



Joint Press Release

Navajo Nation Office
of the President and the Vice President
and Navajo Nation Office of the Speaker



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 3, 2019

Jared Touchin (OPVP) 928-871-6497
Carl Slater (OOS) 928-871-7160

Navajo Nation demands fair distribution of Impact Aid funding for Navajo students

WINDOW ROCK – Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez, Vice President Myron Lizer, and the 24th Navajo Nation Council stand united in demanding fair distribution of Impact Aid funding for Navajo students in the state of New Mexico.

“The Navajo Nation strongly supports needed changes in the allocation of Impact Aid funding for the Gallup McKinley County, Cibola and Central Consolidated school districts, as these districts provide significant educational services to Navajo children,” said President Nez. “Impact Aid dollars should be provided to these schools to adequately fund school operation, maintenance, culturally appropriate learning, Native language programs, and educational resources.”

President Nez and Speaker Seth Damon recognize that with the New Mexico State Legislature currently in session, it is imperative that the Navajo Nation have a seat at the table and that Navajo students receive a fair share of educational funding as the state determines a new distribution formula for Impact Aid.

The Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President and the 24th Navajo Nation Council recognize that the recent decision regarding public education, Yazzie/Martinez vs. State of New Mexico, is a landmark ruling for the future of education in the state of New Mexico with far reaching impacts for Navajo students in public school systems. On Wednesday, President Nez and Speaker Damon issued a joint letter to New Mexico House and Senate members outlining the Navajo Nation’s position.

“At-risk students, including Native American students, deserve an adequate education that prepares them to succeed in life, and the New Mexico Public Education Department must implement the necessary changes to ensure that all students receive such an education,” stated Speaker Damon.

On Wednesday, the Council’s Naabik’íyáti’ Committee approved Legislation No. 0008-19 sponsored by Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty, which supports S.B. 172, which would exclude impact aid from the definition of “federal revenue” for the purpose of determining the State Equalization Guarantee Distribution.

The state bill would remove the 75-percent credit taken for impact aid funding. Federal properties, such as Indian trust and treaty lands, are exempt from local taxes, which has disadvantaged Native American

students residing on or near tribal lands, while “property rich” urban communities receive the bulk of Impact Aid funding. The bill seeks to equalize the distribution of resources to schools throughout New Mexico.

Generally, a state receiving Impact Aid is not allowed to reduce state funding based upon the district’s receipt of Impact Aid. However, New Mexico’s school funding formula, the State Equalization Guarantee distribution payments, allows the state to reduce the amount it gives to local districts receiving the federal assistance subject to approval from the U.S. Secretary of Education.

“This also has a huge impact in terms of school and school transportation and how we provide services to our children. It is only right that the Council and President Jonathan Nez take a stand to recapture those dollars,” said Delegate Crotty, who requested the joint letter to be attached to the legislation to establish the position of the Navajo Nation in regard to S.B. 172.

Vice President Lizer stated that at-risk Navajo students deserve an adequate education that prepares them to succeed in life, and the New Mexico Public Education Department must implement the necessary changes to ensure that all students receive such an education.

“Looking to the Yazzie/Martinez case, the current funding formula ultimately results in inadequate funding for federally-connected students, including students living on Indian lands, violating their fundamental right to education,” said Vice President Lizer.

#