

MINUTES
Legislative Education Study Committee
Anthony and Las Cruces
September 22-24, 2026

Tuesday, September 22

The following voting, advisory, and guest members were present:

Voting: Chair William P. Soules; Senate President Pro Tempore Mimi Stewart; Senator Craig Brandt; Representatives Brian Baca, Joy Garratt, Yanira Gurrola, Tanya Mirabel Moya.

Advisory: Senators Harold Pope, Natalie Figueroa; Representatives John Block, Catherine Cullen.

(1) Call to Order, Introductions, and Approval of September Agenda and July Minutes. Senator Bill Soules, Chair, LESC, called the meeting to order at 9:15 a.m. Chair Soules facilitated introductions of committee members present in Anthony, and John Sena, Director, LESC, introduced staff. Because the committee did not reach a quorum, Chair Soules moved to the next agenda item (2), Community Welcome. At 10:09 AM, after the Community Welcome presentation, the committee approved the July minutes and the agenda.

(2) Community Welcome. Nubia Tarazona, Superintendent of Gadsden Independent School District, provided an overview of the district, which serves approximately 11,117 students across 22 schools, including five prekindergarten centers. She highlighted the district's multicultural and multilingual student population, including more than 4,000 English learners (EL) and approximately 2,480 special education students. During the first 100 days, Tarazona conducted extensive stakeholder engagement through school visits, community meetings, staff discussions, parent outreach, and student surveys. Feedback identified priorities including improved communication, stronger alignment between district leadership and schools, enhanced accountability, expanded use of data, and strengthened special education services. Tarazona highlighted several district accomplishments, including the opening of the new Gadsden Middle School, which has contributed to increased enrollment and improved learning opportunities. She reported growth in reading, math, attendance, student engagement, college and career readiness, and positive EL outcomes. The district has also expanded dual-language education programs, emphasizing bilingualism as an asset and creating pathways that extend into middle and high school. She noted significant progress in participation in New Mexico's Seal of Bilingualism, increasing from approximately 60 graduates annually to about 300 graduates in 2026. Looking ahead, the district's strategic plan focuses on increasing student achievement, strengthening instructional interventions, improving special education services, expanding bilingual programming, increasing gifted education participation, and enhancing emergency response systems.

Committee discussion focused on attendance improvement strategies, dual-language education, professional development, funding challenges, and workforce development. District leaders described efforts to improve attendance through monitoring, family engagement, extracurricular opportunities, and student recognition programs. Members praised the district's dual-language model and discussed challenges in recruiting qualified bilingual educators, while district leaders requested additional funding to support program expansion and teacher endorsements. The district also reported reductions in Federal Title I and Title III funding and described the impact of border enforcement on student attendance. Discussion concluded with workforce development initiatives, including partnerships with higher education institutions and local employers to expand career pathways, internships, certifications, and employment opportunities in high-demand industries throughout the region, especially in New Mexico.

(3) Screen Use in Elementary Classrooms Legislative Taskforce Report.

Marit Andrews, Principal Analyst, LESC, explained House Memorial 2 (HM2), signed during the 2026 legislative session, requested LESC to conduct a comprehensive study on the use of screen time for instruction and assessment in elementary classrooms, including the impacts of programs on student learning, development, and well-being. Ms. Andrews said LESC staff convened a screen use legislative task force to study the impacts of screen time for instruction and assessment in elementary classrooms and draft policy options for consideration for the Legislature. Ms. Andrews presented the legislative task force report, including an overview of LESC staff and task force work; findings and data reviewed by the task force, including relevant research and policy work in other states; and recommendations for the Legislature, the Public Education Department (PED), and local education agencies (LEAs).

Next, Benjamin W. Barlow, Principal, North Star Elementary School, Albuquerque Public Schools (APS); Yvonne Garcia, Deputy Secretary of Student Support Services, PED; and Renata Witte, Vice President for Legislation & Advocacy, New Mexico Parent Teacher Association (NMPTA) explained why they chose to be a part of the HM2 legislative task force. Ms. Witte said she has seen screen use in elementary classrooms change since the Covid-19 pandemic. Mr. Barlow said not all screen time in schools is created equal and provided examples of appropriate and inappropriate use of technology in elementary school. Finally, Deputy Secretary Garcia discussed how proposed kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) developmentally appropriate guidelines for daily screen use could help PED support schools and districts to ensure required technology use in classrooms is evidence-based, purposeful, and supportive of healthy child development.

LESC committee members asked questions, including but not limited to, research on the impact of screens on social emotional learning for students; if New Mexico collects data on screen time; and whether or not the task force recommended the K-12 guidelines for daily screen use should live in statute or administrative code.

(4) Civics Seal. Erica Wheeler, Humanities Specialist, Public Education Department (PED); Jamie Patterson, Social Studies Support Specialist, Las Cruces Public Schools (LCPS); Kaelie Herrera, Student, Mayfield High School; and Edward Gurrola, Education Director, Santa Ana Department of Education presented a model of implementing a civic seal credential on high school diplomas. Presenters began with a recap of the stakeholder working group's efforts in studying and soliciting feedback on elevating civics instruction and democratic participation in New Mexico. Presenters highlighted other states such as Kentucky and Nevada who have implemented similar civic seal programs that emphasize practical skills like problem-solving and civil discourse. The panel then introduced a comprehensive K-12 framework built on gaining and practicing civics knowledge and engagement, outlining grade level graduation roadmaps and accessible statewide and local opportunities at all grade levels. Furthermore, the panel emphasized the framework could drive positive student outcomes and support educational equity by aligning with the Bilingual Multicultural Act, Hispanic Education Act, Indian Education Act, and Black Education Act to preserve heritage languages and foster culturally relevant instruction.

Mr. Gurrola shared a recent practical application where 30+ students completed a summer internship at the Santa Ana Pueblo, focusing on workforce readiness and exposing students to community issues and problem-solving. The panel then concluded their presentation by outlining potential metrics such as participation surveys and community involvement assessments.

Members asked questions and discussed topics including the importance of moving beyond textbook learning to active civic participation; cost barriers of civic activities like Model UN and creating a supporting fund in response to those barriers; the ability for a framework to be adaptable to local district needs; and engaging with students at the state legislative level. Other questions included whether it was necessary for the civic seal requirement to be codified through legislation, PED rulemaking, or local district policies; lawmakers roles in prescribing high school government curriculum; and the need to cultivate trusting, collaborative relationships with classroom teachers to ensure successful implementation. Representative Garratt noted that relevant legislation is already being drafted.

(5) Secondary Grades Literacy Tour. LESC staff, committee members, and PED staff visited Gadsden Middle School to observe disciplinary literacy coaching and instruction. This is the school's third year participating in the initiative. Visitors observed disciplinary literacy in a English language arts and English language development classroom and in a social studies classroom.

After visiting classrooms, LESC staff, committee members, and stakeholders convened for a presentation about Gadsden Middle School's participation in the initiative. The presentation covered the disciplinary literacy coaching framework, a program overview, and survey data about the effectiveness of the initiative from participants.

(6) Revenue Estimates. Daniel A. Estupiñan, Senior Policy Analyst II, LESC, and Ismael Torres, Chief Economist, Legislative Finance Committee, provided an overview of the preliminary consensus revenue estimates for fiscal year 2028 (FY28). For FY28, the consensus revenue estimates project revenues could exceed total appropriations in FY27 by \$924.2 million. The estimates also indicate FY28 recurring revenues may exceed FY27 recurring appropriations by approximately \$3.6 billion, suggesting significant capacity for non-recurring appropriations in FY27.

Members asked for additional context on the general fund reserves, the methodology associated with the revenue estimates, the impact of data center infrastructure spending on the regional economy, how health premium revenue flows to the healthcare affordability fund, recent trends in corporate income taxes, and when final revenue estimates will be presented.

Wednesday, September 23

The following voting, advisory, and guest members were present:

Voting: Chair William P. Soules, Vice Chair Andres G. Romero, Senate President Pro Tempore Mimi Stewart; Representatives Brian Baca, Joy Garrat, Yanira Gurrola, Tanya Mirabal Moya.

Advisory: Senators Natalie Figueroa, Harold Pope; Representatives John Block, Catherine J. Cullen.

(7) Director's Report. John Sena, Director, LESC, presented the director's report, including the introduction of new staff: Crystal Tran, Policy Analyst, and Ethan Sullivan, Committee Services/Research Assistant. Director Sena then provided an overview of the September newsletter.

Director Sena also provided an update on the *Martinez-Yazzie* education sufficiency lawsuit, noting parties convened in the Santa Fe District Court on September 4 for oral arguments regarding the plaintiffs' objections to PED's remedial plan.

(8) Assessment Results. Lynn Vásquez, Senior Manager, PED, presented New Mexico's spring 2026 statewide summative assessment results. In the 2025-2026 school year (SY26), New Mexico sustained its literacy rates. Students in third to eighth grade reached proficiency rates of 45 percent, up more than 10 points since 2022. Mathematic scores gradually improved for students in third to eighth grade achieving proficiency rates of 28 percent, but high school mathematics remains a significant challenge. Science remained stable with an overall proficiency rate nearing 34 percent. PED staff noted historically-underserved groups experienced meaningful long-term gains, stating Native American and economically-disadvantaged students are among student groups with notable five-year improvement. Ms. Vasquez discussed how environmental factors matter in contextualizing SY26 results. For example, attendance patterns, such as chronic absenteeism, along with economic disadvantages, are associated with student achievement. PED intends to

use student assessment results to refine school support and identify factors contributing to strong student performance.

LESC members asked questions about student retention in elementary grades; proficiency rates of students who are not chronically absent; how to improve science readiness scores and re-invest in science education; the impact of high-quality instructional materials on student's summative assessment results; the racial and ethnic identification amongst students with multiple heritages, racial, and/or ethnic backgrounds; the percentage of teachers training in the science of reading; and, broader opportunity gaps challenging schools with low proficiency rates.

(9) Priority Schools Bureau. Amanda DeBell, Deputy Secretary of Teaching, Learning, and Innovation, PED, presented on school improvement and transformation. In 2026, PED identified 67 schools in need of improvement. PED provides support to these schools, including support for school site administrators provided through PED's Priority Schools Bureau. The bureau aims to increase the efficacy of school leaders and to reduce the churn of principals. In 2026, 22 schools exited intervention through sustained graduation-rate improvement, sufficient improvement across applicable accountability measures, or after demonstrating sufficient improvement for student groups. PED will continue to work with schools that did not exit the program and will provide principals additional coaching.

Committee members asked how New Mexico School DASH plans are utilized in the model and whether schools requiring intervention are encouraged to become community schools. Committee members emphasized the importance of consistency across each level of school leadership and expressed concerns that root causes analyses sometimes reveal elements outside of an educator's control, such as food and housing.

(10) Four-Day School Weeks. John Sena, Director, LESC, and Megan Kuhfeld, Ph.D., Director of Growth Modeling and Data Analytics, Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA), presented to committee members on the trends related to four-day school weeks in New Mexico and national research on the impact they are having on student outcomes. student outcomes. Director Sena shared data showing the number of school districts and charter schools on four-day school calendars grew from 57 in SY25 to 85 in SY27, while the total number of schools on a five-day calendar dropped from 126 to 104 during the same time period. While four-day school weeks had previously been used primarily in small, rural districts, Director Sena highlighted a growing number of larger and more urban schools in New Mexico adopting this model. Dr. Kuhfeld noted this trend was not limited to New Mexico, as four-day school weeks had increased by 600 percent nationwide over the past two decades.

Director Sena discussed how many New Mexico schools operating on four-day weeks have historically outpaced statewide academic achievement. However, Dr. Kuhfeld's remarks included national research that finds negative average effects on student achievement and limited benefit to teacher recruitment and retention. Director Sena recommended lawmakers

consider a variety of policy measures, including whether schools should have to meet certain geographic or demographic criteria, or demonstrate community support, prior to adopting a four-day week.

Members asked about the designation statuses of schools operating four-day school weeks; expressed concern about the growing trend of schools in urban areas adopting the model; and sought information on the impact of four-day school weeks on student absenteeism. Members also asked how the Legislature could go about removing incentives for four-day weeks within the state's public school funding mechanisms.

(11) Educator Career Ladder Framework. Annie Armatage, Senior Policy Analyst II, LESC, presented a report on an educator career continuum. Ms. Armatage discussed instructional leadership career advancement pathway models in high-performing systems and identified key elements present in each system. LESC staff conducted an advisory group with education partners and stakeholders to arrive at a field-informed consensus for an instructional leadership pathway in New Mexico. Advisory group members agreed such a system should be developed to leverage the expertise of highly-effective teachers to improve schoolwide instructional quality, and to provide expert teachers opportunities to gain additional responsibilities and compensation without leaving the classroom context for administration. The report also included system supports necessary for successful implementation of an instructional leadership pathway.

Committee members expressed support for piloting such a system and asked about the potential fiscal impact.

(12) PED Administrative Rule Update. Daniel A. Estupiñan, Senior Policy Analyst II, LESC, provided an overview of a proposed repeal and replacement of NMAC 6.20.2 that would update budgeting and accounting procedures in school districts, charter schools, and regional education cooperatives. Staff noted the proposed rule is expansive and would impact department procedures related to capital outlay, enrollment growth, operational cash balances, and some local budgeting practices related to monthly reconciliations and the uses of operational resources to support specific student groups.

Members asked for additional context on how the rule would impact the ability of school districts and charter schools to maintain operational cash balances, how the department is defining certain terms in the financial components of the proposed rule, and how the department would determine when enrollment growth projections are unreasonable or lacking in evidence.

Thursday, September 24

This was a joint hearing between the Legislative Finance Committee (LFC) and the LESC. Attendance below reflects LESC member participation.

The following voting, advisory, and guest members were present:

Voting: Chair William P. Soules, Vice Chair Andres G. Romero, Senate President Pro Tempore Mimi Stewart; Representatives Brian Baca, Joy Garrat, Yanira Gurrola, Tanya Mirabal Moya.

Advisory: Senators Natalie Figueroa, Harold Pope, Gabriel Ramos; Representatives John Block, Jack Chatfield, Catherine J. Cullen, Debbie Sariñana, Nathan Small, Harlan Vincent.

(14) Public Education Department Budget Request. Mariana Padilla, Cabinet Secretary, PED, presented the department's FY28 Public School Support Request. During the meeting, PED made a public school support request of \$5.9 million for FY28, which represents a 2.9 percent increase from FY27. PED's total budget request for FY28 is \$31,819,600. Secretary Padilla began her presentation with a live mariachi band that consisted of students enrolled at Lynn Middle School. Selected students enrolled at J. Paul Taylor Academy also joined Secretary Padilla in her presentation to share their experience with Latinos in Action, a student organization imparting leadership skills.

Committee members discussed requested allocations for math, chronic absenteeism, student enrollment trends, school transportation, instructional leaders and coaches, support for unhoused students, special education services, Indian Education Funds, and English learner support.

(15) School Leadership. Sunny Liu, Fiscal Analyst, Legislative Finance Committee, and John Sena, Director, LESC, presented about the impact school leadership has on educator, student, and broader school outcomes. Director Sena shared research highlighting how school principals' consistent and extended tenure positively impacts educator retention and instruction.

Mr. Liu presented recent trends in New Mexico's school leadership retention and attrition, noting approximately one-third of superintendents leave their positions annually. Over the last decade, most school districts have experienced at least three superintendent turnovers. School districts experiencing superintendent attrition are also more likely to experience principal attrition. Mr. Liu also discussed trends in principal succession, noting assistant principals often lead schools experiencing principal vacancies. Additionally, data show some educators follow experienced principals who may move schools.

Director Sena recommended the Legislature consider strengthening school leadership through strategic succession planning, developing a systematic leadership pipeline, and increasing principal pay to ensure salaries are competitive and reflect the role's responsibilities.

Members did not ask questions due to scheduling constraints.

(16) New Mexico Public Schools Insurance Authority Status Report. Patrick Sandoval, Executive Director, New Mexico Public Schools Insurance Authority (NMSPPIA); Sunny Lui, Principal Analyst, Legislative Finance Committee; Deborah Donaldson, Senior Vice President, Segal; and Martha Quintana, Deputy Director, NMPSIA, presented updates on the merger of

Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) and NMSPiA for minimum employer contribution for health insurance premiums for public school personnel. Vice President Donaldson provided a summary and variation of costs of medical in-network benefits overview for APS and NMPSiA enrollees. Executive Director Sandoval provided budget requests and enrollment guidelines for the APS and NMPSiA merger.

Committee discussed a preference for a professional auditor to determine the exact costs of health premiums, as well as long term sustainability due to rising costs.

Item(17) Public Media Partnership Phil Hoffman, General Manager and Chief Executive Officer, New Mexico Public Broadcasting System (PBS); Jeff Pope, General Manager, KUNM; and Tazbah McCullah, General Manager, KSFR presented on the critical services that public radio provide in New Mexico free of charge to the general public, including educational programming, local news coverage, and public safety and emergency alert infrastructure. The panel requested \$5.9 million from the state in FY 28 for 15 stations. Members noted the depth of service that public media provides around native language programming. Members also thanked the presenters for their role in maintaining the emergency alert systems considering the recent wildfires and flooding, and for their efforts in training cohorts of new journalists in New Mexico.