




## B i t e - S i z e

 According to the Southwest Outreach Academic Research Center (SOAR), New Mexico teacher vacancies in FY23 (690) decreased by 34 percent from FY22 (1,048). However, PED reports vacancies have since increased to 721. Vacancies in FY22 were concentrated among special education and elementary school teachers.

 August 2023 revenues transferred to the lottery tuition fund totaled \$4.9 million, a decrease from July 2023 revenues of \$5.7 million. To date, FY24 proceeds total \$10.6 million compared with \$9.1 million in the same period last year, an increase of about 16.5 percent.

 The Public Education Department (PED) appointed Margaret Cage, Ed.D. as the new Special Education Director on October 2, 2023. Dr. Cage has spent over 25 years in education, serving as a teacher, instructional coach, turnaround specialist, school leader, and school system director.



# i n f o r m E D

a publication of the Legislative Education Study Committee

Representative G. Andrés Romero, Chair / Senator William P. Soules, Vice Chair / Gwen Perea Warniment, Director / October 2023

### From the Chair

Over the past five years, the Legislature debated and acted on increasing class time. Sandwiched between those efforts was the Covid-19 pandemic. It's time to allow districts to catch their breath and hit their stride in making calendars work for their communities. Meanwhile, the Legislature could best spend time considering what resources support improved programming and provide high quality staffing our districts need.

Since returning to in-person learning in 2021, schools have seen increased absentee rates. New Mexico is not unique in this; it is a national issue. In 2018, the Legislature passed the "Attendance for Success Act" which urges schools to begin addressing systemic issues behind absenteeism. The premise was we can neither educate our students nor connect them to services when they are not in school. The "Attendance for Success Act" was ahead of its time and is a tool the Legislature should use to assist schools to address absentee rates.

While efforts toward stability and addressing school attendance are ongoing, the Legislature can also take a more holistic approach to education. We must start evaluating the health and safety of our communities. For too long, the Legislature has fragmented budgetary and policy decisions into categories with little recognition of how the areas of health, security, education, employment, and the environment intersect one another.

For ideas like the "Attendance for Success Act" to be successful, we must have community supports to lift up families. Students deserve to be safe at school and in their community. We need an economy that supports families with jobs and comfortable pay.

In education we often hear "our school is our community." However, if we want schools to thrive, we must ensure communities are thriving as well. As always, I hope you join us with your questions and comments as we continue working throughout the fall months.



## School Redesign for Middle Schools: What Works?

Middle and high schools today are under pressure to prepare students for the increasingly complicated world that awaits them after they complete school.

Redesigning middle and high schools has been called for in recent years, arguably decades, to respond to these pressures. Research shows distinct needs and potential policy implications for both middle and high school students. Even though many middle schools operate like mini high schools, research shows younger adolescents have different cognitive, social, and emotional needs than their older peers. So, what might work best in middle school?

Middle school students—often defined as being in sixth through eighth grade—are experiencing an important time in their development with distinct needs from their younger and older peers. While brain science has shown birth to three are crucial years for brain development, more recent advances in brain imaging are showing the early teen years are another important period in which a second growth spurt—focused on neural connections between different parts of the

brain—takes place.

Middle school students also experience rapid physical growth and change in their self-identity. At this age, youth experience an increased need for autonomy and agency and undergo a neurobiological shift that creates more attunement to social information—as a result, they often have a heightened sensitivity to social relationships and cues, status, and respect.

Research shows some components of school that may be particularly important for middle school include supporting students' sense of belonging, feelings of competence, and increasing opportunities for autonomy. School practices such as teaming among educators, advisory periods to start the day off with a consistent adult and group of students, robust social-emotional learning curriculums, beginning career exploration, and shared planning time for educators to better support students are best practices for middle school students.

In an article from the Remaking Middle School initiative, a research project housed at the University of Virginia, researchers offer areas to pay attention to when designing

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# Report Highlights Continued Need for Investments in Teacher Pipeline

New Mexico State University’s Southwest Outreach Academic Research (SOAR) Center reports the educator vacancy count reached 1,471 positions statewide in 2023. As in prior years, teachers and educational assistants represented the largest share of vacancies (51 percent and 33 percent, respectively), with teacher vacancies increasing by 9 percent from 2022.

SOAR’s Educator Vacancy Report is a snapshot of public job postings and educator preparation program (EPP) data each year and is the state’s sole mechanism for quantifying teacher demand. While the report has provided important information to stakeholders since 2015, the state continues to lack a complete picture of the educator ecosystem. A 2022 LESC brief investigated more precise measurements used by other states, including student enrollment, student-teacher ratios, district

surveys of hard-to-staff positions, licensure data, retirement trends, and long-term substitute positions.

The number of students admitted to the state’s 14 EPPs has increased annually since FY19. However, from FY22 to FY23, growth in students admitted was smaller (9 percent) than in the prior two years (18 percent and 24 percent). Consequently, the number of EPP completers also increased, following steep declines from FY12 to FY18. In FY23, 1,158 students completed EPP programs, a 13 percent increase from FY22, and more than double the percent increase of the prior two years.

While the total number of EPP admits and completers continues to grow, 57 percent of all completers graduated from alternative programs in FY23. Although research on the efficacy of these programs is mixed, some studies suggest alternatively licensed teachers

experience higher attrition rates. Conversely, evidence suggests graduates of teacher residency programs have higher rates of retention, and, by their fifth year of teaching, may surpass their non-residency-trained peers in raising student achievement scores. PED reported 226 candidates completed teacher residency programs in FY23, or about 20 percent of FY23 EPP completers.

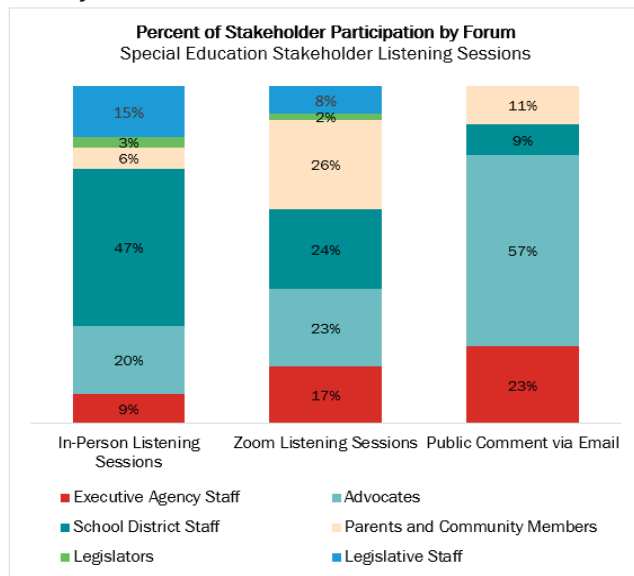
Since the *Martinez-Yazzie* consolidated lawsuit’s ruling in 2019, the Legislature has worked to strengthen New Mexico’s educator workforce. To address court findings, the state will need more precise reporting on educator demand, paired with performance data of EPP completers, and continued investments in programs designed to prepare the best teachers, paired with competitive pay to keep educators in our classrooms.

## Redesign for Middle Schools

(continued from front)

middle schools: 1) Including students and offering collaboration in decision-making; 2) Adopting a developmentally supportive curriculum; 3) Incorporating social-emotional learning; and 4) Paying attention to physical space so youth are not confined to desks all day in a way that mismatches their cognitive and social development needs.

Middle school is a crucial time to re-engage students and ensure they’re ready for what’s next. As lawmakers contemplate school practices for these grades, a focus on developmental needs can help show what pays off the most.



Source: LESC Files

## Special Education Stakeholder Listening Session Participation

The LESC facilitated nine stakeholder listening sessions statewide from June to August 2023 to provide stakeholders with an opportunity to share feedback and suggestions about special education services in New Mexico. The purpose of the listening sessions was for stakeholders to express opinions, share ideas, and tell their stories, and then use that context as a starting place for a special education stakeholder working group. The special education stakeholder working group is currently meeting, and will provide feedback on policy proposals that emerged from the listening sessions, to ensure these proposals can reflect both research and community voice.

According to the attendance sheets, 411 stakeholders attended the nine listening sessions, and each listening session had an average of 36 participants. As shown by the graphic above, combined, school district staff and advocates constituted more than half of the stakeholder groups. Parents and community members and executive agency staff accounted for 31 percent of the participating stakeholder groups.

### i n f o r m E D

October 2023

Published monthly in the interim by the Legislative Education Study Committee  
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<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Entity/LESC/Default>

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