

EDUCATION

SFPS graduation rates dismal

It's not fun to kick off a column with bad news, but a recent Kids Count report by New Mexico Voices for Children — an Albuquerque-based nonprofit focusing on research, data, public policy and educational reform — uses Public Education Department data to show that Santa Fe Public Schools ranks near the bottom of the state's 89 school districts when it comes to graduation rates. We're at 53 percent. Dulce Independent Schools and House Municipal Schools were also down there, and Española Municipal Schools just squeaked ahead of us with 54 percent.

Smaller school districts including Mosquero, Tatum and Quemado were near the top, with rates of 98 percent, but keep in mind their student population is lower than ours. New Mexico Voices for Children's website — www.nmvoices.org — also features a number of interesting reports on early-childhood investment and health care options for kids.

Sweeter news

The Los Angeles Unified School District's Board of Education voted earlier this month to stop offering chocolate and strawberry-flavored milk in school cafeterias as of this

coming semester. According to a *Los Angeles Times* article, "the move makes L.A. the largest school system in the nation to pull flavored milks out of schools and is part of a larger push to make the food served at school more nutritious. L.A. Unified earlier banned soda sales at schools."

About 60 percent of the district's children were choosing chocolate or strawberry over white milk, the report notes. It quotes Megan Bomba, a project coordinator at Occidental College's Urban and Environmental Policy Institute and a school food reform advocate, as saying, "If they (L.A.) succeed, no other district will have an excuse."

Santa Fe Public Schools stopped serving strawberry milk two years ago, but still offers fat-free chocolate milk and white milk.

School partnerships work

Last month I profiled The Salazar Partnership, a collaborative community-based organization of local professionals and educators who work together to create a healthy school environment by improving medical and dental care for kids and promoting healthy diets and sharp reading skills. This volunteer partnership, headed up by Santa Fean Bill Carson, works in both Agua Fria and

Salazar elementary schools. I noted in that column that The Salazar Partnership is like a micro-version of Communities in Schools, a national organization founded about 30 years ago with the goal of bringing professional community resources into public schools. (www.communitiesinschools.org).

Carson just sent me a five-year evaluation of Communities in Schools and its educational model that notes that this "model of integrated services, when implemented with fidelity, yields both substantial and substantive improvements in school and student outcomes." The report goes on to state that this type of focused community support positively impacts attendance, academics, student morale, family relationships and parental involvement. The Salazar Partnership is about to celebrate its 15th year working in Santa Fe Public Schools.

Perusing the periodicals

Let me close by referring you to the American Educator website — www.aft.org/newspubs/periodicals/ae/. This is a quarterly journal with a current issue that features strong articles about teacher training, teacher preparation and professionalism in Finland, and a neat piece by Andy Waddell called "Why I Force My Students to Memorize Poetry Despite The Fact That It Won't Be on the Standardized Test."



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