

B i t e - S i z e

 Accounting for action during the special legislative session, the Public Education Department has set a preliminary unit value of \$4,531.74, down \$70.53, or 1.5 percent from the FY20 value. While the amount the schools receive per enrollment-based funding unit is down, the number of units they will generate will be up because of an increase in the units generated by students at risk of failing because of low income, English proficiency, and transience.

 New Mexico educators this year will test the state's new teacher evaluation system, Elevate New Mexico, with a goal of formal implementation during the 2021-2022 school year. The system relies on observations, surveys, and the teacher professional development plan; PED has not specified how each element will be scored. The department is encouraging administrators to use the plans to help teachers develop skills in remote teaching, technology, and student social and emotional supports.

 The Lottery Authority transferred just over \$3.5 million to the lottery scholarship fund in June, a drop of about \$300 thousand from May. Total revenues for FY20 are on track to come in around 11 percent under the FY19 total, although higher than projected. The program initially covered 100 percent of tuition for New Mexico high school graduates attending college full time and earning a 2.5 GPA, but now covers a minimum of about a third of tuition, with higher awards dependent on the availability of funds.



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Representative Christine Trujillo, Chair / Senator Mimi Stewart, Vice Chair / Rachel S. Gudgel, Director / August 2020

From the Chairwoman

Ready or Not

Nothing prepared New Mexico's teachers for what hit them this spring. Years of study and experience working with students meant little as educators faced the difficult task of meaningfully engaging children remotely, through a computer screen and with home-based activities. Even when the technology worked, even when teachers could reach students, even when students had homes conducive to staying on task and on track, teachers found they simply did not have the training or experience they needed. Face-to-face interaction, important for lawyers and architects, is critical for teachers and the foundation of classroom practices. But that option was off the table.

Now, what seemed like a temporary situation in March has become the norm. Optimistically, teachers will be able to get back into the classroom with students part time if schools transition to a hybrid model, but educators could be teaching home-based students on and off throughout the year as the number of COVID-19 cases swells and subsides. Schools throughout the South have opened only to shut down again when cases spread among students and staff.

Most school administrators have taken steps to better prepare their teachers for distance learning, and the Public Education Department is encouraging school administrators to include skills related to remote learning in the professional development plans for teachers. But more must be done; the shutdown has bigger lessons to teach us.

The National Center on Education and the Economy, a well-regarded policy think-tank, reports high-performing school systems around the world were better prepared for closures because most had emergency distance learning plans already in place and teacher education programs that include training in the skills and tools of distance learning. In Singapore, teachers and students practice distance learning annually. Further, the best schools systems have built on these systems during the coronavirus emergency.

New Mexico schools must learn from this experience. They must plan for the next pandemic and augment teacher education with the tools for teaching during one.



Special Ed Results Raise Accountability Concerns

Poor achievement among New Mexico's special education students, called out by the district court in the *Martinez* and *Yazzie* school quality lawsuit and exacerbated by remote learning, highlights the need to examine how the state funds services and holds local schools accountable, an LESC brief says.

New Mexico spent a total of \$613 million in state and federal funds on services for students with disabilities in FY20, a nearly 17 percent increase over FY15 even as public school enrollment dropped, but test scores for those students changed little and significantly lagged those of students overall.

In 2019, 12 percent of students with disabilities scored as proficient in reading, compared with 34 percent of all students, and 8 percent achieved proficiency scores in math, compared with 20 percent overall. Similarly, while 75 percent of 2019 high school graduates earned their diplomas in four years, just 64 of students with disabilities graduated in four years.

LESC is scheduled to discuss special education funding and accountability at 3:15 p.m. on August 24 at a hearing to be webcast on nmlegis.gov. Speakers are expected to

include parents of special education students, advocates, a University of New Mexico professor, educators, and the staff attorney for the non-profit Disability Rights New Mexico. New Mexico includes gifted students in special education but gifted services are not included in the LESC review.

For the past two years, LESC staff reports, the U.S. Department of Education's Office Special Education Programs has concluded, based on achievement and compliance data, New Mexico needs help meeting the requirement of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act – IDEA – to provide students with disabilities with a “free appropriate” education.

The federal regulators, which required the state to get technical assistance and develop an improvement plan, say the Public Education Department has taken “substantive” steps in using data to improve services, providing guidance and training to local and state staff, improving accountability, and working with families.

However, the office noted the state department failed to meet its targets for the participation and performance of special edu-

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State Might Need to Change Extended Learning

Reluctance among school districts and charter schools to implement extended learning programs known to improve student performance suggests the state might need to change its approach, LESC analysis indicates.

In a report prepared for a hearing scheduled for 2 p.m. August 24, staff notes use of voluntary extended learning programs has fallen far short of available funding. While the Legislature funded about 87 thousand slots in FY20

for the K-5 Plus extended school year program, which adds 25 days to the school year for elementary students, just 21 thousand students participated.

Similarly, lawmakers funded 124 thousand slots in extended learning time programs, which add 10 instructional days for elementary and high school students, but just 42 thousand students participated.

Local school officials reported implementation of new K-5 Plus programs

was stymied by a requirement that students have the same teacher for the academic year and other rules intended to ensure the integrity of the program.

Legislative Finance Committee research has shown K-5 Plus can help close the achievement gap between low-income students and their more affluent peers, but the program works best when it meets certain criteria.

The Legislature during the regular session before school closures approved program flexibility to encourage schools to start programs, but the COVID-19 pandemic prompted the Public Education Department to cancel the summer 2020 extended learning programs, leaving FY21 participation uncertain.

The hearing brief suggests the poor participation, even without a pandemic, raises questions on whether discretionary K-5 Plus and extended learning programs could be tweaked to provide additional learning time.

Extended learning was expanded, in part, in response to a finding in the consolidated *Martinez* and *Yazzie* school sufficiency lawsuit that services were underfunded and unavailable to many children who could benefit.

Special Education Results Raise Concerns

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cation students on standardized tests, the number of students evaluated quickly, and services to children under 3 years old.

About 15 percent of total funding for special education is covered by the federal government; however, Congress promised to pay 40 percent of cost of educating special education students when it initially passed IDEA in 1975.

“Where special education is perhaps the most federally regulated area of student instruction, it remains one of the most underfunded and ends up accounting for a disproportionate amount of states’ total expenditures for public education,” the brief says.

New Mexico adds to special education management concerns with its approach to distributing funds for special education services.

New Mexico’s public school funding formula includes factors for each special education student based on the level of services each needs. As a result, school districts and charter schools can generate more formula dollars by identifying students as high need, or class D, a classification that generates twice as much funding as a class C classification and nearly three times as A and B classifications.

The brief says the approach punishes schools that use early intervention to keep students from needing more intensive approaches.

The formula also includes additional units for special education staff, encouraging local schools to claim excessive numbers of ancillary staff.

A simpler, more transparent method of funding special education would be to provide local schools with an amount based on student population. In FY20, about 16.6 percent of New Mexico school students were identified as having a disability that qualified for services, the brief says.

Survey Shows Closure Impact on Families

A Public Education Department survey of students’ families assessing attitudes about the public schools before and after schools closed for the coronavirus pandemic finds significant declines in satisfaction in five areas.

Although responses under-represented several demographic groups, more than 21 thousand families reported their level of agreement with 13 statements about their experiences before and after the move to distance learning.

Families of high school students reported higher levels of stress and lower levels of enjoyment after the transition. Compared with families with students in other grades, those with students in pre-kindergarten through second grade reported higher levels of satisfaction with guidance and resources supporting learning

from home.

While English learners were significantly under-represented in the survey, the department concludes those families, on average, indicated a more favorable experience after the switch than their English proficient peers.

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325 Don Gaspar, Suite 200
Santa Fe, NM 87501
(505) 986-4591 www.nmlegis.gov/lesc

Chelsea Canada, Staff Editor | Helen Gaussoin, Editor

