



# DEPARTMENT OF DINÉ EDUCATION

## THE NAVAJO NATION

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## PRESS RELEASE

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### THE NAVAJO NATION SET TO IMPLEMENTS DINÉ EDUCATION ACCOUNTABILITY WORKBOOK

**Window Rock, Arizona.** Department of Diné Education (DODE) anticipates on September 27, 2016, the Secretaries of U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Interior will officially approve and sign the Diné Education Accountability Workbook. "This is a historical monumental accomplishment for the Navajo Nation," said Dr. Tommy Lewis, Superintendent of Schools.

"The Department of Dine' Education will implement the Accountability Plan in the upcoming 2016-17 school year for the 66 BIE funded schools on Navajo," said Dr. Tommy Lewis. "In preparation for the implementation, DODE will host meetings and information sessions with schools shortly after it is officially approved to outline the Accountability Plan and its requirements for the first year." In 2005, the Department of Diné Education initiated the Navajo Accountability Workbook when the No Child Left Behind Act was still the federal education law.

Pursuant to the former No Child Left Behind Act, the Navajo Nation seeks to waive the existing Adequate Yearly Progress Accountability plan as administered by the Bureau of Indian Education. Diné Education Accountability Workbook is a formal application for an Alternative AYP Plan. In the past, the implementations of NCLB did not academically served Navajo children very well. It is DODE's position and had made it known to the USDOE and USDIO that most Navajo students fail to meet proficiency standards in mathematics and reading under the existing BIE plan. DODE wants to improve students academic level by using the Diné Accountability Workbook. In December 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) superseded the No Child Left Behind Act.

On December 18, 2015, President Barack Obama signed ESSA into law. The Accountability Plan meets the requirements of the ESSA which is the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act, a federal law. "ESSA provides more support for Indian Tribes to take control and become more involved in the education of American Indian students," said Dr. Lewis. "It gives tribes better opportunities to direct the education of students attending schools in Indian lands and tribally controlled schools. The Diné Education Accountability Workbook has been modified to meet the requirements of ESSA. Now, the Workbook meets federal requirements. The number one goal of the Accountability Plan is to close the academic achievement gap that currently exists on the Navajo Nation."

Currently, the 66 BIE funded schools are held accountable to the state accountability system in which each school are physically located. In response to the state accountability system, Dr. Lewis had this to say, "One of the fundamental problems with these state-based accountability plans is that the accountability results are not readily comparable across states. The academic standards among the states vary, which makes it very difficult to assess, for example, how 5th grade students in Arizona are doing compared to 5th grade students in New Mexico or Utah. Moreover, the assessment tests vary among the states, with different phrasing for assessment questions, different sequencing of those questions, and different foci of content and subject matter. Also, the states have different academic standards as well as assessments which makes it difficult for our Navajo students because students do transfer from state to state as well as transfer from public schools to BIE operated schools, and to grant schools all in one school year. We now have a chance to align a system that will serve the needs of our children as well as schools. "

The Diné Education Accountability Workbook will use the Common Core State Standards and use the PARCC assessments among the 66 BIE funded schools.

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“The Diné Accountability Workbook includes Navajo language and cultural knowledge,” said Dr. Lewis. “The goal of incorporating Navajo language and culture into the school system is described in the Navajo Nation’s Sovereignty in Education Act of 2005 as critical to the very survival of the Navajo culture and its people.”

“We have an opportunity to implement the Accountability Plan and do it right so it positively impacts our children’s learning,” Dr. Lewis said. “We ask for your cooperation and assistance in implementing this Dine’ Education Accountability Plan to start this coming school year 2016-17. After final approval by the Secretaries of Education and Interior, the Department of Dine’ Education will sponsor meetings and information sessions so teachers, administrators, support staff, parents, and school board members can better understand the reasons for the Academic Plan.”

Contact Dr. Tommy Lewis, at (928) 871-7475 for additional information on the Diné Education Accountability Workbook.

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*Pursuant Title 10 Navajo Nation Code, the Department of Diné is the administrative agency of the Navajo Nation with responsibility and authority to implement and enforced, on the Navajo Nation, educational laws of the Navajo Nation. Dr. Tommy Lewis is the Superintendent of Schools and Timothy Benally is the Assistant Superintendent of School.*