FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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HEHSC receives report regarding a study to improve the reading scores of bilingual Navajo elementary students

WINDOW ROCK – The Health, Education, and Human Services Committee received a report on Wednesday from Gregory Allen, a graduate student and elementary school teacher in Kirtland, N.M. Allen described the relationship between reading scores and musical tone tests amongst Navajo elementary school students in Kirtland, Newcomb, and Shiprock.

“When a student is reading, their voice is the same tone as when they are singing,” Allen said. “Students whose first language is Navajo, often have lower reading scores than students whose first language is English, but these scores do not properly reflect their intelligence.”

Allen explained that his study focused on the correlation between Navajo student’s reading scores and their response to three musical tone tests: steady-beat, pitch-matching, and rhythmic-echoing, the pitch-making test most closely correlated with the student’s reading levels.

“I have found that if a student comes from a Navajo speaking home and they sing a song in the Navajo language, it is much easier for them compared to singing a song that is written in English,” said Allen.

Allen plans to utilize his research to develop curriculum and testing materials that he hopes will improve the reading scores of students who come from a Navajo speaking home.

HEHSC vice chair Council Delegate Charles Damon II (Bááháálí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Lichíí’, Rock Springs, Tsayatoh) encouraged Allen to transform his research into Navajo music education materials that encompass Navajo music to benefit schools across the Navajo Nation.

“The Navajo language is complex as there are only four syllables,” said Delegate Damon. “I am impressed that you are incorporating the Navajo language into music education.”

HEHSC chair Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) expressed enthusiasm for the study and encouraged Allen to develop customized academic assessments that truly reflect the intelligence of Navajo children.

“This is the first time I have seen a study involving music on the Navajo Nation,” said Hale. “This study has my full support and I believe it will improve our student’s reading levels.”

HEHSC voted 3-0 to accept the report.

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