

Navajo Education

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The Navajo Nation has endured years of war, years of struggle, and years of transformation from the traditional to modern world. As days, weeks, months, and years begin to pass on through, old and new compelling issues arouse on the reservation and its communities. Such issues that are constantly on the minds of our Navajo leaders include: alcoholism, crime, obesity, uranium mining, environmental exploitation, and the list could go on forever. Forever is a long time; however, one crucial issue many have overlooked is the education among the Reservation schools. In all cases, “the object of education is to prepare the young to educate themselves throughout their lives,” yet if this be true, how does the reservation differ from this concept (Hutchins). Due to schools with a limited amount of resources, needed and uncertified teachers, parental unawareness, and student lack of desire to attend local schools; students who attend reservation schools aren’t receiving the education they should. The educators and parents should be doing everything in their power to resolve such an issue.

While the backbone and the foundation of the Navajo Nation was being commenced, “242 schools on the Navajo Reservation... covering a vast geographical area of 25,000 square miles,” had been constructed (Rude and Gorman). Two hundred and forty-two schools without any doubt is one huge improvement and “300,000 to 400,000 students are school age”; however, the real problem relies within what occurs in the school itself (Lewis). Reading and sharing textbooks with friends, bummed at the fact there are no interesting clubs to join, and disappointment that no AP or college classes are available are emotions that one feel when a school isn’t able to offer as much. From

personal experience, attending a low-income, isolated, run-down, unknown school on the reservation opened my eyes to see the reality behind education on the rez. Never was there money to replace old and damaged books, to replace green dusty chalkboards, to replace worn-out buses; there was nothing. Some days I didn't attend school because of the high raised gas prices or when it rained or snowed, I had no way to leave my house. Overall I can say that I didn't carry a book to every class because I didn't have one, took regular classes like the other kids (Honors wasn't a choice), skipped practice (didn't have a ride home), and missed school a lot due to car troubles and the messy roads.

Undoubtedly, schools having limited resources is unusual, but what makes it worst is finding out that those who are supposedly our educators...aren't certified. In the past, teachers, including superintendants, have either been fired or left themselves. Reliable and dependant, many students see an educator as and sometimes question whether he or she knows what they're really talking about. We listen to them, learn their teaching skills, follow the rules, and learn the material of course, but how can one be so sure that they're a trustworthy source? At a parent teacher conference my sophomore year, my concerned mother asked my algebra two teacher about his own schooling and if whether or not he'd received Arizona certification. Surprisingly, it came to our attention he hadn't! From then on, I can't say I know who is certified and who isn't. The men and women who are meant to lead the school (superintendants), "chose to resign from their positions...reasons were related to politics, family, community, personal, Navajo culture, and Language," each and every year leave the school without any improvements to the school system (Slowman). When a new school year begins, conflict arises when there

aren't enough teachers for a given subject or a principal to lead the school. How are students to receive their education when no one is there to educate?

Nonetheless waking at the break of dawn to hop on the bus is one thing, but receiving the support and confidence from parents is another. Parents, whom are supposedly to be the ones children look up to and that children's "behavior reflects parental and cultural influences as well as his own emerging beliefs and values," (Parent). Children grow up, behave and do as they had been raised to do modernly and culturally. Many a times, parents on the rez have only received education from kindergarten through high school and never pursued a college education. As a young, easily manipulated child, he or she is able to believe that it's okay to not obtain a higher education if mom or dad didn't. It's difficult enough that parents don't stress the importance of a long-lasting education, but when they expect less of what is needed from them, then there's a bigger problem! In a study at Montezuma Creek on parental expectation of their children's education, simply "all parents...expected from their Childs education...A good job," (Parent). From this study, it can be concluded that the concern and reason behind their child attending school would be to receive a good job and nothing more than a "secure survival," (Parent). Marie White, educator for thirty-five years at Red Mesa Elementary states, "there is low self-esteem within the parents, especially the ones that are not educated, they're not involved with their children's education which causes dropouts, drug usage, and babies having babies." I feel that parents should be more involved with their children's lives and education because their support will assist their children to pursuing their dreams and career for a stable life.

As a result, it has become a question whether or not to attend school some days, which leads to low graduation rates and dropouts. Overall the amount, “of American Indians living on reservations, only twenty-five percent are high school graduates,” which means that if it was the Navajo reservation alone, the percentage rate would be lower (Prater). As a community and nation of one, we should all work together and encourage all to finish twelve years of schooling. As a student on the rez, I saw six friends dropout and majority of seniors barely passing with a D. Students have no want to be in school and to learn; to them, it’s not an environment of learning, but one to waste time.

Despite the fact that not all voices can be heard, I believe that mine can and so can my fellow peers. We are a forgotten community, one that hardly is seen on the Arizona map; but through effort and support, I believe that change will come towards our community schools if we seek to make our voices heard. We all search for a change in betterment of our schools. If we can bring the community together through chapter meetings, school board meetings, or begin PTA meetings and discuss the current issues, I feel we’ll be able to encourage parents to get involved in school activities and advocate to all students the importance of education. Also by writing letters to our current Navajo Nation President, Ben Shelly and letters to the board of Dine Education asking for better sources, educators, and funds, we’ll put the Red Mesa community back on the map. Not only that, but we’ll be improving the education system and providing bright futures for those of the next generations to come.

References

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