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**Date:** Tue, 2/14/2012 5:19:53 PM

**Subject:** Chiefs in the News

*\* FYI: In an effort to keep you informed about how the press is reacting to your colleagues, or the various reforms that they are spearheading, here are three articles below. First two reflect a hostile mood toward Hanna in New Mexico; one editorial calling on the legislature to 'hold her accountable' via a confirmation hearing and one article reporting a poll taken by district superintendents giving her performance a 'D' grade. The third article reports Chris confirmation hearing, previously scheduled for this Thursday, will be postponed due to questions about his residency.*

*Let me know if you would like for me to remove you from future emails like this, or if you'd like for me to use a different email address. We promise to send positive ones along as well.*

## Hold Skandera accountable

The New Mexican

Posted: Monday, February 13, 2012

<http://www.santafenewmexican.com/Opinion/Our-view-Hold-Skandera-accountable>

New Mexico now has the distinction of being the only state that requested No Child Left Behind waivers for its public schools that did not receive one. It still could be awarded, but the state has work to do. One chief reason given by the federal government was that our state did not use its new school rating system -- the A-to-F report card -- to help address the educational achievements of minority students who are lagging behind. A second: "lack of consultation with diverse stakeholders and communities," to quote directly from a December letter from the federal Department of Education.

This failure makes sense when you consider that critics of Public Education Department Secretary-designate Hanna Skandera have been saying for the past year that she does not understand our state's diverse populations. On top of her lack of knowledge, Skandera apparently has not been willing to reach out to New Mexicans about our state's educational challenges -- whether experts in Indian education, English-language learning or concerns of local Hispanos. She disbanded standing advisory committees on bilingual education, Indian education and Hispanic education. In other words, Skandera brought in outside reforms without trying to become familiar with the place where those reforms were supposed to take root.

The federal government, far away in Washington, D.C., picked up on that lack of knowledge and wants our waiver application to be reworked. The waiver is important because it means that schools would leave the confusing labels of "Adequate Yearly Progress" to a clearer but still problematic A-to-F system that Skandera and her consultants devised. Still, we agree with the feds that helping close the achievement gap should be part of a school's grade. After all, "minority" is a misnomer in New Mexico, where 71 percent of students are considered to be from minority ethnic groups. The report card's standards also must be made clearer -- the final grade is unequivocal, but it's difficult to understand how the "teacher" arrived at it. The feds caught that failing as well.

One year in, Skandera still awaits confirmation to her post. With only a few days remaining in this legislative session, she still hasn't faced a hearing before the Senate Rules Committee. There is talk that she could remain unconfirmed, for the second session in a row. We think the person in charge of the public schools should be held accountable by senators constitutionally charged with confirming a governor's choice. In other words, schedule a hearing.

Under Skandera's watch, the Public Education Department has lost key staff members in its Bilingual Education Bureau and doesn't appear to be in any hurry to replace them, despite the many children in New Mexico who learn in two

languages. Critically, there also appears to be little understanding on Skandera's part that the education of Indian children in this state involves complex laws -- including the support of Native languages and statute-required parental involvement. It's not possible -- or desirable -- to be English-only in a state where so many children speak Spanish, Tewa, Keres, Navajo or another language first. The layoffs of dozens of employees and the subsequent contracts to out-of-state consultants must be examined in the light of day.

Legislators should hold Skandera accountable before this session ends. Her explanations might satisfy, but we doubt it. Unless Skandera can make it clear that she truly wants to work with -- and respects -- the diverse people of New Mexico, it might be time to send her packing.

## **Superintendents Give Education Boss Bad Report Card**

By [Hailey Heinz / Journal Staff Writer](#) on Tue, Feb 14, 2012

<http://www.abqjournal.com/main/2012/02/14/news/superintendents-give-education-boss-bad-report-card.html>

In a recent online poll of state superintendents, the half who responded gave Education Secretary-designate Hanna Skandera an average grade of "D" for her overall performance.

The online poll was anonymous. It was administered by Hugh Prather, a retired superintendent who is now an education consultant.

In a foreword to the final report, Prather wrote that he wanted to give superintendents a chance to speak their minds about Skandera without fear of retaliation.

The survey was sent last week to the superintendents of 88 of New Mexico's 89 school districts. The exception was Española, which appointed a new superintendent Friday. Of those 88 superintendents, 45 responded. To ensure against multiple entries from the same superintendent, Prather checked for surveys taken multiple times from the same computer address.

While most responding superintendents gave Skandera low grades, 11 gave her an overall grade of "A" or "B."

Through spokeswoman Aimee Barabe, Skandera was dismissive of the report card.

"Secretary Skandera is completely focused on education reform during this legislative session," Barabe said in a written statement. "While she is aware of the report, she feels the department's time is best spent on advancing these critical initiatives. Secretary Skandera has been very active in working with superintendents throughout the state to garner their input on education reform and will continue to do so in the future."

The superintendents were asked to give Skandera an overall letter grade and grades for the particular areas of: training and preparation, effectiveness leading the Public Education Department, sensitivity to New Mexico culture, involvement of superintendents, communication with school districts and demonstrated competence. She received "D" grades in every area except communications with districts, for which she received a "C."

Skandera got her lowest marks for involvement of superintendents. In that category, 32 superintendents gave her either a "D" or an "F."

The report also includes written comments from superintendents. Many of the negative comments emphasized that superintendents did not feel their input was taken seriously and that Skandera did not understand New Mexico's unique cultural milieu.

"I believe she is a capable woman — but has no education credentials," one superintendent wrote. "She does not understand the many issues we are dealing with, as we have so many children and families in crisis. Reading and math come second to being able to eat and have a roof over your head. Secondly, the Secretary-designate says she communicates, but the conversation tends to be one-way with the same info over and over."

Positive comments centered on that Skandera brought fresh ideas to New Mexico and has made education a prominent issue.

"She is doing a good job in moving the state forward," one superintendent wrote. "Finally a chance to do more for kids. The Secretary is a breath of fresh air. Education is finally on everyone's mind and we should be supportive of new ideas

to improve student achievement.”

Albuquerque Public Schools Superintendent Winston Brooks said he did not respond to the survey.

Prather, a former Los Lunas superintendent, now assists school boards, schools and other teams that are struggling to work together productively. He emphasized he did not have a client that requested the report card but did it on his own because of personal concerns about Skandera’s performance and a desire to see how superintendents felt.

Some of Prather’s recent work included team building with high school faculty in Hatch, training the Springer school board on superintendent evaluation and helping Bernalillo Public Schools with strategic planning. He said he charges \$100 per hour for his services.

— This article appeared on page C1 of the Albuquerque Journal

## **Hearing on N.J. acting education boss postponed over residency questions**

Published: Monday, February 13, 2012, 5:41 PM Updated: Tuesday, February 14, 2012, 6:05 AM

By Star-Ledger Staff

TRENTON — Christopher Cerf may not want to order those new business cards just yet.

In a surprise move today, the head of the Senate Judiciary Committee postponed a scheduled Thursday confirmation hearing for Cerf, who was nominated by Christie in December of 2010 to become the state’s Education Commissioner.

Cerf has retained the acting tag for more than a year as State Sen. Ronald Rice (D-Essex) blocked the nomination using a senatorial practice known as courtesy. The informal rule allows senators to block gubernatorial appointments of people who live in their districts.

Cerf, who has owned a home in Montclair since 1999, lives in Rice’s district. He seemed to bypass the legislative tactic last month when it surfaced that he rented a home in Somerset County and thus courtesy shifted to State Sen., Christopher Bateman (R-Somerset).

But Nicholas Scutari (D-Union), who chairs the Judiciary Committee, says he pulled Cerf’s name from the hearing because he has new doubts about Cerf’s actual abode after Cerf gave an interview to the Asbury Park Press where he said, "I have two residences."

"The facts are that I own a home in Montclair and that I reside there many nights a week. I have also rented a home ... in the southern part of the state and I spent several nights a week there. I use it to shorten my commute," Cerf said.

Playing referee in the dispute is nearly impossible because the courtesy process is governed by tradition, not law. However, State Sen. Gerald Cardinale (R-Bergen) said he has always opposed nominees who used gimmicks to skirt senatorial courtesy.

"I think you have to be honest about this stuff," Cardinale said. "I would not sign off on this if he said he lived in place, but lived in another. But we should get the facts before we judge, so I agree with Scutari for trying to get to the facts, even if the governor is a Republican."

Christie’s office declined to comment.

Cerf deferred questions about his nominations and residency to his spokesman at the Department of Education, Justin Barra, who did not return calls and emails seeking comment.

Rice invoked senatorial courtesy after learning a consulting firm founded by Cerf had been paid \$500,000 to make recommendations about which Newark schools could be closed or consolidate based on declining enrollment or poor academic performance. Cerf cut ties with the firm before assuming his public role and did not profit from the contract

"If in fact this is true, then it goes back to the main problem," said Rice. "This man lacks integrity and veracity and that

should concern the governor."

Former Montgomery Township Mayor Louise Wilson said the news was all over town that Cerf had moved to Montgomery. She said she never saw the acting commissioner around the township, but "I'm not sure I would recognize him, to tell you the truth."

Montgomery, in staunchly-Republican Somerset County, is known for its open space and large, luxurious homes, but Wilson said the address given for Cerf is much more "modest."

She also said Montgomery is also frequently home to many who work in Trenton, however. "It's a much shorter commute than from Montclair," she said.

Wilson, a Democrat who served on Montgomery's township committee for eight years before losing reelection in 2010, also referred to the tiff over senatorial courtesy.

"When I first heard the news, I assumed he had made the choice to live here so as not to be burdened with that any more, and frankly I didn't blame him," she said. "The 18 months as acting commissioner because of his nomination being held up all this time, I just don't know that's fair."

She said Montgomery is a "great place" to live.

"I hope that he ultimately moves his whole family here, because then there wouldn't be this perception," Wilson said.

By Jarrett Renshaw and Jeanette Rundquist/The Star-Ledger

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