

New test results detail improvements at Gallup-McKinley County Schools

Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
Friday, 16 August 2019 01:57



District among top ten state schools in proficiency growth

Gallup-McKinley County Schools Assistant Superintendent Gerald Horacek wanted to stress one point when he spoke to the Board of Education during the Aug. 6 regular meeting.

“Growth matters, especially when it comes to how your students are doing academically in [English Language Arts] and math,” he said.

Horacek was referring to the updated results showing proficiency growth in ELA and math across New Mexico schools in the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Career tests, which he presented during the regular meeting.

First, Horacek reiterated the test results he shared at the board’s July 15 regular meeting.

Over the past five years, the proficiency rate in math at GMCS has risen from 9.1 percent to 16.42 percent, whereas the state average in math proficiency rose from 17.4 percent to 20.3 percent.

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The results show how much GMCS has closed the gap with the state average in math proficiency, Horacek said.

“It’s a tribute to what the board has allowed us to do,” he said.

As for ELA, the proficiency rate at GMCS has risen from 14.6 percent to about 29.6 percent over five years, while the state average in ELA proficiency went from 26.4 percent to 32.7 percent.

This means the district has more than doubled its proficiency rate in ELA and closed the gap with the state average in five years.

Board Vice President Chris Mortensen said the results were astounding, but also asked Horacek about any obstacles that could be keeping the district from scoring even higher than it did.

“It’s continually refining what we do,” Horacek said. “We strive to make sure in the classroom, the correct standard is being taught and to the right rigor.”

This means making sure teachers are teaching to the right standard for each grade level, and that they are making the material challenging enough to help the children grow and improve.

“What all kids want, regardless of where they live or come from, they all want to be challenged,” Horacek said. “They want to be held to high expectations.”

Despite the growth that has occurred in five years, Horacek believes all the students want to continue to be challenged and grow even more.

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“We were never going to look at [the results] and say, ‘We made it,’ because a child is tied to that,” he said. “We need way more than 30 percent.”

Horacek added the data, which he and Superintendent Mike Hyatt reiterated comes directly from the state, speaks for itself and shows what GMCS is doing for students is working.

“That just says something about you all, and the parents in our community, and administrators and teachers, that we’re doing some good things,” he said.

The higher growth rate for GMCS compared to the state average makes Horacek believe the district can surpass the state average in less than five years.

He also wanted to stress the PARCC results encompass all of the students who take the test at GMCS, and not just a select group or grade.

Horacek then moved on to the newest state data, which showed the one year change in the ELA proficiency rate among the 10 largest New Mexico school districts.

GMCS was second in growth in the state with a 3.7 increase, ahead of Albuquerque Public Schools, Farmington Municipal Schools, Gadsden Independent Schools, Las Cruces Public Schools, Los Lunas Public Schools, Rio Rancho Public Schools, Roswell Independent Schools, and Santa Fe Public Schools.

The only district ahead of GMCS for one-year growth was Hobbs Municipal Schools.

However, for the two-year change in ELA proficiency, GMCS had the highest growth in the state, besting the other nine school districts with a 6.1 increase.

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This announcement was met with applause from the room.

As for a one-year change in math proficiency, GMCS was the only district to have a significant increase compared to the other nine previously listed school districts.

The results were similar for two-year changes, with GMCS scoring the highest growth in math proficiency among the 10 largest districts in the state.

“For everyone in the audience, this is monumental, incredible stuff,” Horacek said. “If we didn’t have the board’s support and Mr. Hyatt’s revision of putting the right people in the right places, you would never see [these results].”

Dist. 1 Board Member Kevin Mitchell said he was impressed with the growth GMCS has had in the past two years.

“It’s very important for our kids, in order for them to succeed, we need to see growth,” Mitchell said.

Hyatt said the growth has been difficult to recognize for some people in the community, but at this point the district has come a long way.

“We were the lowest-performing district in the state of New Mexico, and now we’re in the middle in ELA proficiency rates,” he said. “Obviously, we’re not going to settle for that. It’s valuable for our community to continue to advocate for students and celebrate their successes.”

Hyatt said the idea of GMCS doubling the state growth rate would have sounded crazy to some people five years ago, but the results prove it was not impossible.

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“Our students are just as capable as any student in New Mexico, or across the country,” he said. “This is just proof {that}what we’re doing is working, and we’ll continually adjust what we’re doing because there’s room for growth.”

Dist. 3 Board Member Priscilla Manuelito said the proficiency growth across the district has been a team effort.

She also addressed a number of naysayers who were downplaying the results and successes of the district’s students.

“It’s disappointing when we work day in and day out, so hard, both our staff and students, and [some people] do not give them the credit they deserve,” Manuelito said. “It is an injustice.”

Manuelito said she wants the board to advertise the students’ success wherever they can.

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