



RIO RANCHO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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"Student Excellence"

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Dear Parent or Guardian,

The New Mexico Department of Public Education has released its annual school ratings for 2009. The ratings are based on the results of the New Mexico Standards-Based Assessments (NMSBA), achievement tests given to students in grades 3-8 and grade 11 in the spring of 2009.

Schools may achieve a rating of "Meets AYP" or "AYP Not Met". AYP stands for "adequate yearly progress", and refers to the federally-mandated goal that all students demonstrate proficiency in reading and math by the year 2014. The academic data is reported in terms of the percentage of students meeting or exceeding proficiency targets.

We are pleased to let you know the percentage of Rio Rancho High students meeting proficiency increased in all but three subgroups this year, and the school made AYP for two of the five subgroups that did not make AYP last year. Rio Rancho High also has one of the highest graduation rates of any large high school in the state and its test scores generally rank high among New Mexico schools.

However, since the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires that schools meet AYP for 100% of all up to 37 possible data points for two consecutive years in order to exit the school improvement cycle, RRHS remains designated as a school in "restructuring." State law, in accordance with the mandates of NCLB, establishes steps schools must take to inform parents of this designation and to, if possible, provide parents with the opportunity to transfer their child to a school that has not been found "in need of improvement" (referred to as "school choice").

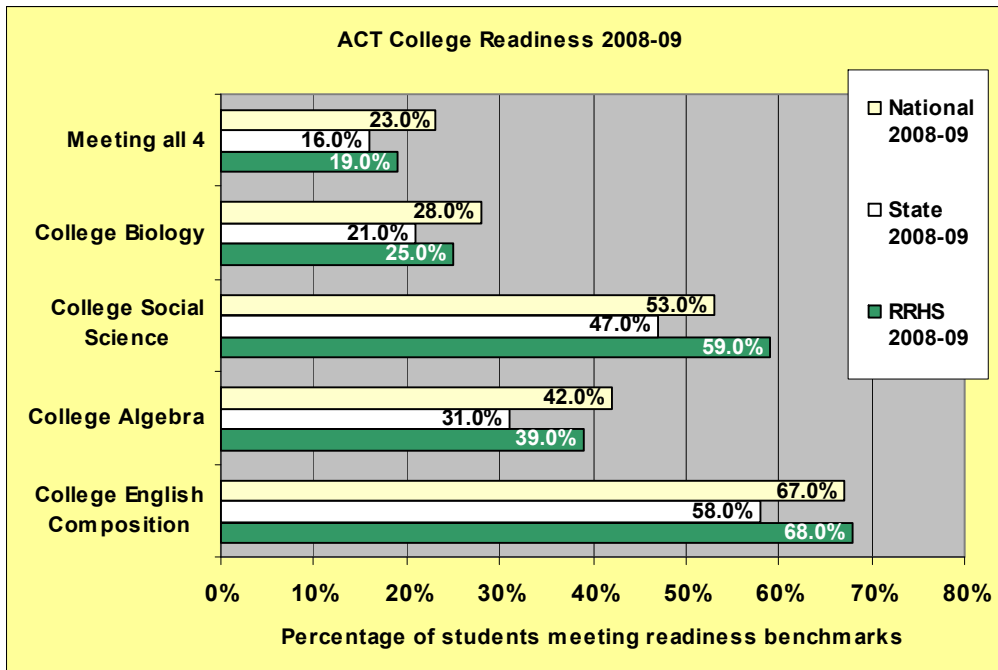
How Did Our School Do?

The chart below shows how Rio Rancho High eleventh graders scored on the tests given in the spring of 2009:

Rio Rancho High School										
Proficiency: Expressed in terms of the percentage of students in a subgroup demonstrating proficiency in the subject area. A school meets AYP if the percentage of students demonstrating proficiency meets or exceeds state targets. Participation: Indicates whether at least 95% of students in the subgroup completed the test.										
Percentage of indicators meeting AYP: 85% (23 of 27 rated areas)										
School rating: AYP Not Met			School improvement status: Restructuring II (R-2)					Years in school improvement: 5		
Subgroup	All students	Caucasian	African-American	Hispanic	Asian/Pacific	American Indian	English-language learners	Students with disabilities	Economically disadvantaged	Additional indicator: Graduation
Mathematics proficiency	57.8 Meets AYP	66.5 Meets AYP	58.8 Meets AYP	45.5 Meets AYP	**	50.0 Meets AYP	15.6 AYP Not Met	23.0 AYP Not Met	49.7 Meets AYP	Meets AYP
Reading Proficiency	62.1 Meets AYP	69.2 Meets AYP	58.8 Meets AYP	53.5 Meets AYP	**	53.5 Meets AYP	21.9 AYP Not Met	32.2 Meets AYP	55.0 Meets AYP	
Mathematics Participation	Meets AYP	Meets AYP	**	Meets AYP	**	**	**	Meets AYP	Meets AYP	
Reading Participation	Meets AYP	Meets AYP	**	Meets AYP	**	**	**	Meets AYP	Meets AYP	
**Subgroups with fewer than 25 students <u>do not</u> receive an AYP designation based on the percentage of students demonstrating proficiency. Subgroups with fewer than 40 students <u>do not</u> receive an AYP designation for participation.										

The NMSBA, the state’s achievement test, is just one of the measures we use to gauge student progress and success. Another is the ACT (American College Test), the college admissions exam required by most New Mexico and western U.S. colleges and universities and becoming widely accepted at major universities across the country. Nearly three-quarters of last year’s senior class took the ACT, so its results represent the accomplishments of a substantial number of seniors.

Rio Rancho High’s composite ACT average of 20.9 exceeds the state average by .9, and is just .2 short of the national average.



The ACT also measures college readiness. Our results show we still have plenty of work to do, but again, in all areas RRHS students exceeded the state average and in two subject areas also exceeded the national average.

What we are doing about it:

The chart below shows the percentage of students demonstrating proficiency last year and this year in the tested core subjects of reading and math. The hard work of our students and teachers, coupled with the changes instituted during the last school year, are reflected in the significant gains made by almost every subgroup this year in both reading and math. We are especially pleased that students with disabilities and economically-disadvantaged students made AYP in reading this year after not doing so last year, in part because of the strong gains. However, the state accountability system primarily considers whether subgroups have achieved state targets, so the school did not meet AYP in three subgroups that posted 5%+ gains.

Subgroup	Reading			Math		
	Proficient & Above 2008	Proficient & Above 2009	Difference	Proficient & Above 2008	Proficient & Above 2009	Difference
All Students	58.4%	62.1%	+3.7%	52.8%	57.8%	+5.0%
Caucasian	62.0%	69.2%	+7.2%	59.3%	66.5%	+7.2%
African-American	52.5%	58.8%	+6.3%	30.0%	58.8%	+28.8%
Hispanic	54.1%	53.5%	-0.6%	45.9%	45.5%	-0.4%
Asian*	73.7%	68.2%	-5.5%	63.2%	77.3%	+14.1%
American Indian*	46.9%	53.3%	+6.4%	46.9%	50.0%	+3.1%
English Language Learners	15.4%	21.9%	+6.5%	10.3%	15.6%	+5.3%
Students with Disabilities	16.4%	32.2%	+15.8%	14.6%	23.0%	+8.4%
Economically Disadvantaged	44.9%	55.0%	+10.1%	36.7%	49.7%	+13.0%

That said, we still have a long way to go. We believe the major changes in our educational program made over the past two years will continue to improve student achievement and increase the percentage of students achieving proficiency in the core subjects:

- Students are required to take four full years of the core courses: English/language arts, social studies, science, and math, and to take these classes all year every year at RRHS. With the former four-block schedule, students could go a year or more without taking a math or science class -- ample time for many to forget what they had learned. The division of the humanities curriculum – English and social studies were previously taught as a combined humanities class – has also had a significant impact. We are already seeing improvements in math and reading which we believe are directly related to these changes.
- The seven-period class day is designed to improve “continuity of instruction” and help students better retain what they have learned. We feel the new schedule is helping students to retain their knowledge and skills in the core subjects and be better prepared for college or the workplace.
- The class schedule includes a mandatory “pathfinder/advisory” period during the school day for ninth grade students, as well as an advisory period for those struggling in the core subjects. During this period, a teacher provides instruction in study skills and careers, and works with students who need help to get them back on track and help them master the skills they need to be successful. In addition, all 9th grade students are on a team with teachers sharing a common planning period to ensure “failure is not an option.”
- RRHS retains its rigorous standards and graduation requirements: to earn an RRHS diploma, students must earn 28 credits and must pass every class, from 9th grade through 12th grade, in order to graduate.

It should be noted that this chart compares two completely different groups of students, last year’s 11th graders to 11th graders from two years ago. With two different groups of students, there could be many reasons that the percentage of students scoring at the “proficient” or above level could increase or decline from year to year.

Under NCLB all students, including students with limited proficiency in English and students with disabilities, are required to meet the same rigorous standards of proficiency in reading and math. Our special education teachers and students have worked very hard to bring the achievement levels of students with disabilities up to the same level as all other students. This year, that effort paid off: our students with disabilities posted significant gains on the road to achieving proficiency in reading and math. However, we are still not where we need to be and continue to search for answers to help this group of students. We are taking specific steps this year to evaluate and improve learning for students with disabilities throughout the district:

- The general education curriculum (subject areas such as math, science, reading, English, and social studies) must be taught consistently throughout the district, with instruction adapted as is necessary to meet the needs of students with disabilities.
- Schools and teachers must adopt programs, materials, and teaching strategies that will accelerate student growth to allow grade level catch up.
- Students with disabilities who need extra support in order to achieve proficiency will be provided with help using tried-and-true methods and materials approved by the district.
- Teachers and staff must be provided with increased professional development opportunities with a commitment to and training in inclusive practices and quality reading programs.
- The district has created several new teaching positions to support Special Education students including: twelve Special Education Intervention Teachers, three Special Education Instructional Coaches, two Transition Specialists, and a District Behavior Specialist.

Many factors contribute to making a school successful. Achievement tests like the NMSBA are just one measure: a snapshot of how our students performed at one particular point in time. The tests provide us with useful

information about where our instruction is effective and where students need extra help. We use this and other data, including student performance on assignments throughout the year, to adjust our instructional strategies for your child and our children in general.

How Our Schools Compare:

The following chart compares the overall performance of Rio Rancho HS with other high schools in Rio Rancho and with the state averages:

High School	Percentage of all students scoring at the "proficient" level or above		2008 Graduation Rate
	Reading	Math	
Independence HS	**	**	30.5%
Rio Rancho Mid-High (grades 8-9, now dissolved)	74.6%	60.0%	67.2%
Rio Rancho High (grades 10-12)	62.1%	57.8%	86.3%
Rio Rancho Cyber Academy	89.8%	65.3%	57.5%
Cleveland High (new school)	N/A	N/A	N/A
State average (all schools)	55.0%	41.0%	54.0%

Data on all of our schools may be accessed through the RRPS Web site: <http://www.rmps.net/Achievement/Instruction/09SchoolAYPreports.htm> This site also includes links to the Public Education Department (PED) reports containing complete data for each school.

**Percentages not reported for subgroups of fewer than 10 students

School Improvement and Your Options for School Choice:

Schools that do not make AYP for two consecutive years enter the school improvement cycle. Once entering this cycle, schools must make AYP for two consecutive years in order to leave school improvement status. This is becoming increasingly difficult, because each year the targets schools must meet in terms of the percentage of the students who demonstrate proficiency are higher. With only a couple of exceptions, all of New Mexico’s large high schools are now in some phase of school improvement.

Each year a school does not meet AYP targets, the federal law requires additional changes and interventions. Like many highly-regarded high schools in New Mexico, Rio Rancho HS is now in what is called “Restructuring II”. While this sounds ominous, we didn’t wait for the federal law to tell us we needed to make some major changes, and in making the schedule and other changes described above have already met some of the state’s requirements for restructuring.

When a school is in “school improvement” status, parents must be offered the option to transfer their child to another school within the school district that has not been identified for improvement if such a school is available. Currently, Rio Rancho High offers no alternatives for transfer, since the district has no schools serving 9th - 12th graders that are not in school improvement status. This includes the new Cleveland High School, due to a federal requirement that new schools must inherit the school improvement status of the schools from which its student body comes. Since Cleveland’s students come from the former Rio Rancho Mid-High and Rio Rancho High School, both of which were considered to be in need of improvement (“Restructuring I”), Cleveland inherits that status. The district has vehemently protested labeling a school as “failing” before a single student enters its doors, but the state has made it clear it cannot circumvent the federal requirement.

Parents may consider requesting a transfer under the provisions of the Open Enrollment Act to Cleveland, Independence High, or the Rio Rancho Cyber Academy, all of which are in school improvement but which may offer programs that meet their child’s needs. Under open enrollment, schools accept student transfers on a space-

available basis. Students transferring under open enrollment are subject to all of the provisions of the law as well as New Mexico Activities Association guidelines governing participation in student athletics and activities.

- Independence HS offers “career pathway” programs in culinary arts, film and health care (Certified Nurse Assistant) in cooperation with Central New Mexico Community College (CNM). Independence also offers flexible scheduling for working students and programs and day care to support teen parents.
- The Rio Rancho Cyber Academy offers educational programs delivered online, with support from the school’s teachers and lab facilities. The Cyber Academy made AYP this year, but remains in school improvement because a school must make AYP for two consecutive years before exiting the school improvement cycle.
- Cleveland High offers a similar academic, extra-curricular, and co-curricular program to that of Rio Rancho High School for students in grades 9-11 (Cleveland, as a first-year high school, does not have a senior class).

Both schools accept students through an application process. Parents wishing to transfer their child should contact the school to inquire about available slots and begin the application process. If the demands for transfers exceed the available space, the priority is to accommodate low-achieving low-income students. Transportation may be provided to students accepted at Independence and the Cyber Academy; parents wishing to transfer their children to Cleveland will be responsible for their own transportation.

If you would like to exercise the transfer option, please pick up a transfer form from the school office, fill it out, and return it to the school office within 30 days of the receipt of this letter.

Test scores are just one factor in determining if a given school is the best place for your child. If you have questions about your child’s or our school’s test results, please feel free to contact me. We will be glad to work with you and your child to help you understand the results and determine whether your child would be best served by remaining at Rio Rancho High or by transferring to another school.

In addition to offering parents the option to transfer, schools in the school improvement cycle must also schedule a public meeting to provide an explanation of what the identification means and why the school was identified as a school in need of improvement. This meeting will be held **Thursday, September 10, 6:30 PM - 8:00 PM at the Rio Rancho High School Cafeteria**. At the meeting, the school must provide data for other schools in the district and statewide, and an explanation of how parents can become involved in addressing the issues.

The law also requires the school to evaluate and revise its Educational Plan for Student Success (EPSS), a process our school has always followed. Finally, the school is required to implement an “alternative governance plan” developed last year with input from parents and teachers and approved by the school board in June. Some highlights of this plan include:

- Transitioning 9th graders into high school by assigning each freshman student to a team of five teachers who work together to plan and coordinate instruction in the core and required subjects. This is similar to the middle school-style model that has worked well for eighth graders at the Mid-High.
- Requiring that freshmen who are identified as being below proficiency in reading and/or math to participate in additional daily instruction through a math/reading lab
- Acquisition of Data-Driven Classroom through federal stimulus funds. This software helps to make student achievement data readily available to teachers so they can use it to identify students’ strengths and weaknesses and provide individual help to students
- Additional professional development and training for teachers, notably in constructive use of collaborative planning time and in “differentiating” instruction to meet the needs of each individual child.

Whether you decide to request a transfer for your child or not, we encourage you to take an active role in your child's education. Parents are our partners in supporting school improvement and play a very important role in their child's success in school. Here are some ways you can help:

- Attend the public meeting on our school's academic status on **Thursday, September 10, 6:30 PM - 8:00 PM at the Rio Rancho High School Cafeteria.**
- Become involved with your School Advisory Council and/or the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA)
- Communicate regularly with your child's teachers
- Encourage your child to become involved with extracurricular school clubs or activities such as athletics or music, or in community or church groups. Students who feel connected to school and are involved with their school and community tend to do better academically.
- Help your child at home with reading and math
- Make sure your child attends class and comes to school well-rested, fed, and ready to learn

Please remember that if you do not complete and return the transfer application **within 30 days**, your child will remain at Rio Rancho High. As noted above, if you have any questions or need additional information about your school choice options, please feel free to contact my office.

Sincerely,

Richard VonAncken
Principal, Rio Rancho HS