

TWENTY-SECOND NEW MEXICO FIRST TOWN HALL

K-12 EDUCATION IN NEW MEXICO: BENCHMARKS FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM

Taos, June 3-6, 1999

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Based on the focus of children being our first priority, the Town Hall states unequivocally that our public education system in New Mexico is inadequate. It must be one of the highest priorities for the next five years. The legislative and executive branches should fund education first and prioritize the rest of New Mexico's needs after. Specific, far reaching solutions will take much political willpower and personal sacrifice.

THE BENCHMARKS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Students must progress through the school system on the basis of achievement of certain benchmarks. We can no longer tolerate a state statute which allows social promotions. Students will demonstrate mastery and proficiency, appropriate for their age and grade, in the following basic skills and their practical application: reading spelling, mathematics, science, social studies, technology, verbal and non-verbal communication including writing and listening, and mastery and proficiency in a second language. Students' education must include the arts, humanities, physical education, health education, library and research skills, and career readiness. Social and emotional skills are also important. Students should respect themselves, others, and the physical environment, appreciate and celebrate cultural diversity so they are able to effectively communicate and compete in our global market society. They will have teamwork skills, moral values and high aspirations for themselves and understand the purpose of their education.

Parents and the Community must take responsibility for their children's participation and performance. Every parent/advocate is expected to spend the equivalent of one day during the school year in the classroom with their child or participating in a school function. Employers will encourage their employees to be involved.

The School System—Every school district and individual school will have an Educational Plan For Student Success (EPSS) developed specifically to improve student learning and be formed in concert with students, parents, teachers, and the community.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT IN THE CURRENT EDUCATION SYSTEM

- The salaries of teachers and professional staff within New Mexico schools must be raised above the regional parity levels.
- By the 2001-02 school year, implement a plan to reduce existing class size to an effective targeted level based on research.
- A central funding mechanism is needed to insure equitable funding throughout the state.
- The legislature and the governor should commit the majority of general obligation bonds, severance tax bonds, and non-recurring general revenue fund dollars each year for the next five years to our capital needs.
- All available tobacco settlement money will be used in our educational system for the benefit of our children. Health promotion, anti-tobacco initiatives and enhancing general teacher pay all are important and legitimate uses of the tobacco settlement money.

WHAT SHOULD SCHOOLS AND THE SCHOOL SYSTEM LOOK LIKE OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

- New Mexico First, together with the State Board of Education and the State Superintendent, will call a meeting of interested business groups such as GBEE, ABEC, MRGBEC, and others, legislative leaders, chambers of commerce, mayors and city councils, county commissioners and school boards, and teacher groups to review the findings of the Twenty-Second New Mexico First Town Hall.
- The Town Hall needs to lobby the legislature and governor to provide full funding for comprehensive implementation of the accountability strategies contained in the New Mexico Accountability Plan for School Success.
- Recommendations proposed by this Town Hall should be undertaken through a comprehensive strategy of systemic change, coordinating efforts with other agencies and organizations.

Human Resources

Teacher Preparation, Retention and Professional Development

- Ongoing professional development should be provided for all staff, for all tasks, including teaching and other student needs, interacting with parents, and partnering with community groups.
- University education programs need to teach strategies based on current research in all content areas, especially reading, including how to motivate and reach reluctant learners.
- Incoming teachers must be technology proficient.
- An induction course, including a mentoring program, needs to be established for three years for new teachers.
- The requirements for substitute teachers need to be raised.
- Alternative licensing for non-teachers seeking to enter the teaching profession needs to be developed.
- The alternative licensing process for non-teachers seeking to enter the teaching profession needs to be streamlined, and individuals seeking employment who have marketable, transferable skills that will benefit the education of our children should be actively recruited.
- A concerted effort needs to be made to recruit minority and bilingual teachers and administrators and hiring and promotion will be done on the basis of "potential" rather than experience therefore improving the image and effectiveness of all teachers. Minority teachers and community viewpoints need to be incorporated into the school reform efforts.
- A salary incentive program needs to be instituted.

- Teacher contract days need to be increased by the 2001-2002 school year to 210 days with a salary increase commensurate with the increase in contract days. Student instructional days will increase to 190 days. By the school year 2004-2005 student instructional time should increase to 200 days with 220 days for teachers.
- One hour per day should be scheduled for preparation time in all grade levels.
- Teacher performance reviews should utilize self-assessment, peer review, and student performance.
- School and district reporting requirements should be reduced to reporting on matters relevant to key performance measures.

Leadership

- Quality training, such as Strengthening Quality in Schools should be provided for administrators and school board members.
- Salaries need to be tied to levels of performance.
- School principals should be recognized for success and be subject to disincentives for failures.
- Training should be provided in cultural sensitivity and for dealing with issues of poverty.
- Quality leaders need to be encouraged, developed, and mentored to take on leadership roles.
- Local grassroots efforts should be supported to help provide leadership development.
- Leadership needs to be responsive, both locally and system-wide.

Parental Involvement

- Parenting classes in current curriculum should be increased.
- Business should be encouraged to allow parents in their employ time off to attend school functions.
- Regular communication between the classroom and parents should be established.
- Access to information and resources needs to be provided for parents.
- Enforceable consequences need to be established for parents on issues of attendance, performance and behavior.
- Parents and business need to be invited into schools and their participation valued.
- Parents need to be invited into meaningful activities beyond fund-raising.

Community Relations

- A forum of business leaders, government representatives and parents should be created to discuss the Twenty Second New Mexico First Town Hall report and develop these connections into a partnership.
- Partnerships should be established with a variety of community groups and interests.
- Business advisory groups should be created to work with local school boards.
- The business community should be informed about needs in the education system.
- A guide of best practices needs to be developed regarding the role of business in schools.
- Joint master planning focus groups need to be created.
- Legislators need to review existing unfunded mandates and either fund them or eliminate them before creating any new mandates.
- The educational community needs to work with the media to communicate educational successes and to provide outreach.
- A focused public relations campaign should be implemented to make the public, teachers and administrators aware of benchmarks and standards.
- Understandable, bilingual materials defining grade levels, benchmarks and related standards need to be prepared and distributed to parents.
- Parents and business should be invited into the schools and their participation should be valued.

Infrastructure

- The state will pursue equitable funding sources and mechanisms to improve buildings, add new structures, and ensure student access to current technology.
- For substantial physical plant improvement and all new school construction, school districts will involve community leadership and expertise to design schools based on student, teacher and community needs. Dedicated to the specific purpose of learning, new schools will be architecturally designed to encourage flexibility of use, reflect developments in technology and be based upon the particular school's strategic plan to create a learning-friendly environment.
- Funding sources should include joint-power agreements with other governmental agencies and aggressively seek contractual arrangements with the business community.
- In addressing needs for classroom space, alternative facilities such as multiple use buildings, community resource centers and other available building space should be considered.
- By 2005, Career Resource Centers will be implemented in all middle schools and high schools. These centers will have the latest computer systems equipped with the Internet and software to include career interests, inventories, aptitudes, SAT/ACT study skills, etc.
- Adopt the Public School Capital Outlay Equity Study Task Force recommendations
- Establish standards for smaller schools and classes
- Establish standards for classroom and building sizes for all districts
- Look at school within school strategies for magnet and advanced placement schools.

Distance Learning and Technology

- Implement the "New Mexico Educational Technology Plan: A Road Map to Student Success"
- Partner with business, national labs and universities
- Provide related professional development

- Balance funding priorities against capital outlay
- Develop partnerships with phone and communication companies
- Maximize appropriate application for home schooling.

Curriculum and Instruction

- An adequate number of high school counselors assigned a group of students throughout high school will guide and facilitate students' decision-making skills, career exploration and research, conflict resolution, etc.
- The required instructional programs for the state will include for all students funding for the arts and humanities, music, physical education, library research skills and career readiness and mastery of a second language.
- A longer school year will be implemented to allow for more hours of instruction.
- Options for extended day enrichment activities will be instituted. The Legislature will be encouraged to explore the modification of the transportation formula to permit more flexible bus schedules.
- Schools will be provided increased flexibility with textbooks including those that reflect New Mexico history/culture.
- High quality curriculum, geared for real life survival skills and complimenting the School to Work program will be implemented.
- Character education will be implemented in all classes.
- Ethics education will be taught and citizenship modeled in the context of daily experiences at all levels.
- The curriculum needs to reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity found in our state.
- Students' progress in K-6 will be documented and communicated by portfolio records of competencies achieved. In grades 7-12, competency reports will also follow the students.

Instructional Program

- Develop an instructional program which is designed to move students towards achieving state standards and benchmarks, using proven, research-based practices such as: Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, Core Knowledge and Character Counts
- Include service learning, and instruction on conflict resolution and mediation skills
- State Dept. of Ed provides technical assistance to assure standards and benchmarks at school and classroom levels
- School administrators and teachers assure that standards and benchmarks are implemented at the classroom level
- Alignment and coordination of the entire curriculum for grades pre-K to 16 with standards and benchmarks, on a statewide basis with related professional development provided
- Development of the instructional program involving students' input appropriate to their ages and grade level
- Establishment of a support system to assure that all students reach standards and benchmarks.

Early Intervention/Early Education Programs

- Understanding by all stakeholders of demographic, ethnographic and societal impacts on early childhood development and education
- Access for all three and four year old children in New Mexico to quality pre-school programs funded by the state
- Certification of teachers for early childhood training and the payment of a living wage for pre-school teachers
- Cooperation and integration with other agencies to promote early childhood literacy and to provide free information resources and training opportunities for parents of children aged 0-3
- Access for all students to full day kindergarten programs
- Adoption of criteria that ensure that children are healthy and are physically, socially and linguistically able to learn.

Student Support and Promotion

- Developed criteria to place students in need, and regularly assess improvement or proper placement of those students
- Development of prevention and intervention programs to provide a safety net for students not reaching benchmarks and standards
- Student Success Package, enacted by state eliminating social promotion, mandating, and funding district plans, such as after-school, weekend and summer remediation programs, criteria for evaluating the programs, retaining students only after remediation strategies are exhausted.
- Implementation of remediation efforts that include summer school, mentoring, and after school programs
- Establishment of alternative programs for educating students who would otherwise be expelled
- Emphasis on parental accountability for student absences – it is the law
- Provision of adequate support services in terms of counseling, health care and protection services by certified staff
- Establish K-10 uniform competency based program followed by the availability of narrow curricular pathways qualifying for graduation at grade 12
- Establishment of student mentoring efforts by using existing teachers, parents, other students and community resources.