



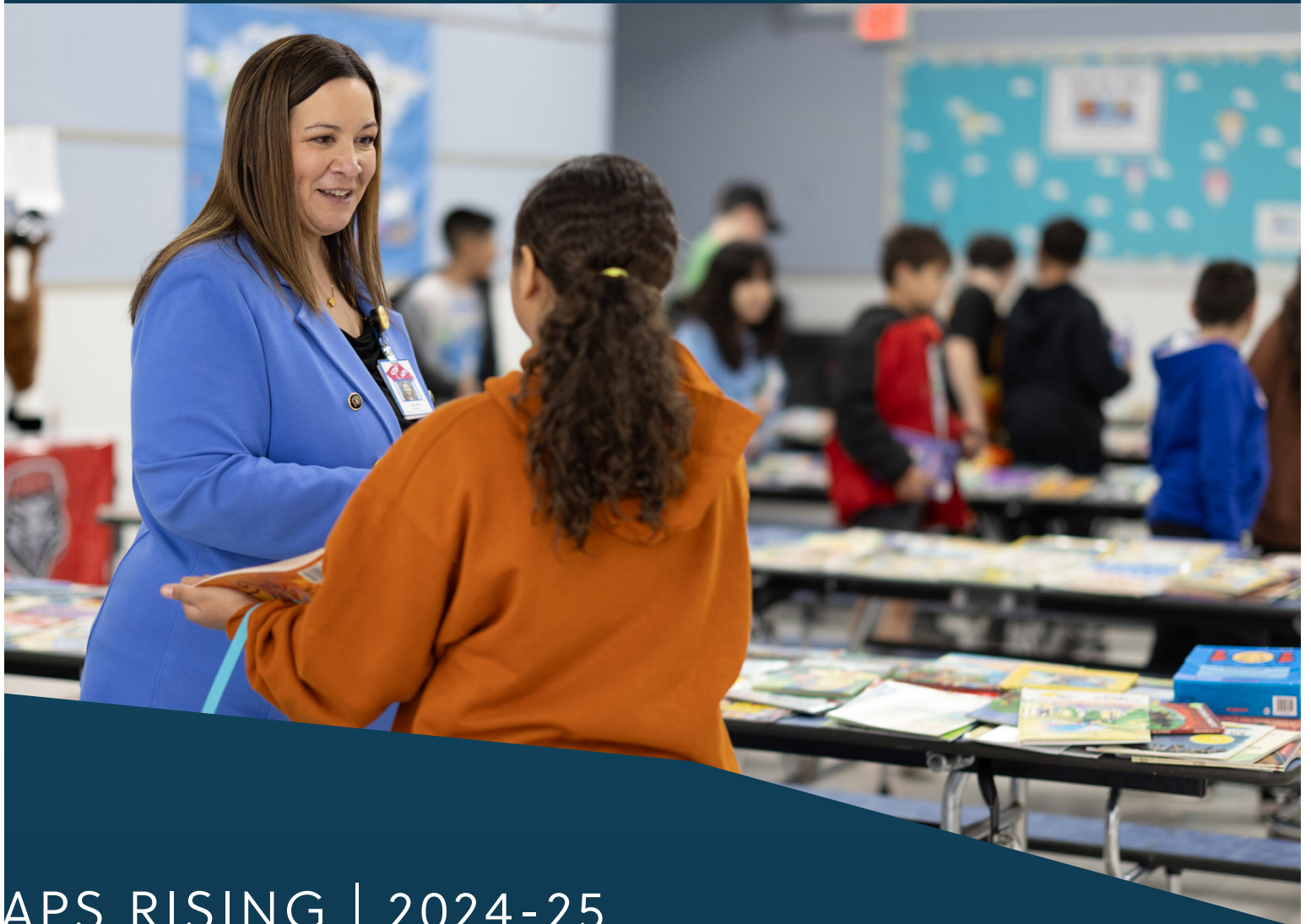
ALBUQUERQUE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

APS RISING

GAINING ALTITUDE

A START TO SUCCESS

Dr. Gabriella Durán Blakey



APS RISING | 2024-25



LOOKING BACK, LOOKING AHEAD

I've visited with thousands of students, staff members, community members and families during my first year as superintendent of Albuquerque Public Schools, and though their perspectives are as unique as their thumbprints, I believe one overarching statement can encapsulate where we are.

We had a promising 2024-25 school year – one to celebrate, one to build upon.

It wasn't perfect, of course. Not for me, not for the people we aim to serve. But our successes far outweighed our minuses, and though we've got much work to do in the coming years, I can confidently say APS is rising.

You'll hear that a lot – it's our theme for 2025-26 and beyond. But before we talk about tomorrow, I want to let you know about the year that's just passed (in a flash, it seems).

First things first: I want to thank people for helping me navigate my first year. Though I've spent my adult life in education, and had a deep background in the district as a student, teacher, administrator, associate superintendent and chief operations officer, this position is different. And now, more than ever, I realize how interconnected we are.

Kids can't learn if they can't get to school (thank you, bus drivers!) Kids can't function properly if they don't eat well (thank you, Food Services!) They can't flourish without dedicated, wonderful teachers, principals, coaches, club sponsors, band directors, redirectors and support staff. Thanks to you, our students are better prepared to improve academically, function in society and move toward a great future.

It takes way more than a village. It takes a vision, and for that I thank the **Board of Education and community** for helping us set sail toward a better APS. Incredibly, the 2025-26 school year is on the horizon, and I'll have plenty to say about that as it nears. But I want to report to you on a dozen key efforts we undertook in 2024-25, because I believe open communication is the quickest way to improve.

We still have things to work on. But after a year on the job, I can tell you this: APS is not afraid of hard work, and I believe that effort, dedication and diligence will pay off. Watch us rise!



ALBUQUERQUE PUBLIC SCHOOLS
APS RISING





IMPLEMENTED AND EXECUTED THE STRATEGIC PLAN

Our **Strategic Plan**, years in the making, is constantly under review. Key to its effectiveness is remaining true to four key goals – and five guardrails.

It's not just about reporting to the board on a regular basis. Internally, we use a Project Management Oversight Process to keep track of strategic initiatives across the district and make sure we're taking real steps toward reaching our goals for students. This means checking in regularly on key efforts, making sure teams have what they need to keep moving – and adjusting when things aren't working. It helps us stay focused, avoid duplication, and keep our work connected to what's happening in classrooms.

A committee made up of APS administrators and principals meets regularly to review updates from departments working on initiatives tied to the Strategic Plan. This group asks hard questions, gives feedback, and shares ideas to help project leads stay on track. And it's not just talk — many of these initiatives are tested and refined by principals and staff doing the work every day.

HITTING TARGETS

The numbers below will give you some idea about how we’re doing. We’re very proud to see progress in several key areas. But we also know challenges lie ahead. What I’m happiest about is our use of data in real time – our schools look at assessment results, then use them to pivot to better learning strategies for our students.

Here’s a quick look at some success through the year:

We’re happy to report we’ve seen gains in reading and math proficiency rates in both elementary and middle school during this year, based on interim assessments in 2024-25:

- **3rd Grade:** Reading proficiency rate among all students increased by 17.5 percentage points from our first assessment to the final one in the 2024-25 school year; math increased by 24.2 percentage points in the same time frame.
- **4th Grade:** Reading up by 15; math up by 22.8
- **5th Grade:** Reading up by 10.9; math up by 17.6
- **6th Grade:** Reading up by 7.9; Math up by 12.2
- **7th Grade:** Reading up by 9.5; Math up by 9.6
- **8th Grade:** Reading up by 9.3; Math up by 9.9

Biggest gains (all students) in reading from beginning of the 2024-25 school year to the conclusion

Elementary

Carlos Rey 23.1 percentage points
East San Jose 14.2 percentage points
Onate 12.8 percentage points
Barcelona 11.7 percentage points
Inez 10.9 percentage points

Middle School

eCademy 17.1 percentage points
Eisenhower 14.7 percentage points
Harrison 13.2 percentage points
Cleveland 12.9 percentage points
Madison 12.1 percentage points
Tony Hillerman 12.1 percentage points

Biggest gains (all students) in math from the beginning of the 2024-25 school year to its conclusion

Elementary

Coyote Willow 39.9 percentage points
Double Eagle 39.5 percentage points
Osuna 38.5 percentage points
Hubert Humphrey 36.6 percentage points
S.Y. Jackson 35.7 percentage points

Middle School

eCademy 21.1 percentage points
James Monroe 17.5 percentage points
Jefferson 16.6 percentage points
Tony Hillerman 15.5 percentage points
Cleveland 15.5 percentage points



ASSESSED DISTRICT PROGRAMS

For many years, APS was insulated from the world outside the district or public education. We rarely got input from outside advisers; we almost never asked others to review how we were doing from a management, business or even educational perspective.

No longer. This past school year was rife with input from the outside. **Our Cabinet, Finance, Special Education, Federal and State Programs, Teaching and Learning** departments all received evaluations or input from experts in the field.

Letting that light in has helped us refine, revise – and occasionally, reenvision – what we’re doing. A great example is Special Education, which serves 26% of our students. Another is Finance, where we are about to embark on introducing a new financial and human resources software program from Oracle. It’s a big deal. Our old system, about 25 years old, is archaic and will no longer be supported by the vendor. To implement this system, we are getting help from top consultants who will help train our staff members so we can provide the best service to our employees – and prospective employees.

Finally, when the school year began, we created a Federal and State Programs office. Its mission was to align the dollars we receive from federal and state government to dovetail with our daily work at schools. Like all changes, this one was difficult at times. But this office has helped us move key funding to schools most in need and also assess whether some programs were duplicative or archaic. It was a great start toward taking an objective approach to how we deal with important funding.



EVALUATED FINANCIAL POSITION, OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCIES AND ALIGNMENT WITH THE DISTRICT'S PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

In an earlier section, you read about the progress made with federal and state programs. It was significant. But another bright spot was in our Finance Department's collaboration with the academic side of our house to create a 2025-26 budget with impact.

Key to this were listening sessions held by the **Board of Education** – town halls that helped guide priorities on spending. Once those were done in the fall, finance and academic leaders met throughout the school year to craft a \$2.25 billion budget that focused on improving student outcomes through the lens of the Strategic Plan. It's important to note that in an era of declining enrollment – most funding for schools is keyed off how many children are in seats – a nimble and flexible approach to budget is a must. Thanks to the **Legislature and Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham**, our employees are getting a 4% rise in their salaries for the 2025-26 school year. When people ask about why our budget has risen over the past few years, consistent investments in our single greatest spend – employees – is the reason.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

We evaluated our Special Education Department, and information gleaned from both outside evaluations and internal assessments reveals this: We need to do much more training of our staff at all levels. We're being more deliberate with our Individualized Education Plans, making certain to clearly outline support and resources students need on an individual level.

FOSTERED POSITIVE COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

The fact is, APS is central to daily life in Albuquerque. We have one of the city’s largest workforces, and we educate the vast majority of its kids. But rather than rely on numbers, I’ve made it a point to participate in key organizations.

I’m a member of the **United Way of North Central New Mexico and ABC Community Schools Partnership board of directors**, as well as a member of the **Greater Albuquerque and Hispano Chambers of Commerce**. My calendar is packed with meetings that include local and state leaders – the mayor, county manager, county commission, city council and law enforcement. The list goes on.

Just as important, however, are the committees we’ve established to help better operate the state’s largest school district. Nearly two-dozen APS high school students compose our **Superintendent’s Student Advisory Committee**, and they advise me on key issues such as safety, accountability and school culture.

GETTING INPUT FROM ALL ANGLES

We’ve created four more advisory boards for parents, teachers, principals, and business members. The people in those groups are from every part of town, every walk of life, and they meet with us often, offering thoughts on how APS can be more effective on every front. Our **Student Advisory Council** helped us form initiatives around communications and safety, to name just two. Our **Business Advisory Council** offered key input on how we can be better community partners – and solicit help from the business community. Separate **teacher** and **principal** consortiums provided on-point advice on issues that affect our schools and individual classrooms. In every group, we learned something – and our leadership team used that input to guide our actions going forward.





ESTABLISHING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

In early 2025, I was honored when my two-year contract was extended by the Board of Education. Board members and I communicate often on the district's progress, challenges faced at individual schools, and on important outreach efforts. At the end of each week, we provide to the board a summary of what I've done, who I've seen, and an outlook for the near- and long-term.

The result: a more cohesive way of operating based on respect and the constant flow of information. My weekly communication to **all APS employees** and the **APS community** has a simple goal: Offer key insights not only to policies or objectives, but to the people I meet every day in our schools. You can read about and meet school custodians, outstanding teachers, coaches and counselors in the weekly message, which appears Fridays on APS.edu and also in **The Core**, our bi-monthly newsletter.

When I became superintendent, I made it a goal to visit as many schools as I could. I got to more than **100**, taking note of the many good things our students and employees were doing every day. Our **leadership team** also visited all our schools several times a year to see how we could better support them. I celebrated with **APS teams** as they competed in state competitions, and attended some of our many fine arts showcases. In the final analysis, I wanted to create a familiar, not foreign, presence in the places where learning is happening.

IMPROVED COMMUNICATION

I've agreed to dozens and dozens of interviews with media outlets throughout the year, including tough sessions when conditions were not always favorable. I've also placed a high priority on communicating internally, because the more APS speaks frankly and openly with its own workforce, the more likely there would be a better understanding of goals, priorities, and yes, challenges.

Along the way, we have continued to up our district's social media presence while also reviving tools that had lain dormant for the past several years – APS Perspective and a reconstituted intranet that houses several in-house offerings for employees.

Outward facing options also have been favored in the past year. We have introduced Let's Talk, a platform that allows APS to be more responsive to questions and inquiries from parents, students, families, community and staff. Let's Talk tracks how long it takes us to respond – and its results are monitored by me and our Cabinet. The expectation: Respond, and respond quickly.





RIGHT-SIZING, WITH INNOVATION AT ITS CORE

The district made several right-sizing moves in late 2024, including the repurposing of Taft Middle School to house Coronado Dual-Language K-8 School in the North Valley. The transition in 2025-26 will allow for the growth of a popular program while allowing for the consolidation of Taft to nearby Taylor Middle School. The combination of those two schools will allow for more resources to flow to students while creating a more vibrant North Valley middle school community.

These changes are making possible a new APS International High School, which will move into the Coronado campus downtown. The International High School will accommodate Albuquerque's newcomer and refugee students and is envisioned to create a more inclusive educational environment for students new to the area. These students will be celebrated for their assets while also gaining key language skills that will serve them as they progress toward a diploma.

SCHOOL SCHEDULES

There was plenty of success on this front.

A **community survey** in the fall of '24 helped create a **two-year schedule for the 2025-26 and 2026-27 school years**. Community members and staff overwhelmingly voted to begin school earlier in August and conclude in late May, and the administration and board heard their wishes loud and clear.

But APS made other gains in terms of scheduling in the past year. A change to the district's transfer system has eased the process by which families may request transfers and an overwhelming majority were granted early in the process – a customer-friendly option that makes it easier for students to switch schools, and also, become members of the district community.

In response to **HB 171**, a state law requiring changes to graduation requirements, we re-envisioned many of the courses students need to progress through high school. One key change is the addition of a **personal financial literacy course requirement**. Overall, we're creating more relevant course offerings for many students while also allowing for improved rigor at both the high school and middle school levels.

We've led the charge for continued funding for key programs that engage students, even down to the elementary level. **Genius Hour** and **TOPS** offerings – which have proved wildly popular for students and staff – will continue in the next school year. We've also done work on innovative programs such as Sustaining the Future at Mountain View and Los Padillas elementary schools, Polk Middle School and Rio Grande High; Global Pathway at Roosevelt; and are soon establishing a prestigious International Baccalaureate offering at Cleveland Middle School.





SUCCESSES AND HEADLINES

It's clear we did a lot. But I want to talk about people, because people are critical to any success we have.

Here's an admittedly incomplete list of people who received recognitions this year:

Four Albuquerque Public Schools teachers received the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching. Only 336 got the honor around the nation – we had four! They are:

- **Tara Palomares**, a Sandia High School geometry and AP calculus teacher.
- **Kimberly Conell**, an AP calculus teacher at La Cueva High School.
- **Lesha Rupert**, who teaches AP biology, anatomy & physiology, and biology at Eldorado High School.
- **Christopher Speck**, an eighth-grade science teacher at Madison Middle School.

Three APS middle school teachers won the prestigious Golden Apple Award for excellence in the classroom. They are:

- **Cara Heck**, James Monroe Middle School
- **Mary Kershaw**, Eisenhower Middle School
- **Don Starr**, Desert Ridge Middle School

Ventana Ranch Elementary School was selected as a Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education. Congratulations to **Principal Paula Garcia and her wonderful staff**.

Our **APS Finance Department** won an achievement of excellence certificate from the Government Finance Officers Association. The organization lauded the Finance Department for its report in the fiscal year ending in June 2023. An impartial panel judged the document to meet program standards and convey the district's financial picture in a "spirit of full disclosure." It is the 10th consecutive year APS has received the honor. Congratulations to **Chief Financial Officer Rennette Apodaca and her team**.

APS Food and Nutrition Director Sandy Kemp won Director of the Year from the New Mexico School Nutrition Association.

APS/PEPSI TEACHERS OF THE MONTH

- Mandy Shaw, Freedom High
- Monica Gomez, Lavaland Elementary
- Alejandra Padilla, Jackson Middle
- Leroy Quintana, Emerson Elementary
- Beatrice Salazar, Los Ranchos Elementary
- Rachel Kilman, New Futures High
- Deanna Sherred, Griegos Elementary
- Amaal Bahraq, Mountain View Elementary

APS/NUSENDA STUDENTS OF THE WEEK

- Tanner Ozdoba - Cibola High
- Lesly Gaytan - West Mesa High
- Dylann Garcia - Manzano Mesa Elementary
- Kaydence Adams - Grant Middle
- Evie Varela - Kit Carson Elementary
- Dillon Goodwin - Georgia O'Keeffe Elementary
- Leto Franks - Roosevelt Middle
- Lincoln McCrea - Corrales Elementary
- Sophia Renae Torres - Tony Hillerman Middle
- Maddilyn Apodaca - Adobe Acres Elementary
- Hope Lammers - George I. Sanchez Middle
- Isaac Espino Ortiz - Truman Middle
- Zariah R. Zamora - Bandelier Elementary
- Konner Vigil - La Cueva High
- Mustafa Alhameedi - Carlos Rey Elementary
- Solomon Torres-Moss - Tomasita Elementary
- Ethan Apodaca - Bellehaven Elementary
- Desi Simms - Comanche Elementary
- Aubriella Sandoval - Valle Vista Elementary
- Florencia Antonia Paz Trigo - Volcano Vista High
- Gael Torres - Polk Middle
- Destiny Perez - Del Norte High
- Arabella Rivera - Volcano Vista High
- Jinan Marwan - Sunset View Elementary
- Alyssa Herrera - Seven Bar Elementary
- Kamil Oliver - Lew Wallace Elementary
- Anaya Villarreal - Freedom High
- Rubi A. Armendariz, Griegos Elementary
- Mabel Bova - Inez Science and Technology Magnet Elementary
- Leyla Galileah Guillermo - Eugene Field Elementary
- Antonne Benett Uy - Kirtland Elementary
- Haylee Warren - Mitchell Elementary
- Dion Session - Atrisco Heritage Academy High
- Melia Romero - Sombra Del Monte Elementary
- Dylan Malone - nex+Gen Academy Magnet High

EMPLOYEES OF THE MONTH

September 2024

Maria Carter - Clerk, Whittier ES
Debra Chandler - College & Career Counselor, La Cueva HS
Nathan Griffin - Custodian, Lowell ES
Deborah Burnett - Educational Assistant, Painted Sky ES

October 2024

Scott Hinken - Salvage/Receiving Clerk, M&O
Jennifer Lucero-Montoya - Compliance Coordinator, Coordinated Health
Armando Reyes - Technology Educational Assistant, Coronado Dual Language Magnet
Harold Valdez - Electrician, M&O

November 2024

Loriel Figiel - Nurse, Kennedy Middle
Susana Munoz - Custodian, Atrisco Heritage Academy HS
Jami Ramos - Community Partner Coordinator, McKinney Vento Program
Luisa Storey - Athletic Trainer, West Mesa HS

December 2024

Michael Detimmerman - CSI, Transition Services
Robert Gavigan - Clerk, eCademy HS
Romie McCoy - Behavior Redirector, Reginald Chavez ES
Carlos Trujillo - Dean of Students, Lowell ES

January 2025

Pauline Castillo - Secretary, Dolores Gonzales ES
John Duran - Head Custodian, Desert Ridge MS
Jennifer Hart - Crisis Resource Counselor, APS Counseling Department
Enrique Ochoa - Athletic Trainer, Volcano Vista HS

February 2025

Ramona Aragon - Bookkeeper, Cibola HS
Marcella Jones - Director, APS Student Services Center
Ami Montoya - Assistant Principal, Mission Avenue STEM Magnet ES
Kathryn Murphy - Transition Specialist, APS Special Education

March 2025

Chelsea Darrall - Librarian, Double Eagle ES
Santino Hernandez - Assistant Principal, West Mesa HS
Eric Romero - Head Custodian, Chaparral ES
Richard Villones - Police Officer, APS Police

April 2025

Jenna Bludworth - Principal, Marie Hughes ES
Meg Crist - Extended Leaves Specialist, APS Human Resources/Benefits
Gary Day - Clerk, Edmund G. Ross ES
Angelica Trujillo - Special Programs Educational Assistant, Taylor MS

SELFLESS SENIORS

The APS Education Foundation honors some of our top seniors every year in a program called Selfless Seniors.

For 2025, they are:

- Noah Chavez - West Mesa High
- Elecia Padilla - Valley High
- Kailyn Montoya - Volcano Vista High
- Robert Mendoza - Rio Grande High
- Eli Crowley - Sandia High
- Dani Figueroa - Nex+Gen Academy High
- Amari Solomon-Iule - New Futures High
- Mattie Espinosa - Manzano High
- Clay Hsieh - La Cueva High
- Jazmine Montoya - Del Norte High
- Ryan Ramirez - Cibola High
- Felipe Hernandez - Highland High
- Charles Epp - Eldorado High
- Leona Belmares - Atrisco Heritage Academy High
- Kaylee Shelton - Albuquerque High





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