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Subject: Oped supporting Gov. Martinez & Hanna's reforms - for your review
Attachments: Draft Chiefs Op-Ed for NM.DOCX

Chiefs,

Hanna's office has asked the chiefs to author an op-ed that is:

1. A strong endorsement of Secretary Skandera - touting the opportunity New Mexico now has on the national stage to be a leader in reform.
2. An endorsement of student achievement as part of teacher evals.
3. An endorsement of early reading intervention with a strong point (but subtle) of retention. There is a competing reading bill in our legislature that is being sold as a better alternative to ours because it allows parents to reject holding their kids back, thus more "parental involvement."

Attached is a piece we have drafted. Please let me know if it is ok to include your name as an author.

Thanks,
Jaryn

Leaders in every state have a vital responsibility. They are accountable for creating an education system to provide each child access to an education that will equip them with the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed.

Many influences are beyond our reach, but education is the one thing a state can control that makes a huge difference in a child's life. When each and every child is offered a high quality education, these students receive the tools they will need to reach their full potential. And their possibilities become limitless.

As New Mexico's leaders know and we have experienced in our states, reform is not easy. It requires a clear, defined plan that refocuses the system around what matters most – student learning.

Implementing bold reforms rooted in high standards and accountability is the most important thing New Mexico can do to improve the quality of life for its children and its future as a state. Thanks to the leadership of Governor Martinez and Education Secretary Skandera, New Mexico has the opportunity to adopt policies that will truly transform its education system to focus on student achievement.

Last year, New Mexico adopted A-F school grading to provide schools, students, parents and communities with a clear understanding of their local school's state of education. This year, lawmakers have the opportunity to establish reforms focused on two critical areas: reading skills and effective teaching.

Reading is the foundation of all learning. Research confirms that students who don't master reading skills by the end of third grade are almost guaranteed to fall behind, drop out of school and never graduate.

With nearly 80 percent of fourth-graders reading below grade level New Mexico must act now. Thankfully, Governor Martinez and Secretary Skandera have proposed legislation to ensure no student leaves third grade without critical reading skills.

The tradition of passing students who can't read into the fourth grade isn't just neglectful, it's shameful. Students cannot learn if they cannot read. This legislation will equip students to succeed in and beyond elementary school, because it requires schools to provide struggling readers the customized reading instruction and additional support they need.

The second proposal under consideration will recognize and reward effective teachers for their important work. Teachers have a critical impact on student achievement. In fact, students with effective teachers achieve almost four times the learning gains as students without effective teachers.

However, most teacher evaluation systems leave teacher quality to chance. Students need effective, inspiring educators, and schools need a way to distinguish between effective and ineffective teachers.

Including student achievement in meaningful evaluations is the only way New Mexico and other states will modernize the teaching profession and attract and maintain a workforce of highly effective, professionally compensated teachers. This method takes the guesswork out of an evaluation. It rewards effective teachers while creating a way for these professionals to share their expertise and provide critical support to struggling teachers.

Most importantly, these reforms reject old educational myths that cripple so many schools. Low-income and minority students can learn, and these policies ensure that all students are given that chance.

These new reforms and their implementation will require unwavering commitment to New Mexico's students and a willingness to challenge the status quo. Both are qualities Governor Martinez and Secretary of Public Education Department Secretary-Designate Skandera have consistently demonstrated. Because of their vision and leadership, New Mexico is on the stage to become a national leader in bold, student-centered education reform.

The future of our country will be determined by the current quality of our education. New Mexico's state and local leaders must act today to improve education, thereby strengthening tomorrow. We certainly hope they will make this crucial commitment.