

B i t e s i z e

 The Public Education Department plans to use a \$20 million federal grant to create local literacy connection teams to integrate evidence-based literacy programs in district schools and charter schools. The department anticipates the grant, to be distributed over three years, would pay for services for 30,000 students in 12 districts and charter schools.

 July revenues for the lottery tuition fund totaled almost \$3.2 million, 4 percent more than June but 26 percent less than July 2016. August revenues totaled more than \$4.8 million. Year-to-date proceeds total almost \$8 million, about 12 percent more than the \$7.05 million in proceeds from the same period last year.

 The Public School Capital Outlay Oversight Task Force is considering including teacherages, housing for teachers and school administrators on school sites, in the capital outlay funding process. Many rural school districts use teacherages as recruitment tools. The Public School Facilities Authority is compiling a report on the age, use, and location of an estimated 598 teacherages in the state.



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 / October 2017

From the Chairwoman

Political Education

The biggest problem with the Public Education Department's suspended push to adopt politically tweaked science education standards was the potential impact on New Mexico's students and its education system, but that wasn't the only problem.

Adoption of the weakened standards, which the department said it would rewrite after hours of testimony from hundreds of opponents, would have left New Mexico children unprepared to compete for jobs in STEM – science, technology, engineering, and math – and would have dragged New Mexico schools further behind.

The department has announced it will restore evolution, the age of the earth, and climate change to the standards – great, if it follows through – but that was only the biggest problem. The department must still answer for the obvious political influence in their writing, the undisclosed process that led to their proposal, and their rushed public airing.

Let's be clear: The department cannibalized the national Next Generation Science Standards – the collaborative effort of educators in 26 states and numerous national science organizations – because the exclusions conveniently line up with the governor's politics. The department argued the removal of those scientifically sound principles, along with the baffling insertion of oil and gas promotion, would give districts flexibility – a disingenuous argument from a department that has implemented mandatory, significantly disputed school and teacher evaluation systems.

The politically adjusted standards, called the NM STEM-Ready Science Standards, were the product of an unexplained process and developed despite overwhelming endorsement of the Next Gen standards from a department-appointed panel of educators and scientists four years ago, a department-convened focus group of around 85 educational professionals two years ago, and the Legislature this year. (The governor vetoed the bipartisan bill.) In addition, while the Next Gen standards have been publicly available since 2013, the NM STEM-Ready proposal was released last month and got one public hearing.

New Mexico badly needs to update its science education curriculum, last updated in 2009 and unfit for today's students. It should, in fact, adopt the strongly endorsed, inexplicable ignored, Next Gen standards, as written. Unfortunately, the process so far clearly shows petty politics have taken precedence over sound education.

Senator Mimi Stewart

Local Districts Question PED Special Ed Figures

School district officials say the Public Education Department has been unclear on how it concluded local school agencies underspent from \$1,900 to \$32,000 on special education, LESC analysts report.

The department notified some school districts in September that it had reconciled local special education spending from FY11 through FY15 and found some shortfalls on special education “maintenance of effort” spending, the level of spending needed to draw federal funds.

It is unclear if the department reconciled charter school spending. While more than 50 school districts told LESC staff they received notices, none of the charter schools LESC contacted had been notified.

While the shortfalls are relatively small, school district special education directors have expressed concerns over inconsistencies in department calculations of local MOE and poor communication on how it calculated the liabilities. The delay in reconciling special education funding over several years, contradictory information in past years, and outstanding MOE issues at the state level also

contribute to confusion.

LESC is scheduled to hear a report on the department's reconciliation and district concerns at 9 a.m. on October 24.

To comply with Part B of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA-B, local agencies must spend the same amount overall or the same amount per child, no matter if the source of funds is state or local.

Under federal rules, local school agencies can reduce special education spending in certain circumstances, with conditions including certain changes in personnel and student enrollment and need. Federal rules require state officials to monitor local compliance and determine if the local school agency is eligible for an exception.

The department's September notices to districts did not contain details on the causes or fiscal years of the liabilities or how districts could confirm the amounts. Although the department indicated it would send a follow-up letter with an explanation the first week of October, school district officials have not yet received

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Schools Launch Rockets for Science Ed

High school students from southeast New Mexico are building rockets to learn science in a program organizers say teaches design, analysis, critical thinking, reasoning, problem solving, leadership, and innovation skills.

The first year of SystemsGo New Mexico, administered by the Pecos Valley Regional Educational Cooperative, culminated with an April rocket launch in Jal with teams from Loving, Lake Arthur, Hobbs, Lovington, and Carlsbad, as well as Jal.

Teachers and students from all those schools except Carlsbad talked about the science, technology, engineering, and math – STEM – education program

with the committee in September.

Students worked in teams of about five to 10 and drew the designs, computerized blueprints, ran simulations, made revisions, and assembled the rockets. On launch day, students were responsible for a pre-launch checklist and for solving problems on the fly.

Teachers testifying before the committee emphasized instructors take a hands-off approach, leaving it to the students to find answers.

The group said the program has drawn wide community involvement, with local restaurants catering the launch event, local fire and rescue teams using the downed rockets for

retrieval drills, and local law enforcement managing traffic for the launches.

Start-up costs for the program, developed by a private company, can run from about \$5,000 to about \$6,000 per grade, depending on the grades involved, for equipment, training, curriculum, and license and launch fees. Subsequent years cost less.

SystemsGo, which also works with schools in Texas, provides classroom and launch support, in addition to teacher training and curricula.

The company says the program is endorsed by NASA and certified by the Space Foundation. Advanced students work with research universities and launch a vehicle from White Sands Missile Range capable of carrying a 35-pound payload to 100,000 feet.

First-level students design and test vehicles to lift a payload of one pound to a height of one mile, while second-level students work on rockets that can travel faster than the speed of sound, or faster than a mile in 4.69 seconds.

SystemsGo New Mexico has scheduled its next year-end launch for April 21, 2018, again in Jal.

Local Special Ed Spending Under Review

continued from front follow-up correspondence.

However, meeting minutes of the New Mexico Council of Administrators of Special Education indicate the department hired certified public accountants to reconcile local MOE spending because of inaccuracies in the earlier calculations by department staff, since let go.

The department has told districts they must repay the federal government for the shortfalls; however, U.S. Department of Education staff advised LESC analysts that the liability for any shortfalls lies with the department, not the local school districts.

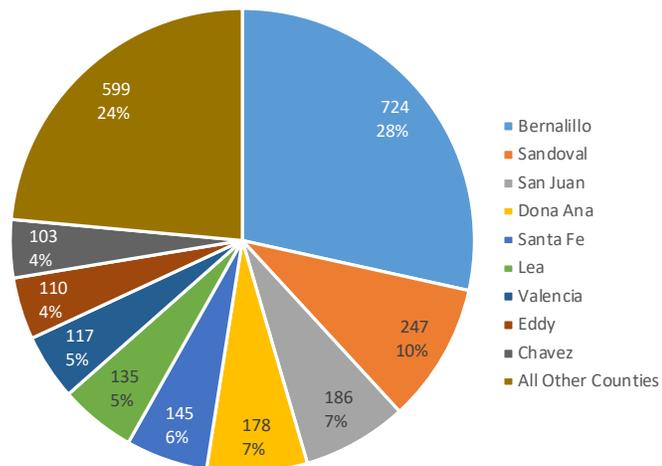
While the department can seek repayment from local school districts, federal officials are uncertain if a state can force a district to repay. A state department cannot withhold IDEA-B funds for failure to pay.

The state has had its own problems with special education MOE. The U.S. Department of Education has found the state owes \$85.7 million for MOE shortfalls from FY11 to FY14.

While the state has been negotiating with federal officials, department officials have yet to announce a settlement.

Virtual Schools Draw Out-of-District Students

County of Residence for Virtual Charter School Students, FY18



New Mexico's three virtual charter schools – New Mexico Virtual Academy, New Mexico Connections Academy, and Pecos Connections Academy – are based in San Juan, Santa Fe, and Eddy counties but draw many of their students from outside their school districts. Charter school authorizers get an administrative fee equal to 2 percent of the charter school's program funds, state funds allocated to the school through the enrollment-based funding formula. As a result, districts with district-chartered virtual charter schools can get funding for students outside their districts, creating an incentive for districts to authorize virtual charter schools.

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