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READERS CAFE: Gov. Susana Martinez listens as Rio Rancho first grader Devin Nevins on Thursday.

Governor, UNM Regents back AIMS in Rio Rancho

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Gov. Susana Martinez and the UNM Board of Regents affirmed their support for the AIMS charter school opening a campus in Rio Rancho, with Martinez saying she anticipates “no problems” in getting state approval for the expansion.

Speaking after a “Reader’s Café” event for first graders Thursday morning at Cielo Azul Elementary School, Martinez gave high praise to the Albuquerque Institute of Math and Science, which is planning to start with 40 sixth-grade students taking classes at the University of New Mexico West campus next fall. Eventually the school will expand to grades 6-12.

"AIIMS is an amazing school," Martinez said. "When you have a 95 percent graduation rate, and 96 or 97 percent going to college – the leadership in that school, the teachers in that school, the commitment of the kids – I wish I could replicate that school all over this state.

"They are phenomenal. And if we can take their best practices and start implementing them in our schools, we're going to have AIMS all over.

"It's up to AIMS and where they can find a facility, and that sort of thing, because it's a charter school. I'm sure there will be no problems in actually approving it because they're so successful. They're amazing."

Later in the afternoon, the UNM Regents unanimously supported a motion supporting AIMS efforts in Rio Rancho, including allowing the charter school to conduct classes on the UNM West campus.

Dr. Sue Cleveland, superintendent of the Rio Rancho Public Schools, opposes AIMS coming to Rio Rancho. She says the charter school is not following state law because it is expanding outside of its home district (Albuquerque). As such, Cleveland believes AIMS should have to follow the same rules any start-up charter school has to follow, including consultation with the home public school district.

AIMS, meanwhile, says because it is a state charter school instead of a district charter school, it should be allowed to expand outside of Albuquerque as long as it has approval of the Public Education Committee, an advisory body to the Public Education Department, and the PED itself. AIMS officials claim that it received approval from the PEC; Cleveland says it did not.

School district spokesperson Kim Vesely said RRPS would not have a comment on Thursday's developments.