



KWIYAGAT
COMMUNITY ACADEMY

Fund Development Plan 2025





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The Need

Ute Mountain Ute Tribe

The Ute Mountain Ute Tribe is a proud, small community with about 2,100 members residing on nearly 600,000 acres. Their tribal government is based in Towaoc, Colorado, approximately 15 miles south of Cortez and nearly 200 miles from the nearest major city. Historically, the Ute people were hunters and gatherers, but this way of life was disrupted by European colonization. The introduction of goods like salt, flour, and sugar, the mass slaughter of buffalo and other large animals, and the forced attendance of Ute children in boarding schools eroded the Ute's traditional education, language, culture, and spiritual practices.

This history of forced displacement and cultural assimilation caused the Ute people to be separated from their ancestral lands, severing their connection with the environment that had supported them for generations. The loss of cultural practices, language, and social structures led to deep disconnection from their heritage, which has had lasting effects on their community cohesion and identity. The trauma from these policies has been passed down through generations, impacting the physical, emotional, and spiritual health of the Ute people to this day.

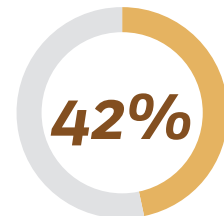
The Ute children who were forced into boarding schools lost their connection to their culture and community, leading to generations of children growing up without a strong sense of identity. This has made them more vulnerable to issues such as drug abuse, domestic violence, diabetes, and suicide. As a direct result of these historical policies, 42% of Ute Mountain Ute Tribe children were living in poverty in 2022, more than double the rate in Colorado.



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Established in 2021, is
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the 1940s.

Kwiyagat Community Academy

Kwiyagat Community Academy (KCA), established in 2021, is the first public school to operate within the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe's boundaries since the 1940s. The school restores local control over education, ensuring that students learn the Ute language, traditional skills, and Indigenous knowledge in the classroom. KCA provides young generations with the opportunity to reconnect with their rich cultural heritage, recognizing that preserving this knowledge is vital for a thriving future. The school is also working to heal the historical wounds caused by the Indian Boarding School Era by offering cultural learning opportunities in multi-generational settings.



Newly installed Indigenous garden/edible garden in front of Grade 3-5 Modular



When KCA first opened, it served 27 students in kindergarten and first grade. It has since expanded to include 61 students across grades K-4 in 2024. By the 2025-26 school year, it expects to have around 75 students with the addition of a fifth grade. The school currently operates out of two modular buildings with three classrooms each, two small playgrounds, and an outdoor learning area.

KCA's staff consists of a principal, an office and business manager, five classroom teachers, five educational assistants, Ute language teacher, and a range of consultants offering services like tutoring, community outreach, nursing, outdoor education, grant writing, and financial management. Notably, 80% of classroom teachers and 100% of Educational Assistants are Native American. For the 2023-24 fiscal year, the school's budget was \$2,186,243. The student body is 99% Native American, with 100% of students qualifying for the Free and Reduced Lunch Program.

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KCA's mission is to provide an educational experience rooted in Nuchu (Ute) culture and language. The school emphasizes small class sizes, an interdisciplinary, Indigenous, and project-based curriculum, high academic standards, character development, personal wellness, and community involvement.

The Ute people are proud and resilient, with deep knowledge of the land and strong connections to their ancestors. They are driven by an unyielding spirit and optimism, using their community's resources and strengths to tackle the challenges they face. Addressing the serious societal challenges in the region requires coordinated, systemic solutions.

Building a modern elementary school will be crucial to advancing KCA's mission, providing students with both a culturally rich and academically rigorous education and represent a major advancement for the sense of belonging among the community.



K-2 Building Outdoor Learning Area



History of Indian Boarding Schools

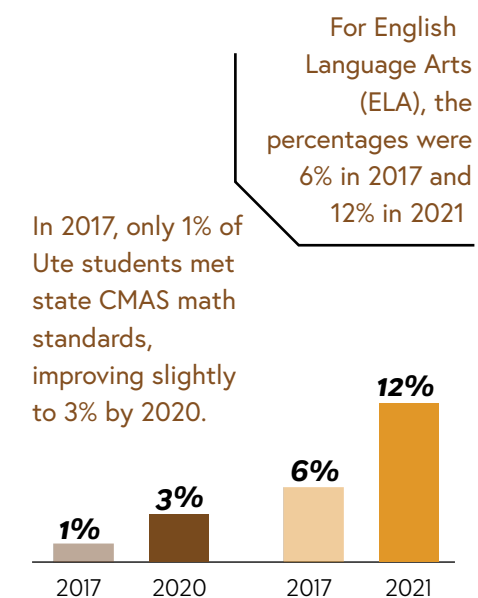
Several government agencies forcibly removed children from the Ute Tribe starting in 1880 when the nearby Fort Lewis Boarding School opened in 1880 closing in 1911, Southern Ute Boarding School opened in 1886, closing in 1981, and the boarding school in Towaoc was open for a few years in the 1930, closing due to lack of water. Ute culture and language were ignored, and Ute Mountain Ute children were instead taught a traditional American curriculum. To lose your language is to lose your culture and identity. Students from Towaoc, as well as others from boarding schools across the western United States, were taught American history, culture, art, music, and science, with little to no focus on Ute traditions. They were given processed American food and exposed to European and American perspectives on economics, government, art, and music.

This system of education gradually eroded Ute language and cultural knowledge. While some students completed the BIA schooling and went on to succeed in American educational and economic systems, encouraging their children in the 1960s and 1970s to integrate into the American mainstream, others struggled to reconcile this education with their traditional values. As a result, many of their descendants also found it difficult to fit into American schools and society. In the worst cases, descendants of the boarding school era have felt completely disconnected, leading to struggles with drug abuse, domestic violence, suicide, diabetes, and a loss of identity.

Since the 1960s, many families from Towaoc have seen their children struggle in traditional school systems, unable to find fulfilling careers or academic opportunities. Additionally, students were often bussed to schools from early morning to late evening, further contributing to their sense of disengagement.



Ute Language and Culture Teacher Betty Howe teaching Grade 1.



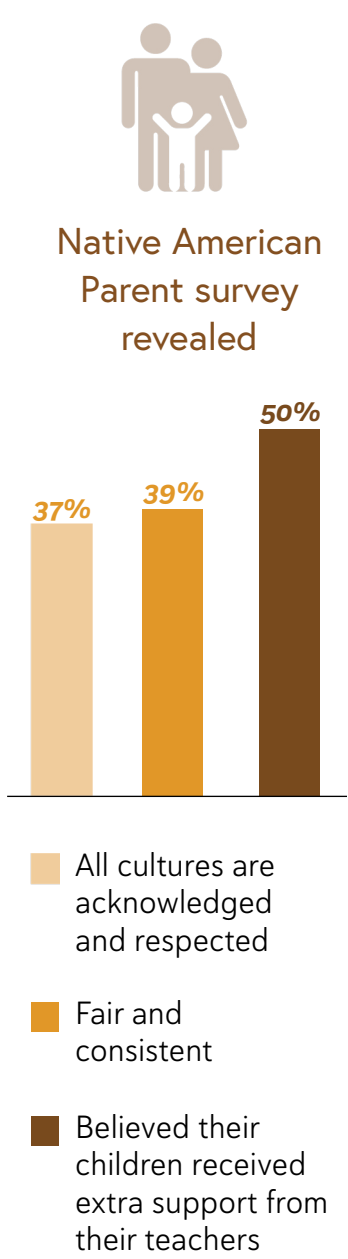
Education Disparity

School outcomes for Ute Mountain Ute students have consistently lagged those of their non-Ute peers, as highlighted by the 2019, 2020, and 2021 Indian Education Progress reports for Montezuma-Cortez Schools. In 2017, only 1% of Ute students met state CMAS math standards, improving slightly to 3% by 2020. For English Language Arts (ELA), the percentages were 6% in 2017 and 12% in 2021. By high school, the percentage of Ute Mountain Ute students demonstrating college readiness in reading and writing was only 9% in 2017 and 22% in 2021. Native American students also drop out at higher rates, with just 57.1% graduating from Cortez High School within four years, compared to 67.9% of their non-Tribal peers in 2021.

Native American students represent 38% of special education enrollment and 11% of gifted students in Cortez schools, though they make up 27% of the total student population. Attendance rates for Ute Mountain Ute students are lower as well, with elementary school attendance at 78% compared to 92% for non-Tribal students. During the 2020-21 school year, Ute Mountain Ute students were 3-4 times more likely to opt for remote learning, mainly due to increased COVID-19 risks in multi-generational homes. A Native American Parent survey revealed that only 37% of parents agreed that “all cultures are acknowledged and respected” in school, 39% felt discipline was “fair and consistent,” and 50% believed their children received extra support from their teachers.

Demographic data from Towaoc (World Population Review, 2022) further illustrates the challenges on the reservation. Among adults over 25, 22% lack a high school diploma, 55% have a high school diploma, 18% have some college education, 2% hold an associate’s degree, 3% have a bachelor’s degree, and 1.74% have a graduate degree. The average annual earnings for adults in Towaoc is \$24,853, and for women, who make up 60% of the adult population and are often heads of households, the average income is \$19,853. The poverty rate in Towaoc is 33.24%, and as of 2022, only 18% of individuals aged 20-24 were employed. Towaoc has a total population of 1,153, with 95.3% identifying as Native American.

In contrast, Kwiyagat Community Academy (KCA), located in Towaoc, offers a culturally-centered educational experience with a regular schedule that allows families to bond and engage in a nearby, supportive environment. The school fulfils its mission by incorporating Ute language and culture into daily lessons taught by Ute Elders, alongside a rigorous academic curriculum enhanced by place-based learning opportunities. Additionally, KCA has funding for a school nurse to provide health screenings and lessons, as well as classroom-based social-emotional programs that promote positive character development and wellness skills. The school also engages students in community field trips, cultural events such as Pow Wows and Drum and Singing groups, and parent activities, along with guest speakers.



KCA’s ambitious vision is to produce graduates who have a strong foundation in Nuchu culture and language while incorporating modern perspectives as contributing members of the Ute Mountain Ute community. The school has four main goals:

-  Revitalizing Ute culture and language
-  Increasing academic performance
-  Enhancing character and wellness
-  Creating meaningful community connections



The school balances a traditional English Language Arts and Math curriculum with customized Ute language and culture materials. A part-time Ute Elder teaches 30-minute Ute language and culture classes in each classroom every afternoon, and special education students are fully integrated into general education classes. Field trips, daily instruction, and guest speakers focus on providing positive role models of Ute professionals and offer equitable educational opportunities through a racial justice lens, incorporating diverse perspectives that counter the Western-European biases found in standard curriculum.

Staff and board members participate in ongoing professional development centered on KCA’s mission to improve student achievement, cultural awareness, career readiness, character development, wellness, and community connections. These sessions, held regularly throughout the year and during the Board’s annual Strategic Planning session, focus on addressing long-standing inequities in educational opportunities for Ute Mountain Ute youth. Recent professional development included discussions on how language and culture evolve over time and how educators’ own diverse backgrounds shape their approaches to teaching. These sessions have strengthened bonds among staff and fostered a unique school culture dedicated to KCA’s mission.



The Plan

Kwiyagat Community Academy (KCA) plans to build a 21,000-square-foot elementary school by August 2027. This new facility will serve the Towaoc community with a modern school and surrounding playfields, addressing the educational, language, cultural, and community needs of its students. The new school will also improve instructional services, student safety, and interactions with Tribal business and government employees, becoming a central community hub, much like schools in other rural areas of Colorado and across the U.S.

(KCA) plans to build a 21,000-square-foot elementary school by August 2027.

Current Situation

KCA opened in 2021 with 27 students in Kindergarten and Grade 1. It has since expanded to 61 students in grades K-4, with plans to grow by one grade level and 15 students each year. By the 2025-26 school year, the school expects to serve up to 75 students in Kindergarten through Grade 5. The school currently operates from two modular buildings, each containing three classrooms, alongside two small playgrounds and an outdoor learning area.

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K-2 playground



Space Limitations and Growing Needs

In the upcoming year, Ute language and culture classes will be held within classrooms or in the lunchroom, neither of which is ideal. Meetings with parents and community members will be held in the lunchroom, which currently accommodates only 25 students. As the student population grows, KCA will need multiple lunch periods—potentially up to four or five—making it difficult to prepare, serve, and staff lunches efficiently between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m.

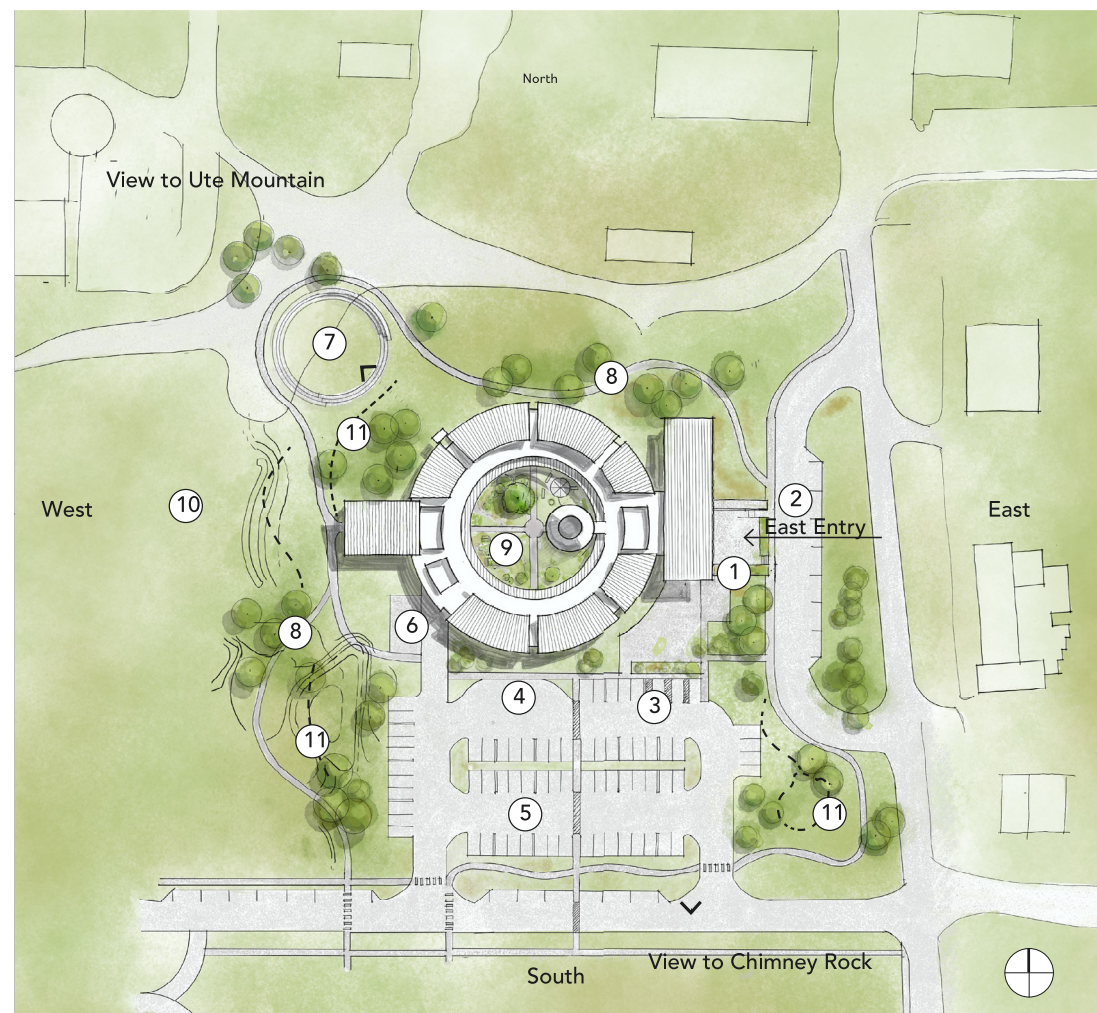


Proposed Facilities

KCA plans to relocate to a permanent facility just south of the current location. This 26,000-square-foot school will feature seven 800-square-foot classrooms, four elective rooms of the same size, a 1,600-square-foot kitchen and lunchroom, a 2,000-square-foot indoor gym, a 1,000-square-foot library and community meeting space, along with offices and small group instructional spaces. Outdoor areas will include entryways, parking and drop-off/pick-up zones, lower and upper elementary playgrounds, outdoor learning spaces, a gathering circle, and sidewalks, covering about 188,000 square feet.

Legend

1. Entry Courtyard
2. Primary Drop-Off for Cars and Buses
3. Elder & ADA Parking
4. Secondary Drop-Off
5. Staff and Visitor Parking
6. Service & Facilities Area
7. Outdoor Amphitheater & Learning Circle
8. Walking Paths
9. Central Courtyard/Playground
10. Playground



Site Map

Next Steps

In January 2023, Kwiyagat Community Academy (KCA) secured a \$2 million USDA Community Facilities Grant as a matching contribution for eventual construction costs. The Tribe has also raised \$700,000 from private foundations to fund an architectural contract with Ferguson Pyatt Architects. The goal is to complete schematic designs, design development, and construction documents by December 2024. These documents will enable KCA and the Tribe to apply for a Colorado Department of Education BEST Grant in January 2026.

If the BEST Grant is approved, construction is slated to begin in November 2026, with completion expected by July 2027. The total project cost is estimated at around \$18 million, though KCA is still awaiting the latest cost estimates. An additional \$6 million is estimated to be required for the additional roads and adjacent park/playgrounds, which would bring the project cost closer to \$24million; however, no exact number has been determined for this additional work.

The BEST Grant proposal will be expected to demonstrate at least 30% matching funds. In a typical Colorado School District, the 30% matching would come from voter approved bonds. However, the Ute Mountain Ute reservation’s land is federal Trust lands and cannot be used for mill level or bonds. Therefore, the 30% matching must come from other sources.

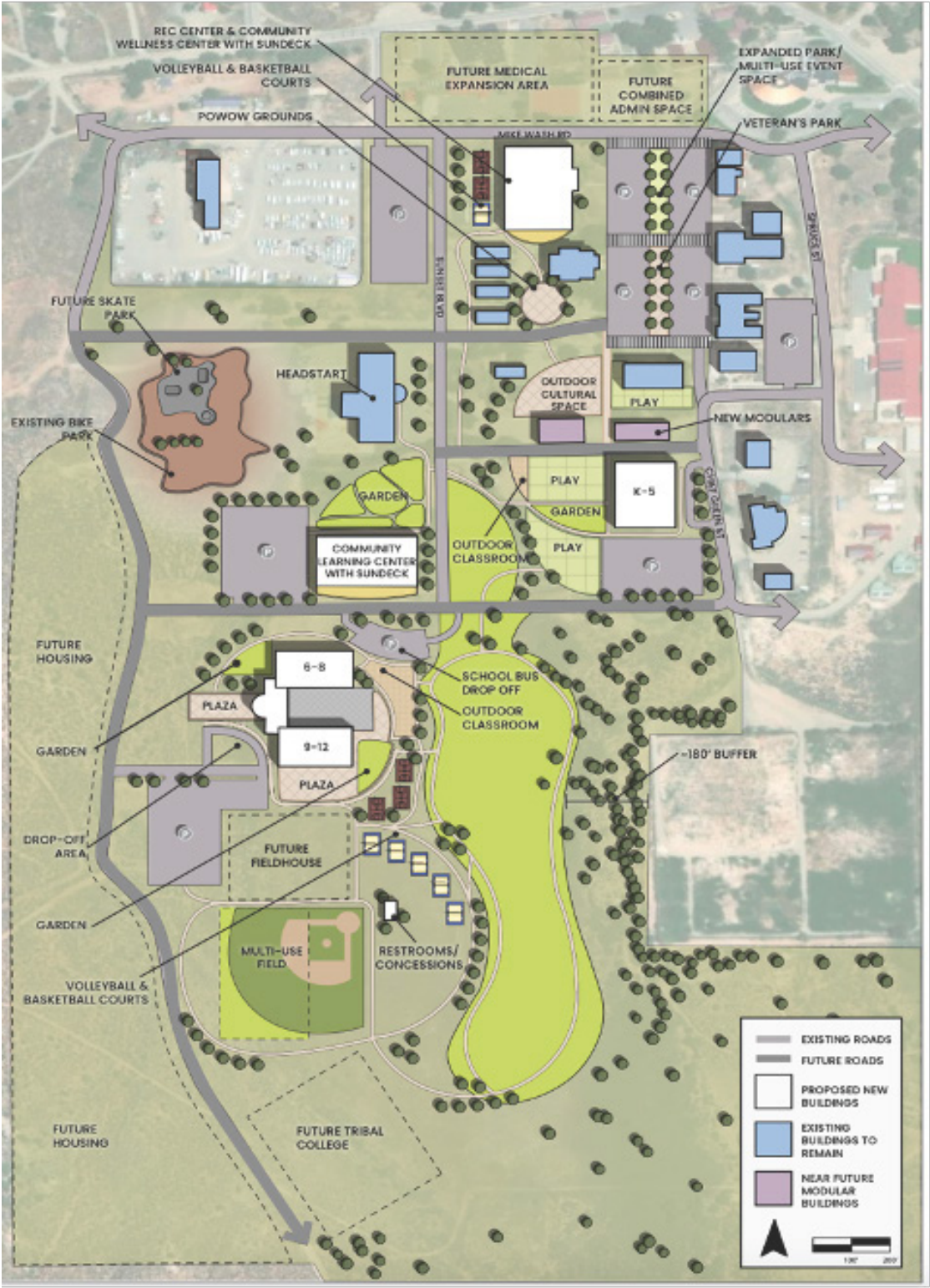
The following table demonstrates the potential funding breakdown based on currently allocated funding sources and future needs:

Funding Sources	Total Cost of School Facilities
USDA Grant (confirmed)	\$2,000,000
BEST Grant (applying January 2026)	\$10,000,000
Private Foundations (needed by January 2026)	\$6,000,000
Total	\$18,000,000

The coming months are critical for securing the remaining funds to bring this vision to life for the Towaoc community. KCA is actively seeking potential funding opportunities from organizations and donors who share a commitment to providing high-quality education and facilities for Native American students.

KCA is seeking funding to support the next phase of the project, including building specific parts of the school, such as the library, nurse’s office, cafeteria, auditorium, or outdoor learning area.

Educational Quadrant: The new KCA building is the beginning of a larger vision for expanding educational opportunities on the Ute Mountain Ute reservation to include Middle and High School facilities, Community Learning Center, and Recreational Parks. The map below is the Education Master Plan, completed in February 2023.



Idealistic K-12 campus and community open spaces as part of the master plan. The space relevant to this project is outlined.



Previous Funding Received

Over the past few years, KCA has received generous support from various foundations and organizations that have been instrumental in enabling the school to expand and improve its facilities. Some of the key contributions include:

Program	Amount	Start Date	End Date	Purpose
Charter School Growth Fund	\$250,000	August 2023	August 2025	Assistance with current campus expansion to include 3-5th grade modular and architectural fees for the new campus.
Denver Foundation	\$408,000	August 2021	December 2024	Provided significant support for the remodel of the Tribe's K-2 Education Building, the purchase of the three-classroom modular, and architectural services for the new campus.
Gates Family Foundation	\$480,000	August 2021	December 2024	Contributed to initial K-2 building renovation and 3-5th grade campus expansion.
State of Colorado RISE Grant	\$478,000	June 2021	September 2023	Assisted with the initial renovation of the existing K-2 building and improvements to the K-2 playground and outdoor learning areas.
Colorado Health Foundation	\$350,000	September 2024	December 2025	Assisting with future KCA building architect expenses.
Colorado Charter School Institute	\$152,000	August 2021	June 2022	Funded roof replacement, fencing, school, sidewalks, and signage.
Daniels Foundation	\$36,000	January 2022	December 2024	Supported the development of outdoor learning areas to the current campus.



Program	Amount	Start Date	End Date	Purpose
Colorado Housing and Finance Authority	\$27,000	February 2023	December 2024	Contributed to the development of a fencing and basketball court of the current campus.
Denver Broncos	\$10,000	January 2022	January 2024	Supported the installation of an irrigation system and turf at the current campus.
Nathan Yip Foundation	\$30,000	March 2022	December 2022	K-2 playground.
Colorado Department of Education	\$73,000	March 2021	December 2023	3-5 grade playground and K-2 building fire alarm.
Colorado Department of Health	\$10,000	January 2024	June 2024	Garden and Outdoor Learning Area Educational Shade Structures and Learning Stations.
Trees Water People	\$15,000	January 2023	December 2024	Irrigation Systems, Plants, Sod.
Federal Funding through KCA	\$100,000	January 2022	June 2023	Facilities Improvements to current campus (e.g. new HVAC system, Shade Structures).
Colorado Office of School Safety	\$42,500	March 2023	December 2024	Security camera, fencing, Grade 3-5 classroom fire alarm, traffic barriers.

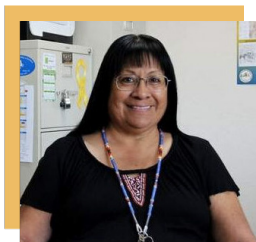






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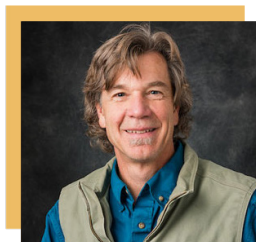
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For More Information





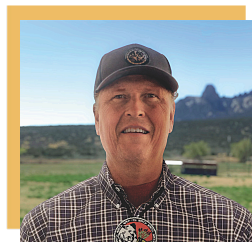
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