

Navajo Nation to focus on Impact Aid funds

Written by Staff Reports

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SANTA FE, N.M. - Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Council Delegate Paul Begay met with New Mexico Indian Affairs Cabinet Secretary Lynn Trujillo and New Mexico on Public Education Department Deputy Secretary of Identity Equity and Transformation Kara Bobroff Aug. 29, at the New Mexico Indian Affairs Department in Santa Fe to discuss education issues such as impact aid, the Yazzie/Martinez vs. State of New Mexico decision, and House Bill 250.

The meeting included discussion on how to fairly allocate and align programs and policy funding with recently passed laws and ongoing initiatives to best benefit Native American students in the State of New Mexico.

“Today’s meeting is very critical to keeping the line of communication open as we move closer to the next New Mexico legislative session in which many of these issues will be considered. From our position, we greatly appreciate the opportunity to discuss these matters as we work through these important issues to develop a comprehensive position that is feasible and that ultimately benefits our Native American students in the classroom,” Nez said.

For the upcoming New Mexico legislative session scheduled to begin in January 2020, impact aid funding is expected to be a subject of great debate for tribes as it relates to the Yazzie/Martinez vs. State of New Mexico case, which led to a landmark ruling in 2018 for the future of education in the state with far reaching implications for Navajo students in public school systems.

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During its most recent session, the New Mexico State Legislature approved House Bill 250, the Native American Student Needs Assessment, which was then signed into law by New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham. The bill created new sections of the 2003 Indian Education Act that require historically defined Indian impacted school districts, including charter schools, to conduct an assessment to determine what services are needed to assist Native American students in graduating and becoming college or career- ready.

Following the assessment, the historically defined Indian impacted school districts and charter schools are required to meet with tribes to prioritize the needs of Native American students in closing the achievement gap by making the needs of Native American students a priority in the school district or charter school budget.

Additionally, these school districts and charter schools are required to develop and publish a framework for improving educational outcomes for Indian students, developed in collaboration with school employees, tribal leaders, Indian students and families, social service providers, and community and civic organizations. The framework is required to include programs, services, culturally relevant activities, and professional development to improve Indian education in the state.

Begay, who is a member of the Navajo Nation Council's Health, Education, and Human Services Committee, also spoke about the importance of developing solutions that are fair, equitable, and beneficial for schools and Navajo students.

Trujillo and Bobroff offered their support in continuing the dialogue with the Navajo Nation and other tribes in preparation for the upcoming session of the New Mexico State Legislature.

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