



## The Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President

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## Navajo leaders prioritize Navajo culture and language in Navajo schools



**PHOTO:** Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez attends the Department of Diné Education two-day joint meeting on Feb. 17, 2020 at Twin Arrows Navajo Casino Resort in Leupp, Ariz.

**LEUPP, Ariz.** – Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez was joined by members of the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee of the 24th Navajo Nation Council, Navajo Nation Board of Education, Department of Diné Education (DODE) to discuss education issues and concerns within the Navajo Nation during a two-day joint meeting on Sunday and Monday at Twin Arrows Navajo Casino Resort. Community members, educators, and school board members were also in attendance at the meeting.

The Department of Diné Education provided an overview of the Diné School Accountability Plan, Navajo Nation Head Start, and the proposed transfer of school oversight from the Bureau of

Indian Education (BIE) to DODE, and others. The New Mexico Indian Education Council reported on New Mexico education issues, including the review of legislative priorities for full funding for Impact Aid for schools.

During his opening remarks, President Nez said, "Our priorities should reflect the well-being and development of our Navajo children. This meeting allows all parties to come together to discuss issues and concerns and bring forth solutions and recommendations. As leaders, we need to be a part of the decision-making process that impacts our students and children."

There are approximately 167 public schools, 91 Bureau of Indian Affairs schools, 26 contract schools, and 41 private and mission schools within the Navajo Nation. According to the U.S. News Report, "Native youth have the lowest high school graduation rate of students across all schools. Nationally, the American Indian/Alaskan Native high school graduation rate is 69-percent, far below the national average of 81-percent."

"Not only are the Nation's schools experiencing low percentages of graduation rates, but Navajo students are also having difficulty transitioning into college. Recently, the Office of Navajo Nation Scholarship and Financial Assistance has spent approximately \$5 million on developmental education courses. In other words, a large portion of financial aid is spent on getting students ready for college – we must do better," said President Nez.

"Most importantly, our Navajo culture, our Navajo Way of Life teachings, and language should be a priority in all our schools across the Nation. Our culture and language possess many teachings and disciplines that can never be learned or grasped from textbooks. Our sacred teachings are invaluable, and it will lead our future with self-resilience, strength, and growth," added President Nez.

During the meeting, the Department of Diné Education presented proposals and initiatives of change within DODE to Navajo leadership, including the P.L. 93-638 (Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act) transfer of the BIE to DODE, which proposes to transfer BIE Navajo district offices funding, administrative authority, and management to DODE.

"This is only one option and recommendation from the Department of Diné Education, however, as leaders, educators, parents, and community members, we can create many other options to help our Navajo schools and students. We must keep our students and children first when we discuss policy changes. When our students succeed, it creates a stronger foundation and a better and brighter future for all of us," said President Nez.

On behalf of the Office of the President and Vice President, we thank the members of HEHSC, DODE, Navajo Nation Board of Education, New Mexico Indian Education Council, and visiting educators and school board members for attending the joint meeting to address matters related to the Navajo education system.

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