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## **President Shelly Attends Public Meeting on School Closures**



**NAVAJO, N.M.-**  
Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly attended a three- hour public meeting last Wednesday at Navajo Middle School gymnasium in regards to the closure of three middle schools on the Navajo Nation.

More than 100 people listened and learned more about the closure of the schools by Gallup McKinley

County Schools.

“I just heard about this situation last week Friday. We lost communication between them (the school board) and us...there should have been tribal consultation.” President Shelly stated.

According to a May 11 press release from Gallup McKinley County School, Superintendent Ray Arsenault stated “Because of continuing decreases in overall budget, the Gallup McKinley County School District has reviews many option to operate more efficiently...future phases of this plan will include the consolidation and/or closures of schools.”

However, in an email that was distributed at the public meeting from Larry Behrens, Public Information Officer with New Mexico Public Education Department, Behrens stated “Although final budget numbers have not been finalized, Gallup is expected to

receive about \$2.6 million more in SEG (State funding formula dollars) in school year 2013 with a small increase over current year.”

However, in an updated press release, school officials state they are “combining schools” and don’t state they are closing schools.

“We are not going to turn our backs on this. Lets key in on this, why it is being said. What is the justification to closing three schools on the Navajo Nation. We need to be sensible and address the problem. Parents, teachers, even the students were not consulted on the reorganization or closures of the schools. That should happen first.” President Shelly stated.

Liberty Davis, Navajo Pine High School sophomore, spoke about the consolidations of the school and the impact it would make to her three younger siblings, all of who are would be in middle school.

“If the middle school students get pushed up to the high school, they are rushing the middle school students to become young adults fast. They will be bullied at the school by the high schoolers. They would be moving to fast. They should mature at their own pace. I don’t want that for my young sister.” Davis said.

In an email from Gallup McKinley School legal counsel Roman Vigil “The closing of schools in Navajo, Tohatchi and Crownpoint is for the benefit of reorganization. The students will be consolidated into two schools – one with K-6 and one with 7-12. Because there is a very low enrollment, the district does not see the necessity of maintaining a third separate school in the communities.”

In President Shelly’s closing remarks, he said if student enrollment is forcing schools to close, then we need to find out why.

“We put our trust in our school board members. We trust them with our most precious resource, our children. We need good communication not lost communication.” President Shelly stated in his closing remarks.

Navajo Nation Council Delegates Jonathan Hale, Leonard Tsosie and Roscoe Smith were present along with New Mexico State Representative Sandra Jeff and McKinley County Commissioner Genevieve Jackson.

President Shelly encouraged community residents to be present at the next Gallup McKinley County School District Board meeting next Monday, May 29 at 6pm.

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