

MARK
RONCHETTI
✦ GOVERNOR ✦

**The Mark Ronchetti
Student Success Plan:
Putting our Future First.**

Education

Nothing holds our state back more than its failure to educate our students well and prepare them for the workforce. In New Mexico, too many children do not experience the promise of a great education. We cannot continue to fail generation after generation of children. Just 1 in 3 students reads on grade level (it's worse for math), and 1 in 4 students do not graduate from high school. We rank dead-last nationally in academic achievement. This is a high-stakes problem that contributes to so much else we face: rising crime, poor health, drug abuse, and an economy that is slow-growing and lacking in talent.

Here's why education is so important:

- Education is very often the key to success in life. It creates opportunities and opens doors, ignites dreams and ideas, and creates responsible critical thinkers. When a child does not receive a quality education, they are far less likely to find well-paying jobs in careers they love. Life is harder, and opportunities are elusive.
- Education is key to breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty. Every child can learn—regardless of their background, income, or upbringing—and when children from low-income families succeed in the classroom, it's easier for them to find success in life. One well-educated child can lift an entire family—and its subsequent generations—out of the challenges of poverty.



- Education is usually at the center of every great “American Dream” story. In fact, it’s one of the most important promises of America. Great teachers and great schools inspire children to believe they can become anything their heart desires and equip them to achieve it. If we fail at educating our kids, we fail to extend to them one of the hallmark, life-changing benefits of living in our country.
- An economy cannot thrive where a solid education is hard to find. Great economies depend on the availability of well-trained, highly-skilled thinkers and workers. Our public schools are our most important workforce pipeline. When the system fails to adequately prepare kids for college and careers, businesses choose to locate and grow elsewhere (they can’t find the workers they need here)...and, as a consequence, our brightest and best talent is forced to leave our state as well.

For too long, we've excused poor performance. Why? Too many have allowed themselves to believe the lie that a child's destiny—in the classroom, and thus in life—is determined and set by their demographics... by where they live, what their parents earn, and what the color of their skin is.

Nothing could be more poisonous than telling a child—either explicitly or through the more implicit path of lower expectations—that they cannot learn.

We need to completely re-think how we approach education in New Mexico so that every child is allowed and encouraged to reach their full potential. And, we need to strive for excellence again. There is simply no greater challenge facing this state, and it requires urgent action, especially given the historic learning loss that has occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mark's education plan proposes bold steps to make up for lost learning time; direct more dollars to the classroom and out of the education bureaucracy; protect parents' rights to know how their children and schools are performing, as well as what their children are learning; expand public school options and the sharing of great educational models across public schools; improve our education system one school at a time through a focus on better leadership; better prepare our students for the workforce; intervene early and focus on literacy; and ensure our schools are safe and our kids have the mental and emotional health resources they need.

Mark Ronchetti proposes:

I. Make Up for Lost Time

Even before COVID, New Mexico was grappling with a learning crisis. Then, the Governor shut public schools for over a year – longer than most other states. New Mexico students lost more than 406 million in-class hours of instruction while our schools were closed, and academic growth suffered. The Governor's administration has neglected to acknowledge the learning loss that occurred during the pandemic, they've too often assumed that children will simply catch up, and they have no plan for identifying the students most affected and getting them back on track. Now that schools are back open, chronic absenteeism is off the charts,

and the education system has been slow and lacked a coherent strategy in spending the nearly \$1 billion in federal COVID-relief money for our schools. For context, New Mexico received \$5,000/child in COVID-relief funding; chances are, most parents would say their child has not felt the benefit of another \$5,000 worth of investment in their learning.

To make up for lost time, we need to:

- Provide every low-income child's family in the first through third grades a \$1,500 education stipend – each of the next three years – to purchase outside-of-the-classroom academic support for their child. This would allow parents to partner with their child's teacher in getting the right kind of help – in the most important subject areas – for their son or daughter, helping catch up nearly 60,000 students across the state in the grades where literacy development and foundational math skills are so important.
- Require school districts to spend their COVID-relief funds on classroom learning interventions, directed at helping those who have fallen furthest behind, as opposed to capital projects or other programs not centered on learning.
- Launch school-based summer academies, short academic programs designed to help struggling students master the basics and get back on grade level over the summer.
- Increase meaningful and strategic instructional time throughout the school year – not a one-size-fits-all approach, but a school-by-school commitment to getting kids more time in the classroom.

*** Note: a 2/27/21 op-ed by Gwen Perea Warniment, the Governor's deputy public education secretary at the time, starts with the sentence: "Please don't call it 'learning loss.'"*

*** Note: The Governor's COVID-19 responses, in general, have not worked – New Mexico has the 7th highest COVID-death rate in the nation, despite adopting some of the most restrictive and onerous mandates.*

II. Put More Education Dollars in the Classroom

Just as students need to be spending more time in the classroom, more of our education dollars need to be in the classroom as well. Consider the following: between 2007 and 2019, spending on general and central office administration (the education bureaucracy) increased by 55%, while instructional and student support spending grew by 20% and principals' offices by just 2%. Recent estimates indicate that nearly 70% of school districts have grown their central office administrative spending faster than their classroom spending. (analysis by Think New Mexico)

Mark would change state law to limit the growth of administrative spending in education, directing the lion's share of new education dollars into classrooms – including additional instructional coaches, teacher leaders, academic resources, and interventions for struggling students. Additional dollars to the classroom will also be targeted to help retain and recruit new teachers to help bring down class sizes to improve the teacher-to-student ratio.

III. Protect Parents' Rights to Engage in Their Child's Education

Parents are a child's first teacher, and even after a child enters school, they continue to motivate and support them on their educational journey. Parents are also critical partners with their child's classroom teacher, and they have every right to be aware of and participate in the education of their child.

Under Mark's plan, state law would make it clear that parents have the right to:

- 1. Know and have a say on what their children are learning.** There is a reasonable expectation that students will be taught the basics at school, not be subjected to political agendas. Parents should have access to course materials, curriculum, and books. Parent concerns should be addressed respectfully.

2. Understand at all times where their children stand academically and how schools are performing

- a. Parents should know—at various points throughout the school year—whether their child is learning at grade level, and if not, what options and interventions are available to get them back on track.
- b. Annual testing should be made available in a timely way so that parents, teachers, and schools can make summer-time decisions about interventions to keep kids progressing at grade level.

3. Know how education funding is being spent—all the way down to the school level

- a. There is no investment more worthwhile than education; in fact, it accounts for 45% of the state budget. Parents must be able to easily determine whether the nearly \$4 billion our state spends on public education is getting into classrooms and to kids who need the most help.

4. Send their children to the public school that best meets their needs

- a. A zip code shouldn't determine whether a child has access to a great education from a great public school. Parents should have more public school options to choose from and be empowered to select the public school that best fits the interests, needs, and abilities of their child – whether that's a traditional, magnet, or charter school.
- b. When we find public schools that are getting great results for the kids they serve, we should allow them to serve more students and encourage their learning models to be shared and implemented in other parts of the education system.

IV. Better Prepare Our Students for the Workforce

Some students will choose college after graduating high school. Some will enter the workforce. We need better preparation for our students no matter the path they choose. For students who will enter careers after high school, we can do a much better job ensuring they have the tools to be successful.

Mark's plan would include helping students earn work certifications while still in high school, so they can be as employable as possible, as quickly as possible.

Additionally, students who complete their high school course requirements by the end of the 11th grade should receive a scholarship to spend their entire senior year in an apprenticeship, internship, or career-focused postsecondary education, similar to a program that recently launched in Colorado called Path4Ward.

Mark would expand trade and vocational schools, and better align our high school and community college course offerings with the workforce shortage areas and industry growth target areas in New Mexico.

And finally, some of the best teachers are not, in fact, traditional teachers at all. They are the electricians, nurses, computer programmers, entrepreneurs, and others who have knowledge to share, but have been historically shut out from teaching in our public school classrooms. Mark would make it easier for these experts to teach relevant subjects in middle and high school, which would also help alleviate our teacher recruitment challenges. And, New Mexico's education system should make it easier for students to learn outside of a classroom's walls—on job-sites, in hospitals, and “in the field” instead.

V. Improve the System School-by-School, Focus on Developing Great Leaders

Too many students languish year after year in a public school that is failing to educate them well. Fortunately, we know that great school leaders can turn around poor-performing schools, by elevating

expectations, improving hiring practices, building a “can do” culture, better developing and supporting teachers, and implementing best practices designed to understand each child's academic needs and help them grow. Mark believes (and research shows) that no school has ever been turned around in the absence of a great leader. Leadership is essential to improvement.

Under Mark's plan:

- Chronically low-performing schools would undergo leadership changes.
- The State's very best principals would earn six-figure salaries and be given more autonomy in how they lead their school. Currently, too many great principals leave the profession early. Successful principals should be treated as the CEOs of their schools, not as middle managers in large district bureaucracies.
- Schools led by great principals would take on assistant principals who would train for a year or two under their leadership, then be deployed to lead schools of their own.
- Successful school leaders would be paired with principals in need of help, and they would engage in an active mentoring relationship.
- The highest-performing teachers in each school district would be encouraged and funded to enter principal development training.

VI. Early Intervention: the Key to Success

By the third grade, every student should have the ability to read; unfortunately, New Mexico ranks 49th in the nation in literacy. Students who cannot read by the third grade have a harder time learning, are more prone to discouragement in later grades, and are more likely to drop out of school.

Mark's plan for literacy growth hinges on three things: an expectation that every early-grade teacher is trained every year in the best strategies and science on teaching literacy; instructional coaches and support staff are prioritized toward English Language Arts

classes in grades K through 3; and both parents and students should know their reading level—and how it’s changing—on a month-by-month basis, with regular conversations between parents and teachers about what needs to be done inside and outside the classroom to improve their reading skills.

It’s true that many students enter kindergarten unprepared to learn. Achievement gaps do form early. As such, Mark believes the State’s broad and well-funded early childhood education programs should focus on—and be accountable to—improving kindergarten readiness for kids age 0 to 5. He would ensure the State’s new early childhood cabinet department is fulfilling its intended purpose—to better coordinate early childhood programs and ensure that those families who really need to be accessing the child care, home visiting, and pre-K programs are, in fact, enrolling in them.

VII. Attack the Truancy Problem

We know this for certain...if students are not in class, they cannot learn. With over 40% of the students in APS chronically absent—nearly double the rate of absenteeism just a few years ago—we must change this systemic failure.

The reasons for absenteeism are varied and complex. The Governor has taken a different, and failing approach to truancy that is serving no one, least of all the children caught in the web of non-attendance.

- Use COVID funds to hire and build teams in high truancy schools to focus exclusively on getting children back to school and/or finding education alternatives that meet the needs of the child and their family.
- Create high-risk classrooms with lower student-teacher ratios in high-risk schools for children experiencing high rates of truancy. Teachers should not bear the burden of trying to adapt lessons to keep higher performing students engaged while meeting the needs of chronically absent, while chronically absent students will benefit from closer interaction with teachers and pace of learning.

- Encourage opening of more bilingual charter schools to address the needs of our Spanish-speaking population.
- High-school age students not regularly attending school will have their driver’s licenses revoked.
- Enforce the Compulsory Attendance Law.

VIII. School Safety and Attention to Mental, Emotional Health

We need to do more to recognize and address the mental health needs of our young people, including investing our education resources in a more robust mental health system.

Implement a new program aimed at placing retired law enforcement and military in our schools as part of faculty. This means these employees would pay into education retirement while keeping our schools protected. Each school would be allowed to define the role for its “Security Resource Officer” or security aide. For example, one school may need the role to be exclusively law enforcer and disciplinarian. Other schools may add an emphasis on informal counselors, role models and authority figures. The benefits of having a security resources officer or security aide include:

- Increased perception of safety by students, staff, and parents resulting in an improved perception of the school environment.
- Leads to more positive relationships between police and young students, and between police and schools nurturing a positive attitude of respect.
- Police presence serves as a deterrent to crime and misbehavior.
- Allows police to establish relationships with students and staff that facilitate gathering information to prevent crimes or intervening with students who may be planning a crime.
- Safer school conditions promote better learning conditions, resulting in increased attendance, test scores, and grades.

School policing is significantly different from traditional policing in a community. Therefore, the officers will be trained/encouraged to train specifically for working in schools. Training would be tailored to the duties and activities assigned to the officers. There are several excellent existing federal programs that train these officers to be effective in schools. Training might include: adolescent development; de-escalation techniques or recognizing signs of mental distress and trauma;

techniques to maximize an officer's positive impact on student disciplinary outcomes; and legal issues such as students' rights to privacy.

The program would require that parents be notified immediately after their children are involved in any activity with an officer, such as being questioned or arrested, and clearly state the situations in which parents should be notified or be present.



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