



The Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President

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Nez-Lizer urge all schools on the Navajo Nation to implement online learning for the current semester to reduce COVID-19 risks

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer are urging all schools on the Navajo Nation, including public, Bureau of Indian Affairs operated, tribally-controlled, private, parochial, and charter schools, to utilize online/virtual learning for the remainder of the current semester to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 among students, teachers, and other school employees. In July, the Nation's leaders urged schools to implement online/virtual learning and now they are urging schools to continue with the online format for the remainder of the current semester.

During a recent discussion with federal officials, BIE Acting Associate Deputy Director Charles Sherman assured President Nez that the BIE would respect the sovereignty of the Navajo Nation and proceed with online classes when BIE schools reopen. BIE schools are currently closed until Sept. 16, 2020. State educational departments and governors for the states of New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah have also acknowledged the Navajo Nation's inherent sovereign authority to impose online learning for schools within the Navajo Nation.

"The number one priority is the safety and health of all students, teachers, and administrators during the COVID-19 pandemic. We urge all schools to do their very best to provide all students with the resources needed to advance their education. We recognize that there are challenges including the lack of adequate telecommunications infrastructure to support online learning for all students and we are advocating to use CARES Act funds to help address that issue. The Navajo Nation is exercising our inherent sovereign authority to protect the health and well-being of our children, their families, and our communities," said President Nez.

In July, the Nez-Lizer Administration presented a proposal to use approximately \$94 million in CARES Act funds for telecommunications and broadband development. Through Resolution CJY-67-20, the Navajo Nation Council approved \$68 million in CARES Act funds for broadband development, which remains under consideration by the Nez-Lizer Administration.

In addition, the Navajo Nation Board of Education passed resolution NNBEAU-658-2020, approving and recommending that all Navajo Nation schools provide virtual or online options. The Department of Diné Education also conducted two surveys, one for parents and one for school principals, regarding options for the upcoming school year. According to the Department of Diné

Education, the results indicate that an overwhelming majority of parents support virtual/online learning for the safety of their children.

On Thursday, the Nez-Lizer Administration also introduced the “Navajo Nation Reopening Plan,” which will serve as a guide to safely and gradually reopen business on the Navajo Nation during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Plan includes safety-guidelines for Navajo Nation residents to follow through the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic, directs places of business to implement COVID-19 policies and procedures meeting certain standards, and provides a color-coded system for progressively reopening business on the Navajo Nation based on data-driven analysis and input from health experts.

“The Navajo Nation has had 48 consecutive days with less than 100 reported daily cases of COVID-19, and 13 consecutive days under 50 daily cases. We commend and thank our Navajo people for listening to our health care experts. Now that we are moving forward with a phased-in reopening plan that includes safety measures and guidelines, we have to remain diligent and proceed very carefully. If we see a spike in new cases, we will immediately re-evaluate the plan and proceed accordingly based on the data and recommendations of our health care experts,” said Vice President Lizer.

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