

Navajo Head Start partners with Diné College to help teachers obtain degree

Written by Gallupsun Staff
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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Sharon H. Singer, assistant superintendent of the Navajo Nation Department of Diné Education, is pleased to announce a new partnership between Navajo Head Start (NHS) and Diné College to help paraprofessionals obtain their associates degree in early childhood education, and Navajo language and culture.

Singer explained NHS and Diné College established this partnership to further the mission and vision of both institutions, which is to make higher education and a highly-qualified workforce a priority for NHS.

“We are excited with our new partnership with Diné College, who will be working with our para-professionals in obtaining their A.A. degrees in early childhood education, and Diné language and culture,” Singer said. “This partnership will further promote our initiative to have a highly-qualified workforce.”

Diné College entered into the memorandum of agreement (MOA) with the Navajo Nation, which was signed by Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly in April. Per the agreement, the Navajo Nation and the Navajo Department of Diné Education (DODE) will be committed to supporting NHS and its staff in attaining Associate of Arts degrees in early childhood education from Diné College for the next three years.

In 1995, the Navajo Nation, under the leadership of then-Navajo Nation President Albert Hale, made a promise to develop the capacity for Navajo language and culture immersion in NHS centers.

Dr. Daniel McLaughlin, chairperson for the Center for Diné Teacher Education, explained that Diné College is preparing future teachers to become respectful and effective teachers utilizing Navajo-Diné teachings with all students. He described the partnership as a “win-win-win.”

“It’s a win-win-win. It’s a win for Navajo Head Start, it’s a win for Diné College, and it’s also a win for the teacher candidates, not to mention communities and Head Start centers across the Nation,” McLaughlin said. “We like to beef up our enrollment and have our faculty busy doing what they do best—that is train teachers.”

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McLaughlin said their lessons will be based on *Sá'aqh Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón*, developing their students according to Navajo teachings and traditions.

The partnership begins this summer and more than 25 NHS staff plan to attend classes at various Diné College sites across the Navajo Nation.

Navajo Head Start recently established a partnership and cohort program with Arizona State University, which recently graduated three NHS teachers with master's degrees in instruction and curriculum with an emphasis in early childhood education.

"We look forward to working with Diné College in getting our staff into their classrooms and on the road to earning their bachelor's degrees," Singer said.