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APS board unanimously agrees to renew superintendent's contract

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Albuquerque Public Schools Superintendent Gabriella Blakey can stay in her position until at least June 2030 after the Board of Education voted unanimously to renew her contract Wednesday night.

Blakey has led New Mexico's largest public school district since 2024 after serving the district on and off for 20 years. She is a graduate of APS' Highland High School.

"The work we're doing to improve outcomes for our students is vital, and I'm grateful to the board for recognizing that we're making progress and for continuing to have faith in my team and me," Blakey said in a statement. "As someone who grew up in Albuquerque and attended APS schools, I am committed to this community and will continue to work hard for our students."

Wednesday was Blakey's second contract renewal after another unanimous extension until 2028 in February 2025. The renewal does not come with a salary increase; Blakey will continue to earn $295,000 a year, according to APS spokesperson Martin Salazar.

Under Blakey's leadership, APS reading and math proficiency rose by 9 and 2 percentage points, respectively, according to the latest school progress report compiled by the New Mexico Public Education Department. Science proficiency dropped by 3 percentage points during that same time period.

Graduation rates at APS are up almost one percentage point since the beginning of Blakey's tenure, meaning APS high school students graduate in four years 76.8% of the time, still nearly four points below the state rate, according to the PED.

Board members deliberated for about an hour in a closed session late Wednesday night before voting to renew the superintendent's contract.

"It was fairly straightforward," said board member Courtney Jackson. "The contract says that if she is making progress towards the goals, then she receives a two-year contract extension, and she is demonstrating progress towards the goals, so I think it was pretty apparent that that extension would occur."

Jackson said she was pleased with the work Blakey had done thus far.

"I think she has a vision for where she wants the district and our students to go, and we should give her the opportunity to allow her to continue to do her work," she said.

New board member Rebecca Betzen said that she couldn't disclose what happened during the executive session, but hopes Blakey uses the extra time to do right by APS students and teachers.

"I think it's a real opportunity for her, and I hope she takes advantage of it," Betzen said, "and that she really can work hard to make sure that the people that are working under her feel valued and appreciated, and that we make our classrooms places where students want to be."

Blakey told the Journal this month she was committed to working with the Albuquerque Teachers Federation to find solutions for educators' workplace concerns. Some APS teachers reported long hours, administrative issues and poor student behavior in a union survey earlier this year.

"I take her at her word," union president Ellen Bernstein said. "I believe that the highest level of working together is possible."

If Blakey stays through the new end of her contract in the summer of 2030, her tenure will be more than double the length of the average urban superintendent's, according to a survey by the Council of the Great City Schools, a Washington, D.C.-based education policy group. The report found that superintendents in large urban districts typically stay in their positions for just under three years on average.

APS has about 63,700 students at more than 140 schools and employs over 11,000 staff members. The district's last two superintendents, Raquel Reedy and Scott Elder, served for five and four years respectively, until they retired.

"The fact that we have a superintendent who wants to stay and wants to continue to do the work for Albuquerque Public Schools is a testament to her commitment to our community," Jackson said.