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Reporting Requirements: Alleviating Administrative Burdens on Local Education Agencies

Reporting requirements continue to be a primary concern for school districts and charter schools throughout New Mexico. School districts and charter schools have expressed frustration with the number of reporting requirements, duplicative data entry needs, an excessive frequency of reporting, an unnecessary complexity in forms, deficiencies in technological infrastructure, and a general lack of communication related to reporting requirements. As a response to Executive Order 2022-058, the Public Education Department (PED) implemented a comprehensive plan for reducing administrative work by 34 percent and paperwork required of teachers by 41 percent, but a large majority of remaining reporting requirements are mandated by federal regulation and state statute.

Given that school districts and charter schools are primarily funded by state revenue, the Legislature has a key role to play in alleviating the administrative burdens placed on local education agencies (LEAs).

This policy brief provides an overview of current reporting requirements and considerations the Legislature may pursue in the 2024 regular legislative session.

Landscape of Reporting Requirements

In a May 2022 survey of school districts and charter schools, LESC staff found central office staff, on average, invest approximately 600 hours each year in complying with reporting requirements. This finding contrasts those in a 2016 report titled, [Efficiency Evaluation: A Review of Public Education Reporting](#), which suggested reporting compliance required 15 thousand hours each year. However, the methodology of the 2016 report suggest the authors primarily focused on Albuquerque Public Schools (APS), and did not fully incorporate the potentially lower requirements associated with smaller LEAs. For example, one LESC survey respondent indicated their staff invested 900 hours in complying with their LEA's reporting requirements, which had a student enrollment of approximately 23 thousand.

The average number of hours dedicated to reporting requirements identified in the 2022 LESC survey may also be somewhat skewed by the large proportion of small school districts that replied to the survey. While

Key Takeaways

Public school personnel invest hundreds of hours each academic year complying with reporting requirements.

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As of September 2023, there were approximately 129 statutory reporting requirements.

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There are three primary categories of reporting requirements. These include compliance, financial transparency, and program performance.

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There are ongoing efforts at the Public Education Department to streamline the collection and validation of data, with the potential for those initiatives to reduce the administrative burden of reporting requirements.

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small LEAs may not have as many reporting requirements as larger LEAs, their comparatively limited personnel are disproportionately impacted when new reporting requirements are imposed. This disproportionate impact, at times, leads to a charter school administrator or school district superintendent taking on multiple administrative roles, including those responsible for complying with reporting requirements. By drawing the attention of school leaders away from their critical roles in schools, excessive reporting requirements may be acting as a constraint on the Legislature's recent investments in professional development that sought to uplift the profession.

These competing demands on administrators and school staff should be alleviated if the state is to make measurable and meaningful progress toward its goal of sustainably improving student achievement and educator wellbeing.

Volume of Reporting

In a September 2023 analysis, LESC staff found the Public School Code included approximately 129 separate reporting requirements for school districts, charter schools, PED and other entities involved with education in New Mexico, including the Educational Retirement Board, Public School Facilities Authority, Public Schools Insurance Authority, teacher preparation programs, regional education cooperatives, the Higher Education Department, and LESC. These requirements are only inclusive of those enacted by the Legislature in state statute, and did not include those required by the federal government as a condition for receiving federal funds.

Aside from the 129 reporting requirements codified in state statute, there are also a wide range of reporting requirements imposed by PED. In 2022, PED identified 244 reports that LEAs must submit across 24 different units of the department. Some of these requirements have since been rescinded by the department as a response to Executive Order 2022-058, but the sheer volume and range of reporting requirements continues to be a concern for some school districts and charter schools.

The influx of federal funds as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic has also been a contributing factor to administrative burden, with the federal government requiring significant reporting as a condition for receiving the funds.

Types of Reporting Requirements

In general, LESC staff have identified three broad categories that existing reporting requirements typically fall into, including:

- Compliance requirements, which are designed to ensure a particular law or policy is being followed or to enable an agency to perform a particular function.
 - *Compliance Example:* The Public School Finance Act requires school districts and charter schools to report to PED on the number of students enrolled on a particular day. This enables the department to accurately calculate the state equalization guarantee distribution.
 - *Compliance Example:* The School Personnel Act requires school districts to report on the size and composition of classes, enabling PED to determine if the school district or charter school is meeting the class size requirements outlined in state law.

- Financial transparency requirements, which are designed to promote the prudent use of public money and to provide stakeholders and the public with information on how public schools, PED, and other entities use public funds.
 - *Financial Transparency Example:* The Public School Finance Act requires PED to set up an online statewide financial reporting system, updated at least annually, that enables the public to compare the expenditures at different school sites.
 - *Financial Transparency Example:* The Public School Finance Act requires PED, the Legislative Finance Committee, and LESC to collaboratively prepare a report that includes an assessment of data on the relationship of licensure-experience factors to actual teacher costs; an analysis of the relationships among a teacher's licensure level, educational attainment, years of experience and salary; and recommended changes, if any, to the Public School Finance Act.
- Program performance requirements, which enable PED, the Legislature, and other stakeholders to evaluate programs required or authorized by the Public School Code to determine if current laws are effective in meeting the needs of students or improving student outcomes.
 - *Program Performance Example:* The Bilingual Multicultural Education Act requires PED to report to the Legislature each year on achievement and language proficiency data for bilingual students and to evaluate bilingual multicultural education program effectiveness.
 - *Program Performance Example:* The Hispanic Education Act requires PED and the Higher Education Department to report to the Legislature and the Governor each year on Hispanic student achievement at all grades; attendance for all grades; the graduation rates for Hispanic students; and the number and type of bilingual and multicultural programs in each school district and charter school.

LESC staff review found there are 66 compliance reports, 32 financial transparency reports and 58 program performance reports, with some of the total of 129 reporting requirements fitting into multiple categories.

Statutory Requirements

As LESC staff reported to committee members in June 2021, the Public School Code contains 129 reporting requirements for schools, the department, the Public Schools Facilities Authority, the Educational Retirement Board, and other entities; however, eight authorize the department to require a report but do not actually mandate a report, another five require a report only if the recipient requests it, and 16 are situational, such as a requirement that schools report student injuries, and do not necessarily represent an administrative burden. In addition, 55 of the statutorily required reports designate the Legislature or a legislative agency as the recipient of a report, but Legislative Council Service staff could access only 10 of those reports and staff from LESC and Legislative Finance Committee confirmed just 10 more are available to legislative staff. This suggests 35 of those reports were either not produced or not distributed as intended and raises the possibility that eliminating these reports would not reduce the report's associated administrative burden.

If the Legislature were to consider repealing a range of statutorily required reports, the associated administrative burden may not be entirely eliminated, as statute is only one way reporting requirements are created. PED has substantial control over how to interpret statutory requirements to “monitor” compliance and over what data to collect and how often it is collected. Following the 2016 report, the Legislature repealed five of six statutory requirements highlighted as in need of review by the authors of the report, but at least one of those requirements remains in place: While a state law requiring an annual student survey was repealed, an annual survey was retained under the state’s compliance plan with the federal Every Student Succeeds Act.

Despite its limited role in interpreting and monitoring program compliance, the Legislature must balance the need for information with the ability of the reporting entity to provide the information and be diligent to the burden created with every reporting requirement.

Data System Duplication and Validation

In recent years, LEAs have expressed concerns related to data duplication, with a number of LEAs reporting they often submitted data to STARS (the Student and Teacher Accountability Reporting System), only to have to pull that data for submission to other portals, many of which often had different sign-in credentials. In June 2022, the department identified 27 online applications that LEAs used for data entry, with the validation of that data—the process of identifying errors—requiring up to a month to complete.

Duplicate Data Entry

Respondents to the LESC survey identified dozens of reports involving duplicate data entry, such as data entered into STARS having to be submitted again for special education, and data for the multilayered systems of support (MLSS) entered a second time for *Martinez-Yazzie* lawsuit compliance. While some respondents noted the time required to submit duplicate data may only be take an additional 10 minutes, the time does add up when considering the large volume of reporting requirements. Of particular frustration to LEAs were data submission requirements that could be met if the department were to extract that data from its own data systems.

Grant applications are among the reports that often required duplicate data entry. There may be potential to alleviate the burden associated with grant applications by adopting a “common application” model similar to Colorado, where applicants can submit one application for a range of programs.

Project Nova and the Future of Data Collection

In the 2023-2024 school year, PED will transition to a centralized real-time data system that will automate many of the repetitive processes of the past. Named “Project Nova,” the new data system will lead to the adoption of the nationally recognized Ed-Fi data standard and represents nearly five years of work to coordinate and construct a streamlined student data warehouse. The new system has the potential to offer timelier, higher quality data, empowering the Legislature and other education stakeholders to make better-informed decisions.

This transition may yield greater efficiencies, both in terms of cost and time invested in reporting data. Similar adoptions of the shared data standards embedded in Project Nova are estimated to have reduced the data collection burden of Nebraska by 25 percent, saved

Michigan \$16.3 million in annual data submission costs, and helped Wisconsin process up to 30 million data transactions per day.

Project Nova has the potential to reduce administrative burdens associated with data collection by phasing-out the manual entry of data that was required in STARS templates and the manual validation of that data by PED staff. After the implementation of Project Nova, each school district and charter school will be able to upload their data onto the state's operational data store (ODS), which will then automatically accept the data submission, or reject the submissions and notify LEA personnel of issues in formatting.

In addition, PED plans to construct an education data clearinghouse, a public-facing set of reports for research organizations, further reducing the administrative burden of manually filling requests for research organizations and legislative staff. While the new system will not completely eliminate manual labor for school districts and PED, automating many of the state's data collection processes will allow education policymakers to invest more time using the data, rather than collecting it.

As New Mexico begins to transition to the new data system, school districts and charter schools should prepare to build a culture of data quality, and the state should consider whether statutory changes are necessary to change how data is collected, governed, and used.

Considerations for Alleviating Administrative Burden

Ongoing initiatives to reduce reporting requirements and the administrative burdens associated with them, including Project Nova, may continue to have a positive impact on the workload placed on public school personnel. Sustaining these efforts may require legislative action, including:

1. ***Appropriating adequate funding to PED*** for the personnel compensation associated with maintaining the Project Nova data system. PED has historically struggled to maintain staff, especially for high-skill data architecture positions that carry high salaries in the private sector. To improve PED's staffing capacity, PED may need the capability to offer competitive salaries, which may necessitate exempting the department from the provisions of the State Personnel Act.
2. Enact statute to ***support the safeguarding of sensitive student information*** on newly automated data systems by statutorily creating an education data governance council, including representation from school districts, charter schools, and PED, to guide data governance policies and act as stewards of sensitive student data.
3. ***Repeal statutory requirements*** mandating the completion of reports that are considered by legislative and PED staff to be obsolete, redundant, or lacking a specific goal or purpose.
4. ***Implement sunset clauses*** on future statutory requirements mandating the completion of reports, so as to ensure reports intended for short- and medium-term accountability roll off as their legislative intent phases-out.