



The Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 31, 2020

Nez-Lizer put forth CARES Act funding proposal to support virtual learning to help protect students and teachers from COVID-19 exposure

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer presented a comprehensive proposal to use portions of the Navajo Nation’s CARES Act funds for student relief and to assist schools. The focus of the funds first, is to implement a virtual learning platform at schools, as opposed to in-person classroom instruction. A second focus of the funds, is to provide more safety measures for students, teachers, and all school employees due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The proposal was presented before the 24th Navajo Nation Council during a special council session held by tele-conference on Tuesday.

The proposed CARES Act funding amounts include the following:

- Over \$94 million for telecommunications and broadband development/implementation
- \$40 million for undergraduate college student relief
- \$5 million for graduate college student relief
- Over \$5 million for Navajo Head Start centers
- Nearly \$4 million for teacher development and student support
- Over \$3.7 million for technical needs for Department of Diné Education
- \$5 million for educational incentives under Department of Diné Education

“We continue to rely on the data and advice of our health care experts. The safety and health of our students, teachers, and other school employees is the top priority for the Nez-Lizer Administration. The number of COVID-19 cases here on the Navajo Nation is flattening, but based on the high number of COVID-19 cases in cities and other areas near and around the Navajo Nation there remains substantial risk for our citizens. Our Administration supports the reopening of schools through online/virtual learning, but we also realize that there are challenges with that approach including the lack of adequate telecommunications infrastructure to support online learning for all students. That’s why we are proposing to use \$90 million in CARES Act funds to help address that issue,” said President Nez.

The Department of Diné Education recently 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, preliminary results indicate that an overwhelming majority of parents support

virtual/online learning for the safety of their children – official results are being compiled. In addition, the Department of Diné Education has a work group in place that is working to secure laptops, wifi equipment, and other resources to help implement virtual learning. The work group has recently secured 2,500 laptops, in part due to a generous donation from the New Mexico Public Education Department and other organizations.

The Bureau of Indian Education notified President Nez that their 65 schools on the Navajo Nation will remain closed until at least Sept. 16, 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Here on the Navajo Nation, we’ve gone 35 straight days with less than 100 cases reported daily, but the cities and towns around the Navajo Nation are still reporting high numbers. We have several different types of school on the Navajo Nation including public, BIE operated, tribally-controlled, private, parochial, and charter schools that span three states. Each school has their local authority and governance, so this really has to be a collaborative effort among all school officials, teachers, parents. It will be challenging, but we have to do everything we can to protect our students, teachers, and many others so that our students can continue to advance their education. We strongly recommend that the Navajo Nation Board of Education pass a resolution supporting virtual/online learning for our students,” stated Vice President Lizer.

The Nez-Lizer Administration will continue to work with the Department of Diné Education to pursue and implement virtual/online learning for schools on the Navajo Nation. More updates will be provided during upcoming online town halls, radio messaging, and other correspondence.

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