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- LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS RECEIVE TRAINING
- DINÉ BÍ OLTÁ SCHOOL BOARD ASSOCIATION FORMS EXECUTIVE BOARD
- BOARD MEMBER RESIGNS

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Navajo Nation to Request Partial Lifting of Head Start Suspension

Head Start Bureau Visits Navajo Nation

Window Rock, Arizona. Following a complete on-site assessment of the Navajo Nation's Head Start program by National Head Start officials in April, 2006, the Department of Health and Human Services, Admin-

istration for Children and Families (ACF), Head Start Bureau, "summarily suspended" the program.

In a letter dated May 1, 2006 to President Shirley, the ACF detailed reasons for the suspension: "We have determined that the failure of the Navajo Nation to: 1) conduct appropriate criminal record checks; 2) assess individual em-

ployment applications; 3) obtain the required signed declarations [from employees]; 4) involve the Policy Councils (and therefore parents) in decisions to hire and terminate Head Start employees; and 4) implement procedures for ongoing monitoring of Head Start and Early Head Start operations". Immedi-

Continued on Page 4

General Election 2006: Navajo Election Administration Announces Board of Education Candidates by Agency

Window Rock, Arizona – In June 2006, the Navajo Nation Election Administration announced the certified candidates for the five elected positions on the Navajo Nation Board of Education. Elected from each agency, these board members will become part of the 11-member Board of Education, the governing board of the new Department of

Diné Education.

The 2006 board candidate(s) by agency are as follows:

Chinle Agency

- Jimmy C. Begay
- Jo Nell Sells

Fort Defiance Agency

- Leo T. Gishie
- Richie Nez
- Stanley Manuelito
- Katherine D. Arviso

- Sylvia Edgewater-McCray

Western Agency

- Dolly Manson, Ph.D
- Melanie Lee Haskon

Shiprock Agency

- Virgil Kirk, Jr.

Eastern Navajo

- Dolly C. Begay

Diné Education, NASBA Representatives Provide Training to Local School Board Members

Window Rock, Arizona—Representatives of the new Department of Diné Education, the new Navajo Nation Board of Education, and the Navajo Area School Board Association (NASBA) presented at local school board trainings across the reservation, providing updates on three key issues:

- Background checks
- Local school board roles and responsibilities, and
- The proposed restructuring of Head Start.

“Those present were very accepting of the training,” said Pauline Billie, Executive Director, NASBA, and presenter on background checks. Ms. Billie provided additional information on the background checking process principally from 25 CFR Part 63 Indian Child Protections and Family Violence Prevention.

Mary Helen Creamer, Pro-

gram Manager, Tribal Education Department, presented the Navajo Sovereignty in Education Act of 2005, enacted last summer, focusing on local school board roles and responsibilities.

“Local school board members are very interested in the working relationships between the new Board of Education, the Department of Diné Education, and the new Diné Bí Oltá School Board Association,” explained Creamer. Creamer’s presentation focused on how the above organizations each contribute to improving education for students.

Reuben McCabe, Education Specialist, Tribal Education Department, presented on the proposed restructuring of the Head Start program, providing information on the “decentralizing” of the existing hierarchical structure, which would shift greater responsibility to the local level.

Recommendations from

those in attendance include:

- Improving ELO/local board relations;
- Providing more training on the new Title 10 law;
- Improving communication from top level executives to the local level, especially regarding Head Start, BIA restructuring;
- Improving parental involvement in addressing local issues; and
- Bringing education stakeholders (states, public schools, BIA schools, contract/grant schools, Navajo Nation) together at a conference, and through caucuses, roundtable discussions, address the myriad education issues facing the Navajo Nation.

Rebecca Benally, Vice President of the new Navajo Nation Board of Education attended the Shiprock presentation, providing information on the role of the Board.

Diné Bí Oltá School Board Association Forms Executive Board

At the 1st Annual Diné Bí Oltá School Board Association (DBOSBA) Conference held in March, an Executive Board of the Association was formed consisting of four elected members representing community schools and three elected members representing BIA schools.

The establishment of the Board was pursuant to §301 of Title 10, Establishment of Executive Board. Members of the DBOSBA Executive Board are:

- Robert Black, Jr., Chair, Shonto Community Schools (Grant School)
- Donovan T. Andy, Vice-Chair, Cove Day School (B.I.A. operated school)
- Betsy Dennison, Lake Valley Community School (B.I.A Operated School)
- Fernie Yazzie, Borrego Pass (Grant School)
- Treva Roanhorse, Ch’oshgai (Grant School)
- Eugene Guerito, Dził Na’oodiíi Community School (Grant School)
- Chester Claw, Tonalea Day School (B.I.A. Operated School)

The conference included attendance of workshop presentations by Board Members representing Community and B.I.A. Schools. Topics of presentations included: B.I.A. School Restructuring Plans; What Board Should Know; Child Abuse; Navajo Language Culture Standards, etc.

Parental Involvement Training/Workshop

Window Rock, Arizona – “Parents were very enthused about the training,” said Sylvia Jackson, Education Specialist with the Diné Language and Culture/Community Services Program, about a round of parental involvement training given in June.

“They want to hear from the Department,” she said. “They are concerned and want to help their children be successful. They want more communication with schools. They want to work side by side.”

Training was provided at the following locations:

- Rock Point Community School
- Red Mesa Public School
- Little Singer Community School
- Window Rock Education Center
- Chinle Boarding School

In addition, parents made the following recommendations:

- Identify the roles and responsi-

bilities of the Indian Education Committee, Parent Advisory Committee, and Parent Teacher Associations.

- Strengthen familiarity with Federal programs for Indian children at local schools, e.g., Title One, Impact Aid Money, No Child Left Behind, etc.
- Improve communication between communities, school boards and schools. Practice of K’e by school personnel
- Improve partnering between school and community
- More training on NCLB by school personnel
- More parental involvement in school decision-making process
- Strengthen familiarity of state standards through continued training for parents
- Strengthen familiarity of teacher certification process for parents
- Integrate special education into school curriculum

- Integrate Navajo concepts/philosophy into school programs
- Improve sensitivity to Navajo language and culture topics
- Involve Navajo elders into the schools as Traditional counselors and teachers
- Open up more communication between parents, school personnel and students

Workshops were conducted as a follow-up to the development of a Parent Teachers Leadership for Education handbook, developed in collaboration with the various parent associations, school boards, and committees.

“The handbook will be distributed in September,” said Jackson. “This handbook will let parents know their rights and how they can become more involved with their child’s education.”

Board Member Resigns

President to Appoint New Board Member

Window Rock, Arizona – In June 2006, the Parent of School-Aged Children Representative resigned her post on the Navajo Nation Board of Education.

Citing medical reasons, Ms. Christina Woodyty’s resignation has created a Presidential appointment vacancy on the Board.

“The Board wishes Ms. Woodyty good health,” said Board President, Dr. Phillip Bluehouse. “We express regret that she is unable to continue serving on the board. We look forward to

the President’s appointment for a replacement and the Education Committee’s confirmation.”

The Office of the President is currently seeking to fill the vacancy from a previous pool of interested individuals.

The Navajo Nation Board of Education is made up of eleven members, six of whom are appointed by the President of the Navajo Nation, and five who will be elected in the upcoming 2006 Navajo Nation General Election.

Board of Education Announces Schedule of Regular Meetings

Window Rock, Arizona – During its April meeting, the Navajo Nation Board of Education announced that it would meet regularly the first Friday of each month, unless otherwise announced.

All meetings will be held in Window Rock, Arizona. Meetings are open to the public. Inquiries about the Board’s meetings can be addressed to Mary Helen Creamer, current contact person for the Board by calling (928) 871-6995.

Continued from Page 1

ate suspension was determined necessary “because of serious risk to staff or participants’ health and safety”.

The letter also outlined a 30 day corrective action plan for the Nation to implement in order to correct the most urgent of these failures. The 30-day plan addresses Child Health and Safety; Facilities and Equipment; Physical Environment; Toys, Materials, and Furniture; Maintenance and Operation of Vehicles; and Safety Education.

Subsequently in June, a 49-page Overview of Findings report was sent to President Shirley, detailing a comprehensive list of all the citations against the program. This Overview also added to the aforementioned short-term 30-day plan, both 60-and 90-day plans for corrective action.

A Navajo Nation Presidential “Core Team”—Executive Branch Division Directors—was mobilized July 9, 2006 to help the Head Start program comply with

the provisions of the 30 – day corrective action plan specified by Federal Head Start Bureau officials. This group has worked steadily to work out details for implementing the corrective actions required by ACF. These plans were shared by the President’s office with Head Start Bureau officials on July 10, 2006.

At the meeting, the Navajo Nation reported to Federal officials that about 85 percent of the required background checks for all staff were already completed.

Subsequently, Head Start Bureau officials, including Director, Channel Wilkins, met at a special meeting of the Education Committee of the Navajo Nation Council July 11, 2006 to discuss their report with local leaders, the President’s Core Team, and representatives of the Navajo Nation Head Start program.

Following the meeting, the President’s Core Team stated that it would send a Letter of Request to the U. S. Department of Health

and Human Services, Head Start Bureau, requesting partial lifting of the suspension. The letter will also contain a six month budget for complete “recovery” of the program; a report on the status of background checks for staff, including policies and procedures; and a request for technical assistance.

Director Wilkins assured Navajo Nation leaders that, upon receipt of the letter, the Head Start Bureau would respond within 24 hours on whether or not to grant partial lifting of the suspension.

Complete copies of the 49-page report from the Office of Head Start, can be accessed online through the Navajo Times website, www.navajotimes.com. Following the story, “Head Start Report Details Unsafe Conditions”, click on the “more” button. At the end of the story, click on “The complete report is available here” to download a PDF file version of the report.

Department to Assist Schools in Corrective Action, Restructuring

Window Rock, Arizona – A special Task Force of the Department of Diné Education will be assisting Navajo schools in Corrective Action or Restructuring.

“The [Education Committee’s] Subcommittee [is] concerned with the number of schools that are in Corrective Action or Restructuring status,” stated a Department memorandum from Leland Leonard, Executive Director.

Established at the request of the Education Committee’s Subcommittee on School Board Policies, the Department’s Task Force is comprised of the Navajo NCA Office; the Office of Diné Science, Math and Technology; the Office of Monitoring, Evaluation and Technical Assistance; and the Office of Diné Culture, Language and Community Services.

The Task Force will be headed up by Ms. Lorena Zah Bahe, temporarily employed to

coordinate with the programs listed above “to discuss and develop a plan.” The Task Force met at its first meeting on July 12 to review accountability provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act, School Improvement plans of the three surrounding states, and BIA School Improvement plans.

The Task Force will present its recommendations to the Subcommittee, which is scheduled to meet on July 24, 2006.