



NAVAJO HEAD START

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Navajo Head Start partners with Navajo Technical University to help its employees obtain degrees

25 NHS employees enrolled in summer classes at NTU

CROWNPOINT, N.M. — Navajo Head Start employees now have a better opportunity to pursue and obtain their college degrees thanks to a partnership established between Navajo Head Start and Navajo Technical University.

On July 15, Navajo Head Start (NHS) signed a memorandum of understanding with Navajo Technical University (NTU) to help its teachers obtain their Associate of Science degrees or their Bachelor of Science degrees in early childhood multicultural education from NTU.



Navajo Head Start and Navajo Technical University sign MOU to help Head Start employees obtain degrees. PHOTO, L-R: Rolanda White, NHS; Dr. Lamont Yazzie, NHS; Casmir I. Agbaraji, Ph.D., NTU; Morris Denetdeel, NHS; QuinTINA Deschenie, Ed.D., NTU; Sharon H. Singer, Navajo Head Start; and Dr. Elmer J. Guy, Navajo Technical University.

The partnership, forged by Sharon Henderson Singer, assistant superintendent of the Navajo Department of Diné Education and Dr. Elmer J. Guy, president of NTU, creates even better opportunity for NHS employees to attend classes during the summer session when NHS is on break and on the weekends all while remaining full-time employees.

Both entities were swift in implementing the new partnership and getting NHS employees enrolled in classes.

“Within two weeks, we were able to get things running. It was amazing having two entities come together with a vision and just making it happen right then and there,” said Singer. “Though it was short notice for our employees, we had over 30 students who applied and are now taking classes at NTU.”

Currently, there are 25 NHS employees enrolled in summer classes at NTU. Other employees have consulted with their school readiness coaches inquiring about available courses since the partnership was established.

Rolanda White, a school readiness coach at NHS, participated in a similar partnership at Arizona State University where she earned her Masters of Curriculum and Instruction. Becenti was involved in this new partnership between NHS and NTU, from recruiting staff, to chaperoning visits to NTU to ensure needs were met.

“The employees were excited about the opportunity to attend classes in the vicinity of their homes and a lot of them are very dedicated,” said White. “The employees have come together as a group to help each other succeed—I think that is their goal.”

Singer is pleased with the program thus far and is impressed with the variety and flexibility of class structures offered at NTU, as well as the university’s emphasis on culture in early childhood education.

“Dr. Lamont Yazzie and I got to meet with Dr. Guy and his staff, we let them know some of our needs as far as obtaining our goal of having a 100% highly-qualified workforce,” she said. “We wanted to go with the weekend college concept, which I think was really unique for an institution and its paraprofessionals who work full-time.”

Dr. Lamont Yazzie, director of educational services at NHS, also commended the NHS staff for taking advantage of the opportunity to improve themselves and in turn, improving early childhood development services on the Navajo Nation. He also commended NTU for partnering with NHS as they share similar goals to develop a highly-qualified workforce for the Navajo Nation.

“Partnerships, with sound and quality services responding to the needs of our communities on the Navajo Reservation such as this partnership with Navajo Technical University, help us pursue and meet those efforts in serving the birth through five-year-old population,” Dr. Yazzie said.

Dr. Guy explained NTU is proud to have new students enrolled at NTU and is excited to see the perspectives they bring to the classrooms. He hopes to help create similar partnerships in the future.

“We been wanting to partner with Head Start because we know they need early childhood teachers as well as other institutions, the bureau school and public schools. We want to help build the Navajo Nation so that we have our own professionals,” said Dr. Guy. “That is the only way to build our nation, through education.”

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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, Ariz., capital of the Navajo Nation.