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 Editorials

Editorial: There's a teacher shortage; it's time to reward them

By Albuquerque Journal Editorial Board
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In the first official week of summer, it's hard to think about school starting up in just over a month. But it's important that everyone who values public education and the teachers who deliver it do just that. Because New Mexico, like most every state in the nation, is short of teachers.

Some of that shortage may undoubtedly be attributed to disenchantment with Gov. Susana Martinez's education reforms and former Secretary of Education Hanna Skandera's introduction of performance-based teacher evaluations. But the fact is that after the last round of evaluations, New Mexico had more highly effective and exemplary teachers than ever before, that student test scores now count for just 35 percent of a teacher's grade at most, and thousands more students are able to read and do math at grade level. In 2017, slightly over 3 percent of the state's K-12 teachers were rated ineffective, while 74.3 percent were rated effective, highly effective or exemplary.

So rather than focus on the eval red herring that Martinez/Skandera critics keep trotting out, how about focusing on what would make New Mexico teachers' jobs not only easier, but also more rewarding?

- Like getting more funding directly to those teachers' classrooms. In the past legislative session, House Bill 180 would have ensured more money went straight to classrooms instead of administration, and would have mandated real-time electronic reporting to save teachers and districts time and money on data collection. It didn't even get out of its first House committee.
- Like ensuring greater participation in, and more opportunities for, free teacher training and engagement. This month, around 1,300 teachers participated in the New Mexico Teacher Summit, two days and 300 workshops led by teachers, for teachers. Everything from teacher wellness to how to best help homeless students, to specific take-outs on Istation, and other tests and graduation and science standards. The teachers heard directly from Martinez that their work with our children is valuable and

to “remember what you hold in your hand ... and don’t ever let go.” They heard directly from acting Education Secretary Christopher Ruskowski that their work is dynamic and cutting edge, and making a huge difference in their students’ and peers lives. And they heard from each other how to handle the many situations that teacher education programs can’t begin to prepare you for. It’s no wonder that in three short years, Teacher Summit enrollment is up from the original 300 teachers.

- Like getting more educators into data-driven mentoring. The New Mexico Public Education Department has also increased its Teachers Pursuing Excellence and Principals Pursuing Excellence programs, and since 2015, graduates in turn have helped students improve at a higher rate.

- Like rewarding teachers monetarily for jobs well done. This year, NMPED included \$5 million in the governor’s budget to provide bonuses for highly ranked teachers – \$5,000 for exemplary teachers, and \$10,000 for exemplary math and science teachers. That’s real money that shows teachers they are valued and should help some join, and others stay, in the profession.

Data from the U.S. Department of Education for the 2017-18 school year showed that teacher shortages were affecting every state in the country. This coming year, Albuquerque Public Schools has an estimated 380 teacher and 90 educational assistant job openings for a student body of about 84,000. Of extreme need is 200 special education teachers. Las Cruces Public Schools has around 79 openings and, again, the biggest need is for 21 special education teachers. Santa Fe Public Schools has around 84 openings and Rio Rancho Public Schools has some 66 openings, mostly at the secondary level.

Teaching is an extremely difficult job, with society expecting the man or woman at the head of the classroom to be everything from substitute parent to social worker to educator. It is no wonder there are many openings every year. New Mexico’s education leaders, the legislative class of 2019 and the incoming governor should expand on programs that value our great teachers, as well as programs that help their colleagues get to good, better and best.

Because Martinez is right, they hold our children’s futures, and thus our state’s future, in their hands. And it is past time to reward those who make it bright.

This editorial first appeared in the Albuquerque Journal. It was written by members of the editorial board and is unsigned as it represents the opinion of the newspaper rather than the writers.