



25th Navajo Nation Council

25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

MEDIA CONTACT:

nnlb.communications@gmail.com

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Navajo educational stakeholders address critical challenges at Diné Bí Olta School Board Association Forum



Darrick Franklin, Senior Planner, Department of Diné Education (left), Delegate George Tolth (center), Jordan Etcitty, Director of Diné Bi Olta School Board Association (right)

Window Rock, Ariz. – On Wednesday, educational leaders, administrators, and school board members from across the Navajo Nation convened at the Navajo Nation Council Chamber to discuss pressing issues surrounding the oversight and funding of Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) and tribally controlled schools.

The meeting, organized by the Diné Bi Olta School Board Association, sought to align priorities and address systemic challenges that have long hindered educational progress within the Navajo Nation.

The forum provided a platform for stakeholders to voice their concerns regarding the complex and often overlapping demands imposed by BIE, Department of Diné Education (DODE), and other regulatory bodies. Key issues included the excessive oversight and bureaucratic obstacles that local schools face, which often impede their ability to tailor education plans to meet the specific needs of their communities.

Delegate Tolth expressed, “It’s frustrating working with the ‘one size fits all’ approach that many feel conflicts with the principle of local control.”

Concerns were raised about the cumbersome requirements for school improvement plans, which are often tied to funding and professional development but are viewed as overly restrictive and not reflective of local needs.

A significant portion of the discussion focused on the disparities in funding between BIE-operated schools and other federal school systems, such as the Department of Defense schools. The forum highlighted that BIE schools receive significantly less funding per student, which places them at a competitive disadvantage, particularly in retaining qualified teachers and maintaining adequate facilities.

The shortage of certified Navajo teachers was identified as a critical issue, exacerbated by the inability of tribally controlled schools to offer competitive salaries and pensions compared to state-funded schools.

Former educator Delegate Helena Nez Begay called for more support from the Navajo Nation and federal government to address these disparities and to attract and retain high-quality educators within the Nation's schools.

Another pressing concern was the state of school facilities, which are often in disrepair and lacking basic amenities such as adequate heating, cooling, and internet access. The forum underscored the urgent need for increased funding and more efficient processes to address these infrastructural challenges.

The complexity of data reporting requirements was also a key topic. Stakeholders urged for better alignment between the different entities (BIE, DODE, State Education Agencies) to streamline data requests and reduce the administrative burden on schools. The need for improved communication and support from these entities was emphasized as essential to ensuring that schools can focus on delivering quality education rather than navigating bureaucratic hurdles.

The forum addressed the critical issue of Navajo language and cultural revitalization within schools. Participants discussed the lack of adequate resources and support for developing Navajo language curricula and assessments. Participants also called for a unified approach across the Navajo Nation to standardize and enhance language education, with some suggesting incentives for families to encourage the use of Navajo language at home.

In response to these concerns, forum participants discussed the need for legislative advocacy at both the state and federal levels. The Navajo Nation Education Committee is working on drafting legislation to address these issues, including the reorganization of BIE oversight to restore powers to the Navajo Nation's educational system. Additionally, there is a focus on revising the Title 10 law to better align with the Nation's educational goals and needs.

The forum marked a significant step forward in addressing the educational challenges faced by the Navajo Nation. As stakeholders continue to collaborate, there is a shared commitment to improving the quality of education for Navajo students through more equitable funding, better infrastructure, and a stronger emphasis on cultural and language preservation.

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