



Diné Bizaad Revitalization on the Navajo Nation

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — The Diné Bizaad subcommittee of the 24th Navajo Nation Council (NNC) held a work session with Navajo Technical University (NTU) Interim Dean of Graduate Studies, Dr. Jennifer Wheeler and recent NTU Master's Degree recipient Jennifer Gross to discuss Diné Bizaad revitalization, development and history of the language.

“The subcommittee meets with our language champions and experts,” said Chair Nathaniel Brown (Dennehotso, Kayenta, Chííłchinbií'tó). “Their passion, zeal, and understanding of the importance of our language continues to inspire us, it's our responsibility to hold onto our language and to teach our Diné people.”

Dr. Wheeler provided a presentation on the Diné Bizaad Graduate Program her and her colleagues extensively worked on to establish at NTU. NTU works in collaboration with Gallup-McKinley County Schools to provide Navajo language courses at their institutions, but this effort is not enough.

Wheeler indicated the Diné people are losing their language at an increasing rate due to the stigma, which leads to parents preventing their children from learning the language. After acquiring her Doctorate's Degree, Wheeler has made it her mission to teach Diné Bizaad.

The next presenter was Gross who reached out to Navajo Leadership for assistance on equal pay for Diné Bizaad teachers. Gross highlighted the wage gap between bilingual and regular program educators at her institution, with bilingual educators making \$16 thousand less than regular program educators

“English teachers have all their lessons and teaching materials already prepared for them in English,” said Gross. “All they have to do is make copies and disseminate to their students, without having to create a lesson plan in Navajo and deciding how to deliver the information in Navajo to students.”

Council Delegate Eugene Tso (Chinle) informed the subcommittee that the American Rescue Plan Act includes a language retention fund with its legislation that could possibly be utilized to fund Navajo education centers for equal pay.

“Make use of our elderly and medicine people to help our youngsters master Diné Bizaad,” expressed Delegate Tso. “Navajo language is attainable; you have to learn to live it to know what it is. Universities can teach Navajo, but they have to learn and understand all aspects of the language.”

The Diné Bizaad subcommittee will draft a resolution on behalf of the NNC for the states of New Mexico and Arizona for continued support of immersion schools and equal pay amongst educators.