

LOCAL

Is Doña Ana County ready to thrive? It takes a community to educate our children

Lori Martinez For the Sun-News

Published 1:03 a.m. MT Mar. 31, 2019

In January 2018, I wrote a column about the importance of investing in early childhood education, and civic engagement as a strategy for making it happen. That was a big political year for New Mexico, so the column was about getting informed on the issues, learning about candidates running for office, and talking to our elected officials.

Now, one year later, there have been significant changes for New Mexico. A new governor and a slew of newly elected legislators has been cause for celebration for many who have seen the last 10 years as a dismal failure to our education system and economy. The landmark education lawsuit, *Martinez/Yazzie v. the State of New Mexico*, resulted in a scathing 600-page rebuke from Judge Sarah Singleton outlining the many ways New Mexico has failed to abide by our own constitution and provide a sufficient and uniform education to every student. Our State Legislature just concluded what was arguably one of the most active and difficult legislative sessions some of us have ever seen, and education was front and center. Next month, the plaintiffs and the State will go back to court to find out whether New Mexico's plans and newly enacted laws will be enough to satisfy the judge.

That year, 2018, was also the year we saw New Mexico drop to 50th in the nation in both education and child well-being, adding to a sense of urgency that the time to act on behalf of our children was long past due.

To make our educational system one that truly serves every student will require an intensity on the state and local levels that most of us have never seen. We have a lot of work to do. Many who work in education feel this keenly, whether in the classroom with students, or working to make the educational systems themselves more effective.

Are we ready?

The election results may reverberate for a long time, but great education is about more than elections. For years, educators have been tasked with doing the day-to-day work of teaching without sufficient resources, and our children paid the price.

Here's the point: Education is a shared responsibility.

Great education doesn't happen without community. The kind of education that sets our children up for a lifetime of thriving (not just surviving), takes a village mindset. My hope is that the state of education and child well-being in New Mexico causes all of us to hold a mirror up to ourselves and ask "What can I do?" We all have a role.

My challenge to you is this: Remember that your voice, knowledge, and experience is critical, and don't let yourself become numb to the grim statistics you hear. New Mexico has yet to mobilize our greatest resources to overcome the challenges we face — Our resilience, our languages, our wealth of cultural resources and values rooted in community. And yes, tangible resources like money funneled effectively to classrooms. Most importantly, we need our people.

Business owners, you are the experts on the ground. Tell us what skills your employees need, so we know what to teach. You can show the next generation what it takes to succeed in your industries.

Faith communities, you are masters at activating people, often last-minute. Your knowledge of community is crucial. Tell us what you see.

Elected leaders and government officials, we need access to you. We need to see you in our communities and know you take our concerns seriously.

Parents, you are your children's first and best teachers. Those of us in education don't always see everything that's happening with your kids. Your knowledge of your child is the key to learning how best to teach them.

Students, we do a poor job of understanding you, the very people we are here to serve. Your voices matter. Help us understand what helps you learn and what doesn't.

Educators, the work you do is sacred, and we fail you often. Help us understand what you need to succeed in your classroom.

Retirees, you have expertise and experience from which everyone can benefit.

To anyone I left out, we need you, too.

The work we do is rooted in relationships. It's messy, and also one of the most impactful tools for change we have. We are the SUCCESS Partnership, and we are educators, nonprofits, government entities, parents, faith-based members, business owners, and advocates committed to transforming education in Doña Ana County. We invite you to partner with us.

Lori Martinez is the executive director of the nonprofit organization Ngage New Mexico. Ngage is the support organization for the SUCCESS Partnership, a collaborative effort to improve education and child well-being across Doña Ana County. To stay current with education efforts visit: successdac.org. To receive the Ngage monthly newsletter with grant opportunities and local events, e-mail info@NgageNM.org. To contact Lori, e-mail lori@NgageNM.org.

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