



# RAMAH NAVAJO SCHOOL BOARD, INC.

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**Congressional Testimony of the Ramah Navajo School Board, Inc.  
Regarding FY 2021 Appropriations for the BIE  
to the U.S. House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees  
on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Submitted February 3, 2020**

Honorable Chair, Ranking Member and Subcommittee Members, *Ya'ah't'eeh*. My name is Marlene Watashe, President of the Ramah Navajo School Board, Inc., On behalf of the Ramah Navajo people I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide our testimony.

I represent Ramah Navajo School Board, Inc. (RNSB, Inc.) Our corporation oversees many programs and services on Ramah Navajo Land. RNSB, Inc. is incorporated by the state of New Mexico and authorized by the Ramah Navajo Chapter to operate the K-12 Pine Hill School, a Head Start program, Early Intervening services, the Pine Hill Health Center, Behavioral Health, Social Services, Higher Education Program and a scholarship program. As you can see we provide many much needed programs and services to the Ramah Navajo People all the way from birth to old age. Ramah Navajo land is also located in a remote mountainous region of New Mexico. There are very limited opportunities for employment and education outside our campus. In order to provide quality services and programs we must have an adequate infrastructure in place to support what we do. We need good roads, water system, electrical lines, sewer system, gas lines for heating, and buildings. Most of the infrastructure was built in the 1970s and early 1980s. Through natural wear and life span of the infrastructure, and although we have done our due diligence in operation and maintenance, many parts of the infrastructure are in need of repair or replacement. The federal funding we receive is allocated for operating the grants and providing services. Therefore, very little is left over for repair or replacement.

I am here today to ask this congressional Subcommittee to assist us in funding the much needed repairs or replacement of our infrastructure. **Our priority budget line items in the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) budget are ISEP formula funds; Student Transportation; Education IT (access to broadband) as well as the BIE Education Construction budget line items for Facilities Improvement and Repair and School Facility Replacement Construction.**

**Facilities Improvement and Repair and School Facility Replacement Construction.** First and foremost, we deeply appreciate the Subcommittees' commitment to increases in appropriations for these line items, particularly the increases for Facilities Improvement and Repair and School Facility Replacement Construction. The state of our school facilities is such a pressing need, it is hard to talk about anything else. Progress on improving our school facilities and other schools' facilities has been possible because of bipartisan Congressional commitment to both increased funding and increased oversight. Unfortunately, because of our experiences with the Indian Affairs Division of Facilities Management and Construction (DFMC) over the past year, we are asking you to redouble your oversight of DMFC.

In 2018 after RNSB, Inc. came to Washington, DC to testify before this Subcommittee about the appalling state of our school facilities and to meet with our Congressional Delegation, the Director of the BIE and the Director of the Office of Facilities, Property and Safety Management (which oversees DFMC), we were able to enter into a planned agreement with the DFMC on a phased approach to addressing our critical facilities issues such as a lack of lightning protection on our school buildings and a black mold infestation which had caused our library and kindergarten buildings to be shut down. These Phases are: Phase 1: Address Emergency Work Items; Phase 2: Renovate and Repair Existing Structures; Phase 3: Gym Replacement and Grounds Improvement and Repair.

We were encouraged when this planned, phased approach was created and when Phase 1 was completed. However, since that time we have run into roadblock after roadblock with the DFMC. Each phase is designed to have a planning stage; design stage; and construction stage. Unfortunately, for the past year we have been stuck in the planning stage for both Phase 2 and Phase 3 of our plan. The crux of the issue appears to be that that DFMC is, by our calculations, substantially underestimating the "program of requirements" (POR) during the planning stage. The POR is determined based on projection of the number of students who will be using these facilities in the future. The last 10 years of data on a school's Average Daily Membership (ADM) go into calculating the POR. We ran these calculations ourselves, using the DFMC guidelines, and arrived at substantially different POR numbers than the DFMC. Unfortunately, we found inconsistencies in how the DFMC is calculating ADM and calculating POR—resulting in what we believe is a substantial underestimating POR and then using these POR numbers to propose unworkably smaller buildings than what we currently have. These disagreements on POR calculations have created material delays in Phases 2 and 3 moving forward. Unfortunately, we are concerned that other schools are also being given smaller POR numbers but may not know that it is possible to object to these calculations.

**Estimated Costs for Our Most Pressing Funding Needs.** Below we highlight some of our most pressing funding needs. We believe that our Pine Hill School faces challenges similar to many other schools in the BIE school system and we hope that by highlighting our specific examples, this can help inform the development of the FY 2021 BIE budget in a way that can benefit all students.

1. Our water system needs to be replaced. From the two water wells (need water pumps, drop pipes, electrical lines), to the water lines (needs to be relocated away from under the road), new water filtration and treatment center, all the way to the sewer lagoon.
  - A. First, a Preliminary Engineering report (PER) must be completed.
  - B. Estimated Cost - \$4,450,000
2. The paved road coming onto the RNSB, Inc. campus needs to be repaved as there are many cracks and potholes.
  - A. Estimated Cost - \$1,000,000.00
3. The campus is in need of a perimeter fence to enclose the campus. Currently, the campus is open and anyone or thing can walk across the campus. The school and clinic need to be secured. This is a major safety issue.
  - A. Estimated Cost - \$1,000,000.00

4. In order, to provide a safe campus the campus, especially the school needs an upgraded security camera system.  
A. Estimated Cost - \$1,000,000.00
5. The Pine Hill School receives ISEP funding, but it is not sufficient to cover the salary of all needed teachers, support personnel, and to operate an effective facilities management department.  
A. Estimated Cost - \$150,000.00
6. Ramah Navajo is in a remote area with many of its road unpaved. The Pine Hill buses must navigate many miles of unimproved roads. We need sufficient funding for bus replacement and repair. And funds for road improvement (gravel for the unimproved roads).  
A. Estimated Cost - \$1,000,000.00
6. The Pine Hill School currently relies on patchy, unreliable internet access. 12 miles away, there is a fiber optic landline we could connect to. Reliable internet access would be a lifeline for both our Pine Hill School and the medical clinic we operate.  
A. Estimated Cost - TBD

## **Conclusion**

The Ramah Navajo People have come a long way on the road to self-determination and to establishing the capacity to govern and educate our own people and provide services to three counties in New Mexico in an intergovernmental, collaborative way. There is still a way to go on that road, and we believe that the best way to stay the course and to continue to make progress is to maintain the current institutional relationships that the community has forged with our tribal, federal and state partners. Thank you for being our partners as we work to provide a safe and promising future for our students.