

**MINUTES**  
**Legislative Education Study Committee**  
**Roswell, New Mexico**  
**June 25 - 27, 2025**

Wednesday, June 25

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

Voting: Senators William P. Soules, Mimi Stewart, and Candy Spence Ezzell; Representatives Debra M. Sariñana, G. Andres Romero, Joy Garratt, Tanya Mirabal Moya

Advisory: Senators Anthony L. Thornton; Crystal Brantley, Pat Boone; Representatives Catherine J. Cullen, Yanira Gurrola

**1) Call to Order, Introductions, and Approval of June Agenda and May Minutes.** Senator William P. Soules, Chair, Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC), called the meeting to order. Chair Soules facilitated introductions of the members of LESC and of LESC staff. The meeting minutes for the May LESC hearing were approved. The agenda for the June LESC hearing was approved.

**(2) Community Welcome.** Brian Luck, Superintendent, Roswell Independent School District (RISD), was joined by Cynthia Price, Behavior Specialist, RISD, and Lucie Hall, Principal, University High School and Early College High School, RISD, to welcome committee members to Roswell and highlight the work of the district to support students in Chaves County. Superintendent Luck pointed to RISD's success in reducing chronic absenteeism, the quality of Roswell's early learning initiatives, and outlined recovery efforts in the aftermath of the 2024 floods.

Ms. Price provided lawmakers with an overview of RISD's various mental health and social emotional learning initiatives and emphasized the importance of developing systems of care to meet student needs.

Principal Hall discussed the challenges facing alternative schools due to the calculation method for graduation rates. Due to this method, alternative schools across the state are designated for intervention because of low graduation rates. A University High School student also presented her capstone project: a coloring book introducing children to first responders in the community.

Members inquired about the district's vacancy rate, English learners served, and the initiatives of RISD's Early College High School and University High School. Additionally, members paid tribute to the first responder coloring book and its author.

**(3) High School Graduation Requirements Implementation.** Breezy Gutierrez, Director of the College and Career Readiness Bureau, Public Education Department (PED), provided an update on the

implementation of House Bill 171 (HB171) for the 2025-2026 school year. HB171 updated graduation requirements for New Mexico students by removing certain graduation requirements, incorporating best practices, and increasing flexibility for students to be college and career ready. One key change of HB171 removed algebra 2 as a course requirement (although it must still be offered in all schools) and a former provision requiring students to demonstrate competency prior to graduation. HB171 also incorporated best practices by allowing students to use career and technical education (CTE) and work-based learning courses as substitutes for core credits in English, math, and science, while also requiring school districts and charter schools to develop a graduate profile and students to continue to complete Next Step Plans. Finally, high school students have the flexibility to determine an elective pathway that serves their interest and local school boards can recommend additional units that meet department academic content and performance standards.

Director Gutierrez introduced a new platform called Level All to host Next Step Plans that helps students in grades eight through 12 to plan for college, career, or the military. Level All offers students a comprehensive library for college and career planning, financial and career skill building, and leadership development. The Level All platform allows teachers and parents to be a part of the planning process.

Legislators discussed their concerns regarding changes made by HB171. Specifically, the removal of requiring students to demonstrate competency was a key discussion topic as it relates to economic development, job security, and attracting STEM companies to consider New Mexico students for employment. Additional discussion topics included clarification on capstone projects and a possibility for middle school students to be included in completing Next Step Plans.

**(4) Superintendent Panel.** Brian Luck, Superintendent, Roswell Independent School District (RISD); Lee White, Superintendent, Loving Municipal Schools; and Sharon Rowley, Superintendent, Portales Municipal Schools answered panel questions regarding structured literacy implementation, math instruction challenges, instructional time, at-risk funding impacts, superintendent workload, artificial intelligence in education, school board relations, and immigration enforcement protocols.

Superintendents highlighted key instructional challenges, including insufficient teacher preparation, and chronic absenteeism. They described innovative responses, such as Loving Schools' participation in a Cooperative Educational Services

(CES)-supported math pilot with embedded coaching, and advocated for the expanded use of technology to support learning recovery. Funding disparities were also discussed, with some districts benefiting from increased allocations for at-risk students while others faced funding declines.

The conversation also addressed the heavy emotional burden of school leadership, with superintendents sharing experiences of student trauma and mental health crises and calling for expanded support services and safer school environments. They emphasized accountability systems must extend beyond test scores to encompass the full scope of schoolwork. Emerging issues, such as the responsible use of artificial intelligence in education, were discussed, along with calls for stronger board relations and leadership stability. Superintendents recommended more flexible school board training options and clear communication from state agencies.

**5) Teacher Preparation and Support.** B. Lee Hurren, Ph.D., Dean of the College of Education and Technology at Eastern New Mexico University (ENMU), provided an update on the university's reading clinics, noting growth from 13 to about 80 participants and plans to expand to a year-round clinic serving children and adults. He also shared that ENMU is exploring math and numeracy clinics modeled after the reading program currently in place.

Dr. Hurren highlighted several teacher preparation programs at ENMU, including agriculture, food science, and kinesiology (AFKS), which offers training in areas such as adaptive physical education training, sports administration, career and technical education, educational studies, special education, elementary education, early childhood education, secondary education, residency in educational leadership, and counseling. He noted these programs are "growing and strengthening" due to new hires and faculty enthusiasm. However, ENMU continues to face challenges recruiting and retaining faculty in the counseling program due to a limited pool of qualified candidates and competing opportunities. ENMU plans to incorporate trauma training in its curriculum to provide educators with the skills to work with students who have experienced such events.

Members asked several questions focused on additions needed in teacher preparation, what curriculum updates have been made to align with the newly required structured literacy practices, whether there is a program to train teachers in the pedagogy of teaching a trade, trends in enrollment in colleges of education and teacher preparation programs, and a description of both the standard and alternative licensure programs. Members also asked if

ENMU incorporates instruction on community schools or adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).

Thursday, June 26

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

Voting: Senators William P. Soules, Mimi Stewart, and Candy Spence Ezzell; Representatives Debbie Sarinana, G. Andres Romero, Joy Garratt, Tanya Mirabal Moya

Advisory: Senator Anthony L. Thornton; Representatives Catherine J. Cullen, Yanira Gurrola

**(6) Roswell Summer Reading Program Site Visit.** Karla Stinehart, Director of Elementary Education, RISD; and Christy Surgett, Certified Academic Language Therapist, RISD, along with their team, led LESC committee members and staff on a site visit to observe the summer reading program at Del Norte Elementary School.

**7) New Mexico's Approach to a Comprehensive Literacy Framework.** Evan Chavez, Policy Analyst, LESC; Karla Stinehart, Director of Elementary Education, RISD; and Christy Surgett, Certified Academic Language Therapist, RISD, provided a historical overview of literacy initiatives throughout the state and nation, implementation considerations for literacy initiatives, and local efforts to strengthen literacy instruction in RISD.

Members asked about how other states are approaching individual reading plans, how RISD is serving English learners, how the district is encouraging parental involvement in its schools (and whether that involvement contributed to higher literacy outcomes), how educators build background knowledge among students to improve their comprehension skills, the impact of student retention, which states are properly implementing parent read at home plans, and for additional context on the student interventions provided by RISD.

**(9) Public School Insurance.** Daniel A. Estupiñan, Senior Fiscal Analyst II, LESC, presented to lawmakers on a proposal to apply an 80-20 cost share model for public school health insurance premiums. In this model, the employer would cover 80 percent of premiums, to the health benefits of public school employees. This proposal comes on the heels of Laws 2025, Chapter 80, which required state agencies to adopt the 80-20 model for their employees.

Mr. Estupiñan estimated the 80-20 model for public school employees would shift \$51.1 million in premium costs to school districts and charter schools, while saving employees with salaries

of \$50 thousand and above between \$2.3 thousand and \$4.8 thousand in yearly premiums.

Several members expressed support for the effort and called for the Legislature to enact the change. Additionally, members asked the New Mexico Public Schools Insurance Authority to outline their initiatives to support overall health and wellness.

**(10) Federal Funding Update.** Daniel A. Estupiñan, Senior Fiscal Analyst II, LESC, provided an update on federal funding changes. Mr. Estupiñan informed members that PED had received preliminary awards for Title I-A (low-income students), Title IV-A (student academic achievement), and Title V-B (rural education); and indicated that PED has not seen any significant fluctuations in preliminary awards. Daniel also informed members of the proposed new K-12 simplified funding formula issued by the Trump Administration, which would combine 18 grants into one \$2 billion discretionary grant resulting in a \$3.8 billion reduction for these programs. Chairman Soules reiterated the impact of reduction of federal funds on two key items pertaining to this formula: supporting effective instruction and education for homeless children and youths. Lastly, Mr. Estupinan reminded members of the urgency of expanding data infrastructure in New Mexico since the Institute of Education Sciences will be reduced by 67 percent.

The legislators discussed the importance of working closely with the New Mexico congressional delegation to ensure the state's priorities are conveyed and to ensure federal appropriations are sustaining key education items in New Mexico. The Chairman would also like to ensure that the state's education budget has ample time to respond to changes in federal funding.

Friday, June 27

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

Voting: Senators William P. Soules; Representatives Debbie Sarinana, G. Andres Romero, Joy Garratt, Tanya Mirabal Moya

Advisory: Representatives Catherine J. Cullen, Yanira Gurrola

**11) New Mexico Military Institute.** Colonel David West, Chief of Staff, New Mexico Military Institute (NMMI), provided an overview of NMMI's inclusion in the Public School Capital Outlay Act through the passage of Senate Bill 280 in 2025. He discussed the institute's funding sources, outlined its facility needs, and shared information on available legislative scholarships and educational programs, including the Early Commissioning Program. Colonel West also described the academic rigor of NMMI's curriculum

and explained the rationale behind the establishment of the Intermediate Preparatory Academy, NMMI's affiliated middle school.

Dr. Nina Leacock, Head of School, Intermediate Preparatory Academy, offered a description of the school, highlighting the student population it serves, key program elements, and the school's ongoing growth.

Members asked about the expansion of NMMI affiliated middle school campuses, enrollment in both the high school and junior college programs, and the Public School Facilities Authority's need to establish adequacy standards regarding NMMI's inclusion in the Public School Capital Outlay Act. Members also inquired about NMMI's goals related to this inclusion, enrollment application deadlines, and the availability of legislative scholarships. Additional questions focused on the enrollment of special education students, how discipline issues of all students are handled, trends and factors related to student disenrollment, academic performance requirements and how they are enforced, and the transportation services provided.

**12) PED Rules Review.** Conor L. Hicks, Policy Analyst I, LESC, provided an update on the adoption of New Mexico Administrative Code (NMAC) 6.30.19 and NMAC 6.35.2.

Members asked whether PED provides formal notification to school districts and charter schools of adopted rules and implementation considerations, how many purple star schools exist in the state, and whether they are primarily schools located near military installations.

**(13) Director's Report.** John Sena, Director, LESC, provided an update to LESC members on three items: the LESC June 2025 interim newsletter, the *Martinez-Yazzie* lawsuit, and personnel. Director Sena noted the state's improved graduation rate, which is now at 78 percent, the highest in over a decade. Subgroup analysis showed increases for Hispanic students, English learners, Native American students, and students with disabilities, though African American student graduation rates declined. Director Sena introduced the team's summer intern and teacher on special assignment (TOSA). Both expressed gratitude for the opportunity and spoke about the value of engaging with the legislative process.

Director Sena also shared a memo to PED outlining how LESC staff can support the *Martinez-Yazzie* remedial action plan process. Though not mandated by the court, LESC staff offered to assist with consultant selection, attend stakeholder engagement sessions, provide policy and fiscal analysis, and offer statutory review. Legislators expressed appreciation for the intern and TOSA's professionalism and reaffirmed the importance of maintaining

inter-agency presence and collaboration, especially during overlapping meetings.