



INDIAN COUNTRY SNAPSHOT:

Chickasaw Nation

In the early 2000s, non-traditional Chickasaw students looking to build rewarding careers faced a conundrum. Many worked jobs “where advancement was no longer possible,” and “their job limited the time and flexibility to go back to school, while family and financial obligations made it exceedingly difficult to pursue higher education after work.”¹ In addition, they typically didn’t meet the minimum qualifications for jobs in the Chickasaw Nation’s government and enterprises.² In response, in 2006 the Chickasaw Nation created the School-to-Work Program (STW), which works to create “a nation of educated and highly trained professionals who can meet the demands of today’s workforce.”³ STW enables participants to earn the degrees and certifications they need to advance by enabling them to spend part of the workday attending classes while also receiving on-the-job training within the Chickasaw Nation’s government departments and enterprises. To ensure they can support their families, students are paid for a full 40-hour work week. According to one participant, “The hours I put in at school are part of my 40-hour week. I have more hours to give to my family now.”⁴ Of the 365 people who have completed STW since its inception, 341 of them have secured full-time employment, and 217 work for the Chickasaw Nation.⁵ Established as a stand-alone program, STW is now a key component of the Chickasaw Nation Employment Access Division, created in 2018 to “provide stepping stones to long-term employment for Chickasaw citizens.”⁶ The Division’s other “advancement-focused”⁷ training programs include Toksali SMART (which helps youth ages 14-21 “develop healthy and productive work behaviors necessary for success in today’s labor markets”) and the Chickasaw Institute of Technology (which provides targeted training in high-growth fields such as construction, electrical, HVAC/R, plumbing, and Certified Nursing Assisting).⁸ Recently, the Chickasaw Nation partnered with the State of Oklahoma to launch its Driver Education Training Program, which equips participants with the necessary skills to obtain driver’s licenses, enhancing their employment prospects.⁹

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RELATED RESOURCES

[Chickasaw Employment Access](#)

[Chickasaw Nation School-to-Work Program](#)

[Chickasaw Nation School-to-Work Program Brochure](#)

[NCAI Policy Research Center Tribal Insights Brief: Higher Education & Workforce Development: Leveraging Tribal Investments to Advance Community Goals](#)

[The Ada News: Chickasaw achieves goals with help of School-To-Work program](#)

[Chickasaw TV Video Network: Revolutionary School-to-Work Program](#) (video)

[Oklahoma’s Nursing Times: School to Work Program Gives Opportunity](#)

[Chickasaw Institute of Technology](#)

[Toksali SMART Program](#)

[Chickasaw Driver Education Training Program](#)



The Ada News: Commitment to education a hallmark of the Chickasaw Nation

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- ¹ NCAI Policy Research Center, *Higher Education & Workforce Development: Leveraging Tribal Investments to Advance Community Goals*, Tribal Insights Brief, Summer 2012, p. 7
(https://www.issuelab.org/resources/35387/35387.pdf?download=true&_gl=1*758prz*_gcl_au*MTQyNjlyNTU1NS4xNzI5NjE4MDQw*_ga*Njg3ODM5MjE3Mjk2MTgwNDA.*_ga_5W8PXYGBX*MTczMzI1NTczMy40LjAuMTczMzI1NTczMy42MC4wLjA, accessed December 3, 2024).
- ² Ibid.
- ³ Chickasaw Nation, *School-to-Work Program Policy Handbook*, October 2016, p. 2. To be eligible for STW, applicants must meet one of the following criteria: out of high school for four or more years, first-generation college student, single parent or guardian who has custody of one or more children under the age of 18, be a U.S. Military veteran, or have a documented disability. Applicants also *must* have a high school diploma, GED, or high school equivalency; must be in good academic standing; and have pending or current enrollment in an accredited college or vocational program (Chickasaw Nation, “School-to-Work Program” webpage (<https://www.chickasaw.net/services/school-to-work-program.aspx>, accessed December 3, 2024)).
- ⁴ Chickasaw TV Video Network, “Revolutionary School-to-Work Program” (Video), September 5, 2014
(<https://www.chickasaw.tv/videos/cntv-september-15-2014-revolutionary-school-to-work-program>, accessed December 3, 2024).
- ⁵ CNIQ, Chickasaw Nation Intranet Quorum. According to Chickasaw, “The program provides quality career readiness and support services throughout the student participant’s academic journey. Career advocacy helps ensure STW graduates are prepared for the preemployment process and are either employed within 90 days of their graduation date or are pursuing graduate school” (Chickasaw Nation, “School-to-Work Program” webpage).
- ⁶ Chickasaw Nation, “Chickasaw Employment Access” webpage (<https://chickasaw.net/Our-Nation/Careers/Employment-Access-Navigators.aspx>, accessed December 3, 2024).
- ⁷ Chickasaw Nation, Conversation with NCAI, June 28, 2024.
- ⁸ Chickasaw Nation, Correspondence with NCAI, November 8, 2024. Trainees in these and the Employment Access Division’s other programs earn a monetary subsidy to support them as they work to complete their training prior to seeking employment. To learn more about the Division’s various programs, please go to: <https://chickasaw.net/Our-Nation/Careers/Employment-Access-Navigators.aspx>. In FY 2024, 815 Chickasaw youth participated in the Toksali SMART program, and 56 Chickasaw citizens graduated from the Choctaw Institute of Technology (Chickasaw Nation, Correspondence with NCAI, November 8, 2024).
- ⁹ As of November 2024, the program had helped nearly 600 Chickasaw citizens obtain their driver’s licenses (Chickasaw Nation, Correspondence with NCAI, November 8, 2024). To learn more about the Chickasaw Driver Education Training Program, go to: <https://www.chickasaw.net/Services/Education-Training/Driver-Education-Training-Program.aspx#:~:text=Classes%20provide%20skills%20and%20knowledge,receive%20a%20certificate%20of%20completion>.