

BREAKING GROUND

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New Tohatchi High School comes with a pricetag of \$68 million

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Gallup-McKinley County Schools invited Navajo Nation leaders and New Mexico education leaders out to the groundbreaking ceremony for the new Tohatchi High School on Jan. 19.

Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren, New Mexico Public Education Department officials, the Gallup-McKinley County School Board, Navajo Nation Council Delegates Nathan Notah, Vince James, and Dr. Andy Nez, along with Department of Diné Education leaders were present at the groundbreaking and expressed their well wishes for the construction of the new Tohatchi High School building.

“Our children are our future,” Nygren said. “Everything we do is to refine their mindset to prepare them for their future.”

The building is one of 10 that will be built by Gallup-McKinley County Schools along with a new trade school. The new high school will come prepared with up-to-date facilities and a larger gym that can seat up to 2,000 fans.

Construction is scheduled to begin in April. Albuquerque-based firm Bradbury Stamm Construction is leading the project that carries a price tag of \$68 million.

“[The new] Tohatchi High School will be more than just classrooms,” GMCS Board Member Kevin Mitchell said. “It will be a hub for inspiration and innovation. Our students will have access to a state-of-the-art facility to help their dreams come true.”

The first Tohatchi school was completed and opened as a K-8 school in 1958. Then in 1964, a land withdrawal was the first step on the path to building a middle and high school combination in Tohatchi. This school opened its doors to students in 1968 and celebrated its first graduating class in 1971.

Before the Tohatchi schools opened, students attended first through fifth grade in Mexican Springs, New Mexico, while high school students from Tohatchi, Twin Lakes, Mexican Springs, Naschitti, Toh-la-Gai, and Coyote Canyon were bused in to Gallup High School.

The second Tohatchi High School, built to serve as a grade 9-12 school, was completed in 1982 and acknowledged its first graduating class in 1985. The next ceremonies were held in the Tohatchi Middle School gymnasium until the Tohatchi High School gymnasium was completed in 1985.

The longest principal to serve Tohatchi High School was Ethel Manuelito for seven years, followed by Fred Milton for five years. Manuelito was also a student in the first graduating class from Tohatchi High School. The longest serving faculty was Fern Spencer, who spent 49 years teaching at Tohatchi High School.

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