



AFT New Mexico • Albuquerque Teachers Federation • NEA-New Mexico
New Mexico Coalition of Education Leaders • New Mexico PTA
New Mexico School Boards Association

2021: RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE

1. **SEG Sufficiency and Stability Funding:** Stability is essential as we continue to strive for systemic equity in our public schools. The COVID 19 pandemic has created significant new costs for districts: from purchasing expensive protective gear for staff and delivering meals directly to students who aren't in school, to investing in computer equipment and internet hot spots to ensure students can access online learning, all while districts are still coping with decades of disinvestment in its schools. The state must continue to lay the groundwork for an equitable education system.

Many districts have experienced shrinking student enrollment this year as some parents opt to homeschool or to temporarily transfer their children out of state. Some students are missing due to lack of connectivity or family struggles. The state's most vulnerable children have experienced the worst effects of school closure.

District costs continue to rise even as enrollment shrinks, but there are indicators that enrollment declines are only temporary, making it imperative that New Mexico's lawmakers ensure operational and transportation funding stability.

- We must enact a temporary provision (hold harmless) in order to offset the current and inevitable future enrollment fluctuations. This measure must account for historical trends based on at least a 3-year average for the next 2 to 3 fiscal years, as well as controlling for future growth units. We must preserve public funding for public schools.
- Funding for current programs, additional resources, as well as flexibility for new mandates and requirements are essential to ensure that every school system provides each New Mexico student an equal opportunity to succeed.
- It is also critically important that we protect operational reserves to help districts navigate unforeseen challenges.
- Finally, any reduction in the credits for impact aid or other local revenue sources will necessarily affect the SEG. The SEG should be protected, so that no district's SEG is reduced as a result of changes to credits in the funding formula.

2. **Flexibility to Address Local Needs and Issues of Equity:** Administrators, educators and families are looking forward to taking advantage of the investment our state has made in additional learning time. Both the Extended Learning Time and K-5+ programs will help us to address historic student needs that have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

Extended Learning Time Program: While some districts can best address students' needs with 10 additional days of schools, others feel the **flexibility** to add hours instead of days will best support their students, especially those whose needs have increased as a result of the pandemic. Diverse yet successful models include the "Genius Hour" program offered by Albuquerque Public Schools, as well as **locally modified ELTP programs** in Deming Public Schools and Cuba Independent Schools.

K-5+: We know that online learning has been difficult and problematic. There are concerns some students, especially those who have had intermittent or no attendance while learning has taken place on-line, will be at a significant disadvantage compared to their peers who have reliable internet access and have been able to attend class consistently. Our K-5+ Program is perfectly situated to provide targeted elementary school students with extra class time and support.

- The state should make a **temporary modification to the current K-5+ Program** requirements in order for districts to provide support for specific elementary students who experienced attendance issues during remote and/or hybrid learning and provide them with in-person schooling during the 25 days before, or after, the 2021-2022 school year.

Community Schools: Strategies for meeting the needs of students and families are enhanced as partnerships are built between schools and community-based organizations.

Attendance for Success Act: This law was clearly not designed to accommodate the current challenges. We are therefore requesting that the implementation of the act be delayed. Otherwise, schools will be forced to create attendance plans and set attendance improvement targets for an exorbitant percentage of students, whose attendance issues were no fault of their own and may be attributable to the various remote and hybrid learning models, parent choices, and more.

3. **Social Emotional Learning:** Policy-makers and educators alike have a growing awareness of our state's Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) statistics and how the resulting toxic levels of stress impact learning for a significant number of students. Even before the pandemic there was consensus that Social Emotional Learning (SEL) must be infused into all that we do in public schools. The pandemic has exponentially multiplied this need.

Students are whole beings, growing academically, physically, socially, and emotionally. The more **we focus on the whole child**, the more students learn and the healthier they will be. ACEs can be substantially buffered by stable and supportive relationships with caregivers. Schools and educators can also play a critical role by promoting these kinds of caring relationships, as well as social and emotional skills, that support healthy youth development for all students; removing punitive disciplinary practices; and supporting the physical and mental health needs of students.

- **The flexibility** to free schools from counting content minutes to ensuring students are ready to learn the content is especially important now. Essential in this effort is staffing schools based on the needs of the whole child. Every pre-K-12 school should have a team of specialists to address student mental health. Depending upon local needs, such teams may be comprised of counselors, nurses, social workers, school psychologists and/or behavior intervention specialists, each of whom play a distinct and important role in providing complimentary mental health supports to students.
- Our state must begin **an analysis of current staffing** in our schools and the cost of meeting national staffing standards-working toward the goal of staffing schools for the needs of students.

4. **Supporting Current and Future High Schools Graduates:** Our **current high school students** need a focus on, and some flexibility with, the approved demonstration of competency needed for graduation, especially for the classes of 2021 & 2022. NM is currently **supporting capstone projects** as a demonstration of competency for graduation. Capstone projects are described as a “culminating activity” that students complete in their senior year that “synthesizes classroom study and real-world perspective” through a project that focuses on a student’s personal interest.” Some additional areas that will support current high school students to graduate are a temporary re-calculation of graduation rates to **allow extended time for required course completion and allowing GED completers to count as graduates.**

In 2007 the NM Legislature passed HB 584, High School Redesign. HB 584 increased requirements for graduation to three credits in mathematics (one must be equivalent to Algebra II) and at least one unit as advanced placement, dual credit, or one distance-learning course. The New Mexico PED added a year of math to the requirements in 2009 and a half-year of Health in 2013. The current NM requirement for graduation is 24 credits.

Overall, our course requirements do not prepare students for careers that exist today and do not allow the flexibility needed to serve all students. Ideally, **future students should be able to choose pathways to graduation** (much like we do in college). This way, the focus is on skills and relevant knowledge based on student choice. For example, in an area like English, students who plan to go into a technical field could take a technical writing and reading course rather than the current requirement of literature courses for four years.

- It is time to **rethink and modernize our current HS credit requirements** so that future students have the ability to choose a personalized pathway in eleventh and twelfth grade. High school students deserve more options especially when it comes to electives and CTE programs. College and career success for New Mexico’s High Schools should be based on a course-taking plan grounded in equity, student choice and diverse pathways to graduation.

5. **Educator Recruitment, Retention and Preparation:** New Mexico has an aging educator workforce and our ability to attract and retain educators across the state must be of the highest priority. NM lawmakers made significant investments in programs and salaries intended to do just that in the regular 2020 session. Unfortunately, some of those essential programs were cut during the Special Session. We must do all we can this year, and in future years, to stabilize our revenue sources and restore the cuts that were made to programs that support attracting and retaining the educators our students need and deserve. We must not lose sight on this goal. In priority order we must:

- **keep all school personnel employed**
- partner with LEAs in covering any increases to **the employer and employee cost of equitable health care** for school personnel
- invest as we can, as much as we can, in **salaries for all school personnel with the goal of becoming regionally competitive**

In addition, we recommend:

- Sufficient funding for the same salaries for all **counselors, social workers, therapists and nurses**
- **Funding for staffing efforts** in each district to attract and retain social workers, counselors, school psychologists, and nurses in every school, as needed, to mitigate the effects of trauma and poverty among our students
- A **living wage** for our EAs, secretaries, clerks, cafeteria staff, custodians, and bus drivers

The Education Partners also support:

- Initiatives to **enhance New Mexico’s educator preparation programs**, including extended clinical experiences.
- We must fully **fund and expand Grow Your Own Teachers**, scholarships and loan repayment programs to attract young and second career people into the teaching of STE(A)M, Citizenship, Special Education, Bilingual and Indian Education, and other programs to prepare New Mexicans for careers in education.