



25th Navajo Nation Council

# 25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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## **Health, Education, and Human Services Committee pushes for implementation of Data Sharing Agreement**



**PHOTO: DODE and HEHSC had a virtual meeting with the Bureau of Indian Education about the Data Sharing Agreement at the Navajo Nation Washington Office.**

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – Members of the 25th Navajo Nation Council’s Health, Education, and Human Services Committee (HEHSC) and the Department of Diné Education (DODE) met with congressional leadership on Capitol Hill on Sept. 14, to help re-implement a Data Sharing Agreement between the Navajo Nation and the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE).

“We’ve been on Capitol Hill talking with congressional leaders about how this Data Sharing Agreement needs to be submitted to the Navajo Nation for review,” said HEHSC Chair Vince James, “This is a priority for us to address as soon as possible.”

The Data Sharing Agreement between the Nation and the BIE provides DODE with access to the Bureau’s Native American Student Information System (NASIS) for purposes of conducting a study and evaluation of Navajo student achievement in BIE-funded schools.

According to DODE’s Office of Education Research and Statistics Program Manager and Delegated Assistant Superintendent for Navajo Head Start, Roy Tracy, the Data Sharing Agreement started in 2015 to support a project called the State Tribal Educational Partnership (STEP) Grant, in which DODE created a five-year partnership agreement with the state of New

Mexico to access student data for schools in the Gallup McKinley County School District and Central Consolidated School District. The project was successful and was used as a template to initiate data sharing agreements with both Utah and Arizona.

The STEP Grant catapulted DODE into a data sharing environment with both State Education Agencies and Local Education Agencies, which formulated the Data Sharing Agreement initiated between DODE and the BIE.

The last agreement was signed in 2015 by former Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly. The Nation was given a one-year extension that expired two years ago, according to representatives from DODE.

“There are 32 Navajo controlled, BIE-funded schools across the Navajo Nation. The reapportionment plans for these schools happen every four years,” said Delegate Dr. Andy Nez (Crystal, Fort Defiance, Red Lake, Sawmill). “Consultation between the Navajo Nation and BIE is holding up this agreement.”

The Data Sharing Agreement is not only critical in guiding reapportionment for Navajo controlled, BIE-funded schools but is also needed to access BIE data to produce reports for the Navajo Nation Council.

“Every four years, DODE works with HEHSC on reapportionment for BIE-funded Navajo schools. By accessing school board name, name of “schools”, student enrollment, and student chapter affiliation, HEHSC determines the number of school board seat positions,” Tracy said. “The Data Sharing Agreement also captures student academic performance, absenteeism monitoring, enrollment performance, that helps DODE provide these schools with professional and administrative development, parental information, and district funding reports to Council.”

While in Washington D.C, HEHSC and DODE had a virtual conference with the Bureau of Indian Education Director, Tony Dearman, and Associate Deputy Director of Navajo Schools, Emily Arviso.

Director Dearman said he supports the Data Sharing Agreement and its contribution to benefitting tribal schools.

Arviso said there are issues in how the Diné School Accountability Plan (DSAP) data protection and usage, that are holding up the reauthorization of the Data Sharing Agreement.

“The Department of Education (DOE) owns the DSAP. It wasn’t developed by BIE. The DOE is waiting on a plan from the Navajo Nation as to how they will use the data and how it will be protected. I believe this is why it’s on hold,” Arviso said. “We are missing the part of accountability. What data is shared, how it will be shared, used, and protected? DOE is waiting on this information from the Navajo Nation. We are willing to work with DODE and we are coming to the table to address these issues.”

DODE Acting Superintendent of Schools, Claudia Edgewater said the department would work immediately on responding to BIE’s request for updated information regarding the DSAP.



**HEHSC met with Senator Martin Heinrich (D-NM) to advocate on behalf of reauthorizing the Data Sharing Agreement, prioritizing movement on the Gallup Indian Medical Center, and Veteran's issues.**

Both Tracy and Edgewater agreed that the BIE's request for updated information was submitted previously when the Data Sharing Agreement was initially authorized.

"We've already addressed this request when it was signed five years ago," Tracy said. "Nothing has changed. We need BIE to send the agreement to the Nation for authorization."

HEHSC Chair James said without the agreement in place, reapportionment will remain unresolved.

"How do we move forward with strategic planning for our schools without this agreement in place? How can we assist BIE with positions that are in demand? How can HEHSC assist when we don't have this information," James said. "BIE needs to reissue this agreement and we've asked Congressional leadership to push BIE to get this agreement in place."

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