WELCOME AND CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR NEW APS SUPERINTENDENT DR. BLAKEY!

I have worked with you for a long time, and over those years, I have known you as a collaborative leader who respects educators. I have witnessed you refusing to subscribe to the tired, lazy, and false notion that some students come to school with deficits to be fixed. I look forward to working with you to create a culture of respect for all students and staff that supports asset-based, student-centered pedagogy. I believe we can build on and nurture the diversity our students bring to the classroom.

I read your letter to the Albuquerque Journal. I appreciated what you wrote, and I want to share some of it here. I will also respond to your ideas on behalf of all those ATF represents.

I recognize the enormity of the task at hand. We need to increase our literacy and math proficiency rates, encourage our students to take the rigorous courses that are going to prepare them for college or the career of their choice, and we need to ensure that our students are leaving us with the skills, habits, and mindsets they’re going to need to succeed in life, things like perseverance, self-regulation, and social awareness.

Yes, Dr. Blakey. We, the educators, are ready to partner with you. With the signing of HB 171/a into law we must seize the opportunity to diversify course offerings to our high school students and ensure that we are supporting their interests and giving them choices in what and how they learn. With a renewed commitment to career and technical education in both middle and high school, we can improve our graduation rates and help students achieve their career goals.

It’s obvious we have work to do in preparing students for success from the earliest grades to the day they graduate. In literacy, we must support elementary teachers to utilize the knowledge they are gaining from LETRS training, while encouraging them to think more broadly about the importance of fostering deeper comprehension. We need to build strong literacy programs that educate the whole child. We must do all we can to build background knowledge in all content areas that set students up to connect with the many aspects of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. When students have opportunities to make explicit and purposeful connections through reading, we will see math skills improve as well. After all, the deepest learning will be achieved when we write about and defend our mathematical thinking!
If we are to help students develop the skills, habits, and mindset they need to succeed in life, we must also support educators to develop and implement student-centered learning activities. We need to be supported to exercise our professional efficacy if we are to meet the specific needs of our students and nurture their success. To do that we must have coordinated departments in APS that are structured to support schools, not the other way around.

Among my many other priorities are offering Genius Hour, art, and music at all of our elementary schools and providing access to electives for all middle school students. I also want to increase access to bilingual programs, work with community partners to create more opportunities for high school internships and invest in more robust career technical education programs.

Yes! Enrichment is remediation, and I have high hopes for middle school change. The NM House of Representatives just passed a memorial that relies heavily on the APS/ATE Joint Middle School Task Force recommendations on how we can better support our early adolescent learners. I look forward to working with you to implement changes that will best suit the needs of this unique group of students.

And expanding bilingual education! Hooray! You know well that research has found that bilingual individuals may actually process information more efficiently than their monolingual peers. We must ensure our bilingual programs are staffed with educators who feel supported at both the school and district levels.

Judge Singleton’s ruling in the Martinez/Yazzie case cited the Bilingual Multicultural Education Act created by the legislature to ensure equal education opportunities for students in New Mexico. This act states that cognitive and affective development of these students is encouraged by:

- using the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the students in a bilingual multicultural education program;
- providing students with opportunities to expand their conceptual and linguistic abilities and potentials in a successful and positive manner; and
- teaching students to appreciate the value and beauty of different languages and cultures.

Even the authors of the NM State Constitution envisioned a public school system in which all schools were bilingual, and all students graduated as biliterate.
over course offerings. A variety of courses across content areas will count for credit toward graduation, including many career and technical classes and foreign language studies.

We know that curricular choice helps us keep students engaged and graduating on time. We would like to thank House Education Committee Chair and ATF member Rep. G. Andrés Romero for sponsoring this bill and building bipartisan support. Rep. Romero worked with current ATF Executive Vice President Sean Thomas and former ATF High School Vice President Tanya Kuhnee several years ago to construct the research basis for this bill.

Another memorial was passed that stemmed from the direct work of ATF union members. A memorial sponsored by Rep. Joy Garratt, retired ATF Fed Rep, will ask the Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC) to study how we can change middle schools to help us better serve the needs of early adolescent learners. The recommendations were based on the work of the APS/ATF Joint Middle School Task Force!

We were also pleased with the passage of SB 137 which will improve school board accountability. School boards will now have mandatory training and more transparency in their campaign fundraising. Here in APS, we know those are good things.

As for the mediocre, our initial raise of 4% - which would have barely covered the 3.4% inflation rate - was reduced to 3% by the Senate Finance Committee.

Here come the deltas.

There were several bills and memorials that failed to pass because of inaction.

A memorial that should have been a shoo-in asked the Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC) to study modernizing salaries for higher education faculty, specifically adjunct professors. This memorial was sponsored by Reps. Garratt, G.A. Romero, Herrera, Baca, and Moya.

Another memorial that couldn’t cross the finish line was sponsored by Rep. Yanira Gurrola, former ATF Fed Rep. It called for a LESC study to make recommendations about state-funded credential differentials. This study would have specifically — but not exclusively — focused on attracting and retaining TESOL and bilingual educators. Some of these ideas stem from ATF President Ellen Bernstein’s “Teacher-Weighted Formula” which she has presented to the LESC on several occasions.

In addition, our union fought wholeheartedly for a $30,000 minimum salary for our classified colleagues. HB 199 would have ensured that those who help teachers and support and related staff educate the students every day earned salaries above the national poverty level.

Imagine a day when:
- the buses didn’t run
- the office was closed
- there were no EAs to help out in classes and on the playground
- no health assistant was there to care for ill students
- no lunch was served in the cafeteria
- the campus had no one to clean it.

If you have lived through a day in which one or more of these catastrophes occurred, you can understand the importance of adequately paying our classified co-workers.

Sadly, funding for this raise was not included in the budget, so the bill was shelved this year. However, we cannot thank Reps. G.A. Romero, Herrera, Lara, Gurrola, and Baca enough for their courage to push for what is right by sponsoring this bill. We know they will keep up the fight.

In a year when the budget surplus was unprecedented, we couldn’t stop ourselves from hoping for flexibility and additional funding for the State Equalization Guarantee (SEG) so districts would have more local decision-making power to meet local priorities. This was not the first year we lobbied for the SEG funding to support our goals to increase stagnant salary differentials — and it won’t be the last. Sadly, the vast majority of funding in the educational budget was earmarked for state mandates.

We issued the call early and loudly that the primary focus for education during this session had to be a dedication to staff retention. Without educators we cannot educate our students. We were firm in expressing that educational efforts in the legislative session should have focused on reducing workloads, increasing morale, and mitigating issues that hinder our state’s and district’s ability to retain our precious educational professionals.

That must be the focus of the 2025 legislative session. You can help by making sure you connect with your representative and senator.

The AFT, along with its affiliates and researchers, have developed resources to help school systems succeed in educating all students. Colorín Colorado is the nation’s leading bilingual website for serving educators and parents of English language learners (ELLs)

Visit www.ColorínColorado.org Today!
IT’S TIME TO NEGOTIATE!

Spring brings negotiations between your union and the district. Last year, the two parties agreed that the 2023-2025 Negotiated Agreement would remain in place for two years. Most unions and districts negotiate for longer terms than that.

But we know how things can change after the legislative session and new issues arise every year. APS and ATF agreed that, in the interim, we would meet to negotiate over money issues — raises, differentials, etc. — and language clean-up in the contract.

Given how unpredictable our board of education has become, last year APS and ATF agreed to go back to the practice of opening the entire contract (money and language) in the odd years following the 60-day legislative session. In the even years, following the 30-day session, we will address only money issues and clean up language.

Your ideas and needs are important. Contractual changes will be saved for next year, and money ideas will be added to our list.

As always, we will do our best to negotiate for what our members need.

YOUR INSTRUCTIONAL COUNCIL HAS A LOT TO SAY ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL’S BUDGET

Your school’s Instructional Council (IC) is a vital vehicle for building democracy in the workplace. The IC is described in Article 7 of the APS/ATF Negotiated Agreement. Section H clearly describes the IC’s role in budgeting discretionary funds. With budget calls being released on February 15 and expected to be finalized by early April, it’s a good time to examine this function of our ICs. Stay tuned to ATF communications. We will keep you aware of the hard due dates as we get them from APS.

A great start to deciding how discretionary funding will be spent at your school is to begin a conversation in your IC about the specific needs of the students at your school. This will go beyond the number of classes for each grade level and bring on discussions about interventionists, more library time, STEAM programs, and many more topics.

Next, it’s time to examine your school’s budget. These documents are open and public, and all staff at your school have the right to receive a copy. The spreadsheet you receive should delineate if the funding source for each item is considered “operational” or “discretionary.” The operational items are solid, but the discretionary items allow your IC to get creative in how you will spend these monies to meet the specific needs of your school.

Our contract says, “It is the responsibility of the IC to work in collaboration with the staff to set priorities for discretionary funds or at risk in the school’s budget and in developing and overseeing the implementation of a budget that places resources where they will effectively support the school’s goals.” That means the decision on how to spend discretionary funds should be collaborative, not dictated by any one member of the school staff.

CLASS SIZE ISSUES

Class sizes in New Mexico are set by state statute. They are also embedded in your APS/ATF Negotiated Agreement - Appendix B. These class size prescriptions need to be followed. However, there are nuances to how these limits are applied.

Elementary

Kinder is the only grade level with a definitive cap of 20 students. Within APS it’s
a well-established practice that the lower grade level class size limits are applied to combination classes.

For example, a K/1 combo class should have a class size limit of 20 students.

1st through 5th grade have class size limits that are set by averages. 1st through 3rd grade shouldn’t exceed an average class size of 22 students. 4th and 5th grades should not exceed an average class size of 24 students.

Schools with bilingual and dual language programs sometimes have lower class sizes to meet bilingual requirements while the counterpart English-only classes have higher class sizes.

As an example, at a school with two 4th grade classes and two 5th grade classes, each grade level may have one dual language (DL) class. The DL classes may have only 15 to 17 students while the English-only classes have above-average class sizes. This circumstance allows all 4th & 5th classes to be averaged and meet the requirements.

Middle and High School

Middle and high school teachers have “daily teaching limits.” 7th grade through 12th should not exceed 160 students being instructed per day.

One example of an exception to this might be a teacher agrees to go beyond this limit to build a program such as music at their school. In APS, 6th grade — although cited as being averaged in with elementary school — has been established through practice as following the 7th and 8th grade limits. This is holdover language from the junior high model of years past.

Middle and high school English classes have slightly lower daily teaching limits.

Middle school English teachers should not exceed 135 students per day with 27 students per class.

High school English teachers’ caseloads should not exceed 150 students per day with 30 students per class.

If you or a colleague think your class sizes or daily teaching limits are being exceeded without your consent, contact your ATF staff representative. We will help to evaluate this and work with your administrator to adjust teaching loads.

SMALL GROUPS FOR HIGH SCHOOL SPECIAL ED
SOCIAL STUDIES & SCIENCE

Last school year, special education teachers were told that the district was phasing out small groups for science and social studies. APS’s reasoning was that students would benefit from mainstreaming in all subjects. This would have required special educators to not only change their students’ IEPs but to take part in practices they knew were not best for their students. Every educator who prescribes small-group instruction in a student’s IEP believes this to be in the student’s best interest.

The district backed off from this change. However, APS never followed up to let people know this policy was rejected. The bottom line: Special educators can continue to ask for small group science and social studies classes in IEPs.

ATF FED REPS PASS GAZA CEASEFIRE MOTION

At February Fed Rep Council, ATF Fed Reps voted 104-28 in favor of a motion calling for our union to sign on to the National Labor Movement’s Call for an Immediate Ceasefire in Israel-Palestine.

The motion’s sponsors also included language by the Chicago Teachers Union centered around establishing social emotional supports for members and students, which we are currently in the process of developing.

To read the full text of the motion, go to atfunion.org/answers-docs/
CALENDAR OF EVENTS

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Cost</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fri., 2/16/24</td>
<td>PD Day for ES, K-8, &amp; MS</td>
<td>All Day</td>
<td>Patience and Professional Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon., 2/19/24</td>
<td>Presidents' Day</td>
<td>All Day</td>
<td>No Classes!</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thurs., 2/22/24</td>
<td>H.E.L.P. - Supporting Students with Challenges</td>
<td>5:00-6:30pm</td>
<td>Free</td>
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<td>Sat., 2/24/24</td>
<td>Restorative Practices from Covid to Calm: Being the Restorative Educator</td>
<td>9:00-12:00pm</td>
<td>Free</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tues., 3/5/24</td>
<td>Fed Rep Council</td>
<td>4:30-6:45pm</td>
<td>Volunteeringism &amp; Leadership</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sat., 3/16/24</td>
<td>Restorative Practices from Covid to Calm 2: Building Your Restorative Community</td>
<td>9:00am-12:00pm</td>
<td>Free</td>
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UNIONS WORK FOR ALL!

EXPERTS AGREE:

YOUR UNION FIGHTS FOR:
Justice | Democracy | Professionalism | Advocacy | Community | A Better Future for All

JOIN THE ATF NOW
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