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APS is about to get better

From the Top WINSTON BROOKS APS Superintendent

Folks, I don't mind telling you that, as corny as this may sound, things here in Albuquerque are even better than I expected.

That's not to say there isn't room for improvement — that's a given — but from what I've seen so far we have the people, passion and desire to make Albuquerque Public Schools one of the premier urban school districts in the nation.

Now, you might be thinking that I have to cheer for the team because, after all, I am the superintendent. But I think as we get to know each other, you'll find I don't make promises I'm not willing to keep, and I'm not big on goals without plans.

It was invigorating to visit several campuses the first day of school and not just see, but feel, the excitement. It may have been the first day back, but I already saw teachers engaging students with meaningful activities, students learning and parents eager to be part of it all.

At one high school, I met a mother who accompanied her two sons to registration, one of whom hadn't been in school for two years. Standing next to this young man, I could see that he was glad to be back, eager to learn and proud to have his mom at his side.

I can't emphasize enough the important role parents play in educating their children. If you are a parent who accompanied your child to registration, open house or to meet the teacher, bravo!

On the drive back to the office, I thought about that young man who decided to try again. He took a big step that day. Showing up to class on time and ready to learn is a critical part of the educational process.

Truancy has lots of symptoms. We will take a closer look at the issue and develop strategies to prevent teens from walking out on their futures.

Teachers, principals, school staff and parents all care about the education of our young people and need to continue to do everything they can to see that these teens get to school.

One way the district will help this year is with a new notification system called ParentLink.

This system will send a message to a parent's home phone, cellular phone or e-mail address, letting them know their student was absent.

It's important to remember: The majority of our students love to learn, and student achievement is our first priority.

Most people haven't been in a classroom since they were students, and a lot has changed since then.

We need to figure out how to reach our students, how to tap into their world and capture what drives them to excel.

Our mission goes beyond educating; we want to inspire, and we have the professionals in place to help us reach that goal.

Already, many of the efforts made to redesign our high schools are paying off.

We recently found out that APS students improved their ACT scores, outperforming their peers in the state. That's something worth cheering about.

Also, know how thrilled we are to receive two \$9 million federal grants — one that will enhance safety and wellness services, the other empowering us to advance the high school redesign concept over the next five years.

While a lot of energy is being pumped into secondary education, we also are shining the spotlight on elementary and middle school students.

One goal is to standardize our curriculum so that students in all parts of the district are learning the same material and can easily move from one school to another.

Changing the perception of APS is another goal of mine. We want to, as they say, "put the public back in public education." With more than 87,000 students and 14,000 employees, we will always face challenges, but we also have a lot to celebrate. One way we hope to share our good news is by redesigning our Web site at www.aps.edu. Our goal is to make this a user-friendly resource available to you at all times.

The lens through which the public sees Albuquerque Public Schools has to reflect a more accurate picture of educators, students and administrators if public perception is to change. That is everyone's responsibility.

On that note, you might be interested in a self-imposed deadline coming up. On or by Sept. 20, this administration will present a plan for meeting the district goals to the Board of Education. You've learned a little about them here, but there's much more. We will be held accountable. We've already committed to increasing student proficiency by 9 percent over the next three years.

In closing, I want to thank the Albuquerque Journal for this opportunity to connect with you monthly. My wife, Ann, and I are glad to be here. It's been only a couple of months, but my perception is that you are as hungry for change as we are. Let's get to it!

Winston Brooks became Albuquerque Public Schools superintendent on July 1. Send comments or questions to him at superintendent@aps.edu.

