

State educators celebrate Year of Literacy

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SANTA FE — More than 300 educators from around New Mexico gathered during the week of June 6 for the Public Education Department's Literacy and Humanities Bureau Summer Convening at the Albuquerque Convention Center to celebrate New Mexico's Year of Literacy and to learn how they can improve all students' ability to read.

The department hosted representatives from more than 50 school districts and charter schools as well as national and local experts to share information about the department's structured literacy program, which is based on a theory of the science of reading.

On June 7, during the event, Public Education Secretary Kurt Steinhaus announced four Structured Literacy Model Schools: Vado Elementary School, Gadsden Independent School District; Bell Elementary School, Deming Public Schools; Arts Academy at Bella Vista, Clovis Municipal Schools; and Mountain Mahogany Community School, Albuquerque charter school. The Structured Literacy Model Schools are exemplars in the state for implementing structured literacy in New Mexico classrooms. These schools will each receive a \$50,000 grant and coaching support and will support teachers across the state who will be able to see these schools' research-based literacy instruction in action.

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“These dedicated teachers showed up during the summer break to add to their knowledge in supporting their students and improving their literacy skills,” Jacqueline Costales, Interim Deputy Secretary for Teaching, Learning and Assessment said. “The energy and excitement they brought to the event, especially after this long school year, is indicative of how motivated our educators are to move the needle for our students.”

Hamish Brewer, known as the Tattooed Skateboarding Principal, was the keynote speaker for the event. The New Zealand-based educator, principal, author, and international speaker challenged the room of educators to think about their legacies. He reminded educators and administrators that every child is an opportunity, not an obligation, and that “we don’t enroll students; we enroll families.”

“The future looks very promising for the students in New Mexico as we provide educators with the tools and understanding of how to teach reading,” Severo Martinez, director of the Literacy and Humanities Bureau, said. “Every student comes with strengths and areas for development. Our goal is to help advance students based on their strengths and provide them with support in areas of development to accelerate their learning.”

Between breakout sessions, participants strolled the Comprehensive Literacy State Development/Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Gallery Walk, which showcased the work done at districts through grants.

“The grants have allowed leadership and teachers to make a very important shift in instruction in terms of reading interventions,” Esther Peterson, associate director of Teaching and Learning K-12 at Las Cruces Public Schools, said. “They have allowed us as leadership to help our teachers understand where core instruction needs to happen and where interventions are critical so that our students can move forward in their reading instruction and proficiency.”

The Public Education Department’s public schools support budget for the upcoming fiscal year includes \$11.5 million for professional development in the science of reading for teachers and principals and to provide coaching support for educators across the state.

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“Structured literacy is important because every person deserves the right to reach proficiency in reading,” Gina Rodriguez, an instructional coach at Joe Harris Elementary School in Rio Rancho, said. “The science of reading within structured literacy gives us the tools to help students become proficient readers.”

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