

School board thanks legislators for support during 2020 session

Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
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The latest challenge with impact aid

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The battle for Impact Aid rears its head throughout the year for many rural New Mexico schools, including Gallup-McKinley County Schools.

The Second Session of the 54th New Mexico Legislature provided a prime opportunity for legislators to combat the effects of large amounts of aid being credited to the state by the federal government and handed out to larger, richer communities.

Senate Bill 198 a key bill pertaining to Impact Aid, awaits a decision in the Senate Education Committee. The GMCS Board of Education thanked local legislators for their efforts in fighting for Impact Aid during the board's March 9 meeting.

The legislators present at the meeting spoke about their experiences with Impact Aid, as well as what their plans are going forward.

Sen. Clemente Sanchez, D-Grants, one of two sponsors for SB 198, spoke about Impact Aid as it pertains to the state's economy, and how bills pertaining to Impact Aid could be line item vetos.

A line item veto allows a chief executive to reject particular provisions of a bill enacted by a legislature without vetoing the entire bill.

"We have to have a balanced budget, and right now we're not balanced based on what's happening in our local economy with oil [prices]," Sanchez said.

SB 198 protects the Impact Aid designated for smaller school districts, such as the Gallup-McKinley County School District, by preventing the state from re-distributing those funds elsewhere, such as in larger school districts, like Albuquerque.

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Sanchez said he thinks this move can be done, and that other legislators will support it until it is fulfilled.

“As long as I’m the legislature, I’m not going to give up,” Sanchez said. “Because it’s not right [for the state to take aid away].”

Rep. Eliseo Alcon, D-Milan, said he felt they had made strides in this ongoing effort during last year’s session.

“Last year was the first year we finally made some progress,” Alcon said. “Both our senators, all our representatives, we got together and said we’re going to do this.”

Alcon said the biggest thing that happened last year was when they all got to meet the Speaker of the House at his office in Santa Fe and told him about their situation.

“We are strong enough where we should make a difference for our children in our school district,” Alcon said.

The Speaker of the House listened to them, Alcon continued, and he began working on a revised impact aid formula the local districts could work with.

“That’s a lot more money than I ever brought home before in all the years I’ve been fighting out there,” Alcon said.

Rep. Wonda Johnson, D-Crownpoint, spoke about how a good education is the children’s birthright, and why she will continue to fight for Impact Aid.

“It is wrong [the aid is claimed] because our students deserve the best education,” Johnson

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said. “They are only young once, and they’re only going to experience high school and middle school once. It is our responsibility to provide them the best education possible.”

Reps. Patricia Lundstrom, D-Gallup, Harry Garcia, D-Grants, Alcon, and Johnson, along with Sens. George Muñoz, D-Gallup, and Sanchez were praised by the board and given commemorative plaques for their efforts.

By Cody Begaye
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