



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

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Council Delegates call for compliance with SB 163, meaningful consultation and cultural protections at New Mexico Indian Education Summit



Speaker Curley urged for clear implementation timelines for SB163.

SANTA FE, N.M. — On Wednesday, members of the 25th Navajo Nation Council called for full compliance with Senate Bill 163 and stronger tribal-state collaboration during the 2025 Government-to-Government Education Summit, hosted by the Santa Fe Indian School and organized by the New Mexico Indian Affairs Department.

SB 163 guarantees Native students the right to wear tribal regalia at graduation and other public school events. Speaker Crystalyne Curley urged clear implementation timelines, defined disciplinary protocols, and culturally informed communication with school boards statewide.

“We need ongoing consultation and data collection to assure that compliance is being followed, not just with our students but across the state,” Speaker Curley said while emphasizing the need for school districts to revise handbooks and policies to reflect the law.

“There is still hesitancy among our students—these past experiences can retraumatize families,” she added, calling for “Know Your Rights” sessions, statewide data gathering, and culturally sensitive outreach to support families. “This isn’t just about one group of students. It’s about doing right by all students across the state,” she said.

Navajo Nation Vice President Richelle Montoya urged the Governor's cabinet to ensure SB 163 is enforced in all public schools—not just those with high Native student populations. She cited a troubling case involving a hair-length policy that discriminated against male students, despite long hair being a significant cultural tradition in many Native communities.

Montoya warned that such policies, if unaddressed, contradict the intent of SB 163 and perpetuate exclusion.

In her opening address, Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham reaffirmed New Mexico's commitment to educational equity and sustained tribal investment. She noted the state's improved child well-being ranking—from 50th to 17th—and highlighted culturally grounded education models like immersion schools and the New Mexico School for the Arts.

She emphasized that students thrive when language, culture, and heritage are integrated into their education.

Amid concerns over federal funding cuts and the elimination of Head Start, the governor called for reimagining funding models that uphold tribal sovereignty and ensure accountability for impact aid. "Education is the most powerful tool we have to change the outcome of our state," she said.

In closing remarks, Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty raised concerns about the summit's structure and the lack of meaningful, results-driven consultation.

"We haven't been able to provide meaningful, result-driven consultation," she said. "In order to do this, we need to have information ahead of time." Crotty also highlighted differences in tribal governance, noting the complexity of the Navajo Nation's governmental system and the importance of state recognition of those distinctions.

She further called attention to rising ICE activity impacting tribal college students, including detention cases where tribal enrollment was not recognized. "Our students need to feel safe—school should be the safest place for our students and parents," she said.

Council Delegate Helena Nez Begay also attended the summit.

The event served as a forum for tribal leaders and state officials to align on shared priorities, emphasizing cultural identity, educational equity, and deeper consultation to improve outcomes for Native students statewide.

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