

HOPi SCHOOL SYSTEM

P.O. Box 1170, Keams Canyon, AZ 86034

www.hopischoolsystem.org

MEMORANDUM

TO: Hopi School System Stakeholders, Local School Advisory Boards, Educators, School Staff, and Community Members
FROM: Ms. Arayah Mitchell, *Chief School Administrator*, Hopi School System
DATE: October 2026
SUBJECT: Comprehensive Transition Update: Progress Achieved (July 2026–Present), Governance Clarification, and Strategic Path Ahead

1. Message from the Chief School Administrator & Operational Context

Greetings to the Hopi School System Community. I address you with complete transparency from the Central Administration Office of the Hopi School System to share critical operational updates, progress achieved since July, and our strategic plan for the remainder of School Year 2026–2027.

For those community members whom I have not yet had the privilege of meeting, I am Arayah Mitchell, originally from Chinle, Arizona, I have had the pleasure of working on the Hopi reservation for two and a half years prior to stepping into this leadership role, serving as Federal Programs Director then later, High School Principal at Hopi Jr./Sr. High School. In my seventeen years as a dedicated educator, my career includes fourteen years with Chinle Unified School District where I served as an: Elementary School Teacher, District Data Analyst/Staff Developer, and Elementary School Principal. I also have served as a Principal Education Specialist for the Navajo Nation Department of Diné Education. I officially assumed the role of Chief School Administrator (CSA) for Hopi School System on July 20, 2026, and I am fully committed to building an educational system that honors our local school identities while establishing strong, centralized support for all of our children.

The Hopi School System was officially established on July 1, 2026, bringing seven local schools under the governing authority of the Hopi Board of Education:

- Keams Canyon Elementary School
- Hopi Jr./Sr. High School
- First Mesa Elementary School
- Second Mesa Day School
- Hopi Day School
- Hotevilla-Bacavi Community School
- Moencopi Day School

The overarching mandate for Year One is focused on creating the foundational systems, financial controls, organizational structures, and administrative supports necessary to operate as a unified school system, while protecting the unique local identity and needs of each village school.

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"Our shared vision for the Hopi School System is anchored in Puhupöhut—forging a new path forward." Through dedicated teamwork, transparency, and community partnership, we are laying the groundwork for state-of-the-art facilities, academically rigorous and culturally grounded programs, competitive staff compensation, superior housing, and premier athletic opportunities.

2. Unification Imperatives & Implementation Acceleration

The initial implementation plan envisioned a gradual Year One transition in which the Central Administration Office would be established while local school operations remained essentially uninterrupted at the site level. For School Year 2026–2027, each school continues to operate under site-based budgeting because school budgets were submitted to the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) prior to the official establishment of the Hopi School System.

However, upon assuming office on July 20, 2026, immediate review of legal matters, school audit statuses, site budgets, and system-wide financial structures revealed critical mandates from federal partners that required accelerating our implementation timeline. Through bi-weekly technical assistance meetings with the BIE, federal authorities clarified several non-negotiable operational requirements for School Year 2026–2027:

1. **Unified Single Audit Mandate:** BIE clarified that all seven Hopi schools must be audited under a single, unified Hopi School System audit for School Year 2026–2027, rather than operating under seven separate site audits.
2. **Consolidated Tax Identification (EIN):** Because of the single system audit requirement, individual school sites can no longer utilize separate Employer Identification Numbers (EINs) for tax and reporting purposes. All seven schools must operate under the unified Hopi School System EIN.
3. **Centralized Federal Funding Drawdown:** BIE federal funding was drawn down from the Internal Revenue Service via the main Hopi Board of Education account and subsequently distributed to the newly established bank accounts for local school sites.

These mandatory requirements effectively pushed the "fast-forward" button on our transition timeline. Addressing these external compliance directives required immediate administrative consolidation to protect federal funding and ensure legal compliance across all seven campuses.

3. Summary of Major Accomplishments (July 1, 2026 – Present)

Despite the unexpected complexity of these transition requirements, Central Administration and the Hopi Board of Education have achieved significant structural milestones over the past two months:

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- **Governance & Tribal Leadership Alignment:** On July 22, 2026, the Hopi Board of Education presented the newly established school system structure to the Hopi Tribal Council.
- **Comprehensive Campus Visits & Community Engagement:** The CSA and HBE members conducted site visits across all seven school campuses to meet with educators and staff, address transition questions, and present Year One implementation plans. System leadership also participated in school Meet & Greets and Open Houses at Moencopi Day School and Keams Canyon Elementary School. We look forward to more opportunities to meet and greet the families of all school sites.
- **Legal & Financial System Diagnostics:** Legal counsel gathered and reviewed all active legal matters and historical audit data across all seven schools. Financial consultant and Certified Public Accountant (CPA) CW Payne was retained to support central financial architecture and single-audit preparation, while accounting firm RED-W was engaged to perform the School Year 2026–2027 single audit associated with the unification.
- **Banking & Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP):** New HBE bank accounts were established to manage BIE funding flows, supported by weekly technical assistance meetings with Bank of America. HSS purchased Tyler Technologies ERP Pro as its permanent enterprise finance system, targeted for full operational go-live in School Year 2027–2028 with staff training occurring throughout School Year 2026–2027. QuickBooks is currently deployed for Central Administration Office operations.
- **BIE Technical Support & Advisory Communication:** Bi-weekly technical assistance meetings were established with BIE officials to handle reporting, funding drawdown, and transition compliance. Additionally, the CSA convened an initial advisory meeting with Local School Advisory Board members on September 1, 2026, providing follow-up guidance regarding board feedback, questions, and the review of Advisory School Board By-Laws.

4. Central Administration Operations & 120-Day Interim Department Work Plans

Because the new Central Administration Office did not initially have funding for new positions, HBE approved the temporary reassignment of experienced staff from local school sites. These 120-day interim reassignments allow HSS to build essential administrative departments without disrupting day-to-day school site operations. The CSA works in coordination with these site Principals to establish days dedicated to site based and CAO. The staff who are in these roles were recommended by the principals of their local schools. I extend my appreciation to those sites.

The table below outlines the core responsibilities and immediate action plans assigned to these interim department leaders:

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Central Department	Interim Leadership Focus & Immediate Action Items
Information Technology (IT)	Auditing site-level IT infrastructure; compiling comprehensive network data, hardware inventories, and telecommunications contracts across all seven sites to consolidate phone and internet service contracts under unified HSS vendor agreements.
Facilities & Maintenance	Gathering site-level facility data and reviewing Maximo work orders across all campuses; migrating facility management operations to the new HSS Maximo platform used by BIE to identify, track, and fund capital repair and facility improvement projects.
Personnel & Human Resources	Collecting and auditing employment contracts across all seven schools; analyzing position descriptions, contract verbiage, and compensation structures to prepare a standardized HSS salary schedule for SY 27-28.
Finance & Business Operations	Establishing the Central Administration Office budget; setting up new site-level bank accounts; managing federal funding distribution; overseeing QuickBooks deployment and preparing for Tyler Technologies ERP Pro implementation.

5. Governance Roles & Responsibilities of Local School Advisory Boards

As the Hopi Board of Education assumes its role as the governing body for the unified school system, local community members and board members have sought clarity regarding the continuing role of Local School Advisory Boards. Under the Hopi Education Code and HSS Policies and Procedures, Local School Advisory Boards serve as essential conduits connecting local villages, parents, school administrators, and the HBE.

While site-specific governing authority rests with HBE, Local School Advisory Boards maintain six authorized advisory and engagement responsibilities:

1. **Parent & Community Engagement:** Attending and supporting Family Teacher Organization (FTO) meetings, Parent Advisory Committee gatherings, and school cultural events to encourage parent involvement.
2. **Student Academic Data Review:** Reviewing and analyzing aggregated, non-identifiable student achievement profiles and test data to advise the school principal on academic improvement goals.
3. **Site-Based Budget Advisement:** Reviewing local school facility needs, advising the principal on site-based budget priorities, and reviewing proposed financial plans prior to submission to HBE.
4. **Staffing & Programmatic Recommendations:** Offering local community advice and recommendations to the principal regarding school staffing needs, staff recruitment strategies, and candidate interview panels. Recommendations are made, then Site Principal sends onto the CSA for review and then to HBE for final approval.

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5. **Policy Support & Strategic Planning:** Assisting HBE and the Chief School Administrator in gathering community input for the Comprehensive 5-Year and 10-Year Hopi Education Strategic Plan and advising on local parent involvement policies.
 6. **Quarterly HBE Reporting:** Submitting formal written quarterly school updates and advisement to the Hopi Board of Education regarding any school matters requiring governing board attention.
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6. Immediate Priorities for October 2026

During the month of October 2026, Central Administration and the Hopi Board of Education are executing the following high-priority initiatives:

- **Organizational Refinement:** Finalizing and refining the organizational structure for the HSS Central Administration Office.
 - **Salary Schedule Development:** Reviewing and finalizing the standardized HSS salary schedule for formal adoption by HBE.
 - **Village Town Hall Meetings:** Launching a series of community town hall meetings across all Hopi villages to present updates, answer community questions, and hear directly from community members. The first town hall is scheduled in Kykotsmovi Village, date TBD.
 - **Tribal Council Briefing:** Presenting a second formal progress update to the Hopi Tribal Council regarding system unification, financial management, and audit preparations.
 - **Intergovernmental Coordination:** Continuing bi-weekly technical assistance meetings with the BIE and maintaining regular coordination with local school principals.
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7. Looking Ahead: School Year 2026–2027 Implementation Timeline

To ensure full operational readiness of Central Administration by July 1, 2027, the Hopi School System will execute the following phased implementation schedule:

*Timeline Target	Key Transition Milestones & Operational Goals
November 2026	Permanent Central Administration positions will be advertised internally; interested current employees may submit letters of interest and professional resumes.
December 2026	The Chief School Administrator, CAO, and local school principals will participate in interviews for advertised Central Administration positions.
January 2027	Selected Central Administration personnel are expected to begin serving under the HSS Central Office. Remaining unfilled positions may be advertised externally.

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Spring 2027	Central Administration will establish key system-wide working committees for Housing, Curriculum & Assessment, Culture & Language, Transportation, Technology, Budget, Family Engagement, and Facilities.
Spring 2027	Formal launch of community-wide strategic planning for the Comprehensive 5-Year and 10-Year Hopi Education Strategic Plan.
July 1, 2027	Target date for the HSS Central Administration Office to achieve full operational capacity for School Year 2027–2028.

**Timeline target is subject to change.*

8. Closing Commitment & Community Partnership

The transition to a unified Hopi School System represents a transformative investment in the future of Hopi youth. Year One is fundamentally dedicated to establishing structural integrity—transparent financial management, standardized personnel systems, clear governance, and active communication.

To maintain open dialogue, Central Administration will schedule monthly community meetings with the CSA and administrative team to answer questions and address community concerns. Together, as we walk this path of *Puhupöhut*, we remain steadfast in our dedication to providing every Hopi student with an exceptional, culturally grounded, and high-quality education.

Askwali for your continued dedication, support, and partnership.



Arayah Mitchell
Chief School Administrator

10/06/26