

Alamogordo Public Schools are Top in State
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It has been said that data is hard to argue with. According to the Nation's Report Card, New Mexico ranks near the bottom of the list in the United States in 4th and 8th grade math, science, and reading. No Child Left Behind is causing public school districts, schools, and teachers to make sweeping changes in order to keep up with the challenge of meeting the goal of one hundred percent proficient by the year 2014.

Here is the good news. The Alamogordo Public School District cares about kids. APS is full of hard working and dedicated professional teachers and administrators that are making a difference in the lives of children.

Schools in New Mexico are rated every year based on the New Mexico Standards Based Assessment (NMSBA) that is given in March to every third thru ninth and eleventh grader in the state. The scores from this test, along with daily attendance rates, and participation rates on the NMSBA, are used to rate each school and district in the state. Each school and district receives a rating of either "Met AYP" or "AYP Not Met". Each year, the New Mexico Public Education Department sets an annual measurable objective (AMO) for math and reading. This AMO is the lowest acceptable percentage of students that can pass, or be proficient, on the NMSBA. Each year this percentage will increase until it reaches 100% in 2014. If a school or district does not have enough students pass the NMSBA, they do not meet Adequate Yearly Progress or AYP.

Once again, it is hard to argue with the data. Alamogordo Public Schools had thirteen of sixteen schools meet AYP for the 2006-07 school year. When compared to the rest of the state with comparable sized districts, APS **ranks number one** with 81.25% of schools meeting AYP. This percentage is greater than the 2005-06 school year, with Sacramento and Academy del Sol meeting AYP after not meeting AYP last year.

What is the big deal about this new assessment? This high stakes test assesses students on concepts that are taught in class everyday. Questions from the NMSBA come directly out of the New Mexico Standards and Benchmarks. The Standards and Benchmarks are the blueprint for curriculum in New Mexico schools. The difference between this assessment and other assessments that have been given in the past is the critical thinking writing component. Roughly 70% of the test is short answer or essay called constructed response. These constructed response questions are worth 50% of the total points. The constructed response questions are critical thinking questions used to determine if students know concepts, rather than just facts. In other words, if a student does all of the multiple choice items correctly, and does not attempt constructed response questions, the best the student can hope for is a 50%. Critical thinking skills are a must on this test, as they are in life. As a result, teachers are helping students understand not only basic facts, but also how to determine the correct answer of complex questions using higher level thinking skills. With the help of our excellent teaching staff, students are truly become great thinkers.

APS is in the third year of a new reading initiative targeting all students. This reading initiative began with kindergarten thru third grade and has moved up into the middle schools for this school year. APS understands that if students cannot read, they will not

succeed in the classroom or in life. This year, all elementary schools met AYP, and we have an action plan in place for all of our schools. The district is progressing towards deploying a math initiative designed to build successful math students. This new math initiative will be implemented this year.

For the first time in New Mexico's assessment history, schools are able to use state test results to impact student learning. Teachers and administrators in Alamogordo Public Schools have been working diligently over the past 3 years to improve the quality of instruction for all students. The hard work is becoming evident. Encourage the teachers and staff at your local public school. They are working hard every day to provide an excellent education to each student in the Alamogordo Public School District.