



NAVAJO HEAD START

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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CONTACT:
Adrian Dotson | 928-380-2158

Navajo Head Start desperately needing facility upgrades

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—Sharon Singer, assistant superintendent

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.—Navajo Head Start serves roughly 2,200 children across the Navajo Nation. Most head start centers are utilizing facilities that are more than 30 years old. These outdated facilities are falling apart and are unsuitable for effective learning and educational development for children.

NHS has recently undergone a restructuring plan to improve and expand early childhood development services. The program is focused on preparing children for K-12 education by developing literacy, science and math skills. The plan also includes making much needed facility upgrades to the 96 head start centers across the Navajo Nation.

Studies have proven the quality, age and features of the building effect children’s ability to learn and retain information. Facilities on the Navajo Nation need to be modernized in order to most effectively educate young children, head start administrators say. Education facilities play a key role in the education process.

“Our facilities are dilapidated and are in need of major upgrades and renovations,” said Sharon Singer, assistant superintendent. “We want the best for all of our children, including the best facilities to facilitate learning and development.”

Newer facilities can improve a child’s overall learning of materials. In a study conducted by the Council of Educational Facility Planners, researchers found that students who were in new or renovated buildings had higher performance scores, especially in math. New structures help to make students feel safe which allows them to focus on their schooling. When children are not distracted by leaks, broken equipment or rundown facilitates, their attention is focused on what they are being taught.

New buildings will also benefit teachers and staff. In one study, educators in newer structures felt safer and more confident. When the instructor feels safe and confident in the classroom, children are the ones who benefit. Faculty can perform their job more effectively and students gain more knowledge.

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Air quality is an important part of the building and can affect more than a student's ability to learn. In some older buildings, contaminants such as asbestos, radon and formaldehyde float in the air. Children under the age of 10 are more vulnerable to these contaminants and could possibly get sick.

Indoor air quality can cause what the Environmental Protection Agency calls "sick building syndrome." Symptoms of this syndrome can include irritated eyes, nose and throat, upper-respiratory infections, nausea, dizziness, headaches, fatigue and sleepiness. When children are out sick, they miss out on learning and fall behind. With new facilities, air flow is better and these illness are less likely.

There currently is not enough money in the NHS budget to make all the necessary changes. NHS has set aside some funding for new facilities but it is not nearly enough to address the problem. NHS hopes to gain attention and support of the U.S. Congress and other law makers, and is also looking for donations and grants to make necessary improvements. For Navajo Head Start to reach its maximum potential, facilities will need to be renovated.

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Navajo Head Start is the largest federally-funded grant program in the country. Head Start and Early Head Start services are provided within the geographical area of the Navajo Nation, an area approximately the size of West Virginia that spans more than 27,000-square-miles across the states of Arizona, New Mexico and Utah. The Central Administration offices are located in Window Rock, AZ, capital of the Navajo Nation.