

Welcome to the New Futuristic Education. A Visionary Culture of Innovation, Creativity, Collaboration, and Discovery.

It is truly a privilege and honor to serve the Dine' (Navajo) Nation K- 12 education in the tri-state areas of AZ, NM, and Utah. Clearly, the Navajo Nation Council, The President's Office, and the Dine' (Navajo) Nation Board of Education takes seriously the need to critically review and recast our education system to a hallmark of exceptional Native indigenous schooling system. They have made clear we need an educational system whereby our very own people will have restructured opportunities and repurposed resources to ensure that every child and every student will have a chance to attain brilliance in their own right. We are aware our Navajo educational system has had and



continues to have great success yet still we see critical challenges. On a strong positive note, we are fully aware these challenges can be overcome as many have demonstrated coming from the determination of our educators and leaders. It is long past time we recognize and acknowledge the collective strength of our educators that despite deeply flawed structural educational inequities, cultivating exceptional schooling is well within reach. Let's look at how far Dine' College and Navajo Technical University have come, we have Rock Point Community School, Window Rock

Tsehootsooi Dine' Bi'Olt'a', STAR School, Puente de Hozho School, Navajo Prep IB School, the newly developed Pinon Eagles Online Academy, the Stanford University-K12 connection, "What Does it Mean to be an American" transactional Student Reflections project, which includes Navajo students, and the list goes on.

Let us make no mistake about these accomplishments clearly indicative of the unwavering determination by our educators, our people, to create an outstanding educational system. There is not a single Navajo parent that we know of who wants their child to do poorly in school. After years of educational delivery on Navajo land however, where we see that forty-four per cent (44%) of adults do not graduate from high school and only seven per cent (7%) graduate from college, are cause for serious critical dialogue. How data of this form exacerbates widespread unemployment and other stinging debilitating demographics across our Navajo landscape drives home the point that deep structural changes are needed in our educational system. We must think critically about what the purpose of education is. Deep profound questions arise as to why educate? How shall we structure our education? Education to what ends? Why replicate a filtering school system that feeds a highly stratified society, a continuous socioeconomic strata inequality? Do we desire a deeply stratified socioeconomic system in our homeland? Are we not a visionary culture of innovation, creativity, collaboration, and discovery? As we have often heard, without a vision, cultures, peoples, vanish.

#### Navajo Nation Education Laws.

No one is above the law. Enforcement of laws that govern schools are a serious matter. We must communicate clearly to the school constituency, parents, and taxpayers that accountability, transparency, and enforcement of laws that govern our education are profoundly serious. Laws that apply to education are important in financial management and stewardship, building codes and regulations, school busses and transportation laws, curriculum, assessment, cultural language, IT, food service, maintenance, and human resources. We must hold ourselves to the highest standards in

compliance with statutorily established laws that govern Navajo Nation education. The Navajo Sovereignty in Education Act 2005 (NSEA 2005), amending Titles Ten and Two of the Navajo Nation Code, is clear in its mission and goal to improve the educational delivery of schools serving the Navajo Nation. Elected officials and employees are held to the highest standard in their fiduciary duty to serve as "...stewards of public trust requiring the highest degree of honesty, impartiality, and diligence." Elected officials and employees have a public fiduciary duty "...to act with scrupulous good faith and honesty of behalf of someone else." To that end, the Navajo Sovereignty in Education Act 2005, as amended, has established the Navajo Nation Board of Education that reads:

There is hereby established the Navajo Nation Board of Education (hereafter, "the Board"), within the Executive Branch of the Navajo Nation government for the specialized purpose of overseeing the operation of all schools serving the Navajo Nation, either directly if under the immediate jurisdiction of the Navajo Nation, or if operated by another government, by joint powers agreements, memoranda of understanding/agreement, cooperative agreements or other appropriate intergovernmental instruments.

The Board carries out its duties through the Department of Dine' Education under §107. A. that specifically states in part:

The Department of Dine' Education ("Department") is the administrative agency within the Navajo Nation with responsibility and authority for implementing and enforcing the educational laws of the Navajo Nation. The Department is subject to and carries out the laws adopted by the Navajo Nation Council. ... .

The Department, under §107 Department of Dine' Education, B.4. is authorized and directed for one to:

Determine the impact of educational programs on Navajo students by inquiring into Areas of concern, such as achievement data, test results, budgets, language proficiency, special education programs, supplemental programs, staffing, social and economic variables, curriculum, health and safety, adequacy and accessibility of facilities, and other areas of inquiry relevant to the education situation of Navajo students.

Further, under the same subsection, B.11, it is specified that:

The Department shall be available to work with other schools, school districts, governing boards, local communities and other appropriate entities to develop plans for the implementation of Navajo education laws, to coordinate utilization of available resources and to assist in the development of new resources.

### The Education Equation.

The institutional determinants of variations that correlate with deleterious schooling outcomes and eventual lagging economic productivity must be identified and removed from the Navajo Nation educational equation. What are some significant complex weighted variables that contribute to the deleterious outcomes data where forty-four percent (44%) of adults do not complete high school or that only seven per cent (7%) eventually graduate from college? These variables bear on the need for new policy formulation sometimes well outside the box that will result in a higher school attendance and graduation rate, higher poly-tech school and college entry and success rate, and

ultimately identify new effective educational experiences that will maximally contribute to a greater robust economy.

What type of an indigenous educational system do we want for our people, one that will empower the lives of our people in real time, in real places, in real settings with highly effective educational “tools”, the tools of reading, writing, and math so critical to socioeconomic success? Our public demographics are very telling in that there is a great need to place at the forefront advancing knowledge focusing on the “know-how” to solve pressing challenges in our educational system. Urgent dire questions need answers as to when doors will be opened to invite creative talent, innovations, new insights and perspectives, sharp and energetic minds, a “can-do” optimism to focus unendingly on bringing real-world solutions to our Dine’ Nation’s challenging educational system. There is this critical need to examine how our conventional educational system seems to support daily ground level social and economic challenges in our communities, within our homeland, our Four Sacred Mountains. The Dine’ Nation education system must take the “road less travelled” for this road will lead to discomfort, to great uncertainty, taking one out of the comfort zone. We must not take comfort in the road most often travelled observing indifferently, nonchalantly the deleterious socioeconomic demographic outcomes in our homeland. Our school children, our youth, deserve nothing less.

#### Cultural Education – “Kodoo Lai, Lak’ee Iina’ – Henceforth, In One’s Hand is Life (to be Cultivated).”

Our cultural teachings and wisdom have much to offer in this regard to strengthen resolve in meeting and addressing challenges of our time. Our previous generation have met challenges of their time with deep abiding faith in the sacredness and sanctity of our Native language and culture. Our future generation will no doubt come upon dire challenges wherein sovereign cultural selfhood will once again hold sway over the merciless life challenges. Our Navajo language and culture in our educational system should not have to be put to the wayside as a hindrance to exceptional education. School children and citizens in other countries speak up to three or four different languages. The days of our cultural language suppression are over, the days when many experienced personal and social ridicule, stigma, soap in the mouth, yard stick ruler striking over the hands, other forms of corporeal punishment and abuse administered on our youth. Yet, our school children persisted, speaking our language in the schools, protecting our bona fide rich Navajo language use and cultural teachings in our school system.

In the interest of healthier life ways, the critical cultural consciousness that has anchored an unyielding bond and resiliency that has held off enculturation, assimilation to outside forces must be reaffirmed with and unto each generation at home and in our school system. The writings on the wall are very telling that our people, young and elderly alike, long for these important cultural teachings and knowledge.

#### Education Matters.

Instituting, cultivating highly effective, highly performing school practices that differ substantially from poorly performing school practices should not be the only choice. There are many similarities in highly effective school practices regardless of zip codes just as there are many similarities in poorly performing school practices mostly all in red-lined zip codes. While each of

these schooling features can be identified and replicated, should we not explore globally highly effective educational system of other nations? But the first order of business here as our explicit goal is to ensure that we have schools that are safe, especially considering the horrific virus pandemic. Once we have school buildings that meet the life-safety regulatory requirements, codes, guidelines, and standards of OSHA, the Federal government, the tribal government, and the state school safety and security measures, then we can begin instilling highly effective, highly performing school practices here in Dinétah, our homeland.

Exploratory schools that come from our ingenuity, our creativity, should be encouraged, supported, and developed. Education matters in that it can make a difference in one's life. As has been well documented, while economics and education are separate discrete entities, they are in effect intricately interconnected to where they educate one another. Much like a well-oiled interlocking gear wheel, they turn one another to either great education and robust economy or to poor education and challenging economic livelihood. Our demographics is ultimately the real test and evidence of our educational system effectiveness. Clearly, as we look up the steep mountain, we have far to go.

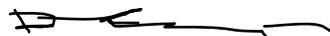
#### Futuristic Navajo Nation Education.

It is common knowledge that while the American education system as historically documented and as we experienced is deeply stratified and structurally unequal, there are strong indications as we have demonstrated that these inequities can be overcome. The structural inequalities are not chance events nor natural events. Rather, the inherent inequity in our education system are economically and socially engineered to where some school children and students do very well, some not so well, and the rest do not have a chance even before they step out the door.

This schooling inequalities amplifies to the next level where inequity morphs into the real world of high versus stagnant gloomy economic growth, high robust income versus stagnant hollow income, healthcare disparities, nice homes versus dire delapidated housing if one can get housing, in short, the stinging life conditions feed back into the struggling educational system for the next generation. But can we prepare and position students to experience a great education and further reduce the spatial distribution and exclusion in the social and economic equity metrics? How one can enroll vulnerable students who are at risk and not position them for success at the next level, in effect rob our school children and students of their future, will require massive locally driven turnaround support and interventions. We are here to state unequivocally the deeply structured educational divide and inequality in Dine' (Navajo) education can be repurposed with existing funds toward a more empowering education. We have clearly demonstrated that school transformation to a highly effective school is well within our reach.

On behalf of the Navajo Nation Council, the President's Office, and the Navajo Nation Board of Education, I welcome our public to the new futuristic education for our future generation, an undertaking that will challenge and bring out the best in every one of us for unity does make for accomplishing great deeds. Axeehee'.

With Genuine Respect,



Harold G. Begay, Ph.D.

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