



N.M. Schools Are Making Real Progress

By **Veronica C. García** Secretary, Public Education Department

While headlines over the articles reporting public school test scores scream about failure, the truth is we are seeing more and more success.

We have higher statewide achievement scores than we've had in the last four years. For example, the percentage of eighth-grade students proficient in math increased during the past four years by more than 12 percent among Hispanics, by 15 percent among Native Americans and by 22 percent for economically disadvantaged students.

Yet, according to the federal government, we have more failing schools. This is the paradox of AYP — adequate yearly progress.

Accountability for the education of our children is necessary, and New Mexico has been nationally recognized as one of the top 16 states for strong accountability, high standards and good assessments. We are seeing progress and results.

It's unfortunate that the federal system is so flawed that it misleads the public about the quality of our schools, teachers, administrators and students. Their hard work is being overshadowed by flashy headlines.

For example, all Albuquerque public high schools increased the number of students proficient in reading by an average of 3 percent last year. Rio Grande High School didn't make AYP but topped the list posting an increase of 24 percent. That's incredible progress that deserves recognition.

For years, we looked to Los Alamos and La Cueva High Schools as exceptional schools making progress with high numbers of students proficient in math and reading. However, both schools missed AYP this year.

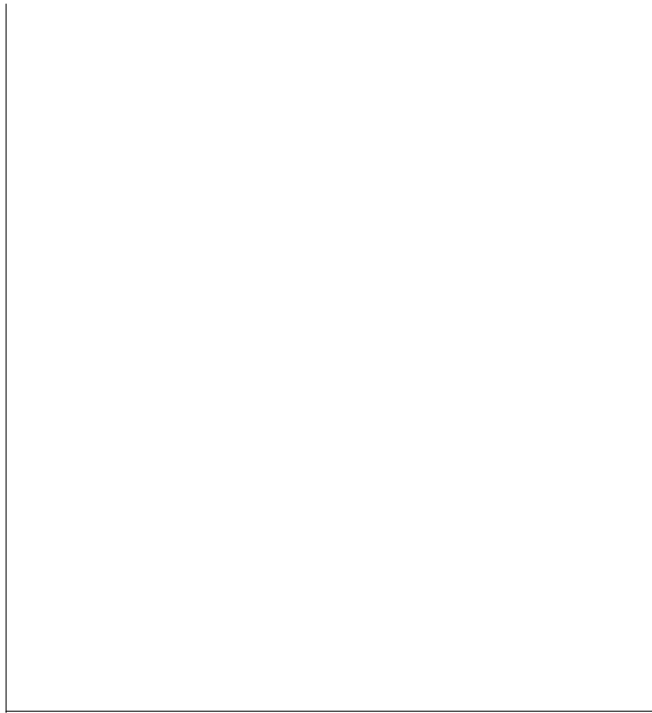
That may have you believing that the schools crashed and burned. Not true. Both schools are still exceptional, making progress with high numbers of students proficient in math and reading. They just didn't increase the number as much as needed to stay on track to meet the 100 percent student proficiency goal by 2014 for one sub-group of students.

Keep in mind that 40 percent of the schools in New Mexico that missed AYP missed by only one to three indicators. Some schools missed only one of the 37 indicators by only one-tenth of 1 percent.

It is critical that parents, community members, and state and business leaders look at the achievement data for each individual school, ask about improvement strategies, ask for data on progress, focus on short-cycle assessments to track student performance throughout the year and focus on individual student proficiency. AYP does not track the academic progress of individual students from one grade to the next. Since AYP is not a comprehensive tool that measures growth, using the same snapshot score at the classroom level to judge the effectiveness of a teacher would be grossly unfair.

Parents, please do not be discouraged by your school's AYP rating without doing the research. We are moving forward and we still have a long way to go. Let's continue to rally around our schools and students and keep the positive momentum.





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