

Historic Diné School Accountability Plan approved

Written by Staff Reports

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - On Sept. 28, U.S. Department of the Interior Secretary Sally Jewell and U.S. Department of Education Secretary John King finalized the historic Diné School Accountability Plan for 60 Bureau of Indian Education-funded schools on the Navajo Nation before Navajo Nation leadership including President Russell Begaye, Vice President Jonathan Nez, Navajo Nation Board of Education President Dr. Pauline M. Begay, and Department of Diné Education Superintendent Dr. Tommy Lewis Jr.

“We want a world class education system for our children and future generations,” Begaye said. “Our responsibility as a sovereign Nation is to challenge our young minds to reach their highest potential, as they are our future leaders. This plan is not a quick fix. It will take everyone from our parents, teachers, administrators and legislators working together to achieve our goal of a world class education for our Navajo youth.”

“The Department of Diné Education has been working to ensure that any Navajo child regardless of where they reside on the reservation will have equal standards and will enjoy a strong curriculum that highlights Diné language, history and culture,” Lewis Jr. said. “These standards will be central in educating all of our children across the Navajo Nation. Navajo leaders, past and present, have worked tirelessly in this effort. We are honored to see this come to fruition and congratulate everyone involved in bringing this important matter to a reality for our children.”

Currently, the 60 BIE-funded schools on the Navajo Nation use the state accountability system in which each school is located.

“One of the major challenges with using three different state-based accountability plans is that

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the student performance data is not easily comparable across three state systems,” Begay said. “The academic standards and assessments among the three states vary, which makes it difficult for the Navajo Nation, parents and communities to assess student performance. This plan aims to solve the central issue of accountability.”

Lewis added: “Many of our families and their children move from different parts of the reservation to another. Children entering a new school should be able to pick up immediately where they left off. With high hopes for our children come high expectations in their educational achievements.”

In 2005, the Department of Diné Education initiated the development of the Navajo Accountability Workbook under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, formerly known as the No Child Left Behind, to use an alternative definition of Adequate Yearly Progress.

In December 2015, President Obama signed into law the new Every Student Succeeds Act that replaced NCLB. In preparation for the implementation of ESSA in school year 2017-2018, the Navajo Nation chose to seek approval for phase one of the Diné School Accountability Plan for school years 2015-2016 and 2016-2017.

The Navajo Nation will continue to work with the Departments of Education and Interior to develop and implement the future phases of the plan to be consistent with ESSA.