

B i t e s i z e

 A New Mexico high school redesign, enacted in 2008 in an effort to improve college readiness, appears to have increased the rigor of high school math and science courses and enrollment in algebra II and lab science, a study by Regional Educational Laboratories Southwest and New Mexico Achievement Gap Research Alliance finds. Students' proficiency in reading, math, and science also improved, especially among Hispanics.

 New Mexico had 673 vacant educator positions in 2017: 476 for teachers, 32 for administrators, 140.5 for ancillary staff, and 24.5 for counselors, New Mexico State University's College of Education reports. The totals for each group are higher than in 2016 and most are in the central region of the state. The [report](#) is available online.

 The Public Education Department is rebuilding the Professional Practices and Standards Council, an administratively created body charged with ensuring high standards in the preparation and practice of licensed educators and support providers. The council has been inactive most of this administration. Council members will meet quarterly, visit school sites, and recommend standards to govern the approval of preparation programs.



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

From the Chairwoman

Getting Back on Track

Stretching New Mexico's thin government resources around its many needs is never easy, not even in a good year. And the last few years have not been good.

Since 2014, when the oil industry crashed, New Mexico has faced some of its most financial difficult times, with multiple rounds of emergency budget cuts, widespread shifting of earmarked funds to the general fund to cover basic costs, the cancellation of tens of millions of capital outlay projects, and a 2016 fiscal year that ended with the state in the red, a violation of state law.

During these hard times, legislators worked hard to prevent harm to New Mexico's most critical services. For schools, that meant focusing most cuts on spending outside the formula and compelling school districts to draw down cash balances to pay for operations.

It wasn't like the state's public schools were in great shape to start. With high populations of poor students and English learners, New Mexico has a more complicated, more expensive school population. Legislative studies show – and an ongoing lawsuit argues – New Mexico falls short of providing schools with the resources needed to help these high-risk students succeed.

Now that the economy is starting a mild recovery, it's time to start fixing some of the problems left behind not only by the fiscal crisis but also by historically unmet need.

The Legislative Finance Committee's budget recommendation is a good start. Importantly, it boosts funding for at-risk students by \$22.5 million through an increase in the funding formula factor. The spending plan also increases the statutory minimum salaries for teachers at each licensing level and provides across-the-board 1.5 percent pay increases for education employees. Finally, it responsibly increases spending on the so-called below-the-line programs directly administered by the department that are showing results. In particular, it protects the K-3 Plus extended school year program for low-income schools – a program we know can help close the achievement gap – from additional department cuts.

New Mexico has many needs: high poverty, high crime, many vulnerable populations. By investing in schools, we can make the difference in our children's lives that will help reduce these needs in the future.

Senator Mimi Stewart

Committee Endorses 2017 Education Proposals

The LES C will consider a number of proposals for possible endorsement during its January meeting, covering topics ranging from teacher salaries to virtual schools.

These proposals are being considered in addition to five bills endorsed by the committee in December.

Among the proposals scheduled to be discussed at 10:45 a.m. on January 15:

- A bill to amend the public school funding formula to phase in a 42 percent increase to the multiplier for students at risk of failing and to replace the current teacher “training and experience” index that covers the higher cost of more experienced teachers with a factor aligned with the current three-tiered teacher licensing system;
- A bill to limit schools in larger school districts from generating small-school funding by requiring schools in districts with more than 500 students to serve at least three grade levels, and requiring the Public Education Department to total the enrollments of closely located schools for the purpose of calculating size units;

- A memorial requesting LES C convene a working group to study virtual education best practices and the authorization, oversight and fiscal and educational accountability of virtual schools;

- A bill to increase the statutory minimum annual salaries of Level 1 teachers from \$30,000 to \$36,000, of Level 2 teachers from \$40,000 to \$44,000 and of Level 3 teachers from \$50,000 to \$54,000, in line with the Legislative Finance Committee's FY19 appropriation recommendation.

Among the proposals endorsed by the committee in December:

- A bill, endorsed by the Public School Capital Outlay Oversight Task Force, to replace the current formula for calculating the local match for projects with a formula that more accurately reflects the district's ability to pay;
- A bill to amend the definitions of “school-age person” and “qualified student” to prevent schools from counting students over age 21 in enrollment;
- A bill to extend the school bus replacement cycle for school-district-owned buses to 15 years,

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School Boards, Leaders, PTAs, Teachers Plan for Session

With the legislative session starting on January 16, education organizations have outlined their policy wish lists, with the school boards association saying it wants the Legislature to keep its hands off cash balances, superintendents calling for adequate funding for buses, one of the teachers' unions asking for better health care for students, and charter schools asking for better buildings.

Representatives of the New Mexico School Boards Association, Coalition of Education Leaders, School Superintendents' Association, National Education Association, Parent Teacher Association, and Coalition for Charter Schools testified before the committee in December on their legislative priorities for the upcoming session.

All of them expressed support for more money for public schools.

Joe Guillen, executive director of the School Boards Association, said board members statewide adopted resolutions opposing further use of district cash balances to support

operations and supporting greater funding through the funding formula and salary increases to cover both a higher cost of living and insurance premium and pension fund contribution increases.

He said the association's positions are guided by support for local control and decision making and an opposition to mandates from the state that do not include adequate funding – unfunded mandates.

The association's legislative list also includes increased funding for school buses, funding to cover the costs of teachers who obtain national board certification, greater support of regional education cooperatives, and money to expand an existing tax study to include looking for an additional revenue source for public schools.

Stan Rounds, executive director of both the New Mexico Coalition of Education Leaders and the New Mexico School Superintendents' Association, said the organizations' legislative priorities also promote

local control and adequate funding for schools, including more money for school transportation and instructional materials.

The executive director of the New Mexico chapter of the National Education Association, Charles Bowyer, said the teachers' union wants greater support for early childhood education, reduced student testing, more professional development and supports for teachers, higher quality health care for students, and pay raises for all school employees.

The priorities of the New Mexico Parent Teacher Association are guided by the education reform study *No Time to Lose*, Renata Witte said, and emphasize a common vision for New Mexico schools, closing the achievement gap, and promoting early childhood supports for English learners and low-income students.

Matt Pahl of the New Mexico Coalition for Charter Schools said the organization's priorities include improving charter school access to permanent facilities and allowing charter schools greater flexibility with the credentials of their teaching staff.

He said they oppose changes to the funding formula that would reduce funding to charter schools.

LESC Considers 2017 Legislation

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from the current 12 years, or at 300,000 miles, whichever comes first;

- A bill, endorsed by the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee, to expedite reciprocal licensing of teachers who are military personnel, their spouses, or veterans who hold a valid current or expired teaching license in another jurisdiction;
- A bill, endorsed by the Public School Capital Outlay Oversight Task Force, that requires nonprofit foundations organized specifically to buy charter school facilities to enter into a legally binding agreement with the charter school to transfer the facility's title

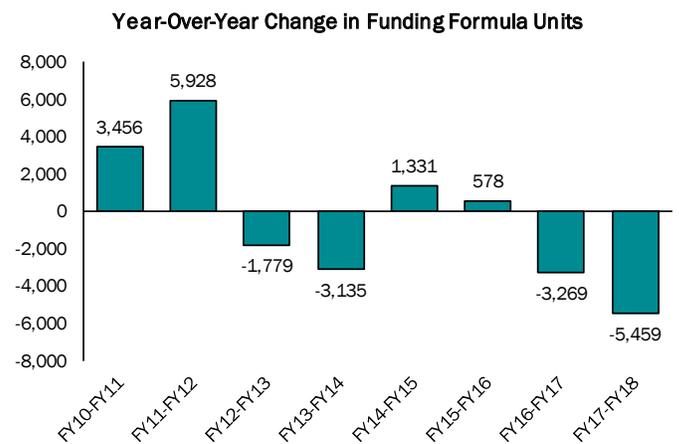
to the school immediately after final acquisition of the title.

Final School Unit Count Big Drop from FY17

The final FY18 count of school district and charter school units – a number based on enrollment multiplied by the specific needs of each student and the overall needs of each school district – was 625,462, down almost 5,500 from FY17 and 6,000 less than the Public Education Department estimated. The significant decrease could mean an increase in the per-unit value, resulting in a larger-than-planned mid-year distribution of funding to school districts and charter schools.

LESC staff estimate the final unit value could increase by as much as \$48, from \$4,053.55 to about \$4,101, based on preliminary estimates for Impact Aid, revenue certain school districts receive to offset the impact of federal properties within the district that the state takes credit for when distributing formula funds.

However, money could revert to the state's general fund if the department's estimate of Impact Aid is too conservative.



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