

Mixed Reviews on School Grading Plan

By Hailey Heinz / Journal Staff Writer on Tue, Oct 11, 2011



Albuquerque Public Schools officials gave mixed reviews Monday night to the Public Education Department's proposal for how A-F grades should be assigned to schools.

Some board members said they were pleased the proposal included factors like attendance and the number of students in extracurriculars.

Others were leery, with board member David Peercy saying that it lacked the specific details necessary for him to make an informed judgment about it.

He pointed to a key item in the proposal, which says each elementary and middle school will be graded on a 100-point scale. Forty points will be assigned for "student performance, including achievement on the New Mexico Standards-Based Assessment."

"It's still not clear what we mean when we talk about academic success," Peercy said. "So if 40 points is the maximum, how do I get 40 points? How do I get 35 points? We'd have to guess."

During its regular session in January, the Legislature passed a bill to assign A-F grades to schools statewide. It was left to the PED to decide how those grades should be assigned.

The PED's current proposal is a draft, and the department has planned two hearings to gather public input. One is scheduled for Oct. 31, from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. in Santa Fe at the Jerry Apodaca Education Building. The second is scheduled for Nov. 2, from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. in Alamogordo in the board of education meeting room.

APS Superintendent Winston Brooks told the board his biggest concern is a provision that says the PED will annually publish on its website and inform districts about "the additional academic indicators it will use to rate public schools and how much weight will be applied to each indicator."

"What that means to me is that the rules can change every year," Brooks said. "I don't know if I would call that a deal-breaker or not, but it's very serious."

Brooks said he worries that if the rules change often, schools and parents will be left without a baseline, and will not be able to tell if their schools are genuinely improving, losing ground or staying the same.

Richard Bowman and Sade Bonilla, who are working with APS through the Harvard Strategic Data Project, prepared a list of their questions and concerns, which they presented to the board. Bowman said he is particularly concerned about the way high schools are evaluated, because three-fourths of a high school grade would be based on the performance of juniors. In high schools, only 11th-graders take the New Mexico Standards-Based Assessment.

According to Bowman and Bonilla's report, this "ignores the common knowledge that the majority of students who drop out do so before 11th grade spring SBA testing. This creates an incentive for schools to push out children before the 11th grade testing window opens."

Board members will pose their questions at a Wednesday regional meeting of the New Mexico School Boards Association, where PED officials are expected to take questions on the matter.

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