

# Congratulations CLASS OF 2024



# THE GRIN



SPECIAL EDITION

GILA RIVER INDIAN NEWS || [www.GRICNEWS.org](http://www.GRICNEWS.org)

JULY 5, 2024

## GRIC's Tribal Education Department Celebrates Graduates with 2024 Banquet

### GRIN Staff

Gila River Indian News

The Gila River Indian Community's Tribal Education Department (TED) celebrated the ending of the 2023-2024 academic year with their grand banquet at the Gila River Resorts & Casinos - Wild Horse Pass on Friday, June 7. The event hosted over 300 attendees and honored over 100 students graduating from high school, college, trade programs and GED programs.

A number of TED advisors offered words of encouragement and pride, including Gov. Stephen Roe Lewis; Lt. Gov. Regina Antone; and Council representatives Duane Jackson Jr., District 1; Ann Lucas, District 2; Nada Celaya, District 4; and Charles Goldtooth, District 6.

"Each and every one of you guys are shining stars and shining beacons of hope in our Community," said Gov. Lewis in his opening remarks to the attendees at the banquet. "Don't forget that."

Three outstanding students chosen by TED advisors addressed their peers and families, sharing their educational journeys and aspirations. Asia Antone-Rodriguez, an urban Community member from Surprise, graduated from the GED program. Diego Rhodes, Community Member from District 6, graduated from Betty Fairfax High School. And Darius Jackson, Community member from District 1, graduated from Midwestern University

with his Doctorate in Physical Therapy.

"This is our time to celebrate our achievements and remember to express gratitude to those who have supported you," said Antone-Rodriguez. "If you're unsure of what path to take eight years ahead, I want you to understand you have everything within you to succeed right now."

The highlight of the evening was the recognition of all the graduates as they walked across the stage. Each grad shook hands with their TED advisors and GRIC tribal leaders to showcase the academic excellence within the Community. The ceremony concluded with a lively raffle, adding an element of excitement and camaraderie to the festivities.

After the event, Sherilyn Analla, Director of Education at TED, sent a written statement to the GRIN highlighting the resources available for Community members who want to further their education.

"I would like to remind the Community that the Tribal Education Department has the funding to send people through secondary education whether it be a vocational program, community college, or colleges and universities at all levels," wrote Analla. "So, if there are people out there on the fence about jumping into a vocational or a traditional academic program, then stop by Student Services for more information."



Students pose for a photo as they wait to cross the stage for their families, peers, and tribal leaders. Velia Moncada/GRIN



L-R: Associate of Arts graduate, Mary Elias, Urban Community member from District 6, Gov. Stephen Roe Lewis, and Grace Elias, Urban Community member from District 6, at the 2024 TED graduation banquet. Velia Moncada/GRIN



Students, family, and tribal leadership attend the 2024 Graduation Recognition Banquet on June 7. Velia Moncada/GRIN

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# Message from Governor Stephen Roe Lewis:

Today, the entire Gila River Indian Community along with our Tribal Education Department whole-heartedly celebrates the Class of 2024. We are extremely proud of your achievements. You overcame so much to accomplish your goals and I hope you enjoy this special moment, because you earned it. Education is a priority in the Community, and it is always a joyous occasion when our students complete a successful year.

For some of you, this is only the beginning, and you will continue your educational journey on to the next level. For others, this represents a major milestone. You have reached the pinnacle in your quest for knowledge, and you are ready to begin a new path. No matter where you are in your plan, remember that you will always have the Community's full support.

The Gila River Indian Community has advocated for education since the time of the late Chief Antonio Azul. It was important then, and it is important now. Chief Azul told Arizona's governor that the O'otham and Pee Posh wanted nothing from the government except schools. When you graduated and walked across that stage, you walked in the same footsteps as envisioned by Chief Azul.

As we honor our students, let's also honor the families as well. You're a part of this class, too. I thank you for the role you played in supporting our graduates. You are a child's first teacher, and they truly learned from the best. You instilled many important lessons, and their achievement is a testament to your love and dedication.

I want to also recognize the educators and those key staff members who patiently guided our students along the way. You made an enormous impact on the Class of 2024 and your efforts have not gone unnoticed.

Congratulations to all our graduates! You are already leaders and I wish you luck and strength in the days ahead.



Governor  
**Stephen Roe Lewis**

Lt. Governor  
**Regina Antone**

Community Council  
Representatives

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Duane Jackson Jr.  
Joey Whitman

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**District 3**  
Avery White  
Joseph Manuel Jr.

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# Message from Lt. Governor Regina Antone:



As I attended the 2024 graduations, award ceremonies, and the banquet. I was honored, and proud to see this year, the highest number of GRIC students of all ages, completing their goals.

I spoke with many students and hearing their dreams moving forward. I was impressed with their passion in attending vocational schools, colleges or continuing on for a higher degree. Listening to their ending careers, I could only see and envision all the needs for these types of careers in our own Community, it's our future.



As Lieutenant Governor, I must commend all the students who completed their GED in 2024. That test is very difficult to pass. The commitment, patience and persistence to complete it, wow, this is truly admirable.

Thank you to the support of the families, friends, and teachers, who helped these graduates succeed. My sincere Congratulations to all GRIC 2024 graduates, job well done!!



May you continue to be blessed and have the strength to walk your own path of life. I look forward to attending your next graduation, and always continue to reach for the stars, as our ancestors hoped for us.

# CLASS OF 2024





# 2024 Chief Antonio Azul Awards

## Scholar Award Recipients:

### 4th Grade

**Justice Antone**, Sacaton Elementary School, Chief Azul Scholar  
**Maria Gutierrez**, Hartford Elementary School, Honorable Mention  
**Hailie Antone**, Sacaton Elementary School, Honorable Mention

### 5th Grade

**Gabriella Ortiz**, Estrella Foothills Global Academy, Chief Azul Scholar  
**Sariah Soke**, Jane D. Hull Elementary, Honorable Mention  
**Bella Valenzuela**, Blackwater Community School, Honorable Mention

### 6th Grade

**Tayva Torres**, Horizon Honors, Chief Azul Scholar  
**Juan Alvarez III**, Coolidge Jr. High, Honorable Mention  
**Mialana Piedra**, Villago Middle School, Honorable Mention

### 7th Grade

**Jazmyne Mendivil**, Coolidge Jr. High, Chief Azul Scholar  
**S-Vek Pedro**, Coolidge Jr. High, Honorable Mention  
**Odin Jackson**, Coolidge Jr. High, Honorable Mention

### 8th Grade

**Amira Quiroz**, Coolidge Jr. High, Chief Azul Scholar  
**Gavin Molina**, Coolidge Jr. High, Honorable Mention  
**Maleena Ahmsaty**, Coolidge Jr. High, Honorable Mention

### 9th Grade

**Paige Thomas**, Coolidge High School, Chief Azul Scholar  
**Orlando Piñon**, Betty Fairfax High School, Honorable Mention  
**Jorge Gutierrez Jr.**, Chandler High School, Honorable Mention

### 10th Grade

**Kaylani Lyons**, Basha High School, Chief Azul Scholar  
**Amare Pratt**, Casa Grande Union High School, Honorable Mention

### 11th Grade

**Natasha Juan**, Coolidge High School, Chief Azul Scholar  
**Jason Allison**, Skyline Gila River, Honorable Mention  
**Seth Enos**, Coolidge High School, Honorable Mention

### 12th Grade

**Cailinn Allen**, Mountain Pointe High School, Chief Azul Scholar  
**Caiden Lewis**, Coolidge High School, Honorable Mention  
**Bianca Cardona**, Cesar Chavez High School, Honorable Mention

### Undergraduate College Student

**Sineca Jackson**, University of Hawai'i at Manoa, Chief Azul Scholar  
**Alani Rhodes**, University of Arizona, Honorable Mention  
**Rachel Hendricks**, Northern Arizona University, Honorable Mention

## Citizenship Award Recipients:

**Alayna Mark**, Casa Grande Union High School  
**Amethyst Jones**, Coolidge High School  
**Bianca Cardona**, Cesar Chavez High School  
**Caiden Lewis**, Coolidge High School  
**Cailinn Allen**, Mountain Pointe High School  
**Damyen Alapizco**, Cesar Chavez High School  
**Elizabeth Rose Pablo**, Casa Grande Union High School

**Gabriel Coppedge**, Casa Grande Union High School  
**Gilberto Villarreal**, Coolidge High School  
**Gisele Flores**, Casa Grande Union High School  
**Josiah Ochoa**, Casa Grande Union High School  
**Malia Harvier**, Skyline Gila River  
**Nevaeh Quiroz**, Coolidge High School  
**Rosita Gomez**, Coolidge High School  
**Trenton Pedro**, AC Prep Academy





# Congratulations CLASS OF 2024



## PRE-K



**Ju'k Hiosik "Bunny" Hernandez**  
*Sacaton Headstart*

Bunny you did great job!! Keep learning and continue to do great in school.  
Love, Mom & Dad



**ViviAnn Champagne**  
*Sunrise Preschool*

We are so proud of our ViviAnn! You did it baby girl. Now on to the next adventure Kindergarten.

## KINDERGARTEN



**Adrian Baldonado**  
*Blackwater Community School*

Grandson, Congratulations! Your hard work paid off, keep reaching for the stars. We Love You.  
Love, Grandma Sunshine & Grandpa Chuck



**Hunter "Juk" Lopez**  
*McCartney Ranch Elementary School*

Hunter Juk, you have been the little ray of sunshine our family needed since the day you were born. We are all so very proud of you in all you do, both academically and athletically. This is only the beginning of many great memories we will make with you. We know you will excel in 1st grade and your entourage will be there every step of the way. Let's go Juk!



**Levi Nez**  
*H.B Williams Elementary  
White House, TN*

Congratulations Levi!! We are all very proud of you. We all love you so much.



**Richard B. Cachola III**  
*Hancock Elementary*

Yay! Off to 1st grade. We love you and are so proud of you RJ!



**Trista Tate**  
*Arizona Virtual Academy*

You made us so proud baby, we love you XOXO  
Mommy, Daddy, Me, Matt, Tiara, and Trinity



**Ulani Carrillo**  
*ASU Preparatory Academy*

Congrats Ulani! Your family is so proud and we can't wait to see you graduate high school and then college. Our forever Sun Devil. We love you!



# Gila Crossing Community School Promotes Pre-K and Kindergarten Class

**Joseph Morales**  
GRIN Intern

On May 23, the Gila Crossing Community School (GCCS) in District 6 - Komatke held its Pre-K and Kindergarten promotion ceremonies, a joyous moment for all students in these classes.

GCCS warmly welcomed the families, who were there to support the students and celebrate their significant academic milestones.

The Kindergarten classes were presented first as they walked through the cafeteria in their gowns. All students smiled big and waved to their families as they marched toward the central stage. Families cheered and had cameras out to capture every moment for their students. The classes returned their support to their families by performing multiple songs and thanking them for their support while in school.

Once the performances finished, each student would be called up by their teacher to receive their certificate of

completion.

After the Kindergarten classes finished, it was the Pre-K class's turn to take the stage. The students for Pre-K were presented with a cap and stole, symbolizing their transition to the next level. The class then provided a special introduction in O'otham, a moment that initially made the students shy, but soon they became comfortable with the families in the crowd cheering them on.

Their promotion marked the beginning of a new chapter, and the students returned to their classrooms, waving into the crowd with a sense of excitement for the future.

The families in attendance gathered outside the cafeteria to follow their students into the classroom and take pictures with them. All the families shared their congratulations with balloons and other gifts for the students who were being promoted. The event successfully highlighted the young students' achievements in school (GCCS).



Gila Crossing Community School's Kindergarten class. Photo Courtesy of Joseph Morales



Students receive their certificate during a ceremony on May 23. Photo Courtesy of Joseph Morales

# 54 Grads Celebrate Promotion to High School at Sacaton Middle School Ceremony

**Velia Moncada**  
Gila River Indian News

Fifty-four students at the Sacaton Middle School closed a chapter in their lives with the end of their middle school era. Students, families, school faculty, and tribal leaders filled the Sacaton Braves gymnasium on May 21 to celebrate the 2023- 2024 eighth-grade promotion ceremony and these students going on to high school.

The ceremony began with the Pledge of Allegiance performed by student graduates Sariyah Koch, Serena Koch, Savannah Miranda, and Gloria Lynn Santos, followed by Superintendent Robert



Students enter the school's gymnasium for the middle school promotion ceremony. Velia Moncada/GRIN



Lewandowski's friendly welcome that earned him a standing ovation.

Special remarks by Governor Stephen Roe Lewis and a keynote address by Jacob Moore, an Arizona State University Vice President and Special

Advisor on American Indian Affairs, were among the highlights of the evening.

"The Creator gave you a special gift that is going to help our Community," said Gov. Lewis. He reflected on the ways the Community's ancestors, the HuHugam,

were highly skilled and talented people who practiced engineering, architecture, and sustainability.

"Each and every one of you has that gift," said Gov. Lewis. "It's your DNA. You have that O'otham/Pee-Posh radiance in you. So

all the decisions that you're going to make as you go into high school, whatever path you take, you are poised to make a difference for our Community and for your family's future."

Moore introduced himself by sharing his upbringing and telling stories about his educational journey growing up in the Tohono O'Odham Nation, He

recounted his experience leaving the reservation for high school, which he called a huge adjustment as he was introduced to different cultures. He acknowledged that many of these students might also transition from the Community.

"You're going to find your way again, in terms of starting over, because now you're a freshman, but that's a good thing," said Moore. "The future is yours."

Students were presented with their certificates of completion amidst cheers from their friends, families, and now former teachers. Tears from students and parents alike were seen on their faces, but not of sadness. The new high school students cried tears of joy as they walked to the class song, "Pursuit of Happiness" by Kid Cudi.



54 students are promoted from Sacaton Middle School during a ceremony on May 21. Velia Moncada/GRIN



Students are escorted by family into the school's gymnasium. Velia Moncada/GRIN



# Congratulations CLASS OF 2024



## 8TH GRADE



**Amaya Sequoia Mae Dixson**  
*Eagle College Prep: South Mountain*

Amaya is smart, determined and beautiful inside and out. She was 1 of 4 students to be awarded the Principals Honor Roll Award for only receiving A's and B's this school year, keeping her on Honor Roll all year long. She's worked hard, her dedication to get it done has paid off. Today she wants to be a Lawyer when she's grown. Moms proud of you Mya, continue to excel. I love you.



**Athena Sigarroba**  
*Saint Peter Indian Mission School*

Dear Athena, Congratulations on your promotion from Junior High to High School! This is a remarkable milestone, and I am so proud of your achievements. As you embark on this new journey, remember: "The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams." – Eleanor Roosevelt. Keep believing in yourself, stay curious, and embrace every opportunity that comes your way. Your determination and hard work will lead you to great success. Best wishes for an exciting and rewarding high school experience! With pride and love, MOM.



**Ava Clark**  
*Peridot Our Savior's Lutheran School*

Congratulations Ava! We are so proud of you and love you so much.



**Ilyjah Rivera**  
*Diamond Valley Middle School*

You did it Ilyjah! So proud of you! We love you!



**Jessica Espinoza**  
*Payne Junior High School*

To My Best Friend, where has time gone; watching you grow up into these double digits has been an amazing adventure, look forward to many more memories. Jessica all your hard work and dedication is paying off, never doubt yourself and know with Christ all things are possible. WE LOVE YOU Ducky! Love Always, Auntie Sunshine, Uncle Chuck & tribe.



**Jorge (George) Flores**  
*Cactus Junior High School*

It's hard to believe that Jorge is going to be in H.S. I can still remember his kindergarten graduation like it was yesterday. Finishing the school year with a 3.50 GPA, Jorge was a 3rd year member of the Cactus Symphonic Band and the recipient of the Principal's Character Award. As he heads to High School he leaves these words.. "You become what you believe".



**Jose Duenez Jr.**  
*Casa Grande Middle School*

Congratulations Jose!! We are very proud of your promotion to high school. We have seen you mature into a respectable, helpful, and driven young man. We know you have big plans for your future and support your choice to attend P.A.C.E. for your next school year. You have our love and support always. Duenez Family.



**Keona S. Neals**  
*Willis Junior High School*

Keona, you are everything I could hope for in a daughter. Beautiful, intelligent, funny, and you are the strongest person I know. You amaze me everyday and my only hope for you is that you don't settle. You deserve it all and there isn't anything that you can't do. Love, Mom.



**Leah Kai Jackson**  
*Desert Wind Middle School*

We are so proud of our Kai! We wish her continued success in high school!



**Maleena Moon Ahmsaty**  
*Coolidge Junior High School*

Moon, our wish for you is that this life becomes all that you want it to be. Your dreams stay big, your worries stay small I hope the days come easy and the moments pass slow & each road leads you where you want to go & if you're faced with a choice, and you have to choose I hope you choose the one that means the most to you. Love Mom, Dad, Sissy & Brother



**Nevaeh Gutierrez**

Proud to announce my oldest granddaughter Nevaeh Gutierrez graduated 8th grade at Cheatham elementary. Ms. Nevaeh received two scholarships. Wishing my granddaughter the best of luck in high school.



**Raylyn Smiley**  
*Coolidge Junior high*

Congratulations son... You have come a long way and we are so proud of you. Continue reaching for the stars. We are all here rooting you on... We love you from Mom and your siblings.



**Raysean Pablo Jr.**  
*Villago Middle School*

Congratulations on completing middle school and receiving the silver presidential award for having a high GPA, continue to strive for the best in high school with academic and sports. Love mom, dad, and sisters Kierah & Layla.



**Tiara Tate**  
*Skyline Middle School*

We are all so proud of you love you so much from dad, mom, Matthew, trinity and Trista.



# 2024 Coolidge High School Graduation Ceremony

**Joseph Morales**  
GRIN Intern

On May 22, Coolidge High School held their graduation ceremony for the class of 2024, marking the end of their high school journey as they celebrate their accomplishments.

Some of the graduating class represented the Gila River Indian Community and were bestowed a black stole from the Gila River Tribal Education Department (TED).

The students, brimming with excitement and joy, made their way onto the school's football field, ready to take their seats and embark on their memorable evening.

The ceremony began with a land acknowledgment shared by GRIC graduate Caiden Lewis

from District 4, the current Akimel O'odham /Pee-Posh Youth Council Vice President. Fellow graduates then shared speeches about their academic journeys.

As the last speaker concluded, the students stepped onto the stage to receive their diplomas. They were greeted with cheers from their friends and families, and cameras captured the moment.

The graduation ceremony was exciting from beginning to end, with the opening land acknowledgment, which set the tone and showed support not only for the Community but also for the students who represent it.

Fireworks would close the ceremony with students rushing to celebrate with each other and their families.



Coolidge High School Senior Class of 2024. Photo Courtesy of Joseph Morales



GRIC students receive their diploma during the Coolidge High School Graduation ceremony on May 22. Photo Courtesy of Joseph Morales



# Congratulations CLASS OF 2024



## HIGH SCHOOL



**Amethyst H. Jones**  
Coolidge High School

My beauty, I am beyond proud of everything you have accomplished all through these years of schooling, you have branched out more and have gotten involved in school clubs as well as choosing to continue your education at GCU. We are all very proud of you and will always be here to help you any way possible, we love you and can't wait to see what your future holds for you. GCU here we come!!! GO LOPES!!! c/o 2028



**Analysa Josephine Morgan**  
Casa Grande Union High School

Congratulations baby girl! We are so proud of you and your accomplishments, you're going to go far in life. This is just the beginning, the world is yours.



**Angel Butler**  
Phoenix Digital Academy



**Angelo Rodriguez**  
Shadow Ridge High School



**Angelo Valencia**  
Poston Butte High School

Angelo is an outstanding and highly motivated student. His future aspirations are to attend the Embry Riddle Aeronautical University for a Bachelor's Degree in Mechanical Engineering, he will join a prestigious company for a career in Aeronautics.



**Bianca Cardona**  
Cesar Chavez High School

I am proud to have made it this far and be an influence on my younger siblings, cousins, nephews, and nieces. I am thankful for my family, friends, and advisors for helping me and encouraging me to continue with my education at Northern Arizona University.



**Cailinn Allen**  
Mountain Pointe High School



**Casey Winston McAfee III**  
South Ridge High School

Chino, we are so proud of you and your accomplishments. We are so excited to see what the future holds for you and we believe you can accomplish anything you set your heart and mind to. Love you always, Dad, Mom, Naia, and Felix.



**Caswell Gerlaugh-Sam**  
Imagine Prep Coolidge

Words cannot describe how proud we all are of you, Caswell. You have come such a long way and have so much more ahead of you. Keep reaching for the stars!



**Dannielle Claudine Alphas**  
ASU Prep Digital

You did it Dan! We are beyond proud of you! We love you to the moon & back!



**Evan Namingha**  
Imagine Prep Coolidge

To our Sonny Boy!! We are all so proud of you!!! This year hasn't been easy, but with extra push and resilience you did it! Never underestimate your worth and strength. We Love you! Your papa, sister, and the rest of our loved ones we lost and present are so proud of you.

From your momma and Hailey.



**Gabriel R. Coppedge**  
Casa Grande Union High School

Congratulations!! We are all so proud of you. Please continue to reach for your dreams and don't let anything hold you back. I'm proud of the young man you've become and I have no doubt in my heart that you will accomplish great things.

Love, Mom.



**Gabriel Lewis**  
Coolidge High School

Gabriel, We are all Very Proud of you! No matter what you keep pushing. You are a positive role model for your younger siblings. We all love you very much. No matter what happens in life, you keep moving forward.

Love, Dad, Candi, Isaac, Paige Peyton, Peter, Odessa & Bells!  
Good Job Gabriel!



**Irie White**  
Basha High School

To our Irie Jahnay, it's been an honor and a privilege to help you grow into the beautiful and intelligent young woman you are becoming. Graduating from High School and now off to bigger and better things "we are so proud of you and look forward to your next chapter. Wishing you all the best for the future and all its challenges and opportunities.

Love, Auntie Sunshine, Uncle Chuck & tribe.



**Isaiah Rivera**  
West Valley High School

We are so proud of you Isaiah! You did it! We love you!



# Congratulations CLASS OF 2024



## HIGH SCHOOL



**Keanen C. Cachola**  
Coolidge High School

You Did it Son!! All your hard work has paid off! We are beyond proud of you, and know you will do great things! We love you!



**Manuel Murillo IV**  
South Ridge High School

We have always said that our son amazes us, and now he is taking it to a whole other level. He will now be the first person in our family to attend university. Our son has continued to put fourth his very best effort in everything he has done in school and in life. He was #3 of the graduating class, with a final GPA of 3.927. Manuel was inducted into the National Honor Society, where he participated in various school activities as well as volunteering at the St. Vincent De Paul making food boxes. Our son will be attending NAU in Flagstaff this fall, majoring in Software Engineering. The skies the limit, and our son is taking off!



**Matthew Rodriguez**  
HOPE at Pinal County Youth Justice Center

My mistakes do not define me, it's what I do after! REDEMPTION TIME! We're proud of You, Matthew! With Love, Your Family.



**Mireya "Momo" Hernandez**  
Casa Grande Union High School

Princess Momo, chasing a dream requires effort, passion and hard work. You have conquered every obstacle and goal you set for yourself. We have enjoyed watching you shine in school, on comp floors and under the Friday Night lights. It has been nothing less than amazing watching you blossom into the beautiful, amazingly talented, smart young woman you are. Remember, "With God, all things are possible..." Matthew 19:26 Congratulations! U of A is lucky to have you.... Bear Down Baby Girl! We love you always...Your Family.



**Odessa Thomas**  
Casa Grande Union High School

We are very proud of you Odessa, you never gave up, all the late nights, early mornings paid off. I know your Dad is very proud of you! Look how much you have grown. We all love you Odessa. Love, Mom, Dad-Nic, Paige, Peyton, Peter, Gabriel, Isaac & Bells. Most of all, your Dad (Peter Thomas - Thumper).  
You did it baby!



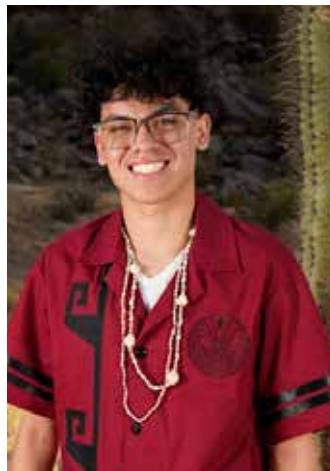
**Patrice Nasewytewa**  
Desert Vista High School

Congratulations, to our oldest daughter, Patrice! We are very proud of your determination, focus, and hard work to graduate high school with the additional challenges presented by a world-wide pandemic. Your hard earned diploma will serve you well as you move forward into the next phase of your journey. You truly can do anything. We love you more than you will ever know. We are so proud to be your parents, Steve and Sandy.



**Samar Smith**  
Basha High School

There's no words to express how proud we are at all you've overcome & all you've accomplished. Continue to amaze us in this next chapter of your journey & always lean on Christ. Never stop growing, exploring, learning & challenging yourself, mijo. We love you & we are always here to support you. Good luck!



**Samuel Lujan Jr.**  
Cesar Chavez High School

Sammy, we are so proud of you son! We cannot wait to see what you accomplish next. Just remember your family will always support you and be there for you every step of the journey. We love you so very much son! With the greatest pride, we wish to tell you Congratulations!!



**Saniah Elaine Mercado**  
Tolleson Union High School

Saniah, we are so very proud of you! You're an amazing, intelligent, charismatic, and beautiful young woman. Continue to believe in yourself, through your own motivation, there's no limit to what you can accomplish! We will always be here for you throughout your journey in life, keep reaching for the stars! We Love You!



**Stanley Miles III**  
Academies at South Mountain

We are very proud of you. Stay focused on your goals. We love you. From Dad, Mom, and your brothers and sisters.



**Susan Ishmael**  
Culpeper County High School



**William James**  
Higley High School



**Asia Antone-Rodriguez**  
GED  
CTC Lab, Sacaton



## Arizona State University Honors Native Grads at American Indian Convocation

**Velia Moncada**  
Gila River Indian News

Indigenous Class of 2024 graduates of Arizona State University – many of whom missed walking for their high school graduation because of the COVID-19 pandemic – were honored for their academic accomplishments at the annual American Indian Convocation (AIC) ceremony held May 9 at ASU's Grady Gammage Auditorium in Tempe.

Held each year since 1990, the Native graduation ceremony, organized by the university's American Indian Student Support Services (AISSS) program, attracts a crowd of hundreds of grads, family members, peers, and tribal leaders.

"This is a very special



**Chi'Chino Spirit, welcomes in the Arizona State University's American Indian graduating class of 2024 into the ASU Gammage theater for their graduation ceremony.** CPAO Photo

celebration for the class of 2024, as it is the first time for many of you, because during your high school graduation we were in the pandemic and shut down," said Patty Talahongva, a

Hopi journalist and Master of Ceremony for the occasion.

This year, 175 Native American graduates registered for the convocation, with each student presented with a unique Pendleton stole in ASU's maroon and gold colors. Among the students honored were two proud Gila River Indian Community (GRIC) members.

"Anybody can do it, and the tribe is very helpful when it comes to helping Community members in getting their education," said Jennifer Hinton, District 6, who works as the Adult Education Manager for GRIC's Tribal Educa-

tion program. Hinton, who recalled her academic accomplishment as a long process with some challenges, received a Master's of Education degree in Higher and Post-Secondary Education.

Marissa Cervantes, a Community member and a Victim Advocate for GRIC's Crime Victim Services (CVS) office, received her Bachelor's degree in Sociology at the ceremony.

After receiving her Pendleton stole and graduation certificate, Cervantes said, "I would tell people, even if it takes time, you can still get it done. It took me 12 years to get here, so



**Students enter onto the stage welcomed in by their loved ones.** CPAO Photo



**Gov. Stephen Roe Lewis and ASU graduate Marissa Cervantes, District 4.** CPAO Photo

it's always doable. You've just got to stick with it."

Miss Indigenous ASU 2024-2025, Monica Yazzie, and 2024-2025 Miss Indigenous ASU 1st Attendant, Randii Lantz Castaneda, provided a blessing and land acknowledgment for

the convocation. Painter and Native flute player Randy Kemp, (Choctaw-Euchee-Muscagee-Creek Turtle Clan), and the Gila River Indian Community's Chi-Chino Spirit performed for the 2024 ASU Native graduates.



**175 students receive recognition during ASU's annual American Indian Convocation on May 9.** CPAO Photo

## Community Member Darius Jackson Earns Doctorate in Physical Therapy

**Velia Moncada**  
Gila River Indian News

Community member Darius Jackson accomplished a significant milestone for himself and for the Gila River Indian Community (GRIC) this spring by graduating with a Doctorate in Physical Therapy (PT) from Northwestern University.

Dr. Jackson, a former Akimel O'otham/ Pee-Posh Youth Council District 1 representative and advisor, said he was motivated to pursue his doctorate by his own battles with injuries and by his calling to serve the Community.

"I was injured a lot," said Dr. Jackson of his years playing sports. "Growing up in a Community where people rely on pain medicine...I wanted ... turn (that) approach. Physical therapy is a way where you can recover from injuries (and) pain, and have a better sense of your quality of life without having to take pain medicine. I love that because to me it's more functional and makes a person's quality of living a lot better."

Having graduated from Coolidge High School in 2015, Dr. Jackson said he considered joining the mil-



**Community Member Darius Jackson, District 1, earns Doctorate in Physical Therapy from Northwestern University.** Photo Courtesy of Darius Jackson

itary before attending college. However, he decided to pursue his interest in human anatomy and health at Arizona State University, where he spent four years and graduated with his bachelor's in science in Exercise and Wellness.

Before becoming a Doctor in Physical Therapy, Jackson spent two

summers working as an intern for the Community as a PT Technician with Gila River Health Care (GRHC) in 2017 and 2018. After he graduated ASU, he was offered a full-time position as a PT technician in 2019. He explains that the PT staff at GRHC encouraged him to pursue PT school.

"I got really motivat-

ed and they taught me a lot and basically encouraged me to keep on applying," said Dr. Jackson. "That's when I went to apply to like five different schools, and I got into two."

Northwestern University in Glendale accepted Dr. Jackson into their three-year Physical Therapy doctoral program. He describes

those years as a fun yet, challenging time. He participated in the Midwestern's student physical therapy association, including attending to neurology and geriatric patients.

Excited by his success in the program, Dr. Jackson still admits to facing challenges and sacrificing a lot of his free time to dedicate himself to school. He said the first year was the hardest and most stressful. He had to find his footing with heavy lectures and exams every week while managing his time for his personal life and mental health.

"You want to study and get one of the top grades in the class," he said. "It took me a little while to understand what that was. Spending so much time in the classroom and having to deal with my mental health was just fatiguing."

The new doctor says he overcame his challenges with the support of his peers in PT school along with the support of his family and the Tribal Education Department, which helped guide him along his educational journey. He says finding a common interest in PT with his peers made him feel like he wasn't alone with his stress. Partnering with his classmates

to study and spending time outside of class also helped – especially during exam weeks, when his class would go out for chicken wings at the local Wing Stop.

As a part of his studies, Dr. Jackson underwent clinical rotations, spending nine months at locations in Buckeye, Tucson and in Idaho practicing under board-certified Physical Therapists.

"I like getting to know my patients," said Dr. Jackson, explaining that personal connection helps build better PT programs. "I like getting that one-on-one interaction. You get to build a rapport, understand not only their primary limitations, but also to learn about their life."

Dr. Jackson plans to take his Arizona state board test in July. Ultimately, he wants to become a certified neurological specialist and orthopedic specialist. He also says he plans to return to GRHC, to give back his skills to the Community that strengthened him.

"I surprised myself," said Dr. Jackson. "I feel empowered and proud of myself because this is ultimately what I wanted."



# Congratulations CLASS OF 2024



## HIGHER EDUCATION



**Alani Rhodes**  
*University of Arizona*

Hi Everyone! I recently graduated from the University of Arizona with a Bachelor's of Veterinary Science & I'm attending the University of Arizona, College of Veterinary Medicine in the fall. I plan to come back and serve the community. To all those kids out there who think they can't achieve your dreams, I promise you, you can. Don't be afraid to ask for help. You are Resilient. You are Powerful. We are the future! To my parents, thank you doesn't begin to express my gratitude towards you and to my granny who is my reason, I love and miss you.



**Anaiya Jackson**  
*Central Arizona College*

Anaiya has worked very hard to complete her first steps to her main goal. She will continue to attend college into the nursing program. Anaiya does also have a full time job while attending school. She has always set goals for herself and we know she will be successful. We, her family and friends are very proud of her.



**Debra A. Garcia**  
*Arizona State University*

I want to express my deepest gratitude to my community (Gila River Indian Community (GRIC)), family, and friends who have supported me throughout my educational journey. Your encouragement, support, and unwavering belief in me have been invaluable. To the Arizona State University, my professors, academic advisor, and success coach have guided, inspired, and challenged me to grow academically and personally. I am profoundly grateful for all the knowledge and experiences gained. Thank you all for being a part of this significant milestone in my life and contributing to my accomplishments and success. Sapo.



**Gloria Horton**  
*Lake Forest College*

I'm proud to announce that I have graduated Magna Cum Laude from Lake Forest College finishing strong with a 3.8 GPA



**Jennifer Hinton**  
*Arizona State University*

Urban District 6 member, daughter of Jeannie Peters Hinton and the late Virgil Hinton Jr., of HonDah. I want to thank my family for being there and especially my Mom, she was my biggest support. I love you MOM! I also want to thank my late Father for instilling hard work and strength within me, To the Community, thank you for providing the opportunity for me to obtain my education debt free! I am grateful for the knowledge I have gained at ASU and am excited on where it will take me. Forks up!!



**Karissa M. Ortega**  
*Arizona State University*

Congratulations to a very deserving person. You set a goal and achieved it. We know you will achieve your next goal because of your hard work, discipline, and your dedication. We will be here for you through all your journeys. We are proud of the young woman you have become, and the special woman you will be. Continued success "Riss", we love you. From your entire family.



**Keith Harvey**  
*Chandler-Gilbert Community College*

It took a while but I did it. I still don't like calculus but I managed and passed.



**Lorena Clashin**  
*Grand Canyon University*

Thank you to my family for their patience, words, encouragement and tough love through my educational journey. This journey was an adventure from my bachelor's straight into my master's program which made me realize it doesn't matter where you start it is how you finish. This will not be the end of my educational journey I will be returning for more at Grand Canyon University for my Doctorates degree. Lopes Up!



**Nathan S. BrownEagle**  
*Capitol Technology University*

I'm grateful to my family and my Community. I appreciate all of their support.



**Rachel Hendricks**  
*Northern Arizona University*

I am thankful for all who have given me advice and encouragement. My friends and family were cheering me on from start to finish. My spouse thank you, I know when those classes ran late or when I needed to stay on the NAU campus for the weekend, he was always there for me. My mentor teacher, Mrs. Burruel, she has been such a great inspiration to me. Having a support system that I have, I couldn't have done it differently! Congratulations class of 2024! To my nephews, aunty did it!



**Susan Valencia**  
*Arizona State University*

While being a full-time wife, mother, and employee, Susan pursued her lifelong goal of returning to education. Susan was able to attend Arizona State University and obtain a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration through the support of friends and especially her family. Thank you to the Gila River Indian Community and Tribal Education Department for helping Susan achieve her dream.



**Ta'fv Gail Dillon**  
*New York University, Shanghei China Campus*

Your greatness comes where your comfort zone ends. Never be too afraid to take chances.



**Todd Tate**  
*Tohono O'odham Community College*

We are so proud of you and everything you do for me and the kids xoxo you did it daddy!! Love, Kristy, Matthew, Trinity, Tiara, and Trista.



# Congratulations

# CLASS OF 2024



## HIGHER EDUCATION GRADUATES

**Serena Almaguer**, Arizona State University, Bachelor of Arts, Fashion  
**Cameron Andrew**, Arizona State University, Bachelor of Science, Communication  
**Kayla Rico-Jimenez**, Arizona State University, Bachelor of Science, Criminology & Criminal Justice  
**Danielle White**, Arizona State University, Bachelor of Arts, Secondary Education (English)  
**Patrick White**, Arizona State University, Bachelor of Science, Psychology  
**Missy Compton**, Arizona State University, Bachelor, Sustainability  
**Jennifer Hinton**, Arizona State University, Masters, Higher and Postsecondary Education  
**Tony Martinez**, Arizona State University, Bachelor, Tourism Development and Management  
**Tomasi Moustafa**, Arizona State University, Bachelor, Psychology  
**Karissa Ortega**, Arizona State University, Bachelor, Criminology and Criminal Justice  
**Susan Valencia**, Arizona State University, Bachelor, Business Administration  
**Elsa Wiston**, Arizona State University, Bachelor, Health Education and Health Promotion  
**Andrew Zelenak-Ruiz**, Arizona State University, Bachelor, Digital Audiences  
**Alexis Allison**, Aveda Institute, Certificate, Cosmetology  
**Angela Solorino**, Aveda Institute, Certificate, Cosmetology  
**Alexis Rossel**, Cal State University-Sacramento, Bachelor, Health Science  
**Jesse Manuel**, Carrington College, Certificate, Dental Assisting  
**Deseray Miles**, Carrington College, Certificate, Medical Assisting  
**Soledad Alvarez**, Carrington College, Certificate, Medical Assisting  
**Alaya Antone**, Carrington College, Associates, Health Studies  
**Amanda Cardona**, Carrington College, Certificate, Medical Assisting  
**Lucia Enos**, Carrington College, Certificate, Medical Billing & Coding  
**Richard Lopez**, Carrington College, Certificate, Electrical Technology  
**Brianna Knox**, Central Arizona College, Certificate, Welding Technology  
**Zachary Morago**, Central Arizona College, Associates, Recreation and Tourism  
**Anaiya Jackson**, Central Arizona College, Associates,  
**Kory Peter**, Central NMCC, Associate, Business  
**Deborah Soke**, Chandler-Gilbert Community College, Associates, Management  
**Randall Lara**, Chandler-Gilbert Community College, Associates, Engineering  
**Tara McCandless**, Chandler-Gilbert Community College, Associates, Psychology  
**Jordan Howard Arman**, Chandler-Gilbert Community College, Associates, Counseling and Applied Psychological Science  
**Brianna Francisco**, Chandler-Gilbert Community College, Associates, Psychology  
**Gwendolyn Morago**, Chandler-Gilbert Community College, Associates  
**Keith Harvey**, Chandler-Gilbert Community College, Associates, Business Administration  
**Angela Norris**, Devry University, Bachelors, Business Management  
**Rosaura Rivera**, Devry Keller Graduate, School of Management  
**Danielle Moffett**, Gateway Community College, Associates, Nursing  
**Eica Dawahoya**, Gateway Community College, Associates, Business  
**Joshua Salazar**, Grand Canyon University, Bachelor, Christian Studies  
**Lorena Clashin**, Grand Canyon University, Masters, Mental Health and Wellness  
**Antonia Hugo**, Grand Canyon University, Bachelor, Elementary Education  
**Destini Johns**, Grand Canyon University, Bachelor, Psychology

**Andrea Palacios-Silvas**, Grand Canyon University, Master, Leadership  
**Gloria Horton**, Lake Forest College, Bachelors, Business  
**Rhonlee Espinoza**, Mesa Community College, Associates, Biological Sciences  
**Ariel Moristo**, Mesa Community College, Associates, Drafting and Design Technology  
**Irene Huerta**, Mesa Community College, Associates, Social Work  
**Mary Elias**, Mesa Community College  
**Lehua Dosela**, Mesa Community College, Associates, General Studies  
**April Osife**, Middle Tennessee State University, Bachelor, Biochemistry  
**Robin Bilagody**, Michigan State University, Juris Doctorate (JD), Law  
**Darius Jackson**, Midwestern University, Doctorate (D.P.T.), Physical Therapy  
**Tafv Dillon**, New York University, Bachelor, Biology  
**Kevin Russell**, Northeastern University, Masters, Data Science  
**Darylene Blaine**, Northern Arizona University, Bachelor, Business Administration  
**Rachel Hendricks**, Northern Arizona University, Bachelor, Elementary Education  
**DeRay Uqualla**, Northern Arizona University, Bachelor, Interdisciplinary-Strategic Leadership  
**Charmaine Woods**, Ottawa University, Bachelor, Secondary Education  
**Halle Lefkowitz**, Pepperdine University, Masters, Clinical Psychology  
**Trinity Valenzuela**, Phoenix College, Associates, Early Education  
**Sihki Norris**, Phoenix College, Associates, Illustration & Sequential Art  
**Whitney Madsen**, Pierce College, Bachelor, Dental Hygiene  
**Desiree Lopez**, Santa Fe Community College, Associates, English/Creative Writing  
**Serah Pino**, Savannah College of Arts and Design, Bachelor, Illustration  
**Rachel Jones**, Scottsdale Community College, Associates, American Indian Studies  
**Elaine Peters**, South Mountain Community College, Associates, Psychology  
**Amberly Kisto**, South Mountain Community College, Certificate, Behavior Health Science  
**Julien Young**, South West Adventist University, Bachelor, Communications  
**Josephine Morago**, The Refrigeration School, Diploma, Welding  
**Jacob Dobbs**, The Refrigeration School, Diploma, Electro-Mechanical Technologies  
**Kobe Milda**, The Refrigeration School, Diploma, Welding  
**Sheldon Montero Zamudio**, The Refrigeration School, Diploma, Electro-Mechanical Technologies  
**Matthew Stoeckinger**, The Refrigeration School, Diploma, Welding  
**Fernando Madril**, The Refrigeration School, Associates, Mechanical Maintenance Engineering  
**Derek White**, University of Kansas, Bachelor, Psychology  
**Carlos Olivias**, Universal Technical Institute, Certificate, Welding  
**Allen Lewis**, Universal Technical Institute, Associates, Automotive Tech II  
**Destiny Sanderson**, University of Arizona, Bachelor of Science, Natural Resources w/minor in AIS  
**Alani Rhodes**, University of Arizona, Bachelor, Veterinary Science  
**Preston Soke**, University of Arizona, Bachelor, Cyber Operations, Defense & Forensics  
**Angela Williams**, University of Dubuque, Bachelor, Business Administration  
**Heather Medicine Bear**, University of North Dakota, PhD, Indigenous Health  
**Deante Moore**, University of North Texas, Master of Science, Counseling  
**Michaela Begay**, University of Oregon, Master, Curriculum & Teach