



Strengthening Quality in Schools
sponsored by the Governor's Business Executives for Education



The Sky is Not Falling: What's Right About Education in New Mexico and Albuquerque Public Schools

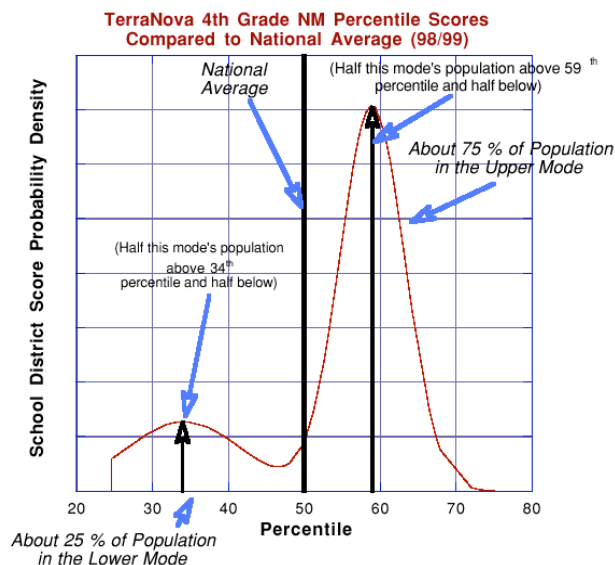
*Much has been written or spoken recently about how "bad" the education system is in the U.S. and, specifically, New Mexico. As a proponent of the use of quality processes in schools, particularly the application of the Baldrige Criteria, the Governor's Business Executives for Education and its Strengthening Quality in Schools (SQS) initiative, along with the New Mexico Statewide Baldrige in Education Initiative (NM BiE IN), would like to "set the record straight": there is always room for improvement, **but we have much to be proud of** about the quality of our education system in New Mexico and in our largest school district, APS.*

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Focusing our Resources Where They Are Needed

Education improvement has been a top priority in New Mexico for as long as most policy makers and citizens can remember. New Mexico was one of the first states in the nation to create a funding formula that recognized and addressed disparities in this geographically and ethnically diverse state (New Mexico was the first minority-majority state). To this day, over thirty years later, New Mexico's public school funding formula is still held up as a model in the nation for equity. Many different organizations continue to work on education improvement, and a robust public discussion on various reform options has engaged the public and private sectors in recent years. One example of how those discussions can lead to important data-driven actions is shown in the figure below. Although New Mexico's median national percentiles for Grades 3 to 9 are close to the national average¹, when the data is disaggregated, it shows that about 3/4 of our students are in districts whose average score is well above the national average (98/99 data). This data, collected by one of the many active volunteer organizations in New Mexico working to improve education, the Coalition for Excellence in Science Education (CESE - <http://www.cesame-nm.org/>), also shows, however, that 1/4 of our students are in schools in need of significant assistance.

The Sky is Not Falling for All School Systems in New Mexico Many of Our Schools Are Already Performing Well Above the National Norm



This “Bi-Modal” Distribution of School District Performance Is
Pervasive for All Measures, in All Topics, Through 2001.

This "bimodal" data reinforces the efforts by the State Board of Education during the last three years to utilize the funding formula and an Accountability System to focus attention and resources on those schools and districts most in need. For example, when statewide results of the Accountability System were released this year and it revealed that four APS schools (out of 126)

¹ <http://sde.state.nm.us/press/oct.02/html/10.31.02.htm>

that were receiving special assistance were still on "probationary" status (making them "corrective action" schools), the APS School Board reallocated an additional \$1M in funding², and deployed additional resources to work with the schools. Education has the focus of our entire community!

New Mexico's Education Quality Journey and Accountability System

New Mexico's State Board of Education and State Department of Education have fully embraced quality processes to improve the education system in New Mexico. As one of six Baldrige in Education Initiative states (<http://www.biein.org>), New Mexico has worked for the past two years to integrate data-based decision making and self-assessment into every aspect of its education system. New Mexico's Accountability System is one example of how that initiative has driven real system change. It measures and weighs five indicators:

- Student achievement
- Student dropout
- Student attendance
- School Safety
- Parent/Community involvement

The Accountability System categorizes each school based on their individual performance in these areas into four categories, which then identifies the level of special assistance they need:

- Exemplary
- Exceeds Standards
- Meets Standards
- Probationary

Probationary schools are carefully watched with requirements for improvement plans. After three years, probationary schools that do not show improvement are classified for "corrective action", which allows the state to provide special oversight and focuses community attention and resources to provide assistance. It is important to note that "Meets Standards" is a very tough requirement on a relative basis to other states. Information on New Mexico's Accountability System can be found at the State Department of Education website:

<http://www.sde.state.nm.us/div/ais/si/index.html>.

Recently released data (<http://sde.state.nm.us/press/oct.02/html/10.31.02.html>) from the State Department of Education indicates that New Mexico's schools have shown incremental improvement in Terra Nova results, with New Mexico's median national percentiles for Grades 3 and 9 being close to the national average in all content areas. A complete report on our Terra Nova results can be found at:

➤ <http://www.sde.state.nm.us/div/ais/assess/dl/exec.summary.hsce.10.23.02.pdf>

² <http://www.abqjournal.com/news/763890news09-05-02.htm>

Preliminary analysis of this data by CESE indicates that many of the lower scoring districts are closing the "gap" - bringing the upper and lower modes depicted in the previous chart closer together. Additional studies looking at achievement results by ethnicity indicates more resources need to be provided to our minority students, an issue that is being addressed through the use of federal programs identified for that need, as well as local efforts by many organizations.

Albuquerque Public Schools Performance Results

Did you know for APS:

- Data from the 2000-2001 Terra Nova show that out of 115 regular schools, 7 were at or above the 80th percentile, 22 at or above the 70th percentile, and 49 at or above the 60th percentile.
- Of 126 schools, 10 were rated as "Exemplary", 15 were rated as "Exceeds Standards", and 67 were rated as "Meets Standards". The remaining schools (19) were identified as "probationary" and will receive special assistance to ensure they do not become corrective action schools.
- According to a 2001 study by the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research (<http://www.manhattan-institute.org>), the APS graduation rate is the third highest in the nation among the 50 largest school districts, the second highest in graduation rate for Hispanics, and first for Anglos.
- Student standardized test scores in APS are better than the whole state average (one of only four districts among the nation's top 100 largest districts to do so).
- APS is one of 10 large urban districts receiving assistance from the Broad Foundation that has committed \$400M to focus on education improvement.
- APS is one of three pilot Baldrige in Education Initiative (<http://www.biein.org>) demonstration districts in New Mexico. Rio Rancho, adjacent to Albuquerque is also a Baldrige District, and is undergoing certification to use the Baldrige Criteria as the basis for its accreditation with the State Department of Education and the North Central Association.
- APS has launched a math, science and technology initiative in two of its 11 clusters, and plans to expand innovative curriculum, linked to career pathways across the entire district. Over \$2M has been secured in two years for this effort, which links the private sector, national laboratories, and others.
- APS is an active participant in the Next Generation Economy cluster initiative, ensuring that curriculum is focused on the promising high-wage jobs in the local economy (<http://www.nextgenclusters.org>).
- ACT and SAT scores for APS students are higher than those across the state and higher than the national average.

- APS has 23 National Schools of Excellence - one of the highest percentages in the nation among large school districts.
- The number of students who completed Advanced Placement courses has grown 43% since the 1999-2000 school year.
- A new, unique teaming arrangement for management of the district will provide continuity - one of the most unique governance structures in the nation.
- APS received almost 50% of a \$4.9M federal grant called ENLACE to increase the number of Hispanic students earning high school and college degrees. This is funded through a four-year W.K. Kellogg Foundation grant.
- APS partnered with a statewide Information Technology association (NMITSA) to create an IT career pathway in Albuquerque High School, articulated with a degree program at Albuquerque TVI. With almost two hundred students enrolled last year and over 400 students enrolled this year, this initiative will serve as a model across the district and the state for industry collaboration and career focus.

A graphical display that demonstrates the Terra Nova achievement of APS is shown below for the 2000-2001 school year (<http://www.rda.aps.edu/w3/dashboard/main.asp>). This data demonstrates that APS students consistently perform above the national average:

APS 2000-2001 TerraNova Composite Percentiles	
All Students	
<p>Grade 3 - 57.6</p>	<p>Grade 4 - 61.2</p>
<p>Grade 5 - 60.1</p>	<p>Grade 6 - 51.6</p>
<p>Grade 7 - 53.3</p>	<p>Grade 8 - 59.8</p>
<p>Grade 9 - 56.4</p>	

Community and Business Involvement in Education Improvement

For well over a decade, a number of regional and statewide business organizations and other community groups have worked to assist in the improvement of education in New Mexico. Some of these include:

The Governor's Business Executives for Education (GBEEs): This group, formed in the early 1990's, and about to serve under its third Governor, champions the use of quality systems to improve the process of education. Using Baldrige based criteria, the GBEEs have created a process called Strengthening Quality in Schools (SQS - <http://www.sandia.gov/sqs>), which provides training and assistance to teachers and administrators, allowing them to engage their students in self assessments, the use of data and goal setting. Hundreds of teachers across the state have undergone this training and are producing dramatic results in their classrooms, from first grade to high schools. It is anticipated that 75 schools this coming year will apply for the Baldrige based New Mexico Quality Award this year.

Statewide New Mexico Baldrige in Education Initiative (NM BiE IN): Formed as a partnership with the GBEEs and the State Department of Education (SDE), the New Mexico BiE IN has focused the attention of the State Board of Education (SBE), the Commission on Higher Education (CHE), three major school districts and many private and public sector partners on the use of the Baldrige Criteria to create a process of continuous improvement in education. Providing training and direction for future planning and performance at the SDE and SBE with the training of all personnel, and more recently supporting a Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Grant to train Superintendents and Principals across the state in quality processes, BiE IN has created a cadre of supporters at the policy level that will sustain and build upon the work of the Strengthening Quality in Schools initiative in the classroom.

The New Mexico Business Roundtable for Educational Excellence (NMBREE): This statewide business organization (<http://www.nmbusinessroundtable.org/>) has worked in the last two years to coordinate the needs and positions of many different organizations to provide a common voice for business in the efforts to improve the education system.

New Mexico First: This public policy organization (<http://www.nmfirst.org>), created by Senators Dominici and Bingaman, has examined education in a number of Town Halls, the most recent, in 1999. Members of an Implementation Team from that Town Hall have worked to build consensus on key educational improvement ideas, including the development of a consensus matrix, and the convening of a major educational improvement conference this year in Albuquerque.

Albuquerque Business and Education Compact (ABEC): This regional organization, comprised of education, business and public sector representatives, has worked for many years to address the issues of education improvement in the Albuquerque Public Schools. Their recently upgraded web site (<http://abec.unm.edu>) is intended to serve the community as a valuable source of information to assist in decision-making.

Conclusion

Our society today thrives on controversy, scandal and conflict. It is what sells newspapers, commands TV ratings, and occupies political rhetoric. "Bad news" captures the headlines above the fold; "good news" is relegated to page C4 of the Business Section. Although much has been written recently about how "bad" the education system is in the U.S. and, specifically, New Mexico, as this short paper demonstrates there are many more good things to celebrate that have not sparked public recognition. The cup is more than half full, but there is always room for

improvement. As efforts like Strengthening Quality in Schools expand around the state and our education system and the public recognizes the importance of data-driven decision making; and as collaborative engagement occurs as evidenced by New Mexico First's statewide efforts to identify and build consensus; and as the initiatives of ABEC and NMBREE establish partnerships between and among education and private sector entities, we will continue to see improvement in the quality of education offered our children, a growing prosperity in our communities, and a greater hope for the future.