




B i t e s i z e

 Preliminary FY19 distributions through the state public school funding formula totaled \$2.554 billion, according to the Public Education Department, \$33.5 million less than the appropriation. The distributions include \$14.8 million for two charter schools the Public Education Commission voted to close at the end of FY18, decisions affirmed by the PED secretary but stayed under court appeals, and a third charter school that shut down on its own.

 English-learning students made greater gains on standardized tests last school year than students statewide, improving an average 3.9 percentage points on English and 2.4 percentage points on math. Statewide, the English score improved by 2.5 points and the math score by 1.9 points. However, English learner scores were lower overall, with proficiency at about 7.5 percent for both English and math, compared with 31 percent for English and 22 percent for math statewide.

 The presidential budget proposal for the federal fiscal year that starts in October calls for cutting \$4.4 billion from state and local education grant programs, but the U.S. House Appropriations Committee has proposed a \$344 million increase. The committee plan calls for \$100 million more for a broad category of grants that can be used for violence prevention, mental health, and security measures in schools.



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Senator Mimi Stewart, Chair / Representative G. Andrés Romero, Vice Chair / Rachel S. Gudgel, Director / August 2018

From the Chairwoman

Impetus

Few were surprised when a district court judge ruled this summer that the state is providing a constitutionally inadequate education to public school students. New Mexico ranks near or at the bottom on most national measures of school performance. Without hyperbole, New Mexico is failing our children and, most of all, our most vulnerable children – those who are poor, transient, or struggle with English.

But that lack of surprise should not be interpreted as a lack of concern. Certainly, while support for public schools is merely lip service for some politicians, most state policymakers recognize the future of the state is significantly dependent on the quality of our schools. That, unfortunately, has not translated into effective action.

With the court ordering the state to come up with a public school reform plan by April, New Mexico now has no choice but to act effectively. Under almost any reform scenario, New Mexico will need to increase spending on public schools – a 2008 study concluded funding was about \$335 million a year short of need. However, money alone won't solve our problems. We need to commit to a systemwide approach with changes based on successful models, not the piecemeal, sometimes ideological and unproven, reforms of the past.

Developing a fully integrated education system is among the four pillars of a world-class education program identified in the National Conference of State Legislatures' report *No Time to Lose*, a study of the common elements of successful school systems internationally. New Mexico would be well-served by using its evidence-based recommendations as a guide for reform.

New Mexico lawmakers, like all New Mexicans, want only the best education for our children. The Legislature over the last seven years has increased state support for prekindergarten and the K-3 Plus extended school year program by 350 percent. Earlier this year, before the ruling, the Legislature approved a substantial increase in funding for at-risk students. We are moving in the right direction but the time has passed for small steps. This ruling could be the big push New Mexico needs to make a leap forward and turn good intentions into results.

Senator Mimi Stewart

Four-Day School Week Needs More Study

New Mexico is among five states with more than 20 percent of school districts using four-day school weeks but little research exists on the impact of the shorter week on education, families, or communities.

However, while most information on four-day school weeks is anecdotal or inconclusive, a seven-year longitudinal study comparing similar Montana schools with four-day and five-day school weeks found student math and reading scores declined in four-day-a-week schools even as scores improved in the schools with traditional calendars, LESG staff report.

The schools in the study provided equal hours of instruction, and some of the schools that implemented the shorter week initially saw scores improve but those gains were lost over time.

The committee is scheduled to hear a staff report on four-day school weeks at 4 p.m. on August 16 at its meeting in Santa Rosa.

Almost 40 of New Mexico's 89 school districts and 22 charter schools use a four-day school week, although most of the district schools are in rural areas and less than 4 percent of New

Mexico public school students are affected.

Nationally, the practice is most common in largely rural districts, with more than half of the U.S. school districts with four-day school weeks found in Colorado, Montana, Oklahoma, and Oregon. In Colorado, 58 percent of school districts use the shorter week but the schools account for just 13 percent of the state's school population.

Formally assessing the performance of New Mexico four-day-a-week schools is difficult because most of the districts have been using the alternative calendars for many years – or since opening in the case of charter schools – making longitudinal studies impossible. Changes in proficiency testing methods also make it difficult.

Some New Mexico school administrators say the short week is a tool for recruiting teachers to hard-to-staff areas and can save money.

Mountainair Public Schools found habitual truancy dropped from 59 percent to 19 percent two years after the district adopted a short school week in FY16.

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Some Teaching Methods Rely on Myths, Not Science

Commonly accepted theories on learning, like the idea that students have learning styles or are predominantly right- or left-brained, are myths that can harm students by replacing effective teaching practices and using resources ineffectively, a neuroscientist and education researcher says.

In [testimony](#) to the committee in June, Melina Uncapher, Ph.D., an assistant neurology professor at the University of California-San Francisco and education director of the university's Neuroscape Center, said education needs to be an applied science, like medicine, and innovation needs to be based on that science.

She said education needs to do a better job of debunking myths, iden-

tifying good practices, and applying that knowledge to classroom practices, possibly through a "learning engineer," a new type of education specialist.

Among the myths is the idea that students have different learning styles, a belief she said is held by 96 percent of teachers worldwide but is not supported by science.

"People might have preferences for how they take in or perceive information but that is not how someone learns it in a deep way," Uncapher said.

Debunking a myth she reported is believed by 80 percent of teachers, Uncapher said students use their whole brain to learn, not just the linear and logical "left" side or abstract and creative side "right" side. Other myths

are that video games are bad for brain development, and the damage of childhood trauma cannot be undone. Action video gamers often have better executive function and pattern recognition than average, and child resilience can be built through one stable, supportive adult, Uncapher said.

She said scientific research shows learning has three steps: encoding, or the "residue of experience"; storage; and retrieval.

Exercises such as re-reading, highlighting text, or cramming do a poor job of encoding because they create short-lived, weak memories. More effective encoding involves self quizzes, student elaboration on material, connecting the material to other lessons, and other techniques.

Storage can be improved through sleep and exercise, with late school starts for adolescents as one possible approach. She said spacing the course material over time also helps.

"Reloading after some forgetting leads to stronger memories," she reported.

Uncapher said retrieving information can be improved by practicing the recall of information through frequent, low-stakes quizzes, asking students to answer questions without checking notes, writing exercises at the end of classes, and other approaches.

Impact of Short School Week Unclear

continued from front

Some of the New Mexico charter schools with short weeks, which are mostly in urban areas, say the schools stay open on the fifth day for students working on projects, tutoring, and make-up work, tempering any potential savings from the short week.

Closing schools one day a week also raises concerns about the burden placed on working parents, who must find day care for that day, and on poor families, who often rely on school food services.

Instructional time in New Mexico is measured in hours per year. The law also requires a minimum number of hours per day for different grade levels but this requirement can be waived.

A 2009 law changed the instructional time requirement to days, with 180 days for "regular" schools and 150 days for "alternative" four-day-a-week schools, but implementation was delayed until 2011 and the law was repealed before it went into effect.

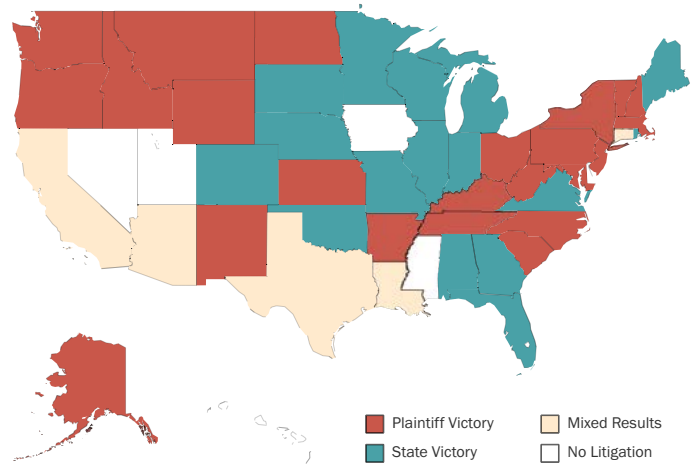
Before the 2018 legislative session, the Legislative Finance Committee proposed a 5 percent reduction in the appropriations to districts and charter schools with short weeks that failed to provide a total of 176 days of instruction. That proposal was not adopted but the approved budget effectively places a moratorium on the expansion of four-day-a-week schools by prohibiting the Public Education Department from approving the budget of any school newly adopting the short week.

Most States Face Legal Challenges

New Mexico is one of 44 states where plaintiffs have challenged the equity or adequacy of public school funding and is among more than half of the cases with rulings where the plaintiffs have prevailed.

The courts have sided with the plaintiffs in 23 states and with the states in 16 cases. Five states have had multiple court decisions, with some favoring the plaintiffs and some favoring the state. Six states have not had a school finance lawsuit.

School Funding Lawsuits



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