## Bite-Size

The 2026 Kids Count Data Book published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, a private philanthropic organization, found New Mexico's overall child well-being score improved between 2019 and 2024. The improvement was driven primarily by economic well-being, as the state improved by 15 percentage points in this area compared with 2019.

School enrollment declines is one of the most significant challenges facing public education today, due largely to falling birth rates. In the past decade, Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) recorded a decline of more than 22 thousand students enrolled under New Mexico's public school funding formula, leading APS to initiate a "right-sizing" initiative.

On Tuesday, November 3, New Mexico voters approved almost $20 million in general obligation (GO) bonds to fund school libraries across the state. Library GO bonds are the primary source of state funding for school libraries. Research demonstrates access to strong school libraries is associated with better student outcomes.


# informED

a publication of the Legislative Education Study Committee

Senator William P. Soules, Chair / Representative G. Andrés Romero, Vice Chair / John Sena, Director / November 2026


### From the Chair

It's an exciting time of year. With only a couple of months before the next legislative session, it's the time LESC considers budget and policy proposals to improve education in New Mexico.

Over the last six months, we've traveled around the state, learning from educators in local school districts and charter schools. Our staff has conducted studies ranging from ways to improve funding for career and technical education to better regulating distance learning schools and programs. They have visited schools, talked to national experts, and gathered feedback from stakeholders to determine the best path forward for pressing education issues.

The result is a slate of proposals that includes increasing educator minimum salaries, raising pay for all school employees, creating better planning tools for school districts and charters schools, finding a sustainable way to fund career and technical education, and regulating technology use in schools, among others.

If history is any indication, not everyone will love every idea. And not all of them will make it through the legislative process. But I'm confident they will prompt discussions and, for those bills signed by the governor, make schools a better place for New Mexico students and educators.

LESC is a made up of people who care about education. We're current and former educators, school board members, and higher education faculty. And if it wasn't for the "D" or "R" after our names, you might be hard pressed to tell what party we belong to. I truly believe our LESC members put kids before politics.

I'm looking forward to the next few months. These 60-day legislative sessions can be long and arduous, but they are also invigorating, and hold the promise of a better future for New Mexico. Let's get to work.



# Recommendations for Full-Time Distance Learning

Distance learning meets a real need for many New Mexico students, but despite 9,700 students attending a full-time distance learning program in the 2025-2026 school year (SY26), the state's regulatory framework has failed to keep pace with the programmatic landscape. New Mexico has offered full-time distance learning programs for decades, but the state has not adopted a comprehensive set of programmatic and fiscal guardrails to ensure these programs meet state and federal requirements and provide an adequate education to students. In addition, New Mexico students enrolled in distance learning programs attend school less and perform lower on state assessments than their in-person peers.

In response to these concerns, the Legislature enacted Laws 2026, Chapter 8 (*House Bill 253), creating some guardrails for full-time distance learning programs and temporary provisions, and requested LESC, in collaboration with the Legislative Finance Committee (LFC) and the Public Education Department (PED), complete a comprehensive study of full-time distance learning programs in New Mexico.

In the 2026 interim, LESC staff visited 11 distance learning programs across the state, interviewed school leaders, and analyzed enrollment, assessment, and funding data, as required by statute. These visits involved classroom observation and structured interviews with administrators to explore how programs are verifying attendance, ensuring engagement and safety, and managing funding to support programs.

While schools' approaches to serving students took different forms depending on their context, common trends emerged that can inform a statewide policy framework, including: high concentrations of student needs, a heavy reliance on learning management systems, excessive class sizes, variations in local approaches to instructional time, inefficiencies in how public funding is allocated and used by distance learning programs, and broad considerations around local and statewide governance of public schools.

Additionally, last school year two school districts signed away control of more than $35 million in public funds to a private company providing distance learning services.

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# Public School Capital Outlay State Local Match Rate

Throughout the 2026 interim, LESC staff, in collaboration with LFC and Public School Facilities Authority (PSFA) staff, studied New Mexico's public school capital outlay state and local match rate and potential revisions to the "phase two" formula. This was done to establish recommendations ahead of the 2027 legislative session at the request of the Public School Capital Outlay Oversight Task Force (PSCOOTF).

Public school capital outlay provides funding for the construction, renovation, repair, and upkeep of public school facilities across the state. In New Mexico, this is funded through a combination of state and local resources using the state and local match formula. This cost-sharing model was designed in response to the 1998 *Zuni* lawsuit which challenged New Mexico's system of funding school projects; the ruling prompted reforms under the Public School Capital Outlay Act, including the adoption of a standards-based funding system with a state and local match.

In 2018, the Public School Capital Outlay Act was amended to establish the phase two state and local match formula. The phase two formula was designed with three main goals: better reflect a school district's ability to pay, utilize statewide adequacy standards to determine district facility needs, and consider differences in per-student facility construction and maintenance costs. The model shifted costs from the state to districts, and was implemented just as construction costs increased during the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, districts are requesting and receiving more waivers—local match reductions—to soften the burden. This indicates the phase two formula is not working as intended as it is failing to capture a district's true ability to pay for their public school facilities and reflect current market conditions.

One recommended option is incentive-based waivers, pairing updated waivers with funding adjustments or project-specific matches, which would allow districts to lower construction costs and make projects more affordable.

While the Public School Capital Outlay Act was designed to provide adequate and equitable funding for public school facilities and account for the state's unique needs, work remains to ensure the system is functioning as designed. To proceed with revising the state and local match for public school capital outlay, LESC, LFC, and PSFA staff will continue to evaluate feedback from PSCOOTF and other stakeholders. The proposal will be presented at the LESC/LFC joint committee meeting on November 20, 2026.

# Distance Learning

(continued from front)

New Mexico needs a robust distance learning policy framework that can respond to current and anticipated challenges to support student success and protect fiscal integrity.

The report's recommendations clarify existing law, strengthen oversight, and promote best practice so distance learning complements—rather than destabilizes—the broader public school ecosystem.

LESC staff will present its findings at the committee hearing on November 18, 2026, in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

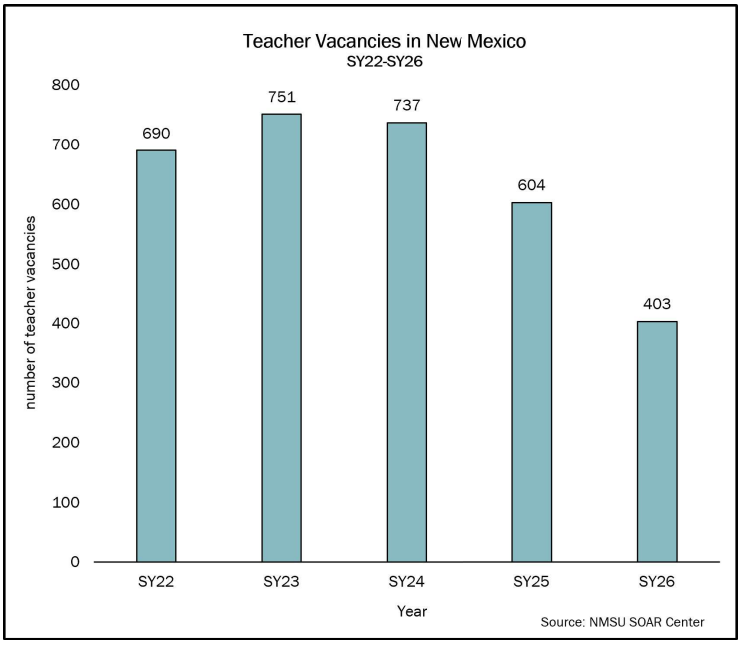
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Ethan Sullivan, Editor
Marit Andrews, Contributing Editor

# Teacher Vacancies Decrease Across New Mexico




According to the New Mexico State University's (NMSU's) Southwest Outreach Academic Research (SOAR) Evaluation & Policy Center—an evaluation center for grants, internal research, and external organizations—the number of teacher vacancies across New Mexico has decreased from a peak of 751 vacancies in SY23 to 403 in SY26. Teacher vacancies have steadily declined in each of the three school years since then. Teacher vacancies have declined by about 46 percent, or 348 fewer vacancies statewide, since SY23. The continued decline suggests meaningful progress in addressing teacher vacancies, but NMSU's SOAR Evaluation & Policy Center notes continued efforts will be necessary to further reduce teacher vacancies.