

**Name:** Margaret Mendoza

**District:** Las Cruces

**Position:** 4

*Please answer the following to the best of your ability within 150 words or less.*

### **1. What is motivating you to run for the school board?**

I was raised by a single mom and that fact alone limited me to two choices according to my high school counselor: take typing classes and get a job as a secretary or get married. I chose college instead. Today, I hold a PhD in Rhetoric and Professional communication. Today in Las Cruces the poverty rate among school-age children is 34.7 percent. I am running for the school board to ensure that Las Cruces kids have better choices than I had.

### **2. What will your priorities be as a school board member?**

Advocacy to meet the unique needs of Las Cruces students, parents, teachers and staff;

Equity and more: I will put resources to work where they are needed most, and I will work to insure that a high quality education is available to every student.

Access: expanding community schools, creating closer ties between schools, local communities and families. Providing access to much needed services for students and families and making schools more valuable resources for the community.

### **3. What have you done in the past to help your community thrive?**

At New Mexico State University I served as a resource for first-generation, under-represented and low-income under-graduates preparing for graduate school. We provided tutoring, and counseling combined with paid research opportunities, faculty mentors, advanced writing instruction and opportunities to visit graduate schools across the country. Many of my students in addition to being the first in their family to go to college, these students were helping their families financially by working part time jobs. Most were graduates of Las Cruces high schools. The chance of enrolling in graduate programs increases if parents have degrees and can advise and support their student's efforts just like the chances of graduating from high school increase for students whose parents did the same. Some of my students have become university faculty, one is a medical doctor working for his tribe while another works at a graduate school recruiting under-represented students.

### **4. How have you previously advocated for students and educators in your community?**

I have written grants, lobbied members of congress, and organized student activities that would make their research available to the public,

**5. How did your educational experiences shape you, and what lessons will you take with you from those experiences?**

Not every parent can meet with teachers or attend PTO meetings. Sometimes paying the rent and buying groceries takes priority. Not every parent can help with homework or cover the cost of extracurricular activities. After working at a sales job that kept her on her feet all day my mother barely had the energy to cook dinner much less sit down with us to do homework. Today's parents are working multiple part time jobs to do the same. They are disinterested, just preoccupied with survival. That mean their s preschoolers may not have access books or games or art supplies that help prepare kisd for school. It means that by the time they enroll in kindergarten they are already lagging behind in learning skills. It takes years to fill that learning gap. I was lucky because we couldn't afford a TV so I read everything I could get my hands on. We had books from the thrift shop, and we had a library right down the street. I read the books my older siblings read even though I was not supposed to, and teachers did not approve of the subject matter of some of my book reports. Mom could not help with homework beyond long division and I was never very strong in math but reading improved my writing and communication skills as well as expanded my knowledge base outside of the elementary curriculum. Now books are online, and libraries may not be accessible because of their distance from semi-rural homes. Books also compete with video games which may teach some high-tech tools but don't help develop vocabulary or communication skills.

**6. Have you ever worked as an employee in public education? If so, how did your school board affect you? What lessons will you take from your experience into this position?**

I have worked at both public and private universities. Private school were appointed, not elected boards' focus seemed to be more on fund raising rather than student services. Their priorities were attracting donors first and students second. Students in private colleges were not as diverse and services for those few students were limited. In contrast, public colleges have built strong recruitment and retention programs for low-income and under-represented groups. They have developed more inclusive curriculum and are more likely to learn from their students while they are teaching.

**7. New Mexico has the lowest high school graduation rate in the nation. What specific steps will you take to address this problem?**

End the ability for students to drop out before graduation. The reasons for the early drop out option no longer exist. The number of farming families have declined and the need for children to work harvests and care for animals barely exists. At the same time the need for continuing education has grown. Public high schools can no long prepare students to make a living with a high school diploma. At the same time there is a great need for effective college preparation AND effective professional trades preparation. This would require greater coordination with working professionals in the field, funding for internships and hands-on projects. It will also require a change in the mind set that professions in the trades are the domain of boys from low income families. Both college and trades are pathways out of poverty for men and women. Students who are who are well supported and making real progress toward their goals are less likely to want to leave early. I also believe that kids growing up in poverty have trouble

imagining success in the future. That may be why they are attracted to a quick fix even it includes breaking the law. We can address those issues through community schools that rally around these students, help meet their basic needs and raise the possibility of a better future.

**8. New Mexico ranks 49th in 4<sup>th</sup>-grade reading and math scores. What specific steps will you take to address this problem?**

Frankly I question the validity of one-size fits all testing. We need another system that provides us with information teachers can actually use in their classrooms. I would like to see a portfolio approach where student work is collected and compared to prior work. Teachers can know quickly which teaching methods have been effective and which need adjustment. It will be more time- consuming but it will also provide more relevant information about each student and can inform the teachers' methods of instruction. If we have to have a testing system that can provide statistical comparisons with other schools, I would suggest minimal testing in 4<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades that requires minimal classroom preparation time. I do not support teaching to the test.

**9. How will you advocate for both the students and the employees of the public education system in your role?**

When we advocate for employees we are also advocating for students. Support staff play an integral role in the health and well-being of students and faculty but their need for advocacy are often overshadowed by the needs of teachers and students. One example is this past summer when the district was at the end of the budget year but required buildings to be cleaned and repaired even though they did not allocate all the funds that were needed. The work got done as best as it could. But maintenance would have been easier if it was fully funded. We need to find ways to make sure our students get the best services and plan more carefully. Instructional staff have the support of the union to negotiate issues come before the board and they are also protected by confidentiality agreements. Board members have to balance the rights of teachers with the needs of the students. I support union membership and I understand that unions fight for the best outcome for students, faculty, and staff. I will work to maintain that balance.

**10. Think New Mexico, a non-partisan think tank, released a study in 2017 which suggests that the percentage of a state's education budget that makes it to the classroom, as opposed to administrative costs, is related to student performance. Do you agree? Will you advocate for an increased percentage of the budget going to the classroom? Why or why not? If so, how will you address the issue?**

Yes, I agree. I also hold individual school districts accountable for their administrative costs. I have been able to attend a budget meeting at LCPS and I have done additional research on our administrative costs, but I have not been able to find out what percent of the budget goes to administration and how much goes to instruction. We need this information to be more accessible to the public. I have seen national statistics that suggest administrative budgets should be between 10 and 25 % of the total funds available. I would advocate for costs in the

middle of that range. At the same time, we need to be able to cover the cost of Columbia construction.

**11. New Mexico is combating a “teacher shortage.” A recent study by NMSU said New Mexico’s “teacher attractiveness score”\* is 2.18 on a scale of one to five. What will you do to increase this score and make sure these vacancies are filled by qualified individuals as quickly as possible?**

There are lots of reasons teachers’ salaries are low and the new state administration is addressing many of those issues. Teacher and staff salaries have been increased by 7 and 6 %, a much larger increase than provided over the 8 years of the previous state government. Current raises are a welcomed increase, but they don’t make up for the 8 years when raises didn’t even cover cost of living increases and in some cases, the increase in the cost of health insurance is greater than the increased income. Wages are still a major issue that need to be addressed. Adding to the shortage is the insistence of the use of Common Core and national tests results as a form of teacher evaluation. Both encouraged teachers to change professions and discouraged students from considering careers in education. Positive steps are being taken by the state to increase the number of students going into teaching. For example, there is funding available to pay tuition for teachers aids earn degrees in education. This is a very positive step and I would support programs that promote teachers and staff as valued members of our community. States like Nevada have paid bonuses that more than cover moving costs to attract teachers from other states. Since teacher qualifications vary from state to state these candidates would need to be carefully screened.

We also need to update our teaching resources. Each school needs a current computer lab for students. We should also be looking at other technology available like e-books and e-book readers that could engage students more fully. I know that funding is an issue, but these changes are essential for our students’ future.

**12. How can you make your school board an example of excellence for the other boards in the state?**

Currently our school board consults in private then votes in public. I want to see a more transparent decision making. Board members serve on several committees that hold meetings open to the public I would like to see those publicized more effectively. Currently you need to check the board’s website for that information. Not everyone has access to the internet or knows where to look. I would also like to see changes in the way public input is taken during meetings. Now people can comment if they sign in at the beginning of the meeting, but we can’t ask questions about issues in discussion. I would also like to see meetings held at different venues, to increase opportunities for community input.

*\*According to [NMSU](#) "Teacher Attractiveness Score" takes into consideration compensation, working conditions, teacher qualifications, and teacher turnover.*