

Education: Challenging the ‘Status Quo’

Beth Miller, Guest Columnist

Twenty-twenty (2020) has been the year of challenges that has left no rock unturned, including traditional in-class education. COVID-19 has forced our hand to change the way teachers teach and how children learn. No one is at fault, not the kids or the teachers, not the principals nor the parents. Our teachers and principals deserve our deepest gratitude for their dedication as they seek to deliver online education and we applaud our parents who have assisted at home. Together, we will get through these unprecedented times.

As New Mexico looks beyond the pressing problems of the pandemic, attention needs to be directed to the long term focus of creating a quality standard of excellence for education at all levels. Education is not a political issue, rather, it is a moral obligation to future generations. Providing quality education preserves our values and ensures families a means to access jobs and careers. George Washington Carver said it best, “Education is the key to unlock the golden door of freedom.” This is the freedom to be productive citizens, participating in the overall betterment of society.

For many years, New Mexico has hovered at the bottom of national rankings in education. It is time to move the needle from the ‘status quo’ to excellence. Future generations are depending on bold action beginning in the 2021 legislative session. We have all heard the rhetoric of the need to move education out of the bottom rankings, but politics gets in the way. Challenging the status quo simply means proposing new ideas that may be worth exploring. With a proactive approach, a quality standard of excellence can be achieved. Sustainable growth in education requires us to think about the following:

- Give local school districts the power to make decisions for their own communities.
- Implement a standard of ‘best educational practices’ at all levels.
- Improve teacher training and offer incentives for high-achieving college students to enter teacher education programs.
- Insist on accountability for all stakeholders (i.e., school boards, administrators, principals, teachers, and support staff).
- Expect and encourage parents to be key partners in their children’s education.
- Promote high expectations for teachers, creating a standard of excellence and pride in the profession.
- Keep the Land Grant Permanent Fund solvent so that it will ensure quality education for generations to come.
- Increase teacher and staff pay to be a viable competitor.
- Take a serious look at school choice and implement it to help students to achieve and thrive.

The innovative concept of school choice allows state funding to follow the student. Every student receives funding which parents/guardians can use at the school of their choice (public, private, charter or even home school). This will give parents/guardians the opportunity to choose the best avenue of education for their children. Competition creates an initiative for positive change. When there is competition for students, educational outcomes improve.

Investing in a positive change such as school choice will enhance a standard of excellence and put educational funding to efficient use. We can redefine education to make it work for every student and family. School choice is a choice for our kids and their future!