




## B i t e - S i z e

 A joint group including staff from the Legislative Finance Committee, the Department of Finance and Administration, the Department of Taxation and Revenue, and the Department of Transportation, estimates recurring revenues for FY25 to reach \$13.051 billion, an increase of \$3.482 billion over recurring appropriations in FY24.

 Total revenues transferred to the lottery tuition fund for FY23 totaled \$50.6 million. Total revenue transferred to the lottery tuition fund increased for FY23 as compared with FY22, which saw a total of \$41.1 million in revenue.

 On August 29, New Mexico Attorney General Raul Torrez announced his intent to take over the *Martinez-Yazzie* litigation. Torrez said he hopes to help the state develop a definitive resolution and a potential settlement that will put the state into compliance.



# i n f o r m E D

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Representative G. Andrés Romero, Chair / Senator William P. Soules, Vice Chair / Gwen Perea Warniment, Director / September 2023

### From the Chair


Recent record-breaking budget projections have placed the public's focus on the question: does New Mexico have a plan to address the vast and diverse needs of our students? The short answer we at the LESC can offer is yes. However, such a short answer requires a longer explanation.

As a state, we must keep investing in adults who work with our students every day. One example of this includes providing stable funding to teacher residency programs that allow aspiring educators to work with a master teacher over the course of a school year to refine their skills before entering their own classrooms. We know the majority of educators leave the profession within 5 years. If we can better prepare our future educator workforce with practical experience and the opportunity to work under a veteran teacher, then we can better retain these future teachers.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, there have been rising concerns about the mental and behavioral health of students. To address this, the Legislature appropriated \$10 million to community schools and family engagement initiatives. To continue addressing student mental health issues, LESC is working on a plan to increase the school counselor workforce by supporting a pilot counselor and social worker residency programs. In doing so, we can lower the student to counselor ratio.

Finally, if we are going to address our students' needs, then they need to be at school regularly. We've heard from school districts who have hired attendance coaches with federal relief money. These attendance coaches often work with families to provide food, clothing, rental assistance, and other support to alleviate issues that may be keeping their child out of school. If we are to improve the wellbeing of our students, we must help address the needs of our communities. Our attendance teams are doing just that. Coupled with continued investments in career and technical education and secondary school redesign, the LESC is looking comprehensively at student engagement.

These are just some of the LESC's plans. We hope you can join us in this conversation.



## Educators Continue to Feel Overworked and Underpaid

A recent report found teachers feel overworked and underpaid, despite stress levels returning to pre-pandemic levels and slight improvements in job satisfaction in the past year.

The report, released by Rand and based on survey data, also found teachers work more hours per week – 53 versus 46 – than other working adults, and one out of every four hours was unpaid. Only 34 percent of teachers said their base pay was adequate, compared with 61 percent of working adults.

As lawmakers plan for the 2024 legislative session, they will continue to consider educator compensation as one way to improve recruitment and retention of educators, as well as ensure every classroom has a high quality teacher.

Educator pay in New Mexico has risen significantly over the past four years. The Legislature has increased teacher minimums while simultaneously providing funds for teacher salary increases. A beginning teacher in New Mexico now earns a minimum of \$50 thousand, while a level 3 teacher earns a minimum of \$70 thousand.

According to data from the National Education Association, the average teacher salary across the country during the 2022-2023 school year was estimated to be \$68,469. Average salary estimates vary greatly from state to state, ranging from \$92,307 in Massachusetts to \$48,530 in Mississippi.

New Mexico's average teacher salary was estimated to be \$63,580 during the 2022-2023 school year. That was higher than every bordering state, with Colorado coming closest at \$61,907. Average salaries will probably be higher for the 2023-2024 school year after the Legislature provided additional 6 percent increases for all school employees. School districts and charter schools were also allocated additional funds for new learning time requirements, most of which were intended to cover additional pay for educators.

Despite increased pay, it's unclear whether teacher pay has kept pace with inflation. When New Mexico implemented its three-tier salary structure during the 2003-2004 school year, teacher salary minimums were set at \$30 thousand, \$40 thousand, and \$50 thousand

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# Air Quality and Investments in HVAC in New Mexico Schools

Across the United States, many schools are grappling with excessive heat that, in some instances, has forced the closure of facilities or the early dismissal of students. These disruptions are becoming an increasingly common occurrence in schools with aging facilities, some of which do not have the resources to upgrade their heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems.

In New Mexico, school districts and charter schools have leveraged Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) distributions to make significant investments in improving indoor air quality and the overall state of public schools. As of February 2023, approximately \$49.5 million in federal Covid-relief funds has been invested in improving indoor air quality, with an additional \$21.2 million being used to improve the quality of facilities. According to the U.S. Department of Edu-

cation, there are significant resources still available to schools in New Mexico for continued facility improvements, including \$131.7 million from ESSER II and \$717 million from ESSER III.

In addition to federal relief funds, school districts have made use of state capital outlay funds to improve school ventilation systems. SB212 from the 2022 legislative session appropriated \$75 million from the public school capital outlay fund for school districts' local capital priorities. Of the \$75 million appropriation, 25 school districts spent a portion of their funds on HVAC repairs or upgrades, spending as much as \$28 million on these projects along with other local maintenance priorities.

During the 2023 legislative session, the legislature appropriated an additional \$65 million for prekindergarten, career and technical education, and other local maintenance priorities. Funding is also available via annual sys-

tems-based awards made by the Public School Capital Outlay Council (PSCOC), a program specifically designed to help schools repair failing building systems when needed.

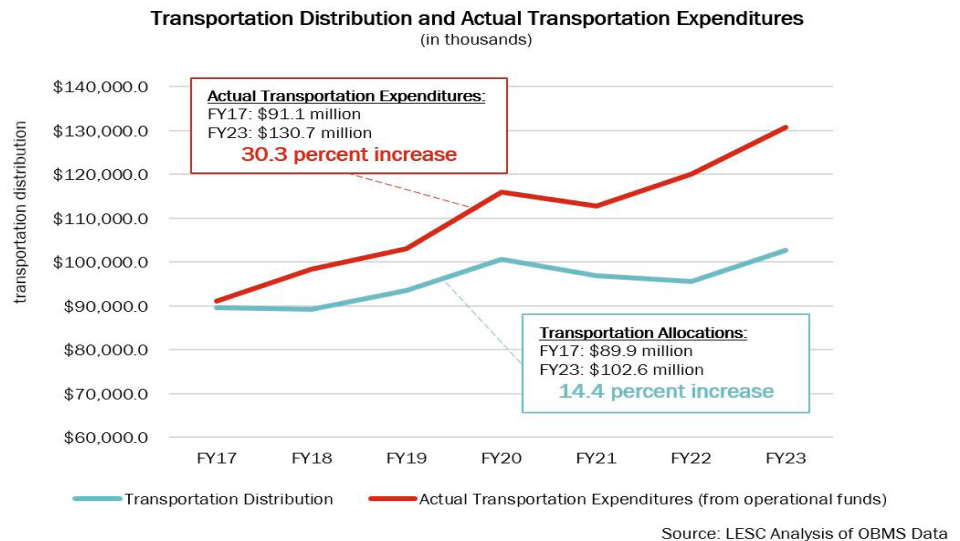
Despite significant funding made available for HVAC projects, little is known about the status of school air quality across New Mexico. Given the state's interest in improving air quality in schools, the legislature passed House Joint Memorial 7 during the 2023 legislative session, requesting the Public School Capital Outlay Oversight Task Force (PSCOOTF) to study public school HVAC systems. The goal of the task force's study is to examine HVAC systems and recommend a sustainable funding mechanism for school HVAC improvements. PSCOOTF has begun working on the study.

## Educators Feel Overworked

(continued from front)

for level 1, 2 and 3, respectively. According to a Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index calculator, \$40 thousand in 2003 has the same buying power as about \$67 thousand in 2023, \$7,000 less than the current Level 2 minimum.

According to the Rand report, though, pay is not the only factor contributing to teacher well-being or retention. The report notes both the amount of time teachers work and their overall working conditions as important to keeping teachers in the classroom.



## Transportation Costs Increasing Faster than Allocations

Allocations to school districts and charter schools from the transportation distribution have not kept pace with actual expenditures for student transportation. Allocations from the transportation distribution have increased in recent years, from \$89.9 million in FY17 to \$102.4 million in FY23, an increase of 14 percent. Over the same period of time, school districts and charter schools have increased the amount they spend on transportation (using operational funding) by 30 percent, from \$91.1 million to \$130.7 million.

During an ongoing LESC evaluation of the transportation distribution, many New Mexico school districts affirm that the cost of providing transportation has increased substantially, driven largely by highly competitive salaries for private-sector drivers, increasing fuel costs, and substantial behavioral needs on school buses. LESC staff are developing policy and budget recommendations to address outstanding issues in the transportation distribution.

## informed

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