



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ECECD Reaffirms Commitment to Support Native American Early Education in New Mexico

SANTA FE – Today, as Native American Heritage Month draws to a close, the New Mexico Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD) reaffirms its commitment to advance an early childhood system across Indigenous communities that strengthens educational supports, builds government-to-government relationships, and fosters mutual trust, understanding, and partnerships, while respecting tribal sovereignty. Since the department's inception, ECECD has made support of culturally and linguistically appropriate early education in Native American communities central to its mission. This commitment is reflected in the leadership structure of the agency itself, as ECECD became the first early childhood agency in the nation to create an Assistant Secretary position specifically dedicated to Native American early education and care.

"It is critical that we listen to the experts and the leaders of each community to understand the early childhood system they have created - babies are sacred," said Jovanna Archuleta, ECECD Assistant Secretary for Native American Early Education and Care. "Everything I am supporting or promoting in this position is also what I am doing in my own home with a toddler, in just three months of transitioning her to our tribal Head Start – she is speaking Tewa and learning about the culture of Nambe Pueblo. In the new year, and with the FY23 budget request for the Tribal Investment I look forward to what more is to come and how we can strengthen the relationships with each Tribe, Pueblo and Nation."

Since ECECD was launched in July 2020, the agency has worked in partnership and close consultation with the state's sovereign governments – in accordance with the objectives and goals laid out in the New Mexico Early Childhood Strategic Plan (2021-2024). Projects include:

- Agency's FY23 budget request calls for a dedicated tribal investment fund of \$1.5 million to increase access to early childhood programs and services to support the vision of each unique Tribe, Pueblo or Nation
- During the 2021 legislative session, legislators provided funding through House Bill 2, including \$2 million specific for the recruitment of bilingual and indigenous early educators
- Agency agreements with nine Pueblos to provide technical assistance and consultation through an early childhood facility assessment, which will result in gap analysis report of access to early childhood learning environments
- Agency agreement with Tesuque Pueblo to operate a culturally relevant, mixed-age PreK program administered and evaluated by the Pueblo's standards

- Investment in a Tribal Waterford Upstart program to bring learning to the home, providing a computer, wireless internet access, and a license to utilize the program. This program is for preschool/Head Start aged children
- Collaborated with the Public Education and Higher Education departments in hosting a government-to-government summit focused on cradle-to-career Indian education
- The department has internally appointed Tribal Liaisons to represent each program to enhance collaboration and communication on prenatal to age five services.

“It is important to teach our children the culture of Tesuque Pueblo to sustain and enhance our Tewa language, culture, and traditions,” said Clarissa Vigil, Tewa/Early Childhood teacher in Tesuque Pueblo. “To support the health and self-identity of our children by instilling the values of love, care, and respect. In collaboration with New Mexico Early Childhood Early Education and Care Department our language and cultural effort are supported by understanding the importance of valuing a Tesuque Pueblo child.”

“The children and families from the Pueblo of Isleta will benefit from all support provided by collaborative partnership provided by Early Childhood Education and Care Department,” said Andrea Pesina, Executive Director for Isleta Pueblo Head Start and Child Care Program. “The benefits of collaboration allow more opportunities for children’s education, growth and development and have a variety of support and enhancement.”

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The New Mexico Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD) launched in 2020, one of only four cabinet level agencies nationwide that consolidated all early childhood agencies under one roof. ECECD’s mission is to optimize the health, development, education, and well being of babies, toddlers, and preschoolers through a family-driven, equitable, community-based system of programs and services. Learn more about how ECECD supports children, families, and the early childhood professionals that serve our communities at nmececd.org. On Facebook and Twitter as [@NewMexicoECECD](https://twitter.com/NewMexicoECECD).