

B i t e s i z e



The transfer of \$5 million to the instructional materials fund for public schools from a similar state fund for private schools is on hold while the state Supreme Court reviews a prior ruling. The high court had ruled the appropriation of public money to private schools is unconstitutional but is reviewing that decision in light of a U.S. Supreme Court decision that found a Missouri church has the same right as any charity to seek state money for nonreligious purposes.



Deming High School students in June took first place at a national engineering contest for the second year in a row, while Chaparral Middle School students placed second in their category. In the MESA (Mathematics Engineering Science Achievement) USA National Engineering Design Competition, competitors must build a programmable arm capable of screwing a nut onto a bolt and other tasks. Students must also write a technical paper and do a 10 minute presentation.



Parents of a Mora student have named the Public Education Department and Mora Independent Schools in a legal petition seeking due process for the child they say was denied adequate access to a public education. The parents allege the state does not have a plan to meet the needs of autistic students or support school district efforts to meet those needs. The petition seeks an evaluation for the student and autism-related professional development for staff.



i n f o r m E D

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Senator Mimi Stewart, Chair / Representative Stephanie Garcia Richard, Vice Chair / Rachel S. Gudgel, Director / July 2017

From the Chairwoman

Global Thinking

It's not hard to find support for the argument that good schools are critical to economic development. In dozens of surveys, business owners say an educated and skilled workforce is their highest priority – higher than government incentives and low taxes. A state needs good schools if it wants to attract and grow business.

Indeed, the Legislature has made public education funding a priority for several administrations and education “reform” has been a hot topic in the national and local education conversations for at least two decades.

But, for all the attention, schools have failed to progress. New Mexico schools continue to lag the nation and U.S. schools are losing ground against schools in other countries. Results from the Programme for International Student Assessment, which measures reading, mathematics, and science literacy in 15-year-old students from more than 70 countries, show U.S. students, once among the best in the world, are average in reading and science and below average in math. To be clear, U.S. schools aren't deteriorating; they are just not keeping pace with those in many other countries.

Among the differences between U.S. schools and those with more successful education systems are intensive teacher education programs, educational governance less vulnerable to politics, educational funding independent of a community's wealth, strong supports for struggling students, and coherent systems of education that emphasize critical thinking over testing.

Marc Tucker, who will appear before the committee on July 27, makes the point in his book *Surpassing Shanghai* that low-skill jobs, the kinds that have been “off-shored” to lower-wage workers in other countries, are quickly disappearing as more tasks are automated, but knowledge-based jobs can't be automated. Very soon, the countries winning on education will be those best positioned to win in a global economy.

It's time policymakers here quit looking for quick fixes for schools and adopt the comprehensive commitment to education that has led to meaningful improvement in other countries. If we aren't willing to learn from the successes of other countries, we are destined to fall behind, on education and the economy.

Senator Mimi Stewart

Literacy Fund Changes Stymie Administrators

Eligibility criteria for the administration's key early reading support program has changed four times in the program's six years and the number of grants awarded has bounced up and down, frustrating school administrators who say they can't develop effective programs without some predictability, an LESC hearing brief says.

In the first year of the program the Public Education Department calls Reads To Lead, the agency used a competitive process to distribute the grants for reading specialists, learning materials, professional development, and other supports for kindergarten-through-third-grade students.

For the next three years, FY14 through FY16, the department provided grants to any school district or charter school that applied and met minimum criteria.

However, when the program seemed to have only a small impact on student reading skills, the department in FY17 returned to a competitive process and then changed the eligibility criteria again for FY18, the brief says.

As a result, the number of dis-

tricts and charters receiving grants was 25 in the first year, more than 130 in years three and four, and down to 63 in FY18.

Over the six years of the program, the state has appropriated a total of \$77 million to early reading supports, with \$44.6 million distributed in grants to school districts and charter schools, LESC numbers show.

The department has used the rest for statewide efforts, including about \$5.7 million in FY17 and FY18 for statewide literacy specialists and a literacy coordinator.

The committee is scheduled to hear about the effectiveness and implementation of reading supports spending at 3 p.m. July 26 at their meeting in Church Rock.

Lawmakers have raised concerns that the department does not include in its grants criteria any requirement that programs target low-income students and others who would benefit the most from interventions.

Although the provision did not survive the 2016 legislative process, the budget bill for that year initially included language requiring—
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PED Takes Next Step on ESSA Path

The Public Education Department has responded to the almost 50 points in the U.S. Department of Education review of its education plan, department managers say, and should hear back in about three months whether the plan has been accepted.

New Mexico was one of 16 states and Washington D.C. to be among the first to submit the accountability plan required under the Every Student Succeeds Act, or ESSA, the 2015 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that governs federal Title I grants for high-poverty schools and other major federal programs.

Most of the items in the federal review of the New Mexico plan asked for more detail and greater clarification of the department's policies.

Department officials presented the unrevised plan to the committee during hearings in June.

LESC staff in their analysis of the

plan noted the new law provides states with much greater flexibility in complying with federal law, particularly on school assessments and student testing.

However, the state's ESSA plan is essentially an update of the PED's 2011 strategic plan, an LESAC analyst testified.

PED administrators said they were already in compliance with many of the requirements of ESSA under a waiver from the stricter rules of the prior reauthorization, the No Child Left Behind Act, and did not need to change many policies.

The New Mexico plan got top marks from a panel of educators, advocates, and others put together by Bellwether Education Partners, an education policy nonprofit that promotes the Common Core academic standards, spars with teacher unions, and strongly supports "school choice," the controversial policy that provides

parents with publicly funded "vouchers" for the tuition costs of private schools as one alternative to traditional public schools.

The Bellwether panel noted the New Mexico plan was well-written and clear. However, the review has been criticized for concluding New Mexico's school grading system, which department managers have struggled to explain, is easy to understand for parents and the public.

The New Mexico accountability plan outlines the state's use of existing standardized testing and a tool for assessing English proficiency, a teacher evaluation system that will add a teacher report card, and an intervention plan for failing schools that requires districts and charters to close the school, redesign and restructure its programs, reopen it as a charter school, or offer choices that include private schools and online learning.

The plan also includes short-term and long-term goals, including a three-year plan to increase the share of students performing at grade level to 50 percent, increase the high school graduation rate to 80 percent, and decrease the share of college freshmen from New Mexico who need remedial classes to 25 percent.

Currently, 20 percent of students are proficient in math and 27 percent are proficient in reading, the high school graduation rate is 71 percent, and 43 percent of college freshmen from New Mexico need remediation.

Change Only Constant for Program

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ing some of the reading initiative money be directed specifically to students "who are socioeconomically disadvantaged and who are not proficient in reading."

Although the department returned to a competitive process that year, it did not include criteria concerning low-performing schools or low-income students.

The Legislative Finance Committee earlier this year recommended moving \$10 million for reading supports under department management to the fund distributed to public schools through a formula that considers the specific needs of each school and its students. Ultimately, the Legislature appropri-

ated \$4 million through the funding formula, and reduced the early literacy grant program by \$2 million.

Additional concerns have been raised about inconsistency in the pay for the literacy specialists and coordinator. Between FY17 and FY18, the budgets for the salaries for the positions were cut 12 percent to 15 percent, LESAC analysis indicates.

K-3 Plus Funding and Students Served

The number of students scheduled to be served by the K-3 Plus extended school year program this summer was down 28 percent, even though appropriations were up.

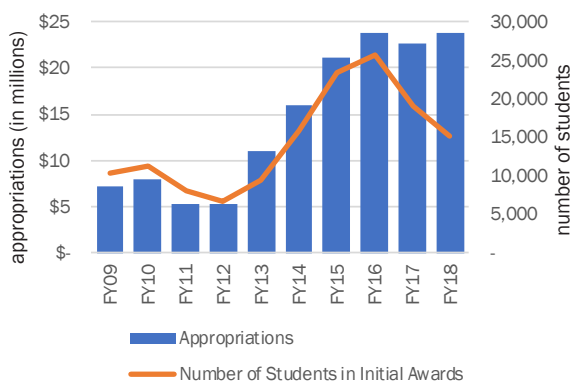
The FY18 budget included a 4 percent increase for the program for low-income, low-performing students; however, spending in FY17 was inflated by the use of funds left over from prior years, resulting in

an actual decrease in the amount available in FY18.

Policymakers outside the

Public Education Department were surprised by the drop and concerned that late notification left families scrambling for summer child programs.

Funding for the program, demonstrated to be effective, has increased 350 percent since FY12.



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