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Navajo President Shelly Applauds NM Decision to Keep Schools on Navajo Nation Open

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. - Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly said he pleased that New Mexico Public Education Secretary Designate Hanna Skandera disapproved Gallup McKinley's County School Board's plan to close three reservation schools.

"I am pleased with Sec. Skandera's decision. She has made a decision that will keep three of our middle schools open and allow our children to continue their education without worrying about being placed with older students. I applaud her recognition too that this issue wasn't properly brought to our people and government," President Shelly said.

In May, the school board passed a budget that would have closed middle schools in Navajo, Crownpoint and Tohatchi. Since then, President Shelly has met with education officials to prevent the closures.

Sec. Skandera sent a letter dated July 11 to GMCS Superintendent Ray Arsenault and Board President Mavis Price and wrote that the board's decision failed to provide educational benefits of the school closures and lacked community involvement.

In addition, Sec. Skandera wrote the school board didn't adhere to the spirit of the Indian Education Act by consulting with Navajo Nation regarding reorganization efforts.

"There is no documentation to support a conclusion that the local school board involved the Navajo Nation Department of Diné Education in the final decision," Sec. Skandera wrote.

"We hope this decision will open the door to communication with Gallup McKinley County School District. Our community members, parents and the Navajo Nation government need to be kept up to speed about changes that affect our children. Our children are our most precious resource and we must treat them as such," President Shelly said.