

# New Gallup charter school for Natives on track to start classes in August

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SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

**GALLUP** — Organizers for the "Six Directions Indigenous School" say they have solved their biggest problem — finding a home for the school.

Lane Towery, the chief organizer for the school, said Tuesday that school officials are in talks with Western New Mexico University to use space in its complex for classes this coming August.

Officials for the Six Directions Indigenous School, which is the first charter school in Gallup devoted to providing a curriculum centered on Native values, had hoped originally to make a deal with the Gallup-McKinley

County School District to place their classes in unused portions of one of the district schools.

And while the district at first seemed to support the idea, the district's school board eventually turned the proposal down, leaving the school with no home.

Towery said he is optimistic that the home problem has now been solved and the officials are now making final plans to begin accepting applications in about six weeks both from parents who want their children to go there and people who want to work at the new school.

Towery said the charter school will accept at least 50 and possibly as many as 80 students for the sixth and seventh

grades. The school is planning to add a grade a year until it provides classes for the sixth through 12th grades.

And while the school is open to both Natives and non-Natives, the philosophy behind it is geared to helping Native students reach their potential.

The idea for the school began in 2014 when Towery and others saw test scores for the district. The scores showed that Anglo students scored better on both math and English.

In fact, 59 percent of the Anglo students who took the math test showed proficiency compared to only 25 percent of the Native students. In English, it was an even greater disparity — 64 percent to 25 percent.

What was needed, in their opinion, was a school that was geared toward teaching Natives and to come up with this, promoters of the idea began meeting with local parents, educators and anyone else who had an idea on how to improve the quality of education for Native students.

This will be something entirely new for Gallup, said Towery and in the summer of 2015, they began submitting a proposal to the state of New Mexico to get their proposal approved so they could get state funding for the school.

A year or so ago, Frank Chiapetti, the superintendent of the Gallup-McKinley County School District, spoke out in

support of the concept.

Chiapetti acknowledged that culturally responsive models for Native youth are difficult to implement in the multicultural Gallup schools, adding, "I think I could see a niche in Gallup for this sort of school."

Since then the district, working with the University of Virginia, has implemented a number of changes to those schools where Native students were lagging behind other ethnic groups and just recently the test scores have showed major improvements in the performance of students at many of these formerly failing schools.

On Sept. 24, the New Mexico Public Education Committee approved the group's appli-

cation. It was only one of two charter schools approved at that time for the entire state.

Parents who want to send their children to the school are urged to apply as soon as the enrollment period begins and before the enrollment period ends in May.

If more parents apply than there are positions, the selection of who will be accepted will be done, as it is in the case of all charter schools in the state, by lottery, said Towery.

Parents who want to keep in touch with the school or learn more about it can visit the organization's website - [sixdirectionsschool.org](http://sixdirectionsschool.org) which also includes information on how to register your child,