



# NEWS RELEASE

## Office of Public Relations

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### Diné Language, Culture Targeted at May Summit

**TSAILE, Ariz.** — Diné College continues to impact Navajo language and culture, with a recent Summit focused on their vitality around the Navajo Nation and beyond.

James McKenzie, the Navajo Language Development Coordinator at Diné College and a planning committee co-chairman of the Navajo Language & Culture Revitalization Summit (NLCRS), said the purpose of the three-day Summit was to build awareness, dialogue, understanding, unity and action around Navajo language and culture efforts.

"This first gathering was just the start of what we plan to make a movement, not for schools or institutions alone, or communities alone, not just for parents and cheiis and masanis (grandparents) alone, but for all of us to come together to identify how we can learn from each other, share and support each other's efforts in Navajo language and cultural maintenance and revitalization," McKenzie said.

"Through strengthening our network of support and resources, advocates for all of our initiatives will be able to make cohesive and unified efforts to make real and lasting change for the maintenance and revitalization of our language and culture."

While recent U.S. Census data shows that the Navajo language is spoken in a little more than half of Navajo homes, reports from NLCRS participants indicate that that number is declining rapidly.

In order to effectively address that decline, it is critical that we avoid limiting our efforts to one area — we need to address Navajo language from all directions, including increased usage within the home, among family members, in communities, in current and newly developing media, as well

as in school-based efforts, such as immersion programs, McKenzie and other officials attending the Summit said.

Gallup-McKinley County Schools Superintendent Mike Hyatt said about 10 people from the Gallup school district attended the Summit. He said the attendees ranged from administrators, teachers to athletic coaches.

"We at the district went to the Summit to gain professional knowledge, collaborate and participate in the dialogue to strengthen the GMCS Diné Language Program," Hyatt said. "The Diné oral language should be a priority. It is a cultural language and should be taught in that manner."

McKenzie said close to 300 people attended the summit, which was held May 22, 23 and 24. He said topics at the Summit included community-based language and cultural initiatives, charter schools, storytelling, and, generally, system-wide language revitalization.

The NLCRS Planning Committee plans to make the Summit an annual event to continue the progress made at the inaugural event.