

Assessing tribal education progress in the pandemic

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Sun Correspondent
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GMCS is figuring it out

The pandemic proved to be a major obstacle as the Gallup McKinley County Schools performed its annual district-wide Tribal Education Status Report to document the progress of nearly 9,000 Native American students in the 13 schools located on the Navajo reservation in the GMCS Districts.

GMCS Assistant Superintendent of Student Services Pauletta White did her best with the annual Tribal Education Status Report for the 2020-2021 school year, which she presented Oct. 4 to the School Board. However, the report is missing student achievement data as well as attendance information.

Because of the pandemic, the state received an accountability waiver from the U. S. Department of Education, setting aside requirements that certain assessments be reported.

White told the *Sun* that the district is finding alternative ways to assess the students and gather data.

“In the district we’re looking at how can we monitor our students so we know that they are progressing, because there is no data from [the] prior year to say ‘yes, this student is improving from here to there’,” White said. “Since we don’t have that data we’re looking at our in-district data to say ‘ok, students are progressing.’”

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“[When] kids are here in school in person their attendance rates are a lot higher than when they were in ... the hybrid setting,” White said. “So they were missing a lot of school when they were in the setting from last year.”

The Tribal Education Status Report is broken into groups based on age and race. Elementary students had the highest percentage of attendance during the 2020-2021 school year at 89.02 percent, and those in middle school had the lowest percentage at 78.42 percent. Native Americans had an 81.93 attendance rate overall.

The report showed that 557 Native American students received their diplomas at the end of last year. The most recent graduation rate data is from the 2019-2020 school year. It shows that a little over 77 percent of Native American students graduated that year.

White stated that the district's main focus and takeaway from the report has been looking at graduation rates and attendance since the other data was incomplete.

“Right now we’re focusing on our graduation [rates], our attendance, [and] other areas,” White said. “For example, students will still graduate whether we have a remote setting or not.”

“So we’re looking at that data to see how many students did graduate and what are we doing for those who did not,” White explained.

White said the lack of data could be a challenge in documenting results in future years.

“Right now I really don’t know what type of data we’re going to be using in the future because we’re not assessing students like we were before,” she said.

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Nevertheless GMCS Superintendant Michael Hyatt took what data was presented seriously.

“[This] document shouldn’t be something that is just given to the state and placed on a shelf,” he said.” It should be used and shared and combined with other status reports to better improve areas of education in Tribal communities.”

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