



Home of the Roadrunners

Ventana Ranch Elementary School is a safe learning community where students, teachers, staff and parents are committed to the shared responsibility for each child's total development. Through our combined efforts, our students will become responsible, productive, knowledgeable and skilled contributors to our community and beyond.

Ventana Ranch Elementary School has been selected as one of 13 New Mexico schools to be honored as a "School On The Rise" for 2009. We were awarded this honor because we met our Adequate Yearly Progress goals. With our Annual Measurement Objectives increasing as much as 12% in some grade level configurations, we are being congratulated for our students' phenomenal success. The ceremony will be held Wednesday, February 11, 2009 in the State Capitol Rotunda.

On the far west side of Albuquerque, there was a large plot of land with no noticeable difference from the vast mesa surrounding the new homes in the area, but the potential it held was impressive. A developing community noticed a herd of portable classrooms clustering on a multi-acred site soon to be known as Ventana Ranch Elementary School.



In early 2004, a school was born. It began as a pod of 44 portable buildings including the cafeteria, library, computer lab, and gym. It was slated to open with 550 students; instead, it housed 750 students and 65 staff members.



This young school would soon grow into one of the largest in the state. It would spend two long years waiting for a permanent home. Students would play outside on a small dirt playground if the weather permitted. Supplies for teachers were sparse and many made do with what could be made, scavenged, or bought out of pocket. Several staff members did double duty, covering a class in the morning and acting as a tech person or administrator in the afternoon. Some even held pullout sessions in the lounge and library due to lack of space. Still, everyone pulled together to make the school a safe, productive, and positive place to learn.



As the ground breaking commenced, and the new building began to take form, so did the hopes of those eagerly awaiting its completion. It took two years, but as December of 2006 approached so did the time to move in. During semester break, battling one of the worst snowstorms Albuquerque had ever seen, teachers, administrators, parents, custodians, and students all helped to transfer everything from the portables to the new building. It was a true labor of love. Because the school had been designed for 650 students and opened its doors to 1350 students, portables were still needed, but a permanent home was established and the future looked promising.



By the end of that first semester, with so many students on the small campus, it became evident something needed to change. There were simply too many students on the small campus making safety a rising issue. The radical idea of dividing into two schools began to develop and came to fruition in the fall of 2007. With two semi- separate administrations, schedules, staff, and student bodies, Ventana Ranch became Ventana Ranch East and West. It was a difficult and confusing transition. Everyone, including those at the APS district office, had problems separating the two schools. Without any extra funding, and in spite of the efforts of office staff and APS personnel, the majority of the year was spent determining what supplies, mail, staff, students, or other items of concern belonged to which school.



February 2008 brought a contingent of district administrators to the school to review the over-population issues and the dire need for more schools to be built. After much discussion and several important meetings, it was decided Ventana Ranch must be divided once again, this time into three separate schools on the same campus until two new schools could be built. Students and staff were organized into the schools they would attend once the new buildings were ready. All was in place for the upcoming school year— new administrators hired, office staff established, and separate budgets developed— with the promise the two new schools would be housed in their new facilities off the Ventana Ranch campus by February of 2009.

Amidst the constant turmoil and transferring of students, the original Ventana Ranch Elementary School not only made AYP for the 2007-08 school year, but was removed from the New Mexico state designation list and given the honor of being noted as a School on the Rise. One of the main reasons for this was the consistent and steady guidance of the new administration. Using a variety of collaborative efforts, all the administrators involved in the evolution of Ventana Ranch sought to find the best balance possible to ensure the continuous learning of all students. All staff was kept apprised of the ever-changing school developments and everyone was allowed a voice in the process. The main branch of Ventana Ranch developed a strong Instructional Council, which empowered to make school wide decisions as well as guide the direction of future endeavors. To maintain equilibrium, standards based progress reports were adopted and used to their fullest extent early on in the history of the school and served as a continuous guide for instruction.



In partnership with this administrative leadership remains the strength of a seasoned staff. Of the 40 teachers on the staff, eleven are currently working on professional dossiers to further advance their learning. This complements the ten teachers who completed their PDD's the previous year and demonstrates the levels of continuous improvement evident every day on campus. Along with

personal professional development, staff members are engaged in a variety of collaborative endeavors. With flexibility and communication as a priority, Ventana Ranch is proud of their strong grade level teams, which meet weekly to discuss student growth and methods for improving achievement. Curriculum maps, pacing guides, standards based assessment, and a variety of teaching methods serve to increase student achievement. Reflection and backward design planning are utilized throughout so all staff are continuously questioning how learning will be assessed. Every class utilizes a mission statement and involves students in establishing class and personal learning goals.

Ventana Ranch students are continuously made aware of the value of learning. By using data folders, students are readily able to assess and keep track of their own learning. They are encouraged to question, set personal goals, and invite their parents into the learning process. Students are also recognized for academic and social progress through weekly awards and semester celebrations. Learning is a priority at Ventana Ranch and is encouraged in all settings.

Parent involvement is also an essential component to student success. As a result, parents are invited to participate in their child's learning through a series of events throughout the year. Each semester Ventana Ranch hosts a Math and a Literacy Night. These events are open to all family members and serve to encourage the development of math and reading skills. At the beginning of each year there is a Curriculum Night for parents in which all teachers sit down with parents to explain the lesson concepts for the upcoming year. Parent/Teacher/Student conferences are held each semester and serve to update all parents on the academic status of their child. For fun community events, Ventana Ranch hosts Bounce Back to School Night, an evening of games, dunk the principal, and food events; Talent Night, an opportunity for students to display their various talents; Drama Productions; Storybook Day, where students get to dress up as their favorite storybook character; and Read to Your Child Night, where parents get to come to school for a fun night of reading and sharing favorite stories. In addition to school wide events, we encourage parents to volunteer in the school and in the classroom. Parents are always a welcome component at the Ranch.



To continue to move the school in the direction of continuous improvement this year, several foundational plans are in place. The Instructional Council voted to implement two new school-wide initiatives in Fall, 2008: a reading approach involving homogeneous grouping at each grade level and the behavior program Time to Teach. Both of these strategies are designed to better serve the Ventana Ranch population and will continue to enhance academic growth and understanding. A data retreat is planned for the spring semester during which staff members will analyze school data and learn how to use it to set goals. The Instructional Council will continue to meet twice a month to address ongoing staff development needs. Twice-monthly staff meetings will be led by grade level teams and comprise a sharing of ideas designed to enhance the quality of instruction. Continually empowering the staff and inviting them to take part in their own professional development will be essential to the ongoing educational growth of the school and the students.



When all is said and done and the dust finally settles on Ventana Ranch what will remain is a dedicated administration, staff, and student body. All involved know the importance of collaboration, communication, and perseverance. Most were there in those early days when a dirt mesa was considered home. Those who remain look forward to the day when the portables don't block the view of the city and a grass field filled with laughing children graces the east side of the campus. It will be a glorious sight. Until then and beyond, Ventana Ranch will continue to place learning first.

“Success is a journey, not a destination.”
Arthur Ashe