

# Sacred Beginnings Learning Tour- Native American Early Education & Care

*Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD)*

**Dr. Joannie Suina** (*Pueblo of Cochiti*)  
Assistant Secretary



NEW MEXICO

**Early Childhood**

Education & Care Department



# Assistant Secretary for Native American Early Childhood Education and Care

- Dr. Joannie Marie Suina (Pueblo de Cochiti), Ed.D., is a seasoned executive with over a decade of experience advancing Tribal priorities through culturally responsive systems building and intergovernmental collaboration.
- She holds a Doctorate in Educational Leadership and a Master of Jurisprudence in Indian Law.
- As former Special Projects Coordinator at the New Mexico Indian Affairs Department, she led statewide initiatives in Indian education, broadband equity, economic development, and the MMIP crisis response.
- A Pueblo mother and early childhood champion, Dr. Suina has led relief efforts, supported Native language and kinship programs, and directed over \$2 million in emergency funding to Tribal communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.



**Dr. Joannie Suina**

Assistant Secretary for Native American  
Early Childhood Education and Care

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# Office of the Assistant Secretary (OAS) for Native American Early Education and Care



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(Pueblo of Cochiti)

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**Mark Hume**  
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Policy Analyst



**Julianna Baca**

Tribal Grants  
and Contracts  
Fiscal  
Specialist



**Alvaro  
Quintanar**

Administrative  
and Fiscal  
Support

# About ECECD

- In 2019, Gov. Lujan Grisham and the New Mexico Legislature created the Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD)
- The Department officially launched on July 1, 2020.
- New Mexico was the **fourth** U.S. state to create a cabinet-level department fully dedicated to early childhood services
- To date - 11 states have now established early childhood focused state agencies or offices
- New Mexico is the only state to have a Native American Early Education and Care Office at the state government level

**NEW MEXICO**  
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**About the Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD)**

In 2019, Gov. Lujan Grisham and the New Mexico Legislature created the Early Childhood Education and Care Department, **consolidating all early childhood programs and services into a single cohesive, equitable, and effective system** designed to meet the needs of New Mexico families and young children ages prenatal-to-five.

**Vision**  
...families and young children are thriving.

**Child Care Services**  
The Child Care Services Bureau (CCSB) administers the **Child Care Assistance** and the **Child Care Regulatory Oversight** programs. The child care assistance program helps parents/legal guardians who are working, going to school, or in a job training program with child care expenses. The Regulatory Oversight Unit ensures that licensed child care centers and homes and registered homes provide a quality, safe, and healthy environment for children.

**New Mexico PreK**  
New Mexico PreK is a free program that equips three- and four-year-old children with the early literacy, math, and social-emotional skills they will need to enter Kindergarten ready to thrive. NM PreK is available in both school-based and community-based settings.

**Family Infant Toddler (FIT)**  
All children grow and develop at their own pace. However, sometimes children have special developmental needs or health concerns that may put them at risk or cause a developmental delay. FIT provides early intervention services to children from birth to age three who have or are at risk of developmental delay—as well as their families.

Learn more about ECECD at [nmeccd.org](http://nmeccd.org)  
Toll free: (800) 832-1321  
[ececd-ecs-customerservice@ececd.nm.gov](mailto:ececd-ecs-customerservice@ececd.nm.gov)

Receive your free  
**Safe Sleep Baby Kit**

The Safe Sleep Baby Kit is free to equip parents and caregivers of new babies regardless of income, citizenship status, or family structure.

**OUR PURPOSE**  
The Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD) Home Visiting program provides New Mexico families a Safe Sleep Baby Kit containing materials to foster a Safe Sleep environment in a variety of spaces. Our purpose is to provide all families in New Mexico access to the components of a Safe Sleep environment in a way that is respectful, culturally responsive, equitable, and informed.

**THE KIT INCLUDES:**

- TRAVEL BASSINET
- INFANT CLOTHING
- BABY BOARD BOOKS
- EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

**ABC'S OF SAFE SLEEP**

- A is for ALONE** Baby should always sleep alone, not with an adult, or other children or babies, and without any other items in the sleep space.
- B is for BACK** Always place your baby on their back to sleep, for naps and at night.
- C is for CRIB** Baby should always sleep in a safe crib or cot, in the same room and within reach.

Receive your Safe Sleep Baby Kit visit the Early Childhood Education and Family Supports Portal at [search.nmehhs.edu](http://search.nmehhs.edu) and enter your address, or call 1-800-691-9067

Learn more about ECECD at [nmeccd.org](http://nmeccd.org)  
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Scan to learn more

**About the New Mexico Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD)**

NEW MEXICO  
Early Childhood  
Education & Care Department

Visit us online at [nmeccd.org](http://nmeccd.org) for flyers, brochures, tutorial videos, and much more!

# Vision and Mission

**Vision:** All New Mexico families and young children are thriving.

**Mission:** Optimize the health, development, education and wellbeing of babies, toddlers, and preschoolers through high-quality, community-based and family-driven early childhood programs and services.

# Our Commitment

Our commitment to New Mexicans is to create a cohesive, equitable, and responsive prenatal-to-five early childhood system that supports families, strengthens communities, and enhances child health, development, education and well-being.

All programs are voluntary, with a goal of ensuring every program is linguistically and culturally inclusive.

# Office of the Assistant Secretary (OAS) for Native American Early Education and Care

Early Childhood Education  
and Care Department



# OAS for Native American Early Education and Care

The Early Childhood Education and Care Department Act of 2019 mandated the appointment of an Assistant Secretary for Native American Early Education and Care, making ECECD the first early childhood department in the nation to have a dedicated position to strengthen government-to-government relationships related to prenatal to age five programs and services [NMSA 1978, § 9-29-3\(B\)](#).

## Key Duties of the Assistant Secretary

- Provide administration, coordination, and oversight of Indian early childhood education
- Collaborate with state and federal partners and agencies, Tribal governments, eligible providers, and community partners
- Consult with Nations, Pueblos, and Tribes to support culturally, linguistically, and historically relevant curricula and learning guidelines for Tribal and non-Tribal students
- Assist school districts and educational agencies to expand appropriate Indian education programs for infants, toddlers, children, youth, and families pursuant to Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)
- Seek funding to establish and strengthen programs related to infants, toddlers, children, youth, and families
- Ensure that language and cultural considerations are included in programs administered through the department

# 2025 State-Tribal Collaboration Act (STCA) Report

Our agency continues to invest in Indigenous-centered pathways: Tribal PreK partnerships, immersion-based language nests, culturally responsive workforce development, and capital support for early childhood facilities.

This report captures milestones and lessons learned, while honoring that the deeper work—our relationships and collaboration—will keep growing beyond any written summary

**View the completed 2025 STCA:**  
<https://tinyurl.com/4y83adf6>



20  
25

STATE-TRIBAL  
COLLABORATION ACT  
REPORT



# Key Data Points from STCA 2025

## Workforce Development

- **243 scholarships** awarded to Native American students pursuing early childhood degrees in FY25.
- **22 Native language teachers** received bilingual certification stipends.
- **170 Indigenous/bilingual students** received \$1,500 stipends for higher education pathways

## Compensation and Parity

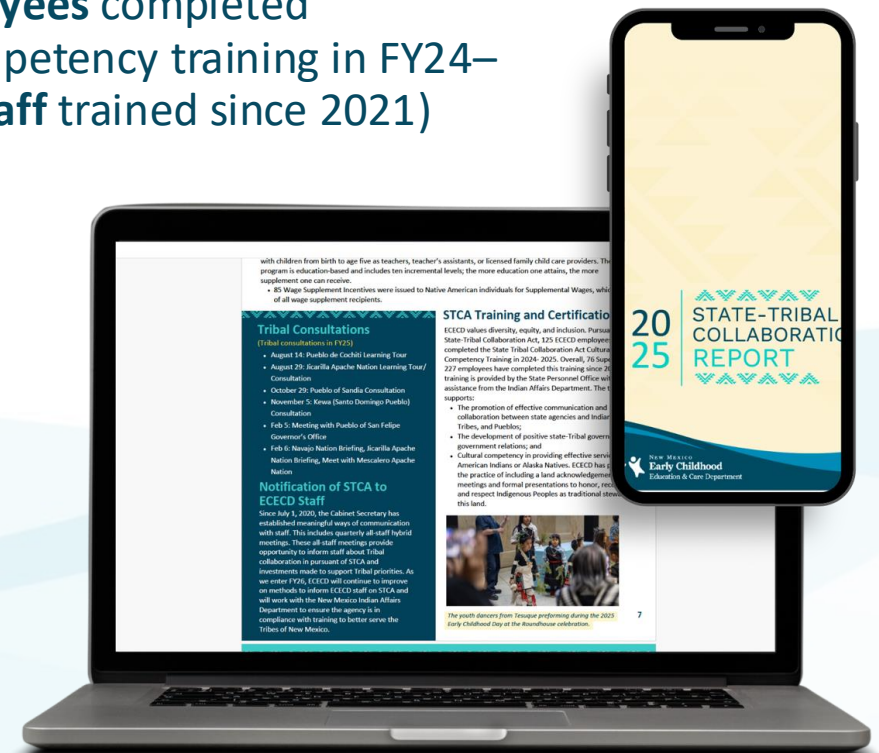
- **192 Native early childhood educators** received PreK/Head Start pay parity awards in FY25.
- **85 wage supplement incentives** issued to Native American educators (12% of all recipients)

## Consultations and Engagement

- **Multiple FY25** consultations held with Tribal governments, including Jicarilla Apache Nation, Pueblo de Cochiti, Pueblo of Sandia, Kewa (Santo Domingo), Navajo Nation, and Mescalero Apache

## Training and Cultural Competency

- **125 ECECD employees** completed STCA cultural competency training in FY24–FY25 (total **303 staff** trained since 2021)



# ECECD Tribal Liaisons

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# Native American Early Childhood Centers

Navajo Nation- Both Head Start and Child Care facilities

Jicarilla Child & Family Education Center  
Santa Clara Head Start

San Ildefonso Day School

Pueblo of Laguna Early Head Start Program

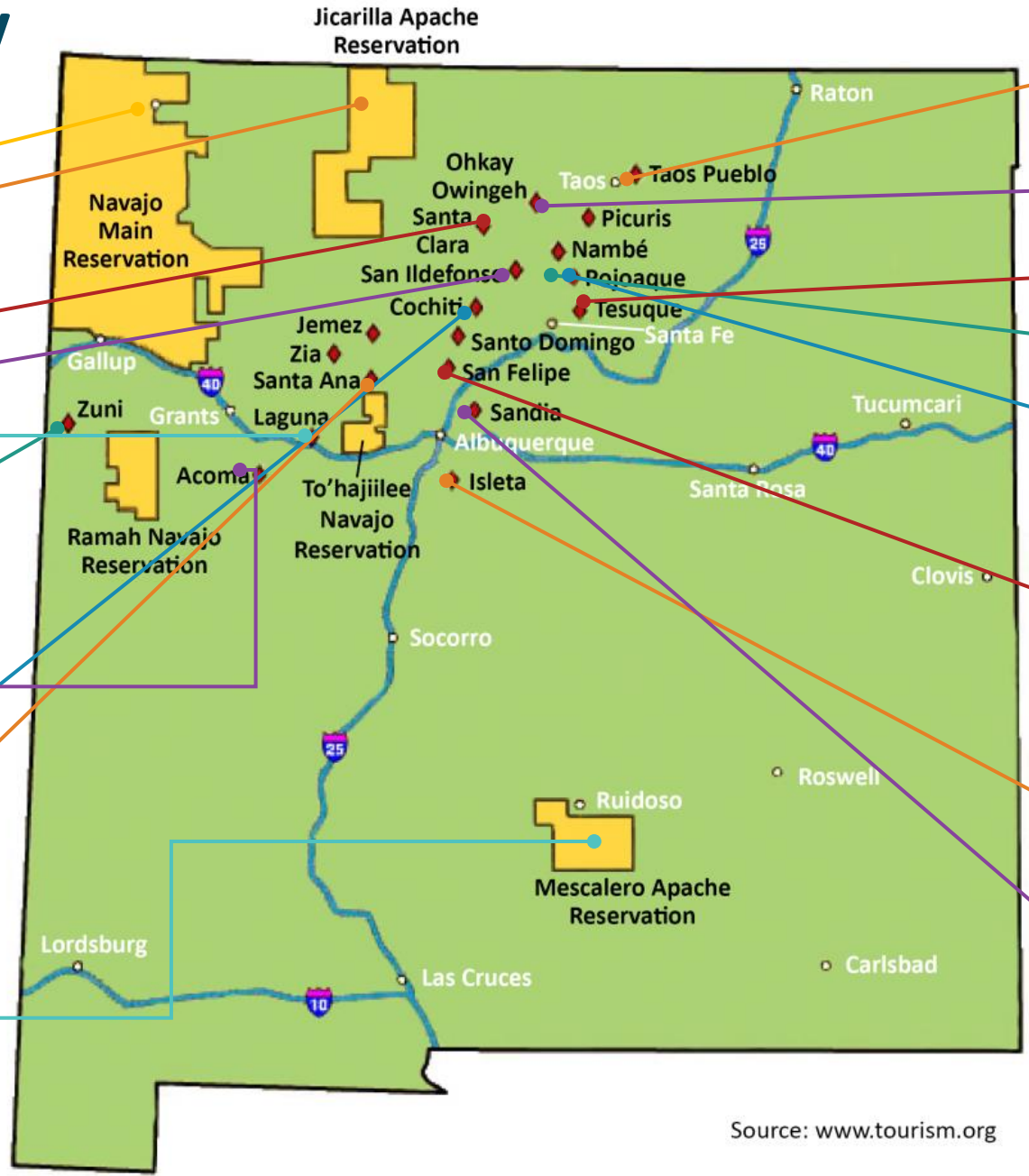
Haak'u Learning Center

Keres Children's Learning Center

T'siya Enrichment & Learning Center

Mescalero Apache Head Start

- Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion
- Zuni Head Start



Taos Pueblo Head Start

Ohkay Owingeh Head Start

Tesuque Child Care Center  
Nambe Pueblo Head Start

- Pojoaque Early Childhood Center
- Pojoaque Valley Head Start

- San Felipe Keva HV Project
- Head Start
- Child Care Program

Pueblo of Isleta Head Start & Child Care Center

- Sandia Child Development Center
- Saad K'idilye

Source: www.tourism.org

## Sacred Beginnings:

*A Learning Tour  
of Native American Early  
Education and Care in  
New Mexico*



- **Affirms and strengthens relationships across partners:** creates regular touchpoints and shared planning with Tribal governments and partner early childhood centers serving Native children statewide, supporting open dialogue, aligned priorities, and coordinated follow-through.
- **Strengthens government-to-government relationships** with the Nations, Pueblos, and Tribes of New Mexico while gathering on-the-ground insights into early childhood education programs
- **Engages** Tribal Leaders, ECE Directors, Home Visiting Staff, and community members in focused discussions
- **Outcomes:** elevate culturally grounded practices, identify resource gaps, and inform FY26-FY27 policy, technical assistance, and funding strategies



# Coordination with Nations, Pueblos, and Tribes of New Mexico

- OAS will align dates with NPT community calendars, protocols, and leadership availability
- Each center will have the opportunity to co-develop host NPT visit agendas with Tribal leadership to center community priorities and strengths
- Invite participation from Tribal Education Directors, ECE programs, home visiting, and elders/culture keepers as appropriate

*We are going on tour!*

## SACRED BEGINNINGS

A Learning Tour of  
Native American Early  
Education and Care

September 2025 - June 2026



*Coming Soon*



NEW MEXICO  
**Early Childhood**  
Education & Care Department

The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Native American Early Education and Care (OAS) at the New Mexico Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD) is proud to launch Sacred Beginnings, a statewide learning tour focused on strengthening government-to-government relationships and listening directly to Native American communities about early childhood strengths, needs, and priorities.

The Sacred Beginnings Learning Tour will take place from September 2025 through June 2026.

*We honor each community's unique approach and welcome any format—brief or in-depth, traditional or creative—that best uplifts your children, families, and early childhood staff.*

**For More Information:**  
Office of the Assistant Secretary

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September 30, 2025

Day of Remembrance: Every  
Child Matters, Every Child  
Remembered



STATE OF NEW MEXICO EXECUTIVE OFFICE SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO

## Proclamation

*WHEREAS*, for more than a century, the United States pursued and permitted policies of forced assimilation that removed American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian children from their families and placed them in a federal Indian boarding school system; and

*WHEREAS*, between 1819 and 1969, that system operated widely at a minimum of 408 schools (431 sites) across 37 states or then-territories, including 21 in Alaska and 7 in Hawai'i; and

*WHEREAS*, the creation and operation of this system were part of a broader effort to acquire Indigenous lands and to sever the cultural, linguistic, spiritual, and economic connections among Indian Tribes, Alaska Native Villages, the Native Hawaiian community, and their territories; and

*WHEREAS*, the removal and placement of children in these institutions broke apart families and harmed Tribal Nations and communities across the United States, including families and communities in New Mexico; and

*WHEREAS*, the deaths of children while under the care of the federal government or federally supported institutions are a profound tragedy and source of generational trauma too long unacknowledged by dominant society; and

*WHEREAS*, the State of New Mexico affirms its government-to-government relationships with the Nations, Pueblos, and Tribes within the state and joins families across the nation in truth-telling, remembrance, and healing; and

*WHEREAS*, tribally controlled schools and Tribal education systems have been instrumental in reclaiming children through education and language, restoring cultural lifeways, and affirming Tribal sovereignty by ensuring that Native children are taught within their languages, histories, and identities; and

*WHEREAS*, today, Tribal Nations and communities lead vital efforts to revitalize language and culture, including through tribally controlled schools, language immersion and revitalization programs, Head Start and early learning programs, and community-based education, which nurture, strengthen, and celebrate Native children and families; and

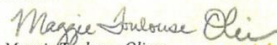
*WHEREAS*, the Early Childhood Education and Care Department, through the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Native American Early Education and Care, is committed to healing-centered, culturally grounded supports for infants, toddlers, and young children, including language revitalization and safe, nurturing birth-five environments.

**NOW THEREFORE**, I, Michelle Lujan Grisham, Governor of the State of New Mexico, do hereby proclaim September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025, as:

**“Day of Remembrance: Every Child Matters, Every Child Remembered”**

throughout the state of New Mexico.

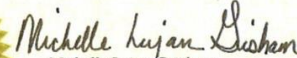
Attest:

  
Maggie Toulouse Oliver  
Secretary of State

Done at the Executive Office this  
17<sup>th</sup> day of September 2025.

Witness my hand and the Great Seal  
of the State of New Mexico.



  
Michelle Lujan Grisham  
Governor



**SEPTEMBER 30, 2025- DAY OF REMEMBRANCE:**

*Every Child Matters, Every Child Remembered*





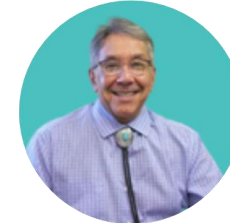
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# *Stay Connected* with the New Mexico Early Childhood Education and Care Department



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**800-832-1321**



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87502-5619**

ECECD's bi-weekly newsletter delivers agency announcements, resources, training opportunities, and upcoming events straight to your inbox. Join our monthly Community Call (held the first Tuesday of each month) for updates and engagement.

**Sign up at [nmececd.org/newsroom](https://nmececd.org/newsroom).**



**@NewMexicoECECD**



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