



**Edgardo B. Castro**  
Principal  
Lincoln Elementary School  
Gallup, New Mexico

**The stats:**

- Years in education: 20
- Years as a principal: 3
- NAESP State Representative

**Education:**

- B.S., Elementary Education, Western Mindanao State University, Philippines
- M.S., Educational Leadership, Old Dominion University
- Ph.D. candidate, Education Leadership, New Mexico State University

**School details:**

- Grade span: Pre-K–5
- Number of students: Approximately 400
- 72% Native American; 16% Hispanic
- 100% qualify for reduced-price lunch
- Whole-school SEL consultation advisory time, 7:45–8:15 a.m.

**Connect on Twitter:**

- @Castro\_NBCD

# Social Justice Warrior

## New Mexico principal helps teachers move up with an eye toward equity

**E**dgardo B. Castro has a passion for leading teachers. And for those teachers who might be considering a career in administration, Castro helps them navigate the roadblocks that can appear along the path.

A self-described social justice warrior, he focuses on how equity, culture, gender, and LGBTQ issues can be incorporated into the road to the principalship. Castro hails from the Philippines, and as a minority school leader, he feels obligated to take bold action by addressing differences that foster equality and equity for all students.

### On what inspired him to lead as a principal

My passion for continuous learning and leading teachers is in my blood. When I taught in North Carolina from 2004 to 2007, my school principal inspired me to think about the school leadership role. Her most inspiring statement was this: “Mr. Castro, I am in awe of how you manage your classroom. You know how to teach the targeted standards and skills. Our third-graders like you. Have you considered being a principal?”

### On his connection to Filipino culture

Born and raised in the southern part of the Philippine Islands, I often have had to explain the geography of where my country is located. Most of the time, I have to explain my race, too. With the name Castro, it sometimes brings with it a bad connotation that I attached to my own self-identity and my identity as a school leader. It became an added layer of challenge as I transitioned from vice principal to principal—but one that I’ve successfully overcome.

### On embedding social justice in his school

Social justice means treating all children with dignity and respect in a caring, safe teaching and learning environment. As a leader in education, I serve all students *in loco parentis*—in place of a parent or guardian. As such, I believe embedding culture in a school is beyond just a one-day celebration of a specific culture, event, or theme.

I take any opportunity available to share my values, culture, and ethnic background. For instance, I enlisted my staff to think about a cultural theme or event for National Native American Heritage Month in November. We decided what we would do to celebrate and what needed to be done to accomplish it. When teachers and staff make a decision together, the outcome is more successful. It allows teachers to have buy-in so they feel a sense of ownership and, as a result, hold themselves accountable.

### On what’s next

I’ve been studying the intersectionality of social justice and how religion and morality affect the performance of school administrators. I want to find out how school leaders’ skills and moral values affect everyday decision-making—a critical aspect of being a good school leader. I’ll focus my research on how school leaders take into consideration their own values as they decide what’s in the best interest of students. **P**