



# EMERGING STRONGER

CHARTING A COURSE TOWARD BETTER STUDENT OUTCOMES

## Albuquerque Public Schools 2024 Legislative Agenda

December 2023

Dear New Mexico Legislators,

Along with the APS Board of Education-approved 2024 Legislative Agenda, Albuquerque Public Schools would like to share with you the district's Emerging Stronger Strategic Plan. The APS legislative agenda aligns with the strategic plan, which serves as a roadmap for achieving board-adopted goals for improved student outcomes. Thank you in advance for taking the time to learn more about our commitment to excellence in education for the public school children of Albuquerque and New Mexico.

### Background

The Albuquerque Public Schools Board of Education has shifted how it governs, prioritizing its work to focus on student outcomes. This Student Outcomes Focused Governance framework centers on the vision and values expressed by the APS community to support what they want APS students to know and be able to do. During dozens of community meetings and countless individual conversations, the community's vision and values became clear – they want schools to focus on literacy, math, post-secondary readiness, and the skills, habits, and mindsets that lead to success. And they expect equity, support, quality instruction, voice, and engagement. The board-adopted goals and guardrails represent the community's vision and values.

The Emerging Stronger Strategic Plan is the district's road map to achieving these goals, focusing on a core mission of providing a world-class education to all students. The strategic plan ensures that everyone in the district knows their role in achieving the goals, and it demands accountability. APS priorities include monitoring student outcomes and aligning the budget and the superintendent's evaluation with a singular focus on improving student outcomes. The components of the APS legislative agenda are critical to the district's success as it works to align resources to its priorities.

### Priority 1: Clear Expectations

New Mexico must strive to provide **High-Quality Education** to *all* students. This means adequate funding for rigorous, grade-level instruction, intervention, enrichment, and learning experiences. The students of Albuquerque Public Schools and the state of New Mexico deserve

equitable access to high-quality, culturally and linguistically responsive curriculum, adequate infrastructure, updated technology, social-emotional learning, and college and career readiness. APS is asking that high-quality instructional materials are adequately funded as well.

## Priority 2: Rigorous Instruction

The key to providing high-quality education to all students is preparing, recruiting, retaining, and supporting **Qualified Staff**. Staffing for an excellent education requires continued investment and support through pay and benefits, including ensuring a stable retirement. Schools need highly-trained and highly qualified educators, administrators, and support staff. The New Mexico Legislature is encouraged to adequately fund the preparation, recruitment, training, and retention of highly skilled professionals.

**Better Benefits** for all employees would help recruit and retain highly qualified professionals. APS provides competitive benefits packages to its employees. To continue to do so and guarantee access to benefits comparable to those available to other state employees, decreasing employee medical insurance costs should not result in increased premiums and out-of-pocket costs for dependents.

## Priority 3: Engaged Students

APS supports **Increased Learning Opportunities** that engage students and improve academic outcomes over merely adding more days to the school year. Increased learning opportunities should be locally designed to meet the unique needs and values of each New Mexico community. School districts can implement research-based practices that excite and engage students, invigorate educators and staff, and work for families. Increased learning opportunities should include more time for classroom and experiential learning, out-of-school time activities for students, smaller class sizes, and embedded professional development for educators. The legislature is encouraged to allow for flexible instructional time that aligns with strategic plans for school improvement.

APS also requests that the legislature allow schools that have more than the state-mandated 1140 instructional hours to decrease their hours to meet the minimum. This impacts the district's two dozen or so Transformational Opportunity Pilot Schools, whose federal funding ends at the end of this school year.

## Priority 4: Responsive and Coordinated Systems

To offset rising construction costs resulting from supply backlogs and labor shortages, APS and school districts statewide need funding for **School Construction, Renovation, and Inflation Stabilization**. Such funding would allow school districts like APS to complete construction projects already approved by voters and the legislature that have stalled due to astronomical labor and materials costs.

Funding for the completion of existing construction projects would also benefit statewide economic development.

Increasing funding for school construction, and renovation would allow school districts like APS to explore creative and collaborative partnerships for safety, learning, and improved student outcomes. For example, APS would like to partner with the City of Albuquerque to expand

violence intervention programs to all high schools; these programs would be similar to those at West Mesa High School and Washington Middle School. In addition, APS and the New Mexico Public Education Department are looking into converting a school impacted by declining enrollment into an Albuquerque Reading Center, where scientifically based reading instruction would be provided to students who need extra support in a setting conducive to improving literacy skills.

APS needs a reliable **Business Cloud Software System** to help ensure secure and transparent business processes. The district's current system is woefully out-of-date. A new system would help with all financial transactions, including budgeting, payroll, procurement, inventory, and accounts payable. It also would be used for state and federal financial reporting.

**Technology Device and Connectivity Funding** is essential to provide an equitable education and core instructional materials for all New Mexico students. School districts are working to ensure all students have a device using Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds, which expire in 2024. The New Mexico Legislature should develop and consistently fund technology devices and connectivity for all students.

**Sufficient Funding for HVAC Upgrades** is needed as school districts add warm summer days to the school year. APS cools 19 million square feet in some of the state's oldest schools, more than two-thirds relying on evaporative (swamp) coolers that aren't effective on hot, humid days. The legislature is encouraged to support funding for improving HVAC throughout the state if we continue to have extended school years.

As New Mexico wrangles with high-profile challenges in addressing academic achievement and educational equity, statewide **School Transportation** is a key component of the promise of educational equity. Students eligible for transportation are less likely to be chronically absent, improving their achievement and educational outcomes. The legislature should look at the current Student Transportation formula and ensure that districts are sufficiently funded and not have to supplement transportation funds from operational. The formula should also provide equitable funding for transportation for magnet schools, which would provide more school choices for students and families.