

Our Commitment to Our Community and Our Children: The Choice is Ours

By Senator Pete Campos

New Mexico draws its strength from its people, and if we are going to overcome the challenges we face and reach our full potential as a people and as a state, we must be willing to invest our personal time and financial resources in schools and community programs.

A healthy community is comprised of caring, innovative and optimistic citizens who contribute their expertise and sweat to worthy causes by participating in community activities and groups. Local participation in neighborhood cleanup campaigns, strong membership in neighborhood watch programs, churches, parent-teacher organizations, clubs and organizations and support for in-school and after-school programs energizes the day-to-day dynamics of a community. These personal commitments and contributions weave the fabric that makes a community great.

Our involvement in our communities as business leaders, parents, civic leaders and good neighbors is critical to ensuring a successful future for our children. We all have opinions, ideas, criticisms, creative energy, similarities and differences and we should be willing to share them. Doing so may create some unwieldy days and awkward moments, but once those pass our communities become greater with the benefit of our collective involvement. The success and reputation of each community depends on the contributions that residents make to support local health care providers, schools and businesses. The pride we take in our heritage, culture, language, neighborhood, business district and faith can either be an unmatched attraction for visitors and those looking to relocate, or they can serve to discourage people from enjoying what each community has to offer.

The choice is ours.

The importance of the commitment that we are willing to make to our public school system, the centerpiece of most of our communities, cannot be overstated. A good school system is the cornerstone of our economic development and public safety efforts. Good schools help produce good students who grow up to be good citizens.

Our entire public education system and everyone who works within it must be committed to turning out the best future leaders possible, and we must be willing to do

our part to support them.

In order to achieve this goal, we must come to grips with the fact that salaries must be raised for support personnel, including school cooks, teachers' aides and custodians. These people, many of whom have demonstrated their loyalty to their schools and their school districts by remaining with them for decades, and the services they provide to our children, are critical to the overall success of our public school system. These folks, along with teachers and principals, ensure that our children have access to good early childhood nutrition, physical education and a strong academic curriculum.

Every child counts and we all must dedicate ourselves to ensuring that each child reaches his or her potential.

We must continue our efforts to coordinate public and private early childhood services to effectively provide social and educational skills development.

Teachers' efforts for expanded professional development and leadership programs for administrators must be supported.

Finally, we must continue to invest in maintaining the physical infrastructure of our schools.

Reaching our potential and living the best we can takes sacrifice. Resources in the form of tax dollars and personal commitment in the form of volunteer hours must be available if our communities and our state are going to advance. Moving forward takes vision, a promise of inclusion and persistence.

Let's join together and remain focused on the big picture: a better public education system, a healthier society and the promise of more and better jobs.