

LEAD LEARNERS



Leader to Learn From: Quincy Natay



EdWeek[™] Leaders To Learn From

Excerpt from EdWeek Leaders to Learn From, February 2021. Chinle USD is a partner with NIET, and Chinle Elementary School was named a 2020 Founder's Award finalist because of its focus on student achievement and growth.

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Superintendent Quincy Natay, Chinle Unified School District

Chinle Unified School District in Chinle, Arizona, serves a sprawling, 4,200 square mile area of the Navajo Nation. It encompasses the stunning cliff walls of the Canyon de Chelly National Monument as well as arid stretches of dusty, unpaved roads where some Native American families live without running water or electricity.

The far-flung nature of the district meant that when the COVID-19 pandemic hit last year, Superintendent Quincy Natay already had a challenging job leading a 3,600-student district where many students lack internet connections and live in poverty. Natay knew that job was about to get even more difficult.

"Leading into this school year [2020-21], we knew the pandemic was not going away," said Natay. "I was concerned about learning loss and knew we had to come up with a reopening plan."

The plan that Natay and the district crafted included acquiring enough

laptops so every student could have one at home, purchasing 1,000 Wi-Fi hotspots from internet providers, and deploying buses throughout the district each day so each could be a distribution point for packets, Wi-Fi connections, and school lunches. While many districts across the nation have implemented similar strategies, the need for stronger connectivity was especially critical for Chinle's students.

Natay has been the superintendent since 2013. He is Navajo and grew up in Chinle, attending the district's schools before embarking on a career with Chinle Unified. The superintendent's own staff members as well as outside observers laud Natay as a soft-spoken but steady leader who has built on his roots in the community to promote high expectations for educators and students in the Chinle district.

Chinle Unified and its seven schools

have shown significant gains on state tests in recent years, though there is still plenty of room for improvement. The passing rate for English/language arts went from 9 percent in 2015 to 21 percent in 2018. In mathematics, it grew from 15 percent in 2015 to 29 percent in 2018.

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The NIET partnership has helped foster a professional learning community in which the stakeholders are constantly analyzing data and figuring out what is working and what isn't, Natay said. The superintendent attributes the academic gains to strategic planning that includes all stakeholders in the district, a preschool program that began five years ago, and a detailed curriculum that is consistent across all schools.

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