




B i t e - S i z e

 The 74 Million, an education focused news organization, featured New Mexico's Educator Fellows program in a recent report analyzing alternative pathways into teaching. Building on Learning Policy Institute research indicating the importance of grow-your-own teaching programs that target staff already working in schools, the article cited Educator Fellows as a model program. Educators Fellows is a two-year program managed by PED and funded with federal American Rescue Plan Act funding. During the 2022-2023 school year, over 300 educator fellows receive paid leave to complete bachelor's degree coursework and coaching to pursue a teaching license.

 PSCOC reviewed a set of connectivity guidelines for construction of the statewide education network (SEN). The technical guidelines give priority to schools with high free and reduced-fee lunch populations and those that do not currently have internet speeds of 100 Mbps upload/20 Mbps download. The state will partially or fully cover the cost of routers, modems, and receivers and provide this equipment to allow students to connect to the SEN. All equipment provided will be compliant with the Children's Internet Protection Act and the terms of an "acceptable use policy."

 In recent years, the legislature has increased employer contributions to the educational retirement fund, with SB36 requiring local administrative units to contribute 18.15% of employee's salaries to the fund beginning on July 1, 2023. That is an increase from the 14.15% contribution requirement prior to the passage of SB42 in the 2021 regular session. Estimates from LFC show that each percentage point increase in employer contributions raises contributions to the educational retirement fund by \$34 million.



i n f o r m E D

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Senator William P. Soules, Chair / Representative G. Andrés Romero, Vice Chair / Gwen Perea Warniment, Director / December 2022

From the Chairman

Investing for Our Future

New Mexicans recently voted to increase their investment in early childhood education by tapping into the Land Grant Permanent Fund. This was a huge step in a positive direction. We have a real opportunity to make a difference for our state's future. Evidence shows experiences early in childhood play a critical role in brain development, and children who participate in early learning programs have better health, social-emotional, and cognitive outcomes than those who do not.

Children born into poverty, through no fault of their own, have the odds stacked against them, and the achievement gap compared to their peers can be as wide as two years by the age of six.

Eighty percent of the brain is developed in a child's first five years of life, meaning they are learning and absorbing behaviors from their surroundings, and if these environments are not healthy, it takes its toll on families both emotionally and physically. This is why the increased funding is so critical, so we can reduce stress for families and ensure they can focus on the needs of their children. This funding should give families access to much needed resources essential to overcoming the challenges we face in New Mexico.

The Early Childhood Education and Care Department notes the funding will go directly towards home visits, early intervention services for children with disabilities, childcare assistance and access to prekindergarten. In addition, the K-12 system will also receive funding.

The amendment will now go to congress for approval and I feel confident it will pass. Our youngest generation of New Mexicans and their families will receive an equal chance at life's greatest opportunities.

Empty Desks: The Hidden Crisis of Chronic Absenteeism

Measures to decrease chronic absenteeism should be prioritized as current data shows troubling absenteeism rates across school districts, staff told the Legislative Education Study Committee at its November meeting in Santa Fe.

Policy Analyst Bridget Condon explained research shows attendance is a critical factor impacting student outcomes. [One study](#) found that only 17 percent of students who were chronically absent in both kindergarten and first grade were reading proficiently in third grade, compared to 64 percent of those with "good" attendance.

While student attendance issues are not new to New Mexico policymakers, the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated chronic absenteeism – defined as missing 10 percent or more of school days – with chronic absenteeism rates rising from 17.9 percent in FY19 to 40.4 percent in FY22.

Experts are seeing the effects of chronic absenteeism translate into widening achievement gaps, particularly for students of color,

English learners, students with disabilities, and students from low-income communities.

Community schools have helped address chronic absenteeism at better rates than traditional schools, Condon said. Dr. Timothy Hand, Anna Age Eight Institute, New Mexico State University, and Dr. Angelo Gonzales, Interim Deputy Secretary of School Transformation and Innovation at the Public Education Department, outlined how community schools are an evidence-based strategy, and when well-designed and fully implemented, community schools [increase student success and reduce gaps in both opportunity and achievement](#).

Condon emphasized that community schools are not the only solution to absenteeism, but can help identify tools to reduce absenteeism and close achievement gaps.

Following national trends toward chronic absenteeism over truancy-based policies, New Mexico adopted policy shifts in recent years that have driven the collection of chronic absentee rates, and re-

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Proposed Changes to High School Graduation Requirements

After nearly two years of research and statewide discussions, Legislative Education Study Committee staff presented a revised proposal to update New Mexico's high school graduation requirements to members in November.

The plan incorporates feedback gathered from education stakeholders ranging from high school principals and teachers to school board representatives and educator unions. There was strong interest in changing the requirements, which have changed incrementally but have not been comprehensively updated in about 20 years.

There was a particular desire to ensure a strong academic foundation for students, while also encouraging student career exploration, access to career technical education and work-based learning, and a wide range of core aca-

demics that allow for student choice. The revised proposal would mean students would need four English credits, four math credits, four social science credits, and three science credits to meet core academic requirements.

While similar to current requirements, the new proposal would eliminate the requirement for all students to take Algebra II and allow for more flexibility in how students could meet other requirements. It also reflects feedback from stakeholders who said requiring four science units, which was in previous proposals, could pose staffing problems.

Additionally, students would have to earn a half unit in physical education, a half unit in health, four elective credits, including a two unit pathway concentration, and two units set by local school

officials. In total, students would have to earn 22 credits to graduate.

Stakeholders also expressed concerns about the timing of implementing new requirements, with most advocating the new requirements, if approved by the Legislature, not take effect until the 2024-2025 school year. That would allow sufficient time for the Public Education Department to adopt any needed regulatory changes and ensure coursework is aligned to new requirements, and would allow school districts and charter schools to prepare for the new requirements.

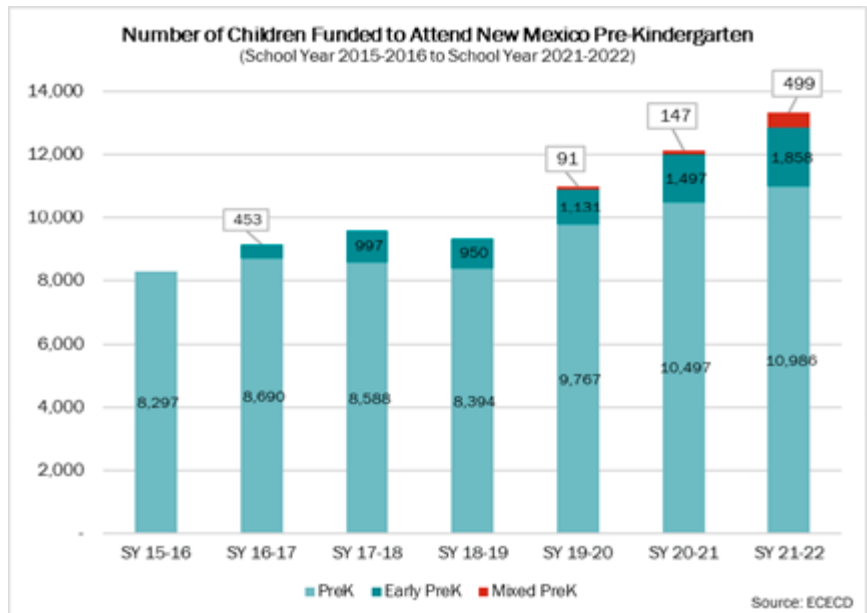
LESC staff will present draft legislation for potential committee endorsement at its December meeting.

Attendance law needs revisiting

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quires district-specific reporting and planning to address absenteeism, Condon said. In 2019, lawmakers repealed the Compulsory School Attendance Law, replacing it with the Attendance for Success Act. Stakeholders have said the law needs updating.

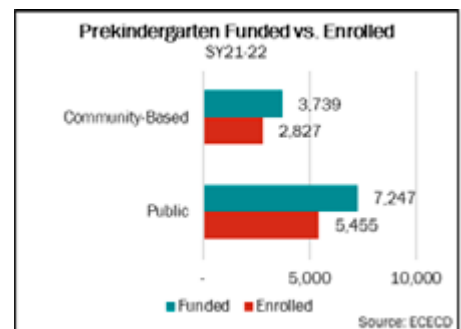
Some stakeholders said to fully move New Mexico away from truancy-based policies, it is necessary to remove the provision that requires reporting to juvenile probation services after other non-punitive measures are used.



Prekindergarten Funding

Funding was authorized for 13,343 children to attend prekindergarten (pre-k), early pre-k, or mixed pre-k for the 2021–2022 school year, but ECECD reports enrollment has been lower than anticipated, largely due to pandemic impacts.

Of the 10,986 funded slots for pre-k, 7,247 were in public pre-k programs and 3,739 were in community-based programs. Data shows 75 percent of funded slots in both public and community-based pre-k slots were filled in the 2021–2022 school year.



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