

Superintendent Mike Hyatt weighs in

ALBUQUERQUE—Judge Sarah Singleton's most recent order in *Yazzie/Martinez v. State of New Mexico* makes clear that the court expects a major overhaul of the state's public school system to bring it into compliance with the constitution and other state laws.

The extensive 600-page "findings of fact and conclusions of law" describes in great detail the need for a multicultural education framework, improved bilingual and English language learner programming, universal and quality full-day pre-kindergarten, sufficient access to extended learning opportunities like summer school and after school programming, social services, smaller class sizes, and increased teacher pay and support to recruit and retain high-quality educators.

"The court's ruling couldn't be more clear: the programs and services that work must be made available immediately to all children, not just some children," said Gail Evans, lead counsel for the Yazzie plaintiffs for the New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty. "The state has failed a generation of children but now has a historic opportunity, and a legal obligation, to rise to the occasion and provide our children the educational opportunities they need to succeed. No more excuses. No more nickel and diming our kids. The time to fix our schools is now."

The court's order mandates that the state take immediate steps, by April 15, 2019, to ensure New Mexico's schools have the resources necessary to prepare students for college and career.

"I just want what every parent wants, for my children to graduate ready to pursue their dreams.

Every New Mexican child deserves that," said Wilhelmina Yazzie, the lead plaintiff in *Yazzie v. State of New Mexico*. "My son's school in Gallup doesn't have enough resources to provide basic materials for all the students, much less offer the culturally relevant programs he needs. Our children are important, and they are just as capable as any other children in the nation. It's time for New Mexico to truly transform our public education system – small fixes just don't cut it."

The judge's order provides legal backing to the Transform Education NM platform, a blueprint for action, supported by research and evidence at trial, that sets forth the initial necessary steps to bring the state's education system into compliance with the constitution. The platform was developed by hundreds of educational leaders, families, tribal leaders, and the lawsuit plaintiffs.

"Our recommendations for overhauling our school system don't just constitute a nice wish-list but are requirements to meet the basic needs of our students," said Veronica Garcia, superintendent of Santa Fe Public Schools, which is one of the plaintiffs in the Yazzie/Martinez lawsuit. "The law is on the side of students across the state. Policymakers need to pass the education legislation necessary to satisfy the judge's order. We won't stop advocating until every child in New Mexico has the educational opportunities they deserve."

"From students to teachers, from curriculum to funding, from early childhood to graduation, we have the unique opportunity to transform our public education system and do right by our students," said Adan Delgado, superintendent of Cuba Independent District, one of the other plaintiffs.

"At-risk and Native American students have been left behind for too long in New Mexico," said Mike Hyatt, superintendent of Gallup McKinley County Schools, also a plaintiff in the lawsuit. "We look forward to working with legislators and the state to turn around our education system to fulfill its constitutional obligation to meet the needs of all students."

By Maria Archuleta
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