



## NAVAJO NATION HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:  
June 8, 2012

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### **NNHRC commends N.M. Public Education Department's decision to keep CCSD intact**

SAINT MICHAELS, Navajo Nation—The Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission commends the New Mexico Public Education Department's decision to keep Central Consolidated School District of northwestern New Mexico intact. The decision was issued today.

NNHRC's involvement on the matter of CCSD began after receiving a letter from Navajo Nation Council Delegate Jonathan Hale on December 21, 2011, in his role as the chairperson for the health, education and human services committee, to investigate further on the matter of CCSD.

"There's new hope," said NNHRC Policy Analyst Lauren Bernally-Long about the decision. Bernally-Long was a former student of CCSD. "Now, we have to sit at the table and move forward."

On May 23, 2012, NNHRC Executive Director Leonard Gorman transmitted a NNHRC resolution to the New Mexico Public Education Department's Secretary-Designate Hanna Skandera to protect and preserve Navajo human rights, civil rights and voting rights.

For the proposed school district by Children First that would have split the district to create a new one, Navajos voting strength would have been diluted. Diluting a protected society like Navajo violates the Voting Rights Act.

NNHRC Commissioners unanimously opposed the school district's split in a resolution (NNHRCMAY-19-12) on May 21, 2012. The split would have segregate non-Native American voters who are parents from the predominately Navajo school district.

According to a press release from N.M. PED, N.M. PED Secretary-Designate said, "In the end, the most relevant factor is the lesson we teach our students; we need to overcome our differences, not divide ourselves."

"The decision comes after NMPED held a three hour public hearing in Farmington in May where all sides were given time to present evidence," according to the N.M. PED press release.

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At the hearing, according to the NNHRCMAY-19-12 resolution, “It was clearly demonstrated based on the people that spoke for and against splitting the Central Consolidated School District that the issue [was] racially polarized.”

“The proposal to split would have created a new school district centered around the Kirtland area,” according to the press release from N.M. PED.” However, the proposed borders of the new district could have presented numerous civil rights issues with students who live on the Navajo Nation.”

Said Dr. Jennifer Nez Denetdale, a Commissioner for NNHRC who represents the education sector, “The decision sends a clear message that there is a need to work for a peaceful co-existence.” Denetdale continued and said, “It sends a message to our students, especially to Navajo students that institutions like the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission, and the Navajo Nation will seek to protect their rights.”

*On June 5, 2012, the oversight committee for NNHRC, the Naabik’iyati’ Committee of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Navajo Nation Council opposed the splitting of CCSD.*

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