



# NAVAJO HEAD START

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## Navajo Head Start teachers graduate from Arizona State University

*Cohort, partnership a success*

**TEMPE, Ariz.**—Sharon H. Singer, assistant superintendent of the Navajo Department of Diné Education, and Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye congratulated three Navajo Head Start teachers who graduated from the Mary Lou Fulton College at Arizona State University (ASU) on May 15.

The three students who participated in the cohort include School Readiness Coach Samantha Johnson from Region I-Shiprock, School Readiness Coach Rolanda White from Region I-Shiprock, and Teacher Percilla Shortman from Region IV-Tuba City. The three graduated with a Master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in early childhood education.

Navajo Head Start has built a strong relationship with the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at ASU. The cohort is intended to provide educators an opportunity to continue their education and in return, bring their experiences and specialized study back to Navajo Head Start to help strengthen its childhood development services.

Singer said she is excited to see the teachers back in the classrooms.

“They have worked very hard through the whole restructuring [of Navajo Head Start] going on three years. Despite all the challenges, they have maintained the momentum. They are certainly role models for the rest of our staff,” said Singer minutes before the convocation began. “We look forward to having them [back] in the classrooms—so that all they have learned will be brought back to the people.”



ASU graduates Percilla Shortman, Rolanda White, and Samantha Johnson meet Ira A. Fulton, husband to Mary Lou Fulton, the college's namesake.

Singer explained the cohort is a great program for Navajo Head Start employees to further their education and to strengthen Head Start's vision to provide the best possible early childhood educational services. Navajo Head Start provides tuition assistance for employees earning a degree or advanced degree from the Mary Fulton Teachers College as long as the student-employee remains in good standing with the college and ASU.

The graduates met the college's namesake Mary Lou Fulton and her husband Ira A. Fulton during a meet-and-greet and thanked Navajo Head Start, ASU, the college, and the Navajo Nation for working together to help teachers further their education. All expressed their desire to continue on with their education and obtain their doctorate degrees.

"We have a momentum going and I am excited to see where Head Start will take us," said Shortman. "Opportunities like this don't happen to a lot of people. I consider myself blessed. What an opportunity?! An education that I can use and share with others."

Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye was also in attendance, along with staff from the Navajo Department of Diné Education. The delegation visited the campus at ASU and met with ASU leadership, attended a tribal leader's reception, the American Indian Convocation and the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College Convocation.

President Begaye praised Navajo Head Start and ASU for its collaboration. He expressed his anticipation for an expansion of other programs such as agriculture, parks and recreation, and technology to devise similar educational programs and partnerships. He believes the cohort between Navajo Head Start and ASU should serve as a model for future programs.

"Thank you for having that insight and foresight in getting this relationship established," President Begaye said to Singer and Dr. Lamont Yazzie. "We really appreciate ASU because this is innovative. You got to be willing to get out into the community."

Singer explained, "Next year, we plan to graduate 16 more [with] bachelor's degrees."

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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.