

New public education secretary visits Gallup McKinley County Schools

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Sun Correspondent
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Kurt Steinhaus is the new Secretary of Education for New Mexico's Public Education Department and this month he made his first visit to Gallup McKinley County Schools District.

Steinhaus is not new to the world of education. He's seen the inside of a school district office before.

Prior to his new post, he was the superintendent at Los Alamos Public Schools. According to the NMPED's website, he has previous experience with the NMPED as the department's deputy secretary and it's pre-kindergarten czar and education policy advisor to Gov. Bill Richardson.

In his new role, Steinhaus is touring New Mexico school districts to meet with students and staff. On Sept. 23 Thoreau Elementary, Thoreau Middle School, and Thoreau High School were on the itinerary.

He also took time to meet with Gallup-McKinley County Schools' curriculum director and business manager. Steinhaus spoke with district leaders about how he could help them at the state level.

In an interview with the *Sun*, Steinhaus said he wants to give school districts the ability to make

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more of their own decisions at the local level.

He noted that GMCS has its own form for walk-throughs. A walk-through is a method schools and district leaders use to monitor a new teacher's performance.

Steinhaus said he would be looking into the possibility of doing away with the state's walk-through form, so districts can handle that situation themselves.

Steinhaus also reviewed some of his other goals for his time as NMPED Secretary.

One of those has to do with his declaration of the 2021-2022 as the "Year of Literacy," something he announced publicly in a media release Aug. 10.

"When I say 'The Year of Literacy' I'm talking about children learning to read books that are written by authors from their communities," Steinhaus said in an interview with the *Sun*. "We want them to learn their language and their culture, and then we want them to learn the language and cultures of the world."

In 2019, only 34 percent of New Mexico public school students were rated "proficient and above" in reading.

Steinhaus said he also has long-term goals, which can be broken up into three individual parts.

His first concern is the social/emotional well-being of New Mexico schools' students and staff.

"I want to be first in the country in the well-being of our students and staff, and have the kinds of support that they need for behavioral health, or if they're feeling anxiety. Because if you don't feel good and you don't feel safe, you're not going to learn anything," Steinhaus explained.

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His second goal is to make New Mexico become the fastest growing state in the nation when it comes to student learning.

His third goal is to be the state where teachers most want to teach, based on salaries, benefits, and working conditions.

“I [wanted to become the NMPED Secretary] because it’s a wonderful opportunity to add some value and be a team player with all the other educators in New Mexico to do what’s best for children and families,” Steinhaus said.

GMCS Superintendent Michael Hyatt said he’s excited to work with Steinhaus.

“I think he’s willing to communicate and listen and be a partner with us and I look forward to that relationship,” Hyatt stated.

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