



A Coalition of Professional Education Organizations

AFT New Mexico • Albuquerque Teachers Federation • NEA-New Mexico
New Mexico Coalition of School Administrators • New Mexico PTA
New Mexico School Boards Association

*The New Mexico Education Partners continue to focus our goals
for the
2013 Legislative Session on the urgent and the pragmatic.*

The member organizations of the New Mexico Education Partners strongly support accountability through a system that is fair and valid. We are all committed to continuous improvement and improved student outcomes, and strongly support the allocation of sufficient resources and support. More importantly, our educators need encouragement; parents need to believe that their opinions and involvement are valued; and we all need the general public to recognize that children are more than test scores and schools are more than just a grade.

New Mexico's reform efforts must be congruent with the future of public education in the United States. New Mexico, along with Forty-six other states and the District of Columbia, has adopted the rigorous English Language Arts (ELA) and Math Common Core State Standards (CCSS). These CCSS are aligned with college and workforce expectations, and provide a consistent understanding of what students are expected to know and be able to do, regardless of which state they live in.

The Partners believe that the Legislature can help us meet the enormous challenges of today and help us transition into a future based on positive, well-thought-out reforms, including the transition to the CCSS and the new accompanying assessments, by considering the seven goals areas presented in this statement.

1. Funding

The Legislature must meet its Constitutional responsibility to sufficiently fund New Mexico's public schools. Increased funding to meet this responsibility must be provided through increases in the school equalization guarantee, provided to school districts in an equitable manner through the public school funding formula. The Partners support the removal of all unfunded, unnecessary, excessive, or duplicative reporting requirements by the Public Education Department.

In 2008-2009, the amount appropriated for public schools through the State Equalization Guarantee was \$2.432 billion. Since then, our public schools have experienced budget reductions averaging 8% and the loss of more than 2,000 teachers and other school employee jobs statewide.

We support returning school funding to at least the \$2.432 billion appropriated in 2008; this would require an additional \$142 million dollars. According to a report by the Legislature's Public School Funding Taskforce, even this level is already \$350 million below constitutionally required sufficiency. The Legislature must begin the process of moving toward constitutionally required sufficient funding of our public schools. Therefore, we oppose any new funding commitments that are essentially unfunded mandates until all existing funding commitments are sufficiently met.

Education employees must have salary increases of at least 4%. In the last four years the cost of living has gone up 9.4%, yet most public education employees have seen no compensation increases. In fact, most employees have seen decreases in compensation through retirement swaps and insurance premium increases.

This year effort to insure the solvency of the Educational Retirement Association will likely require increased retirement withholdings from employees. Without salary increases, the wellbeing of school employees will continue to deteriorate. The Legislature must address this serious decline in the welfare of school employees. In addition to compensation increases for employees the employers share of premium increases required for the New Mexico Public School Insurance Authority and the Albuquerque Public Schools must be funded; the Legislature must not expect school employees to accept yet additional losses in health care benefits.

One method to begin to address the maintenance of school funding and avoid further erosion is to allow the public to decide whether or not to restore the 5.8% distribution from the Land Grant Permanent Fund approved in 2003. We support the passage of a resolution to place a constitutional amendment before the public to restore this funding level.

Not only have recent state budgets been balanced on the backs of employee through retirement contribution swaps, they have been balanced on the backs of children by allowing class sizes to drastically increase. It is time to return the statutory class sized limits and to fund school districts appropriately to address this concern.

No changes to the public school funding formula should be adopted that creates winner and loser districts in regard to the amount of funding received through the formula.

2. Local Decision Making

Trust school districts to make the best decisions for their school communities, using stake-holder processes currently in place in each district. Because of New Mexico's diversity and rural nature one size does not fit all students, or all districts. New Mexico's current state public education

governance system impedes local decision making; therefore, we support a joint memorial directing the LESC to conduct a review and analysis of the state public education governance system to determine effectiveness, results, and stakeholder satisfaction; such a study should report to the 2014 Legislature regarding any proposed changes to the statewide governance system.

3. Full Partnership in Education Initiatives and Reforms

The Partners believe that all New Mexico public education stakeholders must be involved in a collaborative process of identifying, developing, and implementing all new initiatives and reforms. Legislation that creates or proposes these initiatives or reforms should specifically require that representatives selected by stakeholder groups be included in the collaborative process. We continue to assert that major reform initiatives should be through the legislative process, not mandated via the rule-making powers of the Public Education Department.

The Partners support reform plans that are consistent with valid research, are educationally sound, and that are not politically motivated. Experienced educational leadership is imperative for the sake of credibility and to insure acceptance by the public and public school employees. Hence, practitioners should be sought out and actively engaged as any state entity moves forward in making or recommending major change to our public education system. Parents should also be actively engaged from the school house to the state house. Their role as decision-making partners in their children's education should be recognized, valued, and honored.

The current A-F School Grading system must be dramatically reformed to make it more equitable and transparent or it must be repealed. As the system is revamped, the methodology used to calculate grades must be valid, defensible, and replicable. The current system does not properly account for poverty and other demographic differences in student populations. It is too dependent on standardized test scores and is too complicated to be well understood and supported by education professionals and the community at large.

The partners support high school graduations requirements that enable students to be college and/or career ready. Recent changes to high school graduation requirements imposed by rule should be examined by the legislature. These changes were not well conceived before being implemented and were not promulgated until after affected students had already begun their senior year of High School. No student should have his or her future decided by a rule that has not been fully vetted in accordance with statutory requirements before it is implemented. The Legislature should delay implementation of new high school requirements until 2014; even then, they should be implemented only if PED rules are adequately vetted with parents and educators before being imposed.

Intervention not retention should be our guiding principle for achieving reading proficiency for New Mexico's students. Funding for early intervention initiatives is the real way to address reading proficiency in New Mexico elementary schools. We do not support any reading initiative that has student retention and forfeiture of parental rights as contained current law as a primary emphasis.

4. Transition to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

The NMPED adopted the CCSS in October 2010 and is now planning for full implementation, with aligned common assessments in 2014- 2015.

With the transition to the CCSS, New Mexico recently joined the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). As a governing member of the PARCC, New Mexico

will be able to leverage expertise, personnel, and fiscal resources that will ease the transition from the current assessment system to the new assessments. Since the new assessment system is intended to be computer based, aligned to the CCSS in grades 3-11, and allow for multiple assessments each year providing timely instructional information for teachers, school districts must be provided adequate funding for the technology and professional staff development required for full implementation.

The NM Education Partners continue to caution against creating high-stakes reform based in the current New Mexico Standards Based Assessment. Any such reform would need to be changed within a year and would put our teachers, students and school systems in a constant state of confusion and flux.

5. Standardized Tests

A single high-stakes standardized test fails to properly assign accountability to all education stakeholders. The over-reliance on using standardized tests for grading schools, evaluating teachers and principals, and determining student grade placement—all uses for which the test was never designed or intended—must be ended. Transition to new assessments must take capital funding into consideration. School Districts must not be required to implement a testing regime that requires technology that they do not possess! Appropriate professional development must be provided all education professionals so that they can properly utilize the diagnostic features incorporated into the PARC testing process.

6. Educational Retirement

The Partners support the consensus plan put forward by the Educational Retirement Board and its stakeholder advisory group. We reluctantly support an increased contribution rate of 10.7% for all public education employees earning over \$20,000 annually and modest changes in benefits for new employees. However, we oppose any changes in the benefits of current educational retirees or any changes in promised benefits or retirement eligibility rules for current employees.

7. Revenue and Taxation System with Sufficient Elasticity to Provide Resources for Public Education

The partners support a revenue and taxation system with ample elasticity to provide adequate funding for public education even during economic downturns. We believe that any changes in our taxation and revenue must not further reduce the resources necessary to provide the services our students and their families need. We further believe that the revenue system must not include tax giveaways to the wealthy and big corporations at the expense of sufficient funding for public education.