

STATE OF NEW MEXICO
PUBLIC EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
300 DON GASPAR AVE.
SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO 87501-2786
Telephone (505) 827-5800
www.ped.state.nm.us

November 16, 2023

Sent Via Email

Dear District Leaders,

Like many New Mexicans, I am deeply alarmed by the high number of low-performing schools and what that means for the state, the children who are being educated here, and our future. Far too many of our schools are underperforming. Students statewide have low reading and math proficiencies. This is unacceptable. It is time for accountability: for the Public Education Department, for the school districts (including their boards and schools), charter schools, teachers' unions and families. We owe this accountability to our state's most precious resource: children.

While some progress has been made, we cannot ignore the persistent low student achievement results and achievement gaps that continue to plague New Mexico's public schools decade after decade. It is time to break free from the status quo and demand excellence from everyone who works within the state's education system.

In the highlights of the most recent data, we see that every student has the capacity for success, if given the right tools and under strong school leadership. The reading gains in Pojoaque of over 26 percent demonstrate unequivocally how quickly student success can be achieved with the right focus. Leadership in the Pojoaque School District invested time and energy into bringing Structured Literacy to their students and in doing that, showed all of us what is possible. Schools have the tools: they need only be put to use.

The NMPED remains committed to working with school districts and school leaders to make sure these goals are accomplished. This will require the development and implementation of effective, evidence-based policies and programs, as well as leadership, innovation, and change.

Gov. Lujan Grisham and New Mexico legislators have invested billions of dollars in the state's education system since 2019 – levels never before seen in history – but historic academic gains have not followed. Statewide, barely a third of students are proficient in reading and less than a quarter are proficient in math, and these results are worse for students from low-income families and with disabilities, English learners, and Native American students. That must change.

NMPED's proposed budget to the legislature this year will be focused on accountability. It will require that all districts, schools, and classrooms in New Mexico be held responsible for the academic achievement and growth of their students. We can no longer afford to overlook underperforming schools or allow subpar educational experiences to persist. In this model, we will enforce accountability at the district level to ensure that those that do not provide their students with an effective education implement programs and policies that are proven to produce positive results. That shift will allow the state to create a renewed culture of high expectations, collaboration, and innovation that will propel our students toward success.

The time for action is now. Let us come together as stakeholders in education—parents, teachers, administrators, policymakers—and embrace this bold vision for accountability. Together, we can build a brighter future for our children, our communities, and our great state.

Sincerely,

Arsenio Romero, Ph.D.
Secretary of Education