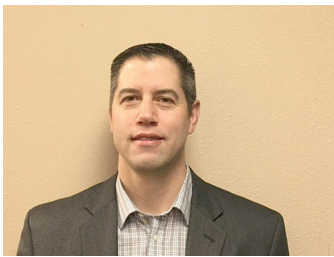


## **PED report card: Six schools raise grade level**

Written by By Babette Herrmann Sun Editor  
Friday, 25 August 2017 02:57

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### **Scores more fall one, two grades**

School grades released by New Mexico Public Education Department Aug. 22, revealed that many of Gallup McKinley County Schools need improvements made – but the overall picture for the district looks rosy.

A handful of schools shined by jumping up a grade or two, while others fell one to two grades.

PED Secretary-designate Christopher Ruszkowski, answered questions for reporters during a school grades pre-release press conference by phone Aug 22, giving an overview of New Mexico. When asked about GMCS' results, he said it's a "complicated picture."

"Gallup, overall is on the rise," Ruszkowski said, but he cautioned that from "a deep look at the data" lower performing schools remain static on growth.

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“There’s some specific, targeted challenges,” he said, adding that the district needs to take a close look at the data in order to continue on the path of improving lower performing schools.

Ruszkowski noted that Twin Lakes Elementary and Catherine Miller Elementary are among the lowest performing schools in the state.

On the flipside, though, Tse Yi Gai High made the list of the top 100 performing schools in New Mexico, ranking at No. 78.

In all, six schools dropped two grades when compared to last year’s results. Crownpoint Elementary went from C to F; David Skeet Elementary went from B to D; Indian Hills Elementary from A to C; Thoreau Elementary from B to D; Tohatchi Middle from C to F; and Twin Lakes Elementary from C to F.

Additionally, eight schools dropped by one grade this year. Catherine Miller Elementary went from D to F; Chief Manuelito from B to C; Crownpoint Middle from A to B; John F. Kennedy Middle from B to C; Middle College Charter from B to C; Rocky View Elementary from C to D; Thoreau High from C to D; and Tohatchi High from B to C.

In contrast, Ramah Elementary and Juan de Onate Elementary leapt upward two grades this year, with Ramah earning a B, and Juan de Onate taking the coveted A grade.

Lincoln Elementary and Tse Yi Gai High, both earned an A. And Washington Elementary and Jefferson Elementary schools increased by one grade to a B.

The PED measures a school’s total grade, by averaging seven grades regarding: current standing; school improvement: improvement of higher-performing students: improvement of lower-performing students; opportunity to learn: graduation; and college and career readiness. Schools receive bonus points for “reducing truancy, promoting extracurricular activities, engaging families, and using technology.”

## **ONE PRINCIPAL QUESTIONS DOWNGRADE**

Middle College Charter High School, which has a history of sitting at the top, grade-wise, fell from a “B” to a “C” this year. It’s a result that has Principal Dr. Rob Hunter reeling, and he’s searching for answers to the drop in grade, as the school excels in reading and math when compared to other district high schools.

He’s encouraging parents to “look at the numbers, not the letters” on the second page of their child’s school report card.

Hunter is referring to PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) compared to the state’s overall standing in math and reading.

Middle College Charter’s proficiency percentage in reading tops 54 percent, and math proficiency ranks at 19 percent. These results are based on three years of student performance. Hunter noted that in the Land of Enchantment, the average in reading is at 37 percent, and math 20 percent. So, the students in his classrooms are excelling in their reading skills and nearly parallel in math skills when compared to state averages.

Hunter noted the PARCC scores should carry more weight as the results show “a student’s readiness for college.”

While the school, earned an “A” in the opportunity to learn and college and career readiness categories, the graduation rate grade came in at a dismal “D.”

Hunter said the low grade is tied to the amount of credits students need to earn to graduate from Middle College Charter. His school requires 29 credits and the remainder of the GMCS district’s high schools require 24.5 credits, he said.

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He seemed vexed by the poor grades in the categories of school improvement (F), improvement of higher-performing students (D), and improvement of lowest-performing students (F).

“It sends the wrong message to parents,” he said. “These grades are not an accurate reflection of how students are performing.”

Hunter, who has worked for the district since 1995, has served as Middle College Charter’s principal for the past three years. The school currently has about 100 students enrolled.

Hunter said he plans on filing an appeal with PED.

## **SUPERINTENDENT WEIGHS IN**

GMCS Superintendent Mike Hyatt said some dynamics changed in the PED’s grading system this year.

In contrast to Hunter’s statement about proficiency not being figured enough into the grading, Hyatt said PED’s increased reliance on PARCC score proficiency may have hurt some schools this year.

He also said the pool of schools PED used to compare GMCS against has risen from 30 to about 100. And he’s not clear whether these other New Mexico schools share similarities to schools here.

And while some school principals and teachers lament their grade, and a handful celebrate, Hyatt echoed Ruszkowski’s praise that GMCS is growing at a fast rate – at a faster rate than any other district in the state.

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To help students continue to climb up the academic ladder, Hyatt said the district is creating a curriculum that closely aligns with common core standards. It's aimed at helping students to perform better on standardized PARCC testing. While the curriculum undergoes a makeover, many students already have put their best foot forward, by excelling in their studies.

To be exact, Hyatt said 709 students increased their proficiency over the past three years.

"It's the biggest accomplishment our district has seen in 25 years," he said.

When asked if he was surprised by the grades any of the district schools received, he mentioned Tobe Turpen Elementary and Gallup Middle School. Both schools maintained their grade level, with Turpen at a "C" and Gallup Mid a "B." He said Ruszkowski visited the district some weeks back, and praised those two schools as top performers in the state.

Meanwhile, Hyatt credited parents for increasingly becoming involved with their children's education in this rural area, where it's a challenge for some students to get to school each day.

"We appreciate their support and we'll continue to make adjustments in helping their students become more successful," he said.

**Visit:** <http://aae.ped.state.nm.us>

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