

Governor pushes to expand Early College High School concept

LAS CRUCES — Gov. Susana Martinez visited Arrowhead Park Early College High School Thursday afternoon to see the school firsthand and draw attention to its example.

Martinez has asked the Legislature for \$500,000 to replicate the school's model at four to five other sites in the state.

"I brag about this school everywhere I go," Martinez told a ninth grade history class. "I want to multiply this school all throughout the state."

Arrowhead Park students will graduate from high school with an associate's degree. No students have dropped out of the school in the three years since it opened. Most of the school's population are minority and first-generation college students.

The governor and Education Secretary-designate Hanna Skandera toured the school and chatted with students, along with New Mexico State University President Manuel Pacheco, Doña Ana Community College President Margie Huerta and NMSU Regent Kari Mitchell who joined in the visit.

Martinez even offered her arm for poking for an 11th grade anatomy and physiology experiment.

She also presented student Maria Guadalupe Carrillo with a certificate of achievement. The high school junior has already earned 55 college

credits.

Martinez spoke with a handful of students in the freshman history class, temporarily interrupting their work drafting their own Declaration of Independence to ask why they chose to attend the school. Some mentioned more challenging classes, others the lure of free college credits and minimizing post-university debt.

While walking down the hall, the governor stopped to ask sophomore Anthem Furth, who was reading "The Count of Monte Cristo," about his career goals. Furth said he wants to study aerospace or mechanical engineering.

The proposed four or five similar schools wouldn't necessarily require new buildings like Arrowhead Park's, Martinez said, but they would require more than just offering dual credit options.

Here, "they help them understand that, at the end of the day, they don't just have a diploma, they have an associate's degree or are ready for the work force," she said. "Or you see the light at the end of the tunnel: 'I have two years (of college complete) and no debt.'"

Las Cruces Superintendent Stan Rounds said the district has talked extensively with the governor and her team about the school, but "finding out from students is the most important thing."

Rounds said he thinks other districts can successfully replicate Arrowhead Park's model if there is the right community buy-in.

"You have to have both sides: the education community and the business community holding hands," he said. "There's a science to it. I can teach the science to it, but I can't teach the heart."

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