




B i t e - S i z e

 The median per-student data transfer rate in New Mexico school districts has increased more than five-fold since 2015, Education Superhighway reports. The nonprofit says 97 percent of New Mexico students have access to networks with 100 kilobits of bandwidth per student, a Federal Communications Commission goal, and 42 percent have access to 1 megabits per second, almost twice the national rate of 24 percent.

 The Public School Capital Outlay Council awarded \$201 million to public schools in October for standards-based and systems-based projects. Of the \$184 million in standards-based awards, \$77 million will be paid by the local districts as their required match. The local match for the \$17 million in systems-based awards is \$5 million.

 New Mexico is losing about \$5 million a year in federal technology grants because prekindergarten is not considered part of elementary education, the Public School Facilities Authority says. The Federal Communications Commission E-rate program covers up to 90 percent of certain networking equipment in elementary schools, but prekindergartens are ineligible. LESC staff has asked the Public Education Department to notify FCC prekindergarten is part of elementary education in New Mexico.



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a publication of the Legislative Education Study Committee

Representative Christine Trujillo, Chair / Senator Mimi Stewart, Vice Chair / Rachel S. Gudgel, Director / November 2019

From the Chairwoman

Responsibilities

Prodded by a state district court order, the Legislature earlier this year dramatically increased spending for children at risk of failing school because of income, English proficiency, and transience. State lawmakers nearly doubled the weight of the funding formula factor for at-risk students. Combined with an increase passed last year, the \$253 million in funding generated by the at-risk factor was a 152 percent increase from FY18. In addition, they created optional funding factors for extended learning programs, including K-5 Plus, and added money to the Indian education fund and bilingual and multicultural education.

Even though the impact of the avalanche of dollars is still unknown, plaintiffs in the case went back to the court earlier this month to ask for more: higher salaries for teachers, more incentives for teachers of at-risk students, and more funding for at-risk students, bilingual program, special education, prekindergarten, and extended learning. They want it before the end of the next legislative session, and they want a detailed statewide plan, with an implementation timetable, on basically every element of the education system before the end of next month.

What happens next is unclear. The court has been silent on the motion. The administration has said it won't appeal the original finding that New Mexico is not providing a "sufficient" education for all children, but it has not indicated how it will respond to additional demands.

What is clear is that it is not in the interests of the children of New Mexico or the taxpayers to turn over the management of public education to the district court. The department has always had the authority to, not just monitor but, compel local schools to implement state-required programs.

The department needs to start now – today – to take a more active role in ensuring schools are using the influx of dollars to successfully educate our children. With rare exception, school districts and charter schools turned down the new money for extended learning, saying it was too hard to roll out an extensive program with such short notice. Many used the new at-risk formula dollars not for new programs but for salaries for existing staff, saying there wasn't enough to cover mandated pay hikes.

Local control is important, but the department and lawmakers also have a responsibility to ensure the money – your money – is being spent in the best interests of the children and, through them, the future of the state.

Transportation Formula Overfunds, Underfunds

While some charter schools and school districts have transportation money left over every year, some districts have to pull money from other operations to make ends meet, a sign the transportation funding formula doesn't work, LESC analysis indicates.

In a [brief](#) presented to the committee in October, staff reports districts spent \$8.6 million in operational funding on transportation in FY18, with just a few larger districts responsible for most of the total.

At the same time, some school districts and state-authorized charter schools had nearly \$1 million in unspent transportation funds. Charter schools – which received about \$2 million for transportation in FY18, compared with the \$87 million that went to school districts – ended FY18 with about 5 percent of their transportation money left over. Leftover transportation funds for districts represented less than a percent of their total allocation.

State law provides a formula to allocate transportation funding to school districts and state-chartered schools but gives the Public Education Department authority

to decide what factors will be funded each year and how much weight each factor will carry.

In practice, staff report, the department uses three formulas: one for school districts with 1,000 or more students, a second for schools districts with fewer than 1,000 students, and a third for state-chartered schools.

Transportation for locally chartered charter schools is provided by the home school district.

Because the funds generated by the variables in the formula varies with their weight, the department's ability to change the weights can result in significant swings in allocations for the same charter school or district from year to year.

In addition, while statute identifies specific factors the department should, but is not required, consider – including enrollment, the number of buses in operation, total miles traveled, and number of days in the school year – the department ignores some numbers for some types of schools. It does not count special education students in the calculation for small school districts or charter schools, and does not count the number of buses in use in large districts, for examples.

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Millions Available To Cover Teacher Prep Costs

Legislative action during the 2019 session added millions to efforts to help teachers with education-related costs, although a glitch in the process could delay some of the awards.

The secretary of the Higher Education Department and directors of teacher education programs at Santa Fe Community College and San Juan College are scheduled to discuss the use of financial aid for teacher recruitment at a committee hearing planned for 9 a.m. on November 21.

To address a teacher shortage in New Mexico – job postings indicate

the state had 644 teacher vacancies at the start of this school year – the Legislature adopted the Teacher Preparation Affordability Act to provide need-based scholarships primarily to minority and English-learner teacher education students and the Grow-Your-Own Teachers Act to provide scholarships to educational assistants pursuing teaching degrees.

However, while the General Appropriation Act, the state budget bill, included \$10 million for the teacher preparation affordability fund, no legislation authorized taking money

out of the fund.

Despite lacking authorization, the Higher Education Department has allocated \$5 million from the fund to colleges. It is unclear if that money will actually be available to teacher education students without action during the 2020 legislative session starting in January.

The Teacher Preparation Affordability Act, like the Grow-Your-Own Teachers Act, provides for scholarship recipients to get up to \$6,000 a year for as many as five years for tuition, fees, books, and supplies.

In addition, the Grow-Your-Own Teachers Act, accompanied by a \$500 thousand appropriation, requires public schools to allow scholarship recipients to take professional leave for classes and practice teaching.

The Legislature also increased funding for the teacher education-loan-repayment programs from \$60 thousand to \$10 million and amended the Teacher Loan Repayment Act to require teachers to spend more time in New Mexico classrooms before becoming eligible for loan repayments.

With the amendments, teachers could get up to \$48 thousand in loans repaid.

Formula Poorly Distributes Dollars

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The discrepancy in factors considered in the three funding models contributes to large differences in the per-student allocation of transportation funds, the brief says.

Large districts receive an average of \$558 per student, while small districts get nearly twice that, with a average per-student allocation of \$1,349. State-authorized charter schools get an average of \$1,166 per student, even though most are in more densely populated urban and suburban areas.

The allocations are more equal on a per-mile basis, with large school districts receiving \$3.21 per mile, small school districts receiving \$3.49, and charter schools receiving \$3.55.

School bus replacement, which is supposed to be on a 12-year cycle but is not in practice, is funded separately from maintenance and operations, but the mechanism differs depending on whether the bus is owned by a district or charter school or by a contractor.

A portion of the money in the transportation distribution is intended to

cover the cost of “school bus rental fees” – the cost of loan payments on contractor-owned buses. School districts hold a lien on the buses until the end of a 12-year replacement cycle, when the contractor gains full ownership.

Because loan payments are included in the transportation distribution, contractor-owned buses are routinely replaced, while district-owned buses are only replaced when the Legislature appropriates funds.

Little Change in NM Reading, Math Performance

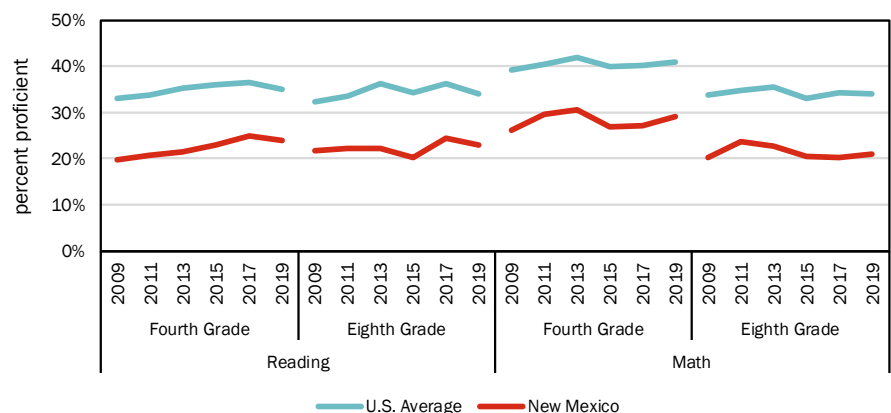
New Mexico math and reading performance on the biennial National Assessment of Educational Progress changed little in 2019, with the share of both fourth-grade and eighth-grade students proficient in reading slightly down compared with 2017 and the share of students in both grades proficient in math slightly up.

New Mexico continues to both mirror changes

in the national averages and lag national performance on both tests in both grades, with proficiency levels about 10 percentage points behind the national average.

The congressionally mandated National Assessment of Educational Progress tests a representative sample of fourth and eighth graders from each state every two years.

Trends in Fourth- and Eighth-Grade National Assessment



Source: National Center for Education Statistics

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November 2019

Published monthly in the interim by the
Legislative Education Study Committee
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