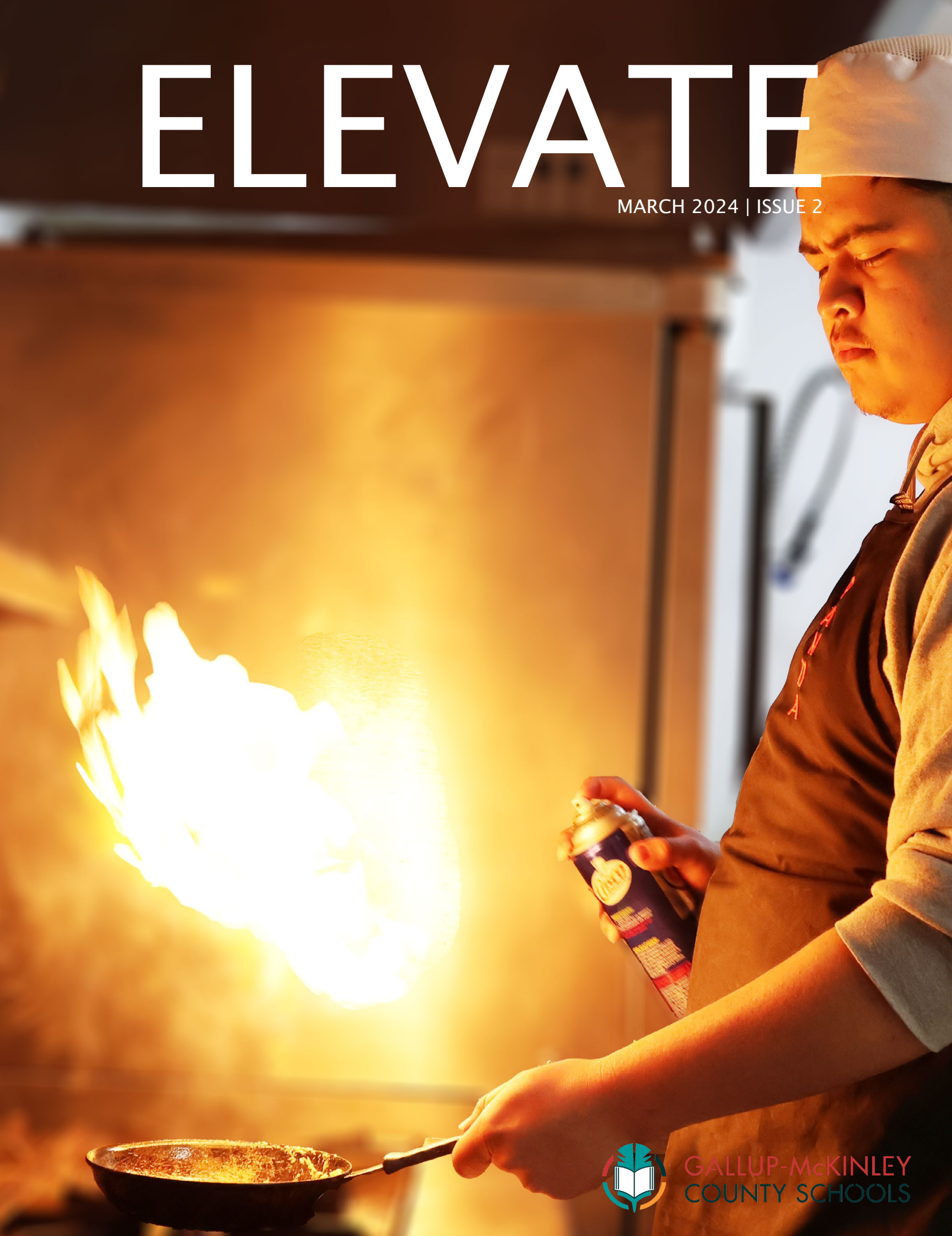


ELEVATE

MARCH 2024 | ISSUE 2



GALLUP-McKINLEY
COUNTY SCHOOLS

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GALLUP-MCKINLEY
COUNTY SCHOOLS

ELEVATE

MARCH 2024
ISSUE 2

640 Boardman Avenue
Gallup, NM 87301

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COUNTY SCHOOLS

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WHAT IS ELEVATE?

Look up elevate in the Merriam-Webster dictionary, and you will find a few definitions: to lift and make higher, to improve morally, culturally, and intellectually, and to raise the spirits of. GMCS, through Elevate 2025, is striving to “Elevate” students and enhance the education process. *The Elevate Magazine is where the district can shine a light on the strategic plan and goals that drive GMCS’s accountability process.* Elevate 2025 encapsulates strategic goals and objectives that will be implemented by 2025.

Every household received the Elevate 2025 Strategic Plan via mail in 2023 when it launched, and it is available for more in-depth viewing at www.gmcs.org. Here is a compacted version of the highlights:

- Our Vision: Excellence in educating our students to become self-reliant, productive citizens in a multicultural society.
- Our Mission: Preparing our students for success. We empower and develop our students through improving academic knowledge, promoting essential skills and positive character traits, providing safe and healthy learning environments, and creating strong partnerships among parents, colleges, and the business community.
- Our Values: Our values lie at the core of our work. They inform our teaching, our philosophy of leadership, and our relationships with the students and the communities we serve.
- The Vision, Mission, and Values weave together and drive the Strategic Goals for Excellence: 1. Increase Student Success. 2. Create Career Pathways. 3. Empower Our Team. 4. Strengthen Partnerships.

Elevate Magazine will feature Strategic Goals coming to life. When teachers, students, parents, and community leaders join forces, magic happens! By working collaboratively, these educational powerhouses unlock the full potential of our students. GMCS believes student success amplifies through effective communication, inclusive learning opportunities, and research-based approaches.

GMCS hopes Elevate Magazine will emerge as an incredible tool that helps foster strong connections between students, parents, staff, and the wider community. It will serve as a platform to showcase our exceptional education, highlighting our commitment to student achievement, quality education, and a nurturing learning environment. Through engaging articles and features, the magazine will strive to inform about the latest updates on curriculum enhancements, innovative academic programs, and the remarkable achievements of our students and teachers. Moreover, it will emphasize the importance of a supportive community and safe schools while celebrating our district’s unique diversity and inclusion. The magazine will encourage parental involvement and provide information on special education and technology integration. With its engaging content and focus on building meaningful connections, our school district’s magazine will serve as a bridge, bringing together students, parents, staff, and the community in their shared commitment to education and success. *Our aim is to report with equity on the events across our expansive district.*

Let’s celebrate the fantastic achievements of our young superheroes and inspire them to reach for the stars. Together, we can empower the next generation, equipping them with skills, knowledge, and confidence to thrive in an ever-changing world. Let’s make education a collaborative journey and prepare our students for a brighter future! As you read through this publication, ask yourself, *“How can I Elevate the students in my community?”*

Running to the Sun

NM Secretary of Education Dr. Arsenio Romero sees a bright future ahead for GMCS students



When the track is long, it's a good idea to have comfortable shoes. But that's not all: it takes determination, hard work, focus and a strong team to get across the finish line.

GMCS is on a path- continuing to better student achievement by focusing on improving proficiency scores and preparing to expand career-centered education at a new facility scheduled to break ground next year.

"GMCS has done a great job of keeping the focus where it should be - on the students," New Mexico Secretary of Education Dr. Arsenio Romero said. "By using data-driven instructional methods and making school engaging for students to reduce absenteeism, you are moving in the right direction."

There's a reason the basics are often called a first step. The fundamentals are the training that gets a runner in shape for longer and more challenging races. The state Public Education Department (PED) is working to build on basics across the state.

"Right now, we are focused on improving student achievement in reading and math. Currently, students in New Mexico are only achieving proficiency levels of 24% in math and 38% in reading, which no one finds acceptable," Romero said.

To help struggling schools change direction, the PED has been investing in educator training, high-quality instructional materials, data-based instructional methods and reducing chronic student absenteeism.

One example of data-based instruction is Structured Literacy, a program that starts with beginner steps like phonics, decoding and

spelling in lower grades, and builds on those skills to help students become proficient in reading, comprehension and writing by the time they get to high school.

"We are seeing encouraging signs from schools and districts that have fully implemented Structured Literacy," Romero said. *At GMCS, "English learner progress increased 5%, putting more English learners on the path to proficiency. There are good things happening."*

New Mexico has a teacher shortage, so the PED is proposing pay differentials for special education and other hard-to-fill positions and expanding Education Fellows and teacher residencies. There's also a lot of emphasis on culture.

"We are focusing on stronger partnerships with the tribes, nations and pueblos in our state and ensuring that we are providing culturally and linguistically appropriate instruction," Romero said, including a PED proposal to invest \$20 million to implement and meet the provisions identified in the Indian Education Act (IEA). "As educators, we need to recognize and respect the unique cultures of Native American students and engage in a continuous dialogue with students, families and elders to ensure we are meeting the needs of those students."

It's always good to start a dialogue on common ground. To do that with students, Romero starts with his kicks.

"It's something that started with my kids, who share my love of sneakers, so I started wearing them to work. I found it's a good way to start a conversation and make a connection with students and adults," he said.

The favorites in his sneaker closet are from the Nike N7 collection, which features designs by native and indigenous artists, inspired by the Native American wisdom of the Seven Generations.

"In every decision, we must consider the impact we have on seven generations. As an educator that's where my focus is, on the kids of today and for generations to come."

PED and GMCS are both emphasizing growing the number of tribal community members who hold a Native American Language and Culture certificate.

"This helps support language and culture within the classroom and in the communities," Romero said.

In addition to the proposed \$20 million for IEA implementation, PED has asked for \$6.5 million to support extended, out-of-school-time learning. The funding would be distributed to pueblos, tribes and nations as well as districts and charters serving Native students. The governor was expected to sign the funding bills on March 6.

Education isn't a sprint, it's more of a relay. It takes students, parents, teachers, and administrators all doing their part.

"GMCS is building the schools that the students and the community deserve. By focusing on college and career readiness, GMCS graduates are getting prepared for life after school and able to contribute to the community. Supporting GMCS means supporting the entire community," Romero said.

"GMCS is building a great new facility for Career Studies," he continued. "High school students from all over GMCS will be able to take advantage of this state-of-the-art new building. Students interested in pursuing in-depth career development skills during high school will be able to take advantage. We are excited to support the community in this building."

The new building will be ready in about three years and will pull career education under one roof. Disciplines offered will include building trades, welding, automotive and diesel, culinary arts, cyber academy, and a STEM Center.

Romero has been on his own educational path for 25 years, a trip that has given him insights that prepared him for the top job. He

was a teacher and principal in Las Cruces before becoming a district-level administrator for instruction and transformation in Roswell. From there, he served as superintendent in Deming and then Los Lunas before becoming Secretary of Education in March 2021.

If he's learned anything over those years, it's that you can't win if you don't show up. GMCS offers resources to help make sure students get to the starting line like transportation, school-community liaisons at every school and team meetings with families after a student misses 10 days of school in a single term.

"All the great work that we do won't matter if there are not students in the classroom," Romero said. "I would encourage families to do all they can to ensure their students go to school ready to learn. If they need help, please reach out to the school or PED, we have services and resources to help."

The New Mexico Public Education Department's Educator Growth and Development Bureau offers a variety of resources for educators to help further their careers and state's goals.

Sponsored professional development opportunities:



Instructional materials and resources:



Information on getting 520 Native American Language and Culture certificate:



Additional resources from Teaching is Changing Lives:



DISCOVER THE PATH TO ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE AT

MCKINLEY ACADEMY

It is that time of year when parents and students start to look towards next year. You may be wondering, why should you consider enrolling your child in McKinley Academy's dual enrollment program? What are the benefits that it offers? One of the most significant advantages of dual enrollment is the opportunity for your child to get a head start on their college education. Students can earn both high school and college credit simultaneously by taking college-level courses while still in high school. This means that when they graduate, they may already have many college credits. This saves time and money and gives them a competitive edge when applying to colleges and universities. **Families save tens of thousands of dollars on college costs.** Students gain early exposure to college experiences that translate into more success when they leave home to pursue college or career goals.

McKinley Academy is the most successful early college program in New Mexico. It serves more students per capita than any other school district in the state, and it is the top performing early college program in McKinley County. It offers a challenging curriculum beyond what is typically provided in a traditional high school setting. Through this program, students are exposed to a wide range of academic disciplines and have the chance to explore their interests and passions. Courses are taught by professors from the University of New Mexico Gallup Campus, who are experts in their respective fields and provide a college-level learning experience. This helps to prepare students for the rigor and expectations of a college environment. They also get to take high school classes from GMCS teachers.

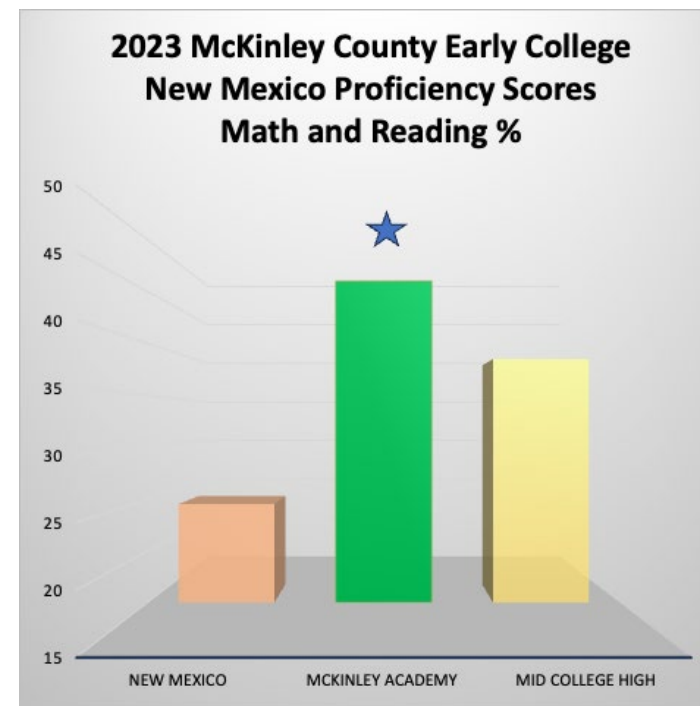
One of the most significant advantages of McKinley Academy's dual enrollment program is that **students can continue to participate in their home high school activities.** They can still participate in sports teams, clubs, and other extracurricular activities

while taking on a more challenging academic load. This allows students to maintain a well-rounded educational experience and develop essential skills such as time management and prioritization.

Moreover, the program provides students with additional resources to ensure their success. Here is some of what McKinley Academy provides: **Free breakfast and lunch, transportation, and all necessary tuition, fees, textbooks, and supplies. Students even receive a personal laptop and Wi-Fi hotspot** if a student doesn't have access to the internet at home. This level of support ensures that students can focus on their education without any financial barriers or technological limitations. Lastly, McKinley Academy enforces a strict code of conduct and academic agreement that sets high expectations for behavior and performance. Adhering to these guidelines, students develop essential characteristics such as discipline, responsibility, and respect. These qualities benefit them academically and are valuable in their personal and professional lives.

McKinley Academy offers numerous benefits for high school students seeking a challenging and fulfilling education. The advantages are plentiful, from earning college credits early to participating in a college environment while still enjoying high school activities. With the support of the program's resources and the cultivation of important qualities through a strict code of conduct, students are well-equipped for success in college and life beyond. So, if you have ever wondered about your child getting an associate in high school, consider the benefits of McKinley Academy's dual enrollment program; it could be the perfect steppingstone toward a brighter future.

Have your child look out for Principal Garro and her Student Ambassadors as they visit the GMCS middle and high schools. Or feel free to contact the McKinley Academy directly. They are helpful and welcoming!



"McKinley Academy has been a wonderful experience for our son Brady. It has provided an environment conducive to learning and the faculty has been supportive of his big dreams. Brady had the opportunity to take challenging classes and become an independent learner in preparation for college. In the fall he will be attending Baylor University on a full ride scholarship!"

- Jessica Balok, D.V.M

"Getting into Mckinley Academy is one of my many achievements, because I want to have a higher education to support my family. I want to get a master's degree in counseling"

-Sajza Begay 10th Grade, Crownpoint High School

"Here at McKinley Academy, I have attended a semester of the Nursing Bridge Program where I learned to take vitals, change wounds, and dress patients. I earned a certificate. I will be attending UNM-Main campus in the fall to become a BSN."

- Elizabeth Sandoval 12th Grade, Thoreau High School

MCKINLEY ACADEMY

**Brittainy Garro
Principal**

If would like more information about McKinley Academy, call 505-721-4200 or go their website at: mah.gmcs.org



Courtesy of J. Padayhag

Janelle Padayhag Hiroshi Miyamura HS (Class of 2019) the first graduating class sent this message:

I had a great experience at McKinley Academy. It helped prepare me for college, not just with class credits but with expectations as well. I had the best of both worlds as I was able to get my college credits while being able to participate in high school experiences.

There's an unsettling sense of self-doubt when entering university life since you're being put through a new environment. McKinley Academy helped ease that as I knew of the expectations and challenges that came with a college classroom setting.

Academically, McKinley Academy has been very vital in my career. I was very indecisive and changed my major often (five times to be exact) but because of the credits I've gained through McKinley Academy, I was still able to graduate one year in advance from my bachelor's degree and double majored.

The best advice I could give to someone considering McKinley Academy is to go for it! It's able to provide you with the best of both worlds by giving you a head start in your academic career but also participating in customary high school activities.

After I graduated from McKinley Academy in 2019, I got into UNM's Business program. However, right before covid hit I decided to switch my major to Speech and Hearing Sciences. I graduated in May of 2022 with a Bachelor's in Speech Science and in Psychology. After graduation, I worked as a teacher for a year in Zuni. My dream has always been to travel the world and did exactly that for a little bit. I was able to go to 4 different continents and various countries in a span of a year. I now live in Las Vegas and work as a RBT while preparing to go to OT school this August to get my doctorate in occupational therapy.



Courtesy of E. Zamora

The Last Huddle

Coach Eric Zamora stepped into Miyamura's Head Volleyball Coach last summer with a hefty mission: Turn the Lady Patriots into a family. He had been involved in the program for several seasons as the JV coach. He knew he had developed the skills and fundamentals needed on the court, and if he could get the girls on board mentally and emotionally, they would be hard to beat. Coach Zamora led the Pojoaque Valley Elkettes to a State Championship in 2013 and was excited to implement his recipe for success. With an endearing and heartfelt smile, he said, "On day one, I told the girls, you have one job: Love each other!" He explained that you can't follow someone into battle or lead them to glory if you don't like them. This team quickly became a family. Senior Jaclyn Yazzie, a transfer from Tohatchi, said, "It was hard to come into a team where most had known or played with each other for years. They accepted me, and I had a great team and volleyball family."

Please don't confuse this with him being soft. Coach Z, as his players lovingly call him, is fierce. He expects perfection on and off the court. If you watch him during a match, he is intense. He has a keen sense of strategy, can see what is coming, and can orchestrate quick adjustments. He is one of the few coaches you will see calling serves, like how a pitching coach calls pitches. With his trademark clipboard over his face for privacy, he communicates precisely where and how to place the ball with his server. Thanks to his attention to fundamentals, the players deliver! Speaking of fundamentals, he has assembled a great coaching staff. Christopher Strobel rounds out the Varsity staff as the Assistant Coach. Years as a player have given him the experience to fine-tune each position. His ability to demonstrate and teach skills is an intricate part of this coaching duo. When you see the girls in action during gameplay, Coach Strobel's calm demeanor often appears to be the voice of reason when Coach Z's enthusiasm and passion get the best of him. Together, they led the Lady Patriots through a brutal pre-season schedule that prepared them to glide through district play and head to state as District Champions! Coach Vallo came on board and led the JV to an undefeated record in district play. Coach Peralto made significant headway with the C team in preparing the youngsters to move up.

Sophomores Brena Saucedo, Elena Haley, and Amber Duboise, joined by Junior Tahiliana Roanhorse

and Margaret Caponpon, contributed significantly, and gained valuable experience to help them step up and lead the team next year. The heartbeat of this family was the eleven seniors who capped off their high school careers at the state championships last fall. Seannowa Smith, Ryleigh Silva, Autumn Boggs, Hailey Situ, Hannah Corral, Brielle King, Jaclyn Yazzie, Taneah King, Amber Duboise, Amalia Wagner and manager Anhinga Lewis are all seniors. Coach Zamora beams when he talks about this team. "You aren't going to find a better group of girls that work harder on and off the court." Principal Nick Garro agrees. "The volleyball team has the highest average GPA of any sport at Miyamura, and they were super exciting to watch!" They average a 3.9 GPA, which is impressive. When you are around these girls, it is very apparent that they completed the one job Coach Z gave them. They love each other! They never fell into the trap that is often the downfall of high school teams: drama!

Besides grueling workouts filled with fundamental drills and conditioning, the team concentrated on the mental aspect of the game. Senior and Captain Autumn Boggs stated, "We knew we were going to state, and we were willing to do what it took to get there!" She talked about Coach Z coming in from day one with high expectations and a no-nonsense approach. As a setter, Autumn had a crucial role. Setters are like the quarterbacks of volleyball. They are involved in every sequence of possessions. She took that sentiment seriously on and off the court. Her tenacity and leadership skills made her the perfect captain choice. I got to sit down with Autumn, Hailey, and Margaret between their hectic McKinley Academy schedules.

We chatted about how the team had one job: to love each other. As Margaret put it, the girls quickly dispelled any notion that it was "Not all sunshine and rainbows!" Autumn agreed and added, "Coach Z called us out on some of our behaviors early on, which didn't seem that important then. Like, during games and scrimmages, when someone came out of the game to the bench, we didn't all stand up. He corrected that right away. Early in the summer, he enforced that, but by the time our season started, it was just the culture of our team!" She also added that Coach Chris backed him up and, early on, kept asking them to define the team culture. Coach Chris's nudging prompted Autumn to have each player

write down three things they wanted to define the team's culture. The most common responses of love, compassion, effort, and grit became the cornerstone of the collective teamwork ethic. Margaret interjected, "This turned things around when you feel like you have a place on the team and in the family!" She continued, "Coach Z is the epitome of a great coach. He worked hard for us and expected us to grow. But it went both ways. He told us we had one job: to love each other. He said he had one job, and that was to love us. His expectations were high, and that pushed us!"

...“You have one job: Love each other!”

Hailey added, "Coach Z told us early on, "If I'm going to be here for you, you better show up for me! And we worked hard!" Hailey talked about how vital conditioning was to the team. "We knew that if we had matches that went to 5 sets, we needed the stamina to get through them." The girls went on to talk about the grueling pre-season schedule. Margaret said, "Coach's told us playing great teams makes you better!" Autumn added, "Playing those big 5A schools and hanging with them early in the season gave us confidence." Hailey jumped in and said, "I'm grateful we played those tough teams from major 5A schools like Albuquerque High. It made us think, if we can hang with them, what's stopping us from destroying our district!" Coach Zamora beams about the team's work ethic. "These girls will go far in life; this is just a steppingstone to greatness!" Autumn, Hailey, and Margaret agree that another aspect that made them improve was playing against Coach Chris in practice. Autumn said, "He didn't take it easy on us, but if you can block him at the net or dig a ball he hit, anyone you meet during the season is stoppable. He didn't baby us, but he also gave us credit if we played well against him. That helped with our confidence!"

Group Visualizations were common practice. The girls looked forward to them and made them part of the game day routine. Hailey said, "Visualizing before the game helps calm us down and focus us

on our goals." It helped focus on the game, but it also helped with team building. Margret said, "It helped us all get on the same page and fire us up! Not only that but when I was struggling with the game's mental side, it turned it around." The team used visualization and relaxation before each game. "It helped us to calm down but get energized at the same time. We would do it together, but it helped each player focus on their game. It helped us become more encouraging and positive with each other! This team didn't criticize but always brought each other up!" Autumn stated.

The 2023 Rudy's Real Texas Bar-B-Q State Tournament didn't go as they had hoped, and they went out in round one with a crushing loss. That does not dim light on what this team accomplished this year. By learning how to love and support each other, they have also learned the importance of defining success and collaboration on their own terms. As the seniors depart to amazing adventures and success, they leave with lifelong friendships. The lessons they learned through teamwork and dedication will show up the rest of their lives. The up-and-coming team looks forward to coming on strong. All would agree they did their job. The Lady Patriots genuinely love each other.



Courtesy of E. Zamora



Courtesy of E. Zamora

Welcome to GMCS Public Relations! We're a team of rockstar communicators dedicated to bridging the gap between schools, parents, and teachers. Our mission is to ensure that all stakeholders are informed, engaged, and connected.

Our main goal is to ensure better communication between the district and the community, including parents, students, staff, and other stakeholders.

However, there can sometimes be obstacles or barriers to effectively sharing information. One common challenge is legal concerns. The school district wants to ensure they follow all the necessary protocols and guidelines to protect everyone's privacy rights and maintain confidentiality. This means there may be restrictions or limitations on what information can be shared publicly.

Don't worry! Despite these challenges, the PR department strives to find creative ways to keep everyone informed and engaged. We work hard to create open communication channels, both online and offline, to ensure that critical updates, events, and achievements are shared with everyone.

Let us introduce ourselves! First up, we have Nikki Hoellwarth, our Public Relations Officer. With her expertise in crafting messages and building relationships, Nicolette is the driving force behind our PR strategies. She's always ready to listen, address concerns, and keep everyone in the loop. Next, we have Vanessa Duckett, our tech-savvy web systems operator and vendor relations manager. Vanessa works tirelessly to enhance our digital platforms, making sure that information flows smoothly and efficiently. She's the go-to person for all things web-related and ensures that our online presence is top-notch. Meet Jennifer Baca, our multi-talented Graphic Designer. Jennifer has a knack for bringing stories to life through her incredible eye-catching visuals. Whether it's covering the latest school events or designing eye-popping graphics, she's got it all covered. Finally, we have Kathy Polich, our Creative Writer/Sports Journalist. Kathy's way with words and experience with sports ensure that we have a unique voice when it comes to covering athletics and activities in our schools. From heart-stopping game write-ups to captivating interviews, she's always in the thick of the action.

We're proud to be a team that values open communication, creativity, and collaboration. Together, we strive to create an environment where parents and teachers feel supported, informed, and empowered in their roles. All our roots run deep in Gallup, and we love showcasing our hometown pride! So, whether you have a question, need some information, or just want to chat, we're here for you. Feel free to reach out to any of us at public_relations@gmcs.org

Cheers,

Team GMCS Public Relations





Barry and Rachel Brown on a New Mexico hike with their dogs.

Courtesy of R. Brown

UNLOCKING SUCCESS

Why Finding the Right Teachers and Administrators is Crucial for Gallup McKinley County School District

A good teacher can inspire, educate, and change lives. A great administrator can lead, empower, and create a positive environment for learning. At Gallup McKinley County School District (GMCS), we understand the crucial role that exceptional teachers, staff, and administrators play in shaping the minds and futures of our students.

With a diverse population and unique challenges, our district is on a mission to unlock the potential of every student. And that mission begins with the recruitment of exceptional staff.

Recruitment is the cornerstone of building a successful education system. It is the first step in ensuring our students

have access to the passionate educators and strong leaders they deserve. With limited resources and a demand for excellence, finding and attracting the right teachers and administrators is challenging. However, the rewards are immeasurable.

Understanding the Need for Exceptional Recruitment

Recruiting exceptional talent is not just a desire; it is a necessity. GMCS faces unique challenges that demand the best of the best. GMCS is the largest geographic school district in New Mexico, covering a little under 5,000 square miles (about the area of Connecticut). We hope to fill many more positions with homegrown talent in the future. However, GMCS must often recruit staff outside of our community. With a national teaching shortage, it is a difficult battle.

When we compromise on recruitment, we compromise on the future of our students. A limited talent pool means our schools cannot provide the quality education and support our students need to succeed. It is a reality we cannot afford to accept.

The Importance of Teacher Recruitment

Teachers are the lifeblood of any successful education system. They are the ones who spend countless hours nurturing and shaping the minds of our children. At GMCS, we recognize teachers' critical role in our students' lives.

A skilled educator not only imparts knowledge but also acts as a mentor, a role model, and a source of inspiration. Teachers create a positive learning environment, cultivate curiosity, and build strong relationships with their students. Their impact extends far beyond the curriculum.

When we recruit exceptional teachers, we elevate individual students and the entire school community. Skilled educators enhance our schools' overall morale, culture, and academic achievements. They bring diversity in experiences, perspectives, and teaching styles — enriching our students' educational journey.

Barry and Rachel Brown relocated from Norman, Oklahoma,



Welding Instructor Vera Casamero showing off her skills.

to join the GMCS team in August 2022. Rachel signed on first as an art teacher. A highly skilled mechanic, Barry had no trouble finding a job at a local car dealership. By the next school year, an open position at the same school Rachel taught at, coupled with his curiosity to try teaching, nudged him into a new career as an educator. The Browns and their

pack of dogs have quickly become a part of the community. Rachel said, "We have absolutely fallen in love with Gallup as a town. We love living in a smaller community and like being surrounded by so much natural beauty. However, the best thing by far is the amazing people we have met here in Gallup." Barry added, "I love the town's size and location!" Both are avid mountain



Principal Richard Moore at the Tohatchi High School Groundbreaking Ceremony.

bikers and enjoy riding at First Mesa and McGaffey. They also love hiking with their dogs.

They had visited New Mexico before on travels and loved the state. Rachel came across the Gallup-McKinley County Schools on a search engine for teaching jobs. The signing bonus and moving stipend got her attention. Rachel noted, "The moving stipend was crucial in allowing us to take a short time off between our job transitions to move and search for a home in Gallup. It helped lessen our worries and uncertainty about making such a large change in our lives." Barry and Rachel have both found a positive working environment and encouraging work staff. The two have bought a

house and plan to make Gallup a forever home. Barry summed up his experience at GMCS, "Super great staff and teachers at the sites. The kids are lucky to have these folks on their side." GMCS is lucky to have recruited this couple!

One GMCS alumni recently recruited is Vera Sue Casamero. Vera was the welding instructor at Navajo Technical University in Crownpoint. On a recruiting trip to the high school, she found out they did not have a welding instructor. Vera said, "I saw this as an opportunity to expand my teaching skills, especially to my community." Vera graduated from Crownpoint High School. She obtained her welding certificate from NTU and her associate degree in welding

technology from New Mexico State University. Vera stated that the signing bonus was a plus, but what caught her eye was the opportunity to positively impact her community by rebuilding and organizing the welding shop at Crownpoint High. She also thought the hiring process went well and stated, "I love how everyone was so helpful with the application process."

The Significance of Administrator Recruitment

While teachers are integral to a student's daily experience, administrators are the behind-the-scenes champions. They ensure that the school operates seamlessly,

provide guidance, and support to teachers, and set the vision for the entire educational institution.

Administrators at Gallup McKinley County School District are instrumental in creating a positive school environment. They establish policies, implement innovative programs, and lead by example. Their influence trickles down to students, teachers, and parents, shaping the educational experience.

When we recruit exceptional administrators, we plant the seeds of success throughout our district. Influential leaders provide the support, resources, and vision that enable teachers to thrive. Their impact extends beyond their initial engagement, creating a solid foundation for long-term student success.

This year's Principal Richard Moore from Tohatchi High School spent in the Marine Corps and the business world more than prepared him to spend his day with high school students. With a master's in business administration (MBA) and a master's in educational leadership, he has a multifaceted approach to administration. He thinks his no-nonsense ways of getting to the bottom line will increase academic achievement at his school. "This school is all about athletics, but why can't we be about athletics and academics? I know we can." Moore said. He continued, "I love the athletics out here, but I want our students to get attention for academics as well. We are going to show everyone we can do both."

Competitive pay and teacher housing make Moore wonder why we do not recruit more Arizona educators. Moore was a teacher and administrator in Arizona before moving to the Philippines with his wife during the pandemic. When he decided to return to the States and go back to work, GMCS offered the total package. Moore said, "People are friendly and eager to help when you do not know how to do something. The district offers lots of professional development. I am happy I ended up here; not every school district is that way. It shows

the leadership has a pulse on what is going on."

Innovative Recruitment Strategies at Gallup McKinley County School District

Recognizing the importance of recruitment, GMCS has implemented various innovative strategies to attract top talent. We understand that traditional methods may not always suffice in this competitive landscape. As a result, we have taken proactive measures to stand out and entice exceptional teachers and administrators to join our district.

We offer incentives and benefits to attract and retain top talent. These may include financial assistance for professional development, housing assistance, and the highest allowable benefits package in the state. By valuing our teachers and administrators, we create an environment where they can thrive and continue to make a difference.

The Ripple Effect of Effective Recruitment

The impact of effective recruitment extends far beyond the individual teacher or administrator. When we recruit exceptional talent, we nurture an ecosystem of success. Our students are allowed to learn from the best, ensuring they can develop the skills and knowledge necessary for a bright future.

Exceptional teachers and administrators do not just improve academic outcomes; they uplift the entire community. They inspire generations, shift mindsets, and create a culture of excellence. As the seeds of education are sown, the benefits ripple through families, neighborhoods, and society.

At GMCS, we have witnessed countless success stories highlighting the transformative power of recruiting exceptional educators. Students who once

struggled to find themselves are achieving remarkable things, breaking cycles of poverty, and pursuing higher education. Our community strengthens and prospers as a result. Superintendent Mike Hyatt stated, "Our recruitment efforts have been very successful over the past few years. We have less openings each school year and we are attracting great quality people that stay longer. 8 years ago we kept only about 70 % of our teachers and now we are over a 90% retention rate."

In Conclusion

Recruitment is not just a box to be checked off; it is the foundation of a successful education system. At Gallup McKinley County School District, we understand the importance of finding the right teachers and administrators to unlock the potential of every student.

We encourage everyone to recognize the significance of exceptional educators in shaping the future generation. Let us support and contribute to practical recruitment efforts, celebrating those who dedicate themselves to molding young minds and creating a brighter tomorrow.

Here is a warm welcome to all our new educators and neighbors!

COME WORK WITH US!
See our career opportunities



From Intern to Family

Most folks around Gallup know the railroad's history in the town's development. One of the area's gems is the Gallup Cultural Center, originally constructed as the Sante Fe Railway Depot in 1918. If you crave a gourmet sandwich, visit the historical building, and find Angela's Cafe. Chances are Angela Chavez herself will greet you. Whether she is crafting a signature coffee or chatting with the regulars, one thing is sure: You are family when you come in.

DeLeigha Chato agrees, "Angela's Cafe is like one big family!" Chato interned through the Gallup McKinley County Schools Pathways Internship Program last school year. As a Tohatchi High School senior, DeLeigha juggled her internship, schoolwork, and athletics. "One of the things I appreciated about working at Angela's was that they supported me in making school my priority." She explained that Angela and Head Chef Melissa Benedict were her biggest fans. She said, "They pushed me to finish my homework and supported my softball team. They would always say record your catching and batting! It made me feel like I was part of the place!" This school year, DeLeigha is a first-year student at UNM-Gallup. She is working towards a degree as a Medical Laboratory Technician. She was highly animated when discussing how exciting working in a lab is and her plans to work as a phlebotomist and researcher. Chato said, "That is another area Angela supported. Anytime customers would come in and tell her they had blood work; she would introduce me and tell them that is what I would do someday!" When asked how the internship prepared her for her college courses and future, she did not hesitate to rattle off a list: customer service, flexibility, and time management. She also talked about how the interview process was helpful. "Next time I have to look for a job, I will have experience with the hiring process."

MENTOR-BOSS CONNECTION

Angela Chavez had a positive experience with the internship program as well. Angela said, "Lala was great. She has a great work ethic and is very trustworthy! If she arrived before we did, she would look at the big whiteboard, see what needed to be completed and get started. She did not have to be closely supervised, which was nice!" Angela explained how she has employed many teens over the years and can tell who will work out from her interviews. She stated, "I knew she would fit in from the beginning. She had a good interview." Angela explained how she is looking for employees who are trustworthy and diligent. She understands that working in her cafe is temporary for most and expects them to advance in their careers and education. Angela hopes they take the real-world skills they gained with her and use them moving forward. Even though she knows they will move on someday, this attitude of acceptance and encouragement is why she has a low turnover rate. The internship went so well that it became a paid position for DaLeigha.

I asked Angela if she would recommend participating in the Pathways Internship program to her business owner friends, and she answered with her trademark smile and a resounding "YES!"

THROUGH THE EYES OF A PARENT

Valencia Chato is always on the go. As a single mom, she works hard to care for her kids,

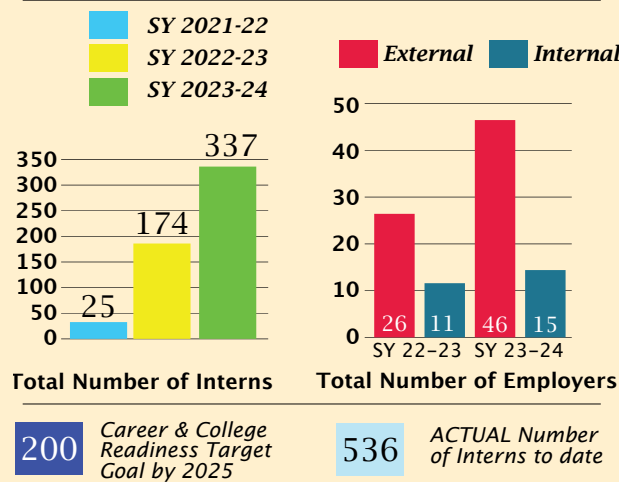


Courtesy of V. Chato

nieces, and nephews. She is always the number one fan in the stands, whether at basketball, volleyball, or even rodeo. Valencia learned this from her mom. DeLeigha appreciates all the sacrifices her mom and grandma made for her. She said, "Both of them always told me education is what is going to get you far." She continued, "I watched my mom work hard 24/7 at work and school. If she can do it, I can do it!" Valencia recounted how the internship helped DeLeigha become more independent and confident. "Lala was a bit shy but did it all herself from the beginning. One day, she told me she would be starting a job. She had done the application and interview process all on her own." Valencia continued, "She became an adult during that time. The internship helped prepare her for life. She had to juggle school, sports, and a job. She figured it out and did well."

After hearing DaLeigha and Valencia talk about how important family is to them, it is not hard to see why DaLeigha thrived at Angela's Cafe. The skills she gained during her internship will help her succeed in her next steps.

Internship Data



GMCS CCCR DEPARTMENT

Jack McFarland - Director
 Kyndee Keeler - Coordinator
 Arnel DeLaCruz - Coordinator

If would like more information about our internship program, Contact CCCR at 505-721-1000



Damien Begay & Hunter Tietjen at the New Mexico Roundhouse in January 2024.

STUDENT INTERN AMBASSADOR SPOTLIGHT

Hunter Tietjen
 Ramah High School
 Grade Level: 12
 School of: Business
 Clubs: I am a member of Business Professionals of America, National Honor Society, Skills USA and Student Body Governance.
 Achievements: I have been on multiple honor roles. My football team was runner up in state. I have been accepted into Nation Honor Society. I have gone to state in multiple events and even won one! This year I was Senior of the Month for Rotary Club.
 Dreams/Goals and Aspirations: I am the class president for the class of 2024 and my goal is to make sure

this is the best/most productive year for everyone! I would like to go to UNM ALB to become an emergency room nurse.

Skills, Hobbies and Interests: I'm skilled in welding. I like to try different trades, like plumbing, dry walling, and wood working. I am also interested in the medical field.

Professional Development: I got first place at our regional BPA competition and am going to compete in the state competition. I'm training in Skills USA. I am in an Internship with Gallup Catholic Charities.

Other Information: I am a member of our local volunteer fire department and I enjoy helping people. One quote that I love is, "Those who are happiest are those who do the most for others." Booker T. Washington

Damien Begay
 Ramah High School

Grade Level: 12
 School of: Business
 Clubs: I am a part if BPS, Skills USA, Youth Council and band
 Achievements: I am part of a youth council where I live and help with my community.

Dreams/Goals and Aspirations: I would like to go to a trade school for welding or carpentry. Later, I would like to go to college for technology.

Skills, Hobbies and Interests: I live to play my guitar and skateboard. I like many sports like cross country, basketball, and track. I will continue with my hobbies in the future.

Professional Development: I have worked as a construction tech and am OSHA certified. I am in welding class and have taken a year of construction class. I have an internship as a culinary assistant.

Other Information: I have taken after my mom as she likes to help and encourage others. I love my family and friends.

EMPOWERING TRADITIONS:

TOHATCHI LADY COUGARS EMBODY DINÉ WOMAN CULTURE ON AND OFF THE BASKETBALL COURT

What does it mean to be more than just a basketball dynasty? For the Tohatchi, Lady Cougars, it means embodying the strength, resilience, and rich cultural heritage of the Diné, Navajo people. This remarkable team has dominated the basketball court and become a beacon of inspiration for the community they represent. Tohatchi becomes a ghost town when the girls hit the court. Everyone and their grandma attend home games and a large loyal group caravan to the out-of-town battles. Step into the Cougar Den on game night to feel adrenaline and excitement. Expect a packed gym, loud fans, and a fierce team.

With the Lady Cougars hailing from the Navajo reservation, their connection to their Diné heritage runs deep. I recently attended a game. As I sat behind a grandmother in the stands with her hair neatly done in a *tsiyééł*, the Lady Cougars hit the court for their pre-game. The players ran on the court as the crowd came to their feet, and the gym echoed with cheers. Many of the girls and the coach often sport the *tsiyééł* as well. A girl about two years old looked up from her popcorn box to see the commotion and let out an enthusiastic cheer. The sense of heritage and cultural pride in that gym was significant.

Coach Tanisha Bitsoi immediately had the team focused, and the warmup was intense. It struck me that Coach Bitsoi was like a Navajo Weaver, bringing all the different yarns together to create a beautiful, sturdy rug that tells a story. As District play and the road to the state championships begin, the Lady Cougars hope to weave another chapter in their story of being repeat state champs! Coach Bitsoi will use her experience as a coach and former Lady Cougar to get it done.

The journey of the Tohatchi Lady Cougars has been challenging. Like most teams coming through the pandemic, many girls were personally affected. Coach Bitsoi points out that most teams must maneuver through team dynamics. Her girls have improved in the last few years by building a culture of unity. Bitsoi said, “Basketball will prepare them for whatever comes along. Getting along with co-workers and other people in your life. Learning to deal with people and high-pressure situations will give them confidence.”

As the Tohatchi Lady Cougars continue to dominate in their relentless pursuit of excellence, their legacy grows more robust. 2013 the Lady Cougars struggled and came up last in District play. By 2015, they were District Champs. Since then, they have had an impressive run. The Lady Cougars won the State 3A Championship Tournament in 2016 and 2023. Another remarkable note: since 2013, they have made the finals or semifinals in every state tournament except for two. 2014, they lost in the quarterfinals, capping off an impressive season.



2023 Lady Cougars at the Office of the Navajo Nation President

Courtesy of T. Bitsoi



Courtesy of T. Bitsoi

2023 Tohatchi Lady Cougars at Window Rock

Remember, they were in last place in their district the year before. If the stars align, they will defend their championship in proper Cougar form and dominate. With nine returning players donning 2023 Nusenda Credit Union Girls Basketball State Championship rings, their experience and leadership are deep.

In the Navajo culture, the strength and significance of matriarchy cannot be understated. Diné women are central to their society, serving as the backbone of their families and communities. Within this strong matriarchy,

women are empowered and valued for their wisdom, resilience, and nurturing qualities. They play pivotal roles in decision-making, preservation of cultural traditions, and passing down knowledge from one generation to another. Coach Bitsoi garners this for her girls on and off the court. “On this team, we are all Navajo Women with an identity of who we are. We use the principle of clan and kinship in everything we do. We model and implement that through our language in game plans.”

In January, the Lady Cougars were guests at the Navajo Nation State of the Union Speech. Adorned in traditional dress, they represented Tohatchi High, their community, and Gallup McKinley County schools with grace and dignity. President Nygren and First Lady Blackwater-Nygren are avid supporters of basketball. The First Family often attends games throughout the Navajo Nation. First Lady Blackwater-Nygren said. “I can see how basketball has positively impacted young women across the Navajo Nation. The game teaches discipline, the importance of physical fitness, endurance, and confidence. They will remember these lifelong skills for the rest of their lives.” She went on to talk about how playing basketball can help players prepare for the challenges they face: “I am proud of the young women who have committed to play basketball. It is something the Navajo Nation has come to be known for. I can see young women’s intense pressure while performing in front of thousands of fans, their yelling parents, and sometimes unfair referee calls. We will continue to support our young athletes.”

Just as they were inspired by those who came before them, the Tohatchi Lady Cougars work to empower future generations of Navajo girls. They understand the importance of representation and strive to serve as role models for young members of their community. Each year, they host a basketball camp in June. Coach Bitsoi is proud of how they model and interact with the younger kids. She notes, “All our current players came to that camp; now they are paying it back to the upcoming kids.”

Let’s celebrate the Tohatchi Lady Cougars for more than just their basketball achievements. Let’s recognize them as the strong, resilient, and culturally empowered women they are, paving the way for future generations to follow suit. Through their unwavering devotion to the game and their community, the Tohatchi Lady Cougars embody the essence of being a strong Diné, Navajo women. Their power extends far beyond the basketball court, leaving an indelible mark on those who have the privilege of witnessing their journey.

Gallup-McKinley County School District applauds the Tohatchi Lady Cougars for their incredible achievements and the inspiration they provide. They remind us we can overcome challenges with determination, resilience, and deep-rooted cultural pride.

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