

MINUTES
Legislative Education Study Committee
Las Vegas, New Mexico
July 23 - 25

Wednesday, July 23

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

Voting: Senator Candy Spence Ezzell; Representatives Brian Baca, Debbie M. Sariñana, G. Andrés Romero, Joy Garratt, and Tanya Mirabal Moya

Advisory: Senators Anthony L. Thornton, Linda Lopez, Natalie Figueroa; Representatives Catherine J. Cullen, Diane Torres-Velasquez, John Block, Patricia Roybal Caballero

Guest: Representative Anita Gonzales

1) Call to Order, Introductions, and Approval of July Agenda and June Minutes. Representative G. Andrés Romero, Vice Chair, Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC), called the meeting to order at 9:11 AM. Vice Chair Romero facilitated introductions of the members of LESC. John Sena, Director, LESC, provided introductions for LESC staff. A quorum of voting members was not present at the start of the meeting. On July 24, a quorum was present. In a motion by Vice Chair, G. Andrés Romero and a second by Representative Tanya Mirabal Moya, the agenda for the July LESC hearing was approved. The meeting minutes for the June LESC hearing were also approved with a motion by Senator Candy Spence Ezzell and a second by Representative Joy Garratt.

2) Community Welcome. Daniel A. Brown, Ph.D., Provost & Vice President for Academic Affairs, New Mexico Highlands University (NMHU) welcomed the committee to the NMHU campus and highlighted the work NMHU is doing to prepare graduate school candidates and career ready professionals. Dr. Brown also briefly described NMHU's collaborations with local high schools and paid tribute to the university's initiatives in serving Native American populations and collaborating with Pueblos.

Christopher Gutierrez, Superintendent, West Las Vegas School District and Melissa Sandoval, Superintendent, Las Vegas City Schools also welcomed the committee to Las Vegas and their respective school districts.

Superintendent Gutierrez highlighted his district's focus on career and technical education (CTE). He mentioned the wide variety of professions available to students in his district and their goal to build more facilities with space for CTE equipment and technology.

Superintendent Sandoval highlighted her district's focus on cultural competence. She discussed funding challenges her district has experienced and the actions they have taken to resolve some of those issues. She also mentioned initiatives they are anticipating in the future and emphasized the importance of focusing on bilingual education.

LESC members inquired about the school districts' duality, ways to address different shortcomings in student outcome trends, and the efforts

being made toward collaboration with neighboring districts. Members also inquired about the different project-based learning opportunities offered to students.

(3) House Memorial 2: Artificial Intelligence Working Group Recommendations. Tim Bedeaux, Senior Policy Analyst II, LESC, presented the work of the LESC Artificial Intelligence (AI) Working Group. House Memorial 2 from the 2025 legislative session asked LESC to convene a working group to study AI use cases in education and make recommendations toward a statewide "AI in education" policy. The working group met four times in June and July 2025 studying the current landscape of AI in New Mexico, promising use cases for AI tools, and trends in other states' AI policies. Ultimately, the working group developed recommendations for consideration by LESC.

Francine Binnert, Librarian, Cottonwood Classical Preparatory School, presented the working group's first recommendation: promote and evaluate access to AI tools. Key policy considerations include making new or existing funding available for the purchase of AI tools, as well as the creation of a vetted list of AI tools to help schools navigate the breadth of available technology.

Jaycie Homer, Teacher, Lovington Municipal Schools, presented the working group's second recommendation: drive effective implementation and deter ineffective implementation. The working group found the Legislature could drive effective implementation by delegating AI guidance to a formal, multidisciplinary governance body, and by ensuring teachers receive professional development on the effective, ethical use of AI.

Paige Prescott, Executive Director, Computer Science Alliance, presented the working group's third recommendation: create and enforce laws to protect student safety, data privacy, security, and sovereignty. The working group believed New Mexico should have a set of minimum standards in law related to data privacy, as well as an enforcement mechanism that offers schools recourse if privacy is breached.

Finally, Andrew Procter, Student, East Mountain High School, presented the working group's fourth recommendation: consider system-wide changes that may be necessary in a world where AI is commonplace. As AI tools become more widely used, assessment systems that focus on knowledge of English and math will become less practical than competency-based assessments designed to measure whether students are attaining critical thinking and reasoning skills necessary to effectively use AI.

(4) Superintendent Panel. Jessica Hathaway, Deputy Director, LESC; Debra Sena-Holton, Superintendent, Pecos Independent School District; Melissa Sandoval, Superintendent, Las Vegas City Schools; Christopher Gutierrez, Superintendent, West Las Vegas School District; and Martín A. Madrid, Superintendent, Santa Rosa Consolidated Schools, answered panel questions regarding the structured literacy initiative, areas of need in improving math instruction, the impact and local usages of additional instructional time, the programmatic impact of recent revisions to the

state equalization guarantee, and the challenges each community would like to share with legislative members.

Members asked for additional context on strategies for improving school safety, whether construction costs have increased and the impact that has had on facility conditions, measure that are being implemented to improve leadership capacity, whether schools receive professional learning during instructional material adoptions, the support provided by the local regional education cooperative, how each district is ensuring each secondary student is acquiring math skills and being prepared for college or career, the usage of cursive writing in public schools, and trends in enrollment.

(5) New Mexico Highlands University Teacher Preparation. Geri Glover, Ph.D., Elisabeth Valenzuela, Ph.D., and Aaron Rudolph, Ph.D., all faculty from NMHU's School of Education provided an overview of student enrollment and demographics, academic programs in undergraduate and graduate programs, and pathways to teacher licensure provided at the School of Education. Dr. Valenzuela, who works specifically in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at NMHU, provided background information on Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) training and instruction for faculty at the university.

Members inquired about how to best align educator preparation programs with best practices and how to make sure future educators are receiving strong preparation in both coursework and clinical practice experiences such as student teaching or residencies.

Thursday, July 24

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

Voting: Senators William P. Soules, Candy Spence Ezzell; Representatives Debbie M. Sariñana, G. Andrés Romero, Joy Garratt, Tanya Mirabal Moya

Advisory: Senators Anthony L. Thornton, Harold Pope, Natalie Figueroa, Gabriel Ramos; Representatives Catherine J. Cullen, Diane Torres-Velasquez, John Block, Patricia Roybal Caballero, Yanira Gurrola

Guest: Representative Anita Gonzales

(6) Public Education Reform Fund Update. Tim Bedeaux, Senior Policy Analyst II, LESC, provided an overview of Laws 2025, Chapter 169 (Senate Bill 201), which converted the public education reform fund (PERF) into a targeted three-year investment fund. Initiatives funded through the PERF are required to undergo an evaluation collaboratively designed by LESC, the Public Education Department (PED), the Legislative Finance Committee (LFC), and the Department of Finance and Administration (DFA). Sarah Dinces, Program Evaluator, LFC, explained the process by which staff collaborated on evaluation instructions, which include a description of how PERF-funded programs will operate, the roles and responsibilities of actors in the educational system for the effective administration of the program, and a description of how the program will

be evaluated. Kenneth Stowe, Assistant Director of Curriculum and Instruction, PED, provided an overview of the five programs funded through the PERF and described the steps PED will take to measure the outcomes of the programs. PED, through a partnership with WestEd, is committed to developing strong evaluations that will provide a deeper understanding of the programs' effectiveness.

(7) High-Impact Tutoring. Conor L. Hicks, Policy Analyst I, LESC; Julie Brenning, Senior Manager, Community Schools and Extended Learning Bureau, Public Education Department (PED); Dr. Anne Marie Strangio, Deputy Director, Student Support Services Division, PED; and Dr. Rachel Boren, Director, Southwest Outreach Academic Research (SOAR) Evaluation and Policy Center, New Mexico State University, presented to committee members on the effectiveness of high-impact tutoring both in New Mexico and nationally.

Mr. Hicks outlined nationally recognized design principles for high-impact tutoring, highlighted legislative support for tutoring, reviewed the evidence base, and provided the Legislature, PED, and local school districts and charter schools with recommendations to improve implementation effectiveness and data collection.

Senior Manager Brenning discussed PED's recent efforts to support tutoring programs, including near peer tutoring, high-impact tutoring, and a virtual tutoring program in partnership with the Personalized Learning Initiative and Saga Education.

Dr. Boren provided lawmakers with the results of SOAR's recent PED-requested evaluation of high-impact tutoring in New Mexico. Results from the evaluation indicated positive outcomes for students, though the sample size was relatively small compared to the overall participation figures.

Lawmakers asked about the distribution of funding across the state, how best to schedule tutoring, and how the Legislature could support expansion of the program statewide, among other lines of inquiry.

(8) Improving Math: Policy and Practice. Jessica Hathaway, Deputy Director, LESC; Shafiq Chaudhary, Director of the Math and Science Bureau, PED; and Kersti Tyson, Ph.D., Director of K-12 Education, Los Alamos National Laboratory Foundation (LANLF) discussed current student math proficiency based on current and past math initiatives and included an update and recommendations from the Math and Science Advisory Council (MSAC) that may improve math outcomes.

Deputy Director Hathaway provided an overview of math legislation across the country, efforts in New Mexico educator preparation programs responsible for building math content knowledge, and possible inventions to improve math outcomes. Director Chaudhary discussed current initiatives from PED including the release of New Mexico's Math Framework 2.0, NUMeROS training and practice for K-5 math instruction, and future legislation that includes training, instruction, and accountability. Dr. Tyson discussed the shifts in mathematics instructions and how MSAC has responded to improving the current math system including: teacher

preparation, teaching profession, teacher leadership, and administrator leadership.

(9) Progress Report: Prekindergarten Quality and Educational Outcomes.

Sarah Rovang, Ph.D., Program Evaluator, Legislative Finance Committee (LFC), and Ryan Tolman, Ph.D., Program Evaluator, LFC, presented LFC's Prekindergarten Quality and Educational Outcomes progress update, providing updates relative to a 2020 LFC program evaluation. Dr. Rovang and Dr. Tolman reported New Mexico prekindergarten continues to improve kindergarten readiness, especially for low-income students, though instructional quality varies by provider type. Expansion has extended access to 65 percent of four-year old children and 24 percent of three-year old children. Still, challenges remain in data tracking, the absence of a unified kindergarten readiness framework, and uneven instructional quality between community-based and school-based programs. Recommendations include collaboration with school districts, PED, and the Higher Education Department (HED), aligning assessments, improving statewide data systems, defining kindergarten readiness, and targeting funding toward evidence-based teaching tools and professional development.

Elizabeth Groginsky, Cabinet Secretary, Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD), presented fiscal year 2026 (FY26) funded enrollment, reporting that the state now has over 20 thousand prekindergarten slots in school-based, community-based, tribal, and Head Start programs. Secretary Groginsky detailed professional development requirements for teachers, Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) observation results showing strong emotional support but lower instructional support in community settings, and efforts to replace the Early Childhood Observation Tool (ECOT) with a new assessment portfolio aligned to the New Mexico Early Learning Guidelines. A pilot of the Minnesota Executive Function Scale (MEFS) showed promising results, with full statewide implementation planned for fall 2025.

The committee discussion emphasized New Mexico's strong investment in early childhood education, with notable gains in prekindergarten access and positive outcomes, especially for low-income students. Legislators inquired about the significance of reported improvements, the use of long-term graduation data dating back to the program's inception, and the importance of strategies to raise proficiency rates beyond 50 percent. Concerns included avoiding a plateau in benefits by third grade, ensuring strategic and targeted funding, and balancing academic measures like I-station with comprehensive, developmentally appropriate, and culturally responsive approaches. Several LESC members stressed the need for data systems that seamlessly transfer information from prekindergarten to kindergarten teachers, as well as the value of measuring non-academic domains such as physical development, social-emotional growth, and creativity. LESC member questions also addressed Head Start's role and potential impacts from federal funding changes, workforce challenges with bachelor's degree requirements, equitable compensation, and ensuring access in all communities.

(10) Early Childhood Workforce Wage and Salary Report. Elizabeth Groginsky, Cabinet Secretary, ECECD, presented the New Mexico Wage Scale and Career Lattice Task Force efforts to create a unified, equitable wage scale and career lattice for New Mexico's early childhood workforce, covering roles from leadership to support staff across childcare, prekindergarten, Head Start, home visiting, and Family Infant Toddler (FIT) programs. The draft framework establishes role categories, essential responsibilities, shared competencies, qualifications, and minimum salaries, with salary floors tied to education and experience levels. Secretary Groginsky shared feedback from over 200 participants in 10 focus groups that showed strong support for competency-based equivalency and raised questions about implementation, communication, and funding of administrative costs. The presentation also reviewed higher education program capacity and credit for prior learning. Secretary Groginsky also highlighted student barriers such as technology access, transportation, childcare needs, academic preparedness, cultural and community obligations, and financial constraints.

Committee discussion emphasized the need to recruit future early childhood educators through high school dual credit and CTE programs, including summer work opportunities in childcare centers. Members highlighted the importance of community outreach, thorough background checks, and mentorships to prevent burnout among new educators. Connections with higher education, particularly in rural health and early childhood programs, were encouraged, with examples of successful on-campus child development labs serving as both learning sites and childcare options. Concerns were raised about ensuring equitable wage increases for all early childhood professionals, including those in private programs, and about maintaining raises regarding inflation. Members discussed the role of higher education and PED oversight in early childhood educator preparation programs, stressing the need for alignment, in-person learning opportunities, and adequate faculty support.

Friday, July 25

The following voting and advisory members were present:

Voting: Senators William P. Soules, Candy Spence Ezzell; Representatives Debbie Sariñana, G. Andrés Romero, Joy Garratt, Tanya Mirabal Moya

Advisory: Senators Harold Pope, Natalie Figueroa, Gabriel Ramos; Representatives Catherine J. Cullen, Diane Torres-Velasquez, John Block, Patricia Roybal Caballero

(12) Charter School Governance and Support: Mark A. Montoya, Senior Policy Analyst II, LESC; Rebekka Burt, Chair, Public Education Commission (PEC); Joseph D. Escobedo, Ed. D, Director of Charter School Team, Board of Education Services Office, Albuquerque Public Schools (APS); Brigette Russell, Ph.D., Interim Director, Charter Schools Division (CSD), PED; and Amanda DeBell, Deputy Secretary of Teaching, Learning and Innovation, PED, presented about charter school governance and structures in New Mexico. Mr. Montoya briefed the committee on the history, support, and

accountability of charter schools nationally and in New Mexico. Mr. Montoya focused on the 2 percent withheld from operating budgets, reporting transparency, and differences between state- and locally-chartered schools in the state. Chair Burt and Dr. Escobedo outlined authorizer roles and oversight of charter schools under their jurisdiction, while PED presenters described the Charter School Division's functions, addressed LESC report findings, and shared policy recommendations.

Committee member questions and comments centered on transparency of charter school withholding usage, adequacy of the statutory 2 percent withholding amount, past legislative proposals to separate PEC and CSD from PED, and other general charter school items.

(13) Federal Funding Update. Daniel Estupiñan, Senior Fiscal Analyst II, LESC, provided an overview of changes in federal policy and budget. The overview included a discussion on changes to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Medicaid, an update on the withholding of federal formula grant awards, revised guidance for federal public benefits, the federal appropriations process, and staff takeaways from recent federal actions.

Members asked for additional context on the income verification process in the school meals program and tax provisions for private school students in the federal reconciliation bill, as well as for clarifications on the impact of the federal reconciliation bill onto public schools in New Mexico and the federal appropriations process.

(14) Director's Report. John Sena, Director, LESC, provided an update to LESC members on two items: the LESC July 2025 interim newsletter, and the *Martinez-Yazzie* lawsuit. Director Sena provided handouts on district demographics to show that the *Martinez-Yazzie* case is serving students from all districts in New Mexico and briefly reviewed the July LESC Newsletter. Director Sena also reviewed dates and locations for regional meetings taking place across the state. As part of the *Martinez-Yazzie* Action Plan process, there are 12 regional community meetings happening in August. The goal of these meetings is to gather public input and help shape the action plan.