



# NEWS RELEASE

## Office of Public Relations

Diné College • Tsaille, AZ 86556 • (928) 724-6698  
[bdotson@dinecollege.edu](mailto:bdotson@dinecollege.edu)

**CONTACT:** Bernie Dotson

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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#### **Diné College, NN, WNMU Ink Special Ed MOU**

*Begaye: 'It's a great day for the Navajo Nation'*

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** — Officials from Diné College, Western New Mexico University and the Office of Navajo Nation Scholarship & Financial Assistance signed an agreement July 31 that formalizes a graduate level special education degree.

The signing took place at the Office of the President of the Navajo Nation and was attended by a small contingent of administrators from each institution. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), signed by Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye, Diné College President Monty Roessel and Western New Mexico President Joseph Shepard, puts into place a partnership that starts come fall of 2017.

"We're excited (today) at signing this agreement with Diné College and Western New Mexico University," Begaye said at the onset of the 55-minute meeting. "This ensures that our special education students will not be left behind. It's a great day for the Navajo Nation."

The MOU targets students already enrolled at either institution, as well as students from outside colleges and universities. Financial aid (ONNSFA) is available for qualified Navajo students.

Shepard promised \$1,000 to Diné students who finish the program and come back to teach at a Navajo Nation school — a caveat being that the student must speak and understand Navajo. "I'm extremely proud to be a part of this signing agreement," Shepard said.

**What is the MOU about?**

The agreement establishes a partnership between Diné College, WNMU and ONNSFA and guides students toward the completion of a Bachelor of Arts degree in elementary education from Diné College and a Master of Arts in Teaching-Special Education from WNMU in five years. At the end of the program, students can become licensed to teach general and special education.

A component of the agreement calls for financial aid recipients from ONNSFA who are part of the program to teach in Navajo schools one year for every year financial aid is received. Students accepted to the program take online graduate classes via WNMU.

"It is a great day for Navajo education," Roessel said. "We are excited to start advertising this program and at creating that pathway toward (WNMU)."

Dr. Tommy Lewis, a member of the Diné College Board of Regents and Superintendent of Diné Schools, initially got the ball rolling months ago with respect to the program and pledged to engage institutions such as Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University and the University of New Mexico, among other schools, in like partnership programs.

Also attending the signing were Sen. Jamescita Peshlakai, D-Cameron, Jack Crocker WNMU Provost, Roberta Marquez, assistant professor of special education at WNMU and Rose Graham, the director at ONNSFA. Peshlakai, who is from Cameron, is a U.S. Army and Persian Gulf War (1990-1991) veteran and graduate of NAU. She is the first Navajo female to serve the Arizona legislature.

Diné College was established in 1968 as the first tribally-controlled community college in the United States. The college maintains six satellite campuses around the Navajo Nation and awards associate and bachelor degrees in a variety of disciplines. Diné College's main campus is in Tsaile, Arizona.

Western New Mexico University's main campus is located in Silver City. The school was started in 1893 and offers associate, bachelor and master's degrees, with campuses in Lordsburg, Deming and Gallup.