



NAVAJO HEAD START

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Navajo Head Start, San Juan Chapter sign MOU

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—Rick Nez, president of San Juan Chapter*

FRUITLAND, N.M. — The Navajo Head Start Center in the community of San Juan Chapter near Fruitland, N.M. is open once again thanks to a memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed by Navajo Head Start (NHS) officials and the San Juan Chapter.

In February, the nearby Head Start Center in Nenahnezad was closed because of health and safety concerns of an aged-facility.



Navajo Head Start and San Juan Chapter sign MOU on July 16 to provide facility usage for Head Start children. PHOTO, L-R: Ashton Metteba, NHS; Robert C. Begay, San Juan Chapter; Esther Keeswood-Begay, San Juan Chapter; Larry Tsosie, NHS; Dr. Lamont Yazzie, NHS; Carlene Wauneka, NHS. Front Row, L-R: Rick Nez, San Juan Chapter; Sharon Henderson Singer, NHS; and Dr. Tommy Lewis, superintendent of the Navajo Department of Diné Education

Head Start officials quickly responded and began working with San Juan Chapter to identify a facility to utilize for the upcoming school year. The chapter offered some space to use in their 10,000-square-foot multi-purpose facility that was built in 2008—a facility constructed using funds from the Navajo Nation and the Navajo Abandon Mine Lands (AML).

On July 16, Navajo Head Start officials including Dr. Tommy Lewis, superintendent of the Navajo Department of Diné Education, Sharon Henderson Singer, assistant superintendent, and Dr. Lamont Yazzie, director of Educational Services at NHS, met with San Juan Chapter officials to finalize the signing of the MOU.

Dr. Lewis stressed the importance of early childhood education and development, and the critical need for the Head Start program on the Navajo Nation.

“We have a chance to get these students on the right track,” said Dr. Lewis. “Those students who go through Head Start—the record shows that they graduate on time and their achievement scores are higher than those who don’t get that kind of experience.”



Rick Nez, president of San Juan Chapter, explained the San Juan Chapter is ready and excited to welcome Head Start into their community and they will now maximize their facility’s potential and usage. He also said they plan to open their senior center soon.

“We are very proud of our community and glad that we are going to get started with Head Start. The kids are going to be enjoying school next door to us,” said Nez. “It’s a win-win situation for the community, for Head Start, and especially the children”

“I am happy the agreement was finalized and the plan is coming to fruition,” he added. “I am excited to make the public announcement at our upcoming chapter meeting. It will become a good community effort.”

Singer explained Head Start is not wasting no time preparing for the upcoming school year and said recruitment is their top priority right now.

“Recruit! We need 20 kids in the program and I understand there are 10 on the waiting list,” said Singer. “Our community assessment shows that there are enough kids in the area.”

Singer said NHS will begin the process of creating and advertising job vacancies as well since the MOU has been finalized. NHS is continually recruiting for Head Start teachers, paraprofessionals and bus drivers.

Navajo Head Start thanked San Juan Chapter for their partnership and for sharing their vision.

“You have a beautiful building here,” said Dr. Lewis. “I know these kids will really appreciate what you’ve done for them—even later on. They are going to remember that experience.”

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