



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

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HEHSC leadership meeting focuses on tribal education policy and governance



University of New Mexico-Gallup hosted a leadership meeting bringing together tribal leaders, school administrators, and policy advocates to address pressing challenges in education.

GALLUP, NM – On Tuesday, March 18, the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee (HEHSC) convened a leadership meeting at the University of New Mexico-Gallup, bringing together tribal leaders, school administrators, and policy advocates to address pressing challenges in education governance, student welfare, and policy reform within the Navajo Nation. Continuing discussions centered on amendments to Title 10, school board representation, attendance enforcement, accreditation standards, and the need for stronger data governance.

“Currently, we lack a comprehensive system to track academic progress that would inform and drive important decision making,” explained a delegate Dr. Andy Nez. “A data repository system would help us maintain real time data to respond to concerns and issues as they arise.”

Data governance was identified as a critical area requiring immediate action. A call was made to develop a Navajo Education Information System that would allow for better tracking of student performance, teacher evaluations, and program effectiveness. Discussions stressed the need for laws that enforce comprehensive data collection, ensuring that decision-making is based on accurate and up-to-date information.

Key topics of discussion was the proposed amendments to Title 10, with an emphasis on clarifying and expanding language related to school board roles and responsibilities. Attendees expressed concerns about the need to clearly define the authority of local and agency school boards within the tribal education system. The importance of ensuring that school board members operate within their governance roles without overstepping into administrative functions was also highlighted.

Another concern was the representation of BIE on the Navajo Nation Board of Education. Participants argued that the absence of such representation limits the ability of these schools to advocate for their needs. Stronger oversight measures were recommended to prevent financial mismanagement and improve educational accountability.

Participants acknowledged that attendance rates have significantly declined since the COVID-19 pandemic, creating challenges in ensuring consistent student engagement. To address this, a proposal was recommended to establish dedicated truancy officers who would work closely with schools and families to address chronic absenteeism

Several participants recommended using the COGNIA accreditation model as a basis for reauthorizing Navajo schools. Attendees emphasized the need for continuous communication between the Department of Diné Education and local schools to ensure proper curriculum oversight. Additionally, integrating Navajo language and cultural education into standardized assessments was proposed to preserve and strengthen cultural identity while maintaining academic rigor.

HEHSC and school officials proposed to conduct a comprehensive review of Title 10 and recommend necessary revisions. The committee also emphasized the importance of ongoing discussions with educators, policymakers, and community leaders to refine and implement proposed policy changes.

“This is not a one-time discussion,” said Chair Vince James. “We will continue these conversations and take every necessary step to strengthen the foundation of our education and human services policies.”

The Health, Education, and Human Services Committee reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening tribal education governance and improving outcomes for Navajo students. Follow-up meetings are planned to advance these efforts, and the committee invites input from all education stakeholders to help shape community-focused policies.

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