

In this Navajo rural community about an hour East of Flagstaff, Ariz., there is a multitude of things that make students successful: love, respect, tradition, culture, support and community; This abundance of actions is geared to make children thrive but access to clean drinking water is a challenge.

Only three-quarters of the families who live in this attendance area of the Service To All Relations or STAR School built on the Navajo tradition of *Ké*, or all things related, have running water. The remaining families in the area made up of the communities of Leupp, Birdsprings and Tolani Lake either haul water or are connected to a community well owned and operated by the school's parent organization.

When the STAR School began participating in NB3's *Water First!* project, the school had already started developing a water institute where water was filtered to make it pure. But in order to figure out why people weren't drinking it, they created a focus group of local senior citizens and discovered that too many thought the water tasted bad and was discolored.

Some community members were buying bottled water but favored soda because it was much cheaper than bottled water, a common dilemma seen across the Navajo Nation even with a 2 percent junk food tax.

"We had to make drinking water cool again," said Pauline Butler, the STAR School's Coordinator of Community Happiness.

The school also had to make it readily available. Students volunteered to make fruit-infused water in the mornings, which was placed in strategic areas throughout the school where students and staff could fill up their water bottles. A former STAR student created a catchy slogan, "Dooda soda" or "Say no to soda" in Navajo.

When the younger students saw their older peers say *dooda soda*, they also followed suit. And after discovering how good it tasted, some asked their parents to buy more fruit and vegetables when grocery shopping.

"I had one parent say, 'What are you telling my kids? I've never bought so many fruit and vegetables,'" Butler said. "The kids are making a big impact on what their parents are buying."

Built on a philosophy of teaching and learning the ancient Navajo value of being ready to help and serve relatives, the school is rooted in tradition and culture. It was a student that reminded Butler that caring for the water is part of Navajo culture. One of the Navajo Hero Twins, *Tóbájíshchíní* or *Born for Water*, whose name, in essence, reminds us that we are all mostly water and need to take care of the water as we take care of ourselves. His name now bestows one of the *Diné* clans.

"He was created to nurture our bodies. He was created to take care of the water," Butler said. "We need to start focusing on the lessons of these (creation) stories."

While the school continues to work on its goals of making clean water available in the three communities and creating an educational program to increase preference for water, traditional tea or berry-infused water, there is a sense they're on target.

“Folks, there is hope,” said STAR co-founder Mark Sorensen to the *Water First!* learning community and summit participants, offering encouragement. “...We can do these things because we have decided to do them.”