

MINUTES
Legislative Education Study Committee
Taos, New Mexico
July 15-17,2026

Wednesday, July 15

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

Voting: Vice Chair G. Andrés Romero; Senate President Pro Tempore Mimi Stewart; Senator Craig Brandt; Representatives Brian Baca, Joy Garratt, Yanira Gurrola, Raymundo Lara.

Advisory: Senators Natalie Figueroa, Linda López, Gabriel Ramos; Representatives John Block, Catherine J. Cullen, Debbie Sariñana.

(1) Call to Order, Introductions, and Approval of July Agenda and May Minutes. Representative Andrés Romero, Vice Chair, LESC, called the meeting to order at 9:07 a.m. Vice Chairman Romero served as chair of this meeting as Senator William Soules, Chair, LESC was excused. Chair Romero facilitated introductions of committee members present in Taos, and John Sena, Director, LESC, introduced LESC staff. A quorum was present and the July agenda was approved, and May minutes were adopted.

(2) Community Welcome. Antonio Layton Jr., Ph.D., Superintendent, Taos Municipal School District (TMSD), welcomed LESC to Taos and introduced Mark Flores, TMSD School Board President; Daniel Barrone, Mayor, City of Taos; and Cynthia Spray, Vice President of TMSD Board and Vice President of the University of New Mexico (UNM)-Taos Administration Board. Panelists shared their deep roots in Taos, with most individuals being proud alumni of Taos High School. Superintendent Layton Jr. shared Taos Municipal Schools primarily serves a multicultural and economically disadvantaged student population. The district has over 1,700 students and 300 school employees. Their theme for the year ahead is "one team together" ensuring they are providing their diverse student population with a high-quality education.

LESC committee members asked questions including, but not limited to, challenges regarding charter schools and employee vacancies. Panelists shared that despite changes to the funding formula, TMSD is losing students, and consequently funding, due to local charter schools' student recruitment. Additionally, the recent funding decrease adds additional fiscal challenges as facility maintenance remains problematic despite reduced student enrollment. In response to members' questions, panelists also shared local cost of living limits school leaders' ability to hire and retain school employees.

(3) Public Education Reform Fund Update. Jessica Hathaway, Deputy Director, LESC; Sarah Dinces, Ph.D., Principal Evaluator, Legislative Finance Committee (LFC); Simon Miller, Strategic Planning and Performance Analyst, Department of Finance and Administration (DFA); Amanda DeBell, Deputy Secretary of Teaching, Learning, and Innovation,

Public Education Department (PED); and Jill Vice, Deputy Secretary of Special Education, PED, presented an overview of public education programs funded through the public education reform fund (PERF).

Presenters noted the structure of the PERF, including how each program's evaluation plan is drafted; the role that LESC, LFC, and DFA staff play in reviewing each evaluation plan, and how final evaluations will be completed. PED staff also provided context on the programmatic features of each program that has been funded through an appropriation from PED in FY26 and FY27. DFA staff also provided an overview of the proportion of each PERF program's appropriation has been expended.

Members asked for additional information on the balance and funding mechanism of PERF, the purpose of innovation zones, whether PED will be tracking the compounding effects of a school receiving funding from more than one PERF initiative, if the secondary literacy program supports out-of-school time programs, and whether funding for educator clinical practice is supporting principal residency programs. Other questions from members included whether PED had insight into why participation in math professional learning was low, how Native American students and English learners were served by the math initiative, how PERF programs interact with federal funding sources, how the special education differentials program is promoting educator retention, and how the conditional payment to unhoused students is supporting student engagement.

(4) State Investment Council and New Mexico Land Office Permanent Funds Update. Charles Wollmann, Chief Communications Officer, State Investment Council (SIC); Dawn Iglesias, Chief Investment Operations Officer, SIC; and Sunalei Stewart, Deputy Commissioner of Operations, State Land Office (SLO) provided information on the status of the state's permanent funds, including the land grant permanent fund, the early childhood education and care fund, and the higher education trust fund. The presenters also noted the role each of their agencies plays in contributing to the growth of each fund.

Members asked for more information on revenue from the land maintenance fund, how renewable energy generates revenue for the land maintenance fund, how the land maintenance fund distributes funds to the general fund, additional information on the agency budget needs of the state investment council, and the amount of initial capital or recurring inflows of capital needed to create additional trust funds.

(5) School Leader Panel. Jessica Hathaway, Deputy Director, LESC, facilitated a panel with Antonio Layton Jr., Superintendent, TMSD; Michelle Gonzales, Superintendent, Peñasco Independent School District; and Michele Hunt, Director, Anansi Charter School. The school leader panel discussed state policy alignment with the reality of implementation, critical student needs with mental health, and pathways for leadership support.

(6) Update on Assessments and Amira. Mark Angel, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Amira Learning, began the presentation by providing background on Amira, its merger with Istation, and Amira's work in New Mexico. Mr. Angel told the committee that over 55 thousand kindergarten through eight grade students are using Amira in New Mexico, including the Amira ISIP assessment, the Amira tutor component, and Amira instruct to partner with teachers on lesson planning. Mr. Angel also explained why the artificial intelligence (AI) components of Amira provide greater dyslexia screening specificity and sensitivity than a teacher test, as Amira takes about 10 times more measurements than a teacher-test does. Mr. Angel concluded his presentation by sharing recent data from New Mexico illustrating that Amira is driving about 10 extra weeks of student literacy growth in New Mexico.

Lynn Vasquez, Senior Manager of Assessment, Evaluation, and Accountability, Public Education Department (PED), then provided a review of New Mexico's literacy assessment system for kindergarten through second grade (K-2). Ms. Vasquez explained that PED requires Amira interim assessments, interventions for students who need it, dyslexia screening, and personalized tutoring for 30 minutes per week for all K-2 students. Ms. Vasquez provided an overview of accommodations available for Amira, feedback PED has received from teachers and administrators, and explained that the transition to Amira establishes a new statewide baseline for K-2 literacy assessment.

LESC committee members asked questions, including but not limited to, how many state agencies have approved Amira, if literacy standards are the same across states, the parameters of the current Amira contract, the assessment procurement process within PED, and concerns regarding assessment accuracy.

Thursday, July 16

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

Voting: Vice Chair G. Andrés Romero; Senate President Pro Tempore Mimi Stewart; Senator Craig Brandt; Representatives Brian Baca, Joy Garratt, Yanira Gurrola, Raymundo Lara.

Advisory: Senators Natalie Figueroa, Gabriel Ramos; Representatives John Block, Catherine J. Cullen, Harlan Vincent.

(7) New Mexico School Board Association Executive Board. Marvin Jaramillo, President, New Mexico School Board Association (NMSBA); Terry Obrien, President elect, NMSBA; Toby Wills, Vice President, NMSBA;

Patrick Cohen, Secretary and Treasurer, NMSBA; Pauline Jaramillo, Former President, NMSBA; and Joe Guillen, Executive Director, NMSBA, presented to the committee. Mr. Jaramillo informed the committee that NMSBA is currently visiting Taos to conduct their annual school board leadership retreat. The retreat is designed to provide a smaller and more focused setting for engaging with the challenges facing public education as well as strengthen skills needed to effectively govern.

Mr. Jaramillo mentioned NMSBA will soon begin developing 2027 legislative priorities. Calls for legislative resolutions will be sent to boards in early August. The resolution and legislative committee will meet in late September. NMSBA membership will finalize priorities for their annual convention in December. NMSBA also thanked the committee for inviting them to participate in the House Memorial 30 Public Education Governance Study.

LESC committee members asked questions, including but not limited to, whether NMSBA members receive a stipend when they travel for work in New Mexico; and how many school boards, either members or districts, are attending the NMSBA retreat in Taos.

(8) Career and Technical Education in New Mexico: A Proposed Categorical Framework. Saraí Ortiz, Policy Analyst, LESC; Jessica Hathaway, Deputy Director, LESC; Breezy Gutierrez, Senior Manager, PED; and Matt Sandoval, Executive Director, Sendero Prep, convened to present on LESC's proposed categorical framework for funding career and technical education (CTE). Ms. Ortiz presented national and state evidence, the state's early CTE policy framework, and LESC's proposed framework. Ms. Gutierrez shared the department's view on a implementation timeline, additional full-time employees that would be needed, and considerations if the Legislature decides to adopt a categorical framework during the 2026 legislative session. Matt Sandoval shared his experience leading CTE programs at Sendero Prep and his feedback on LESC's proposed formula. Committee members asked questions regarding certificate calculations, the Association for Career and Technical Education High-Quality Framework, and CTE research evidence. Members also expressed concerns about the framework's potential unintended consequences, including limiting students' academic exploration and schools' financial incentive to encourage students to pursue CTE.

(9) Paid Parental Leave for Educators. Shannon Holston, Chief of Policy, National Council on Teacher Quality, presented national research on paid parental leave for teachers, and models of paid parental leave across the country. Ms. Holston estimated compensating substitute teachers to provide New Mexico teachers 12 weeks of paid parental leave would cost the state \$6.8 million annually. Committee members asked questions about Senate Bill 188, Paid Parental Leave, introduced in the 2026 legislative session. Some committee members expressed strong support for school employees paid parental leave, while others voiced concern about the cost of the policy.

(10) Build Them Up: Education and Workforce Policy for New Mexico's Boys and Young Men. Bill McCamley, former State Representative and Cabinet Secretary, Author; Curtis Valentine, President, Male Educator Network and Policy Institute; Courtenay Eichhorst, Business Manager, United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipe Fitting Industry Local 412 (UA Local 412); and Joan Baker, Director of Outreach and Engagement, UA Local 412 presented to committee members on ways to support boys and young men in New Mexico. Mr. McCamley and Mr. Valentine discussed data indicating significant risks of isolation and suicide among boys and young men around the country. They highlighted the recruitment of more male educators as an opportunity to provide these boys and young men with positive male role models in their lives. Mr. Eichhorst and Ms. Baker outlined the work of UA Local 412 on pre-apprenticeship programs in New Mexico. These programs give students interested in the trades an opportunity to prepare themselves for an apprenticeship program and potentially increase the likelihood of completing that apprenticeship.

Members asked about the steps UA Local 412 instructors take to protect high-cost machinery and equipment while also giving apprentices opportunities to learn to operate them, as well as inquiring about male teacher residency programs in other states, among other topics. Some members also called for increased investments in behavioral health staffing in New Mexico schools.

(11) LFC Evaluation: Instructional Time and Extended Learning Opportunities in Public Schools. Stephanie Joyce, Program Evaluator, LFC; Sarah Rovang, Ph.D., Program Evaluator, LFC; and Sara Cordova, Senior Manager of School Budget, PED, presented to committee members on LFC's progress report on recent state investments to increase learning time in kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) schools, both during and outside the school day. According to LFC, the state has appropriated a total of \$2.6 billion since the *Martinez-Yazzie* ruling, but schools have increased calendar length by an average of just three days since the 2017-2018 school year. LFC evaluators recommended the Legislature clarify the definition of instructional days in state law, remove the incentive under K-12 Plus for schools to shift to a four-day school week, and clearly define the educational purpose of out-of-school time in statute, among other recommendations. PED expressed general agreement with the findings of LFC's progress report and committed to continued

cooperation with the Legislature to increase learning time and improve student outcomes.

Some members expressed concern about the recommendations' impacts on the feasibility of schools already operating on four-day weeks to continue doing so. In addition, members asked for greater clarity on how the education section of the General Appropriation Act is finalized prior to dissemination to members for debate.

(12) Public Comment.

Friday, July 17

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

Voting: Vice Chair G. Andrés Romero; Representative Joy Garratt.

Advisory: Senators Natalie Figueroa, Bobby Gonzales; Representatives John Block, Catherine J. Cullen, Harlan Vincent.

(13) New Mexico Teacher Preparation Standards. Jesse Chenven, Ph.D., Associate Dean, School of Education, Central New Mexico Community College (CNM) and Kristopher Goodrich, Ph.D., Dean of College of Education and Human Sciences, UNM, presented on the new teacher preparation standards initiated by the New Mexico Association of Colleges of Teacher Education. The standards were developed through a task force, including educator preparation programs (EPPs), state agencies, classroom educators, organized labor, policy organizations, and national experts. The standards aim to clearly articulate the knowledge and skills all new teachers should demonstrate upon completion of any New Mexico preparation pathway, including those that explicitly serve the state's diverse student population. Committee members expressed support for the teacher preparation standards. Committee members asked why faculty compensation lags that of public school teachers, how EPPs are recruiting educators, and what is needed to improve EPP data collection.

(14) Update on Implementation of New State Math Requirements. Marit Andrews, Principal Analyst, LESC; and Annie Armatage, Senior Policy Analyst II, LESC, opened the presentation by providing background on Laws 2026, Chapter 53 (Senate Bill 29), LESC-endorsed legislation that created a statewide framework to address mathematics instruction. Ms. Andrews explained the new law has staggered implementation timelines in recognition of the time needed for EPPs, PED, and school districts and charter schools to implement the new requirements. Shafiq Chaudhary, Senior Manager, Math and Science Bureau, PED, and Kersti Tyson, Co-Chair, Math and Science Advisory Council (MSAC) presented PED's progress, with MSAC's assistance, to develop guidance by the December 31, 2026 deadline. Kristopher M. Goodrich, PhD, Dean, College of Education and Human Science, UNM, and Jesse Cheneven, PhD, Associate Dean, School of Education, CNM, co-chairs of New Mexico Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (NMACTE)—also known as "Deans and Directors"—provided an update on the work EPPs around the state are doing to prepare to implement Chapter 53.

LESC committee members asked questions, including but not limited to, PED's process for receiving stakeholder input, especially for the professional learning plans; ensuring the selection of a mathematics screener does not negatively impact student joy; concerns regarding removal of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages course requirements for some EPP degree programs to make room for math methods courses; and current EPP requirements for math content coursework.

(15) Rule Update: NMAC 6.63.2: School Nurse Licensure Provisions. Conor Hicks, Policy Analyst I, LESC, presented a rulemaking report on the Public Education Department's amendments to NMAC 6.63.2, which align school nurse licensure requirements with Laws 2026, Chapter 40 (House Bill 34). The amendments expand mentorships and evaluation responsibilities to both level 2 and level 3 nurses, broaden eligibility for level 3 licensure to include nurses with at least three years of registered nursing experience, and update competency verification requirements to reflect current national nursing standards. The rule also provides guidance for school districts and charter schools that do not employ level 2 or level 3 school nurses by directing them to seek assistance from the Department of Health. No public comments were received during the rulemaking process, and PED made one technical clarification regarding competency verification responsibilities.

(16) Director's Report. John Sena, Director, LESC, presented the director's report, including the introduction of new staff and summer staff, Hailey Archuleta, Intern; Christina McCorquodale, Senior Policy Analyst; and Allison Muncie, Teacher on Special Assignment. In addition to new staff, Director Sena also noted Conor L. Hicks was promoted to Senior Policy Analyst. Director Sena added two additional hires will start at the beginning of August making LESC fully staffed. Director Sena also provided an overview of July's newsletter that highlights a potential funding formula proposal for CTE and the implementation of new math standards. He provided the members with a year-end budget overview stating that LESC's annual budget is about \$2 million which covers personnel, staff and member travel, and general operations. He said we spent about \$1.75 million and that was primarily due to staff vacancies. Director Sena thanked TMSD staff for their hospitality and members echoed that appreciation.