informED

a publication of the Legislative Education Study Committee

Representative G. Andrés Romero, Chair / Senator William P. Soules, Vice Chair / Gwen Perea Warniment, Director / November 2023

From the Chair

As we get closer to another session, the Legislative Education Study Committee finishes the interim back in Santa Fe. Spending the summer and early fall traveling provides LESC the opportunity to learn from schools about the programming they've been working on. We take what we learned throughout the interim to influence policy and support our schools.

In June, LESC met in Taos. As part of our agenda, LESC toured the Taos High School Wellness Center. We know access to healthcare improves the overall wellbeing of our students. During the 2023 Legislative Session, Senate Bill 397 codified school-based health clinics into law. In doing so, the state made a commitment to provide consistent funding and expertise to our school-based health clinics.

Our September meeting took us to Clovis where we toured the Arts Academy at Bella Vista Elementary School. We were greeted by students who performed a song about the order of operations in math. This magnet school infuses arts into curriculum. This trip made me think about how I could integrate more of the arts into my social studies classes.

Our final trip in October was to Carlsbad, where we were introduced to the district's Opportunity Culture initiative. The Opportunity Culture paradigm intrigued me because the district is attempting to solve two issues facing many schools: how can we provide professional advancement for teachers without taking them out of the classroom and how can we provide teachers with more immediate feedback? Unique to this model, the district hired "multi-classroom leaders:" master teachers who serve as instructional coaches and co-teachers. Students benefit from this model as teachers are provided real-time feedback and help with complex lessons. Having well developed lessons significantly improves student learning.

The benefit of having a devoted, year-round educational committee and staff is that we continue to support and learn from the variety of innovations and needs schools demonstrate for all our students.

The Complexity of Attendance Challenges

School attendance is vital and intrinsically linked to student wellbeing and academic success. Research on attendance and chronic absenteeism consistently finds students who are chronically absent experience numerous adverse impacts: lower achievement throughout a student's academic life, a lack of initial school readiness, falling behind in early literacy and numeracy in elementary grades, greater grade level retention, failing middle school courses, and a lack of engagement in crucial high school years.

When students attend school regularly, they leverage the opportunity to engage meaningfully with courses and curriculum, interact with educators and peers, and actively participate in classroom activities. Conversely, chronic absenteeism disrupts this educational process, leaving gaps in learning and hindering the development of critical academic, social, and emotional skills.

New Mexico, like many other states, has seen its chronic absence rates soar in the last few school years, especially impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Data from the Public Education Department shows an alarming nearly 40 percent chronic absenteeism rate for the 2022-2023 school year. This is a slight drop from a 40.7 percent chronic absenteeism rate for the 2021-2022 school year, however this means over 134 thousand students in New Mexico are still chronically absent—at an average school calendar of 180 days, this means these students are missing more than three weeks of school.

Data also shows 2022-2023 chronic absence rates remain highest for students experiencing housing insecurity (60.82 percent), Native American students (48.28 percent), students with disabilities (44.19 percent), English learners (43.08 percent), and economically disadvantaged students (42.49 percent).

LESC staff conducted a three-part study during the interim to investigate how legislative changes made in recent years—notably shifting the state to an approach rooted in support for families and more robust data collection practices—have impacted approaches to supporting student attendance. This included a review of the state's Attendance for Success Act, review

Addressing Generative Artifical Intelliegence in Schools

As generative artificial intelligence (AI) impacts school systems from administrative tools to classroom instruction, little guidance and support exist. According to the Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) out of Arizona State University, after a review of 51 state departments of education, only two states provided guidance for districts and schools regarding AI this fall, California and Oregon. Another 11 states are in the process of developing guidance, and 21 states do not plan to provide guidance in the foreseeable future, including New Mexico. The remaining states provided no response at all. CRPE notes that the longer states wait, the more ground they will have to cover when they do provide guidance on the use of AI in teaching and learning.

Recently, the Council of the Great City Schools and Consortium for School Networking jointly launched a readiness checklist, designed to guide K-12 schools and districts in understanding critical factors to consider prior to implementing generative artificial intelligence technologies. The checklist serves as a tool for superintendents, district leaders, and technology leaders to evaluate safety, privacy, security, and ethical implications of using AI. The tool is intended to serve as a starting point for education leaders to begin to consider thoughtfully integrating generative AI technologies that align with instructional and operational objective and to help districts ensure data privacy and security as well.

Despite minimal guidance, most states acknowledge AI's potential and impending ethical considerations for educators and students. Two New Mexico deans can provide the state with guidance for moving forward: the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at New Mexico State University, Dr. Enrico Pontelli, and the dean of the College of Learning and Library Sciences at the University of New Mexico, Dr. Leo Lo. We are fortunate to be able to work with these experts who are involved nationally in leading discussions on the emerging role of AI. Dr. Leo Lo was recently elected as the Association of College and Research Libraries Board of Directors President-Elect; when Dr. Lo assumes the presidency in July 2024 he plans to use the platform to pursue discussions relevant to AI in education.

The LESC meeting in November will include a presentation on AI in schools, with an initial focus on supporting educators with the integration of AI in their content area. The panel presentation on November 17 will include both local and national experts, including Dr. Enrico Pontelli.

Challenges with Attendance
(continued from front)

of attendance improvement plans, and meeting with schools and districts statewide to understand how chronic absence is impacting school communities. LESC staff found that while there is strong compliance with the statutory provisions, schools continue to struggle with addressing complex root causes of school absence related to factors such as poverty, transportation struggles, physical and mental health challenges, and adequate social supports for families and students.

This topic will be discussed more at the LESC's November 16 hearing.
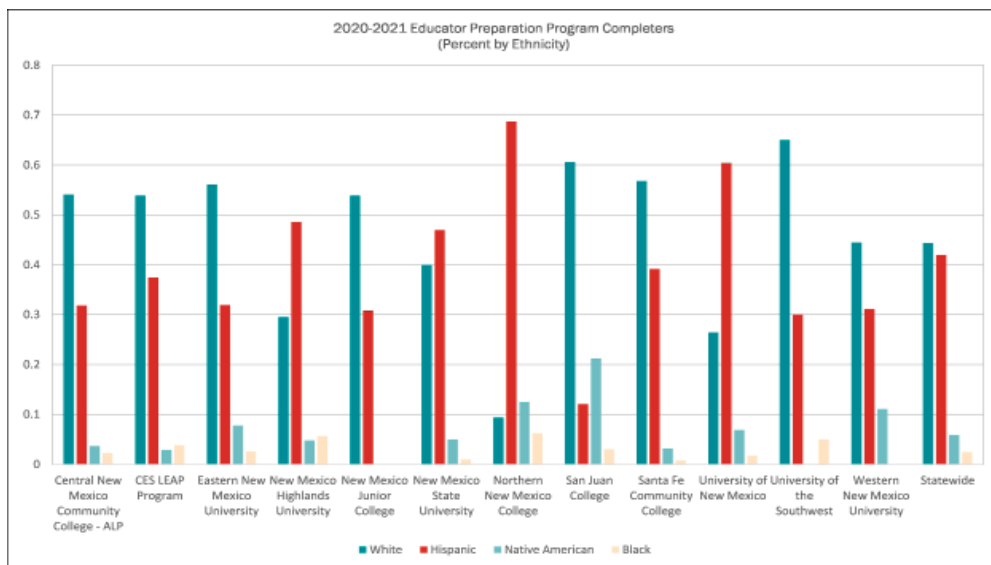
2020-2021 Educator Preparation Program Completers (Percent by Ethnicity)

Students Benefit from Teachers Who Look Like Them

Research indicates teachers impact student achievement more than any other school-based factor. Students experience positive outcomes when they are taught by teachers who look like them. For example, one study shows that black students who have one black teacher by the time they are in third grade are 13 percent more likely to enroll in college than their peers. Since students benefit from having teachers who look like them, it makes sense to ensure teachers mirror their students. However, in general, students are much more diverse than teachers, as nearly eight in ten students in public students identify as a person of color, while only about one in five teachers do so.

Luckily, some teacher recruitment programs have begun to address this issue by implementing programs focused on recruiting teachers that share similar demographics as their future students. As shown by the graph above, there has already been some progress with educator preparation programs in New Mexico increasing the number of Hispanic, Native American, and Black graduates.