

MINUTES
Legislative Education Study Committee
Santa Fe, New Mexico
December 17-19, 2025

Wednesday, December 17

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

Voting: Vice Chair G. Andrés Romero; Senate President Pro Tempore Mimi Stewart; Representatives Brian Baca, Debbie Sariñana, Joy Garratt, and Raymundo Lara.

Advisory: Senators Harold Pope, Linda M. López, and Natalie Figueroa; Representatives E. Diane Torres-Velásquez, John Block, and Yanira Gurrola.

Guest: Representative Tara Lujan.

(1) Call to Order, Introductions, and Approval of December Agenda and November Minutes. Representative G. Andrés Romero, Vice Chair, LESC, started the meeting at 9:20 a.m. Vice Chair Romero facilitated introductions of the members of LESC and John Sena, Director, LESC introduced LESC staff. A quorum of voting members was not present at the start of the meeting.

(2) School Climate: Supporting Student Success. Conor L. Hicks, Policy Analyst I, LESC; Yvonne García, Deputy Secretary of Student Support Services, Public Education Department (PED); and Soña Saiz, Ph.D., Behavioral Health Manager, Safe and Healthy Schools Bureau, PED, presented to the committee on the Panorama school climate survey results, strategies to grow and maintain the state's school-based behavioral health workforce, and initiatives by PED to support healthy school climates. Mr. Hicks discussed New Mexico students' relatively low positive perceptions of their school experience and highlighted the need for increased investment in school counselors, social workers, and psychologists to support student well-being. Deputy Secretary García and Dr. Saiz updated committee members on Panorama survey participation levels across the state and PED's initiatives on restorative practices and behavioral health.

Members asked about available data for school-based behavioral health workers, training and education requirements for these professionals, and PED's technical support for schools to leverage Panorama data to inform decision-making.

(3) School Improvement Update. Amanda DeBell, Deputy Secretary of Teaching, Learning, and Innovation, PED; Elisa Begueria, Superintendent, Lake Arthur Municipal Schools; and Heather Summers, Principal, Clovis High School, presented to committee members on PED's school improvement efforts and the impact of coaching facilitated by PED's Priority Schools Bureau. Superintendent Begueria and Principal Summers both offered testimonials about coaching initiatives to support superintendents and principals, highlighting the impact of leadership coaching,

instructional feedback, weekly professional learning communities, and alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessments. Deputy Secretary DeBell discussed ways in which Priority Schools Bureau's coaching and school improvement work aligns with the proposed *Martinez-Yazzie* remedial action plan and how early evidence suggests these initiatives have improved outcomes.

Members asked about changes to the school improvement designation methodology, strategies for addressing administrator turnover and its impact on coaching effectiveness, and how PED monitors administrator performance.

(4) Local and State Long-Term Financial Planning through Strategic Resource Management. Daniel Estupiñan, Senior Fiscal Analyst II, LESC; Amanda DeBell, Deputy Secretary of Teaching, Learning, and Innovation, PED; and Yvonne Garcia, Deputy Secretary of Student Support Services, PED, provided an overview of how the Legislature is practicing long-term strategic resource management and how school districts and charter schools have adapted to these changes. They also spoke of long-term trends facing the state and public schools, the national landscape of strategic planning, and recommendations for promoting greater intentionality in how the Legislature, school districts, and charter schools use resources to realize sustained increases in student outcomes.

Members asked about the implementation of the unified application for federal programs and the interconnection of existing reporting and strategic planning requirements in statute and rule. Members also asked for additional context on how other states are approaching long-term planning for school districts and charter schools.

(5) Educator Fellows: An Update. Amanda DeBell, Deputy Secretary of Teaching, Learning, and Innovation, PED, and Denise Beutel, Ph.D., Manager of Educator Pathways Bureau, PED, presented an update on the Educator Fellows program. Educator Fellows aims to expand the local educator workforce while providing high-quality, hands-on clinical experience. According to PED, there are currently 370 fellows dispersed across the state in 180 schools. Counties with the most fellows are Doña Ana (67), Bernalillo (61), Curry (52), McKinley (27), Chavez (25), and Valencia (24). The most common licensure areas fellows are pursuing are elementary education (200 fellows) and early childhood (122 fellows). Most fellows identify as persons of color (70 percent) and are first generation college students (60 percent). PED reported current demand for Educator Fellows exceeds funding. PED also states it requires sponsoring school districts to provide a funding match of \$3,840 per fellow.

Committee members asked about the challenges the program faces, how the Educator Fellows program differs from the Grow Your Own program, and whether fellows can seek their education degree from any higher education program.

Thursday, December 18

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

Voting: Chair William P. Soules, Vice Chair G. Andrés Romero; Senate President Pro Tempore Mimi Stewart; Representatives Brian Baca, Debbie Sariñana, Joy Garratt, and Raymundo Lara.

Advisory: Senators Harold Pope, Linda M. López, and Natalie Figueroa; Representatives E. Diane Torres-Velásquez, John Block, and Yanira Gurrola.

Guest: Representative Tara Lujan.

(7) 2026 Legislative Budget and Policy Priorities. Kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) education advocates representing the New Mexico School Board Association, the New Mexico Coalition of Education Leaders and the New Mexico School Superintendents' Association, National Education Association of New Mexico, Albuquerque Teachers Federation and American Federation of Teachers New Mexico, New Mexico Parent Teacher Association, and Public Charter Schools of New Mexico provided an overview of their shared and individual policy and budget priorities for the 2026 legislative session.

Common themes in the presentations included concern about the uncertainty of federal funding and the need for sustained state investment to support state priorities and maintain progress; persistent teacher shortages; increased compensation for certified educators, school staff, and bus drivers; and opposition to unfunded mandates and legislation limiting local control and flexibility. Advocates emphasized the need to increase state equalization guarantee (SEG), public school funding formula, funding; eliminating "use it or lose it" local budget balance requirements; timely distribution of operating and carryover funds by PED; and allowing schools to retain funding reserves for local needs and priorities. Education partners also highlighted priorities. These included implementation of the *Martinez-Yazzie* remedial action plan, professional development, teacher recruitment and retention, strategies to address chronic absenteeism, equitable funding for at-risk students, school safety, out-of-school opportunities, student transportation, capital outlay reform, and stronger coordination between education and workforce partners.

Members asked questions and requested additional information on several topics including how school districts fund school security projects and whether additional resources are needed; the capacity and resources required to serve students receiving special education services; superintendent tenure statewide; the re-establishment of the State Board of Education; minimum salary levels for school personnel; the study referenced by presenters on alternative assessments/measurement of student proficiency in New Mexico; whether changes to assessments or standards are needed to reflect differing educational approaches across the state; how traditional district and charter school governance structures relate to the *Martinez-Yazzie* ruling; how accountability is maintained when charter schools are consolidated in response to funding and enrollment trends; and the increasing workload demands on teachers and administrators.

(9) FY27 LESC Budget Proposals. Daniel Estupiñan, Senior Fiscal Analyst II, LESC, presented LESC staff's budget recommendations for FY27. Staff recommended a 3 percent salary increase for educators, and funding for school districts and charter schools to increase the employer share of covering insurance premiums to 80 percent. Staff also recommended increasing appropriations for out-of-school time, and continued funding for career and technical education programs, the Summer Literacy Institute, and school improvement.

Members asked for additional context on funding for teacher residency programs, outdoor learning programs, the Hispanic Education Act, the Bilingual Multicultural Education Act, and the Black Education Act. Members also asked for more information about staff's recommendations for the public education reform fund, including the structure of the fund and the programs being recommended for inclusion in the fund's multi-year funding framework.

President Pro Tempore Stewart made a motion for committee endorsement of the LESC staff public school support proposal, and the motion was seconded by Vice Chair Soules. The motion passed unanimously.

(10) 2026 Session LESC Endorsed Legislation Proposals. John Sena, Director, LESC, presented nine bills for endorsement by the committee, all of which the committee voted to endorse. The endorsed bills are described as follows:

- Acting on a motion by President Pro Tempore Stewart and a second by Representative Sariñana, LESC endorsed a bill to add a new section to state law authorizing the PED secretary to suspend individual local school board members, by a vote of seven to zero.
- Acting on a motion by Vice Chair Romero and a second by President Pro Tempore Stewart, LESC endorsed a bill to require all school districts and charter schools to pay at least 80 percent of group insurance premiums for all public school employees, beginning in FY27, by a vote of seven to zero.
- Acting on a motion by President Pro Tempore Stewart and a second by Representative Sariñana, LESC endorsed a bill to amend the Attendance for Success Act to allow for greater consideration in excusing absences and directing attendance interventions by school districts and charter schools for students with disabilities or severe medical conditions who are absent from school as provided in students' individualized education program (IEP) or Section 504 plan, by a vote of seven to zero.
- Acting on a motion by Representative Sariñana and a second by Representative Garratt, LESC endorsed a bill to amend the Teacher Residency Act to adjust residency program components and update stipend structures, by a vote of seven to zero.
- Acting on a motion by President Pro Tempore Stewart and a second by Representative Lara, LESC endorsed a bill intended to strengthen instructional quality and ensure earlier identification and support

for students with mathematics difficulty, by a vote of seven to zero.

- Acting on a motion by Chair Soules and a second by Representative Lara, LESC endorsed a bill to amend existing law to clearly define restraint and seclusion practices in public schools, specifying which actions are permitted and which are prohibited, by a vote of six to one. Representative Baca voted in opposition.
- Acting on a motion by Representative Garratt and a second by President Pro Tempore Stewart, LESC endorsed a bill to create the High-Quality Literacy Instruction Act to expand evidence-based reading supports to build upon New Mexico's structured literacy framework, by a vote of seven to zero.
- Acting on a motion by President Pro Tempore Stewart and a second by Chair Soules, LESC endorsed a bill to codify the Office of Special Education within PED in state law and create a Special Education Act, by a vote of six to one. Representative Baca voted in opposition.
- Acting on a motion by President Pro Tempore Stewart and a second by Chair Soules, LESC endorsed a bill to create a two-year pilot program to evaluate the financial impact on a low-income pregnant person of providing a universal basic income of \$1,500 per month from pregnancy through the first year of life of an infant, and would appropriate \$80 million from the general fund for this purpose, by a vote of six to one. Representative Baca voted in opposition.

Friday, December 19

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

Voting: Chair William Soules; Senate President Pro Tempore; Representatives Debbie Sariñana, Joy Garratt, and Raymundo Lara.

Advisory: Senators Harold Pope, Linda M. López, and Natalie Figueroa; Representatives John Block and Yanira Gurrola.

Guest: Representative Tara Lujan.

(11) 520 Native American Language and Culture Certification. Natasha Davalos, Policy Analyst I, LESC; KatieAnn Juanico, Assistant Secretary, Indian Education Division, PED; Patricia Trujillo, Ph.D., Deputy Cabinet Secretary, HED; and Alonzo Hughes, student, gave an update for Senate Memorial 9. Ms. Davalos presented a brief outlining the historical summary of the 520 Native American Language Certification (NALC) and current trends in license holders and challenges for obtaining and sustaining certification. Deputy Secretary Trujillo provided an overview of the technical assistance centers to be constructed and their potential role in supporting 520 NALC certificate holders with professional learning. Assistant Secretary KatieAnn Juanico provided an overview of her team's expansion of language programming in public schools and her

office's attempt to formalize the certification process to align with PED's strategic plan. Alonzo Hughes, a high school junior at Pojoaque Valley High, offered a prayer for committee members in Tewa and shared his experience in becoming an Indigenous fluent speaker for his community and his future.

Committee members discussed the significance of language revitalization and recognized the challenges of sustaining proficiency for endangered languages during leadership transitions and priorities.

(12) PED Administrative Rule Update. Saraí Ortiz, Policy Analyst I, LESC, provided an update on the adoption of New Mexico Administrative Code (NMAC) 6.60.11 (Automated External Defibrillator Training), and proposals to repeal and replace NMAC 6.63.2 (Nurse Licensure Classification); amend NMAC 6.30.15 (Community School Requirements); and repeal and replace NMAC 6.64.10 (Beginner Bilingual Teacher Requirements).

Members asked about the proposed revision of community schools' state coalition membership requirements; if a bill amendment to correctly categorize level two nurses was still required; and, expressed concerns about automated external defibrillators not being required at school extracurricular events.

(13) Director's Report. John Sena, Director, LESC, presented the December LESC newsletter to highlight long-term planning, school climate, and work from the LESC throughout the 2025 interim. He also presented a personnel update to announce the departure of Natasha Davalos, Policy Analyst I, while also recognizing her contributions to LESC during her tenure. Additionally, he noted that he has served as Director for a year and requested the committee complete an evaluation soon. Director Sena informed members the January meeting will be focused on approving the annual report and concluded by updating members on the LESC budget.