



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**Health, Education, and Human Services Committee discusses  
grant proposal with the New Mexico Secretary of Higher Education**

**TOHAJIILEE, N.M.** – On Wednesday, the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee met at the Tohajiilee Chapter to discuss a report on the Native American College Readiness Initiative from New Mexico Cabinet Secretary Dr. Jose Z. Garcia.

“The State of New Mexico is working to secure a grant that would help fund higher education, ultimately making the New Mexico work force globally competitive,” said Garcia. “The grant would allow for selected schools to identify and improve student weaknesses at the sixth grade level, while also making them [students] college ready.”

According to Garcia’s report, the initiative would also withhold ten percent of New Mexico state college budgets, if the college is successful in increasing the number of graduated students, they would be rewarded accordingly. If the college is unsuccessful in graduating the average number of students, they will experience a budget cut.

Garcia emphasized that New Mexico believes the support from tribal governments and families is a necessary component in securing the grant funding.

In response to the report, HEHSC chair Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) requested for Garcia to provide a copy of the grant proposal to the HEHSC and explained that any kind of support would need to go through the legislative process.

“The Department of Diné Education has been successful in obtaining the federal S.T.E.P. grant, and the committee has witnessed its success,” said Delegate Hale. “I appreciate your effort to include the Nation in this initiative. It is not often that we are included in anything concerning public schools.”

Garcia responded by mentioning that he believes Nation building is an essential part of improving higher education, and this can be taught to New Mexico’s Native American students.

“We have a similar program at Pinon Unified School District, and I have seen how successful it can be,” said HEHSC member Council Delegate Dwight Witherspoon (Black Mesa, Forest Lake, Hardrock, Pinon, Whippoorwill). “I truly believe that if you offer a Navajo student the opportunity to experience what it means to be a college student, they will make that vision a reality.”

Delegate Witherspoon further mentioned that the federal government could be much more innovative in assisting states fund higher education, by means of grants and student programs.

The HEHSC accepted the report with a vote of 4-0.

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