

Policy Brief

School Climate: Supporting Student Success

Analyst: Conor L. Hicks, Policy Analyst I

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School safety is a pressing concern for students and families across New Mexico. In recent years, Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC) staff have produced reports on the safety landscape in the state and highlighted local examples of innovative preventative school safety initiatives rooted in relationship-building. These reports were intended to begin a broader conversation about how a school environment can impact a student's academic and personal development. Such an exercise requires a clear understanding of the factors influencing school climate, students' perceptions of that climate, and how policymakers can take meaningful steps to build necessary infrastructure to support positive school climates.

This brief will discuss school climate as a concept, examine existing data on New Mexico students' perceptions of their educational experience, and offer an analysis of early indications from the state's school climate survey results. In addition, this brief will provide an overview of the roles of school counselors, social workers, and psychologists—three key behavioral health roles involved in supporting student well-being—and discuss strategies seen nationwide to recruit and retain these professionals. Finally, LESC staff will discuss policy recommendations for the years ahead.

Dimensions of School Climate

School climate can feel like a nebulous concept. When asked to describe how to tell if a school has a healthy, positive climate, it's common to hear this refrain: you can feel it. While this sentiment has some degree of truth to it, it understates the intentional choices influencing how a school makes people feel.

The Learning Policy Institute, an education policy research organization, published an [August 2025 report](#) focused on positive school climates in community schools in which five dimensions of school climate were identified:

- Safety;
- Interpersonal relationships;
- Teaching and learning;
- Physical and social environment; and
- School improvement processes.

While the report discussed the elements of school climate specifically in the context of the community school model, the five outlined dimensions of school climate offer a concrete lens through which to understand how schools can build positive, supportive, and safe environments for the students they serve. **Table 1: Five Dimensions of School Climate**, shown on the next page, summarizes the various factors influencing school climate and highlights strategies schools can use to improve these.

Key Takeaways

- Since 2023, PED has contracted with Panorama Education, a kindergarten through 12th grade education software company, to measure school climate perceptions statewide (*Page 3*).
- During fall 2024, PED and Panorama received just under 115.5 thousand student responses and 119.6 thousand student responses for the Student Supports and Environment and the Student Well-Being and Competency surveys, respectively (*Page 4*).
- In recent years, the New Mexico Legislature has invested significant resources in bolstering the state's teacher workforce to improve educational quality and better meet the diverse needs of our students. As lawmakers seek to build on these important steps, investments in the other roles within a school, including behavioral health supports, will be critical (*Page 7*).

Table 1: Five Dimensions of School Climate

Learning Policy Institute

Dimension	Definition	Strategies
Safety	The school fosters a stable environment in which all children and adults feel physically, socially, emotionally, and intellectually safe, cared for, and valued.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Codeveloped mission statements, classroom and schoolwide agreements • Routines and consistent norms and expectations • Community circles • Restorative practices
Interpersonal Relationships	The school is designed to foster personalized, trusting relationships among and between students, educators, parents, and community members.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affirmation walls • Empathy building • Advisories • Peer mentoring programs • Home visits and ongoing communication with families • Culturally sustaining family engagement practices
Teaching and Learning	The school develops educators to be coleaders who use their professional expertise to collaborate, plan, and implement high-quality cross-curricular instruction that includes authentic, collaborative, deeper learning opportunities and fosters students' curiosity, creativity, and willingness to take risks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher-led inquiry and professional learning • Cross-grade and cross-subject collaboration and planning time • Culturally sustaining pedagogy and curriculum • Inquiry-based learning and performance-based assessments • Community-connected learning opportunities
Physical and Social Environment	The physical space, surroundings, and resources of the school and the atmosphere of the building create a strong sense of community and signal that all members of the school community are valued and belong.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student and community initiatives (e.g., murals and community gardens) • Parent-led events and programs in which parents and community members contribute their funds of knowledge and cultural wealth • Student-led initiatives and projects • Shared decision-making
School Improvement Process	School improvement is a community-wide effort in which students, parents, school personnel, and community partners work together, take on a shared responsibility for the operations of the school, and participate in collaborative decision-making in service of a codeveloped vision and goals for the school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative, inclusive decisionmaking structures • Assets and needs assessments • Ongoing collection and analysis of actionable data • All stakeholders working on continuous improvement for the school and surrounding community

Source: Learning Policy Institute

Measuring School Climate

As school leaders and policymakers have increasingly explored ways to ensure systems hold schools accountable and consider factors beyond academic outcomes, several states have incorporated school climate surveys into their accountability and improvement systems. These actions align with [research](#) from the Journal of School Health, which shows students who report more positive perceptions of their school's climate see sustained or improved academic performance. According to the Learning Policy Institute, as of [November 2024](#), 14 states use school climate surveys in their accountability and reporting systems.

As New Mexico works to address persistently low achievement and address chronic absenteeism, it is vital policymakers recognize these challenges do not exist in a vacuum. For students to be present at school and succeed in the classroom, it is essential the education system be set up to not only care for the student, but for the child as a whole. By continually monitoring and measuring students' perceptions of their school experience, educators and policymakers can center student voice and equip themselves with the information needed to guide decisions about resource allocation to support overall student well-being.

Panorama in New Mexico

Since 2023, PED has contracted with Panorama Education, a kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) education software company, to measure school climate perceptions statewide. The Panorama Education School Climate and Culture Survey is used by school districts and charter schools across New Mexico to assess student, staff, and family perceptions of their school climate and culture, as well as the individual factors influencing these overall perceptions. While PED uses Panorama's surveys, it is just one option for schools and state education agencies to measure and respond to the school climate perceptions of students. Schools in New Mexico are not required to participate in Panorama, though a significant number of school districts and charter schools have opted to submit survey results. In the fall 2024 survey window, a total of 86 school districts and charter schools, approximately 56 percent of the 153 districts and charters in Panorama's New Mexico dataset, provided responses for both student-focused surveys. Because the reach of the Panorama survey is not yet statewide, state-level policymaking applications remain limited. However, the information gleaned from these surveys, along with additional resources Panorama offers in their accompanying ["playbook"](#) of activities and resources, can be readily leveraged by school leaders to support identified student needs.

Statewide Student Perceptions of School Climate

The Panorama survey includes questions for students, teachers, and families. While the teacher and family surveys offer insight into the perceptions of the adults in students' lives, this brief will primarily focus on the student survey results.

Students at participating schools are asked to complete two sets of survey questions covering various aspects of their educational experience. Altogether, students answer 26 questions during their session. The results of the two survey portions are then broken down to measure students' perceptions of their school environment as well as their views on their own abilities. The surveys and their subcategories are designated as follows:

- Student Supports and Environment
 - School safety: student perceptions of their physical and psychological safety.
 - School climate: student perceptions of the overall social and learning environment.
- Student Well-Being and Competency
 - Self-management: how well students believe they manage their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors.
 - Sense of belonging: the degree to which students feel valued as part of the school community.
 - Self-efficacy: how much students believe they can succeed in their academic endeavors.

Fall 2024 Panorama Survey Results

The fall 2024 administration of the Panorama survey offers the most complete recent measurement of students' school climate perceptions, as participation among schools tends to decline between the fall and spring survey windows. During fall 2024, PED and Panorama received just under 115.5 thousand student responses and 119.6 thousand student responses for the Student Supports and Environment and the Student Well-Being and Competency sets of questions, respectively.

A Note on Fall 2025 Survey Results

Shortly before publication of this brief, results for the fall 2025 Panorama survey administration in New Mexico became available on the data portal. Unless otherwise specified, all discussions of Panorama survey results included in this brief focus on fall 2024 data. This survey window was chosen over the spring 2025 survey window due to the larger number of responses across the state. LESC staff will use 2025 data in subsequent analyses, unless otherwise specified.

In anticipation of future analyses, LESC staff observed one topic area of the student-focused survey changed between the two survey administrations of the 2024-2025 school year (fall 2024 and spring 2025) and the fall 2025 administration. While the two previous survey windows asked students to reflect on their sense of self-efficacy, the fall 2025 survey replaced this topic with a new category entitled "social awareness."

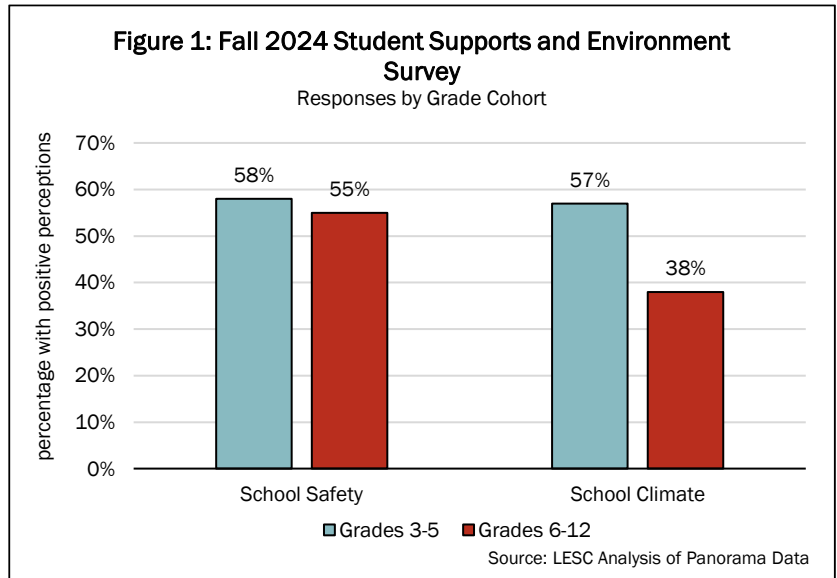
Significant changes to survey content each year make trend analyses difficult. As the state looks to leverage the Panorama survey to make intentional policy choices to support positive learning environments, it will be important to ensure survey content remains consistent each year to allow for year-over-year comparisons.

Student Supports and Environment. The first portion of the Panorama survey asks students to reflect on their perception of the school they attend. In particular, students are directed to consider the way people within the building interact with one another, the cleanliness of facilities, the effectiveness of support systems to address behavior issues, and the treatment of students by teachers.

Some sample questions for this survey include:

- How positive or negative is the mood at your school?
- How often do your teachers seem excited to be teaching in your classes?
- How often do you worry about violence at your school?

Figure 1: Fall 2024 Panorama Student Supports and Environment Survey shows how participating New Mexico students rated their schools' school safety and school climate. Statewide, a majority of third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade students had positive perceptions of both the safety and climate of their school. Most students in grades six through 12 viewed their schools as safe. However, sixth- through 12th-grade students had much more negative views of their school climate, with just 38 percent of students having a positive perception.



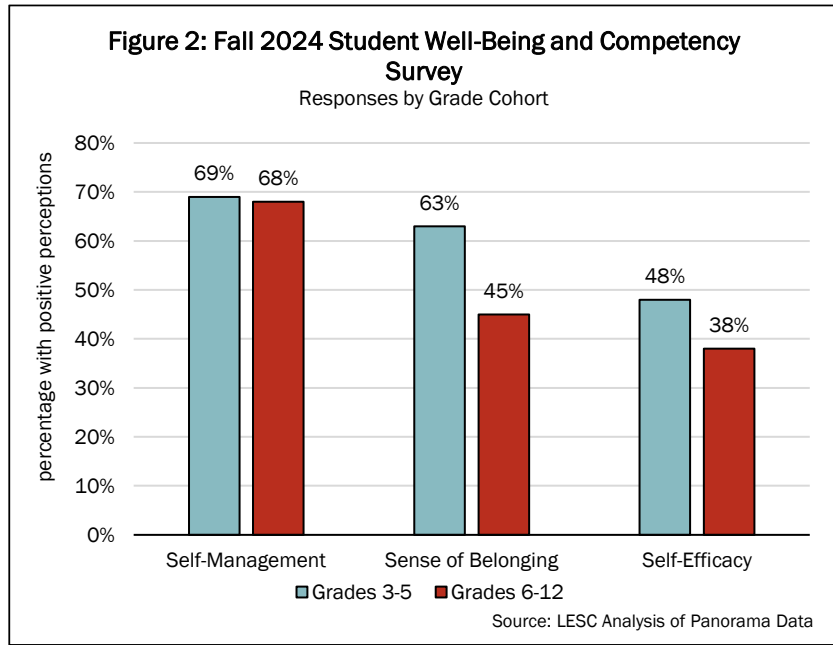
Student Well-Being and Competency. The second part of the student-focused Panorama survey asks students to consider their own social-emotional skills and confidence in their abilities. These questions ask students to reflect on their perceptions of their classroom behavior, academic success, and their sense of inclusion in the school community. Strong majorities of students in both grade cohorts reported positive perceptions of their self-management skills, referencing their regulation of emotions, thoughts, and behaviors.

Students’ perceptions of their sense of belonging, meaning how valued they feel as part of a school community, were considerably higher for grades three through five than their peers in grades six through 12. In the lower grade cohort, 63 percent of students had a positive perception of their sense of belonging, while just 45 percent of students in grades six through 12 reported a positive perception of their place in the school community.

Turning to the final category for this portion of the survey, student perceptions of their self-efficacy were low across the board, though once again with a higher perception for students in the lower grade cohort. In fall 2024, 48 percent of students in grades three through five reported feeling confident in their ability to succeed academically, while just 38 percent of students in grades six through 12 expressed the same sentiment. **Figure 2: Fall 2024 Student Well-Being and Competency Survey** offers a breakdown of student perceptions in all three categories.

Sample questions for the Student Well-Being and Competency Survey include:

- During the past two weeks, how often did you come to class prepared?
- How much support do the adults at your school give you?
- When complicated ideas are discussed in class, how sure are you that you can understand them?



What Does the Data Indicate About New Mexico School Climate?

Looking at New Mexico’s statewide numbers in a vacuum, it is difficult to assess what survey results mean for New Mexico students and the environments in which they go to school each day. As part of their data collection, Panorama compares New Mexico’s survey results to a national dataset including other participating schools. While this dataset does not encompass all U.S. schools and states, it does offer some insight into how New Mexico student perceptions of school climate compare to their peers across the United States.

The following tables list New Mexico’s statewide scores for each topic within the two portions of the student climate survey and contextualizes those scores against the national Panorama dataset. **Table 1: New Mexico Student Supports and Environment Survey Comparisons to National Data** indicates New Mexico tends to hover around the middle to lower end of the national dataset. Of particular concern is the school climate perception for students in grades six through 12, where only 38 percent have a positive view of their school environment. This translates to the 0-19th percentile, lagging far behind most survey results nationwide. In practice, this means anywhere from 81 percent to approaching 100 percent of all other school climate scores for sixth- through 12th-grade students in the national dataset were higher than those in New Mexico.

Table 2: New Mexico Student Supports and Environment Survey Comparisons to National Data

Fall 2024

Topic	Percent Favorable	National Dataset Comparison
School Safety (Grades 3-5)	58	40th-59th Percentile
School Climate (Grades 3-5)	57	20th-39th Percentile
School Safety (Grades 6-12)	55	40th-59th Percentile
School Climate (Grades 6-12)	38	0-19th Percentile

Source: Panorama

In the Student Well-Being and Competency survey, most of New Mexico’s results in fall 2024 again fall in the lower end of the national dataset. **Table 3: New Mexico Student Well-Being and Competency Survey Comparisons to National Data** breaks down these results. In all but one topic across both grade cohorts, New Mexico is placed in the 20th-39th percentile or lower. However, one bright spot in the data is the sense of belonging perceived by students in grades three through five, where 63 percent reported a favorable view. This result places New Mexico

in the 60th-79th percentile nationally, meaning only 21 to 40 percent of scores in the national dataset for this topic were greater than those in New Mexico.

Table 3: New Mexico Student Well-Being and Competency Survey Comparisons to National Data

Fall 2024

Topic	Percent Favorable	National Dataset Comparison
Self-Management (Grades 3-5)	69	20th-39th Percentile
Sense of Belonging (Grades 3-5)	63	60th-79th Percentile
Self-Efficacy (Grades 3-5)	48	20th-39th Percentile
Self-Management (Grades 6-12)	68	20th-39th Percentile
Sense of Belonging (Grades 6-12)	45	20th-39th Percentile
Self-Efficacy (Grades 6-12)	38	0-19th Percentile

Source: Panorama

The results seen in the Panorama student surveys indicate many students in New Mexico have poor perceptions of various aspects of their school climate and culture. Additionally, our state’s school climate perceptions tend to lag many of our peers nationwide. Given this, the focus of this brief will now shift to exploring one aspect by which lawmakers can create the necessary conditions for schools to support student well-being and behavioral health: growing New Mexico’s school-based behavioral health workforce. While many of the impactful strategies for school climate are best implemented at the school or local level, there are concrete policy choices legislators can make to create the critical systems and workforce needed to ensure these local approaches have appropriate resources.

Building a Robust School-Based Behavioral Health Workforce for New Mexico

In recent years, the New Mexico Legislature has invested significant resources in bolstering the state’s teacher workforce to improve educational quality and better meet the diverse needs of our students. As lawmakers seek to build on this work, investments in the other roles within a school, including behavioral health supports, will be critical. These supports often rely upon dedicated professionals on school campuses, such as counselors, social workers, and psychologists. These professionals play an essential role in supporting student well-being, but the individual responsibilities of the three roles vary. To help inform policy discussions around school climate and New Mexico’s school-based behavioral health workforce, this section of the brief provides an overview of the roles of counselors, social workers, and psychologists in a school setting and examines the severity of shortages in New Mexico compared to recommended staff to student ratios.

School Counselors

The role of a school counselor involves numerous responsibilities intended to support a student’s academic achievement, career readiness, and general well-being. Counselors typically serve a broad swath of the student body and perform tasks including academic and career planning, short-term counseling, advocacy related to individualized education plans, and referrals to specialized long-term support services. While students’ mental health needs are certainly part of a counselor’s purview, their role encompasses a broader and more generalized set of responsibilities compared with social workers and psychologists. [New Mexico Administrative Code \(NMAC\) 6.63.6](#) outlines 38 competencies for school counselors.

New Mexico has four higher education institutions that offer advanced degrees in school counseling. Two of the programs are located in southeastern New Mexico, while the other two are located in Albuquerque and Las Vegas. **Table 4: New Mexico School Counselor Degree Programs**, shown on the next page, provides more detail on the type of degree offered at each institution. All of the programs offer school-focused programs. However, individuals with counseling degrees not specifically for school counseling can apply for PED licensure if they meet graduate hours and practicum or internship requirements. All candidates for licensure must also pass a content knowledge examination.

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) has recommended a counselor-to-student ratio of one counselor for every 250 students since 1965. To date, this recommended ratio has never been reached on a national level, though three states did reach the target in the [2023-2024 school year \(SY24\)](#). ASCA reports state-level counselor-to-student ratios using [state nonfiscal public elementary/secondary education survey data](#) from the National Center for Education Statistics. This dataset includes reported staffing figures from state education agencies. Nationwide, the ratio of counselors to students was one counselor per 376 students. In New Mexico, the ratio was notably higher at one counselor for every 440 students.

School Social Workers

Individuals operating within schools as [social workers](#) are trained mental health professionals charged with providing direct services to students in the form of crisis intervention, participation in individualized education program meetings, and service as a liaison between the school, families, and the community. School social workers are equipped to help students manage both school- and home-based challenges in their lives. Social workers may be responsible for connecting students with community resources to address specific needs, assisting districts in providing case management for students and families in need of multiple resources, and more. While social workers are trained to assess and support students dealing with mental health concerns, their purview extends beyond these issues to help address social and familial challenges as well. A full list of the 81 competencies for licensed school social workers of varying levels is included in [NMAC 6.63.7](#).

Similar to counseling, New Mexico has four higher education institutions currently offering either undergraduate or graduate degrees in social work. To become a licensed social worker, however, an individual must have a master's degree. **Table 5: New Mexico Social Work Degree Programs** highlights the four postsecondary schools and the offered degree programs. Additionally, the University of New Mexico is currently developing a two-year Master of Social Work program, though applications are not yet being accepted.

The School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA) notes the ideal social worker-to-student ratio is one social worker for every 250 students. According to SSWAA's [National Census Report](#) from 2022, the most recent data available to LESC staff, New Mexico's ratio is one social worker for every 945 students, far exceeding the recommended ratio.

Table 4: New Mexico School Counselor Degree Programs

Higher Education Institution	Degree Offered
University of New Mexico	Master of Arts
University of the Southwest	Master of Science in Education
New Mexico Highlands University	Master of Arts
Eastern New Mexico University	Master of Education

Source: LESC Files

Table 5: New Mexico Social Work Degree Programs

Higher Education Institution	Degree Offered
New Mexico State University	Bachelor and Master of Social Work
Western New Mexico University	Bachelor and Master of Social Work
New Mexico Highlands University	Bachelor and Master of Social Work
Eastern New Mexico University	Master of Social Work

Source: LESC Files

School Psychologists

Within a school setting, a [psychologist](#) typically works with students who have more intensive mental health needs. This work frequently involves psychological assessments to devise intervention approaches to help a student's emotional, social, academic, and behavioral well-being. [Psychologists](#) may diagnose students and develop responsive processes and plans, provide support for crisis response, and monitor student well-being. Additionally, school psychologists work to support school staff and families, rather than only serving students directly. Ultimately, school psychologists typically serve a smaller subset of a student population and are trained to provide targeted mental and behavioral health services. In New Mexico, the 58 required competencies for varying levels of school psychologists are outlined in [NMAC 6.63.5](#).

The role of a school psychologist in a school community is highly specialized and requires extensive training. However, New Mexico has limited options for interested students to pursue this degree path. Currently, New Mexico State University (NMSU) offers Specialist in Education and Doctor of Philosophy degrees for school psychology. These programs are accredited by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) and the American Psychological Association (APA), respectively, though the latter is on contingency. NMSU will seek full accreditation from APA in 2029. To work as a licensed

psychologist in a New Mexico school, an individual must possess at least a master’s degree, meet graduate hours or supervised experience requirements or be licensed by the state’s board of psychologist examiners, have passed the specialty area examination of the praxis exam, and be nationally certified by NASP.

NASP, in its [2020 Professional Standards](#), recommends a ratio of one school psychologist for every 500 students. In SY24, NASP [reported](#) the national average ratio was one school psychologist for every 1,065 students. In New Mexico, the ratio is even more imbalanced, with just one school psychologist for every 8,863 students.

Lack of Data is a Key Barrier to Addressing Behavioral Health Workforce Shortages

PED tracks the number of license holders for behavioral health licenses issued by the department, as well as the school district or charter school in which that license holder is employed. **Table 6: K-12 Behavioral Health License Holders** lists the number of license holders for social workers, school counselors, and school psychologists as of the 2025-2026 school year. However, in conversations with PED regarding New Mexico’s school-based behavioral health workforce, a common challenge identified was a lack of information on whether individuals licensed as social workers, counselors, and psychologists were actually performing these duties in schools. Going forward, it will be vital for PED, school districts, and charter schools to develop consistent coding and reporting practices to allow state policymakers to identify gaps in services and make responsive budgetary and policy decisions. Furthermore, it will be critical for PED and legislative staff to understand common barriers to entry for these professions, such as additional training requirements and compensation, to ensure the state can develop a robust pipeline for this important piece of the school-based workforce.

Table 6: K-12 Behavioral Health License Holders

As of the 2025-2026 Academic Year

License Type	Number of License Holders
School Counselor	1,608
School Social Worker	1,042
School Psychologist	367

Source: PED

Strategies to Grow the Behavioral Health Workforce

In 2022, the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) published a [report](#) outlining state strategies to recruit and retain behavioral health workers. While not specifically focused on the school-based behavioral health workforce, the report offers insight into strategies New Mexico could potentially leverage to improve access to behavioral health workers in the state’s public education system. These strategies focus on increasing the supply of behavioral health workers, expanding the reach of these professionals, promoting more even distribution of these professionals in urban and rural areas, and retaining trained behavioral health specialists. A brief summary of some of the approaches taken across the country to address this workforce need can be found below:

- Increasing Supply
 - **Career pathways** to help young people develop needed skills and receive required training for behavioral healthcare positions. (examples: Colorado; Washington state)
 - **Residencies**, particularly in rural and tribal communities, to expose young professionals to valuable clinical training. (examples: Iowa, New Jersey)
- Expanding Reach of Current Professionals
 - **Telehealth services** to connect professionals with communities beyond their immediate vicinity. While limitations of care exist due to the virtual format, this approach can help address some gaps in service. (examples: Oklahoma, Louisiana, Maryland)
 - **Licensure for out-of-state providers**, often through an interstate licensure compact. These compacts allow individuals licensed in one compact state to apply to practice in other compact states through a streamlined licensing process. This helps reduce barriers to entry for qualified individuals seeking to practice in multiple states. (examples: Minnesota, Illinois, Kansas)

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- Distributing Professionals More Evenly
 - **Scholarships, loan repayment, and loan forgiveness** tied to practice in a specific geographic area or facility type. (examples: Minnesota, Kansas)
 - **Tax credits** for professionals practicing in rural or underserved communities. (examples: Utah, Oregon)
 - Retaining Workers
 - **Provider resiliency networks** to ensure behavioral health workers have access to services for their own behavioral healthcare needs. This can help providers manage burnout and other challenges related to their work. (examples: Florida)
 - **Mentorship programs** to provide new professionals in the behavioral health workforce with a support system to navigate challenges and share best practices. (examples: Indiana, Minnesota)
 - **Support for continuing education, including release time for professional development, educational leave, and tuition reimbursement**, can help professionals maintain their content expertise and provide meaningful opportunities to grow in their careers without disrupting their normal workflow. (examples: Arizona, New Jersey)

Recent Efforts in New Mexico. Over the past few legislative sessions, lawmakers have attempted to enact some of these strategies to recruit more behavioral health workers. In 2025, several bills proposed to add New Mexico to licensure compacts for social work, counseling, and psychology, though none were ultimately adopted. During that same session, however, lawmakers passed, and the governor signed, [Laws 2025, Chapter 75 \(Senate Bill 252\)](#), to allow social workers to provide telehealth services.

In 2023, Senate Bill 325 would have added school counselors and social workers in public schools to the Teacher Loan Repayment Act, allowing these professionals to receive eligibility for loan repayment awards. This bill was introduced, but not adopted.

New Mexico also operates the [New Mexico Health Professional Wellness Program](#) that serves those licensed by the New Mexico Medical Board, the New Mexico Board of Pharmacy, and the New Mexico State Board of Dentistry, but it is unclear if these services also extend to behavioral health professionals.

Finally, a federally-funded effort through PED's Safe and Healthy Schools Bureau in partnership with the Central Region Educational Cooperative (CREC), the [Expanding Opportunities Project](#), sought to recruit and retain school-based mental health providers to serve rural and frontier communities. New Mexico graduate students enrolled in regionally accredited behavioral health programs who agreed to work in a rural, high-need school for at least 24 months, as well as licensed providers already employed for at least a year in an eligible school, were eligible to receive financial support in the form of academic costs, licensure reimbursements, internship stipends, and salary enhancement stipends. According to a report from CREC, a total of \$4.3 million was spent over the course of five years to support this project, with 540 unique recipients awarded as part of the program.

More broadly, New Mexico lawmakers have dedicated considerable resources to supporting at-risk students in the state's public school system as well as reducing barriers to higher education access. In FY19, the Legislature raised the at-risk index multiplier in the state equalization guarantee (SEG) to 0.13, which generated 29.5 thousand units, or \$122.8 million, for low-income students (based on Title I counts), English learners (ELs), and transient students. The Legislature has raised the at-risk index multiplier several times in recent years, increasing the factor to 0.25 in FY20, 0.30 in FY21, and 0.33 in FY24. By FY25, the formula generated 58 thousand units, or \$380 million, for low-income, ELs, and transient students. Preliminary projections for FY26 indicate the factor will generate just under 45.1 thousand at-risk program units, or \$306.6 million. [Laws 2025, Chapter 69 \(House Bill 63\)](#), increased the at-risk index of the SEG to boost funding for services for at-risk students. This additional funding could potentially be used to hire more behavioral health workers to support students. To further support student well-being, lawmakers have also recently provided funding for wellness rooms and behavioral health initiatives at PED. Additionally, lawmakers in recent years have expanded free college and funded loan repayment programs for professionals in numerous fields, helping to increase access to postsecondary education and related career opportunities.

A Look Ahead

School climate is a challenging policy problem, particularly at the state level, because so many of the most impactful interventions must be undertaken at the local or school level. Though the Legislature may not be able to directly influence every classroom environment in New Mexico, there are steps lawmakers and state government more broadly can take to provide school leaders with the tools they need to promote positive school environments and, ultimately, improved academic outcomes and student well-being.

The Legislature should consider...

- Requiring all school districts and charter schools in New Mexico to complete a PED-approved school climate survey (Panorama or otherwise) to provide a fuller picture of school climate perceptions throughout the state.
- Studying other states' approaches to recruiting and retaining school-based behavioral health professionals during the 2026 interim, including loan repayment expansion, compensation, residency programs, and other strategies.
- Ensuring adequate funding for schools to hire and retain behavioral health personnel.

The Public Education Department should...

- Collaborate with school districts and charter schools to clearly define and distinguish the roles of school counselors, social workers, and psychologists.
- Examine licensure requirements for counselors, social workers, and psychologists to identify opportunities to reduce barriers to school-based employment for these professionals.
- Develop robust reporting requirements to identify whether K-12 behavioral health license holders are performing relevant roles in their schools, allowing for an improved understanding of areas of need across the state.
- Ensure Panorama survey questions and topics remain consistent year-over-year to allow for trend analysis as data is collected.