

Creating a bright future for New Mexico students with action and compassion

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Santa Fe Public Schools Superintendent, Dr. Veronica C. Garcia has never been one to sit passively when it comes to improving outcomes for children.

In her nearly 50-year career she has learned that in order to make meaningful change, one has to be in a position to influence policies that can positively affect the lives of students—an idea she says she picked up as a student herself.

“My interest in public policy actually started in high school,” Dr. Garcia says. “I was on the speech team, and I was reading articles from news outlets like The Atlantic Monthly and U.S. News and World Report that talked a lot about public policy and debated many of these issues. I’ve had this advocacy and public policy bent since I was pretty young.”

One of her main goals has long been to mitigate the stressors children face when living in poverty. She has long pushed for, among other things, increasing student access to mental and physical health services, additional tutoring and access to technology, and programs that provide ample food for children.

“We have to look at children holistically,” Dr. Garcia says. “If a child is hungry, economically insecure, worried about shelter, if they have health or dental issues, or if they have troubles with behavioral health, they’re not going to be able to benefit fully from a quality education.”

Whether in her time lobbying for increased public education funding for the New Mexico Coalition of School Administrators, advocating for equity for impoverished youth for NM Voices for Children, or serving as New Mexico’s first State Cabinet Secretary of Education where she promoted statewide reform, Dr. Garcia has undoubtedly made positive change.

It’s vital to strike a balance between collaboration and being able to, as she says, be “the head cheerleader” and take charge in times of crisis.



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Dr. Veronica C. Garcia, Superintendent

“There are times where commanding is needed, and times where you have the luxury of being able to deliberate and collaborate, and I think it’s important to be flexible,” Dr. Garcia says. “I think that any leader that is worth their salt uses an eclectic management style.”

At the end of the day, she notes, her word is her code of honor and, more than anything, she believes in keeping her word and being honest, fair, and ethical in all that she does.

Susan Cook, COO and Leadership Coach at School Innovations & Achievement—which works with Santa Fe Public Schools to track and improve student atten-

dance—says Dr. Garcia’s passion for equity and improving student outcomes both in and out of the classroom is inspirational.

“When driving change, good leaders, like Dr. Garcia, understand that the art of balancing different leadership styles depends on the situation,” Cook says. “It’s true that one size does not fit all and Dr. Garcia knows how to be flexible in order to strike the right balance.”

Dr. Garcia says the district just finished shaping its five-year strategic plan, which will prioritize instilling in students soft skills, such as collaboration, problem solving, and grit, as well as project-based learning and computer science—all of which stand to further benefit children.

“I’ve been in education in one form or another for 46 years,” Dr. Garcia explains. “I feel that being able to serve in this role is a real privilege, because it is legacy work—we’re touching lives in ways that we don’t even know.

“We’re breaking cycles of poverty for many families; we’re opening doors of opportunity for kids to achieve their dreams,” she says. “And I can’t think of any work that is more profound that I could be doing.”