

New Mexico improves graduation rate 15 percentage points in five years

LAS CRUCES >> New Mexico's public high school graduation rate has improved at one of the fastest rates in the country, according to a new Education Week report.

New Mexico's four-year graduation rate [rose 15 percentage points](#) from 2007 to 2012, according to the [report](#) in the national newspaper covering education.

In 2007, 59 percent of students earned a high school diploma in four years. Five years later, 74 percent of students earned diplomas on time.

Only the District of Columbia made greater strides, jumping 16 percentage points to 71 percent of students graduating on time, according to the report.

"It goes to show that what we're doing — we're on the right track," Gov. Susana Martinez said at a campaign stop Thursday in Las Cruces. "... We raised the bar."

New Mexico still falls toward the bottom of the pack nationwide, however. Only Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, the District of Columbia and Nevada reported lower rates than New Mexico's.

The national average four-year graduation rate is 81 percent.

"We have a lot of work to do still," Martinez said. "We're gonna keep growing. We want to keep moving that needle up. ... But now we have the proof, the data that we are on the right track,"

New Mexico schools have done a better job of tailoring education to individual students' needs over the past few years, said Wendi Miller-Tomlinson, director of secondary education at Las Cruces Public Schools.

"Now we pay really close attention to how individual student groups are performing — special education students, low-income students, migrant students, English Language Learners," she said. "That data monitoring gives us better information, and we can better craft instruction to meet their needs."

Schools are also better at tracking students and reporting graduation rates and other statistics, making the numbers more accurate, she said.

Thursday's meet and greet with Martinez at the Doña Ana Republican Party headquarters was one of her first campaign stops after Tuesday's primary election.

Education has been a crux of Martinez's tenure, including implementing letter grades for schools, establishing teacher evaluations based on student test scores and her failed effort to hold back students who can not read proficiently in third grade.

Many of the measures have drawn ire from teachers and school districts, especially as they increasingly rely on standardized tests to judge progress.

Martinez also criticized President Barack Obama's recent decision to establish the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument and slammed Gary King, who received the Democratic gubernatorial nomination in Tuesday's primary. Martinez likened King to former Gov. Bill Richardson, whose term was marred by "pay to play" corruption.

The Education Week graduation report looks at only one of many ways to calculate graduation rates.

The report calculates "average freshman graduation rate," which looks at the count of students by grade and the overall diploma count. The measure is slightly less accurate than looking at the "average cohort graduation rate," which takes into account students moving into and out of the district.

New Mexico's cohort rate was 70 percent for 2012, four percentage points lower than the freshman rate.

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