MINUTES
Legislative Education Study Committee
Rio Rancho, New Mexico
October 14-16, 2026

Wednesday, October 14

The following voting and advisory members were present:

Voting: Chair William P. Soules, Vice Chair G. Andrés Romero; Representatives Brian Baca, Joy Garratt, Yanira Gurrola, Tanya Mirabal Moya.

Advisory: Senator Harold Pope; Representatives Catherine J. Cullen, Patricia Roybal Caballero, Debbie Sariñana.

(1) Call to Order, Introductions, and Approval of October Agenda and September Minutes. Senator Bill Soules, Chair, LESC, called the meeting to order at 9:02 a.m. Chair Soules facilitated introductions of committee members present in Rio Rancho, and John Sena, Director, LESC, introduced staff. Because the committee did not reach a quorum, Chair Soules moved to the next agenda item. At 9:04 a.m., on Thursday, October 15, the committee approved the October agenda and September minutes.

(2) Community Welcome. Robert W. Dodd, Ed.D., Superintendent, Rio Rancho Public Schools (RRPS), welcomed LESC to Rio Rancho and discussed his leadership vision for RRPS. His presentation discussed the importance of high-expertise teaching and how this informs the vision and mission of RRPS, which is reinforced through what he called the four A's: academics, athletics, arts, and activities. Superintendent Dodd also shared how the state's investments in education has led to student success in Rio Rancho elementary and middle schools.

Committee members asked questions regarding RRPS' chronic absenteeism rates, RRPS' budget allocations, teacher training for students with disabilities, and community values for education.

(3) Access to Student Extracurriculars ("Big 4" Presentation). Robert W. Dodd, Ed.D., Superintendent, RRPS; Gabriella Durán Blakey, Ed.D., Superintendent, Albuquerque Public Schools (APS); Christine E. Griffin, Ed.D., Superintendent, Santa Fe Public Schools (SFPS); and Ignacio Ruíz, Superintendent, Las Cruces Public Schools (LCPS) presented about the importance of sustaining and expanding access to extracurriculars and cocurriculars. School leaders asserted current operational, athletics, and out-of-school funding is insufficient as students must fundraise to cover transportation, equipment, and uniform costs. Superintendent Griffin stated extracurricular and cocurricular programs provide all students, regardless of socioeconomic status, an opportunity to connect with peers and trusted adults and discover new interests. For example, in the 2025-2026 school year (SY26), SFPS had almost 1,900 students participate in extracurricular and cocurricular programs. Superintendent Griffin said over 70 percent of participating students belonged to low-income households and 13 percent of students were unhoused. In APS, Superintendent Blakey said student participation in these programs remained steady despite declining student enrollment. School leaders

emphasized the need to better fund these programs to support student attendance and engagement.

Members asked questions about how to expand access to these programs, available funding sources, financial planning, and student participation.

(4) Arts, Physical Education, and School Libraries. Conor L. Hicks, Senior Policy Analyst, LESC; Amanda DeBell, Deputy Secretary for Teaching, Learning, and Innovation, Public Education Department (PED); and Sheri Jett, Chief Academic Officer, APS, presented about students' access to robust fine arts, physical education, and library programming in New Mexico public schools. Mr. Hicks reviewed existing state funding mechanisms to support these offerings, state law and rule pertaining to them, and the limitations of current data on the relevant workforce. Deputy Secretary DeBell and Chief Academic Officer Jett provided insight into the work of PED to support programs and the efforts of a local school district to ensure adequate staffing and resources, respectively.

Members asked about trends in student participation in arts, physical education, and school library programs, and requested LESC staff examine the potential for burnout among educators responsible for these courses.

(5) Strengthening the Skilled Workforce Pipeline: RioTECH & Central New Mexico Community College Transportation Technology Tour. LESC members, LESC staff, PED staff, and other stakeholders toured and visited with students and staff from RioTECH, a career and technical education (CTE) high school and training hub. RioTECH is a joint collaboration between RRPS and Central New Mexico (CNM) Community College.

Led by RioTECH's principal, Kristopher Johnson, and current students, the group toured the various workshops and labs in most of RioTECH's eight pathways: computer information systems; digital media; electrical trades; plumbing and gas fitting; residential carpentry; residential heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC); and welding. Students from each pathway spoke about their respective paths into RioTECH and opportunities for hands-on learning as well as various skills and certifications they have gained in such a short amount of time. Students also highlighted the transferability of certifications for both civilian and military career advancements.

Thursday, October 15

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

Voting: Chair William P. Soules, Vice Chair G. Andrés Romero; Senate Pro Tempore Mimi Stewart; Representatives Brian Baca, Joy Garratt, Yanira Gurrola, Raymundo Lara, Tanya Mirabal Moya.

Advisory: Senator Harold Pope; Representatives Catherine J. Cullen, Patricia Roybal Caballero, Debbie Sariñana, Diane Torres-Velasquez.

Guest: Senator Shannon Pinto.

(7) Teacher Workload. Annie Armatage, Senior Policy Analyst II, LESC; and Allison Muncie, former Teacher on Special Assignment, LESC, and current third-grade bilingual teacher, El Camino Real Academy, SFPS, presented a report on teacher workload. The Legislature passed House Memorial 47 during the 2026 legislative session and requested LESC staff to study teacher workloads and professional work time. The report emphasized teacher professional work time as the foundation of instructional quality and noted provision of time varies across the state. Teachers consistently report provided time is insufficient to complete required and necessary noninstructional tasks, such as lesson planning, grading, collaboration, and communicating with families.

LESC staff analyzed statute and administrative rule and found state requirements impacting teacher workload have increased over the several past decades, with impacts created by requirements established in 2026 alone perhaps surpassing the impact of requirements created in the prior 40 years combined. However, the report also noted most requirements reflect best practices. Rather than repealing requirements, the state should ensure teachers have enough paid noninstructional work time. The report also emphasized the importance of support systems, particularly maintaining adequate staffing and implementing high-quality instructional resources as critical components to ensure teachers can effectively use noninstructional time.

Committee members asked how legislating minimum teacher planning time would be enforced, whether class size reductions could be an effective policy lever, and whether provision of additional planning time could strain a school's staffing.

(8) Long-Term Financial Planning. Daniel Estupiñan, Senior Fiscal Analyst II, LESC; Yvonne Garcia, Deputy Secretary of Student Support Services, PED; Sara Cordova, Senior Manager of the School Budget Bureau, PED; and John Binnert, Executive Director, Cottonwood Classical Preparatory School, reviewed New Mexico's complex policy landscape around programmatic and financial planning in school districts and charter schools. The panel also discussed policy recommendations proposed by LESC's long-term planning advisory group and LESC's school business official (SBO) advisory group for redesigning licensure requirements for SBOs and requiring long-term programmatic and financial planning for school districts and charter schools.

Members asked for additional context on the school districts and charter schools that requested emergency supplemental funding in the last fiscal year, information on how long-term programmatic and financial planning would impact charter school governance practices, clarity on how the recommendations would impact school board governance, and context on how PED would operationalize its review and approval of long-term programmatic and financial plans.

(9) Bilingual Policy and Proficiency. Evan Chavez, Policy Analyst, LESC, and Korina Cordova, Bilingual and Equity Coordinator, Carlsbad Municipal Public Schools, presented the work of a bilingual education working group convened by LESC staff during the 2026 interim. Mr. Chavez discussed the

formation of the working group, its objectives, and its considerations to improve bilingual education in New Mexico. The report concluded with a recommendation to provide a base stipend for bilingual endorsed educators. Ms. Cordova discussed her role as co-chair of the Bilingual Multicultural Education Advisory Committee and ended her presentation with the benefits of a stipend recognizing the work of bilingual educators and administrators.

Committee members discussed the inclusion of local knowledge and experts to guide bilingual education policy, while also ensuring that national experts are considered. Committee members also discussed funding of bilingual stipends, including how this mechanism should be implemented, and whether existing bilingual funding should be earmarked for stipends.

(10) FY28 Budget Considerations. Daniel Estupiñan, Senior Fiscal Analyst II, LESC, provided an overview of preliminary budget considerations for FY28, including compensation, revisions to minimum salaries, health and risk insurance, data and reporting system updates at PED, out-of-school time programs, universal school meals, and support for schools in designation.

Members asked for additional context on the preliminary budget considerations for paid family leave, including the personnel who would receive benefits through the proposal, and how the budget considerations approached the cost estimates for administrative positions. Members also asked for additional information on how the compensation consideration would apply to certain public school personnel, why LESC staff is proposing larger adjustments to the minimum salaries for certain educators, and how staff is approaching funding for out-of-school time programs and extracurricular activities. Members also spoke about factors contributing to significant increases in health premiums for public school personnel.

(11) Potential Committee Endorsed Legislation Proposals. John Sena, Director, LESC, presented potential committee endorsed legislation and budget priorities for the upcoming 2027 legislative session. Director Sena noted education funding recommendations are developed within state fiscal guidelines to improve their viability alongside other budget priorities. Members reviewed legislative proposals generated from interim discussions, including addressing student screen time, limiting restraint and seclusion, bilingual education stipends, CTE funding, instructional leadership career ladders, distance learning oversight, artificial intelligence (AI) standards, school facilities funding, paid parental leave, long-term financial planning, educator salaries, and education governance. Supporting materials and prior analysis by LESC staff were made available for member review.

Chair Soules emphasized endorsed legislation should generally align with LESC's annual work plan. Members discussed coordination with other interim committees, particularly on public school capital outlay and potential revisions to the state and local match formula. Additional discussion focused on teachers supports, bilingual educator internships, salary proposals for all school employees, educator professional development, literacy, student safety reporting, and four-day school week policies. Chair Soules explained that draft legislation may be considered for endorsement beginning in November, with endorsements expected to be completed by the December meeting, and January reserved largely for final budget discussion before the legislative session.

Friday, October 16

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

Voting: Chair William P. Soules; Representatives Joy Garratt, Yanira Gurrola, Raymundo Lara, Tanya Mirabal Moya.

Advisory: Senator Linda López; Representatives Catherine J. Cullen, Patricia Roybal Caballero, Diane Torres-Velasquez.

(12) Director's Report. John Sena, Director, LESC, delivered a director's report to committee members. Director Sena presented the October 2026 newsletter and highlighted staff work on bilingual multicultural education, teacher workload and professional work time, and long-term financial planning in New Mexico public schools. All three topics had been covered during presentations at the October hearing.

Committee members did not ask any questions.

(13) High Quality Literacy Instruction Act Implementation Update. Marit Andrews, Principal Analyst, LESC, explained the purpose of the presentation is to provide the committee with an update on the implementation of Laws 2026, Chapter 54 (Senate Bill 37), LESC-endorsed legislation which created the High-Quality Literacy Instruction Act to expand evidence-based reading support for public school students. Ms. Andrews explained the new law impacts literacy instruction for public school students as well as preservice educators, and PED has already begun implementation of the new literacy law and outlined for school districts and charter schools how the new requirements fit within the department's broader structured literacy initiative through an August 4, 2026, memo to superintendents. Annie Armatage, Senior Policy Analyst II, LESC, explained Laws 2026, Chapter 54 builds on legislation passed in 2025 that aimed to ensure educator preparation programs (EPPs) equip teacher candidates with strong preparation in structured literacy and the science of reading. Ms. Armatage explained EPPs must now also ensure teacher candidates graduate from their programs with skills to support English learners through biliteracy and oral-language development.

Next, Severo Martinez, Director, Literacy and Humanities Bureau, PED, and Denise Beutel, Ph.D., Manager, Educator Pathways Bureau, PED,

presented on PED's implementation work so far, explaining this initiative represents the largest expansion of New Mexico's structured literacy efforts to date.

LESC committee members asked questions, including but not limited to, sustainability of funding for literacy coaches; what PED is doing to ensure retention of home languages; how bilingual standards are being shared with teachers currently in the classroom; and if PED intends to translate read-at-home plans.

(14) STEM Innovation Network Update. Clint Weckerly, Northeast High Regional Director, New Mexico Highlands University, presented information about the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) Innovation Network, including three network priorities: inquiry-based STEM learning in all New Mexico kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) classrooms; access to out-of-school time STEM enrichment; and strengthening pathways between K-12 education and New Mexico industry. Crystal Gallegos, CTE Coordinator, Jemez Mountain Public Schools, shared the positive impact of STEM programs on students in Jemez Mountain Schools. Ryan Labbe, General Manager, Tyler Technology New Mexico, presented on the value of STEM learning to employers and economic opportunity in our state, as well as ways industry is supporting the STEM innovation network. Soraya Gollop, Ph.D., Director of Project ECHO, University of New Mexico (UNM), described Project Echo, which provides teachers low intensity, high frequency support through subject matter and peer expertise and an ongoing community of practice. Project ECHO is currently piloting implementation support for Integrow math instruction, training 30 to 40 New Mexico teachers. The presenters requested a recurring legislative line item for the STEM Innovation Network.

Committee members expressed gratitude for the work of teachers, schools, and partners to help New Mexico students access STEM opportunities, and voiced support for continued STEM funding for New Mexico schools. Committee members asked whether schools are implementing curriculum and instruction that help prepare students to be apprentices in STEM fields.

(15) Basic Needs Consortium. The New Mexico Basic Needs Consortium consisting of Dr. Sarita Cargas, DPhil., Director, New Mexico Basic Needs Consortium and Professor at UNM; Dr. Alejandra Villalobos Melendez, Ed.D., Director of Strategic Initiatives and Research, UNM Taos; and Benjamin Tobias, Manager of Student Basic Needs, CNM, presented to LESC members regarding campus basic need services. Dr. Cargas explained the consortium initially formed to fill a research gap on the effectiveness of college food pantries and has expanded to include other basic need services such as housing and mental health services. She presented findings of the consortium's 2023 survey that found more than half of New Mexico students experienced some kind of basic needs insecurity. The consortium's primary request is $10 million in recurring annual appropriation to strengthen campus basic needs services and direct student support for ongoing initiatives to promote student retention, graduation rates, and economic mobility. The long-term goal is to see

campus food pantries become a central hub that can staff case managers and social workers to help students.

Members discussed food insecurity trends among off-campus students and a high percentage of students relying on Pell Grants at institutions like UNM. Members drew on their personal experiences to discuss the necessity of such services and emphasize the critical need for such services.