



Navajo Nation Department of Diné Education

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Maori Delegation Visits the Navajo Nation Department of Diné Education

Window Rock, AZ—On September 20, 2011, the Navajo Nation Department of Diné Education welcomed a Maori delegation from the Waikato tribe of New Zealand. The delegation, all educators, came to the Navajo Nation to observe how the Navajo Nation is preserving and revitalizing language and culture in the classroom.

Presentations were given from the Department of Diné Education on the development of the Diné Content Standards. The development of the Diné Cultural Standards is a part of the initiative of the Department of Diné



Vice President Rex Lee Jim and Health, Education and Human Service Chairman Jonathan Hale pose for a picture with the New Zealand Maori delegation the Navajo Nation Museum on September 20, 2011.

Education becoming a State Education Agency. As a State Education Agency, the Department of Diné Education would assume functions comparable to State Departments of Education, where the Navajo Nation would have regulatory control over standards, curriculum development, instruction, teacher certification, professional development, assessment tools in all areas of academics, and certification of professional personnel seeking endorsement in Navajo language and culture.

In exchange, the Maori delegation presented on their education strategies in which tribal knowledge was the most effective way for children to learn. “An educated tribe is a healthy tribe. We want to be successful in our own country, not only in our country but the world”, said Hemi Rau, member of the Maori delegation and Chairman of Board of Trustees for Te Kura Kaupapa Maori o Bernard Fergusson. “Our mission statement for the school ‘Mahia te mahi hei painga mo te iwi – Do the work for the

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betterment of the people' is what we want our children to learn from an early age. This helped us change our attitude toward preservation of language. Parental involvement is a large factor in a child learning language. Parents must understand this is what is going on at this school and these are the expectations.”

Arizona State University contacted the Department of Diné Education for the one day visit and requested a visit to Tsehootsooí Diné Bi Olta in Ft. Defiance, Arizona. Upon arrival, the Maori delegation was welcomed by students who sang an honor song for them.



Students at Tsehootsooí Diné Bi Olta sing a song for the Maori Delegation from New Zealand on September 20, 2011.

During the visit to Tsehootsooí Diné Bi Olta, the Maori delegation was given a tour of the school and visited classrooms in which students sang songs for the visitors. Questions were asked and struggles were shared on how each group is preserving the Navajo and Maori languages.

“The struggles are the same, between Navajo and Maori, to teach the language and culture. They are gaining momentum and doing what they can to preserve their language”, said Timothy Benally, Navajo Nation Assistant Superintendent of Schools.

Prior to all meetings and visits, Vice President Rex Lee Jim welcomed the Maori group with a traditional blessing. Health, Education and Human Services Chairman, Jonathan Hale (Oaksprings, St. Michaels), Navajo Nation Board of Education Vice President Dolly C. Begay, Navajo Nation Board of Education members Rebecca Benally, Dr. Bernadette Todacheene and Tim Bitsilly were present to welcome visitors from New Zealand.

The Waikato tribe of New Zealand is one of 77 tribal groups in New Zealand and is under the authority of the Seventh king of the monarch.

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