

## MINUTES

### Legislative Education Study Committee Silver City, New Mexico October 16-18, 2024

Wednesday, October 16

The following voting, advisory, and guest members were present. Voting: Chair G. Andrés Romero, Representatives Joy Garratt, Raymundo Lara, Tanya Mirabal Moya, and Senator Mimi Stewart.

Advisory: Representative John Block and Yanira Gurrola.

Guests: Representative Luis Terrazas.

**Call to Order, Introductions, and Approval of July Minutes and June Agenda.** Representative G. Andrés Romero, Chair, LESC, called the meeting to order. Chair Romero facilitated introductions of the members of LESC, as well as LESC staff. In a motion by Representative Baca, and a second by Representative Garratt, the agenda for the September LESC meeting was approved. The meeting minutes for the July LESC hearing were also approved with a motion by Senator Stewart and a second by Representative Mirabal Moya.

**Community Welcome.** Will Hawkins, Superintendent, Silver Consolidated Schools, welcomed LESC to Silver City and provided an overview of the school district's demographics, academic initiatives, budget, and student performance. Superintendent Hawkins explained the increase the district received to its state equalization guarantee (SEG) for FY25 was not enough to account for increases in some costs, which meant the district is facing increased costs, particularly in insurance and transportation, while also seeing declining enrollment. The district is working to rightsize its facilities to better align with declining student enrollment and to better address the needs of the community. Superintendent Hawkins discussed issues with attendance and chronic absence rates and asked for legislative support to address attendance and mental health. Silver Consolidated Schools has seen success with implementation of its mental health initiatives, including the Ron Clark Academy's house system to foster student engagement and a sense of belonging.

Michael Koury, Superintendent, Cobre Consolidated Schools, and Suzanne Chavira, Curriculum Director, Cobre Consolidated Schools, explained Cobre has received multiple grants to implement structured literacy, including funding for interventionists and reading coaches. The district has focused on people and professional development, which led to an increase in proficiency rates in 2024. The district aims to reach 75 percent proficiency in reading this year. Cobre also pays teachers a

stipend for completing Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) training, part of the structured literacy initiative. Superintendent Koury emphasized the importance of partnerships and teamwork between districts, highlighting the need to collaborate and share resources to benefit students across the region.

**The Middle Matters: House Memorial 4 Middle School Study Report.** Jessica Hathaway, Senior Policy Analyst II, LESC and Uxue Sansinena, LESC Intern and High School Student at Los Alamos Public Schools, presented a report on middle school education initiated by House Memorial 4 (HM4). The 30-person taskforce included students, educators, parents, and middle school leaders in nonprofit, higher education, and public education roles. The taskforce studied four primary research questions, finding middle school innovation may not necessarily have statutory barriers, but it can still be difficult to redesign middle school models to serve students if these efforts are not part of broader policy frameworks with reinforcing supports and resources. Ms. Hathaway presented five possible policy options for the Legislature, including expanding the secondary student factor in the SEG to include sixth grade, offering more tailored educator preparation and learning for middle school educators, and continuing funding for key items like career and technical education, attendance, and social emotional supports, among others. Ms. Sansinena then offered remarks from her role as a current high school student, noting mental health concerns and a student-centered view of how difficult the middle school transition can feel due to changes in academics, transportation, and increased social pressures. Will Hawkins, Superintendent, Silver Consolidated Schools, who was also a member of the taskforce then discussed efforts in Silver Consolidated Schools to support middle school students, such as the district's use of the Ron Clark Academy approach.

LESC members expressed interest in including sixth grade in the secondary factor in the SEG and specific preparation and learning for middle school educators. They also expressed interest in greater research on the middle school transition to high school.

**Review of Structured Literacy Support Models.** Marit Andrews, Senior Policy Analyst II, LESC, and Tim Bedeaux, Senior Policy Analyst II, LESC, presented the results of an LESC staff evaluation to determine if the state's investments in structured literacy have led to meaningful changes in school-level proficiency rates or student growth over time, and whether those changes varied between model, support, and other elementary schools. Ms. Andrews noted that given that New Mexico has invested in structured literacy for approximately five years, the state should be beginning to see the impact of that investment. Ms. Andrews explained the evaluation also examined trajectories for students as they move from third grade through fifth grade in the same school, asking whether students in model schools and support schools have trajectories that significantly differ from other schools across New Mexico.

Mr. Bedeaux noted analysis of average school-level proficiency and student growth trajectories have indicated New Mexico is beginning to see the impact of structured literacy. Mr. Bedeaux said statewide increases in proficiency may be partially due to the statewide implementation of structured literacy, but isolated declines in proficiency, particularly for third grade students, may indicate schools experience some challenges as they transition to a structured literacy approach to teaching reading. Ms. Andrews continued to explain that while model schools, which tend to serve a higher percentage of disadvantaged students, may be showing some evidence of "closing the achievement gap" with other schools statewide, additional years of data will be necessary to show whether the trends in achievement will continue. Staff plan to perform case studies of schools that significantly outperformed the statewide trend to learn more about the conditions that led to successful implementation of structured literacy; lessons from these schools can help inform policy considerations for the future of the structured literacy program.

Committee members asked questions about the progress of other states implementing structured literacy, PED's plans for structured literacy in secondary schools, and the progress of educator preparation programs in teaching structured literacy.

**House Memorial 51: State Equalization Guarantee Revision.** Daniel Estupiñan, Senior Fiscal Analyst II, LESC, provided an overview of LESC staff's proposal for revising the SEG, in response to a request of House Memorial 51. The proposal included the creation of a standalone component for English learners, the adoption of a revised indicator for poverty, the removal of the mobility component, and an increase to the secondary factor.

Members asked for clarity on how the proposal would support Native American students, whether there would be a provision in place to support school districts and charter schools that could see a revision in their expected funding as a result of the proposal, and for context on why staff was not proposing a more holistic revision of the basic program components.

Tuesday, October 18

The following voting, advisory, and guest members were present. Voting: Chair G. Andrés Romero, Vice Chair William P. Soules, Representatives Joy Garratt, Raymundo Lara, Tanya Mirabal Moya, and Senator Mimi Stewart.

Advisory: Representatives John Block, Yanira Gurrola, Debra M. Sariñana, and Senator Shannon D. Pinto.

Guest: Representative Luis Terrazas.

**English Learner Programming Needs.** Natasha Davalos, Policy Analyst I, LESC, and Viridiana Cisneros, LESC Teacher on Special Assignment,

presented a brief on programming needs for English learners. Ms. Davalos presented four possible policy options for the Legislature, including creating a standalone English learner factor in the SEG, extending the English learner factor to reclassified students during the federally mandated two-year monitoring period, funding below-the-line appropriations to support more educators becoming Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) or bilingual certified, and study the need to embed TESOL-certification or other English learner-specific strategies in all educator preparation programs. Michael Rodriguez, Executive Director, Dual Language Education of New Mexico, showed evidence-based strategies on how to best serve English learning students. Aine Garcia-Post, Executive Director of Bilingual Education, Translation & Interpretation, and Community Outreach, Las Cruces Public Schools, shared insights on how Las Cruces Public Schools serves English learners and funding is used to support these students. Dr. Candice Castillo, Deputy Secretary of Identity, Equity and Transformation, Public Education Department (PED), offered insights on required program practices, the evolution of English learner services across New Mexico, and dedicated funding including opportunities to improve English learner programs.

LESC members expressed interests in current TESOL training and funding to sufficiently prepare teachers for English learner student needs. An increase in New Mexico's English learner student population prompted questions about whether this growth is due to migration or unmet needs within the educational system. Members also expressed interest in the shortage of bilingual diagnosticians and adequately trained counselors which may lead to misdiagnoses and insufficient support for English learner students, particularly those with diverse language backgrounds.

**FY26 Budget Priorities.** Daniel Estupiñan, Senior Fiscal Analyst II, LESL, provided an overview of budget considerations developed by LESL staff in response to member priorities during the 2024 interim.

Members asked for clarity on the multi-year budgeting framework associated with the government results and opportunity (GRO) expendable trust fund, an overview of programs currently funded through GRO, how the budget considerations provide flexible funding to school districts and charter schools, and clarity on the Legislature's investments in early literacy.

**Students in Foster Care and Experiencing Homelessness: An Update.** Natasha Davalos, Policy Analyst I, LESL, and Taura Mangone, LESL Teacher on Special Assignment, presented an update on students experiencing foster care placement and homelessness. Ms. Davalos presented six possible policy options for the Legislature and state agencies, including providing adequate transportation funding, improving cross-agency collaboration between PED and the Children, Youth, and Families Department (CYFD), enhancing data collection and notification systems,

provide technical assistance on at-risk funding, improving communication on partial credits, and the implementation of the Guaranteed Payment for Attendance Program. Cristal Wilson, Director of McKinney-Vento Homeless Project and Title I, Albuquerque Public Schools (APS), provided insights on how APS identifies and supports students experiencing homelessness, including the challenges in identifying and supporting these students and funding initiatives. Ms. Wilson also provided information on dual identification efforts, such as students experiencing homelessness and foster care placement. Simone Vann, Division Director of Identity, Equity, and Transformation, PED, presented the history and current support structures of the McKinney-Vento Program and foster care services, including collaboration efforts via the family resource centers. Ms. Vann also shared the proficiency rates for these students and identified the needs.

LESC members expressed interests in the lack of services in rural areas, the identification of barriers to education, and collaboration to build capacity and share resources. Members were also interested in funding and allocation of resources to address inadequate housing and education for students in need and what support looks like for unaccompanied homeless youth, and the importance of building relationships with families. Additionally, there was interest in expediting evaluations and identifying students in the foster care system to ensure they receive appropriate services and collaboration initiatives between CYFD, PED, and schools.

**Administrative Licensure Task Force.** Erika Hunt, Consultant, EdRD, presented on the work of the administrative licensure task force over the past interim. The task force recommended expanding PED capacity through establishment of a bureau of school and district leadership at PED, updating licensure requirements for principals, and establishing licensure requirements for superintendents. These recommendations built on the task force's recommendations from the prior year that resulted in House Bill 22, introduced during the 2024 legislative session.

Alexis Esslinger, Program Director, Leading Educators through Alternative Pathways (LEAP), shared how the experiences in the field of the deans and directors of educator preparation programs in the state helped shape the recommendations.

Candice Castillo, Deputy Secretary of Identity, Equity and Transformation, PED, expressed PED's support for the task force's work and expressed desire to establish the new PED bureau and to invest in data systems to be able to monitor and report on leadership development programs.

Legislators expressed support for improving school administrator preparation but asked why legislation was necessary to establish a school leadership bureau at PED and to change administrative licensure requirements.

Friday, October 18

The following voting, advisory, and guest members were present. Voting: Chair G. Andrés Romero, Representatives Joy Garratt, Raymundo Lara, Tanya Mirabal Moya, and Senator Mimi Stewart.

Advisory: Representatives John Block, Yanira Gurrola, and Debra M. Sariñana.

Guest: Representative Luis Terrazas.

**Director's Report.** John Sena, Interim Director, LESC, presented the LESC newsletter to committee members. Interim Director Sena also updated the committee on plans to replace the open administrative assistant role with a position that also includes capacity to assist with publication production.

**New Mexico Public Schools Insurance Authority Update and Budget Priorities.** Daniel Estupiñan, Senior Fiscal Analyst II, LESC, explained insurance costs for New Mexico public schools are rising, with medical premiums increasing 81 percent since FY15. Recently, New Mexico Public Schools Insurance Authority (NMPSIA) has increased risk premiums due to factors like chronic health conditions, legislative mandates, environmental damages, and lasting impacts of Covid-19. Mr. Estupiñan proposed that the Legislature could appropriate funds to bolster NMPSIA's cash reserves, offsetting the rising costs.

Patrick Sandoval, Executive Director, NMPSIA, and Martha Quintana, Deputy Director, NMPSIA, presented on the structure and membership of NMPSIA, as well as the FY26 appropriation request. The request includes an 18 percent increase to cover the rising costs of employee benefits and risk premiums. Costs are escalating due to increased prevalence and severity of claims, including property damage from wind and hail, liability, and workers' compensation. NMPSIA plans to increase school insurance premiums to manage its high costs and requested a special appropriation to address sexual abuse prevention and high deductibles on catastrophic claims. Additionally, NMPSIA plans to escalate its cost-saving initiatives, such as loss prevention programs, human resource audits, anonymous reporting for safety, wellness support programs, and strategic partnerships to enhance service affordability and coverage for members.

LESC members asked questions regarding NMPSIA's FY26 request. Members asked whether NMPSIA had region-by-region breakdowns of diagnoses of asthma, COPD, and other medical conditions. Ms. Quintana offered to track down those statistics for the representative. Members also wondered if there were any one-time Covid-19 relief funds that could be used to backfill NMPSIA's projected shortfall. Sunny Liu, Principal Analyst, Legislative Finance Committee, reminded the committee that the deadline

for the expenditure of ESSER dollars had passed, and that most of those funds went directly to schools and to PED. Mr. Liu noted NMPSIA has access to other federal relief resources, but he would need to follow up with more details.

**New Mexico Supercomputing Challenge Presentation.** Dr. Thomas Bowles, Board Member, Supercomputing Challenge; Tim Thomas, Board President, Supercomputing Challenge; David Kratzer, Executive Director, Supercomputing Challenge; and Patty Meyer, Program Manager, Supercomputing Challenge, presented to LESC members on the work of the Supercomputing Challenge to support STEM education and inquiry-based learning in New Mexico.

Presenters shared data on the impact of the Challenge on students across New Mexico throughout its existence, pointing to a total of 12.1 thousand students participating in the program since 1990, with thousands attending New Mexico colleges and universities. Additionally, hundreds of former Challenge participants went on to top-tier universities such as Stanford University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and California Institute of Technology. In 2024, 34 teams totaling 150 students took part in the Supercomputing Challenge to compete for \$17.5 thousand in scholarships.

To sustain the Supercomputing Challenge in the years ahead, panelists asked the Legislature to appropriate \$200 thousand annually beginning in FY26 to support the initiative.