



Photo by Allison Shelley/Complete College Photo Library

2025 AGENCY REPORT

State Tribal Collaboration Act Annual Report

Stephanie M. Rodriguez, M.C.R.P.
Cabinet Secretary

Patricia Trujillo, Ph.D.
Deputy Secretary

Desiree Aguilar
Indian Education Administrator

NEW MEXICO
HIGHER EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT



Fostering Student Success from Cradle to Career

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Agency Mission, Purpose, and Overview	3
Indian Education Division	4
Communication, Collaboration, and Consultation with Tribes, Pueblos, and Nations	6
Higher Education Highlights	7
Current and Planned Programs and Services for Native American Students	7
Academic Affairs	7
Financial Aid	8
Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP)	9
Adult Education	11
Capital Outlay	12
Private Postsecondary Schools Division	13
State Tribal Collaboration Act Training and Certification	13
Point of Contact	14

Executive Summary

The New Mexico Higher Education Department's (NMHED) mission is to provide financial, academic, policy oversight and support to New Mexico's public higher education institutions, Tribal Colleges, and our formal community partners. The purpose of NMHED is to promote efficiency, accountability, and, most importantly, student success. The agency also provides programmatic support and technical assistance to higher education institutions and adult education programs aimed at serving Native American students. NMHED seeks to broaden, deepen, and strengthen pathways of opportunities for Native American students through partnerships with higher education institutions in New Mexico. Increased collaboration between Tribes and the agency enhances access to higher education and adult education programs, leading to positive changes in Tribal communities and the lives of their citizens.

In New Mexico there are 28 Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) including four Tribal colleges and universities (TCUs) and four Native American Non-Tribal Serving Institutions. TCUs in New Mexico include Diné College, Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA), Navajo Technical University (NTU), and Southwest Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI). The purpose of TCUs is to serve and prepare Native American students through the incorporation of language, culture, and traditions within higher education curricula. In 2024, the total number of Native American students served in higher education, adult education, and dual credit programs was 14,150. This included:

- 2,565 Native American students enrolled at Tribal Colleges
- 7,887 Native American students enrolled at public colleges and universities
- 898 Native American students enrolled at private post-secondary institutions and vocational programs
- 1,073 Native American students enrolled in adult education programs
- 2,392 Native American students enrolled in the Dual Credit Program in 2024-25

Agency Mission, Purpose, and Overview

Mission Statement

To provide financial, academic, and policy oversight, and support New Mexico's public higher education institutions and community partners for the purpose of promoting efficiency, accountability, and student success.

Purpose

The New Mexico Higher Education Department (NMHED) fosters and guides a system of higher education that best meets the needs of New Mexicans. This is accomplished by providing financing to, oversight of, and support for all of New Mexico's public universities, colleges, and state-sponsored adult education programs in addition to regulating the state's private, for-profit higher education institutions, and by offering academic and economic programs, such as the Dual Credit Program, in which both public and Tribal colleges and universities may participate.

Agency Overview

In 2005, NMHED was established as a cabinet agency in the Executive Branch as a single, unified department to administer laws and exercise functions formerly administered and exercised by the New Mexico Commission on Higher Education. The agency includes the following public-facing divisions: Academic Affairs and Policy, Adult Education, Capital Projects, Financial Aid, Gaining Early Awareness for Readiness and Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP), Indian Education, Private Postsecondary Schools, and Planning and Research. In coordination with our divisions, the agency works in tandem with our public higher education institutions and community partners to prioritize accessibility and ensure college and career readiness are at the forefront of our services.

Indian Education Division

Mission Statement

The Indian Education Division is responsible for building, ensuring, and maintaining effective two-way communication between the New Mexico Higher Education Department (NMHED) and Tribal communities across New Mexico.

Goals

The Indian Education Division aims to:

- Support Native American students, Tribal education departments, and Tribal communities;
- Strengthen, maintain, and improve the relationships between the agency and Tribes, Nations, and Pueblos in New Mexico;
- Communicate with Tribal communities regularly and seek consultation with Tribal leaders when appropriate;
- Develop new and improve current agency support services for Native American students through effective partnerships with institutions, legislators and Tribes; and
- Explore partnerships with Tribes, Nations, Pueblos, and other agencies or organizations to address topics of mutual concern and support innovative ideas.

Purpose

Reinstated by Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham and NMHED in 2020, the Indian Education Division (IED) builds and maintains effective communication and collaboration among the agency, Tribal colleges, Tribal education departments, Tribal leaders, and Tribal communities throughout New Mexico. IED is committed to working with Tribes, Nations, and Pueblos in the state for the best interests of Native American students in our higher education and adult education systems. The division works to promote and share constituent service support and agency resources available to Native American students. IED is also responsible for upholding the provisions of the State Tribal Collaboration Act (STCA) and the agency's STCA policy. Additionally, the division communicates, collaborates, and consults with Tribes, Nations, and Pueblos to understand the higher education needs and challenges, and works to address them promptly and accordingly.

Partnerships with Tribes

Partnerships with Tribes are a foundational aspect of IED. With the knowledge, support, and input from the Tribes, the division has been able to promote efforts that support Native American students in their pursuits of higher education, supported the passage of key legislation, and continue to building community trust.

The agency's partnership with the Tribes includes attending virtual and in-person college fairs for Native American students and families. These events foster greater connections with the students and families that IED strives to serve. Tribal partnerships were integral in passing the New Mexico Opportunity Scholarship Act during the 2022 legislature. State and Tribal partnerships are essential to accomplishing powerful strides in meeting policy and program goals.

To build upon State-and-Tribal partnerships, IED has actively met with Tribal leadership to discuss each Tribe's higher education needs and priorities, legislative outcomes, and other topics regarding higher education. The division also meets with the Tribal Education Departments on a monthly online basis and has met with Santa Ana Pueblo and attended events for the pueblos of Kewa and San Felipe. The agency will continue to demonstrate their commitment and respect for Tribes through site visits, meetings, consultations, and attending education-related events in communities throughout New Mexico. Through these efforts, IED in partnership with agency divisions can develop and provide opportunities that are key to improving the education of Native American students.

Agency Division Collaboration

Since its re-establishment in January 2020, IED works collaboratively with the agency's public facing divisions to develop and discuss ever-evolving ways to serve Tribal communities. In the spirit of coordination and collaboration, all ideas and plans are not exclusive to the agency. Feedback, ideas, and suggestions from Tribal leaders and communities are essential in this continuous work. The agency understands the importance of working with Tribal communities. Whether it's regular meetings and communication with Tribal education directors, Tribal college presidents, or weekly meetings with the agency's division directors, the conversations surrounding the education of Native American students are iterative. With ongoing collaborative efforts, IED and fellow NMHED divisions look forward to reciprocal relationship building with Tribes through virtual or in-person means.

In November 2023, IED hosted an agency wide professional development training on working with Tribes. This training covered building relationships with Tribes both professionally and culturally. IED recognizes that in State Government, this type of training within agencies is critical to the responsibility of building and maintaining positive State-Tribal relations. IED is happy to serve the agency as the source of guidance for questions related to this work.

In working with Tribes, the relations do not begin and end with the workday. They are constant and intentional; built over time with trust and transparency at the forefront. The relationships developed guide how IED and the agency advocate for Tribes. Furthermore, these relationships

create an understanding amongst both entities that in turn lead to openness for further collaboration.

Communication, Collaboration, and Consultation with Tribes, Pueblos, and Nations

State and Tribal Support on Key Legislation

During the 2025 legislative session, the New Mexico Higher Education Department (NMHED) worked on key priorities in coordination with New Mexico's Tribal leaders and Tribal college presidents.

Priority 1: House Bill 167: High School Equivalency Credential Tests.

Purpose: House Bill 167 will make the High School Equivalency test free for New Mexicans.

Highlights:

- Since 2021, the rate of New Mexicans taking the test has increased nearly 50 percent. The passage of House Bill 167 is expected to further boost the number of New Mexicans testing to further their own education opportunities.
- New Mexico has become the 5th state to make High School Equivalency tests free to all residents.

Priority 2: The Tribal College Dual Credit Program received a \$200,000 increase from FY25 to create equity with non-Tribal colleges and universities in addition to serving a greater number of high school students.

Purpose: The Tribal College Dual Credit Program allows high school students to gain credits for both high school and college courses toward graduation at Tribal colleges in New Mexico.

Participating Tribal colleges include Diné College, the Institute for American Indian Arts (IAIA), and Navajo Technical University (NTU).

Highlights:

- To build equity among all public colleges and universities in New Mexico, House Bill 2 appropriated \$800,000 to the Tribal College Dual Credit program, an increase of \$200,000 over last year's budget.
- A total of 1,580 Native American students participated in the state's Dual Credit Program, including 1,022 at Tribal colleges and universities. More than half of all Native American students participating in the Dual Credit Program are doing so at Tribal colleges and universities in New Mexico.

Through the passage and signage of House Bill 2 this past legislative session, approximately \$9.4 million will be invested in programs and capital projects supporting Native American students and faculty at colleges and universities across New Mexico. The agency recognizes that this is due to the partnership and support of Tribal leaders, Tribal education departments, and Tribal communities to secure investments for Native American students and families to prosper.

Additionally, funding higher education programs, initiatives, and support systems will ensure we are filling the needs of our economy and workforce in New Mexico through a cradle-to-career lens.

NMHED strives to support effective policies that support Native American students in New Mexico. Accomplishing these priorities exemplify the power of collaboration and mutual support between state agencies and Tribal communities. The agency is honored to continue the strong collaboration and communication with Tribes to move effective student-centered policies and goals forward.

Higher Education Highlights

Native American Graduate Credentials

The total number of Native American students that graduated from New Mexico colleges and universities increased from last academic year by 3.6 percent. For Academic Year 2023-2024, a total of 2,290 students graduated. With the following credentials having the highest completions:

- 1,456 certificates and associate degrees
- 350 bachelor’s degrees
- 148 master’s degrees

Opportunity Scholarship

The Opportunity Scholarship enables New Mexicans to pursue a college degree or career training certificate, even if they are starting college for the first time later in life or going back after many years. Students may enroll part time or full time and must maintain a 2.5 GPA while in college. During Academic Year 2021-2022 a total of 2,520 Native American students received the Opportunity Scholarship. Opportunity Scholarship awards increased in Academic Year 2022-2023 totaling 4,183 Native American students receiving the scholarship.

Current and Planned Programs and Services for Native American Students

Academic Affairs

Completions

The total number of Native American students that graduated from New Mexico colleges and universities increased from last academic year by 3.6%. For Academic Year 2023-2024, a total of 2,290 students graduated with the following credentials.

Total Credentials Awarded to Native American Students for Academic Year 2023-2024						
Certificates <1 Year	Certificates 1-2 Years	Associate’s Degree	Certificates 2-4 Years	Bachelor’s Degree	Master’s Degree	Graduate Certificates
439	629	675	13	350	148	11

Total: 2,290

*Note: The above table represents the completions of degrees above 10.

Dual Credit Enrollment

New Mexico is one of fourteen states that funds dual credit coursework. Students can earn credit at both their high school and a local college or university through the state's Dual Credit Program. The program allows high school students to enroll in college-level academic or career-technical courses offered by a public or Tribal higher education institution. Currently, 27 public colleges and universities across New Mexico participate in the Dual Credit Program, three of which are Tribal colleges: Diné College, Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA), and Navajo Technical University (NTU).

- Fall 2024 Native American student Dual Credit enrollment statewide - 1,742
- Fall 2024 Native American student Dual Credit enrollment at Tribal colleges - 628
 - Diné College – 23
 - IAIA – 208
 - NTU – 397

Within the Dual Credit Program, higher education institutions waive tuition and local school districts purchase textbooks and instructional materials that would otherwise be purchased by the students. Public colleges and universities receive a portion of funding for providing dual credit courses through the higher education funding formula, also known as Instructional and General (I&G) funding. Tribal colleges receive compensation for dual credit courses through the Tribal College Dual Credit Program appropriation, which receives annual funding from the State of New Mexico. These funds are administered by the New Mexico Higher Education Department (NMHED). For fiscal year 2026 the fund received an appropriation of \$800,000.

Financial Aid

Purpose

The Financial Aid Division is dedicated to helping students access the fiscal resources needed to attend college in New Mexico. The division oversees nearly \$350 million dollars in state financial aid each year for students in New Mexico through a wide variety of programs to meet the needs of our state's student population.

Goals

The Financial Aid Division aims to:

- Inform students in New Mexico that college is attainable and affordable;
- Provide students and their families with the consumer information needed to make informed decisions about financing an education;
- Make information about our financial aid programs accessible to all who qualify;
- Collaborate with New Mexico's public colleges and universities, ensuring regulatory compliance, and good stewardship of State and Federal funds; and
- Facilitate the student financial aid application process and keep it as simple as possible.

Financial Aid Data

The New Mexico Opportunity and Lottery scholarships have provided support for Native American students enrolled in New Mexico's public and Tribal colleges and universities. For Academic Year 2022-2023, 4,258 Native American students were awarded the Opportunity Scholarship totaling \$10,536,033; and 576 Native American students were awarded the Lottery Scholarship totaling \$2,348,779.

Tribal College Support

In Academic Year 2022-2023, Tribal college students continue to be eligible for the Lottery Scholarship. Qualifying students at Tribal colleges receive the same tuition support as students at New Mexico's public four-year colleges and universities. The agency estimates this will benefit over 1,400 students per year enrolled at New Mexico Tribal colleges.

For Academic Year 2022-2023, approximately \$2.8 million in state financial aid was distributed to over 2,153 students attending Tribal colleges. This aid includes need-based grants such as the College Affordability Grant and the State Student Incentive Grant; merit-based grants such as Teacher Preparation; Grow Your Own Teachers; and State Work Study funds. Additionally, approximately over \$5,099,800 was distributed to 1,074 Native American students in New Mexico Tribal colleges through federal Pell Grants.

Financial Aid Impact

Across both public and Tribal colleges, Native American students in New Mexico were awarded approximately \$16.4 million in state financial aid. Over \$20.9 million was awarded to Native American students through federal Pell Grants.

Since Academic Year 2019-2020, **Over 19,000 Native American students** have received more than **\$49.4 million** in state financial aid while attending New Mexico's public and Tribal colleges. Each year, approximately \$1.5 million in state aid continues to support over 800 students at Tribal colleges.

**Note: All financial aid data presented was pulled from eDEAR (Electronic Data Editing and Reporting) submissions, using summer trailing methodology in alignment with enrollment reporting practices for Academic Year. Ethnicity data is self-reported by students and is based on IPEDS ethnicity coding for Native American/Alaska Native students.*

Contact Information

The Financial Aid Division is available to assist students, parents, and families with questions related to state financial aid programs, including scholarships, grants, and loan forgiveness programs. The agency's Financial Aid Help Line is staffed with experts to answer any inquiries: 1-800-297-9777 or Fin.Aid@hed.nm.gov.

Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP)

Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) New Mexico is a seven-year initiative funded by the U.S. Department of Education. The program aims to increase

access to resources for college and career readiness for students. GEAR UP New Mexico (GUNM), a division of the New Mexico Higher Education Department (NMHED) and serves seven local education agencies in our state.

In School Year 2023-2025, GUNM served 7,576 students in 7th grade through their first year at a college or university. The GUNM college and career readiness program currently serves sixteen middle and high schools historically underrepresented in higher education. Four of the seven local education agencies have a sizable Native American population, including:

- Bernalillo High School
- Capital High School
- Española High School
- Taos High School

Currently, GUNM does not collect specific Tribal affiliation information; however, of the total student population GUNM served in School Year 2024-2025, 71 (9.4%) self-identify as Native American.

GUNM provides a range of services to students and their families, including rigorous coursework, dual credit, tutoring, credit recovery, supplemental math instruction, mentoring by college students, college visits, student leadership opportunities, college entrance test preparation, and financial aid advising and counseling, including submission of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). These services are implemented based on local needs in the four school districts GUNM serves with a large enrollment of Native American students.

Tribal college visits and other postsecondary institutions visited this year include San Juan College, Diné College, the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA), Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI), and Navajo Technical University (NTU). On these visits, students toured the campus, learned about programs that these schools specialize in, and were exposed to education opportunities both within and outside their own communities.

Summer Tribal College Bus Tour

GUNM launched its first annual multi-day Summer Tribal College Bus Tour, a landmark effort to expand access and visibility into higher education pathways tailored to Indigenous students. Over three days, more than 25 students from seven high schools traveled to IAIA, Navajo Technical University, San Juan College, and Fort Lewis College in Colorado.

The tour featured campus tours, interactive workshops, admissions presentations, and cultural programming—including opportunities to learn about tuition waivers, student-led Indigenous organizations, and career pathways in the arts, trades, and technology.

GUNM remains committed to making Tribal college visits—and the annual bus tour—a consistent and meaningful part of our college and career readiness strategy, helping students and their families envision futures that honor both personal goals and cultural identity.

GEAR UP West Conference in New Mexico

In October 2024, GEAR UP New Mexico hosted hundreds of GEAR UP professionals from 35 states and Washington D.C. at the GEAR UP West Conference held at the Albuquerque Convention Center. Over the course of the event, attendees participated in more than 60 workshops on topics such as family engagement, STEM education, financial aid access, and culturally responsive college and career readiness.

GUNM looks to expand its commitment to culturally responsive, equity-centered college and career readiness for Academic Year 2025-2026. GUNM will continue to offer statewide, multi-day bus tours; strengthen intergenerational engagement by developing new strategies that center the voices of Native students, families, and educators; and continue collaboration with Tribal partners, local districts, and higher education institutions through the design of student-centered programming that reflects the values, aspirations, and lived experiences of the communities served.

Adult Education

The Adult Education Division provides funding and oversight for 26 adult education and 18 literacy programs across the state. Each program offers free educational and career development services for eligible New Mexico adults. The division works collaboratively with the Indian Education Division (IED) to increase awareness of the division's work, existing service sites, and partnering with Tribal communities in meaningful and impactful ways.

Adult education programs are vital to the state because they meet learners where they are. Programs provide support to strengthen core academic skills, earn a high school equivalency (HSE) credential or adult diploma, improve English language proficiency and civics knowledge, and promote workplace readiness and soft skills.

To be eligible for adult education services, participants must:

- Be at least 16 years of age;
- Not be enrolled or required to be enrolled in high school; and
- Fall below postsecondary skill levels on an approved assessment.

Preparation for HSE assessments is one of the most requested services that adult education programs offer. New Mexico has three pathways to high school equivalency credentials. The GED® and HiSET® are both nationally recognized, multi-part standardized tests that cover mathematical reasoning, language arts, social studies, and science subject areas. The third and newest pathway authorized in New Mexico is the National External Diploma Program, or NEDP®. This rigorous adult diploma program is a flexible alternative to testing that allows clients to work at their own pace to demonstrate mastery of academic and workforce preparation competencies. In addition to the nine adult education programs offered across the state, the NEDP can be accessed online via a “hub” that prioritizes serving Native American students and parents of young children.

In the 2024-2025 program year, the Adult Education Division served a total of 12,050 students; of these, 1,073, or 8.9 percent, were Native American. Two of these programs serve an entirely Native American population: Diné College located on the Navajo Nation and Southwest Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI) in Albuquerque. In addition, the adult education programs at San Juan College, the University of New Mexico-Gallup, and New Mexico State University-Grants serve high percentages of learners from Tribal communities.

Adult education programs guide students into higher education, career training, and the workforce. Native American adults who participated in adult education in the 2024-2025 program year made strides in their academic goals, with 538 Native American participants making a measurable skill gain. A total of 155 earned their HSE, though note that not all students are seeking a HSE when they participate in an adult education program. While the total number of Native American adult education students declined slightly in this program year, these students' learning outcomes were higher on average than that of their non-Indigenous peers.

Capital Outlay

The Capital Projects Division is responsible for the stewardship and oversight of capital outlay funding to public and Tribal higher education institutions in New Mexico. This is accomplished by developing an annual capital outlay funding recommendation for consideration by the Executive and Legislature. This process includes the approval of capital outlay projects during monthly capital outlay committee hearings, and the management of capital appropriations to community colleges and Tribal colleges and universities using the New Mexico Department of Finance and Administration's (DFA) grant management process.

The department prioritizes projects that address critical health, safety, code compliance, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and asset protection. During General Obligation (GO) Bond funding cycles, the department also considers large-scale projects which renovate existing facilities or replaces existing facilities with new, modern, and energy efficient alternatives within Instruction and General (I&G) funds eligible facilities.

Over the past two years, the department has also considered funding requests which support supplemental funding and demolition. Supplemental requests must support increases in construction and labor costs associated with previously funded projects which were recommended by the department. Requests for demolition funding are prioritized based on the ability to utilize the funding within the fiscal year in which it is secured.

Tribal College Capital Outlay

Tribal colleges and universities (TCUs) play a critical role in educating the surrounding communities and ensuring culturally relevant education practices are at the forefront of their teachings. Ensuring that Tribal colleges have state-of-the-art facilities for students and their programs improves learning outcomes and student engagement. Capital projects within higher education institutions support infrastructure and new construction, which in turn benefits students and staff, the local economy, the workforce, and the communities served in New

Mexico. The total capital outlay funding TCUs received for Fiscal Year 2025 is \$1,500,000. The funding went to Navajo Technical University for an academic building.

Private Postsecondary Schools

The Private Post-Secondary School Division (PPSD) provides oversight and regulation of private colleges, universities, and career institutions in New Mexico, as required by the Post-Secondary Educational Institution Act and the Interstate Distance Education Act. The division also provides prospective and current students consumer protection when a private postsecondary institution ceases its operations or fails to meet standards of quality set by the New Mexico Higher Education Department.

For-Profit Private Schools Defined

A for-profit private post-secondary school is a college, university or career school that is owned and operated by a private company or business. These schools are funded primarily by tuition and fees, and they typically do not receive state or federal funding. These schools often have smaller class sizes and more individualized attention than larger public universities. They also offer a wider variety of programs and career options and can be a good option for students who are looking to get a degree quickly.

State and Private Schools' Relationship

New Mexico has a complex relationship with private post-secondary schools. On the one hand, the state government has taken steps to regulate these schools and protect students from predatory practices. For example, the state has a Private Post-Secondary Schools Division that is responsible for ensuring that these schools are state authorized or exempted and that they meet certain academic standards. The state also has a law that caps the amount of interest that can be charged on student loans from private schools. On the other hand, the state government has also taken steps to encourage students to attend private post-secondary schools. For example, the state offers a tax credit to businesses that provide tuition assistance to their employees. The state also offers a scholarship program for students who attend private schools in rural areas.

Enrollment numbers

The Native American student population enrolled in private post-secondary schools during Academic Year 2023-2024 in New Mexico was 898. This includes enrollments in private state-authorized distance education institutions and private state authorized postsecondary educational institutions with physical presence in New Mexico. Enrollment percentages for programs were as follows:

- 68.8% in Certificate programs
- 17.4% in Associate degree programs
- 8.3% in Bachelor's degree programs
- 3.3% in master's degree programs
- 2.2% in doctorate degree programs

State Tribal Collaboration Act Training and Certification

The New Mexico Higher Education Department (NMHED) has been working to meet 100% staff completion of the “Building Cultural Equity” training offered through the State Personnel Office in conjunction with the Indian Affairs Department. Given that there are limited course offerings and available spots for this required course, it has been a challenge to meet this goal, but the agency continues to make the training a priority for all staff members.

Point of Contact

Desiree Aguilar (Kewa Pueblo)

Education Administrator, Indian Education Division

2044 Galisteo Street, Suite 4, Santa Fe, NM 87505

Desiree.Aguilar@hed.nm.gov

Office: (505) 476-8400

**NEW MEXICO
HIGHER EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT**



Fostering Student Success from Cradle to Career

2044 Galisteo Street
Suite 4
Santa Fe, NM 87505
(505) 476-8400
www.hed.nm.gov