



The 24TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL
Office of the Speaker

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

HEHSC convenes to discuss apportionment for Navajo school boards



PHOTO: HEHSC Chairman Daniel Tso said amendments to the apportionment plan are necessary to ensure that the needs of students and communities are being met.

WINDOW ROCK – Nov. 22, 2019 – The Health, Education and Human Services Committee Nov. 19 work session covered school board apportionment, tribal scholarship endowment plan, and the higher education fund.

School board members from across the Navajo Nation filled the Law and Order Committee office space, including representatives from Diné College and Navajo Technical University. Legislation No. HEHSCO-25-19 was passed Oct. 16 to extend the approval date for the 2020-2024 Navajo Nation School Board Apportionment Policy.

The committee called for a work session with the Department of Diné Education, Office of Diné Accountability and Compliance, and Navajo Election Administration to iron out issues with the apportionment policy.

Data driven options

Dr. Timothy Benally, assistant superintendent of schools, said the research study was conducted in 2016. The study tallied the number of school board members, number of school employees, number of

students, and their chapter affiliation.

ODAC program manager Darrick Franklin said three school board apportionment plans were available: maintaining the status quo for school board membership, reducing the school boards by one member, or combining the school boards at 10 sites on the Navajo Nation. Another component of option three was combining school boards at five sites on the Navajo Nation.

Murray Lee, interim executive director of Navajo Elections Administration said they have grave concerns about the apportionment plan, especially since the initiative was supposed to begin in early Nov. “The Navajo Board of Elections Supervisors discussed this and there is a supporting resolution that’s in the works,” said Lee.

Delegate Edison J. Wauneka (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) was concerned about the work session because of the timeline involved. “I thought we were going to decide on what plans we’re going to use. We did a legislation back in May and I thought we would see some proposed plans today but it looks like we’re going to be behind,” said Wauneka.

www.navajonationcouncil.org

MEDIA CONTACTS: Rick Abasta, Communications Director, (928) 530-8197
Byron C. Shorty, Sr. Public Information Officer, (928) 287-2085, nnlb.communications@gmail.com



PHOTO: Darrick Franklin of the ODAC said the five options of the 2020-2024 Navajo Nation School Board Apportionment Plan have been in development since 2016.

Status quo

Several school board members stood up to speak on behalf of their schools about the apportionment plan. Martha Garcia, speaking on behalf of Ramah Navajo School Board, said they stand behind the resolution that keeps things the same. “We need to do this right. We need to go to the communities, ask questions and have public hearings,” Garcia said in Navajo.

Louise James Nelson of Wide Ruins Community School Board said it was too late to consider changes to reapportionment. Other school board members representing schools in Pinon, Black Mesa, and Crownpoint also stood in support of maintaining the status quo.

HEHSC concerns

In 2016, there was a population of 14,060 students on the Navajo Nation. That number has decreased since then, as many students transferred to urban schools. There are currently 64 school boards with 275 school board members who receive \$250 in stipends for regular meetings and \$150 for special meetings.

Franklin said, “With funding decreasing, the majority of funds will go to administrative costs for schools. Development of a uniform spending policy is needed, including looking into nepotism, and background checks for school board members.”

Delegate Carl Slater (Lukachukai, Round Rock, Tsaile-Wheatfields, Tse Ch’izhi, Rock Point) asked how school board performance is measured. “Evaluations are imposed on teachers and administration. How do we measure the school boards?” he asked. He said \$825,000 in school board stipends was reason enough to measure the success of school boards on the Navajo Nation.

Delegate Pernell Halona (Bahastl’a’a’, Coyote Canyon, Mexican Springs, Naschitti, Tohatchi) said the McKinley County School Board members do not receive a stipend for their duties. He noted that Navajo students enrolled in college sometimes have to take remedial courses before they can take college level courses. “This is going to have a domino effect. That’s why we want to do apportionment,” he said.

The HEHSC will meet Dec. 4 to finalize the apportionment plan.

Higher education

Representatives from Diné College and Navajo Technical University reported on Resolution No. 0263-19 to request \$60 million from the Sihasin Fund to startup institutional foundations at their respective schools. Both institutions had different plans on utilization of the funding, which would have been split at \$30 million to each school. The committee called for the legislation to be rewritten for reconsideration before the next regular meeting in Dec.

The committee also worked through Legislation No. 0238-19 for the approval of \$50 million from the Sihasin Fund to establish a scholarship endowment plan. The interest earnings would be expended in the plan, but the Office of Legislative Counsel noted the amount of money earned from interest would be minimal.

Discussions followed on whether to have the legislation continue as an endowment or as a drawdown with a 10-year timeline. The committee called for a work session with the president to fix the legislation before taking action.

###