

## Eve's Fund marks 20 years with largest scholarship class at Navajo Prep

BY DONOVAN QUINTERO  
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

**WINDOW ROCK** — Twenty students at Navajo Preparatory School in Farmington received scholarships from Eve's Fund for Native American Health Initiatives this academic year, the largest cohort supported by the organization to date. The awards come as Eve's Fund marks 20 years since its founding and more than a decade since it began directing scholarship support to Navajo Prep students.

For many recipients, the roughly \$1,000 award means more than tuition relief. In written reflections, students described communities shaped by limited job options, health care gaps, addiction and economic strain, and outlined plans to return home as nurses, engineers, veterinarians and scientists.

"This scholarship means more than financial help. It represents encouragement, opportunity and the belief that our goals matter," senior Madilynn Mora wrote in a statement. She plans to pursue a career in radiology nursing.

Eight of this year's recipients are first time scholars. Twelve are continuing students who have received Eve's Fund support in prior years. Since the program launched in 2011, the fund has awarded \$152,500 to 93 students, many supported across all four years of high school.

### Students describe education as a path back home

Student statements focused less on the scholarship milestone and more on a sense of responsibility tied to their education.

Kameron Dale, a senior from Crownpoint who now lives in Tohatchi, New Mexico, wrote that he plans to major in biology at the University of New Mexico and pursue a health care career that would allow him to return to small communities like his own, which have health facilities but struggle with staffing and resources.

"I want to give back to both of my communities," he wrote. "I want to become a role model for others, showing that if you keep believing in yourself at a young age and have a passion for caring for others, you can achieve your goal of giving back."

That theme appears repeatedly. Nevaeh Lewis, a senior from Torreon, New Mexico, described growing up in a place where many residents do not see education as a realistic option and job opportunities are limited. She wrote that she plans to attend college, earn a degree and return to support elders who often lack resources.

"I believe education is one of the most valuable tools we have," Lewis wrote. "It builds discipline, opens doors and allows us to reach our goals."

Other students framed education to challenge stereotypes or interrupt cycles they see in their hometowns.

Ryan Dona, a sophomore from Shiprock, described a community facing addiction and social problems and said he wants to return to help strengthen it, so Diné are not defined by those struggles.

"I wish to come back to Shiprock and help create a stronger community," he wrote. "Addressing these problems will help people obtain better opportunities at school and achieve their goals."

### Long partnership with Navajo Prep

This year marks the 15th year of partnership between Eve's Fund and Navajo Preparatory School, according to school officials. Head of School Shawna Allison Becenti said the scholarships remove barriers that can derail students before classes even begin.

"We are deeply thankful to Eve's Fund for their ongoing support of Navajo Prep and our students," Becenti said. "Now in the 15th year of our partnership, this support reflects a shared commitment to empowering our Indigenous students

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Speaker Crystalyne Curley, left, helps distribute gifts during the 25th Navajo Nation Council's Christmas Tree Lighting Program on Sunday, Dec. 14.

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## Christmas at the Chamber



Families line up for Toys for Tots outside the Navajo Nation Council Chamber during the 25th Navajo Nation Council's Christmas Tree Lighting Program on Sunday, Dec. 14.

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A crowd fills the area outside the Navajo Nation Council Chamber during the 25th Navajo Nation Council's Christmas Tree Lighting Program on Sunday, Dec. 14.

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RIGHT: Santa Claus greets children near the Toys for Tots area during the 25th Navajo Nation Council's Christmas Tree Lighting Program on Sunday, Dec. 14.

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LEFT: Speaker Crystalyne Curley greets community members near the gift distribution area during the 25th Navajo Nation Council's Christmas Tree Lighting Program on Sunday, Dec. 14.

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## Dilcon Community School sees enrollment climb, test scores rise

BY KYLE LESLIE  
NAVAJO TIMES

**AMARILLO, Texas** — Dilcon Community School has reached its highest enrollment level in more than two decades, while student academic performance has risen well above national averages for Native-serving schools, according to school officials and staff.

Principal and CEO Bill M. Wachunas said the growth reflects years of steady work rather than a single initiative. Enrollment has increased by 25 students this school year alone and by about 100 students over the past decade, excluding the pandemic years.

"It's good when parents bring their kids here because they know we're doing good," Wachunas said.

Academic results have followed a similar upward trend. Wachunas said the national average

for proficiency at Native-serving schools is about 20.5 percent, while Dilcon's current proficiency rate stands at 37.8 percent.

"We are doing really, really good," he said. "It comes down to the teachers challenging the students and making sure they're performing."

Wachunas credited consistency among staff and clear expectations for students as key factors. He said teachers place strong emphasis on academic accountability, including for students involved in sports and extracurricular activities.

"What we impress to our student-athletes is that you're students first," Wachunas said. "If they're not putting in the effort, it motivates them to work."

School culture also plays a role, he said. "The culture here is really good. The students are motivated," Wachunas said. "We're not perfect by any means. However, overall, we're doing really good."

Teachers say they are seeing the results of that approach in the classroom. Robert Chambers, a middle school science teacher, said attendance has improved and students are becoming more engaged after disruptions caused by the pandemic.

"Our students work hard every day. Their attendance is really good," Chambers said. "With Covid, they really took a hit on education during those few years, but they're engaged, and we're looking at getting them back to grade level."

Leah Nez, who teaches sixth through eighth grade math, said the school benefits from having staff members who are deeply familiar with the community. Many teachers, she said, are graduates of Dilcon themselves.

"So many of us are deeply rooted in this community; it really helps with our teamwork as teach-

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and removing barriers to opportunity.”

Becenti said the impact extends beyond individual students.

“Eve’s Fund’s generosity strengthens not only individual scholars, but the mission of Navajo Prep,” she said, referencing the school’s guiding phrase, Yideesk???góó Naat’aanii, meaning “Leaders Now and Into the Future.”

Navajo Prep reports that approximately 90 percent of its students graduate, and more than 90 percent go on to attend a four-year college or serve in the military.



Aiyana Etcitty



Ryan Dona



RaeLee Smith



Adrianna Martinez-Pablo

## Fund’s origins, growth

Eve’s Fund was established in memory of Eve Erin Crowell, who died in 2005. Her parents, Dr. Robert Crowell and Barbara Crowell Roy, created the organization to honor her legacy and to support students facing financial barriers to education.

Roy, now president of Eve’s Fund, said this year’s expansion reflects both donor support and a long-term plan to stabilize the scholarship program.

“As we conclude our 20th year, we are proud to award the highest number of scholarships in the program’s history,” Roy said. “Thanks to our generous donors, especially the Andrew Delaney Foundation, we are building an endowment to ensure the Eve’s Fund Scholarship for Navajo Prep students continues for generations to come.”

This year’s 20 scholarships represent the largest single class supported since the fund began directing awards to Navajo Prep students.



Nevaeh Lewis



Nataya Platero



Madilynn Mora



Keira Antonio



Traerell Nez



Luke Smith



Talon Wilson



Kameron Dale



Dayvonna Chee



Kokoro Yazzie



Jazlyn Tan



Isaiah Tabaha



Brooke Martin

## Statewide footprint

This year’s recipients come from communities in New Mexico and Arizona, including small places that rarely appear on maps or have more than a single store and gas station. Collin Naseyowma, a junior from Rabbitbrush, wrote that his hometown sits along Route 12 but is largely invisible to outsiders.

“Though not marked on any map, this small community is the place I call home,” he wrote, “and where I was raised by my mother, Kendida Begay and her family.”

That geographic spread reinforces the need for sustained support rather than one-time awards.

Roy said the next phase of the scholarship program will focus on building an endowment to maintain consistent support regardless of annual fundraising fluctuations.

Brooke Martin, a senior from Mulholland Well, New Mexico, has received the scholarship for four years and said the impact is already clear.

“The Eve’s Fund scholarship will benefit my family, myself, and I will be able to give back to my community,” she wrote. “As a four-year recipient, I wanted to express my gratitude because this scholarship benefits my future in many ways that I can’t express.”



Kiara Jim



Collin Naseyowma



Kaleb Jones