

School Board addresses Navajo language revitalization

Written by By Chrissy Largo Sun Correspondent
Friday, 06 November 2015 04:52



No action taken on Chiapetti's future

Board members expanded their ideas and thoughts regarding the issues of low state testing scores from students, and their role in supporting the revitalization of native languages at the Gallup-McKinley County Schools Board of Education's regular meeting Nov.2.

The board's overall main initiative is to receive input from local communities and guidance from elders to help improve student performance.

"I think that it is clear in history that the institution that is most responsible for the loss of Native language and, perhaps Spanish, within our communities is the school systems, going back to the Treaty of 1868," District 5 board member Lynn Huenemann said.

Huenemann added that efforts from the Navajo Nation Council have recently put money towards supporting Navajo language revitalization, but he questions what institution is solely responsible for such a huge role.

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Board President Titus Nez agreed that there is an unlimited amount of needs throughout districts, not just language revitalization, due to the uniqueness and growing population within McKinley County.

“We hear from some of the parents that speak out that there are limited amount of classrooms at their schools in the rural area,” he said. “We need to open up and say, ‘how can we fix this and work together?’”

According to Huenemann, the majority of students that make up the student population in McKinley County school districts are Native American and that they test poorly on state standardized tests. He suggested that having an open dialogue with students, parents and staff will help bridge the communication gap that exists, which will help to address critical issues that are happening in the community.

“How can we do better?” he said. “On one hand, to where those scores that have been historically low in our district can be boosted. But, of course that is one kind of factor. We can look at ways that can strengthen that and at the same time be open to say that math and English are not the only measures of education in life. We have our native languages.”

He said that the board needs to find a way to talk openly about these issues with staff, community and parents and not be afraid of communicating with other people.

“I think we can do better on the scores, but I think that it is bigger than just those scores, I’m looking for a way to do something to really impact our district and change the pattern that has been there for a long time now,” Huenemann said.

Board Secretary Priscilla Manuelito praised Huenemann for bringing the issue of language revitalization to the forefront because she said when it deals with matters of student education and language, input from the communities is vital.

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“From where I stand from as a Native woman, that was something that was always done, was to regroup, as Mr. Nez said, in a hogan, where we discuss with our elders, our goals and our needs as a family,” she said. “If we continue to do that, I think this will work and to be strong for our children for our children’s sake. I want to continue talking about this and not just forgetting about it.”

It was recommended by District 1 Vice President Kevin Mitchell that future work sessions would be the best route to take to ensure that the language revitalization issue continues to be discussed.

Frank Chiapetti’s fate

Meanwhile, at the conclusion of the open meeting, board members met in closed executive session for several hours to discuss the investigation and fate of Superintendent Frank Chiapetti, who has been on administrative leave since Aug. 17.

The five-member board continues to remain silent about the investigation and upon returning from the closed executive session, there was no action to discuss.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:56 pm. Board member Kevin Mitchell said, “It will all be resolved on the twelfth [of November.]”

In the mean time, Special Education Director Carmen Moffett is also acting as interim superintendent.

A special board meeting is scheduled for Nov. 12, but no time or location has been announced as of press time.