



## Anti-Bullying, Awesome Awards promoting good behavior at Cuba Elementary School

*“We are all in this together and we are elementary proud.”— Victoria Dominguez*

December 1, 2019

CUBA, N.M. — The Cuba Elementary School’s anti-bullying program and its Awesome Awards Program is resulting in good behavior according to Victoria Dominguez, the school counselor.

Dominguez praised the students and said they have come a long way since the program began. She helped to initiate an anti-bullying program at the school and has spent a lot of time educating students of ways to identify bullying and ways to prevent it.

In her effort, Dominguez presents an anti-bullying message to classes by using a PowerPoint presentation, showing a powerful video and having children sign a pledge of kindness.

This year’s theme is “Cuba Elementary—We Put the ‘I’ in Kind.”

Dominguez said she understands she can’t change the entire world but said, “We can start with ourselves.”

“We can start being kind to one another, show each other that we are here to care and love one another,” she said. “We are here to get an education at the end of the day.”

Dominguez explained bullying was not a huge problem at the school but they are just like any other school experiencing it.

“There is a lot of peer conflict, kids not getting along and stuff, but I would not necessarily say bullying because bullying is ongoing and you are intentionally hurting somebody and they are having a hard time making it stop,” she said. “That is what I was really working on with the kids, especially the little kids.”

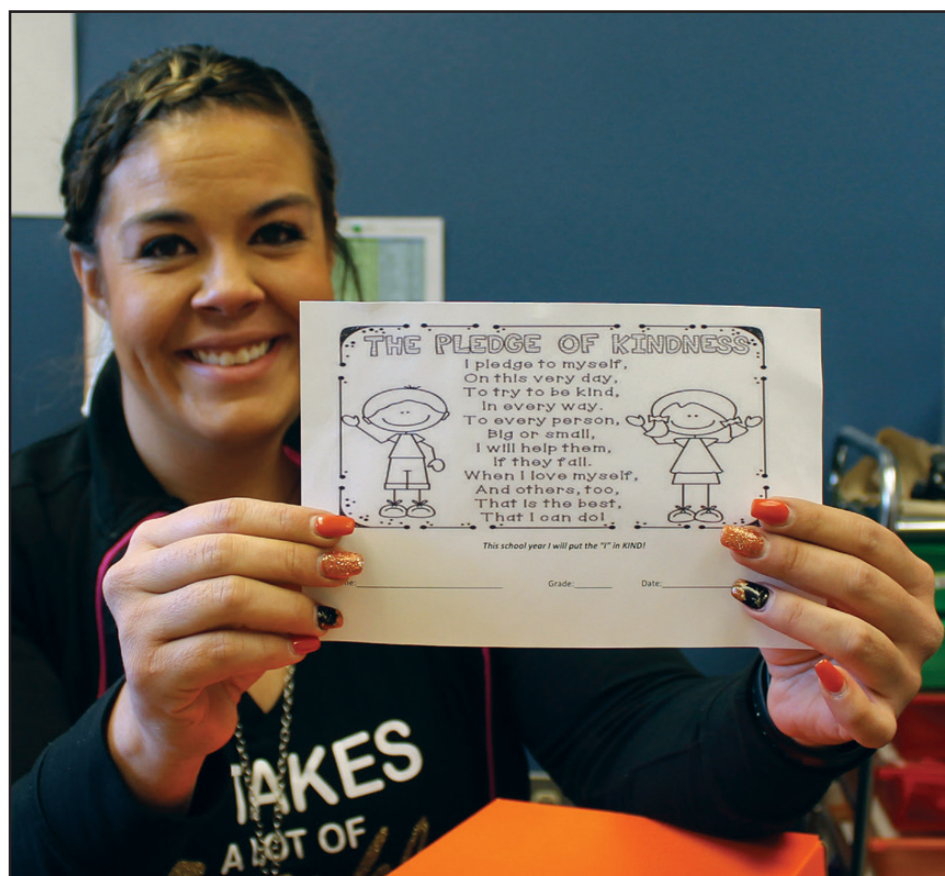
In her presentation to the younger children, she uses the wrinkled heart activity to demonstrate what mean words can do someone. She begins by asking the children what were some mean things that are said at school or some mean things that they heard that hurt them?

Some responses of mean things included, “You’re ugly” or “Your shoes aren’t cool.”

So Dominguez holds the paper heart up and begins to crumble it every time an example of something mean was mentioned.

“So little by little, the kids were seeing what was going on,” she said as she continued crumbling the paper heart.

She then shifted the activity by asking the children, “So what are some things that we say when we didn’t



School Counselor/Social Worker, Victoria Dominguez, holds up a copy of “The Pledge of Kindness” that students sign as part of an anti-bullying initiative that she helped to start at Cuba Elementary School. She is pictured here on Nov. 15, 2019, at her office at Cuba Elementary School in Cuba, N.M.

mean it?”

Some responses were, “Oh, well I’m sorry.”

Dominguez said when the children began saying sorry — she slowly began unfolding the heart.

“I held up the heart and said, ‘At the beginning of this, our heart was nice and pure,’” she said. “But all those mean words really hurt our hearts, even when we said sorry. Even when

we said ‘I didn’t mean it,’ even when we apologize over and over, it still put wrinkles in our heart.”

Dominguez said the exercise is a great visual for the young children to understand that words can hurt.

She is always encouraging good behavior and for kids to be kind. Last year, she began the Awesome Awards

CONTINUED PAGE 6/ Awesome



New buses purchased ... Page 2



Student Senate busy ... Page 5



Navajo Hooghan dedicated... Page 8



Basketball season has started... Page 11





## New buses purchased, transporting students safely

December 3, 2019

CUBA, N.M. — The Cuba Independent School District recently purchased five new buses as replacements to a few old ones.

Matthew Chavez, a mechanic at the bus yard, explained the new buses were purchased and delivered in mid-September and they are all year 2020.

He explained they have 15 school buses that provide daily transportation for the entire school district. Their longest bus route is to the Rincon Marquez-area, which is more than 60 miles roundtrip.

Every school day, the first bus leaves the bus yard at 4:30 to 5 a.m. and then the departures stagger from that time to 7 a.m. for the local area.

He said they also have two activity buses that provide transportation for special events, trips and for the sports teams.

He was not sure of the cost for the



One of the new buses purchased at the beginning of the school year warms up to transport students home on Nov. 15, 2019, in Cuba, N.M.

new buses but he estimates the cost to be around \$70,000 to \$80,000 for the basic buses like the ones they purchased.

Some of their buses are in rotation to be replaced, especially the 2006 ones. He says a lot of the decisions for bus replacements are dictated from the New Mexico Public Education Department and he was not sure of the

policies relative to bus replacements.

He said buses should be replaced after 12 years and activity buses after 20 years.

Dr. Karen Sanchez-Griego, superintendent of Cuba Independent School District, appreciates the work of the transportation staff.

“We are grateful to our hard-working and dedicated colleagues in

transportation — drivers, mechanics, director and all staff there,” she said. “Our kids could not get to and from school without this dedicated group of people.”

For now, the new buses are on the road and safely transporting students back and forth from home and school.



Ms. Felice Chapman reads “Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?” to a Kindergarten class on Nov. 15, 2019, at Cuba Elementary School in Cuba, N.M.



Kindergartner Jerlina Begay, 5, carefully colors and completes assignments on Nov. 15, 2019, at Cuba Elementary School in Cuba, N.M.





# Ms. Linney is helping students to read

*Read with your kids at home for at least 20 minutes a day; students encouraged to read books purchased at recent book fair during holiday break*

December 3, 2019

CUBA, N.M. — Ms. Theresa Linney is doing her part to help students improve their reading and to acquire the skills and knowledge to read at grade-level, and to improve reading comprehension.

Linney serves as the reading interventionist at Cuba Elementary School where she works with students in kindergarten to 5th grades.

“I help students that are below the 30th percentile on standardized testing and reading,” she said. “They come to me and I give them a basic test, they come with i-Ready and Istation scores and most of them are reading like at kindergarten to maybe second grade level.”

Linney works with these students that are having problems with reading and she starts them off with basic phonics.

“We do stuff on the computer. I

like this guy named Jack Hartmann because he does songs for long and short vowels,” she said. “We do rules that they never learned, like if there is an ‘e’ at the end of a word, the first vowel is long and two vowels together... just different rules.”

She explained they fill in the gaps where they are missing so students can start reading a little bit better.

Linney said she has about 50 students she is currently working with.

In addition, she also teaches two classes for dyslexia called Take Flight, which is a comprehensive intervention program for students who have been identified with dyslexia or show signs of dyslexia.

Linney said reading is a very important skill to have. Students should have the capability to read, understand, process and recall what they read. Reading comprehension skills are crucial because they help children develop intellectually, socially



Ms. Theresa Linney, reading interventionist, poses for a photo on Nov. 15, 2019, at Cuba Middle School.

and eventually professionally.

“If you can’t read — there’s not a lot you can do,” she said. “You can compensate and a lot these kids have compensated. They are really smart [kids], all of them are very smart but after a certain point, you can’t keep compensating.”

She explained the inability to read will catch up with you.

“It makes [students] feel inadequate, they are embarrassed to read out loud

in class, they have low self-esteem, they get in trouble because they don’t want to read or because they don’t want to go to language arts classes,” she explained. “So once they start reading, even just a little bit, their self-esteem shoots way up. So it is really important that they start reading especially at this age. The sooner you

CONTINUED PAGE 7/  
Ms. Linney

# Amy K. Romero, new principal at Cuba Elementary School

December 3, 2019

CUBA, N.M. — Amy K. Romero is the new principal at Cuba Elementary School.

Romero started in mid-November and comes to Cuba from Albuquerque where she worked at the Montessori Elementary and Middle School. She has been working in the field of education since 2005.

“I like working with kids, I like seeing them reach their goals, I like seeing them grow,” she said. “They are a lot of fun to be around.”

Since coming on board, she said she has been super busy.

“There is a lot to take in and a lot to learn,” she said.

She is looking forward to the remainder of the school year.

“I think it’s going to be a really good school year,” she said. “I think the next few months is going to be a lot of getting to know the community, a lot of getting to know the staff, getting

to know the kids, and just trying to figure out what’s going to be best for the school. There’s going to be a lot of talking and listening in the next few months.”

Romero went to school at the University of New Mexico to obtain her master’s degree, she was part of the MBA of Ed program which was funded by the Woodrow Wilson MBA Fellowship in Education Leadership program. Before that, she obtained her bachelor’s degree in mathematics from New Mexico Tech.

She was born in California but moved to New Mexico when she was 10-years-old and grew up in Belen, New Mexico.

She is excited to be at Cuba Independent School District. 🐉

Amy K. Romero, principal at Cuba Elementary School, poses for a photo Nov. 15, 2019, at Cuba Elementary School in Cuba, N.M.







## Cuba Schools using eLearning or E-Days when needed

*Teachers are online during the work day and can be emailed or messaged if students are struggling*

December 11, 2019

**CUBA, N.M.** — The Cuba Independent School District recently adopted the eLearning Day Program as an option for continuing an instruction day away from the traditional time limits of a brick-and-mortar class setting.

Edgar San Juan, technology integration specialist, explained the eLearning Day Program fits perfectly with the initiation of their 1-to-1 Laptop Program started earlier this year.

San Juan explained the New Mexico Public Education Department (PED) approved the E-Days or eLearning Days which is modeled after schools in the state of Indiana. The innovative program evolved into an engaging instructional model that attracted Cuba and other schools across the country.

Cuba Schools was a great environment to bring the program because of its unique community and students can continue learning despite the weather and other challenges they may experience. It is a great program that was studied and researched by Laura Saucedo, special education coordinator, over the summer.

An important element of the program is teachers and students have

opportunity to engage with digital resources, collaborate virtually and develop digital skills used beyond K-12.

There is a variety of reason why schools would opt to utilize eLearning besides for the development of blended learning skills. Many school districts use the program to continue learning despite weather conditions preventing students from going to the actual school campus, for professional development, parent conferences or widespread illness.

San Juan explained the E-Days are regular school days and work completed by students on an E-Day serves as a ticket of attendance for that particular day. Completed E-Day work is submitted to the teacher the following day of the designated E-Day in order to be counted for attendance.

“Due to the fact that our students are in rural settings, and in many cases, do not have access to the internet, all assignments are on Google Classroom and [are] easily accessible to the students,” said San Juan.

“Teachers are online during the work day and can be emailed or messaged if students are struggling. Assignments on E-Days are in line with the curriculum for grade and [the] subject level.”

San Juan said they are collecting



data on how E-Days are working for students.

“Last year, there were 10 make-up days due to weather and other circumstances, so learning was stopping and starting, and the school district was trying to make up days and times,” he said.

The school district had two E-Days so far this semester.

For questions about the eLearning Day Program, contact Edgar San Juan at Cuba Independent School District at (575) 289-3211 ext. 610 or by email at [esanjuan@cuba.k12.nm.us](mailto:esanjuan@cuba.k12.nm.us). 🐏

## Dr. Carl Stern stepping down from school board

December 11, 2019

**CUBA, N.M.** — Long-time school board member Dr. Carl Stern will be stepping down for the school board at Cuba Independent School District.

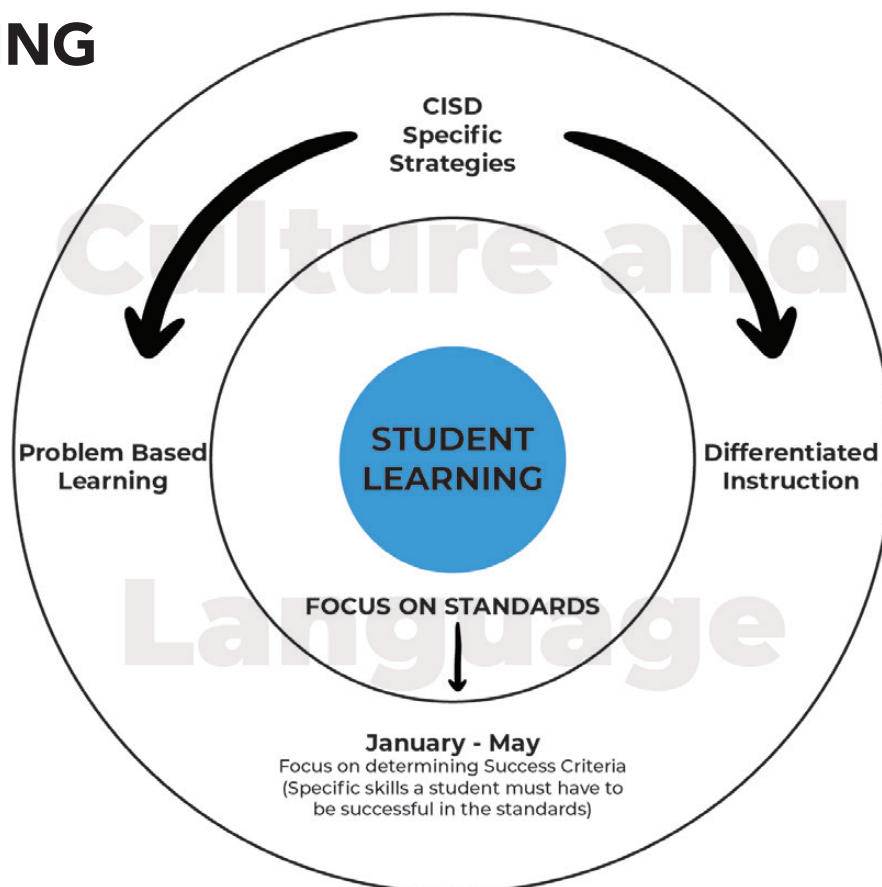
Karen Sanchez-Griego, superintendent, thanked Dr. Stern for his years of service to the school district.

“Dr. Stern committed many years to CISD and has supported student achievement and community development,” she said. “He is dedicated to the bottom line and that is representing the people in his district and ensuring that an equitable education with a cultural lens was adhered to. We thank Dr. Stern for all he has done for CISD and we wish him and his wife Ann all the best.” 🐏

## STUDENT LEARNING

*As we plan:*

- How do we teach the “whole student?”
- Do we know who they are and what they need?
- Do we meet them in a manner that is culturally relevant with respect to their language?





## Student Senate at Cuba High School is busy planning activities

### *Holiday food drives are in process*

December 3, 2019

CUBA, N.M. — The Student Senate at Cuba High School is doing great things to benefit the student body and to help the community.

On Nov. 15, the Senate gathered for an impromptu meeting to talk about some of the projects that they have in process and some planned later in the school year.

Olivia Casaus, a science teacher at Cuba High School, serves as the sponsor of the Senate and explained they are involved in many projects. She said they are the ones that put together festivities for homecoming in the fall and they recently started a free movie night on Half Day Mondays in the evenings.

“We open up the cafeteria and it’s a free movie and we sell refreshments,” said Casaus. “The idea was that we want positive, safe and fun activities for students. We had two [movie nights] so far with great success and plan to continue to have two per month. The students said is like going to the movies.”

“We are [also] selling t-shirts, like Ram gear throughout the district trying to promote school spirit,” Casaus added.

David Benavidez, 17, a senior and treasurer of the Senate, said they are constantly raising money for various projects they have planned.

“My job is to be informed of the amount of money that we have and how much money is going to be spent on supplies to help us with fundraisers and activities for the school,” he said.

David said they have a good amount of money from fundraising thus far, which will be used for activities such as the upcoming prom which happens in the spring time. He said they enjoy putting on fun activities for the students like the fall festival.

“We plan to also purchase a popcorn machine soon so [we] can provide popcorn at the movies,” he said.

Casaus said the prom is usually what they raise money for but she is hoping the junior class takes prom over again because it is the juniors that usually are supposed to put prom on for the seniors.

“The last few years [the juniors] had us do it and we are trying to hand it back,” said Casaus.



Members of the Student Senate at Cuba High School pose for a picture after an impromptu meeting Nov. 15, 2019, at Cuba High School. Back row, from left: Shaun Morales, 10th grade; Jacquelynn Sanchez, 11th grade; Eliyana Sanchez, 10th grade; and David Benavidez, 12th grade and treasurer. Front row, from left: Adrianna E. Cordova, 11th grade; Adrianna Casaus, 10th grade; Adriana M. Cordova, 11th grade and vice president. Not pictured: Laurance Gallegos, 12th grade, president; Coylynn Adams, 12th grade; Sam Tony, 10th grade; Tianna Trujillo, 10th grade; Santiago Casaus, ninth grade; Clay Chavez, ninth grade; and Reynae Duran, ninth grade, secretary.

Aside from homecoming and prom, the Senate is also busy with other activities.

“During the year, we do more community events to bring people in our school together,” said Adriana Casaus, 15, who is a sophomore representative to the Senate.

Another senate functions is to also listen to student concerns and help advocate for them.

“During the year when we don’t have any big projects, we work on changing school rules that the student body has come and told us about,” said Adriana M. Cordova, 16, who is a junior representative and is vice president of the Senate. “One [rule] that we are trying to change is the rule about not being able to wear hats and so we rewrote the rule and we just have to submit it for approval.”

Cordova explained proposals to change school rules are presented to either the principal or it may need to go to the school board for consideration. In this case, she believes the hat rule may need the principal’s consideration to be changed in the school policy which is in the school’s handbook.

The rule change is important to Cordova because students enjoy wearing their hats and because some students may be self-conscious about not wearing them.

“They say [the hats] are a distraction to the class but if anything, it is more of a distraction to always have teachers pestering the students to take off their hats rather than the hats being a distraction,” she said. “So we figured if we take away the rule, it would not be a problem at all. But of course, if a student is acting suspicious or the hat is being distracting to the class, then yes, you can ask them to take it off.”

Right now, the Senate is busy with community activities.

“Now during Thanksgiving and Christmas season, we are doing food drives and we’ll give [the food] to families in need around the school,” said Adrianna E. Cordova, 17, who is a junior and a member of the Senate. “Our [school] counselors have access to information about families in need, so we gather all the food and we have them distribute it.”

The Senate also partners with other student groups and clubs like the Future Farmers of America, to do

the food drives so they can get more people involved and gather more food.

The Senate is also coordinating a Christmas tree decorating contest between all the clubs and classes, which will eventually be judged to decide a winner.

The Student Senate members are elected to represent their respective classes. At Cuba, they call their student council the “Student Senate.” 🐏

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## Awesome

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Program as a way to reward students for being good and for their acts of kindness.

“I am trying to promote positive behavior,” she said.

She said the students have really caught on. Often, students will run up to her when she is on lunch duty and let her know that they have picked up 15 pieces of trash because they know that picking up 15 pieces of trash equals one Awesome Award.

After a student gets three Awesome Awards, they get to choose a prize from Dominguez’s stash of prizes. She has prizes like slime, putty, fidget spinners, fidget cubes, slap bracelets, Slinkys, dragon eggs, cars and other small prizes that children want and enjoy.

Dominguez said the prizes certainly serve as motivation.

“They come in here, their eyes light up,” she said. “The kids really love these... I put them on display.”

She recently conducted an awards challenge to see which class gets the most Awesome Awards; the winner gets to do a fun activity as the reward.

“We do movies and drinks or ice cream or something awesome for the kids,” she said. “It’s incentives, tons of incentives.”

Dominguez has all the Awesome Awards displayed down the hallway near the front office and she said the kindergarten class is leading the challenge with the most Awesome Awards followed closely by the third-grade students.


“They are having a little war right now,” she said pointing and smiling at the wall of Awesome Awards. “It’s all for different kinds of stuff, like for random acts of kindness... like helping.”

Last year, Dominguez took some students to the first round of the Cuba Basketball Invitational tournament, they often do movies in the classroom



with popcorn or they receive ice cream floats.

“We’re all about positivity, unity and we’re all together,” she said about the need to promote good behavior, to spread kindness and to eliminate bullying. “We want to move forward and create a connectedness for the whole school. We are all in this together and we are elementary proud.”

The student handbook states the following, “Staff and students at CISD will not tolerate bullying of any kind. We employ many strategies to discourage bullying and promote a positive school atmosphere. If a student is experiencing any bullying behavior, he or she should report it immediately to a teacher, counselor, or the site principal, which will take immediate action to address the concern.” 



TOP: Second Grade students from Ms. Ortega’s class pose for a photo in front of the display, “At Cuba Elementary, We Put the T in Kind” with Victoria Dominguez, counselor at Cuba Elementary School Nov. 15, 2019, in Cuba, N.M. BOTTOM: Counselor Victoria Dominguez shows the basket of prizes students can receive if they get three Awesome Awards on Nov. 15, 2019, at Cuba Elementary School. She said the children love the prizes.

## ADMINISTRATION

Dr. Karen Sanchez-Griego, Ed.D  
Superintendent

Dr. Matthew Williams, Ph.D  
Assistant Superintendent/Federal Programs Director

Dr. Pedro “Pete” Vallejo, Ph.D  
Principal, Cuba High School

Arsenio Jacquez  
Principal, Cuba Middle School

Amy K. Romero  
Principal, Cuba Elementary School

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## New grant will help increase community involvement, improve Indigenous education

December 3, 2019

CUBA, N.M. — The Cuba Independent School District was recently awarded a new grant to increase community involvement, professional development and technical assistance with the end goal to relaunch schools that are designed to build on community strengths and meet community needs for Indigenous education.

Raphaelita Phillips, the Indian education director, explained the three-year Indigenous Education Initiative grant provides \$250,000 per year. The highly competitive grant is funded by the New Mexico Public Education Department (PED). The grant is the first of its kind and only eight schools were awarded, and they will serve as a trial group as the first recipients.

According to the New Mexico Public Education Department, the grant will inspire and empower local systems to dramatically improve and transform education and life outcomes for Native American students and will be grounded in New Mexico's strengths of culture and place.

Further, the intent of this program is for innovation and flexibility combined with technical assistance to meet community priorities for education and respond to the changing educational landscape and identified needs of Native students in New Mexico.

The grant supports the New Mexico PED in its efforts to address the needs of students identified as "at-risk" in the Yazzie Martinez ruling.

"It is a very high honor to have been selected," said Phillips.

The grant outlines certain benchmarks that need to be met according to the New Mexico PED.

In year one, schools will conduct an internal school review process and assessment, conduct community engagement around future school design toward cultural and linguistic relevance and holistic models of education, and develop a comprehensive plan for staffing that prioritizes hiring and training staff that share the backgrounds of the school's students.

In year two, schools will design a plan based on community-identified priorities, conduct curriculum development/redevelopment process, and establish waivers granted for certain requirements.

In year three, schools will relaunch with new vision based on the community-designed plan that prioritizes academic excellence and cultural relevance in education, and with new accountability measures and support structures for sustainability.

Phillips said one of the stipulations is the hiring of additional staff to carry out the objective of the grant. The school district recently hired Lavern Wagner as the transformational community engagement coordinator.

"This is a brand new position to our district and we wanted to ensure it was filled by someone who understands our local culture, language and community," she said.

"We are very excited about this new position because we will have a chance to do something new and different, not just for Cuba but also be a trailblazer throughout the state," she added.

"We look forward to working with our local [Navajo] chapter officials and other leaders, our community and our staff to make crucial changes for our students because they are our main focus," she said. "We hope to get



Raphaelita Phillips, the Indian Education Director at Cuba Independent School District, led the effort to apply for the three-year Indigenous Education Initiative grant of \$250,000 per year. Phillips poses for a photo Dec. 9, 2019, at her office in Cuba, N.M.

valuable feedback and we encourage the community to come forward and help us make this grant a success."

Phillips said they are planning to do a video documentation over the three years of the grant from the beginning to the final phases.

An official announcement was made Oct. 1 by the New Mexico PED and Kara Bobroff, the deputy secretary of Identity, Equity and Transformation for the New Mexico Public Education Department.

In total, eight schools in four districts received grant funding, the

schools include: Cuba Elementary School, Cuba Middle School, Cuba High School, Amy Biehl Community School, Santa Fe High School, Santo Domingo Elementary, Santo Domingo Middle School and Vista Grande High School. 🐍

## Ms. Linney

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catch them, the better."

This is Linney's first year as a reading interventionist. She was a special education teacher for 24 years prior and she always concentrated on reading in special education.

Last year, she did English Language Development classes and said some of the students tested out through

the WIDA testing which she was really excited about. WIDA is a state assessment to identify English language learners.

Linney said she really enjoys her work with the students and she shares the joy of student success.

"I [had] this one girl [that was] really having a hard time reading. Her mom noticed she was reading better and the teacher told me," she said. "She was doing so great and now she tells me, 'Ms. Linney! I love to read!' She

comes in and we read for at least 20 minutes a day and she stays with me for tutoring as well."

"It is just amazing to see them. I had [another] kid that was in my dyslexia class and he went to middle school and they didn't have [the program] anymore," she said. "But the parent told me he was not having too much trouble reading anymore."

Linney encourages parents to read with their kids at home.

"Read whatever you can to them. If

it's a magazine, a book, a bottle label, something, anything for at least 20 minutes a day," she said. "Parents, grandparents, older siblings, please read with your children. That is the utmost importance. If kids can read, they can reach their dreams. That is what I really believe."

Some students also purchased books during the recent book fair and they are encouraged to read them over the holiday break. 🐍





## Traditional Navajo Hooghan dedicated

*“This hogan is an extension of the classroom and will be used as a place to teach our students about their culture, history and language.”*

— Raphaelita Phillips, Indian Education Director

December 5, 2019

CUBA, N.M. — After several months of construction, the traditional Navajo hooghan (hogan) on the campus of Cuba Independent School District was dedicated and blessed during a dedication ceremony held Nov. 15.

Lavern Wagner, a Navajo language instructor, was excited beyond measure.

“I think it is very significant for this area because of our high enrollment of our student population from Native American heritage,” she said.

Wagner said the school district was also celebrating Native American Heritage Month so the hogan dedication fit perfectly into that theme.

“This is a perfect day to dedicate the hogan,” she added.

Wagner explained the hogan was built for the students and staff.

“We are excited about it... I am,” she said. “There is a lot of teachings about the hogan and that goes right into our curriculum at every school — elementary, middle school and the high school. I feel very fortunate today to be part of this on behalf of my students.”

Kara Bobroff, the deputy secretary of Identity, Equity and Transformation for the New Mexico Public Education Department, attended the dedication.

“I am really excited to be here to have the opportunity to visit your school and to see the hogan [dedication],” she said. “It is a really good opportunity for you [all] to learn a lot about what this means and to utilize [the hogan].”

She said the building of the Navajo hogan on the campus for the promotion of language and culture is important.

“It is one of the most foundational things that we can do for our students to be able to have an actual hogan within their learning communities and also to give them opportunity to



connect more to their own identity, culture and language,” she said. “It’s a classroom that’s way beyond any school can do.”

“One of the reasons why I am so excited about it, there is a potential for all of our communities to have a hogan present in order to preserve, perpetuate and also build culture and language, and indigenous knowledge,” she added. “I think that is something we all should prioritize and something that we all ask for... to put the resources to do [this] is a major transitional thing to take place. So if we’re really looking to change education, how kids learn, this is something that I think is fundamental to that.”

Bobroff is Navajo on her mother’s side and is Ashijihí (Salt Clan), and her dad is Lakota. She started working in her current position this year after being appointed by the governor of New Mexico.

Bobroff oversees everything related to Native American education, bilingual education, charter schools and the Yazzie/Martinez v. State of New Mexico case.

“One thing we are launching now — we want every school and school district to ensure that they have a culturally and linguistically responsive framework that they are teaching from across the entire school, not just in one class, not just once in a while but all the time,” she said. “So that is happening across the state in every school everywhere, so that is a big goal of ours.”

For Raphaelita Phillips, the



Sixth Grade students from Ms. Lavern Wagner’s Navajo Language class pose for a photo in front of the new Navajo hogan built on the campus of Cuba Independent School District. The school celebrated the dedication and grand opening of the hogan Nov. 15, 2019 in Cuba, N.M.

Indian Education Director at Cuba Schools, the hogan dedication was heartwarming.

“The dedication was a huge step in allowing our students to experience Navajo culture and teachings in a different environment. It was a huge success!” she said. “It was really heartwarming to see all of our kids out here, we had a huge turnout with our students and [they] were here voluntarily, they are genuinely curious about what a hogan is and what takes place in there.”

“Based on the number of students in attendance, they are eager to learn, so that is a very positive sign for us,”

she added. “It was a great experience for all students, staff and community members in attendance as we aim to bring everyone together and this was a step in the right direction.”

“We are a mixed community, we have mostly Navajos but other Native Americans students as well, we have Hispanics,” she added. “It was a great opportunity for everybody to experience our Navajo culture and we are welcoming to everybody.”

Phillips explained the hogan dedication was important to ensure

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Navajo Hooghan**



# Cuba Schools celebrate Native American Heritage Month

December 5, 2019

**CUBA, N.M.** — Students and staff at Cuba Independent School District celebrated Native American Heritage Month in November.

The school conducted several events including designating certain days for various Native American activities.

Raphaelita Phillips, the Indian Education Director, was pleased with the ongoing activities throughout the month.

“It is very important to recognize our culture and be proud of it, and to give the kids, our students, a chance to really express themselves and their culture,” she said.

Phillips said they had “Rock your Mocs” days every Friday when students wore their traditional moccasins. They had days designated for wearing Native American jewelry, and they had a fashion show where students were encouraged to wear their traditional attire.

“I think it is really getting a lot of kids motivated and excited to be not only indigenous but Native American,” she said. “It is OK to be proud of your culture and to express yourself, and to be a proud young Navajo man and woman.”

On Nov. 15, Navajo Language Instructor Matilda Lee was busy with her students making fresh fry bread for students and staff during the lunch time break. As she was flapping fry bread and waiting for the hot oil to heat up, she was instructing students making fry bread.

Lee explained her students have been helping to facilitate various events. On this day, they were making fry bread for the entire school.

“We’re just celebrating our heritage, culture and tradition. We’ve been dressing up,” she said. “We had Turquoise Day, we had Fry Bread Day, we had Blue Corn Mush Day and Navajo Tea Day. So today, we are just serving kids [fry bread].”

Besides the fry bread, the students had various Navajo dishes on a table for students and staff to enjoy, there were various stews and other foods.

Lee said she teaches Navajo history as well and she makes sure to include the telling of stories from long ago, the Navajo creation stories, stories that were told by the grandparents and passed down from generation to generation.

“In my classroom, in my area, that is one of my lessons,” she said. “Not

only that, but we are including all the Native Americans around the U.S., even throughout Alaska.”

Lee also said the promotion of Navajo language and culture preservation is very important to her.

“I want the students to use their language,” she said.

Lee has been teaching Navajo language and culture for more than 22 years. Her clans are Hasht’ishnii (Mud People), born for Tó dich’ii’nii (Bitter Water People), her maternal grandfather’s clan is Naakaii Dineé (Mexican Clan), and her paternal grandfather’s clan is Kin lichí’nií (Red House People).

Native American Heritage is celebrated across the country and was first designated in 1976 when the Senate Joint Resolution 209 authorized President Gerald R. Ford to proclaim October 10-16, 1976, as “Native American Awareness Week.” The designation has since been celebrated and it was eventually renamed “National American Indian Heritage Month” by proclamation of President George H. W. Bush in 1990.

On Oct. 31, President Donald Trump again proclaimed the month of November as National Native American Heritage Month.

The proclamation reaffirms the U.S. commitment to work with tribal communities to address serious issues affecting them, and to help protect their rich and diverse heritage. The proclamation also calls for all Americans to commemorate the month with appropriate programs and activities. 🐎



Top: Sophomore Elmyra Herrera, 14, Miss Cuba High School Diné Club Princess 2019-2020, makes frybread Nov. 15, 2019, for students and staff during lunch as part of Native American Heritage Month festivities at Cuba High School in Cuba, N.M. Bottom left: Victoria Dominguez, counselor/social worker at Cuba Elementary School, sports a traditional Navajo bun in honor of Native American Heritage Month. Dominguez is Hispanic but wanted to participate in festivities on Nov. 15, 2019. Bottom middle: A student wears traditional Navajo wrap-around moccasins on Nov. 15, 2019, in Cuba. Bottom right: Dr. Pedro Vallejo, principal at Cuba High School, proudly wears his Navajo attire during the dedication ceremony of the Navajo hogan on the campus of Cuba Independent School District in Cuba, N.M.





## Cuba High School cross-country runners make appearance at state competition

December 10, 2019

**CUBA, N.M.** — The Cuba High School Boys' cross-country team and one female varsity runner qualified and competed in the 2019 5AAA New Mexico State High School Cross Country Championship held Nov. 9 in Rio Rancho, New Mexico.

Jennifer Gauna-Casaus, cross-country coach, said the boys' cross-country team placed 10th in the state competition and Adrianna Casaus was the only state qualifier from the girls' cross-country team.

The qualifiers for the state competition were: Antawn Antonio, 12th grade; David Gauna-Casaus, 11th grade; Julian Gauna-Casaus, ninth grade; Fernando Herrera, 12th grade; Osiris Putnum, 12th grade; Tristan Sam, 12th grade; and Sylas Toledo, 11th grade. The lone qualifier from the girls' team was Adrianna Casaus, 10th grade, placed 47th out of 87 runners.

Gauna-Casaus said they also took two alternates to the state competition, ninth-graders Clayton Chavez who was swapped with David Gauna-Casaus, and Santiago Casaus.

She explained Clayton Chavez chose to step down from the state competition and allow alternate David Gauna-Casaus to compete because Chavez felt Gauna-Casaus beat him at the finish line at the district competition and he thought it was the right thing to do.

"[Chavez] brought a smile to my face every day. He is cheerful, has a positive outlook on everything, puts in hard work without question and has his mind-set on Cuba placing in the top three at state," said Gauna-Casaus.

She explained there were 12 teams that competed in each boys and girls competition. There were 122 teams and more than 900 runners that competed in the state competition. In the 3A competition, 23 teams



competed and only 12 qualified.

Antawn Antonio was recognized as a Navajo Times All-Star in cross country and he received an award Dec. 9 in Shiprock, New Mexico.

Cuba High school has made consistent appearances at the state competition in the last several years.

Leading up to the state competition, Cuba High School hosted the district competition where six teams competed and four teams qualified to compete at state. The Cuba boys' team placed third on their home turf which qualified them to compete at state.

"They had a few ups-and-downs this season with a few injuries and two dual-athletes sharing [their] time with football," said Gauna-Casaus. "But these young men are tough, strong-willed and their determination to win as family — as they say 'family' in their pre-race chant. They improved every competition."

The lone girl's qualifier was Adrianna Casaus who placed 15th and that qualified her to compete in the

state competition.

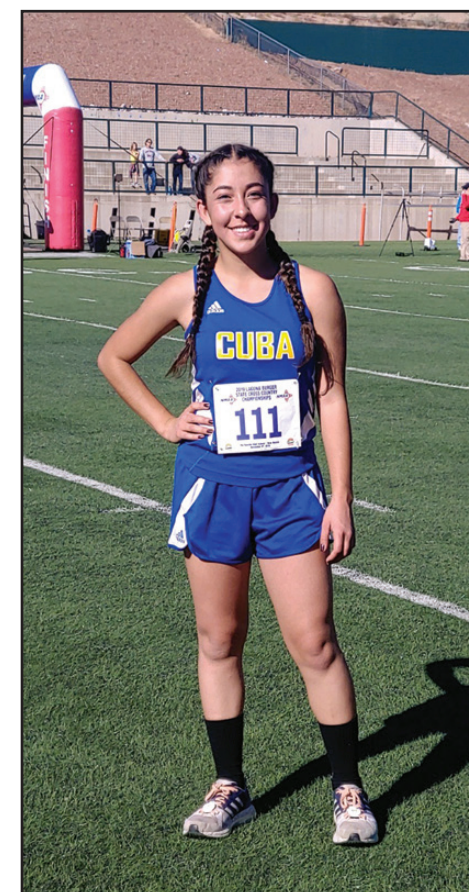
"[Casaus] is a dual-athlete splitting her training time all season between cross country and volleyball," said Gauna-Casaus. "[She] didn't waste a minute pushing and training hard every practice day."

Gauna-Casaus said she is looking forward to the next season.

"I can hardly wait for summer conditioning to get to train these young ladies and gentlemen again," she said. "With all the ups-and-downs, tears and laughter, disappointments and successes, the team really does become family... love them."

Team managers were Cymital Toledo and Serenity Harrison. 🐏

*Top: Members of the Cuba High School Boys Cross Country team Nov. 9, 2019, at the 2019 5AAA New Mexico State High School Cross Country Championship in Rio Rancho, N.M. Bottom: Adrianna Casaus poses for a photo after her competition at the Cross Country Championship Nov. 9, 2019, in Rio Rancho, N.M.*



## Navajo Hooghan

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

the hogan is ready to use for certain purposes.

"In our culture, many of our teachings take place in the hogan. Our stories and songs are tied into the structure of the hogan," she said. "Although our hogan will not be used as a home, we wanted to ensure that we had a proper dedication to ensure it could be used for teaching purposes

from here on out."

"This hogan is an extension of the classroom and will be used as a place to teach our students about their culture, history and language," she added. "We will not be using it for ceremonial purposes as we are a public institution and we want to ensure that it is used as a learning experience and nothing more."

Phillips said they had several representatives from the New Mexico Public Education Department attend besides Deputy Secretary Bobroff.

Navajo Nation Council Delegate Daniel Tso also attended and a few representatives from other school districts attended to see the hogan because they plan to also construct a hogan on their campuses as well.

On the day of the dedication, the hogan was about 98 percent complete and the plastering on the side walls was still being worked on.

Roberto Nutlouis, the lead constructor of the hogan, explained it was not completely done but the dedication had to happen.

"It is pretty much done as far as the structure goes, it is just the finishing touches and the plastering," he said.

He also said a custom-made door is being made by students and will be installed shortly.

Nutlouis said the construction began in May and they have been coming from the Black Mesa-area in Arizona every couple of weeks to work on the hogan.

For now, the hogan is there to use for Navajo cultural teachings and to encourage language preservation. 🐏



## Basketball season has started at Cuba Schools

December 10, 2019

CUBA, N.M. — Basketball season has started at Cuba Schools.

Bruce Hatch, athletic director for Cuba Independent School District, said the season started the last week of November with games. The Cuba High School boys' C-Team, JV and varsity teams beat Crownpoint High School Dec. 3 handedly.

The high school girls' team had their first game against Dulce on Dec. 7 and won 51-22. Only the varsity girls played because Dulce does not have a JV team.

The high school boys head coach is Epi Atencio and they have a C-team, JV and varsity teams. The high school girls head coach is Gilbert Dominguez Jr. and they have a JV and varsity team.

Hatch explained the middle school boys' season is just starting and will go into February and the girls' season is ending shortly.

The middle school boys are coached by Kee Bishara and their first game will be at the Striking Eagle Basketball Tournament in Albuquerque at the end of December.

The middle school girls are coached by Thomas Alvin and their season is winding down, their season began Nov. 12. Their last game will be at the Striking Eagle Basketball Tournament.

"They've been having a pretty good season," said Hatch about the middle school girls' team.

The teams have split basketball seasons at Cuba Schools because of the lack of gym access. The school district only has two full-size gyms.

"It is a short season... a quick season. We try to get them as many games as possible," he said.

Hatch said the middle school girls' team experienced some challenges this season. They had two other teams cancel their girls' basketball program and so they lost games.

"We had multiple games with McCurdy and they canceled their season because they didn't have enough girls to play," he said. "And then we lost multiple games with Coronado because they didn't have enough girls to play the season [as well]."

Hatch said it is unfortunate to have to cancel some of their games because of situations beyond their control, especially when they have tons of kids coming out to participate in Cuba.

"We have two full girls' teams at the middle school level," he said. "We'll probably also fill two boys teams at the



middle school level [as well]."

He said their participation numbers are great.

"I am looking forward to having a good season," he added. "We have a lot of kids participating, so everything looks good for the Cuba Rams."

Nathaniel Valdez, 12, is a seventh-grader and Gavin Undam, 13, is an eighth-grader and they are both excited for their upcoming season.

Nathaniel plays center and Gavin plays the guard position on the boys basketball team at Cuba Middle School, and both are counting down the days to their first game after the Holiday break against Eagle Ridge Middle School in Rio Rancho, N.M.

Both players enjoy playing basketball.

"It's a really hyped up game and full of adrenaline," said Nathaniel when asked why he likes playing basketball. "It's a fast-paced game and it's just an active sport that I enjoy."

For Gavin, it's just the adrenaline that makes him excited to play and compete.

Both players are also looking forward to playing Escalante Middle School.

"That is our rivals," said Gavin about Escalante.

Gavin said he is looking forward to practice and eventually the season.

The basketball schedules can be accessed on the school website at [www.cuba.k12.nm.us/departments/athletics](http://www.cuba.k12.nm.us/departments/athletics).



Top: Nathaniel Valdez, 12, and Gavin Undam, 13, are excited for their season to begin at the end of December. They are pictured in the Cuba Middle School gymnasium during lunch break Nov. 15, 2019, in Cuba, N.M. Middle: Sherrilyn Jim, 14, plays on the girls' basketball team at Cuba Middle School. Bottom: Jaiden Chiquito, 11, plays on the girls' basketball team at Cuba Middle School. In the photo, she is pictured with her friend Rolandrea Gordo, 12, and both dressed in traditional Navajo attire Nov. 15, 2019, in honor of Native American Heritage Month festivities in Cuba, N.M.





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