Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
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Proposal for Tohatchi school to use traditional name

The Gallup--McKinley County Schools Board of Education closed their regular meeting Oct. 28 by discussing whether to pursue a feasibility study and seek funding to construct new school buildings for Red Rock Elementary School and Tohatchi High School.

Mike Hyatt, GMCS superintendent, said the process of building a school is lengthy and the board gets involved when it is time to secure the vendors and oversee the master plans.

“We’re at a turning point with Red Rock and Tohatchi High School,” Hyatt said.

As part of a feasibility study, the district examines the current conditions of existing school buildings and evaluates how that current building might look as a new building or with new amenities.

“That process [opportunity] is coming on us quickly,” Hyatt said. “This would be building two schools at one time, potentially, which takes resources, time, and management.”

The study comes in the wake of finishing work on Thoreau Elementary School this year, Hyatt added. The study would take place by the end of February 2020. Hyatt said they would ideally start the design process by next spring.

“I think this is a necessary thing for this community and also for Gallup,” Hyatt said. “Red Rock Elementary is the last elementary school to be rebuilt in the county, and it needs to be rebuilt as soon as possible.”

Dist. 3 Board Member Priscilla Manuelito brought up an issue the board could address with building a new high school at Tohatchi, which is using the proper Navajo word for Tohatchi.

“I know the traditional name [Tohatchi] was one that bilagáanas [Caucasian people] couldn’t pronounce, so they couldn’t say Tohatchi in Navajo, which is Tó Haachi,” Manuelito said. “That is the proper name for Tohatchi.”

If the district gets a new school built at Tohatchi, Manuelito said she would like to use the proper name for the community.

“I think we owe that to the community of Tohatchi, that we also help our children revitalize their language and say it properly for our elders who named this community, years and years ago,” Manuelito said.

The feasibility study was approved by the board with a 3–0–0 vote.

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