

Bitesize

 Schools with smaller populations of low-income students are about twice as likely to get an A in the state's school grading system than schools with high numbers of impoverished students. The latest grading report shows schools with 80 percent or more of the students eligible for free or low-cost lunch get As half as often as other schools.

 The average ACT score for New Mexico high school graduates was 19.9 in 2016, compared with the national average of 20.8. Both composite scores were down 0.2 percent from a year ago. The scores showed 53 percent hit the benchmark for college and career readiness in English, 39 percent met the mark for reading, 31 percent for math, and 28 percent for science. About 70 percent of New Mexico graduates took the ACT in 2016.

 Health insurance premiums for most public school employees will increase by more than 7 percent in October. The Public School Insurance Authority, which covers all public schools except those in the Albuquerque district, said the increase is the result of more high-dollar claims, higher provider rates, and federal Affordable Care Act requirements. Albuquerque premiums will not increase, although deductibles and copayments will be up.



informed ED

a publication of the Legislative Education Study Committee

Representative Dennis J. Roch, Chair / Senator John M. Sapien, Vice Chair / Rachel S. Gudgel, Director / September 2016

From the Chairman

By the Numbers

With so many numbers thrown at schools – from PARCC scores to school grades to teacher evaluations – it's no wonder public school educators are suspicious of data. Certainly, misapplication or the purposeful misinterpretation of statistics can be used, as a more-than-50-year-old book told us, to "lie."

But data, interpreted correctly and used appropriately, is a tremendous tool. Data can help a teacher reach a child with a learning weakness, a school effectively assign faculty and staff, a district select a curriculum, or a state education department pick the most cost-effective program.

Although educators, parents and students alike complain about the hours spent on testing, short-cycle assessments can help a teacher see which concepts a student has mastered and where a student, or a class, needs more focus.

Data on student truancy, poverty, and transience has helped identify the factors that put a school at risk of failure. Similarly, data that shows a school is a high performer despite being at risk can point the way to best practices.

Following the students who have participated in early literacy, drop-out prevention and other intervention programs can reveal which programs pay off and which are a waste of money.

There's no doubt that New Mexico educators now have the data to make a difference as they shape the futures of New Mexico children. We owe it to the taxpayer to make the best use of every educational dollar. But more importantly, we owe it to our children to use every tool we have to provide them with the best education possible.

Representative Dennis J. Roch

Proposed Pension Rule Could Be Costly

A proposal to bring many substitute teachers into the pension plan could cost school districts millions of dollars, might be difficult to administer, and could make it harder to hire substitutes, LESC analysis indicates.

The Educational Retirement Board has proposed including in the pension plan any substitute teacher who works more than quarter time, a move the Albuquerque Public Schools estimates would cost the district almost \$750,000 and Rio Rancho school officials calculate would cost \$60,000. Together, those districts serve about a third of the public school students in New Mexico.

The committee is scheduled to hear about the proposal at 10:30 a.m. on September 14 during their hearing in Santa Fe.

Currently, the Educational Retirement Board excludes substitutes from the pension plan but defines a substitute as an employee who is filling in day-to-day for an employee who is temporarily absent. Employees filling vacant positions, even if

it is for a teacher who is on extended leave of absence, are not considered substitutes.

The proposed rule would not differentiate between short-term and long-term substitute teachers and would require pension coverage for any substitute working more than 0.25 percent of a full-time position.

In public comments to the proposal, Las Cruces Public Schools said the change would create an administrative burden, comments echoed by school officials in Rio Rancho. Farmington Municipal Schools said they oppose the change.

LESC staff say in a brief prepared for the hearing the statewide financial impact is hard to accurately estimate because it is unclear how many substitute teachers are working more than quarter time or how many are already making contributions under current rules.

However, ERB recently began requiring school districts to report data on all teachers, not just those eligible for the pension plan, and

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PEC/PED Tension Undermines Charter Oversight

The Public Education Commission and Public Education Department should consider immediate mediation to resolve “chronic dysfunction” that impairs the state’s ability to oversee PEC-chartered schools, an evaluation by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers concludes.

John Hedstrom, vice president for policy and advocacy for the association, told the committee during a hearing in August the conflict arises because, while the commission is the authorizing agency, the department secretary can override its decisions, and it relies on

the department for staff support.

He said more clearly delineated roles would not solve the problem and the Legislature should consider amending state law to designate just one of the agencies as the authorizing body.

The 10-member elected Public Education Commission was created by constitutional amendment in 2003 as an advisory board to the Public Education Department secretary. It became the state authorizer of school charters when state law was amended in 2006 to allow for both school-district-chartered and state-chartered charter schools.

In the first of four recommendations in its formal report, the association recommends commission and department staff work to overcome “tension ... so high that it undermines both entities’ capacity to make good decisions about charter schools” with mediation or other intervention for the immediate issues and “develop a long-term plan for resolving chronic dysfunctions.”

The association also finds the commission’s bar for approving charter schools is too low and recommends the commission establish clearer and higher standards, approving a charter only when a school demonstrates it is likely to succeed.

The commission should also address a finding that it “struggles to hold schools” accountable by adopting rules that clearly define the academic and financial requirements for charter renewal and only granting renewal to schools that meet those requirements and are in good standing with their authorizers.

The association finds the commission “struggles to hold schools” accountable and generally has no regulations authorizing its decision-making or clarifying its relationship with the Charter Schools Division. However, while the association recommends the commission adopt rules, the commission does not have the rulemaking authority.

Pension Proposal Impact Unclear

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might have the information needed to make an accurate projection when that information is available.

The brief notes some districts, particularly in rural New Mexico, already have trouble recruiting substitutes and lowering their take-home pay by withholding a pension contribution might make finding substitutes more difficult or force the districts to pay more for substitute teachers.

A survey by LESC staff found the daily rates for substitute teachers range from \$55 to \$115, depending on the school district and whether the substitute is a high school graduate, college graduate, or certified teacher. The median daily pay is \$65 for a high school graduate and \$80 for a certified teacher.

The employee contribution to the pension fund is 7.9 percent to 10 percent of the employee’s pay, significantly impacting take-home pay. Albuquerque Public Schools estimates the new

rule would require it to withhold more than \$420,000 from substitute teacher paychecks.

An LESC staff review of 22 states that, like New Mexico, have separate retirement systems for educational employees, show a handful of those states specifically address substitute teacher membership. A few, including Oklahoma, specifically exclude substitute or temporary teachers, while California, Texas, and other states require substitutes to become members after a certain number of days of service.

Bouncing Truancy Rates Land at FY12 Levels

While the 10 percent truancy rate among middle school students in FY15 was an

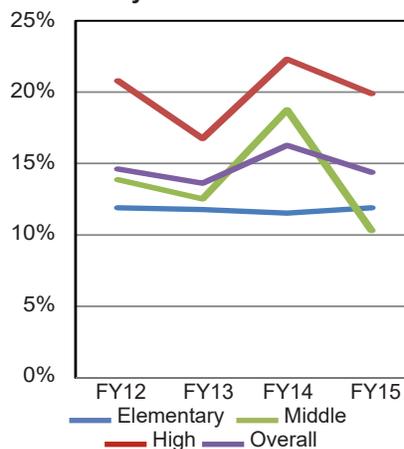
almost 10 point drop from the rate in FY14 and close to 5 points below the rate from FY12, the rate for students in elementary and high school are essentially unchanged from FY12.

Research consistently links high truancy with a student’s risk of dropping out, and habitually truant students are more likely to be at risk of failing because of poverty and family instability.

The Public Education Department operates an “early warning system” that flags low attendance, poor academic achievement and poor behavior. Currently, the system is tied only to the student counts from the 40th, 80th, and 120th day of the school year, but managers are working on a system that works in real time.

Districts may use the system at their own discretion and many have their own systems.

Public School Truancy Trends by School Level



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September 2016

Published monthly in the interim by:
Legislative Education Study Committee
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(505) 986-4591 www.nmlegis.gov/lesc