

League of Women Voters of Greater Las Cruces
Education Study Committee

Meeting with National Education Association – NM

March 1, 2011, 4 p.m., NEA Office, 225 East Idaho, Suite 34, Las Cruces

National Education Association of New Mexico: Kathy Porter, Director

National Education Association – New Mexico – Las Cruces Chapter:
Patrick Sánchez, President, and Mary Parr-Sánchez, Alternate Director
Debra Hanson, UniServ Consultant, NEA,

National Education Association – New Mexico, CSEC – Las Cruces (Classified Workers)
Irma Valdespino, President
Teresa Ybarra, Representative for Education Assistants in NEA and AFT

About the NEA: The National Education Association (NEA) describes itself as the voice of education professionals. Its vision is a great public school for every student. Its mission is to advocate for education professionals and to unite members and the nation to fulfill the promise of public education to prepare every student to succeed in a diverse and interdependent world.

NEA was founded in 1859 and the American Teachers Associations joined NEA in 1966. It represents teachers, education support professionals, higher education faculty & staff, student who are in education programs, substitute educators, and administrators.

[Source: *NEA Today*, January/February 2011, Masthead, p. 6 and Internet web site]

NEA In Las Cruces: There are about 1,100 members (61% of all teachers) in the Las Cruces Chapter of NEA. Although not all teachers join, all non NEA teachers get the same benefits negotiated by NEA. Cost for joining the union for teachers is about \$23 per paycheck or about \$565 per year. The current three year contract is negotiated annually using an Interest Based Bargaining (IBB) method. IBB is a bargaining method and philosophy that always keeps the children's best interests at the center of the bargaining process. Administrators bargain with union representatives. Administrators are also members of NEA. A group known as the LCPS Bargaining Team represents the Board of Education in the bargaining process.

The average salary for certified teachers is approximately \$42,000-\$43,000 per year. Teachers have experienced a pay cut for the last three years. There is a three-tier salary system that was initiated by the State of New Mexico. The highest among the tiers is Level 3 where salaries are approximately \$50,000. Tier 3 is gained by establishing a dossier that reflects additional professional training or a higher educational degree beyond the master's degree, which is required for Tier 2. Some teachers choose not to move up to Tier 3.

Irma Valdespino, President, and Teresa Ybarra, member, of the CSEC, the classified employees branch of NEA, spoke about the union function with the employees who assist in the classroom and ensure a safe, well-maintained environment in the school system (e.g., education assistant, cafeteria workers, maintenance and landscaping employees).

The NEA and LCPS have a cordial relationship under the current LCPS administration. It is described as a partnership involving trust and respect and with a focus on the students. The Interest Based Bargaining method helps to keep the relationship non-adversarial.

The NEA sees the School Board as an advisory body with legal responsibility for hiring and firing the superintendent. Sometimes NEA does endorse school board candidates.

Strengths and Weakness of Las Cruces Public Schools (LCPS): The teachers ability to adapt to change is the systems greatest strength. The teachers are good and caring people at all levels of the K-12 system. The overall drop out rate has decreased from 50% to 40% as of last year, 2010.

Weaknesses were identified in not having “wrap-around” services available for the children. These include special help for children who might have a deceased parent, an incarcerated parent, or other home issues that impact the student’s ability to learn. One-fourth of the children’s parents are not bilingual (do not speak English). This presents special challenges in communicating with the home about the progress of students.

There is a lack of available information for only Spanish speaking parents of English Learner students (ELL) during the school registration process that describes the various options and opportunities, including a course guide printed in Spanish.

Bullying and general harassment, including sexual orientation, remain issues. LCPS has begun to address the problem of bullying with a new anti-bullying campaign, but there is still much to do. Bullying in athletics. is a problem because parents are concerned that punitive action will be taken against the student athlete if the parent complains. Bullying is not necessarily related to gang activity. The rise of the use of electronic devices (cell phones, computers, the Internet, etc.) have contributed to the increase of bullying and the general decline of civility.

The LCPS District is currently drafting a policy on sexual harassment but not harassment in general. A harassment form is available online at the LCPS website for parents to fill out and turn into the administration if they think their child is experiencing harassment at school. The school counselors work with children experiencing harassment problems.

Social Promotion: Currently, the NM legislators are looking at ending social promotion and retaining students in grades 3, 5, and 8. The individuals present were concerned about the impact on students should retention legislation be implemented. Although everyone recognized that some students were not progressing as well as required by adequate yearly progress (AYP) standards, retention removes the student from his/her peer group, and stigma for the retained child is often the result. An alternative option was suggested of having an individual class set up for retained children (such as an in-between 3rd and 4th grade) that groups the retained children together and then moves students into regular classes when they have progressed might be a better solution. What to do about students who haven’t progressed in their current class to the next grade level was recognized as an area for instructional improvement.

Teaching to the Test: There is tremendous pressure to teach to the test. The situation is complicated because decisions are made about this issue by state legislators for the local school system level. The Baldrige business model is applied, and math and reading are the test targets.

The Baldrige model emphasizes data-driven decision making—basing decisions about allocation of resources on the data accumulated by a school system, including test scores, grades, suspensions, absenteeism, participation in extracurricular activities, teacher salaries, etc. According to the study’s authors, this focus lends itself well to implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act, which calls for mandatory testing of students in grades 3 through 8, among other things.

[Source: ACT News, “Baldrige Criteria Show Promise as Model for School Reform, NO Child Left Behind Implementation, November 21, 2001.]

New Mexico Public Education Department establishes standards based assessment with identified benchmarks and performance criteria. MAP (Measure of Academic Progress) tests are available for grades 3-5 that test student skills in math, reading, and science. These tests are administered in April and October and provide results that allow teachers to identify skills of

students that need specific attention. The Individual Education Program (IEP) of the student is adjusted to reflect the test results. Special education students do not do well on the MAP tests. Teachers are concerned that the over emphasis on test is squelching the students' intellectual curiosity and interest in learning. It appears to some teachers that as test scores go up, overall intellectual skills are going down.

Teacher Performance Evaluation: Experienced teachers are evaluated once a year and new teachers twice a year. Evaluation is based on an individual professional development plan (PDP), an educational plan for student success (EPSS), and administrative goals on which there is mutual agreement.

The ideal teacher evaluation would be done by the principal who has visited the classroom many times throughout the year.

Educating the New Teacher: Potential new teachers go through the curriculum at the NMSU College of Education. They do their student teaching in LCPS or other local school systems in the state. The relationship between LCPS and the NMSU program could be closer to reflect the needs identified in the classroom that could be translated into curriculum changes in the College of Education. Longer internships for the student-teachers would give them more experience with the diversity of the classroom. Laboratory schools that would have students attend classes in a different environment than a public school would give student-teachers a greater opportunity to learn techniques to address a variety of learning abilities of students. Title 1 programs will pay for teachers to go to school.

Impact of Charter Schools: NEA represents teachers in the Alma d'arte and La Academia Dolores Huerta Charter Schools. NEA members do not believe charter schools are attracting the best students, leaving only the poorer students in the public school system. There are other private schools in the Las Cruces area such as Catholic Schools and the Christian Academy that attract many good students. However, the two schools chartered in the LCPS system and the two state chartered schools, Alma d' arte and J. Paul Taylor Academy in the juvenile justice system attract many students that often would not succeed in a more traditional school setting. Charter schools are part of a solution, and there is a place for them in the school system. Flexibility in planning how to achieve student success is one of the positive aspects of charter schools. Financial accountability and certification are areas of concern. Charter schools should be held to the same standards of accountability as other public schools.

Opportunity for Change in the School System: A paradigm shift from one size fits all to educating the whole student needs to occur. Educating students to be citizens in a democracy is in peril. A test-driven environment narrows curriculum and focuses only on test outcomes for student performance results and teacher evaluation.

The lack of money for various projects, needs, opportunity, etc., was mentioned several times. The currently federally funded "jobs bill" provided \$100 million in NM this year; however, this was one-time federal stimulus funding and was used to fund needed teachers.



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Questions

1. Describe the purpose of the National Education Association (NEA), its relationship to the Las Cruces Public School (LCPS) teachers, administrators, school board, and students.
2. What do you see as the LCPS's greatest strengths? Its weakness? How would you address them.
3. Do you feel that the student testing assessments are helping you to meet students' needs? In what way? Why or why not? How do you determine what and whether your own students are learning.
4. How are teachers in the LCPS assessed and how often? Are teachers' evaluations tied to student performance progress?
5. How well do you feel that new teachers have been trained before they begin teaching in the LCPS? What practice teaching experiences have new teacher's had before they start to teach in LCPS?
6. What are your opinions about the Charter Schools in Las Cruces? The concept of Charter Schools?
7. If you could make changes in the LCPS that you feel would help students, what would they be?