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Health, Education, and Human Services Committee supports U.S. Senate bill “The Every Child Achieves Act of 2015”

MONUMENT VALLEY, UTAH – The Health, Education, and Human Services Committee last Wednesday, approved Legislation No. 0209-15, which seeks support of U.S. Senate Bill 1177: The Every Child Achieves Act of 2015.

The Every Child Achieves Act would require state and local education agencies to consult directly with Indian tribes concerning educational needs, increases grant opportunities for Bureau of Indian Education funded schools, expand and include indigenous culture and language in the classroom, and further promote tribal self-determination in education.

According to Office of Diné Science, Math, and Technology education administrator, Dr. Calvin White, he explained that the Every Child Achieves Act would allow tribes to maintain authority to create and use tribally developed accountability assessments to measure the progress and success of K-12 Indian students.

HEHSC member Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta) expressed his support of the legislation to the committee and said he was pleased that the Every Child Achieves Act would allow for tribes to begin incorporating more indigenous culture into their curriculum at a much higher ratio than previous years.

“The Navajo language is very important. Our children do well in western education, but they tend to struggle with learning their own culture and language,” said Delegate Brown. “I once heard we need to put ‘Navajo Nation into young Navajo minds first.’”

Delegate Brown added that he is interested to see how the Navajo Nation Department of Diné Education would develop and implement cultural and Navajo language curriculum into Navajo schools if S.B. 1177 is passed at the congressional level. He said other indigenous cultures have begun creating and funding their own schools whose main goal is teaching culture and language.

Dr. White responded that the Navajo Nation should consider developing their own schools, an alternative to state public schools, and create an educational program that would teach Navajo culture and language up to sixth-grade, and then learn western education from seventh-grade until they graduate from high school.

HEHSC chair and legislation sponsor Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) informed committee members that the Every Child Achieves Act is a reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act, which expired in 2007, and is currently being amended.

“This reauthorization is moving us in a direction that would support provisions of what state education should be, and how the Navajo Nation can further define it to better fit our Navajo students’ needs,” said Delegate Hale. “Maintaining control over Navajo curriculum is key to furthering Navajo education at all levels.”

HEHSC members voted 5-0 to approve Legislation No. 0209-15, which now moves forward to the Naabik’iyáti’ Committee for final consideration.

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