

Name: Maria Pacheco

District: Las Cruces

Position: 5

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 am running for school board because there is a lack of communication and transparency with the most recent administration and current school board. I believe that decisions made do not take into account the needs of all students and teachers. I also feel that the fiscal responsibilities that are tasked of the school board are not being fulfilled.

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

My priorities will be to bring back open dialogue and communication between the school board and ALL the stakeholders. The decision making process should be transparent and communications open during the entire process. I would like to work to at getting our teachers more competitive salaries so that our district is able to keep the amazing teachers we have as well as attract new and motivated educators to our district. I would also love to be part of the solution that shows our educators that we value them and what they do for our children. I think it is so important for our employees to feel like they are in a stable and supportive work environment.

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

I have been an avid community volunteer in the Mesilla Valley for the last 25 years. I have been involved with many wonderful organizations and served on boards that promote and help women and children. I have been a member of Junior League of Las Cruces for over 20 years and have served as its president for 2 years as well as on the board for over 10. I served on the First Step Women and Children's Clinic board for 2 years prior to the clinic be taken over by La Familia de Clinica. I served for 3 years on the Las Cruces Public Schools Foundation board. These organizations have raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for our community and its residents.

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

As I said before, I have been an avid community volunteer for the last 25 years, but specifically for students and educators, I have devoted the last 16 years to service for students and educators. I have been on the PTO's (elementary and middle school) and SAC (school advisory committee for high school) and/or served as president since my son started 1st grade up until two years after he graduated. I have served as a booster president for Centennial High football team from 2012-2016. I have served as a committee member on the on the City of the Crosses Golf Tournament committee. During my service I have been personally involved in the raising

of hundreds of thousands of dollars that have helped students, teachers and student athletes. I have worked thousands of hours to bring additional resources to both students and teachers alike.

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

I am a child of New Mexico Public education. I attended public high school in Santa Fe, NM and believe strongly in how public education can influence the person you aspire to be. In high school I was involved in many different organizations, one of which was Student Government. I was truly blessed to be inspired by amazing educators that encouraged me to be a leader. They truly harnessed my yearning to serve others and presented me with the opportunities to do so. I believe this fostering of my desires has helped shape me into the person I am today. If I can be involved with the process that has the same effect on even one student to aspire to be an advocate for others, or help a teacher to influence those they teach, my heart would be full.

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 not ever worked as an employee in public education. But on many of my PTO days, I spent just as much time at the school as many who did work there. Although, I was never a paid employee, I did see how much time and care our educators and our staff personnel put into their jobs. Their job is not an easy one. It takes a community to educate our children and we need to recognize that. Seeing the time that teachers and classified staff, not to mention school administrators put into making our schools successful is both heartwarming and heartbreaking at times. Teachers' jobs are not just 180 days a year from 8 to 4. So many do so much after hours, during the summer and winter breaks. They are invested in their students' success and we need to be invested in their success!

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

First we need to indentify at risk students and provide school wide and targeted interventions. Making sure they are engaged their freshman year of school and that they are attending school is a good start. Creating initiatives that help engage our at risk students is important. Each student should have a connection to the school community and building a strong relationship with an educator is vital to help keep our students engaged. We need to make sure that course content is relevant and has some form of rigor. Some students who leave school have reported they are disengaged from coursework. But we also need to be cognizant that in our area and demographic, there are many other factors that may play into a student leaving high school, including socio and economic factors. Working with other organizations to help at risk youth in our community is imperative to indentify concerns early.

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

Perhaps changing things up a bit might help. If what we are currently doing is not working then the obvious answer to is to change it. I believe that this is where we go directly to our best source of information, our teachers. Find out what they believe we could do to improve our students' success. Is it possible to increase reading comprehension by expanding their knowledge and vocabulary by teaching them history, science and literature? Is it worth a shot? We have hundreds of qualified educators in our district. We need to open up the dialogue and hear what they have to offer to the fix the problem and work together to find solutions.

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

I will continue to advocate for students and employees of public education as I have done for the last 25 years. I hope serving on the board will allow me to be part of the process to make real change inside the system. This means trying to get more of the district dollars and resources back into the schools for the benefit of both our students and teachers. I will continue to foster the relationships with many community organizations that can support and assist with funding and resources for our students and families lacking basic needs. I believe collaboration is step one in having true community involvement in the education of our children. I believe it is essential for the entire community to be involved in the process so that they will have a vested interest in the outcome.

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?

I absolutely agree that more money needs to make it to the classroom. I also believe that the investment we make into our students and teachers will make our students more successful. We need to be able to provide our students and teachers with all the resources they need to be successful. I will be a vocal advocate for putting our district monies into the classroom instead of unnecessary administrative costs. As a board member I will be involved in the hiring of a new superintendent. I believe we need a leader that is hands on and is invested in our students and teachers success more than their own. I will work to insure that our board is fiscally responsible and accountable for all the district budget concerns and that stakeholders are well represented.

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?

Specific to this district, I think the first thing we can do is show our educators that they are valued and appreciated by providing them with a stable and supportive work environment. The first step in that process is selecting a Superintendent that will promote this atmosphere. We must also compensate them better. Having more competitive salaries and wages to attract new

and motivated educators to our district will help fill these vacancies. I also believe that compensating by experience is essential to retention of our most tenured staff. We should be the top paying district in New Mexico. We should be able to recruit the best and brightest teachers and be able to compensate them appropriately.

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

I honestly believe that if the school board is transparent in their business the example will set itself. Open communication with all stakeholders is essential to excellence. As long as the community feels that their voice can be heard and that it is valued, the board will keep its credibility. It is when stakeholders fear speaking up because of retaliation that our school community suffers. Having served on many boards previously, I know how important it is to keep that line of communication open and all decisions made by the board as transparent as possible.

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