

B i t e s i z e

 The Public School Insurance Authority has lowered FY19 projected premium increases for its HMO and "high-option" health insurance plans from 7.4 percent to 4 percent. The board held a second vote on the increases, part of a plan to rebuild cash balances, after legislative staff raised concerns about the impact of the higher rates. The agency also dropped planned increases in risk insurance rates from an average of 6.2 percent to an average of 3.9 percent.

 Most high school students could take no more than two dual-credit courses a semester under a proposal drafted by the Public Education and Higher Education departments. The limit in the draft guidelines for the program that allows high school students to take college classes would not impact students in early college high schools. PED recently released draft regulations for early college high schools that outlines how a school can earn that designation.

 The Public Education Department has proposed new rules on early literacy remediation that appear to exceed PED's statutory authority. Under the proposed rules, grade promotion would be based on a single state-approved test, instead of the multiple methods allowed under state law.



i n f o r m E D

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Senator Mimi Stewart, Chair / Representative G. Andrés Romero, Vice Chair / Rachel S. Gudgel, Director / April 2018

From the Chairwoman

At Risk

With teacher walk-outs in West Virginia and Oklahoma and teacher protests in Arizona and Kentucky, it might seem New Mexico could be next. After all, New Mexico meets most of the conditions the Brookings Institute has identified as risk factors for the next teacher rebellion, with low pay compared with the national average, a decline in the real value of pay, and drops in per-pupil spending.

But, unlike states that have slashed state spending on public education as part of a pro-business, anti-tax political philosophy, New Mexico has tried to make public schools a funding priority, even during the deep fiscal crisis and without the help of an executive opposed to any new revenues that could balance the bust in oil taxes.

During the legislative session earlier this year, with stronger state revenues, teachers received a 2.5 percent pay increase and the minimum salary levels for teachers were raised. Further, the state enacted LESCEncorsed legislation that puts those minimum salaries into statute, instead of simply including them in the budget.

Importantly, the public school funding formula was amended to put more emphasis on the needs of students at risk of failing because of low income and English proficiency, and the budget included money to support that. Protesting teachers in Oklahoma and Arizona are fighting, not just for better pay, but for stronger financial support for schools generally.

Nevertheless, avoiding a strike is a pretty low standard for demonstrating our support for our children and their education.

Depending on the study, teachers are paid 18 percent to 30 percent less than similar professionals with comparable education. While the comprehensive *No Time to Lose* study of world-class education systems identified quality, respected teachers as among the most important factors in a successful system, U.S. teachers get paid less than their counterparts in other countries and work harder with many more hours in the classroom and relatively little time available for collaboration and planning. In addition, they have to be grief counselors, bodyguards, food pantries, and social workers.

New Mexico's teachers probably won't be walking out of their classrooms this year, but if New Mexicans want better schools, we'll need to do more.

Senator Mimi Stewart

School Funding Increases Focused on Teacher Pay

Stronger state revenues allowed state legislators earlier this year to increase FY19 general fund spending on public education by \$107.4 million, 3.9 percent over FY18.

More than half of that – \$63 million – will go to an across-the-board 2.5 percent increase for teachers, 2 percent for other school employees, and an increase in the statutory minimum salaries for teachers at all three licensure levels.

Legislation during the 2018 session also increased funding for early childhood programs and increased the weight of the funding formula multiplier for at-risk students.

The committee is scheduled to review the staff postsession memo on the impact of legislative action at 9:10 a.m. on April 23.

After years of flat budgets and budget cuts, most state-funded agencies will have more money in FY19. Overall, general fund spending is up 4.3 percent, slightly more than the increase for public schools.

However, public schools, which represent 44 percent of all state general fund spending, saw

smaller cuts during the financial crisis triggered by a bust in the oil industry.

Funding for public education includes almost \$91 million in FY19 for special programs at the Public Education Department, so-called below-the-line funding. Special program funding includes \$14.5 million more for the K-3 Plus extended school year program and prekindergarten and a cut of \$11.8 million for other programs.

A 33 percent increase for PED-administered prekindergarten – prekindergarten is also funded through the Children, Youth and Families Department – should allow public schools to serve an additional 2,500 students in half-day programs, or half that in full-day programs.

The increase for the K-3 Plus program, 27.4 percent, is expected to allow the program to add up to 6,600 students this summer, compared with summer 2017, and launch a pilot expanding the program to fourth and fifth grades.

In addition to the budget, the Legislature adopted a bill that increases the support for at-risk students, identified by income,

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School Shootings Prompt Closer Look at Safety

Many New Mexico public schools already limit access to buildings and conduct active shooter drills, but the high-profile mass shooting at a high school in Parkland, Florida, along with the shooting death of two Aztec High School students, prompted legislators during the recent session to authorize tens of millions for school security improvements and call for LESC to study the problem.

LESC at 1 p.m. on April 23 is scheduled to hold the second legislative committee hearing on school safety since the end of the legislation session in February.

Like the hearing held by the Legislative Finance Committee in March, speakers will include the Aztec school superintendent, the chief of the State Police, and representatives from the New Mexico Coalition of Educational Leaders, the state Public Education and Human Services departments, and the

Public School Facilities Authority and Public Schools Insurance Authority.

Legislative staff and speakers at the March hearing noted no single approach is guaranteed to prevent all school violence. Kirk Carpenter, Aztec superintendent, testified schools need better coordination with law enforcement and better services for students with mental health issues.

State Police Chief Pete Kassetas told lawmakers that more armed officers in schools could be a deterrent.

In the brief prepared for the LESC and LFC hearings, staff report New Mexico school districts and charter schools could improve safety with building improvements, better coordination with first responders, and stronger interventions with troubled students. However, it notes factors other than mental health – poverty, child maltreatment, exposure to violence, and substance misuse – are better predic-

tors of a person's potential for violence.

The Legislature has authorized the use of up to \$46 million in public school capital outlay for school security projects over the next four years and directed the Public School Facilities Authority to develop a system for ranking and awarding funds for projects.

In regional workshops held throughout the state in April, PSFA has been providing school officials and the public with an overview of school security in New Mexico and hosting panel discussions with local and state law enforcement officers and insurance and risk experts. A schedule for those workshops is available online at www.nmpsfa.org/?q=posts/psfa-school-security-workshops.

PSFA reports New Mexico schools currently use security cameras, locking exterior doors, and school resource officers, and often include physical security measures as part of new building designs.

Aztec school officials told LESC and LFC staff several measures helped prevent further violence during the high school shooting incident in December, particularly the use of radios by all staff, including substitute teachers, that resulted in a janitor warning the school quickly after the shooter arrived.

Teacher Pay Focus of Increases

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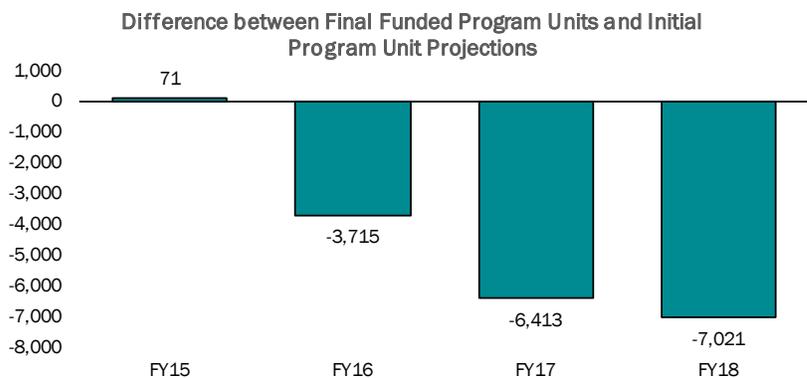
English proficiency, and mobility. Through a change in the funding formula, funding for at-risk students will increase 22 percent.

An increase for at-risk students has been recommended by several studies on the formula that indicate New Mexico spends less on at-risk students than most states. Two pending lawsuits against the state argue the state underfunds services for at-risk students and generally falls short of the total amount needed for the state to meet its constitutional mandate to provide a sufficient free education open to all children.

The lawsuits also contend the current process for providing more money to

schools with more expensive experienced teachers favors wealthier schools. The funding formula changes also updated the formula to reflect the current three-tiered licensure and payment schedule for teachers.

Unit Value Set but Could Increase Later



Since FY16, the Public Education Department has overestimated the number of program units – a figure based on enrollment, student need, and other factors specific to the district or charter school and the students in it – by several thousand, leaving a portion of the full appropriation unallocated until the department sets the final unit value in January.

Legislative analysis indicates the department might have overestimated the projected number again for FY19. Delaying distribution of funds impacts the ability of school districts and charter schools to hire teachers and implement programs. For FY19, that includes legislative mandates to increase salaries for school staff and provide additional supports for at-risk students.

informed

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