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## PRESS RELEASE – IMPACT AID DISPARITY CHALLENGE

April 15, 2020

As a result of the challenge filed last spring by Gallup-McKinley County Schools, Zuni Public School District and Central Consolidated School District, the Federal Impact Aid Office in Washington D.C. ruled today that the State of New Mexico’s school funding formula is not currently equalized. This means that for FY 2020, the State of New Mexico will not be eligible to redirect federal Impact Aid funds generated by children living on federally impacted property to non-Impact Aid Districts in the State. While this is a great step in the right direction to bridging the educational divide experienced by children in impact aid districts, much work is still needed to address the shortcomings of New Mexico’s school funding formula to ensure that the poorest and most vulnerable students in our state have equitable access to educational opportunities afforded other students.

Concerns have been raised since the inception of this practice in the 1970s that the State’s funding formula has created a system of haves and have nots. The State’s practice of redirecting 75 percent of Impact Aid funds to the rest of the state has forced Impact Aid Districts to use operational funding on building repair instead of in classrooms. The current COVID-19 pandemic has further illuminated this disparity: Some students have access to technology while other students are left without because of decades of inequitable and insufficient funding. We have often heard that the formula was designed not to create winners and losers, but during this difficult time it is easy to see whose students have 21st Century learning tools and whose do not.

New Mexico’s Constitution requires a uniform and sufficient education for all students, not a system that further widens the gap to learning experienced by students living on tribal lands, military housing and low income housing. We know that the Judge’s verdict in Yazzie/Martinez vs. the State of NM, and now the Federal Government’s determination, prove that the State’s educational funding formula is in fact “dis-equalized”. While we are pleased that the Federal Government ruled in our favor, we are deeply saddened about the more than four decades of potentially skewed State data submittals that resulted in a funding formula that has removed over 2 Billion dollars from minority, military, and economically disadvantaged students.

We appreciate the support of Governor Lujan-Grisham in acknowledging the inequities in the State’s Impact Aid policy is unfair. We also would like to thank those legislators, tribal leaders, county and city representatives, and many other citizens who have tirelessly fought for Impact Aid credited dollars to be returned to the children that generate them. Out of respect to tribal and military communities, we request that any appeal of this determination would be opposed by the Governor and her staff. Collectively we will continue to work together to fix our educational funding system so that New Mexico’s most at-risk students receive equal access to educational opportunities.

“After this ruling, I hope the State of New Mexico realizes how much they have wronged our students. For many years Native American communities have had their students’ money stolen from their education. Because our district is not as fortunate as other districts in their ability to fund their education needs and school buildings, our students have been left behind.” Charles Long, Gallup McKinley County Schools Board President

“My wife is a fourth-grade educator in Shiprock. We recently made home visits to deliver educational packets to her students. We covered 60 miles in 3 hours. Being able to see firsthand the poverty these students live in and how the state’s funding system negatively impacts our students on the reservation broke my heart. With this determination I am hoping we can begin to do right by our students.” Gary Montoya, Central Consolidated School District Board President

“Our students’ voices have finally been heard. They are the real winners in this fight that we embarked on. Because of them, we are truly proud of all we have accomplished and will continue to accomplish for them, our children.” Stephanie Vicenti, Zuni Public School District Board President