

MINUTES
Legislative Education Study Committee
Santa Fe, New Mexico
November 19–21, 2025

Wednesday, November 19

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

Voting: Chair William P. Soules; Representatives Brian Baca, Joy Garratt, and Tanya Mirabal Moya; Senator Craig Brandt.

Advisory: Representatives John Block and Yanira Gurrola; Senators Anthony L. Thornton, Harold Pope, Linda Lopez, and Natalie Figueroa.

(1) Call to Order, Introductions, and Approval of November Agenda and October Minutes. Senator William P. Soules, Chair, LESC, called the meeting to order at 9:17 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.

(2) Public School Funding Formula (House Bill 63) Revisions Update. Daniel Estupiñan, Senior Fiscal Analyst II, LESC, and Sunny Liu, Principal Analyst, LFC, presented updates regarding the implementation of Laws 2025, Chapter 89 (House Bill 63, or HB63), which amended the public school funding formula during the 2025 legislative session. Mr. Estupiñan provided historical information on the Legislature's previous revisions to the state equalization guarantee (SEG), the state's public school funding formula, including an LESC working group that informed the SEG's revision of the at-risk index. Mr. Estupiñan reported approximately 70 percent of school districts and charter schools gained program units because of the changes to the SEG with losses in funding being limited to school districts with declining enrollment, and charter schools with disproportionately low numbers of low-income students and English learners. Mr. Liu updated the committee on hold harmless language in House Bill 2 allowing a general fund transfer of \$40 million in FY25 for the enactment of HB63.

Committee members discussed the issue of online schools, the transfer of students between school districts serving online students, and the funding of schools based on mobility and poverty levels.

(3) State Trends in Education Choice. Lauren Gendill, Policy Analyst, National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) provided a presentation on national trends in school choice. The presentation outlined national trends in education choice across public and private options, including charter schools, magnet programs, school district open enrollment, private-school vouchers, education savings accounts (ESAs), and tax-credit scholarship models. Ms. Gendill also reviewed recent legislation from other states, common program design features (eligibility, enrollment caps, allowable uses, etc.), and key administrative and authorizing practices such as admissions, oversight, and regulatory waivers. The presentation also highlighted fiscal considerations, how school choice programs interact with state and local funding formulas,

the balance of fixed and variable district costs, and broader budget impacts, providing context for evaluating proposed voucher or ESA legislation.

Members asked questions and requested additional information on several topics, including the role of nonprofit and for-profit charter management organizations; the factors driving families to seek alternatives to traditional public schools; policy considerations to address those factors; outcome data on various school-choice options; the extent to which innovative practices in charter schools can inform traditional public schools; and the capacity or willingness of charter schools to provide additional services for students with special needs.

(4) Strengthening Bilingual Education in New Mexico. Natasha Davalos, Policy Analyst, LESC; Marit Andrews, Principal Policy Analyst, LESC; Michael Rodríguez, Executive Director, Dual Language Education of New Mexico; and José Reyes, Bilingual Instructional Specialist, Gadsden Independent School District, presented to the committee about how bilingual education is offered in New Mexico with a focus on program effectiveness, teacher workforce development and incentives, funding structures, and supports for Spanish and Indigenous language programs.

Legislators raised concerns about the effectiveness and coherence of bilingual and dual language education in the state, particularly in light of persistently low student proficiency rates. While dual language programs are widely recognized in research as the most effective model, members noted many students remain enrolled in programs producing weak outcomes. The committee questioned how dual language models could be more intentionally integrated with statewide literacy initiatives, including the science of reading, and emphasized the need for greater program quality, consistency, and alignment across school districts and charter schools.

Members also focused on structural and workforce issues that might limit program success. Legislators questioned why teacher preparation programs tend to steer candidates toward teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) endorsements rather than bilingual endorsements. The committee discussed the role of incentives, such as stipends, in attracting and retaining bilingual teachers and asked whether administrators and superintendents receive sufficient training to sustain strong bilingual programs. Additional questions addressed the consistency of bilingual and TESOL stipends across districts, the status of past funding and instructional hour issues, and the impact of federal Title III requirements. Legislators also raised concerns about the availability of high-quality bilingual instructional materials—particularly for Native American languages—and whether the state should establish a centralized repository or partner with school districts and tribal entities. Underlying these discussions was a broader concern about the absence of a cohesive statewide strategy, including why New Mexico struggles to retain bilingual educators compared with other states and whether state policy should more deliberately prioritize and incentivize the most effective program models.

(5) Public Education Department School Accreditation Update. Yvonne Garcia, Deputy Secretary of Student Support Services, Public Education Department (PED) and Steven Heil, Lead Data Analyst, PED, updated committee members on PED's efforts to establish a statewide accreditation system for New Mexico public schools. Presenters outlined the project timeline, with full implementation expected by the fall of 2026, and discussed the 10 components in the accreditation process. Panelists also described ramifications for failing to meet accreditation criteria, reviewed feedback from pilot school districts and charter schools, and detailed the support systems in place to help schools struggling to submit annual accreditation components.

Members asked about the granularity of data collected as part of the accreditation process, sought clarity on the staffing needs for the project, and expressed support for efforts to move away from compliance-based accountability. Members also asked about the performance measures provided to schools as part of the accreditation process.

(6) Director's Report. John Sena, Director, LESC, presented personnel updates and the LESC November newsletter to the committee. In personnel updates, Director Sena introduced newly hired Research Assistant Julianna Baca and Policy Analyst Saraí Ortiz. When presenting the newsletter, Director Sena highlighted articles of interest and summarized how the committee's 2025 work aligns with the broader LESC roadmap.

Thursday, November 20

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

Voting: Chair William Soules, Vice Chair G. Andres Romero; Representatives Brian Baca, Joy Garratt, and Tanya Mirabal Moya.

Advisory: Senators Anthony L. Thornton, Harold Pope, Linda Lopez, Natalie Figueroa, and Gabriel Ramos; Representative Yanira Gurrola.

(7) Traditional Elementary Teacher Preparation and Clinical Practice. Annie Armatage, Senior Policy Analyst II, LESC, and Evan Chavez, Policy Analyst, LESC, presented an analysis of traditional kindergarten through grade eight (K-8) teacher preparation programs in New Mexico. LESC staff described continued demand across the state for highly skilled elementary and middle school teachers who are prepared to teach all the state's diverse learners, and an update on how well educator preparation programs (EPPs) are meeting this demand. Mr. Chavez presented a detailed comparison of coursework EPPs require all K-8 candidates to complete prior to graduation, noting substantial differences in how candidates are prepared to teach literacy and math, as well as in their preparation to serve the state's diverse learners. The presentation considered ways to strengthen student pre-clinical practice and clinical experiences. Finally, LESC staff presented policy recommendations and considerations for legislators, the Public Education Department (PED), EPPs, and school districts and charter schools.

Members asked whether specific content is covered in EPP courses, the mechanics of faculty clinical practice supervision, and whether online

programs are appropriate for teacher preparation. Members expressed a desire for more robust teacher preparation in math, special education, and teaching English learners.

(8) Literacy and STEM Institutes Update. Mariana Padilla, Cabinet Secretary, PED updated the LESC on the status of the literacy institute and preliminary timelines of the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) institute. Secretary Padilla noted PED, along with the General Services Department and the Higher Education Department, decided the location of the literacy institute will be near the University of New Mexico's (UNM) main campus in Albuquerque and construction is scheduled to begin December 26, 2025, with a completion date of November 30, 2026. Secretary Padilla noted New Mexico has mirrored its literacy center on others nationwide and conducted visits both virtually and in-person to literacy centers in Kansas, Mississippi, Florida, and Pennsylvania.

Members asked questions about the design decisions, particularly related to sustainability and accessibility. Members discussed the inclusion and priority for biliteracy for teacher development and learning but also had concerns regarding the center's location, in Albuquerque, due to limited reach for residents across the state.

(9) FY27 LESC Budget Proposals. Daniel Estupiñan, Senior Fiscal Analyst II, LESC, presented LESC staff's budget recommendations for fiscal year 2027 (FY27). Budget recommendations to the SEG include a 3 percent salary increase for educators, and funding for school districts and charter schools to increase the employer share of covering insurance premiums to an 80/20 split. Mr. Estupiñan noted the overall recommendation includes a 5.2 percent increase to the SEG, which is responsive to rapidly increasing costs.

Committee members discussed costs in transportation, teacher training, and components of the public education reform fund. LESC staff noted this recommendation would consider committee feedback and a final recommendation would be presented to members at the December LESC hearing.

(10) 2026 Session LESC Endorsed Legislation Proposals. John Sena, Director, LESC, discussed proposed legislation for committee endorsement ahead of the 2026 legislative session. Proposed bills include a measure to allow for the suspension of individual school board members, an increase to the employer share of public school employee health insurance premiums, and an amendment to the Attendance for Success Act to support students with severe medical conditions. In addition, Director Sena outlined proposed bills that would establish an Office of Special Education at PED, define allowable responses to student behavior, provide increased support for literacy instruction, strengthen teacher preparation and residency programs, and require mathematics methods coursework for individuals seeking standard or alternative teacher licensure at both the elementary and secondary levels.

Members asked clarifying questions about potential fiscal impacts, scope, and implications for school districts, charter schools, and the

state. Members directed staff to make revisions and present the revised proposals for endorsement at the LESC meeting in December.

Friday, November 21

The following voting, advisory, and guest members were present for a joint hearing of the LESC and the Legislative Finance Committee (LFC):

Voting LESC Members: Chair William Soules, Vice Chair G. Andres Romero; Representatives Brian Baca, Debbie Sariñana, Joy Garratt, and Tanya Mirabal Moya.

Advisory LESC Members: Senators Anthony L. Thorton, Harold Pope, Linda Lopez, Natalie Figueroa; Representatives Nathan Small, Patricia Roybal-Caballero, Yanira Gurrola, John Block, Diane Torres-Velasquez, Catherine Cullen, and Harlan Vincent.

(12) Public School Capital Outlay: State and Local Match Formula Study. Mark Montoya, Senior Policy Analyst II, LESC; Sarah Rovang, Ph.D., Program Evaluator, LFC; and Drew Weaver, Program Evaluator, LFC, presented an LESC and LFC joint study of the state/local match formula for public school capital outlay. The presentation reviewed the purpose and timeline of the study; the history of New Mexico's public school capital outlay system; key litigation such as the *Zuni* lawsuit; and how the state/local match formula has evolved since its inception. LESC and LFC staff described issues with the formula's factors and assumptions, increasing waiver requests, and recent legislative changes. Staff outlined the research plan, projected state capacity to fund school construction, and case studies showing how match rate calculations differ by school district characteristics and financial positions. Staff also discussed the impact of updated adequacy standards and increasing construction costs. The presentation concluded with considerations for further analysis, such as cost-control strategies and alternative ways to calculate district revenue and emphasized the need to establish clear goals for the capital outlay system and encouraged legislative input in this process.

Members asked questions and requested additional information on several topics, including: the total funds awarded for school projects and how many projects have stalled; the typical timeline for a school project from award to completion; the number of contractors in the state with bonding capacity to undertake school projects; how school replacement costs are planned for; if any mechanisms are used by school districts to save for construction costs; the process for planning new schools in collaboration with local communities; the funding process and prioritization for the construction of administrative buildings; how charter schools participate in the public school capital outlay system and how they generate revenue for projects; the potential to use shared building plans to reduce planning costs; and the preventive maintenance assistance available to school districts.

(13) Martinez-Yazzie Action Plan Presentation. John Sena, Director, LESC; Mariana Padilla, Cabinet Secretary, PED; and Sunny Liu, Principal Analyst, LFC, presented a joint update on the *Martinez-Yazzie* lawsuit

and action plan. Presenters began by providing background on the lawsuit, explaining in 2025, the court ordered PED to develop a remedial action plan using an outside expert to identify stakeholders, and invited LESC to participate. Mr. Liu outlined next steps, including the December 1, 2025 deadline for plaintiffs to file objections to the final plan. Director Sena described the LESC roadmap to address the findings of the lawsuit and broader education systems planning, explaining the roadmap continues to guide staff work plans and can also be a guidepost for the legislative body. Director Sena then explained LESC's advisory and technical role in the action plan process. Secretary Padilla concluded by outlining the components of the action plan and next steps for PED.

Committee members asked several questions, including how PED integrated feedback from tribal leaders and educators into the action plan, what metrics PED is using to indicate student success, future opportunities for community involvement, and how PED is considering student achievement beyond assessments.