

PED Secretary honors three ‘A’ grade district schools

Written by By Deswood Tome Sun Correspondent
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Some months have passed since Del Norte elementary in north Gallup earned an A grade from the New Mexico Public Education Department.

It is one of three schools in the Gallup McKinley County Schools district that received the stellar grade, based on a set of criteria from PED that schools must meet to earn the top grade.

Lincoln Elementary and Tse Yi Gai High School are the other two schools on the honor roll.

“Good morning boys and girls,” PED Secretary Christopher Ruszkowski said, before the hundreds of students in the new Del Norte Elementary gymnasium. “Both of your schools last year—you are all here together—are going like this,” Ruszkowski said, as he used his hand in an upward rising motion.

Del Norte is the district’s newest school that opened in March. It’s Juan de Onate and Washington elementary schools combined.

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"We do three things," Ruszkowski said. "We celebrate and give a gift. We ask that community members come. Three, we learn to make the school great."

There are 121 schools in New Mexico, out of 850, that received an A grade this year, nearly 15 percent.

"I am traveling around the state celebrating all of the 'A' schools," Ruszkowski said. "Number one, very hard, to have an A school without an awesome principal."

The public education secretary gave praise to the teachers as well as parents for the celebrated achievement.

"I get to go to a bunch of different schools on behalf of the governor," Ruszkowski said.

He replaced Hanna Skandera who served as Gov. Susana Martinez's first cabinet secretary for education. The change occurred in June.

Public education in New Mexico has been criticized for cuts in funding. Between the years 2008 through 2016, education has suffered budget cuts by as much as 30 percent.

More than 100 students at Del Norte Elementary are enrolled in special education.

For New Mexico, students in special education suffer from disabilities or they include those who are designated as gifted and talented with high assessment scores.

Kristin Bischoff, Del Norte Elementary principal, attributes the achievement to a well trained staff

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that builds motivation and inspiration.

“It took us a few years,” she said.

Efforts began in 2014 as Bischoff was selected for a cohort program at the University of Virginia, where she spent three years.

New Mexico is one of eight states that uses the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career to assess its education. It uses English and mathematics for grades three through 11 in administered examinations for the assessment. The Bureau of Indian Education also uses PARCC.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act enacted by Congress in 1965, requires public schools to conduct standardized tests to measure students academic performance.

New Mexico adapted its grading system in 2011 using an A through F process associated with annual accountability. New Mexico’s model was the first to be approved by the U.S. Department of Education under the Every Student Succeeds Act.

The New Mexico letter grading system is paired with percentiles for each school’s achievement. An “A” grade indicates a 90 percentile in achievement, while B is 80 percentile.

“I plan to be back here again next year for another awesome year,” Ruszkowski said.

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