



Pueblo of Acoma Consortium Gains High-Speed Internet Access with Support from ACI

In today's fast-paced world, academic success is highly dependent upon access to high-speed internet connectivity.

And as schools across the country adapt educational delivery methods in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Haak'u Community Academy, Acoma, N.M., is positioned to meet this challenge with Wi-Fi access far beyond the school's capabilities just a few short months ago.





"This past school year, students and staff at Haak'u Community Academy had a total of three gigs of internet access," said Nolan Valdo, employment and training coordinator, Acoma Department of Education. "We now have 200 gigs, and the difference is like night and day. This has happened just in time to keep our students connected with the outside world during the COVID-19 pandemic."

Valdo is quick to credit the work of AMERIND's Critical Infrastructure team for bringing this dream to reality. As consultants on the project, ACI completed the E-Rate Program funding application made available by the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). E-Rate funding can be used to increase access to telecommunications in schools, libraries and rural health care facilities.

"The AMERIND team made it happen," Valdo said. "They were so friendly and welcoming and made us feel like part of the family. ACI kept us up-to-date and in the loop at all times."

The two-year application process resulted in a \$2.2 million grant to create fiber broadband infrastructure for the school

and library. A computer lab with 25 workstations in the school library and 12 desktops in the Acoma Learning Center (tribal library) will be able to connect without any buffering or interruptions. The project began in March 2020 and was completed in July – just in time for the academy to prepare for its new school year with 158 students in grades K-8.

Like many other Native American communities, Acoma's past attempts to gain internet access were futile. The community had been overlooked by private internet providers because it lacked the population density and financial resources needed to attract them. For Tribal members, the best way to gain high-speed internet access was to make a 20-minute road trip to Grants, N.M. Students had better connectivity at a local McDonalds than in their own schools.

"Our goal is to ensure our children are getting the best possible education," Valdo said. "We love our community, and we want to teach our children everything we can. If it wasn't for AMERIND's assistance, we wouldn't have been successful at bringing Wi-Fi into the academy. We couldn't have done it without them."