

***Pueblo of Jemez
Testimony ~ Redefining Education***

***Alyce Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff
Commission on Native Children
Regional Hearing***

In 1999, the Pueblo of Jemez, through its Vision 2010 community sessions, asserted its authority and desire to determine what is most important to the education of its tribal members. Jemez began its re-organization efforts in 1999 as part of the Visioning and Planning sessions for the community. From Vision 2010 and the community planning sessions, emerged three overriding themes that have been at the core of the Pueblo of Jemez' Redefining Education Movement and reinforced at the Community's VISION 2020 sessions: The first, to Build Capacity – “within our tribal members to assume responsible leadership roles;” Second, to Take Ownership – “over the educational systems, schools and programs that serve and provide for our children and tribal members;” and Third, “to Redefine Education – so that Jemez Language and Culture are at the heart of how, where and what we teach our children to ensure the survival and advancement of our Jemez people.”

After a series of organizational changes, the Jemez Department of Education was designed to reflect a comprehensive approach to education which begins with the tribe's most precious resource, the infants and works up to the adult learners & college students. Rooted in Jemez Language and Culture; encompassing all support programs, schools and services from the different tribal programs and local schools: bureau, public and charter.

The programs and services administered by the Jemez Department of Education are supported by the following federal agencies: The Bureau of Indian Affairs; The Bureau of Indian Education; The US Department of Education and the US Department of Health and Human Services. Additional programs are funded through State, private and foundation grants, plus personal contributions.

The Pueblo of Jemez, located in the central part of the State of New Mexico, is one of 22 Native American tribes in the State of New Mexico with a tribal membership of 3,900+. Jemez is a very traditional Pueblo that has maintained its cultural and religious practices. It is the only Pueblo where the Towa language is spoken, a language that is unwritten. Jemez recognizes that its language is the core of its continual existence as a strong sovereign tribal nation with a unique identity as Jemez people.

In 1999, the Pueblo of Jemez, through its Vision 2010 community sessions, asserted its authority and desire to determine what is most important to the education of its tribal members. In that same year, the tribal community took advantage of the innovations in New Mexico state law that allowed for the establishment of site-based charter schools responsive to community needs and autonomously operated. The tribe also employed the power of the New Mexico Indian Education Act, enacted in 2001, which supports the tribe's authority over the education of its children.

With the community's support and strength of the law, the Pueblo of Jemez forged a new path toward becoming the first Tribe in the state of New Mexico to establish two charter schools, San Diego Riverside (K-8) and Walatowa High (9-12), whose emphasis are community and culturally based education. Although the latter was denied by the local school board, the tribe won its appeal to the state school board to have the high school charter granted. Following the establishment of both schools, the tribe worked with the NM Charter School Coalition to amend the State law to have the State also serve as an authorizer, further recognizing tribal sovereignty and reinforcing the Government to Government relationship between the State and Tribes.

In 2007 Walatowa Head Start in partnership with Arizona State University, embarked on an inaugural research project funded by the Office of Head Start (OHS) thru the American Indian/Alaska Native Head Start Research Center at CU, Denver looking at the status and use of Native Languages within Head Start programs and if OHS supported their teaching and use. The Jemez PhotoVoice Research project with ASU became the impetus for the Jemez Tribal Council,

thru Resolution, to convert the Walatowa Head Start to Full Immersion. Following this move, Jemez worked with other tribes, state and national partners to influence a major change in National Head Start Regulations; as of December 2016, the OHS Regulations now fully support the curriculum delivery and instruction of Native children served by Head Start in their home (Native) languages and English language instruction is no longer required.

To support the continued expansion and implementation of Towa Language Immersion, the WK Kellogg Foundation provided initial funding in 2015 to introduce the program earlier into the Walatowa Child Care program starting at six (6) months and strengthening the existing transition pieces we have in place with our three (3) local elementary schools with the goal of continuing the Immersion Program (approach) into the early elementary years (to 2nd/3rd grade).

A primary goal identified as part of our grant is to have 100% of our Towa Speaking and Non-Towa Speaking children to be consistently exposed to the language so that we continue to support their understanding and proficiency in the Jemez Towa language leading to eventual fluency. The overall goal is to ensure that the transitions and the curriculum/teachings at each grade level after Head Start build on one another to continue reinforcing their speaking and increasing of fluency at each stage to eventual mastery or grounding in the language, as the child's first language.

As Jemez is unwritten, due to the decision of our religious and traditional leadership, and will probably remain unwritten for some time to come, an ongoing challenge for the schools and educators is how to assess our children thru a formal assessment in an unwritten, non-academic language. In 2017 we began working with the University of New Mexico and the New Mexico Public Education Department on developing oral language based assessments; giving tribes the ability to develop their own assessments in non-written languages that will be recognized by the state and to be used alongside the PARCC and other state mandated assessments in the public, charter and BIE schools, if relevant. However, due to the change in State Governorship and Administration, this effort was stalled, thus, we hired a consultant thru the grant who helped

Jemez together with our local schools develop an assessment that was piloted in 2018/19, and starting with the 2019/20 school year has been used. Three data points are collected each year.

As our students are served by Public, Charter, BIE and Tribal Schools/programs; we continue to strengthen and broaden the professional development for our teachers, educational assistants, community educators, language teams, parents and community to mobilize a larger force toward this effort. To sustain our work and ensure long term- permanent success; we are also looking to “Grow Our Own” educators, fluent in the language that can go thru a formal Teacher Education Degree program, focused on Language Immersion, Multi-Lingual, Multi-Cultural and Dual Language strategies to be used within our different school systems. While at the same time honoring the Alternative Licensure program set up by NM Public Education Department for fluent elder Native Language instructors within our home communities to teach within the Public and Charter schools. Encountering very unique challenges, we continue to work with the University of Hawaii at Hilo and the University of New Mexico to develop and pilot a program with the educators from our local schools and communities that can be replicated or adopted at UNM to be offered to the general population, in particular, those interested in language and culturally based instruction. Jemez has identified a group of educators: tribal education staff, teachers, educational assistants, and retired teachers to begin a MA program with UH-Hilo focused on developing the Jemez version of the Kahuawaiola Immersion Licensure program. The cohort identified has begun taking classes and will have completed the course work and development of a Jemez Immersion Teacher Licensure program modeled after Kahuawaiola by Spring 2026. Starting in Fall 2026, the first cohort of Jemez students will begin their Jemez Immersion Licensure program with an anticipated graduation date of Spring ‘28. To support continued teacher training and development, in Fall 2021, Jemez began to pilot a K-6 Language Immersion school to serve as the lab school in coordination with the UH Hilo Jemez-Kahuawaiola program, as the location where Jemez can help train and develop its immersion teachers as part of the Immersion Licensure program.

Jemez, in partnership with the Pueblo of Zia, are the only tribes in NM to Administer the Title VI Federal Indian Education Formula Grant program in lieu of the local school district, funded by the US Department of Education. Taking another step toward ownership and local control of education in partnership with the district, schools and key stakeholders. In staying true to this model of collaboration, the Jemez-Zia Tribal Consortium was strengthened in 2015 to apply for the 2016 Special Fiber Construction funds through the E-Rate Program of the FCC. Bringing together all the E-Rate eligible entities serving both tribal communities: Libraries, Charter and BIE Schools, was another first in developing a self-provisioned tribal network to bring broadband to a much underserved area. The Jemez-Zia Tribal Consortium was funded on the last day of the funding year and a waiver requesting a year-long extension was approved in December of 2017, giving the tribes 6 months to complete and light a network. The fiber network was brought on-line by June 30th, 2018 and the network build was completed to Jemez in July 2018. A second waiver was requested for a 1-2 month extension and approved. FCC Chairman Ajit Pai, visited the project and all library/school sites on August 20th, 2018.

Being the Trailblazers and Pioneers of different efforts supporting the Educational Vision of our communities, exercising Tribal Sovereignty and ownership over the education of our children; and knowing that Technology can play a critical role in the maintenance and revitalization of our Native languages. We took the challenge of connecting our schools and libraries to broadband to further enhance the educational opportunities afforded to our children, youth and community members. We are at the doorstep and have opened a new door of opportunity for our children and their futures, as the FCC has now opened a Tribal Priority window for spectrum, we have focused on bringing our minds together, to collectively, be a part of another first, in the legacy of the Redefining Education Movement in Jemez. With the COVID-19 Pandemic, school closures and stay at home policies, Jemez invested resources received thru the COVID CARES Act and COVID Treasury funding to connect the overall Tribal Community, Programs and Government Offices to fiber and wireless internet

connectivity. The Tribal Network followed the footprint of the E-Rate project, being placed in a separate conduit alongside the E-Rate Fiber, creating parallel networks to ensure high speed internet connectivity for our students at school, at home and within tribal program sites.

Through Jemez language and culture infused curricula from grades Pre-K-12, dual language and immersion programs for children ages 0-9, community integrated and experiential learning and academic rigor, the Pueblo of Jemez has reinforced the bold truth that children who know who they are, where they come from and the value of their contribution to the community can excel academically.

In fact, the Pueblo of Jemez' progressive efforts have made it one of the most forward thinking, community-based education program in New Mexico. The tribe has succeeded in becoming an influential voice in Indian Education Reform by utilizing its closest, most valuable assets: the people of Jemez. By prioritizing language; implementing culture and traditions, the tribe is redefining community-based education.

An area that the Commission can help influence is the cross-agency coordination and collaboration to prioritize Native (home) language integration and validation across systems. Recognizing that a mono-lingual English based education system is not the most beneficial for children coming from homes and communities where another language is present. Respecting and honoring a tribe's sovereign right to prioritize teaching in their own language and re-designing, along with developing new systems to support such efforts. Standardized, western based models of Education with English as the medium of instruction, will never support the revitalization or maintenance of Native (home) Languages and the government should uphold its trust responsibility to support community defined models of education and learning that best support the survival and strengthening of Native (home) languages. As a Native child grows up and pursues their education, their learning and development is impacted by multiple federal agencies: the Department of Health & Human Services (Child Care Development Fund & Administration for Children & Families, Administration for Native Americans), the Bureau of

Indian Education (tied to the BIA under Interior), the US Department of Education, and the Office of Juvenile Justice Programs, to name a few. Until these systems and funding streams are aligned at the agency/department levels, tribes will continue to struggle with setting up a seamless educational system for their children and youth, especially if their priority is to ground their children in their Native (home) language first.

Investment in funds, resources and flexibilities to allow tribes to define education for themselves, based on tribal and local priorities. Including funds to support locally defined research based practices, curriculum, evaluations and assessments. Integrating unique models of education that focus on experiential, placed based and project based learning opportunities. Connecting students to their home communities and real life situations thru academic, career and technical content rooted in language and culture.

One area to invest resources and build are Coordinated Tribal/School health programs to meet the social, emotional and behavioral needs that this pandemic as brought to the forefront, along with further nurturing personal health, wellness, athletics, nutrition, and health education.

Regardless of the challenges posed, the Pueblo of Jemez is committed to the mission of strengthening, respecting and encouraging the traditional language and culture, while building on the unique talents of each individual, to develop well-educated, knowledgeable, healthy and competent leaders for a stronger and healthy community.

Utilizing the wisdom of the past to instill courage for the future, educating minds, building leaders and creating opportunities has been the cornerstone of the educational success of the Pueblo of Jemez. And we will continue to challenge systems, laws, regulations and standards, plus overcome barriers; to ensure our Jemez language survives and we continue to develop and grow first language speakers in Jemez.