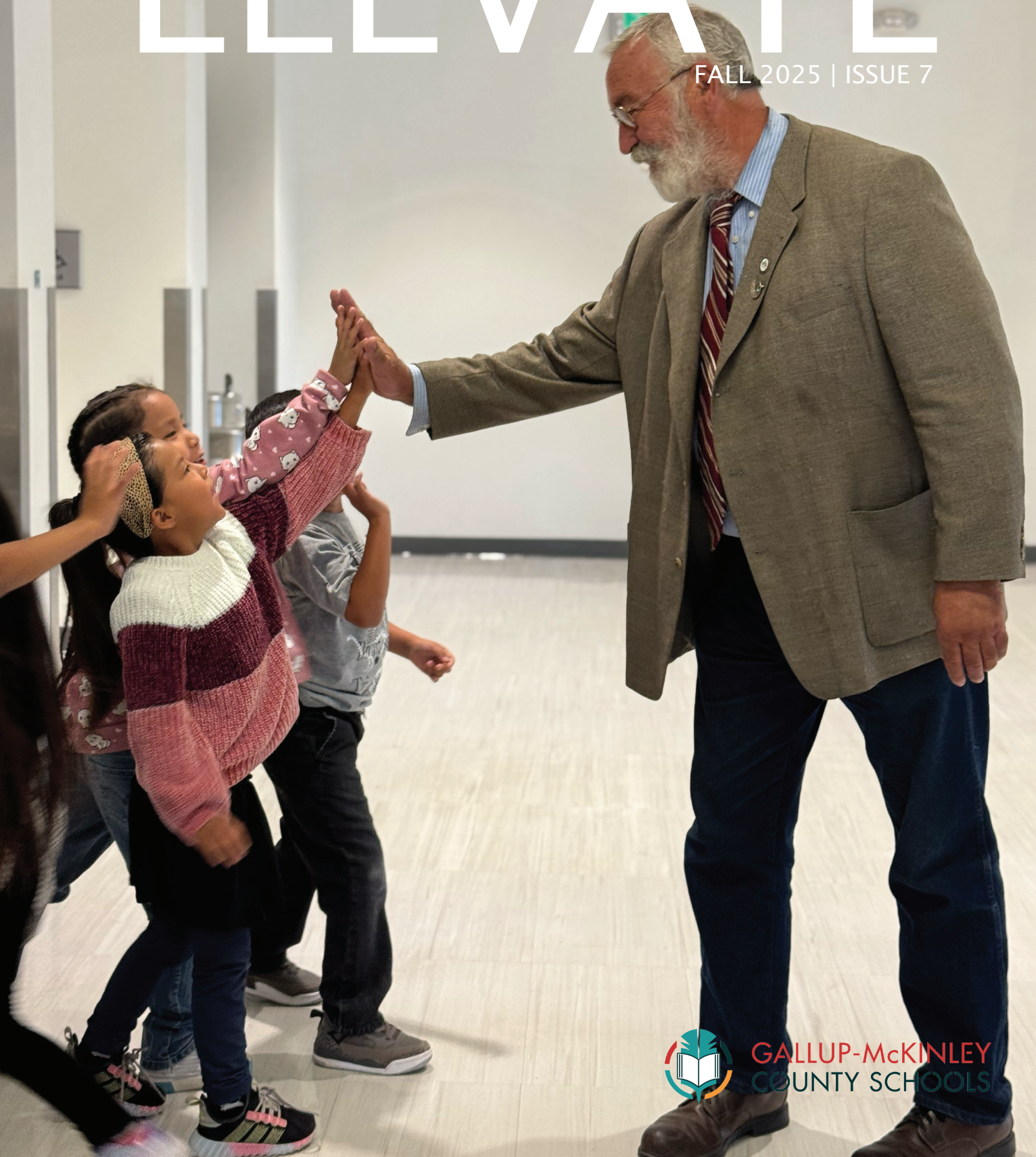


ELEVATE

FALL 2025 | ISSUE 7



GALLUP-McKINLEY
COUNTY SCHOOLS



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GALLUP-McKINLEY
COUNTY SCHOOLS

ELEVATE

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ISSUE 7

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*Front Cover: GMCS School Board Member,
Michael Schaaf with Jefferson Elementary
School students on a visit to see STEM Kits.*

*Back Cover: Superintendent, Mike Hyatt
with GMCS School Board Member Priscilla
Benally trying out a CAT simulator.*

UPCOMING DATES

...October 2025...

Fall Break

October 10

Indigenous Peoples' Day

October 13

GMCS School Board Meeting

October 20

Parent-Teacher Conferences

October 27

Red Ribbon Week

October 27-31

...November 2025...

Election Day

November 4

GMCS School Board Meeting

November 10

Veterans Day

November 11

Thanksgiving Break

November 24-28

...December 2025...

80th Day of School

December 1

GMCS School Board Meeting

December 15

Christmas Break

December 22-31



RISING TO NEW HEIGHTS

Gallup-McKinleyCounty Schools is proud to announce a new chapter in our virtual education program for the 2025-26 school year. Our official K-12 virtual school has relaunched as RISE Online Academy New Mexico.

What families can expect this school year:

- **Personalized support** for both academics and life challenges
- **24/7 tutoring** available whenever students need help
- **School-provided laptops and enhanced WiFi connectivity**, ensuring access for every learner
- **Clubs, field trips, and extracurriculars**, plus the opportunity for 7th–12th graders to join local sports
- **Family advocates** who partner with parents and guardians to connect them with resources and guidance
- **Low student-teacher ratios** for more individualized attention
- **A welcoming parent community**, offering connection and support for families navigating online learning

Powered by Proven Success

RISE is operated by Graduation Alliance, the team behind ENGAGE New Mexico, which helped thousands of students overcome chronic absenteeism after the COVID-19 pandemic. They have been delivering innovative and supportive online education programs to families since 2007.

“We are thrilled to partner with GMCS to bring a top-notch public education to New Mexico

students,” said Dr. Todd Keruskin, Graduation Alliance Superintendent in Residence. “Students will benefit from flexible classes, personalized support, and plenty of opportunities for social interaction through clubs, extracurricular activities, and in-person field trips.”

Open to Students Across New Mexico

One of the most exciting aspects of RISE Online Academy is that enrollment is not limited to Gallup-McKinley County Schools students. Families from anywhere in the state can choose RISE as their K-12 public school option. This expanded reach ensures that students who need a virtual pathway can access a supportive, high-quality education.

A School That Grows With Your Child

From kindergarteners just beginning their academic journey to high school seniors preparing for their next steps, RISE Online Academy is built to grow alongside your child.



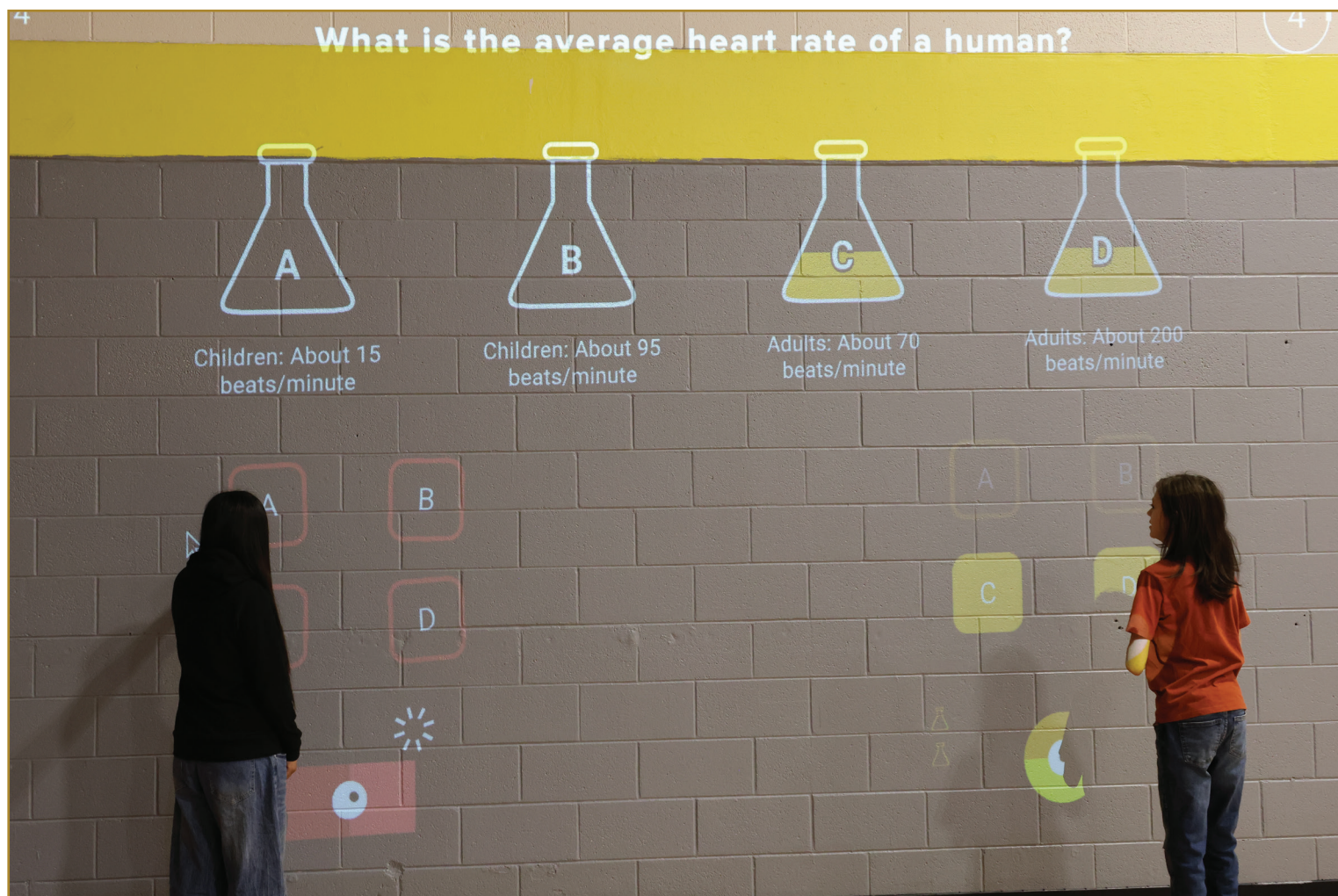
RISE ONLINE ACADEMY
NEW MEXICO

Enrollment is now open statewide!

Visit us today at RiseOnlineAcademy.org to learn more and see how RISE Online Academy can help your child succeed.

TECH MEETS PLAY:

How LU Projectors Are Transforming Middle School Learning in Gallup-McKinley County

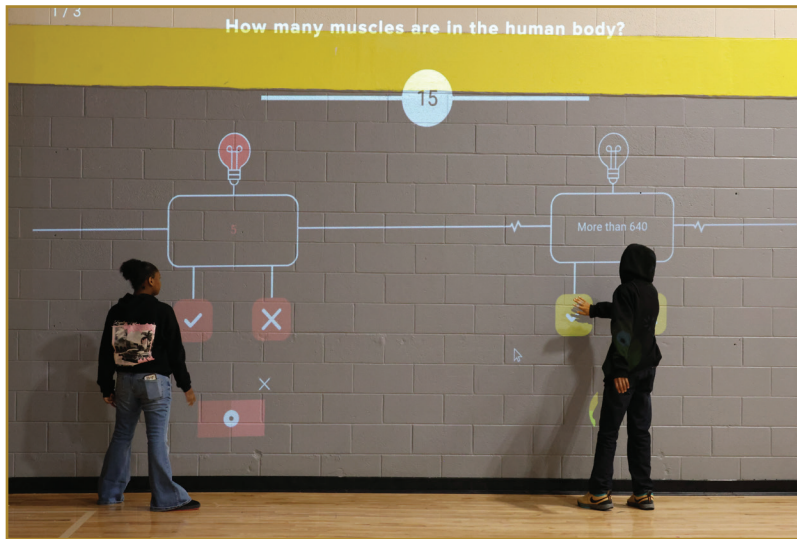


This fall, middle school students across Gallup-McKinley County Schools walked into classrooms that look—and feel—very different. Thanks to Capital Outlay funding secured by Representative Wonda Johnson and Senator George Muñoz, every middle school in the district is equipped with the LU Interactive Projector system. This groundbreaking educational tool blends technology, movement, and creativity.

What exactly is the LU Projector, and why is it generating so much excitement?

“we use it (Lu Projector) for health and fitness and other curriculum that we can tie into our lessons and today we’re going to be using it for health and fitness.”

Jorge Sanchez
Gallup Middle School PE Teacher



A Classroom That Moves with Your Child

Imagine a classroom where the walls come alive with interactive educational games, lessons, and challenges. The LU Projector turns ordinary spaces into dynamic learning environments using high-definition visuals, motion sensors, LED lighting, and immersive sound. Students don't just sit and listen—they move, collaborate, and engage with the material in real time.

For parents, this means your child is not only learning core subjects like math, science, and language arts—they're doing it in a way that's active, fun, and memorable.

Interactive Learning That Supports the Whole Child

The LU system is designed with whole-child development in mind, encourages physical movement, teamwork, and emotional intelligence, helping students build skills that go beyond academics. Whether they're solving math problems through motion-based games or working together on a geography challenge, students are learning how to think critically and work collaboratively.

Built for Teachers, Loved by Students

Teachers can customize lessons using LU's online community platform, allowing them to tailor content to their students' needs. And because LU offers both permanent and mobile setups, schools can share the technology across classrooms and even use it in gymnasiums or multipurpose spaces.

The result? A flexible, engaging tool that meets students where they are—and helps them grow.

A Community Investment in the Future

This initiative is more than just a tech upgrade. It's a statement about the value Gallup-McKinley County places on innovation, equity, and student success. By investing in LU Projectors, the district is giving every middle schooler access to a learning experience that's modern, inclusive, and inspiring.

As a parent, you can look forward to hearing your child talk about school in a whole new way—where learning feels like play, and every lesson is an adventure.

REIMAGINING RURAL EDUCATION

Discover how our school district has overcome geographic isolation and poverty to create relevant career opportunities for students

Portions Originally Published by Business View Magazine



In the vast expanse of New Mexico lies a school district that defies conventional educational models. Spanning 4,957 square miles or roughly the size of Connecticut, Gallup-McKinley County Schools serves students across seven distinct communities, many living over 100 miles from the central office. The district operates in one of the nation's most economically disadvantaged regions, ranked 50th in poverty levels nationwide.

"We're a very unique school district, not only in New Mexico but in the country," says Mike Hyatt, Superintendent of Gallup-McKinley County Schools. "We're the third largest geographically as far as how dispersed our students are. This area is culturally diverse with some very rural and some city center communities, which presents both challenges and opportunities to provide education for students from diverse backgrounds socially, culturally, and



economically.”

The geographic isolation creates extraordinary logistical hurdles. Many communities lack basic infrastructure like no grocery stores within 40 miles, no gas stations, and limited internet connectivity. According to Deputy Superintendent Jvanna Hanks, “Some of our families live with no electricity, no water, and haul water.”

Eighty percent of the district operates on tribal land, serving a predominantly Native American student population. This cultural richness adds depth to the district’s educational approach but requires sensitivity to traditional values while preparing students for their futures. Rather than viewing these circumstances as insurmountable obstacles, district leadership has transformed them into catalysts for educational innovation, establishing Gallup-McKinley as a leader in career pathways and workforce readiness.

RETHINKING RURAL EDUCATION

The career pathways model breaks from traditional college-centric approaches. The initiative responds directly to local business concerns about workforce readiness while addressing the unique needs of students in isolated communities.

“Our work originated many years ago when I heard from business people in our community saying our students weren’t ready for work and lacked the skills needed to be successful,” Hyatt explains. “Coupled with experiences from different conferences and seeing schools doing things differently along the line of career pathways, that’s how it started.”

The district has constructed a comprehensive model providing multiple post-graduation pathways like skilled trades, military service, and four-year college tracks. “Education needs a revolution,” says Hanks. “We need to view

GALLUP McKINLEY COUNTY SCHOOLS GRADUATE PROFILE





education as a continuum in individuals' lives. There is not one path that equals success. There are multiple paths, and students just need to find the ones that suit them best."

This paradigm shift manifests through paid internships, dual college credit opportunities, and specialized career-track courses, even in the most remote schools. The district now funds student internships with local businesses, many of which couldn't otherwise afford to host interns.

"We've figured out a way to pay those students so they're getting real-world experience with direct skills as well as soft skills," Hanks notes. "It gives them a way to feel how the real world works, including showing up and getting a paycheck, while getting experience without making it an economic burden on businesses."

INTEGRATING ACADEMIC CURRICULUM WITH REAL-WORLD SKILLS

What distinguishes Gallup-McKinley's approach

is its intentional integration of career skills with traditional academic subjects, a methodology known as "linked learning" in educational circles. "We link the learning from career pathways with science, math, and English," Hyatt says. "Students get that relevance throughout the curriculum, no matter what course they're taking. We create a collaborative environment where teachers work together on how to best meet students' needs through relevance or partnerships, doing projects together that build that relevance."

The district organizes teachers into "School of", collaborative teams where core subject instructors coordinate with career pathway teachers to create cross-curricular connections. Kyndee Keeler, Director of College Career and Civic Readiness, explains, "Our English, math, history, and science teachers are intentionally connected to career pathway classes to create authentic learning experiences. This approach helps them design lessons that are relevant



and connected to real-world careers, allowing students to see those connections throughout the day.” says Keeler. “In addition, students can take Project Lead the Way courses that explore areas like medical detectives, engineering, and other subjects designed to spark and develop career interests.” The district secured funding from the New Mexico legislature to build STEM discovery centers in elementary school resource rooms, working with the Cal Ripken Jr. Foundation to outfit these spaces with interactive technology.

“There’s more than one way to teach,” Hanks notes. “There’s definitely a way to integrate engineering into math so lessons bring not only relevance but reinforce information for students in a real-world way. Just because students need to create technical writing doesn’t mean they can’t do it by writing a manual on how to create equipment or how to scope out (processes) using a 3D printer to print molds for mass production.”

BUILDING A CONTINUOUS EDUCATIONAL JOURNEY

Gallup-McKinley has constructed a sequential career development path that begins in elementary school and continues through graduation. This approach aligns with research showing that early career exposure significantly increases student engagement and helps children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds envision professional futures.

Elementary students explore careers through hands on STEM activities and career exploration programs. “We’ve started building STEM centers in our resource centers in each elementary school where there are hands-on STEM activities students can participate in,” Hyatt explains. “We have a program called Xello available to all elementary schools. It is an interactive career exploration.”

By middle school, students begin taking dedicated employability skills courses—an uncommon opportunity for grades 7-8. “We

offer employability skills classes from seventh through eighth grade,” says Keeler. “In addition, students can take Project Lead the Way courses that explore areas like medical detectives, engineering, and other subjects designed to spark and develop career interests.”

The district developed a “graduate profile” outlining desired characteristics for graduates: collaborative skills, critical thinking, lifelong learning capabilities, and communication abilities. High school juniors take a three-course sequence in their chosen pathway, preparing them for senior-year experiences outside traditional classrooms.

“Seniors are in a capstone experience tied to their ‘School Of’ pathway. This may include serving as a student intern, taking a dual credit class, or enrolling in career and technical courses at the Opportunity Career Center or through the UNM-Gallup CCTE program.” Keeler says. “All our health students across the District are in internships or dual credit courses, and next year we’ll focus on media students.”

The district tracks post-graduation outcomes through family follow-up calls. “We don’t want them to attend one semester of college and return,” Hanks notes. “We want them to be post-graduate success stories. We track our kids after they leave to see how well we’ve prepared them for their future.”

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES IN ISOLATED SETTINGS

Strategic partnerships form the backbone of Gallup- McKinley’s educational innovation, enabling the district to overcome geographic isolation and limited local industries. The district has developed relationships with national laboratories, universities, technical schools, and regional businesses to expand student opportunities beyond what the local economy offers.

“We partner with Navajo Technical University

for our engineering students,” Keeler explains. “They provide engineering courses each semester and work with Crownpoint High, which is 50 miles away. We also collaborate with Sandia Labs and Los Alamos Labs throughout the year, plus a summer bridge program where both labs work with our students on specific projects.”

These laboratory partnerships offer exceptional opportunities rarely available in rural settings. Students receive scholarships for month-long lab internships, exposing them to cutting-edge research environments. The district also maintains a Business Community Steering Committee that guides school curriculum development.

“Our business community team helps guide our schools of,” says Keeler. “They provide ideas about what work looks like in the real world. Our students visit their businesses, we bring in speakers, and they help develop projects—like our business students working on food truck projects with local food truck operators.”

For college-bound students, the district partners with the University of New Mexico-Gallup for an early college program. “We transport students from across our district to Gallup where they get an opportunity to earn an associate’s degree before graduating high school,” Hyatt notes.

ATTRACTING AND RETAINING QUALITY EDUCATORS IN RURAL AMERICA

Rural education nationwide faces a persistent challenge: attracting and retaining qualified teachers. Gallup-McKinley has transformed its approach to this problem, reducing annual teacher turnover from nearly 50% to creating an environment where educators now stay an average of six to seven years.

“We have communities where we’re asking teachers to come that don’t have a grocery store within 40 miles or a gas station,” Hyatt explains. “They have to make sure they have enough



gas from 40 miles away to travel back when it's running out. It's extremely rural, with limited amenities you would find in larger city centers."

To overcome these challenges, the district implemented a comprehensive teacher support system. Since 80% of the district sits on sovereign tribal land where housing can't be purchased or rented, the district built teacher housing. "We've had to build housing for our teachers," says Hyatt. "We provide it free of charge, paying for their housing and utilities."

Financial incentives form another critical component. The district offers relocation expenses up to \$3,000, recruitment incentives up to \$20,000 for two-year commitments, retention bonuses for staff who stay, and covers 90% of insurance premiums.

These approaches align with research showing that rural teacher retention requires addressing both professional satisfaction and quality of life concerns.

The district's innovative curriculum provides professional fulfillment that aids retention. "When you create a collaborative environment where teachers work together on building relevance for students, we've seen people get excited about that kind of work with their peers," Hyatt notes. "That's driven a lot of our retention efforts."

RECOGNITION, SUSTAINABILITY, AND FUTURE GROWTH

What began as a response to local workforce needs has evolved into an educational model drawing attention across New Mexico and



beyond. Gallup-McKinley now hosts educators from around the country seeking to implement similar approaches in their own rural districts.

"We've done about a dozen total site visits from different foundations and schools across the country coming to look at what we're doing," Hyatt says. "We're not perfect, there are things we're still refining, but we're showcasing our approach especially for rural communities. Not a lot of this work happens in rural settings because of the challenges, so we're sharing what we've figured out with other rural communities."

The district has presented their model at multiple conferences, including EdUprising, NMACTE, and ACTE regional conferences, and was recently featured in ConnectedED's newsletter for experiential learning. Their systematic approach to curriculum development ensures sustainability beyond individual champions.

"We've created individual example lesson plans with fully integrated projects as resources for our educators," Hanks explains. "They can pull down a standard and see an example with integrations for media or engineering. One of the issues we saw in other areas was pockets of success driven by individual people. Our goal is



global success with a sustainable system, so students will have access to quality resources.”

Current priorities include building a central career tech center to provide more specialized opportunities and refining their curriculum integration. “We’re now in the refining stage,” Hyatt notes. “We’ve figured out what works well for our students and are making sure it’s truly embedded in instruction. With turnover, we’re focused on how to create a model that sustains itself when staff changes, especially in rural schools where losing two teachers out of seven dramatically impacts programs.”

From the rugged landscapes of New Mexico, Gallup-McKinley County Schools has forged an educational approach that transcends traditional models, creating pathways to success for students in one of America’s most

challenging educational environments. By reimagining education as a continuous journey from elementary school to employment, the district demonstrates how rural schools can overcome geographic isolation, economic constraints, and infrastructure limitations to prepare students for meaningful futures.

COLLEGE, CAREER AND CIVIC READINESS DEPT

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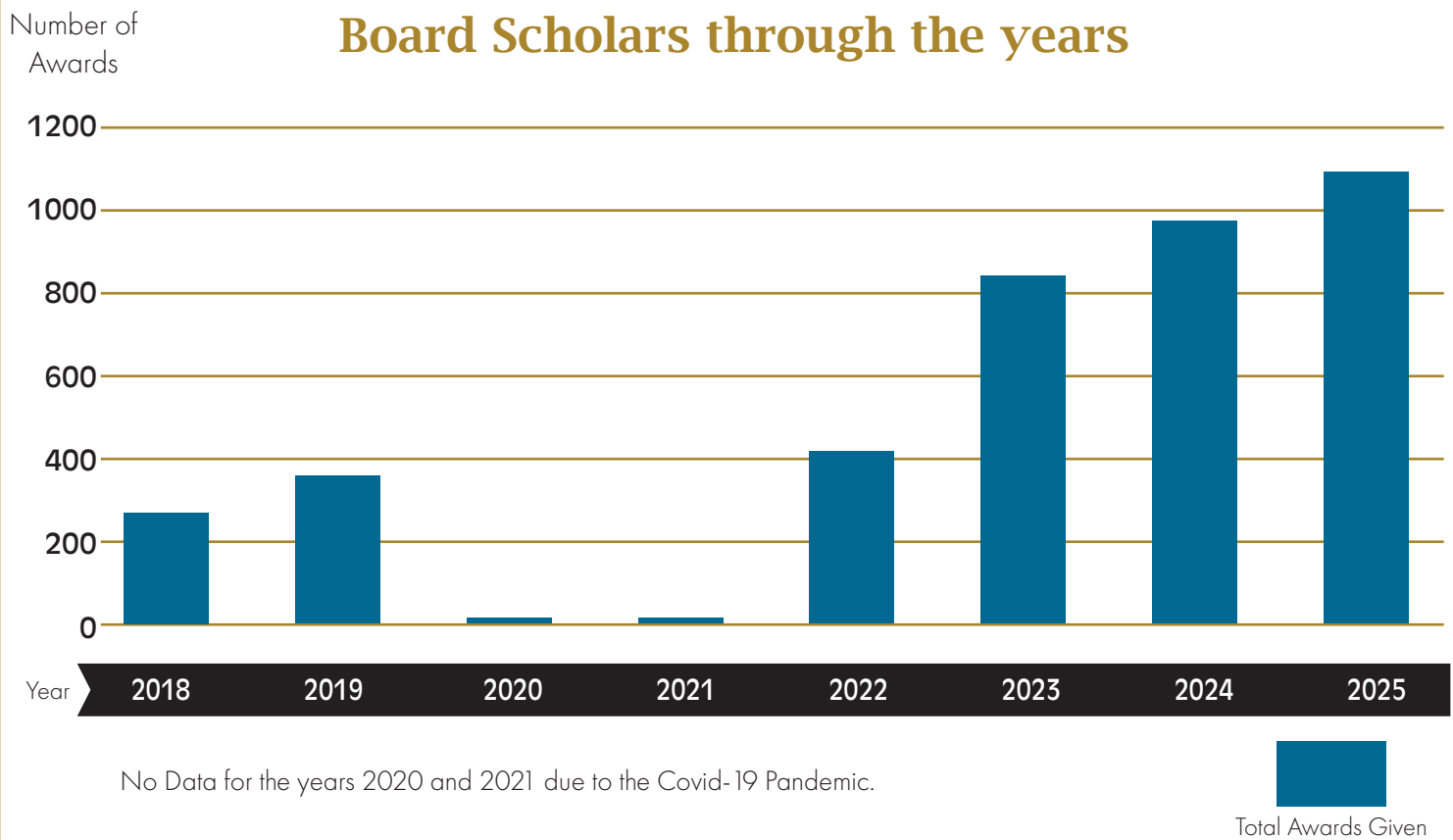
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GMCS Board Scholars

Gallup-McKinley County Schools is proud to recognize the tremendous growth of our Board Scholars program. Since 2018, the number of students excelling in ELA, Math, and Science has increased steadily, with totals rising from 249 scholars in 2018 to more than **1,090** in 2025. Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, our students have demonstrated remarkable resilience and achievement, reflecting the hard work of our educators, families, and community. This growth highlights our ongoing commitment to academic excellence and preparing every student for future success.



GMCS 2025 Board Scholar Ceremony

Presented at the Board Meeting on October 20, 2025

GMCS Construction Projects Build Stronger Futures for Students





Gallup-McKinley County Schools is investing in the future with several major construction projects that will create modern learning environments across the district. These new facilities were made possible by the GMCS Board of Education and Administration's ongoing push for funding equalization in both operational and capital dollars. Leading the way is McKinley Academy, which is preparing for an exciting new chapter as construction continues with a new facility.

Currently housed in a University of New Mexico–Gallup building, McKinley Academy has outgrown its space due to steady enrollment growth and increasing interest in its unique concurrent enrollment model. Students at McKinley Academy are enrolled at UNM–Gallup while remaining connected to their home high schools, where they can participate in athletics, clubs, school dances, and other traditions.

The program offers a rare opportunity for students to get ahead academically. While working toward their high school diploma, students can also earn college credits and even graduate with an associate degree, giving them a strong head start on their postsecondary goals.

The new building, designed with growth and student needs in mind, will create a dedicated home for McKinley Academy. It will provide modern classrooms, collaborative learning spaces, and resources that reflect the program's college-level expectations. Having a building of its own will allow the academy to expand offerings, serve more students, and create a stronger sense of identity and community.

“The new McKinley Academy building strengthens our early college mission by giving students a dedicated space to pursue both high school and college coursework,” said Principal Brittainy Garro. “It provides the environment they need to excel academically, build confidence, and graduate prepared for the opportunities ahead.”

Left: Renderings of the New Thoreau High School, breaking ground, March 2026



Renderings of the New Thoreau High School, breaking ground, March 2026

The McKinley Academy facility is scheduled for completion in early August 2026, joining other construction projects that reflect the district's commitment to student achievement and community growth:

Construction Timeline At-a-Glance

- March 2026 – Thoreau construction starts (delayed by PSFA)
- March 2026 – Tohatchi High School construction completion
- May 2026 – David Skeet Elementary design phase completion

- June 2026 – Crownpoint Middle and High Schools design phase completion
- August 2026 – Navajo Pine design phase completion
- August 2026 – McKinley Academy construction completion
- Ongoing – Gallup Central High/McKinley Tech design phase

At Gallup Central High, soon to become McKinley Tech, the focus is on expanding career and technical education opportunities. “A new building will serve as a cornerstone for Gallup Central High’s/McKinley Tech’s Culinary, Construction, and Business



Tohatchi High School, August 2025.



Renderings of the New Thoreau High School, breaking ground, March 2026

programs—creating state-of-the-art learning spaces that mirror real-world environments,” said Principal Kristi Del Curto. “By expanding these programs, we will not only equip students with industry-recognized skills and credentials but also strengthen the economic

vitality of Gallup through a skilled workforce, local partnerships, and entrepreneurial opportunities that keep talent in our community.”

As these projects progress, anticipation is building among students, families, and educators who see them



Renderings of the New Thoreau High School, breaking ground, March 2026

as investments in the future. From early college to career readiness, GMCS is laying the foundation for student success—today and for years to come.

Gallup-McKinley County Schools: Eight Years of Growth and Achievement

Over the past eight years, Gallup-McKinley County Schools (GMCS) has reached historic milestones, building stronger opportunities for students, families, and staff throughout McKinley County.

One of the district's most significant accomplishments was the GMCS Board's success with House Bill 6 in 2020, which secured the return of \$24 million annually in Impact Aid directly for GMCS students. This funding, once redirected by the state, is now invested where it belongs—into classrooms and student success.

GMCS also served as lead plaintiff in the Yazzie-Martinez lawsuit, which resulted in more than \$1 billion in new funding statewide for New Mexico schools. The district continues to advocate for full implementation of the Indian Education Act, ensuring that Native American students receive sustained and meaningful support.

Through the Capital Outlay lawsuit, GMCS has secured more than \$300 million for facilities improvements. These investments are transforming learning environments across the district. New schools are in design at Crownpoint Middle and High, Navajo Pine High, David Skeet Elementary, and a new Technical School. Thoreau High School has completed design and is awaiting construction approval, Tohatchi High School is on track to open in early 2026, and Red Rock Elementary is nearing the end of construction.

These historic efforts have contributed to exciting academic results. In-Person Graduation

rates at GMCS now exceed the New Mexico state average, and student proficiency growth continues to rise, particularly for Native American students. The creation of McKinley Academy in 2018 has expanded college opportunities, now serving more than 600 students each year. It is the largest public early college high school program in the Southwest, offering students the chance to earn college credit and even associate degrees at no cost, with a new state-of-the-art facility set to open in August 2026.

GMCS is also proud that over 95% of high school students are enrolled in Career Pathways programs, ensuring students graduate with valuable job skills and future-ready training. Paid internships continue to grow, with more than 230 students earning \$12 per hour in 2022–2023 alone. Middle school and high school readiness has been further strengthened through the return of 6th grade students to elementary schools, additional support programs, and districtwide implementation of positive behavior reinforcement systems, which have significantly reduced discipline referrals.

Technology and innovation have been district priorities. Every student now receives a technology device. GMCS has also developed the first Navajo language curriculum and assessments of its kind.

Staff have also seen historic investments. GMCS has provided the largest salary increases in district history, higher on average than any other district in New Mexico. In addition, staff have received annual retention addenda of



GMCS Board Members are recognized at the NM State Legislature on the House Floor in February 2025

\$500–\$2,500. The district also provides one of the best benefits packages in the state, covering 90% of insurance premiums, offering housing incentives for teachers in our rural communities, and continuing to support staff well-being.

Families have also benefited, with the district now purchasing all school supplies for students and classroom kits for teachers, removing financial barriers and ensuring every child has what they need to learn.

GMCS has invested in transportation and enrichment opportunities as well. The district purchased new athletic and activity buses, smaller vehicles for rural student transport, and all-wheel drive vehicles for home-school liaisons. Middle schools now host a Bike Club program with 220 bicycles and safety gear purchased for students, and families enjoy free admission to all GMCS athletic events.

All of these efforts are guided by GMCS's first-ever strategic plan—Elevate 2022, and built upon in Elevate 2025—which outline a clear vision for student success. The district has also expanded its communication with the community through radio, newspaper, text, email, social media and annual surveys, ensuring families are informed and included in decision-making.

Through strong leadership, innovative programs, and an unwavering commitment to students, Gallup-McKinley County Schools has emerged as a model for College, Career, and Civic Readiness in New Mexico. Together, these accomplishments highlight the district's dedication to preparing every student for a successful future.



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