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The Public Education Department (PED) submitted its FY28 agency budget request on September 1. In total, PED is requesting a general fund appropriation of \$31.8 million, a \$4.6 million increase over FY27, or about 17 percent. A large amount of the funding request is attributed to the rise of health insurance and risk premium increases.

LESC staff continues to monitor the *Martinez-Yazzie* education sufficiency lawsuit. On September 4, parties convened in the Santa Fe District Court to present oral arguments regarding the plaintiffs' objections to PED's remedial plan, PED's response to the plaintiffs' objections, and additional arguments. Judge Wilson announced he would provide a formal written decision.

The NMSIC reported the land grant permanent fund reached \$41 billion on August 18, an increase of \$2.8 billion from the end of 2025. The balance of the early childhood education and care fund is currently \$11.2 billion, an increase from \$11 billion at the end of 2025. The higher education trust fund reached \$1.1 billion, an increase from \$1 billion at the end of 2025.



informED

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

From the Chair

Last week, PED released assessment results from the 2025-2026 school year. Students made incremental improvements in both reading and math, but fell short of the kind of progress we saw last year, when statewide reading proficiency rates jumped 5 percentage points.

While we'd love to see more and faster improvement, the results continue to signal the importance of continuing the efforts the state has made over the last few years. We've invested millions in comprehensive literacy training and materials, revamped the way teacher candidates get in-class experience before getting a classroom of their own, and, recently passed legislation to ensure future teachers get adequate preparation to teach math.

We've also provided increased funding for career and technical education, internships for high school students, and other work-based learning initiatives. These efforts are aimed at engaging students to combat chronic absenteeism, and they have been paired with an increased emphasis on student behavioral and mental health.

To see dividends from those investments, however, we need to be patient. Just like savings bonds take time to mature, research shows effective change in education can take five to seven years. We've started to see some of those returns, but the biggest results may be yet to come.

International events over the last year have resulted in increased oil and gas prices; the silver lining is New Mexico's budget will benefit from rising revenues. We are in the fortunate position to be able to continue and, potentially, increase our investments to improve our schools. LES C remains committed to staying the course for the benefit of New Mexico's students.

William P. Soules

Studying Screen Use in Elementary Classrooms

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, the use of technological devices for instruction and assessment has increased in elementary classrooms across the country. In New Mexico, families and educators have raised concerns about the amount of time students are spending on devices throughout the school day, and whether tasks could be completed through more developmentally appropriate and hands-on methods.

House Memorial 2 (HM2), signed during the 2026 legislative session, requested LES C to conduct a comprehensive study on the use of screen time for instruction and assessment in elementary classrooms. After the committee approved the HM2 plan within LES C's larger interim work plan in April, LES C staff convened a task force to study the impacts of screen time. The HM2 task force included families, educators, administrators, high school and postsecondary students, New Mexico Parent Teacher Association members, LES C members, and PED staff.

The task force held meetings in June, virtually and in person at the New Mexico State Capitol. The group worked to review current research and legislation on screen time in the United States,

and conduct analysis of state and school district policy navigating screen use in elementary school classrooms.

The task force learned state legislatures are introducing a variety of measures to regulate the use of technology in the classroom. Introduced legislation includes efforts to reduce potential harm, strengthen safeguards, and equip young people with skills to navigate digital environments safely.

In 2026, five states took legislative action addressing school-directed instructional screen use, including New Mexico's HM2. New Mexico was the only state to pass a memorial convening a legislative task force to study the issue. Other state measures from Alabama, Iowa, Tennessee, and Utah varied from strict limits on all daily screen time in elementary classrooms to requiring school districts and charter schools to implement local policies to reduce unnecessary screen time.

In July and August, a smaller focus group of task force members met virtually to establish draft potential recommendations for PED, the Legislature, and public school districts and charter schools to consider. In late August and early

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Building a Teacher Career Continuum in New Mexico

Longstanding research has shown teachers have the greatest impact on student outcomes of any school-related factor. However, in New Mexico, the primary professional advancement pathways for highly effective educators is an administrative pathway, through which educators become a school or district administrator. In practice, few principals in New Mexico have capacity to spend much time in classrooms as instructional leaders.

An instructional leadership professional advancement pathway could allow New Mexico to leverage highly effective educators to improve instructional quality while also providing career advancement opportunities that do not require teachers to leave the classroom. To better understand how to design and implement an instructional leadership professional advancement pathway in New Mexico, LESC staff partnered with

the Thornburg Foundation—a local philanthropic organization—and the Learning Policy Institute—a national, nonpartisan research organization—to host an advisory group to examine the issue. The educator career continuum advisory group included members from the Public Education Department, the Early Childhood Education and Care Department, the Higher Education Department, the Department of Workforce Solutions, school district leaders, principals, teachers, collective bargaining units, educator preparation programs, the Legislative Finance Committee, and other state education partners.

The advisory group met five times over the 2026 interim with the goal of arriving at a field-informed consensus for how educator career pathways should be built in New Mexico with a focus on the design principles of an instructional leadership pathway. While

New Mexico could benefit from a more holistic educator career continuum inclusive of additional pathways and roles, the advisory group focused its work on adult-facing instructional leadership roles.

The advisory group coalesced around several key elements of an instructional leadership pathway. The advisory group agreed New Mexico would benefit from creating formal structures to leverage teacher expertise to improve schoolwide instructional quality and to provide highly effective teachers a professional advancement pathway that allows them to remain in the classroom setting.

An LESC staff brief, including recommendations from the educator career continuum advisory group, will be presented to LESC on September 23 in Anthony, New Mexico.

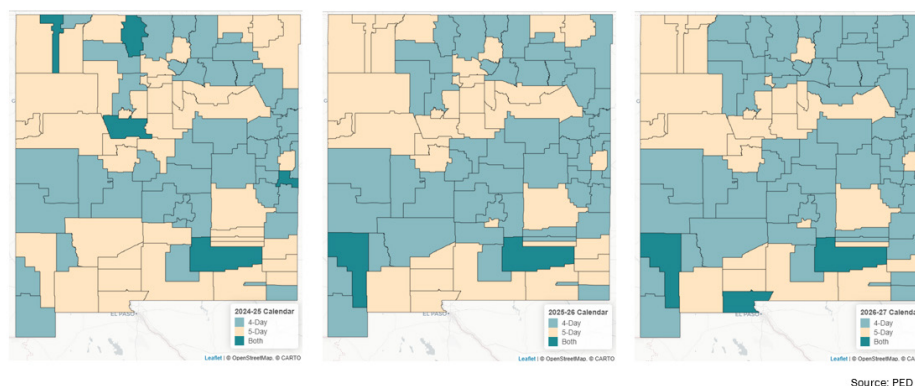
Screen Use

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September, task force members provided feedback on draft recommendations, and finalized the HM2 Screen Use Legislative Task Force Report.

LESC staff and a panel of HM2 task force members will present the legislative task force report and recommendations for the Legislature, PED, and school districts and charter schools at LESC's hearing on September 22 at Gadsden High School in Anthony, New Mexico.

Four-Day School Week Calendars in New Mexico



The maps above show the continued growth of four-day school calendars across New Mexico. LESC staff analysis of Public Education Department data shows the number of school districts and charter schools using four-day calendars increased from 57 in the 2025-2025 school year (SY25) to 85 in SY27 while the number using five-day calendars declined from 126 to 104. Some districts operate schools on both schedules.

The trend extends nationally. The Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) reports more than 2,100 public schools across 26 states used four-day schedules in SY25, up from about 1,600 schools across 24 states six years earlier.

Research continues to examine the effects on student learning, instructional time, staffing, attendance, and costs. On September 23, LESC staff will present a brief on four-day school weeks alongside national researchers and education experts, including the Director of Growth Modeling and Data Analysis to discuss the research and its implications for New Mexico.

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