



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Health, Education, and Human Services Committee addresses concerns of possible closure of Middle College High School

WINDOW ROCK – On Tuesday, the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee received a report from Middle College High School, a charter school that is under the Gallup-McKinley County Schools and is located on the University of New Mexico – Gallup Campus. The update report provided the committee insight into concerns regarding the school’s possible closure by the school district.

The Middle College High School was established in 2002 and is one of New Mexico’s first early college high school programs, which allows high school students to simultaneously earn college credits while working towards their high school diplomas, states the report. It goes on to say that many students also attain an associate degree concurrently with their high school diploma, and prepares them to attend a four-year university or other college and vocational institutions.

HEHSC member Council Delegate Steven Begay (Coyote Canyon, Mexican Springs, Naschitti, Tohatchi, Bahast’á’a’) said the Middle College High School is seeking guidance from Navajo leadership regarding the possible closure of the school due to transportation and enrollment issues, and Gallup-McKinley County Schools proposal to open an academy and close the college high school.

Administrators from the college high school ultimately reached out to Navajo Nation leadership for guidance to deter the school closure because nearly 50-percent of the student population is Native American, and mostly Navajo students, said Delegate Begay. He added that the school is doing very well academically and enrollment is at capacity, and there is no reason for the school to be closed.

HEHSC member Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Beclabito, Cove, Gadi’í’áhi/To’Koi, Red Valley, Tooh Haltsooi, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Tsé ałnáoz’t’l’í) raised concerns regarding the transportation issues because the college high school and Gallup-McKinley County Schools do not provide transportation for students.

“Parents should have a school choice for their child. I am a parent, and I want to make sure that every Navajo child has the opportunity to attend a school that will maximize their potential.

Maybe it's not a four-year college, but maybe a technical college or an agricultural-based program, and we should be able to help them. I am not able to get my child on a waiting list if I wanted to because there is no transportation," said Delegate Crotty.

Dr. Robert Hunter, chief executive officer for Middle College High School, said the school is open to working with the school district to provide transportation for the students, however it could be challenging because the college high school operates on a college-like schedule in which classes can occur between 8 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

The school operates on an open enrollment system and the number of students attending the school is capped at 100, and several are placed on a waiting list. The college high school has increased its efforts to recruit more Native American students and performs academically higher than other high schools in Gallup, added Dr. Hunter.

HEHSC member Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta) expressed support for ensuring the college high school remains open due to its graduation rate of 92-percent and students going on to four-year universities and finishing their college degrees.

"The high school students are better prepared for university because of Middle College High School. How can we ensure that this body aids by drafting legislation in support to keep the middle college high school open? I know we met with the secretary of education before, and I think we can invite them to our committee and have a meeting with them. We are looking at all the data numbers and even though they have 100 students, the data compared to other high schools and their graduation rates is good. It shows that this school is successful," said Delegate Brown.

The committee provided additional recommendations to the Middle College High School such as reaching out to local Navajo chapters and Navajo parents to advocate for the school to remain open.

HEHSC members voted 5-0 to accept the report.

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