

State of New Mexico

Office of the Governor

Bill Richardson
Governor

For immediate release

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GOVERNOR BILL RICHARDSON WANTS STRONG SECRETARY OF EDUCATION, REAL SCHOOL REFORM

SANTA FE - Governor Bill Richardson said today that he wants an education-reform plan that includes a strong Secretary of Education. The governor said he would not support a plan that relies on a policy-making State Board of Education.

“As we head into the final few weeks of the session, I want to reiterate a point that I think has been lost among some legislators,” Governor Bill Richardson said. “Reform can’t be accomplished without fundamentally changing the way the state governs its public schools. In other words, it’s not good enough to create a Secretary of Education who is encumbered by a policy-making Board of Education.

“I will not support such a board, and I don’t believe voters will stand for the status quo,” Governor Bill Richardson said. “I urge the Legislature to pass a joint resolution that either eliminates the board altogether, or creates an advisory commission that doesn’t tie the hands of the Secretary of Education. The Governor will hold such a Secretary accountable. We don’t need a policy-making Board standing in the way of reform.”

Governor Bill Richardson pledged to lead the campaign later this fall to convince voters to approve the creation of a Secretary of Education, as long as legislators don’t include a policy-making board in the joint resolution. If the resolution keeps a policy-making board, the governor said he would campaign against the ballot issue.

Governor Bill Richardson also urged legislators to act quickly on the rest of the education-reform package. Several bills, including the state budget, include many of the key elements of school reform that the governor, legislators, educators and the business community helped shape.

Those bills would raise teacher salaries by 6 percent, while salaries for other education employees would be boosted by 3 percent. School districts would be required to shift money from bureaucracy to classrooms. And the state would make sure school districts spend state funds on teachers, rather than letting cash pile up in non-emergency reserves.

However, the governor said those reforms and others, including a plan to increase the amount of interest distributed to schools from the Permanent Fund, won't work if the Legislature doesn't radically change the way the state governs schools.

"I've done my best to work in a bipartisan manner with legislators, and explain why I think my ideas for education reform are important," Governor Bill Richardson said. "I've also been willing to compromise without sacrificing my core beliefs about how best to achieve reform.

"But the message I want to send today is this: We can't reform schools if we cling to old ideas. Let's create a Secretary of Education who, working with the Governor, has the tools to make real changes in New Mexico's schools."

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