

MINUTES
Legislative Education Study Committee
Santa Fe, New Mexico
May 29 - 30

Thursday, May 29

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

Voting: Senator William P. Soules, Representative Brian Baca, Senator Candy Spence Ezzell, Senator Craig Brandt, Representative Debbie Sarinana, Representative G. Andres Romero, Representative Joy Garratt, Senator Mimi Stewart, Representative Raymundo Lara

Advisory: Representative Catherine J. Cullen, Representative Diane Torres-Velasquez, Senator Harold Pope, Representative John Block, Senator Linda Lopez, Senator Natalie Figueroa, Representative Patricia Roybal Caballero, Representative Yanira Gurrola

(1) Call to Order, Introductions, and Approval of January Agenda and December Minutes. Senator William P. Soules, Chair, Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC), called the meeting to order. Chair Soules facilitated introductions of the members of LESC and of LESC staff. In a motion by Senate President Pro Tempore, Mimi Stewart, and a second by Vice Chair G. Andres Romero, the meeting minutes for the January LESC hearing were approved. In a motion by Representative Debbie Sarinana and a second by Vice Chair G. Andres Romer, the agenda for the May LESC hearing was approved.

(2) Director's Report: John Sena, Director, LESC, provided an update to committee members on LESC staff activities since the end of the 2025 legislative session. Director Sena highlighted the publication of the 2025 Legislative Session Quick Guide and the 2025 Post-Session Report, two reports intended to help lawmakers, stakeholders, and the broader community stay up to date with legislation adopted during the 2025 session and their potential impacts on communities throughout the state. Director Sena introduced two new members of the LESC staff: Evan Chavez, Policy Analyst, and Arlo Menchaca, Research Assistant, and noted the selection of a teacher on special assignment (TOSA) and summer intern. Formal introductions of both the TOSA and intern will take place at the committee's next hearing in Roswell in June. Members thanked staff for their work and expressed appreciation for the two publications. Chair Soules pointed to the reports as useful resources to start the budget planning process, particularly in the face of funding changes at the federal level.

(3) Update on Federal Education Funding. Daniel Estupiñan, Senior Fiscal Analyst II, LESC, provided an overview of the amounts and sources of federal funding streams that are distributed to public schools in New Mexico. Staff also discussed potential budget and policy proposals that may be considered by the federal government. Committee members asked for additional context on the federal proposals around special education, ongoing state and local attempts to increase family engagement in public schools, and the framework staff may propose for use by the Legislature in deciding whether a terminated federal grant should be backfilled by the Legislature.

(4) *Martinez-Yazzie* Motion Update. Jessica Hathaway, Deputy Director, LESC, provided an update regarding the *Martinez-Yazzie* motion. She noted the court ruled PED must lead the development of a remedial education plan, and LESC staff may assist voluntarily. PED is required to select an outside consultant by July 1, submit a draft plan by October 1, finalize the plan by November 3, and complete related status reports. Plaintiffs may object by December 1, prompting further court proceedings if necessary.

Committee members engaged in a discussion regarding the LESC's potential involvement in the development of the remedial plan ordered by the court. Deputy Director Hathaway clarified that participation would be voluntary and advisory. Members raised concerns about allocating LESC staff time without formal direction, especially since the court order does not compel legislative involvement or provide enforcement authority over LESC. The PED affirmed it had already invited LESC into the planning process and committed to providing updates, including on the selection of the required outside expert consultant. Legislators emphasized the importance of stakeholder engagement, data transparency, and ensuring the plan addresses the educational needs of historically underserved student groups. Members highlighted the expertise available in tribal and Hispanic communities, special education, and rural education, urging the PED to work collaboratively with those stakeholders. Concerns were raised about the feasibility of certain plan components, such as equitable broadband access, and the short timeline set by the court.

(5) Special Education Differentials Update. Mariana Padilla, Cabinet Secretary, Public Education Department (PED) and Jessica Dinsmore, Assistant Deputy Director of Program and Support, PED, provided an update on the special education differentials that received a three-year appropriation from the government results and opportunity expendable trust fund in the 2024 regular session. The presenters discussed the origins, design, and impact of the

differentials program on special education teacher recruitment and retention. Committee members asked for additional information on vacancy rates in elementary and secondary programs, the proportion of special education teachers in elementary settings who have received training in structured literacy, the impact of the Educator Fellows program in increasing the number of special education teachers, and the range of roles that were considered for the differentials program.

(6) PED Strategic Plan. Mariana Padilla, Cabinet Secretary, PED, provided an overview of the department's strategic plan, including its vision and its five primary goals: 1) accelerating literacy achievement; 2) accelerating mathematics achievement; 3) improving student attendance; 4) increasing graduation rates; and 5) fostering shared accountability.

Secretary Padilla outlined the strategies PED is implementing to achieve these goals. She also addressed the recent court decision in the *Martinez-Yazzie* lawsuit, presenting the department's plan and timeline for meeting the court's mandates. Committee members requested disaggregated data and clarification on how attendance is reported. Members also emphasized the importance of student engagement and raised concerns about whether PED can meet the compliance deadlines related to the *Martinez-Yazzie* lawsuit.

LESC members recommended collaboration with specific entities on the development of a unified individual education plan (IEP) system and inquired about PED's tracking of federal immigration executive orders. The issue of bullying and its impact on attendance and academic performance was also highlighted as needing attention beyond legislative efforts. PED was asked to provide a map showing the locations of MRI and CSI schools and to engage with the Black, Indian, and Hispanic Education Act councils for input on *Martinez-Yazzie* compliance work. Finally, members urged PED to reference the plaintiffs' motion in the *Martinez-Yazzie* case, including the nine components outlined, as part of efforts to achieve compliance.

Friday, May 30

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

Voting: Senator William P. Soules, Representative Brian Baca, Senator Craig Brandt, Representative Debbie Sarinana, Representative G. Andres Romero, Representative Joy Garratt, Senator Mimi Stewart, Representative Raymundo Lara, Representative Tanya Mirabal Moya

Advisory: Representative Catherine J. Cullen, Senator Harold Pope, Representative John Block, Senator Natalie Figueroa, Representative Patricia Roybal Caballero, Representative Yanira Gurrola

(7) House Bill 2 Overview and LESC Roadmap Update. John Sena, Director, LESC, presented an overview of the public education budget passed during the 2025 legislative session and explained how legislative efforts are related to LESC's roadmap for public education.

The biggest change affecting school funding in the upcoming fiscal year will occur as the result of House Bill 63 (HB63). Director Sena noted the Legislature made a policy decision in HB63 to better target funding appropriated to the state equalization guarantee (SEG, the state's public school funding formula, to schools with higher levels of poverty. Director Sena also pointed out areas in the budget where the Legislature increased salaries for educators, included funding for rising school insurance costs, provided funding for existing programs including universal school meals and career and technical education. The Legislature also provided new funding for initiatives like grants to New Mexico's tribes, nations, and pueblos for Indian education, a statewide student information system, and initiatives funded through the public education reform fund that must be evaluated to determine their impact on student achievement.

Director Sena noted many of the items in the budget are directly related to the LESC roadmap, the committee's strategic vision for holistic, system-wide improvement of public education in New Mexico. The roadmap is designed to provide the committee consistency in policy and budget across changes in administrations. The roadmap includes consideration of four interrelated domains: educator ecosystem, academic design, whole-child supports, and overarching systems. Director Sena reminded the committee that its work in recent years has made progress in each aspect of the roadmap, though additional work remains.

(8) LESC 2025 Research Agenda and Calendar John Sena, Director, LESC, presented the proposed 2025 LESC staff work plan and interim meeting calendar to LESC members. Under the proposed calendar, meetings will be held in Santa Fe, Roswell, Las Vegas, Gallup, and Las Cruces over the course of the 2025 interim. In a motion by Senator Brandt and a second by Representative Mirabal Moya, the committee unanimously approved the 2025 interim calendar.

Director Sena also noted the 2025 LESC staff research agenda covers a broad range of education topics, including the use of artificial

intelligence, bilingual education, career and technical education, charter school governance, school climate, educator preparation and compensation, early childhood school readiness, math, and literacy, among others. Chair Soules emphasized the committee's work during this interim would primarily be driven by education policies and budget items likely to be considered during the 2026 30-day legislative session. Committee members also asked staff to center attendance in school climate discussions, provide greater clarity on what constitutes career and technical education, and study the virtual school landscape. In a motion by Senate President Pro Tempore Mimi Stewart and a second by Senator Brandt, the committee unanimously approved the 2025 research agenda.

(9) Public Education Department Rules Review. Natasha Davalos, Policy Analyst I, LESC, presented an update on the proposed administrative rule regarding the implementation of the Purple Star Schools program, designed to support military-connected students. Amanda DeBell, Deputy Secretary of Teaching, Learning and Innovation, PED, noted it anticipates 10 to 15 schools will apply, primarily near military bases, and clarified the designation is voluntary. While no additional funding is provided, participating schools will receive professional development support. Members emphasized the importance of proactive communication with schools and praised the initiative as a tool to bolster community-military relations.

Ms. Davalos also presented to the committee a review of the proposed rule amendment to the implementation of the Indian Education Act, including updates to the tribal funding allocation model. KatieAnn Juanico, Assistant Secretary of Indian Education, PED, explained 80 percent of funds would be distributed equally among tribes, and 20 percent would be based on student count. Some legislators raised equity concerns, noting significant per-student disparities between small tribes and larger tribal nations with higher student populations. PED responded that the funding formula was shared publicly and received broad support from tribes, pueblos, and nations during consultation.