



# NAVAJO HEAD START NEWSLETTER

NEWS | NAVAJO HEAD START

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## Navajo Head Start now enrolling children from all income levels

March 9, 2015

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** — Navajo Head Start is now enrolling children from all income levels due to the program meeting its low-income quota. Parents and guardians can visit any one of the four regional offices for enrollment applications.

Navajo Head Start (NHS) will need the child's birth certificate, verification of income for parents or guardians, and the child's immunization records.

Early Head Start provides services to children from birth to 36 months and Head Start provides services to children 36 months to

5-years-old. The program offers early childhood education, child development, parental involvement and many more services with emphasis on Navajo language and culture.

Regional offices are located

in Shiprock, N.M., Fort Defiance, Ariz., Chinle, Ariz., and Tuba City, Ariz.

For more information, contact the Central Administration Office at 928-871-6902 or access the website at [www.navajohs.org](http://www.navajohs.org). ■



All Navajo Head Start facilities are prepared with essential Early Childhood Development and Learning equipment.

## Saving Navajo Head Start

**The program is far better than it has been since its conception in 1965**

March 8, 2015

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** — Navajo Head Start has done wonders in the last few years to ensure the youngest population on the Navajo Nation continues to have quality and assessable education.

Navajo Head Start (NHS) has come a long way.

The program is far better than it has been since its conception in 1965 with most changes and restructuring occurring in the last eight years. Navajo Head Start has made tremendous

strides in revamping its programs in the last few years amidst high risk of losing its funding.

In 2006, the program was on the verge of being shut down after it was found that many of its teachers were unqualified and some

having criminal backgrounds. The program reached its lowest point after losing its federal funding and so the positive changes began in order to strengthen the program for its future.

The program's turning point was in 2007 when its

focus changed from being a childcare service and being ineffective to focusing on preparing children for the K-12 system. The program's restructuring also included a focus on edu-

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# Saving / program best since conception

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tion, primarily in literacy, science and math.

In 2010, the program experienced another threat to lose its funds as a result of a federal review that found unresolved deficiencies and non-compliance.

Through diligence and dedication, Navajo Head Start corrected its deficiencies and its non-compliance status.

In 2014, the program passed its federal review meeting all 2,800 federal requirements after a 20-year history of non-compliance. Soon after, the program was awarded a five-year non-competitive grant worth \$125 million from the Administration for Children and Families.

Sharon H. Singer, assistant superintendent, explained passing the federal review greatly helped the program.

By passing the

federal review, the program is able to continue improving its facilities, its overall program and services to better accommodate the children and families involved with Navajo Head Start," she said. "It will authorize the program to receive further funding in the future."

From almost losing its federal funding to being on the verge of collapse, the success and renewed strength of Navajo Head Start serves as a re-emergence for the program.

"The current events surrounding Navajo Head Start act as a fresh start as we move forward into a new era of success," added Singer. "With 96 centers throughout the Navajo Nation, we will be able to provide the best programs and services to children and families alike." ■

## Navajo Nation transfers CCDF facilities to Navajo Head Start

March 23, 2015

### WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.

— Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly announced on March 18 the transfer of facility ownership of several unutilized program facilities of the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) program to Navajo Head Start in an effort to streamline services and to provide much-needed space for children participating in head start.

President Shelly toured the day care center in Crownpoint, N.M., one of the facilities to be transferred, in an effort to place strong emphasis and high importance on early childhood education and development. He was accompanied by staff from the Navajo

Division of Social Services, Navajo Head Start and the Navajo Department of Diné Education.

President Shelly expressed his support for the transfer of the

***"The new facilities will aid Navajo Head Start in providing services to more children and families in the future."***

— ***Sharon Singer***

By partnering together, Navajo Head Start will have enough classroom space for [their] student recruitment drive."

According to Navajo Head Start, the CCDF grant and services will also be transferred under the administration of Navajo Head Start. The transfer of facilities will help address a dire need for facilities and classroom space for hundreds of head start children in four regions across the Navajo Nation.

"The new facilities will aid Navajo Head Start in providing services to more children and families in the future," said President Shelly. "The CCDF classrooms will be used for Navajo Head Start students.

Current Navajo Head Start facilities are worn and outdated, and many are more than 30 years old. Despite the aging facilities, Navajo Head Start has no choice but to continue utilizing such dilapidated buildings in order to provide continued services to its children and families.

Sharon Begay-McCabe, division director for the Navajo Division of Social Services, the division overseeing the CCDF is confident Navajo Head Start will carry out the grant and provide excellent services.

"The bottom line is that we want to help children," said McCabe. "Children will continue to be our top priority—it really does

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# Facilities / CCDF facilities transferred to NHS

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The Navajo Nation, Office of the President and Vice President, the Office of Head Start, Navajo Nation Head Start, the Health, Education and Human Services Committee, the Child Care and Development Fund and the Navajo Nation Board of Education attended the event in support of an effort to streamline services and to provide much-needed space for children participating in head start.

take a whole community to raise a child."

The Child Care and Development Block Grant

(CCDBG) Act of 2014 was signed into law November 2014. This act reauthorizes the childcare care

program which includes a revision of the CCDF. The law helps to clearly define health and

safety requirements for all child care providers, including Head Start programs. Other improvements include distinctly defining eligibility policies and giving parents and families transparent information to all of the child care options available to them.

Combining services provided by Head Start and the CCDF programs across the

nation is a goal led by Linda K. Smith, deputy assistant secretary and inter-departmental liaison for Early Childhood Development for the Administration for Children and Families.

The Navajo Nation is leading the effort by becoming the first grantee to merge such programs.

Navajo families that use CCDF services also use programs pro-

vided by Navajo Head Start. This provides the justification and intent for the transfer of facilities to the head start program to further efforts envisioned by Deputy Assistant Secretary Linda K. Smith. ■

## Navajo Head Start thanks Obama for federal budget increase

"An increase in funding will allow for NHS to not only serve more families, but also continue to make much needed improvements." —Sharon H. Singer, Assistant

March 9, 2015

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** — Navajo Head Start thanks U.S. President Barack Obama for supporting the youngest of our population by increasing the Fiscal Year 2016 budget by \$1.5 billion for the national Head Start programs across the country. This brings the total annual funding

amount to \$10.1 billion a year for all its programs.

Sharon H. Singer, assistant superintendent of Navajo Head Start, the largest Head Start Program in the nation, is excited about the increase in the federal government's budget and said it was exciting news.

"The increase in the federal

government's budget for Head Start programs is exciting news," said Singer. "Navajo Head Start will be able to continue to expand services to current families enrolled in the program and begin serving new families."

Singer explained \$1.1 billion of this increase is to allow children to get

the much-needed educational services they need.

"The program will be able to extend to a full school year," she said. "This provides learning opportunities throughout the year."

Experts say students lose about one month of learning during a three month summer vacation. Programs that have bigger gaps lead to more than one month of information being forgotten by chil-

dren. These fund increases ensure children will be helped with the expanded school year.

According to the Administration for Children and Families' (ACF) blog, only one-third of Head Start programs across the nation are running for a full school day the entire school year. The minimum requirement for Head Start programs is 448 hours of programming over an entire year. Stu-

dents who go to school 180 days a year for six and a half hours a day receive 1,170 hours of instruction annually. By expanding the school day and school year, children will gain more knowledge and will lose less of what they learned over breaks.

The budget for Early Head Start is also increased by \$150 million for the next fiscal year for all

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# Budget / federal increase

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programs across the country. The total amount will be \$650 million dollars, which will help provide the program to more families.

The ACF states that there were more qualified children than the program could support last year. With this increase, more children can be accepted into the program and so they receive the education they need to be prepared for school. These funds will also help to improve the quality of infant and child care, and obtain more Head Start-Child Care partnerships so children have a better opportunity to learn.

As part of the \$1.5 billion increase, there is \$284 million allotted for cost-of-living adjustments. This part of the budget will help offset inflation costs, retain high quality teachers and continue pro-

viding different services to families. Due to rising operating costs, this additional income will help to ensure money is not taken from programs to keep up with the cost of living increases.

***Singer explained \$1.1 billion of this increase is to allow children to get the much-needed educational services they need.***

Singer said there is a lot of potential with the increased funds.

"There is a lot of potential to come from this growth in the federal government's financial plan," said Singer. "Through President Obama's support of Head Start programs, NHS will be able to serve and expand service for more families in need of quality

early childhood development services."

Singer said she has extensive plans and goals for the Navajo Head Start program including developing educational programs to prepare our Nation's youngest children for the K-12 system.

"An increase in funding will allow for NHS to not only serve more families, but also continue making much needed improvements," she added. "Navajo Head Start would like to recruit more highly-qualified staff and begin construction development plans for a new Head Start facility in the future." ■

In 2014, NHS was awarded a five-year, non-competitive grant worth \$125 million. Grant money will continue to be used to hire highly-qualified staff and make improvements to head start facilities across the

## Navajo Head Start creates job opportunities

### Boost to Navajo economy

February 18, 2015

#### WINDOW ROCK,

**Ariz.**— With the

recent surge in funding and a fresh start, Navajo Head Start (NHS) is in a position to be more successful than ever before. This success will benefit the organization and impact the local communities by not only providing and expanding much needed early childhood development services, but also creating many new jobs within the Navajo Nation.

NHS takes pride in hiring the best candidates to foster a high-quality educational environment for all of the children and families that are a part of NHS. This entails strict re-

quirements in the hiring process.

All hired positions in NHS require a Navajo Nation Tribal and Federal background investigation, other types of background checks are not accepted.

Teachers must have a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education or an equivalent to that, as well as at least one year of classroom experience teaching pre-school or toddler-aged children. These requirements also include an early childhood endorsement and a valid drivers license.

NHS paraprofessionals are required to have a high school diploma or an

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# Jobs / NHS opportunities

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equivalent, such as a GED, and a minimum 45 college credit hours. Requirements also include six months of teaching experience and a commercial drivers license.

Bus Drivers must also have a high school

diploma or GED equivalent and the position also requires 12 hours of college credit in child development, a valid CDL license and ability to pass a physical exam.

NHS also has job openings within human

resources and maintenance areas in select regions.

NHS mandates these requirements to create the safest environment as possible for the children and families at NHS. This also allows

for the highest quality of education, as all of the teachers are not only required to have a bachelor's degree, but also experience teaching.

Currently, the unemployment rate of the Navajo Nation is 52 per-

cent. With NHS continually creating new jobs it is aiding the Navajo Nation and boosting the economy as a whole.

Applications for any of the aforementioned job openings can be found at NHS's website [www.navajohs.org/employment](http://www.navajohs.org/employment).

Applications must be faxed, hand-delivered or mailed to Navajo Head Start's Human Resources Section, P.O. Box 3479, Window Rock, AZ, 86515. ■

## Sixty-four new teachers with Bachelor's degrees ready to teach Navajo Head Start students

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** — Navajo children and families utilizing Navajo Head Start programs now have the very best excellence in education right in their own communities.

Navajo Head Start (NHS) unveiled an unprecedented restructuring program that prompted federal reviewers to give a green light to the new policies, and that also brought many qualified educators on board.

program is, it was difficult. The focus was different from what federal officials were accustomed to, and it all goes back to staff and their credentials," said Sharon Singer, assistant superintendent of Navajo Head Start. "We had one teacher with a bachelor's degree and most teachers did not have such before."

In accordance with restructuring efforts, NHS raised the bar in teaching excellence by increasing the number

of educators with bachelor's degrees from one to 64 individuals. The program also employs several paraprofessionals who possess associate degrees.

In its strive for world-class education for NHS, more improvements that will give teachers better salaries and freedom in the classrooms are underway. This strategic plan will offer teachers his or her own pay scale, positions, and the advice of "readiness coaches."

"Readiness coaches are a great way to keep teachers in compliance with NHS's readiness goals," Singer said. "They also help teachers with curriculum planning, and provide them with support. Hiring readiness coaches is just one of the many ways NHS is striving toward its goal of providing an enhanced quality education."

NHS's vision states, "The strength of children, families and community.

Exemplifying high moral principles and commitment to quality serv-

ices. Dedicated to promoting safe and healthy families." ■

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# Navajo Head Start provides structured early childhood development

Preparing young students for success

February 25, 2015

## WINDOW ROCK,

**Ariz.** — Preparing children for life is not an easy task. An education is one of the most important and vital possessions a child can obtain to prepare themselves for the future. Structured early education is imperative in helping a child develop, so they can be successful from kindergarten to high school graduation. Programs such as Navajo Head Start (NHS) provide children an advantage to developing necessary life skills to succeed in the world.

Navajo Head Start offers a variety of educational tools to help prepare young children for school. With multiple service models, each head start center is customized to suit the needs of the community and families enrolled in the program. Families are offered resources

in health, nutrition and education along with a variety of other services. These services help to make sure student can focus on learning without distractions. The head start and early head start programs are great places for children to start their education.

NHS focuses on developing skills such as cognitive, social and emotional growth, as well as character and are learned before a child reaches kindergarten. With structured education, children enrolled in Navajo Head Start are ready for kindergarten when they reach the appropriate age.

The curriculum helps NHS children and families develop the cognitive skills that they will use throughout life. The foundations of reading, math, science and other academics take place before kindergarten. Head

Start structures its education around these subjects to increase cognitive skills while introducing children to the educational process. With the education and cognitive development provided by head start curriculum, children enter school prepared and ready to expand their knowledge.

NHS provides higher levels of school achievement and better social adjustment for kindergarten. Children socialize with each other in preschool and grow socially and emotionally. Interacting with multiple people of the same age helps children learn how to communicate with others and establish friendships. Similar to children in kindergarten, children in head start and early head start programs interact with others on a daily basis.

NHS understands that one

of the strongest factors in a child's early development is their relationship with their parent(s). The parent is a child's first teacher. They teach them words, movements and encourage them to observe the world around them. It is essential for parents to continue to support their child through their education and to continue

the learning at home. If a child is supported by their families and community in the first stages of their life, the child is more likely to be successful in school and better contribute to society as an adult according to observations by neuroscientists.

NHS is dedicated to working alongside parents and families in early childhood

development. Learning does not end when the school day is over. Parents are greatly encouraged to support their child's education by reinforcing lessons from the day into their home life. Parents can read with their students, work on basic math skills and go over lessons taught in head start, and in school. ■

## Singer Elected to National Indian Head Start Directors Association

### Singer making national impact

March 2, 2015

## WINDOW ROCK,

**Ariz.** — Sharon H. Singer, the assistant superintendent of the Navajo Division of Diné Education, was elected to the National Indian Head Start Directors Association (NIHSDA) where she will play a pivotal role in preserving the identity of American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) children

and families.

Singer, who runs Navajo Head Start (NHS), was elected as the alternate for Region 6, which is the Arizona region, and serves as the primary substitute for Region 6 representative Bill Rosenberg.

The association serves as the nation's leading voice for AIAN programs. Founded in 1979, the association has

made strides in providing quality services to all AIAN children and their families.

NIHSDA is predominantly motivated to provide advocacy, leadership, development and professional growth opportunities to AIAN children and families, while preserving and respecting tribal identity.

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# Singer / elected to NIHSDA

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Along with joining the NIHSDA, Singer leads fundamental roles in both head start and early head start programs. Singer also serves on the national work group for child advocacy. Singer will use her past experience from NHS to help make improvements and be a key contributor during her time with NIHSDA.

The election of Singer to the NIHSDA is well

deserved.

In her time with NHS, Singer played a very important role in rehabilitating the Head Start program and helping it get to where it currently is. Much of the recent success of NHS is due to the hard work of Singer, who fought hard to keep the head start program for the Navajo Nation in strict compliance to the mandates of a 2014 federal review and to regain funding to make

further improvements.

Through involvement with other organizations dedicated to improving the lives of children, Singer gained the experience needed to make real changes for programs providing services to families.

She plans to meet with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of North Colorado to do studies to improve early childhood services in Indian Country.

This will help Singer bring more improvements to NHS to benefit the children that learn from the programs offered by head start.

Singer's involvement in multiple organizations devoted to the early development of children shows her determination and dedication to help children who are in the most need of the various services provided by these organizations.

NIHSDA has



Assistant Superintendent, Sharon H. Singer, has been responsible for much of the improvements to Navajo Head Start.

recently revised their mission and values, as well as created a strategic plan to move forward into the next 24 months of operation.

Singer's involvement with the NIHSDA benefits NHS, the two organizations share similar goals and values. ■

## Navajo Head Start desperately needing facility renovations

“Our facilities are dilapidated and are in need of major upgrades and renovations.”

— Sharon Singer, assistant superintendent

February 23, 2015

**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 develop-

ing 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

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# Renovations / facility in need

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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 facilities, 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.

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. ■

## Changing the face of Navajo Head Start

Navajo Head Start looks toward future

February 18, 2015

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.**— Navajo Head Start (NHS) has made tremendous strides in revamping its programs in the last few years after the entire program was reconstructed and almost lost. NHS is now more successful than it has ever been.

NHS exceeded expectations in its 2014 federal review meeting all 2,800 federal requirements after a 20-year history

of noncompliance. In the same year, NHS received a five-year noncompetitive grant worth \$125 million from the Administration for Children and Families.

In 2006, NHS was on the verge of closing its doors after findings that many of its teachers were unqualified and some had questionable criminal backgrounds. Although NHS lost its federal funding in the same year,

it would prove to be the low-point for the head start program as it began making changes for a better future.

NHS was primarily a childcare service, but was deemed ineffective, which led to the change in 2007 to focus on preparing children for the K-12 pathway. This renovation of the NHS program also included a focus on education—primarily in literacy, science

and math.

The last hurdle for NHS came in 2010 after its funding was threatened again after a federal review found unresolved deficits and noncompliance.

Since then NHS has been on a steady rise to success.

After passing its federal review, NHS will be able to continue to improve its facilities, programs and services, to better accommo-

date the children and families involved with NHS. It will also make NHS authorized to receive further funding.

This serves as an important re-emergence for the NHS program, and the Navajo Nation as a whole, after almost losing head start just years prior.

The current events surrounding NHS will act as a fresh start for the program as they move

forward into a new era of success. With 96 head start centers throughout its four regions, NHS aims to provide the best programs and services to children and families alike.

Now meeting federal regulations and maintaining its funding, NHS has all of the tools it needs to continue to empower children, families and communities as a whole. ■