

Make New Mexico First through Education
By Senator Pete Campos

The 2019 legislative session will be a session of great change, and the New Mexico education system is a top priority. Parents, guardians and teachers should be able to assure students that an education will lead to success in careers and in life, in general. The strength of our current society is that developed intellect, cultivated skills and earned credentials matter. Improving New Mexico's educational system will keep our population healthy, attract more high- quality jobs and set New Mexico on the path of long-term success.

The consolidated cases of *Yazzie/Martinez v. State of New Mexico* highlight some of the problems New Mexico has faced in recent years. We must thoughtfully establish a long-term plan to address our constitutional and statutory obligations to all students. Our diverse state deserves an equally diverse education. Multicultural schooling should be accessible to Spanish, English and indigenous language speakers regardless of the intellectual, socioeconomic or physical aspects of their lives. Teachers should be supported as they implement techniques that inspire independent thinking and prepare students for college and careers.

The ideas are endless, but our goals are attainable. First steps include developing a replacement for the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers examinations, know as the PARCC, that can utilize the best parts of the PARCC and remedy the worst; creating standards and continuity to ensure positive outcomes for all school districts; strengthening high school and post-secondary career counseling and placement centers; and addressing the needs of all students, with a focus on at-risk and nontraditional students. New Mexico has many highly qualified education professionals, including assessment developers and teachers, who can assist in our endeavors.

It's time to bring our charter schools, school districts and public institutions of higher learning up to speed so students have educational opportunities, regardless of where they live. Research has shown that when people work together for a common vision and share their ideas and expertise, positive results occur more quickly, and those involved in the change are happier, more motivated and more engaged in the future.

The legislature is responsible for both fostering and participating in a culture of collaboration among governmental, private and nonprofit organizations. Communities and schools can partner with local businesses to develop and support supplemental educational programs, such as vocational training and summer programs for crucial certifications. State agencies can create collaborative databases that keep real-time records of services provided to children and families, ensuring that students and communities have the resources and assistance necessary to succeed. Parents and teachers can use resources, such as the Khan Academy, to supplement classroom materials. With the state's assistance, new resources can also be developed, such as educational television programming and educational hotlines to link individuals to tutoring, counseling and guidance services. Quality leadership and statewide participation will make a difference in the lives of all students.

Of course, reform must be balanced with responsibility. Programs must be evidence-based, highly successful best practices and meet standards that drive New Mexico into the future. Increased funding for schools may be accompanied by increased documentation and oversight. Those who are affected by — and support through paying taxes — education deserve feedback from the schools. Accountability is not just between the school district and the Public Education Department; the business community and general public need to know how schools are doing and what more needs to be done.

While change is hard, it is possible. Over time, New Mexico can develop a compelling education program and set a new international standard. We can provide our children with the rich, diverse education they need — and deserve — to achieve success for themselves and for our shared future. The planning begins this session. Please join us as we continue our work to make New Mexico number one!