

**Name:** Yolanda Cordova

**District:** Albuquerque

**Position:** 1

*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'm a 4<sup>th</sup> generation South Valley resident and have a lived experience that continues to be relevant and linked to the current experience of the community. My professional background as a public administrator and social worker prepare me with needed skills, knowledge and abilities necessary to review and approve educational policy, understand APS' complex budgeting processes, identify and resolve programmatic challenges and issues, and be responsive to parent, student, and community concerns and requests.

My professional working partnerships with CYFD, Department of Health, Workforce Development, TANF/SNAP as well as direct work with Mission Graduate, NMCAN, Youth Development Inc., ABC Community Schools, Pegasus Legal Services for Children and various community providers including First Choice, Presbyterian Health Services and First Nations, provides important context to propel APS and its mission.

I'm running because I also believe in the power of public education. Public education is one of the most important institutions necessary to empower a community, a family and a child.

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

Three specific priorities –

1. Student achievement in all academic areas, including college and career readiness using various methods to demonstrate outcomes. Students are not one score/one test – We need to rely on state exams as well as classroom performance and formative evaluations to highlight the whole classroom experience.
2. Improved coordination/communication of "school choice" through partnership and collaboration with APS Charters, magnet and other targeted programs. I want to see a comprehensive gap analysis of existing "choices" and use the data to inform decision making.

Citywide deployment of restorative justice approaches to address concerns related to school expulsion and student drop out. Albuquerque's high rate of "disconnected youth" requires a focused partnership between APS and City leadership to fix the issue.

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

When Director of School Health with the Department of Health, I directed funding to school-based health centers located at RGHS, Atrisco Heritage, RFK Charter and School on Wheels; and

facilitated funding to community-based organizations for mental health and suicide prevention initiatives and activities for youth development and engagement and lead the partnership to launch community schools. In my current role as Deputy Secretary for Workforce Solutions, I've directed funding to career readiness/career exploration at the South Valley Academy, RGHS and Harrison MS. I was also a volunteer board member of Pegasus Legal Services for Children and advocated for the rights of grandparents raising children, legal clinics focused on guardianship and the rights of young parents raising children.

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

Much of my advocacy has been linked to my direct work as a state administrator through Department of Health, Workforce Solutions and UNM – Psychiatry. I have also used my lived experience as a South Valley resident to share awareness of key issues/concerns; including access to health and mental, impact of poverty on childhood outcomes, impact of positive youth engagement and leadership and the gaps in career readiness; work-based learning and adult mentorship. I've also advocated for the expansion of community schools as a key strategy to address equity gaps and access to services for children and families.

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

I attended Kit Carson, Ernie Pyle and Rio Grande HS and fortunately had a positive experience. However, I recall negative messages about "south valley" schools and as I grew older remember how painful they were to hear. I received an apologetic response from UNM professors and other students when I mentioned I graduated from RGHS and was left feeling confused and oftentimes embarrassed about myself, my family and my community. In my master's in social work I learned about the significance of implicit bias and its power to influence outcomes for communities, families and individuals and used this learning to heal and give myself permission to be proud of my schools, my family and my community. As a board member I will keep this lesson close and work to assure our families and children feel valued and speak with dignity about all the schools and communities we serve – Children are listening.

**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 had a very short experience with APS as an interpreter for the Deaf at Del Norte HS as a first job out of college. I moved to Texas shortly thereafter and worked as a vocational rehabilitation counselor and managed a Deaf and hard of hearing caseload. I worked directly with the special education program in both of these programs and both work experiences were positive. I did not have direct interaction with the school boards, however, based on my experience I would say the overall policy/governance seemed well managed. The special education directors in Albuquerque and Texas provided excellent support to assure coordination of services. The lessons from these two public school work experiences included increased knowledge and awareness of special education policy and implementation and the importance of student/parent engagement.

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

NM does have a low graduation rate. The reasons seem to be connected to a variety of issues that can be directed to schools, students and their families – all of which require attention. On-time graduation rates are also important to review and should be reported. It is beneficial for communities to understand data from various angles in order to inform strategy. Undoubtedly having all youth complete on time is a great goal, however, we should not lose sight of efforts for children who require extra time. We should celebrate all students and acknowledge their accomplishments. Addressing circumstances that lead to delay such as credit recovery, truancy and expulsion; family trauma, substance use and other mental health issues are particularly important when students are identified at risk as early as elementary school. Opportunities for alternative settings, or flexibility and creativity in programming such as credit for work-based learning and pre-apprenticeship where students can earn while they learn have demonstrated success. Review of state policy related to graduation requirements also requires attention to assure current standards align with best and promising practices; especially for at-risk youth.

**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?**

NM ranks low in all childhood outcomes, reading and math scores are just the tip of the iceberg. Student scores are linked to social indicators related to quality of life for children and Albuquerque certainly has several negative factors impacting youth. High crime rates, poverty, lack of affordable housing, CYFD and juvenile justice involvement; slow rise out of an economic recession and income inequality are just a few. The median living wage for a family of four in Albuquerque is \$34,500, not nearly enough to afford a home or reliable transportation. I am certain children living in households below median wage come to school anxious and believe their overall school performance is reflected in their test scores. I'm also certain these children can and are learning. Reviewing them as a whole child and not limiting performance to just one-test/one-score a different picture would emerge. I advocate for a combination of standardized tests, along with classroom performance and formative tests to report outcomes. I also advocate for funding community schools where before and after school programming is included, as well as extended day learning in communities where children are at high risk.

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

First and foremost, advocacy for students and employees is accomplished when a board member commits and dedicates time and effort necessary to fully review, analyze and understand all materials presented for consideration. Since my appointment, time spent preparing for Board meetings easily averages 25-30 hours per week. It's also vital to visit with staff, parents and students to listen to their successes, challenges and ideas as a way to gain understanding of the impact of policy and budgeting decisions. It's equally important to remind staff, parents and students about the role and function of the board, noting we are limited to governance of funding and policy and evaluation of the superintendent; and not directly on the day-to-day administration of the district or human resource. I often refer parents to district staff,

consult with the superintendent to seek clarification on programming that appears to be out of alignment with our mission and goals. It's important to remain open-minded and neutral and to not overreact.

**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 was appointed to the Board in October 2017 and have looked at this issue carefully. APS' budget is very complex and certainly not always easy to understand. My overall impression is the budget is well-organized and managed and is primarily directed to the classroom. The definition of "administrative costs" provided by PED are misleading and confuses the community. The MAJORITY of APS budget is directed toward personnel working in schools, ie, teachers and all ancillary staff, as well as to the classroom for materials and supplies; including instructional materials, computers, furniture. The capital budget is separate from operations and is equally well managed in partnership with capital outlay committee.

In my current role as Deputy Secretary I am responsible for oversight of \$45m comprised of federal and state funds and find many similarities. Like my work budget, APS' budget is constrained by many state/federal requirements and the overall governance is highly structured. I am very impressed with the Chief Financial Officer. I find the office open and transparent and ready to provide information and guidance when revising the budget. The budget is well organized, monitored and managed. The last audit presented to the Board noted only two material findings and the overall health of the budget is secure and appropriate for the size of the organization.

**11. New Mexico is combatting 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?**

As Deputy Secretary for the Workforce Solutions Department we are also addressing this issue. There are fewer people willing to work in the sector of education; with the primary concern noted as wages. Up until this last legislative session, a first-year teacher salary was lower than the overall median wage for NM. The teaching profession has had to compete with other industries and nationally, the overall number of people entering the field has dwindled. The lack of interest in the occupation is not unique to NM and positive messages through marketing are instrumental to note the significance of teaching as a profession. Public education, specifically teachers, have endured a negative image for more than two decades and this negativity has cast doubt and lack of interest. Funding cuts to universities and community colleges, especially in NM, has also significantly impacted schools of education resulting in losses of professors and staffing, advocacy for legislative funding to restore schools of education is imperative if we are

to grow more teachers. Additional strategies needed are alternative licensure programs, teacher mentorship programs, and high school pipeline preparation programs.

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

APS Board of Education already sets an exemplary standard for other boards in the state. Our board members are actively engaged in the NM School Board Association and leadership is found in the number of activities outside of board meetings each board member attends to create awareness and understanding of APS' vision, mission and goals. Personally, excellence is already evident in my commitment to integrity and authenticity, demonstrated in my willingness to work collaboratively and in partnership with all the board members. I am thoughtful during board meetings, especially when I disagree with a position or decision. I support all board decisions. Our ability to work cohesively and cooperatively is important to the community, parents, students and staff especially when faced with difficult decisions or crisis. Leadership in these instances requires an ability to remain calm, fair, and open-minded.

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