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**Dr. Katya Backhouse receives Mountain Plains Adult Education
Association Award of Excellence**

*New Mexico creates data-driven tools to improve adult education
statewide*

SANTA FE – Dr. Katya Backhaus, State High School Equivalency and Data Administrator for the New Mexico Higher Education Department, won the Mountain Plains Adult Education Association (MPAEA) Award of Excellence during a conference in Vail, Colorado, last month. The award honors one recipient from each of the MPAEA states.

“Dr. Backhaus represents the mission and spirit of the New Mexico Higher Education Department,” said Cabinet Secretary **Stephanie M. Rodriguez**. “We are proud to have her as part of our team, where she has been a critical asset in supporting adult education objectives and successes across the state.”

Backhaus, a theoretical physicist with a love of equations, uses her extensive knowledge of data extrapolation and her own experience as an adult educator to assist fellow practitioners in improving their program outcomes. With her expert guidance, New Mexico's Adult Education Programs have attained the highest outcomes in at least five years on each of the federal performance indicators, which include not only learning gains, but the attainment of credentials, employment, and earnings among current and former adult students.

“We are extremely lucky to have Dr. Backhaus on board,” said Adult Education Director Dr. **Amber Gallup**. “Katya brings a unique combination of scientific expertise and adult education classroom experience that allows her to understand and assist other professionals in the field.”

Dr. Backhaus has instituted regular data discussions with every program, hosts monthly webinars on technical data topics, and provides hands-on instruction and assistance to individuals whenever they request it, frequently traveling to the programs themselves throughout the state. Moreover, she does all of this with the striking kindness and optimism for which she is now well known in the adult education community.

New Mexico is showing gains in all areas of adult education, says Backhaus. She attributes this to the enthusiasm of the local program staff who are using her work as a valuable tool to improve learning outcomes across the state. The project focuses on data-driven performance in adult education, supporting classroom methods and increasing positive outcomes.

“It’s not just capturing data,” **Dr. Backhaus** explains about the analytical program she developed, “but assisting with systems, technical supports and evaluations. It shows how to use data to understand the strengths and weaknesses of educational programs.”

Backhaus applauds the courage and commitment of her colleagues in undertaking the changes in data reporting and analysis that she implemented in 2022 and was genuinely surprised to have been nominated. “This award normally goes to practitioners — teachers, instructors and counselors—not to someone in a state office,” she says. “I’m humbled by the fact that the people in the field felt that my work is making theirs easier.”

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The New Mexico Higher Education Department was established in 2005 and oversees the state’s public and tribal colleges, universities and special schools. It also oversees adult education and literacy programs statewide, manages state-funded financial aid programs and capital projects for higher education institutions, provides college readiness services via the GEAR UP program, and grants state authorization to private colleges operating within New Mexico. For more information, visit hed.nm.gov or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) at @NMHigherEd.