

Contact: Karen Francis, Public Information Officer
Navajo Nation Council Office of the Speaker
(928) 871-7160
karenfrancis@navajo.org
www.navajonationcouncil.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: Thursday, February 23, 2006

Navajo Nation Council delegate Leonard Chee , who is chairman of the Education Committee, released the following statement:

The Arizona State Legislature last Wednesday took the first of many steps to pass a bill to establish an Office of Indian Education in the State Department of Education.

HB 2768, "Indian Education Act", similar to the New Mexico law, will enable the 22 tribes to collaborate with the State in addressing the troubling academic status of Native American children educated in Arizona.

With the onset of many requirements, such as the AIMS (Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards) Test and other federal testing requirements for Arizona's children, as well as separate requirements for School districts, the Navajo Nation, through the Education Committee of the Navajo Nation Council, has taken a proactive role in addressing the educational needs of Native American children in the state of Arizona.

Last summer, our tribal leaders, the Navajo Nation Council, passed a historic piece of legislation, "The Navajo Sovereignty in Education Act of 2005", which established its first ever Department of Diné Education. Included in this Act, the tribe authorized the State Departments of Education that operate on the Navajo Nation to form cooperative agreements to address student achievement.

In the State of Arizona, after weeks of negotiations with Superintendent Tom Horne's office, the Navajo Nation Education Committee was successful in convincing the Arizona State Legislature Education Committee that the bill is a step in the right direction.

Data from the state departments of education tells us that the majority of public schools failing state education standards are those schools located on Indian lands. As it is to federal and state leaders, this issue is a concern and a challenge for the Navajo Nation. Representative Mark Anderson, who chairs the Education Committee, has a sincere interest in advancing the achievement of public schools and students on Navajo. He and his co-sponsors, including Senator Albert Hale, recognize the challenges facing Indian students in Arizona.

The proposed bill, as amended, will enable the Superintendent's Office to hire

appropriate personnel, establish an Indian education advisory council, which includes parents, as well as establish two satellite offices, one in northern Arizona and another in Southern Arizona.

The bill, which will be heard next before the Appropriations Committee will give the State Department of Education \$475,000 for the purposes of implementing the Office of Indian Education.

Navajo Nation President Dr. Joe Shirley Jr. supports this bill. With the support of former State Representative Sylvia Laughter as well, this bill will benefit hundreds of our Navajo students and schools by requiring the State of Arizona to establish a unique Indian Education Office. The passage of this bill will not only help the Navajo Nation but all Arizona tribes in addressing the academic achievement of our children. It is imperative that the Navajo Nation and all Arizona Indian tribes demand cooperation from the State to form partnerships in promoting educational programs that are culturally relevant for Indian students.

The Education Committee of the Navajo Nation Council requests that supporting letters are sent to the Arizona legislature to make this vision a reality. Please address letters to your senator and representatives at the following address:

Capitol Complex
1700 West Washington
Phoenix, AZ 85007-2890

###