

## Appendix G: RRPS Press Clips

# ALBUQUERQUE JOURNAL ARCHIVES

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## HIGH SCHOOL TO BE EDUCATION MODEL

August 1, 1998

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**Matthew Franck Journal Staff Writer**

State Administrators To Discuss Reforms

Rio Rancho High School will serve as a model of education reform to school administrators from across the state at a seminar next week. The "A Passion for Excellence: High School Reform in New Mexico" conference at Rio Rancho High is expected to draw more than 250 educators and business leaders on Monday and Tuesday.

Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., is scheduled to headline the event, with a 1 p.m. appearance Monday.

Rio Rancho Principal Katy Harvey said the conference will focus on schools like Rio Rancho High, which she said are trying to reinvent secondary education.

"I think people in this state are looking to Rio Rancho because we are pioneering many things," she said.

Rio Rancho High School, which opened last year, is a \$30 million school funded by Intel Corp. Construction was part of an agreement with Sandoval County, which issued the company \$8 billion in industrial revenue bonds.

At the seminar, educators will explore how to form similar partnerships between businesses and public schools in other parts of the state.

The event is being funded through more than \$37,000 worth of federal and state grants. Half that money is tied to federal school-to-work funds, which seek to involve business officials in teaching students skills that are needed in the local economy.

Bingaman is expected to join a panel discussion Monday that will also feature several prominent Albuquerque-area business leaders.

The seminar will address several high school reform efforts, many of which are being done in some form at Rio Rancho High.

Walter Gibson, **Rio Rancho Public Schools** assistant superintendent, said Rio Rancho High is attracting attention for several reasons, including:

\* Block scheduling, which allows students to receive 48 minutes more of instruction each day, or 20 days worth of classes a year.

\* Integrated instruction, in which teachers try to tie together course work in various disciplines. Students are taught, for example, how math relates to the natural sciences.

\* The attempt to "personalize the school" by dividing students into several smaller groups.

"Personalizing high schools is especially important in New Mexico because our schools are so big," he said. "Studies show that kids often drop out simply because they do not know people at school."

Tim Westerberg and Bob Mackin, two nationally known education reformers, are expected to speak at the event.

Westerberg is the principal of Littleton High School in Littleton, Colo., a school often cited as leading the charge in high school reform efforts.

The conference is also sponsored by the University of New Mexico's College of Education, and the Middle Rio Grande Business and Education Collaborative.

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## HIGH SCHOOL BOASTS LOWER DROPOUT RATE

December 2, 1999

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**Andrea Schoellkopf** Journal Staff Writer

The state's largest high school has one of the lowest dropout rates again this year, according to figures released by the **Rio Rancho Public Schools** on Friday.

Rio Rancho High School's dropout rate fell from 4.16 percent to 3.6 percent this year, which is less than half of last year's statewide average. Superintendent Sue Cleveland called the news "good stuff" for the district.

"We're hoping to do better than a 3.6," Cleveland said. "But it certainly is a good number by anybody's standards. We're proud of the progress we've made."

The 3.6 percent amounts to 116 students who did not return to school this fall.

Cleveland said with large schools, it's often easy to let students slip through the cracks and drop out. She credited the school faculty and staff with keeping kids from leaving.

"This kind of thing doesn't happen by accident," Cleveland said. "This is the result of hard work by teachers and by counselors, who discourage kids from dropping out."

The school, which has 2,751 students, is the largest in New Mexico.

"It is a really big school," said Susan Passell, who is head of the school's Fine Arts Academy, "but built into the school was a lot of personalization."

Rio Rancho High School was built to personalize the classroom experience, with five academies tailored for student interests, Passell said.

"If the kids are enjoying what they're doing, they're going to stay in school," Passell said. "It's not going to seem like it's so hard."

Passell was speaking on behalf of acting Principal Gary Tripp, who was working with a Florida school that wants to use Rio Rancho as its model.

Officials also noted that Rio Rancho opened its first alternative school this year, Independence High, which has 190 students now working toward their diplomas.

"There's quite a few kids over there that might have been at risk for dropping out at a certain point," Passell said.

Although last year's official enrollment was 2,722, Rio Rancho High School saw 3,219 students enroll some leaving during various times during the year. Of those students, there are 116 were considered as dropouts this year.

The rate counts students who have left and haven't graduated or enrolled at another school by the 40th day of the following school year.

Nationally, the most recent dropout rate available was 4.6 percent in 1997, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

The state's dropout rate last year was 7.7 percent.

Albuquerque Public Schools have not yet released the dropout rates for its schools, though the rates for the 1996-97 school year had La Cueva's rate at 2.33 percent, followed by Eldorado at 5 percent. Cibola High School, where Rio Rancho students had previously attended, had an 8.41 percent dropout rate.

PHOTO: Color

CLEVELAND: "We're hoping to do better"

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## Report Praises Schools

January 17, 2003

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**Elaine D. Briseno** Journal Staff Writer

State Feedback Presented Monday

Rio Rancho school board members are celebrating recent feedback from the state because they say it indicates that the district is doing a good job.

Ruth LeBlanc, an education consultant and the **Rio Rancho Public Schools** accreditation liaison with the State Department of Education, presented a report to the school board during a district workshop Monday.

The report was the culmination of an accreditation process conducted by the state and New Mexico North Central Association Commission on Schools.

Board president Lisa Cour said she was excited about the state's feedback.

"That report told us we are doing a good job. It's nice when someone from outside the district recognizes what we are trying to do," she said.

The report says Rio Rancho students are making progress and school curriculums are aligned to state standards. It also says the district has a knowledge of the needs of its students and parents and the district office provides leadership and support for its schools. It also takes note of the district's strong community partnerships.

"Rio Rancho is doing wonderful things," LeBlanc said. "It's obvious they have a systematic approach in place."

The district follows a business-based method called Baldrige to assess its performance and make improvements. The approach focuses on constant improvement by regularly evaluating student progress and setting new goals based on that evaluation. Malcolm Baldrige was secretary of commerce and a proponent of quality management as a key to national prosperity.

Cour said the state's feedback tells her the district is right on track.

"In the beginning, we were scrambling to get the district going," she said. "Then we brought our high school students into the district. Then we were focused on the Rio Rancho Mid-High School. Now we have really hit our stride."

Cour has served on the board for six years.

Board member Reinaldo A.Z. Garcia said he also feels the district is doing a good job of educating students.

"It sounds like they were pretty pleased with us," he said.

Board member Joel Sherman went a step further saying the feedback indicates that Rio Rancho is one of the best districts around.

"I think the state gave us reason to feel our district is one of the top, if not the top, districts in New Mexico," he said. "I'm very pleased to say the least."

As for improvement, Cour said the district needs to continue its efforts.

"We need to continue to look at data and research and continue to listen to and train our staff so they can continue to grow," she said.

LeBlanc said the district needs to work on breaking down its data by gender and socioeconomics.

"It's vitally important so that teachers are aware of how all students are performing," LeBlanc said. "You can learn from that. It gives information that all pieces are in place and effective."

The state used a different process this year to evaluate the district. It used information provided to Quality New Mexico, submitted by each school, to assess the district.

Quality New Mexico was created to award and encourage businesses, schools and other organizations that meet high-performance Baldrige-based criteria. Quality New Mexico board members consist of people from the local business community.

Superintendent Sue Cleveland said it is this method that made the accreditation process useful because of the feedback it provided.

"It's good to have people from the outside look at our district," she said. "We need to continue to link results to the process. Educators love to talk about processes. But you have to look at results, too. You have to go back and see if what you are doing is working."

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