Bite-Size

A 2026 report from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development found U.S. elementary teachers spend an estimated 908 hours annually on direct instruction, compared with an international average of 770 hours. At the middle school level, U.S. teachers spend 893 hours on instruction, compared with 710 internationally.

The Public School Facilities Authority requested a $17.2 million operating budget for fiscal year 2028 (FY28), a $5.9 million increase from FY27. Much of the proposed increase would expand staffing and organizational capacity to manage a growing number of school construction projects and strengthen project oversight.

In August, tribal nations and students amended a lawsuit challenging federal education restructuring and staffing reductions at the Bureau of Indian Education. The Pueblo of Isleta reported challenges with school program staffing and funding, including a notification that some childhood learning disability program funding was on hold.

informED

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Senator William P. Soules, Chair / Representative G. Andrés Romero, Vice Chair / John Sena, Director / October 2026

From the Chair

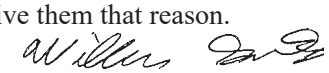
At our recent LESC hearing in Las Cruces, we heard a mariachi performance by students from Lynn Community Middle School. It was a wonderful start to the meeting and a reminder of the importance of arts and music in schools. Students said participating connected them to their cultural heritage and music beyond band. Like sports, music gives kids a reason to come to school. And, school achievement is more than just reading, math, and test scores. School enriches students' lives.

The Legislature has recognized the importance of arts, music, and physical education through school funding formula factors intended to give all elementary students these opportunities. Yet we've heard access still varies across the state.

This interim, LESC staff worked with districts and charter schools to examine access to art, music, PE, and libraries. They found some elementary students may never have a music teacher, while others have full-time music teachers, band, and orchestra. Opportunities often depend on district size or community wealth. Lynn's mariachi group was funded partly through the Hispanic Education Act, not regular school funding.

School communities should have flexibility to decide which programs to offer, but students' opportunities shouldn't depend on whether their families can afford them or whether schools have sufficient funding.

This month, we'll hear from four superintendents advocating state support for activities that matter to kids. Coupled with our staff work, it's clear we need to figure out how every student, regardless of zip code, can access art, music, PE, libraries, and other extracurricular opportunities. As my colleague Rep. Brian Baca always says, every student should have a reason to come to school. We can give them that reason.



Building a Bilingual Education System and Workforce

In 1912, a provision was written into the New Mexico Constitution requiring teachers to be proficient in both Spanish and English. In 1973, 61 years later, New Mexico enacted the Bilingual Multicultural Education Act (BMEA), which expanded this commitment to include languages spoken in New Mexico's pueblos, tribes, and nations. Today, challenges remain in implementing bilingual programs consistently, supporting the bilingual educator workforce, and aligning funding with program needs.

The Legislature continues to strengthen support for bilingual multicultural education programs (BMEPs). However, LESC staff research, previous Legislative Finance Committee (LFC) evaluations, and ongoing stakeholder input indicates the state has not fully met the framework established in the BMEA. In school year 2024-2025 (SY25), school districts and charter schools operated 525 programs statewide.

To improve bilingual education in New Mexico, LESC staff convened a working group in the 2026 interim. Bilingual education experts and practitioners from higher education, tribal communities, school districts, charter schools, and local nonprofits, alongside LESC members, met five times to examine program models, educator preparation, funding, and language proficiency.

While the state has worked to strengthen and promote bilingual education, working group feedback revealed inconsistencies in language proficiency benchmarks and staffing capacity, along with concerns about how bilingual funds are used. These issues limit understanding of programs at the local level and affect expansion of bilingual programs statewide.

A major challenge to New Mexico's bilingual education workforce is the distribution of teachers, rather than simply a shortage of qualified candidates. In SY25, 2,132 teachers held bilingual endorsements, although many did not teach in bilingual programs. Confusion about who qualifies for financial incentives also presents challenges. Bilingual educators routinely report taking on "invisible work," including translating materials and developing lessons, without compensation or recognition, contributing to recruitment and retention challenges.

Recognizing that bilingual education programs vary in intensity

(continued on back)

Examining Teacher Workload and Professional Work Time

The most vital in-school factor influencing positive long-term outcomes for students is highly effective teaching. In New Mexico, the demand for effective teachers remains high, but teachers face higher instructional demands than both national and international peers. In a sample collected by LESC staff, elementary teachers provided an estimated 1,032 instructional hours annually, compared with 908 nationally. One in four New Mexican children also lives in poverty, and the state serves higher percentages of English learners and students with disabilities than national averages, factors contributing to increased teacher workload. In the 2024-2025 school year (SY25), data showed 43 percent of students scored proficient in English language arts and only 25 percent in math.

To examine how to recruit and retain more effective teachers in New Mexico, the Legislature adopted House Memorial 47 (HM47) during the 2026 legislative session, requesting LESC to study teacher workloads. LESC staff research found expectations for teachers have expanded over several decades. In addition to delivering high-quality instruction, teachers must prepare differentiated lessons, analyze student data, engage with families, and provide individualized support. Teachers need adequate compensated time for these noninstructional tasks to reduce the risk of burnout and attrition.

State requirements impacting teacher workload have also increased. Requirements from the 1980s through 2025 were generally moderate in reach, while those enacted in 2026 were broader. New requirements primarily concern literacy and math assessments, intervention plans, and a statewide individualized education program system. Although intended to support student learning, these requirements take time to implement.

Adequate staffing could give teachers more noninstructional time during the workday. Staff shortages can require teachers to take on additional duties, reducing time for preparation and collaboration. New Mexico does not guarantee teachers a minimum amount of compensated noninstructional time, so schedules vary across school districts and charter schools. Other practices to strengthen support include protecting planning time, expanding job-embedded professional development, and the adoption of high-quality instructional materials.

LESC staff will present findings from the HM47 work at the committee hearing on October 15, 2026, at the Rio Rancho Public Schools Administration Building in Rio Rancho, New Mexico.

Bilingual Education

(continued from front)

and need, LESC staff developed stipend options for kindergarten through 12th-grade (K-12) bilingual-endorsed educators working in these programs. Based on working group feedback and additional input from school districts and charter schools, two options would use existing bilingual funds for stipends tied to program intensity; a third could require additional funding.

LESC staff will present a full report and findings at the committee hearing on October 15, 2026, at the Rio Rancho Public Schools Administration Building in Rio Rancho, New Mexico.

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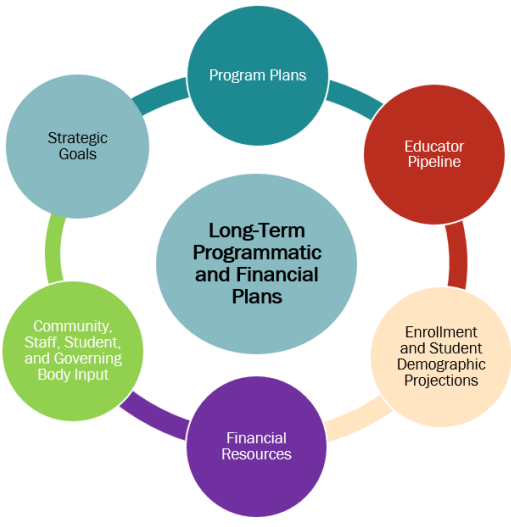
Promoting Long-Term Financial Planning in New Mexico Schools

Figure 1: Recommended Components of Long-Term Programmatic and Financial Plans



Source: LESC Files

At its October hearing, LESC staff will present recommendations for strengthening long-term programmatic and financial planning in New Mexico's public schools. The figure above illustrates a framework recommended by an LESC advisory group that brings together strategic goals, program plans, educator pipelines, enrollment projections, financial resources, and community input.

LESC staff found existing planning requirements are often disconnected, duplicative, and focused on short-term goals. The advisory group recommended replacing the annual Educational Plan with a long-term framework that aligns programming, staffing, and budgets with measurable improvements in student outcomes over several fiscal years.