

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 19, 2021

DEPARTMENT OF DINÉ EDUCATION PRESENTS REOPENING PLAN TO 24th NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

*Schools collaborating with department to safely reopen*

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** - On Wednesday, the Navajo Nation Department of Diné Education reported on its reopening plan for all Navajo Nation schools, including public, private, TCS, BIE-operated, parochial, and charter schools, during the 24th Navajo Nation Council's Health, Education and Human Services Committee regular meeting.

"Today is a momentous occasion to be speaking about the possibilities for our schools to reopen," Ms. Gonnie said. "There are many conversations that took place with many partners... to provide the Navajo Nation School Reopening Plan, which shall serve as the prevailing guidance for our schools located on the Navajo Nation to safely restructure their plans for their local community schools and to reopen safely."

#### **RESCINDING PREVIOUS LEGISLATION**

Navajo Nation Council Delegate Carl Slater sponsored two resolutions that are essential to paving the way for reservation schools to reopen.

The first resolution is No. 0046-21, entitled *An Action Relating to Health, Education, and Human Services and Naabik'iyáti' Committees; Rescinding NABIAU-35-20, Entitled, "An Action Relating to Health, Education, and Human Services and Naabik'iyáti' Committees; Recommending that All Schools, Public and Private, Serving the Navajo Nation, Including those Operated by the State of New Mexico Public Education Department, the States of Arizona and Utah, and All Schools Operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Bureau of Indian Education, to Delay Plans and Decisions to Reopen Schools for the 2020-2021 School Year."*

The resolution would rescind NABIAU-35-20, which recommended that all public and private schools on the Navajo Nation delay its plans and decisions to reopen schools for the 2020-2021 school year. NABIAU-35-20 was passed on August 13, 2020 by the Naabik'iyáti' Committee.

The second resolution is No. 0047-21, entitled *An Action Relating to Health, Education, and Human Services and Naabik'iyáti' Committees and the Navajo Nation Council; Rescinding CO-84-20, Entitled, "An Action Relating to an Emergency for the Navajo Nation; Opposing All In-Person Instruction at all Schools Intending to Reopen within the Navajo Nation Amidst COVID-19; Supporting the Navajo Nation Board of Education in Recommending Virtual Learning."*

This resolution would rescind CO-84-20, passed on October 22, 2020, which opposed all in-person instruction at Navajo Nation schools intending to reopen and supporting the Navajo Nation Board of Education in recommending virtual learning with exception for targeted populations such as students with learning disabilities.

#### **A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT**

“The Navajo Nation School Reopening Plan is a product of many collaboration hours between the community mitigation team, which is one part of the public health branch of the Navajo Nation Health Command Operations Center, Dr. Jill Jim and many other safety teams, [as well as] the internal DODE work group. [The internal work group] has taken on the charge to craft the language and come up with the best practices based on guidance from the Center for Disease Control, and then to bring it in front of these different teams to ensure that what we are doing is aligned with the work that our colleagues in the public health sector and HCOC are doing,” Cognia Navajo Nation Program Manager Shayla Yellowhair said.

Mrs. Yellowhair reported on the components of the Reopening Plan that include the expectations, criteria for individual school reopening plans, and the readiness assessment that schools must complete with a signed attestation statement.

“We are expecting all schools to have consulted with parents and families to determine the best setting for their children. Regardless of the [stage] the Navajo Nation is in as determined by the NHCOC or any executive orders, we expect schools [to have] surveyed parents or [have completed] outreach with parents and families to determine what their needs are [and] what they want for their kids,” Mrs. Yellowhair stated.

In addition to the expectation of collaboration, schools must also follow all executive orders and public health orders in place. It is important to note the Navajo Nation School Reopening Plan is subject to revision as conditions and situations change.

The Navajo Nation School Reopening Plan was approved by Navajo Nation Board of Education on March 16, 2021 and was reported and accepted by the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee (HEHSC) on March 17, 2021.

Public comment is being solicited at this time on both resolutions to rescind the online/virtual only instruction. If you wish to comment, contact [comments@navajo-nsn.gov](mailto:comments@navajo-nsn.gov).

After the five-day comment period, HEHSC will take action on the legislation at their regular meeting scheduled for March 24, 2021.

***For more information on the Navajo Nation School Reopening Plan, including a complete list of criteria, visit [navajonationdode.org](http://navajonationdode.org).***