

## GMCS recognizes teachers, administrators

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent  
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### New school district grades see Gallup outperform ABQ, Santa Fe

The Gallup-McKinley County Board of Education presented awards to 11 teachers and administrators at the Dec. 5 regular meeting of the Gallup-McKinley County Board of Education. The recipients were rated exemplary by the New Mexico Public Education Department earlier this year.

“This is the school district recognizing individuals who have previously been recognized by the state,” Gallup Schools Superintendent Frank Chiapetti said. “The awards are well-deserved.”

Those receiving awards included Peter Ippel, a fifth grade teacher at Indian Hills Elementary;

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Marie Diaz, a first grade teacher at Indian Hills; Felicia Sam, an instructional support coach at Lincoln Elementary; Lanny Ray, principal at Ramah High School; Irene Fuller a math teacher at Miyamura High; Carla Zecca, a math teacher at Gallup High; Yulia Nichols, also a math teacher at Miyamura; Kim Esparza, a kindergarten teacher at Rocky View Elementary School; Larrine Platero, a kindergarten teacher at Crownpoint Elementary; Wendy Sturru, a kindergarten teacher at Thoreau; and Marie Chamberlain, a third grade teacher at Tohatchi Elementary School.

“It’s an honor that I respect,” Ray, of Ramah High School, said. “This is much appreciated.”

There were originally 12 teachers that were supposed to be recognized, but one teacher, Verna Leep of Thoreau Middle School, left the district a short while ago, Teri Fraizer, public information officer at GMCS, who presented the awards during the meeting, said.

Also at the school board meeting, a memorandum of understanding was approved between the district and the National Indian Youth Leadership Project.

The agreement runs from January to June of 2017, and covers pregnancy prevention education with a focus on outdoor activities like hiking and rock climbing, Matt Baker, an educator with the nonprofit organization, said. Baker noted that the group has worked with Chief Manuelito Middle School in past years and would like to partner with Gallup-McKinley County Schools with respect to future grant opportunities.

After the meeting, Chiapetti touted the Nov. 29 release of statewide school district grades given by the Public Education Department. The Gallup-McKinley County School district earned a “C” grade. Gallup outscored Albuquerque and Santa Fe in the grading. Those schools received a “D” grade on the PED district report card.

The district grades are based on an average of school grades which take into effect attendance, graduation rates and surveys.

Gallup has steadily improved from 2012, according to PED data. In 2012 Gallup received a “D,”

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in 2013 a “C,” in 2014 a “D,” in 2015 a “C” and in 2016 the “C.”

All in all, New Mexico school districts have showed improvement the past year with respect to the grading system. The amount of “A” and “B” grades are up 3.3 percent and “D” and “F” grades are down 1 percent. Just 22.5 percent of school districts around the state saw declines in 2016 compared with 31 percent in 2015, according to the released data.

“We are continuing to make progress,” New Mexico Public Education Secretary Hanna Skandera said during a conference last week on the matter. “We are closing gaps in our district grades.” Skandera also said New Mexico schools still have work to do, but she was pleased with the recent district results.

School grades were brought into the fore in 2011 as part of a mechanism to raise standards. New Mexico is traditionally at the bottom of the totem pole when it comes to student test scores and graduation rates.

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