



June 11, 2015
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Pinon Unified School District loses nine buses to overnight fire



Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye and Vice President Jonathan Nez expressed disappointment with the news that buses for Pinon Unified School District were burned overnight. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

TWIN ARROWS, Ariz.— Nine school buses from the Pinon Unified School District were burned sometime after midnight.

Seven of the buses were completely destroyed and two were partially burned.

The Navajo Nation Fire Department from Window Rock is in Pinon, Ariz. investigating the fire. The scene has been shutdown and summer school is cancelled for Thursday and Friday.

The preliminary report is that the incident is suspected arson.

Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye admonished the person or persons responsible and said it is the children and the community that will suffer the consequences.

“It is unfortunate that there are people out there burning

buses that transport our children who are continuing their education during the summer,” President Begaye said. “The people responsible are not harming the vehicles, but our children and our communities.”

He said during the summer, kids are out of school and enjoying free activities sponsored by the school districts, like summer school and the free lunch program.

People with negative intentions need to pause and think about what they are about to do and the people that will be harmed by their actions, he said.

“We’re asking the public to also be on the lookout for people that may want to harm our children and our people,” President Begaye said.

Anyone with information on the fire is encouraged to

step forward and contact the local authorities.

“Our community members need to be vigilant. Keep an eye out for your chapter. NDOT and NECA’s equipment get vandalized also,” said Vice President Nez. “We need to hold each other accountable, from the young to the old.”

Navajo Nation Council Delegate Dwight Witherspoon was equally disappointed with the news of the buses being burned.

“It saddens my heart that any school would be a target for arson,” said Witherspoon.

Attakai Tso, former transportation manager for the Pinon Unified School District, said the fire occurred between midnight and 1 a.m.

“The school security saw the fire and reported it. One bus caught fire and then it spread to other buses. They were able to move some buses, but nine buses were burned,” Attakai said.

“It’s bad, real bad,” he added.

Doug Vaughan, superintendent for Pinon Unified School District, said there were no injuries. Although buses were burned, the bus barn did not burn in the fire.

“There was an incident in the middle of last night. We conducted an extensive survey of all staff and students

and there are zero injuries reported. The incident is under investigation,” said Vaughan.

He said the estimated damage from the blaze is \$1.4 million. The school district is already moving toward replacement of the buses for the upcoming school year beginning in the fall.

“For today and tomorrow, it’s having a drastic effect, we had to cancel summer school. We’ll have summer school back in session on Monday,” Vaughan said.

Pinon Unified School district has a total of 33 buses and for now, there will be enough buses to transport students for the summer school session.

President Begaye and Vice President Nez were attending the Navajo Nation Council Leadership Meeting at Twin Arrows when they received word about the fire.

“I’m asking people to refrain from doing any further damage to our property and ultimately, our children and our people,” President Begaye said.

