

**MINUTES**  
**Legislative Education Study Committee**  
**Las Cruces, New Mexico**  
**October 15-17, 2025**

Wednesday, October 15

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

Voting: Chair William Soules, Senate President Pro Tempore Mimi Stewart; Representatives Brian Baca, Joy Garratt, Raymundo Lara and Tanya Mirabal Moya.

Advisory: Senators Linda M. Lopez, Natalie Figueroa, and Gabriel Ramos; Representative Patricia Roybal Caballero.

**(1) Call to Order, Introductions, and Approval of October Agenda and September Minutes.** Senator William Soules, Chair, LESC, called the meeting to order at 9:15 AM. Chair Soules facilitated introductions of the members of LESC. John Sena, Director, LESC, introduced LESC staff. A quorum of voting members was not present at the start of the meeting. On October 16, a quorum was present. In a motion by Vice Chair G. Andrés Romero and second by Senate President Pro Tempore Mimi Stewart, the agenda for the October LESC hearing was approved. The meeting minutes for the September LESC hearing were also approved with a motion by Vice Chair G. Andrés Romero and a second by Representative Joy Garratt.

**(2) Community Welcome.** Ignacio Ruiz, Superintendent, Las Cruces Public Schools (LCPS), welcomed members of LESC to Organ Mountain High School. Superintendent Ruiz presented to lawmakers on district initiatives to address the findings of the *Martinez-Yazzie* consolidated lawsuit and increase student engagement. Superintendent Ruiz also discussed the district's strategic plan, work to reduce chronic absenteeism, trends in student achievement, and the district's financial outlook.

Committee members asked questions about how the district has used electric school buses, how the Legislature can help LCPS meet its goals in addressing student absenteeism, and the percentage of LCPS students engaged in extracurricular activities and sports.

**(3) Superintendent Panel.** Jessica Hathaway, Deputy Director, LESC, facilitated a panel of school superintendents including Ignacio Ruiz, Superintendent, LCPS; Nichole Burgin, Superintendent, Truth or Consequences Municipal Schools; Michael Chavez, Superintendent, Hatch Valley Public Schools; and Jocelyne Driscoll-Gillespie, Superintendent, Cloudcroft Municipal Schools. Superintendents answered questions about their path to becoming a superintendent, the state's structured literacy initiative, school and district leadership, and what further state-level guidance or investments would be helpful in improving student math outcomes. Superintendents were also asked about impacts of revisions to the state equalization guarantee (SEG), the state's public school funding formula, and how these changes might impact services in their local schools. Finally, superintendents shared insights on their role as a superintendent and their respective communities.

LESC lawmakers requested additional information on several topics, including whether superintendents have adequate staff to support their roles, how schools are engaging students in the classroom, teacher preparation time and the use of professional learning communities, the roles and responsibilities of local school boards and how politics influence decision-making, differences between engaged and disengaged school boards, available recourse for ethical concerns involving school board members, and the impact of re-zoning, particularly how it might impact students in high-needs neighborhoods.

**(4) Public Education Reform Fund Update.** Jessica Hathway, Deputy Director, Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC); Simon Miller, Performance Analyst, Department of Finance and Administration, (DFA); Sarah Dinces, Ph.D., Program Evaluator, Legislative Finance Committee (LFC); and Martin Jones, Ph.D., Data Analyst III, Public Education (PED), provided an update on PERF-funded initiatives. Deputy Director Hathway presented the components of Senate Bill 201 (SB201) from the 2025 legislative session, including how the bill converted the PERF into a multi-year fund, current funding initiatives, partnerships, and evaluation timelines. Mr. Miller provided an overview of current PED appropriations totaling approximately \$60 million. Deputy Director Hathway, Dr. Dinces, and Mr. Miller then discussed in detail current funded initiatives, including strengths and considerations for each plan: 1) Attendance (\$18.6 million, or \$6.2 million per year); 2) Secondary literacy (\$15.6 million, or \$5.2 million per year); 3) Math achievement (\$13.5 million, or \$4.5 million per year); 4) Innovative staffing (\$7.8 million, or \$2.6 million per year); and 5) Supports for unhoused students (\$6.3 million, or \$2.1 million per year). Dr. Jones discussed specific school districts and charter schools receiving funding from each initiative and affirmed funding distributed by PED—and evaluations eventually conducted by PED—are designed to meet all statutory deadlines.

Committee members asked questions about the allocation of funds, the accountability of funds, and the access for rural and other communities to PERF funds. Data collection and the capacity to evaluate data was also discussed. Dr. Jones clarified there will be limited burden on participating school districts and charter schools in collecting data because PED is responsible for collecting data already.

**(5) Assessment Results.** Lynn Vásquez, Senior Manager, Assessment, Research, Evaluation, and Accountability, PED, presented longitudinal student statewide assessment results, including the Amira-ISIP, previously known as Istation, for kindergarten through second grade, New Mexico Measures of Student Success and Achievement (NM-MSSA) for third through eighth grade, SAT School Day for grade 11, and the New Mexico Assessment of Science Readiness for grades five, eight, and 11.

PED noted the current assessment system has been in place since spring 2022, providing four years of baseline and trend data. Committee members inquired about comparisons with the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and PED clarified while state-level results and NAEP trends can show progress in similar ways, the two assessments use

different frameworks, item designs, and performance expectations, making direct comparisons or rankings misleading. Members also discussed the delivery formats of the assessments, which are primarily digital with paper-based accommodations available. Members raised concerns about perceived delays between the administration of assessments and the release of results. PED noted districts receive access to student- and school-level results through vendor portals as early as May, allowing local leaders to plan placements and interventions before the following school year.

Members further asked whether the removal of the prior graduation demonstration of competency requirement has influenced student motivation on assessments. PED stated it is too soon to determine the impact, noting math proficiency had been low prior to this policy change and this reflects broader statewide issues, including chronic absenteeism. Committee members discussed test fatigue, particularly on longer assessments scheduled later in the day, and questioned whether results reflect students' full knowledge. Members also raised the importance of early access to actionable data for intervention planning, especially in districts that test sophomores on PSAT-related measures, which are not used in statewide reporting due to inconsistent participation rates.

Additional discussion focused on instructional materials, science assessment supports, and the need to identify and study schools demonstrating strong growth or high proficiency. Members also asked questions about how investments tied to the *Martinez-Yazzie* lawsuit are contributing to closing learning gaps.

**(6) Educator Accountability Reporting System Update.** Amanda DeBell, Deputy Secretary of Teaching, Learning and Innovation, PED, presented an overview of the 2023 to 2024 school year educator accountability report. Deputy Secretary DeBell noted approximately 50 percent of teacher candidates completed their clinical experience as a teacher of record through alternative teacher preparation pathways.

Committee members asked for more information about the number of students enrolled in and completing each educator preparation program (EPP). Deputy Secretary DeBell commented that the number of enrolled students included all students enrolled in a program. Committee members commented on the need for better data systems to track teacher candidates, including how many teacher candidates pursue employment opportunities out of state, how effective candidates are as teachers, and adequate candidate demographics.

Thursday, October 16

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

Voting: Chair William Soules, Vice Chair G. Andrés Romero, Senate President Pro Tempore Mimi Stewart; Representatives Brian Baca, Debra M. Sariñana, Joy Garratt, Raymundo Lara and Tanya Mirabal Moya.

Advisory: Senators Ant L. Thornton, Natalie Figueroa, Gabriel Ramos; Representatives Diane Torres-Velasquez, Patricia Roybal-Caballero, and Yanira Gurrola.

**(7) Residency White Paper.** Annie Armatage, Senior Policy Analyst II, LESC; Marjori Krebs, Ed.D., Professor and Director of Licensure, College of Education and Human Sciences, University of New Mexico (UNM); and Jesse Chenven, Ph.D., Associate Dean, School of Education, Central New Mexico Community College (CNM); presented a white paper on the role of teacher residencies in preparing high-quality educators for New Mexico classrooms. Presenters discussed trends in residency completion, the needed components to successfully operate a residency program, and a vision of the New Mexico Alliance for Teacher Residencies to create multiple on-ramps through residencies for prospective educators. To support the work of these programs, presenters asked lawmakers to consider indexing residency stipends to level one teacher pay and establish recurring funding for residencies to ensure program stability and expansion.

Members asked how teacher preparation programs and residencies were incorporating structured literacy into their coursework, discussed funding residencies as a recurring budget item, and sought to understand how residencies and teacher preparation programs more broadly could help address the *Martinez-Yazzie* lawsuit.

**(8) Community Welcome.** Valerio Ferme, President, New Mexico State University (NMSU); Rick Marlatt, Ph.D., Professor and Dean, College of Health, Education, and Social Transformation, New Mexico State University (NMSU); and Leanna Lucero, Ph.D., Associate Professor and Interim Director, School of Teacher Preparation, Administration and Leadership, NMSU, welcomed committee members to campus. President Valerio provided an update on student enrollment, NMSU's US News & World Report Rankings, and this year's accolade's for NMSU faculty and researchers in agriculture and artificial intelligence. Other topics of discussion were focused on the institution's infrastructure and the plan to consolidate the layout of campus to ease commuting for students and promote more interdisciplinary learning.

The committee congratulated President Ferme on the institution's national recognition and reputation in agriculture and emerging fields like artificial intelligence and quantum computing. President Ferme also clarified questions on the recent loss of federal grant money on faculty, research, and emerging academic programs.

**(9) NMSU Educator Preparation.** Rick Marlatt, Ph.D., Professor and Dean, College of Health, Education, and Social Transformation, New Mexico State University (NMSU); and Leanna Lucero, Ph.D., Associate Professor and Interim Director, School of Teacher Preparation, Administration and Leadership, NMSU presented on educator preparation impacts and outcomes at NMSU's College of Health, Education, and Social Transformation (HEST). Presenters provided an overview of HEST, including enrollment for all schools within HEST, focusing specifically on teacher preparation. Presenters also highlighted HEST's clinics, experiential learning, and

research and outreach centers. Dr. Marlatt and Dr. Lucero then provided information on the School of Teacher Preparation, Administration, and Leadership (TPAL) within HEST. Presenters explained they have seen applications for their teacher education program increase since fall 2019 across all areas. Presenters finished by outlining recent and ongoing TPAL initiatives, including work to build capacity for quality math instruction through their elementary math and science specialist master's program, NUMeROS kindergarten through fifth grade math micro-credentials, and high dosage math tutoring in partnership with Gadsden Independent School District.

Committee members asked questions about stipends for teacher residencies, tracking EPP graduates, how to better support candidates for teacher residencies, and the work of the STEM outreach center.

**(10) Out-of-School Time Programs in New Mexico.** Conor L. Hicks, Policy Analyst I, LESC; Ann Kluth-Clark, State and Federal Programs Coordinator, Central Consolidated School District; and Vanessa Mobley Knox, Founder and CEO, Borderland Family Ties; presented to lawmakers about out-of-school time (OST) availability and quality in New Mexico. Mr. Hicks discussed national research on best practices, associated student outcomes of OST programs, and site visits to specific program providers around the state. Mr. Hicks offered two recommendations to lawmakers: appropriate \$20 million in funding in fiscal year 2027 to better account for demonstrated demand for OST; and fund OST and high-impact tutoring as separate budget items to avoid artificial competition for resources between the two initiatives. Ms. Kluth-Clark and Ms. Mobley Knox gave lawmakers an overview of the specific services offered by OST programs in their respective communities.

**(11) Tour: Arrowhead Park Early College High School Robotics Program.** Lawmakers heard an overview of a robotics program, including its funding, structure, and student experiences with the program, and observed a student-led demonstration of a robot created by local students.

Friday, October 17

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

Voting: Chair William Soules, Vice Chair G. Andrés Romero, Senate President Pro Tempore Mimi Stewart; Representatives Debra M. Sariñana, Joy Garratt, Raymundo Lara, and Tanya Mirabal Moya.

Advisory: Senators Ant L. Thornton, Natalie Figueroa; Representatives Diane Torres-Velasquez, Patricia Roybal Caballero, and Yanira Gurrola.

**(13) FY27 Budget Proposals.** Daniel Estupiñan, Senior Fiscal Analyst II, LESC, provided an overview of preliminary budget considerations for fiscal year 2027 (FY27), including compensation, insurance, professional development, teacher preparation, out-of-school time programs, and high-impact tutoring.

Members asked for additional context on the preliminary funding considerations for the literacy center, structured literacy, high-impact tutoring, and out-of-school time programs. Other questions included

specific inquiries about capacity at the public education department, the sufficiency of funding for out-of-school time programs, the adequacy of funding for summer internships, and whether there is capacity to increase the number of schools receiving additional support for literacy coaches.

**(14) Legislative Proposals.** John Sena, Director, LESC, presented items for potential committee endorsement during the 2026 legislative session. Legislative items covered subjects including suspension or removal of individual school board members, increasing the employer share of health insurance premiums, attendance provisions for students with severe medical conditions, strengthening teacher preparation and residencies, creating a statewide comprehensive approach to math instruction, allowable responses to student behavior, evidence-based supports to build upon structured literacy, and codification of PED's Office of Special Education.

Members raised several questions regarding the proposed legislative items. Their inquiries included what types of support and professional development measures could be incorporated into proposed legislation; the process for removing or suspending a school board member and what safeguards would govern the use of such measures; whether a review panel and an appeal process should be established for board member suspensions or removals; and, in regard to attendance provisions for severe medical conditions, whether any students were being singled out or targeted. Members also questioned whether the issues regarding attendance provisions discussed stemmed from districts' interpretations of the law and how potential changes might affect other student subgroups. Additional areas of interest included further details on proposed mathematics legislation, conditional promotion policies paired with literacy supports, and the expected timing of draft legislation for committee review.

Members also sought clarification about whether PED plans to introduce its own legislative proposals. Finally, members asked PED leadership whether they anticipate the governor to advance any related proposals with a message and if any department legislation will be ready for review by November.

**(15) Federal Funding Update.** Daniel Estupiñan, Senior Fiscal Analyst II, LESC, provided an update on the congressional appropriations process and potential disruptions in funding some school districts and charter schools may experience as a result of the government shutdown.

Members asked for additional context on the impact the government shutdown could have on distributions of impact aid payments.

**(16) Director's Report.** John Sena, Director, LESC, presented the LESC newsletter to the committee, provided a personnel update on staff changes and promotions, and also reviewed PED's draft *Martinez-Yazzie* Action Plan with committee members. Director Sena highlighted actions in the draft plan that pertain specifically to legislative action—both budget and policy—and outlined next steps for the plan, including that PED would be submitting a revised plan to the court by November 3, 2025.