, Education, & Human Services Committee, during their regular meeting last week, received two reports on the Central Consolidated School District (CCSD) regarding the situation that has resulted from changes in the school district.

The first report was provided by Leonard Anthony (former Council Delegate of Shiprock) and the second was provided on behalf of the CCSD by School Board President Matthew Tso, Superintendent Donald Levinski, and Pandora Mike who is the Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Staff Development.

Both reports cited incidents dating as far back as 1982, when the CCSD tried to split, reportedly, due to high racial tensions between Navajos and non-Navajos. The situation was ultimately settled and the district remained as one.

Most recently, some members of the CCSD, who refer to themselves as Children First, are seeking to split the district along the Navajo Nation reservation borderline. The incident at the impetus of this renewed effort is the May 17, 2011 CCSD School Board vote (4-1) to merge the Kirtland Business Office with the Shiprock Administration Office.

Children First grievances also include the Navajo Preference in Employment Act (NNPEA) and the efforts to include more Navajo language, culture, and history into the curriculum for Navajo students.

“The move was about saving money,” Tso commented. “It was a proactive step at the direction and encouragement of Governor Susana Martinez and Secretary Hanna Skandera to cut school administration costs and put more money back in the classroom.”

The parties that were affected by the merging of offices viewed the decision as racially motivated, according to Tso, which led to the small but vocal group of individuals advocating for splitting the district.

The situation has now escalated to the extent that Secretary Skandera has issued a letter to Superintendent Levinski, which served to notify him that certain decision he has made were not within his authority and that he faced a possible suspension that would be effective thirty (30) days after the letter was written.

In a letter to Governor Martinez, Eddie Mike (Chapter President of Tse'Alnaozt'í'í) supported Levinski, "The people of the Navajo Nation and their leaders call upon Governor Susan Martinez and Secretary of Public Education Skandera to end their attack on Superintendent Levinski, and to end their support to the segregationist group 'Children First.'"

Despite the obstacles the CCSD is faced with, the current administration is still making changes to improve the district's academic performance and administrative responsibilities.

Currently, Council Delegate Russell Begaye (Shiprock) in partnership with CCSD is spearheading efforts to renew five leases within the CCSD.

"The previous administration was not diligent about making sure the leases were up-to-date," Begaye reported to the Committee. "Five leases are currently going through the Signature Authorization Sheet (SAS) review process—two are at the Division of Natural Resources (DNR), one is with Legislative Counsel, and two more are at Department of Justice."

Mike, the Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Staff Development at CCSD, reported that the district's curriculum is now aligned with the New Mexico Common Core State Standards; there are now teacher trainings in calibrating resources to standards, examining student work, and making learning meaningful; there have been twenty-six (26) teachers hired for classrooms; and there are now weekly visits to school sites by an administrative team.

The presenters of each report both highly encouraged the Committee to intervene on the matter in order to support the Navajo students in the district who make up a majority of the student population.

Anthony in his report stated, "This situation is not new and I would like to have the Health, Education, & Human Services Committee to step in to protect the interest of the Indian Children"

Anthony's recommendations included an intervention from the Navajo Nation Department of Diné Education. He also recommended that an inquiry be made to the United States Commission on Civil Rights.

The CCSD representatives asked for assistance on dealing with the State's intervention so that they could continue to make improvements to the school district.

Council Delegates Joshua Lavar Butler (Tuba City) and Dwight Witherspoon (Black Mesa, Forest Lake, Hardrock, Pinon, Whippoorwill) both recommended that the reports and supporting documents be forwarded to Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission.

“I do support you on having this Committee intervene,” Council Delegate Butler commented. “Since this is an ongoing issue and it involves more than just splitting of the district, it needs to be referred to the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission.”

Council Delegate Butler also gave the directive to research previous Committee legislative actions so that such positions can be reaffirmed or so the Committee can take a new position on the CCSD issues.

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