

B i t e - S i z e

 Educator preparation programs, for both traditional bachelor degrees and alternative licensure, admitted more education students in FY20 than in FY19 and more students completed the programs. A total of 1,287 students were admitted to a program and 927 students completed a program, with 60 percent of “completers” finishing an alternative licensure program. The share completing alternative programs was 51 percent in FY19.

 The Public Education Department, with the Department of Health’s Office of School and Adolescent Health, has received a five-year federal grant of nearly \$10 million to improve access to school-based mental health services. Schools will get additional providers based on family income, substance abuse rates, student suicide rates, and student-provider ratios. Rural schools and those serving predominantly Native American students will get priority.

 New Mexico Highlands University, the University of New Mexico, and San Juan College have received a total of \$865 thousand for teacher residency programs, which combine classwork with extensive experience in the classroom. San Juan College, funded for a second year, trains teachers for their home communities in northwest New Mexico. UNM’s Albuquerque Residency Partnership emphasizes teaching English to English learners. Highlands intends to work with regional districts to train math teachers.



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Representative Christine Trujillo, Chair / Senator Mimi Stewart, Vice Chair / Rachel S. Gudgel, Director / November 2020

From the Chairwoman

The Covid Generation

Covid-19 has struck a blow to every aspect of our lives, but nothing has been hit harder than our schools. A re-examination of existing research recently confirmed students lost a few months to up to a year of learning time due to school shutdowns, with struggling students losing the most. And whether you agree the education system should include social services or not, there is no doubt the closure of schools has ripped big holes in the safety net for children with disabilities, mental health issues, and unstable home lives.

Teachers, parents, and school administrators are all working hard to make the technology work, to find missing students, to get help for students who are fraying at the edges. But the education system wasn’t built for this. We need to acknowledge – now – that even if we find the right bandage for today’s learning loss, the injury is long term. No matter how hard and smart everyone works and even if the pandemic magically ends before the end of the year (and that’s not going to happen), we now have a “Covid generation,” a demographic of children who will need more for many years to make up for what they’ve lost in the last few months.

Some policymakers have already suggested extending the 2021-2022 school year statewide. That’s a good start. We know that extended learning can improve academic performance, even whether a child graduates from high school. But this can’t be our one shot. We must commit to a multipronged approach, much like that being discussed as a response to the *Martinez-Yazzie* education sufficiency lawsuit. Indeed, rather than move education reform to the back burner, we need to make it a high priority. The harm we are experiencing now is chronic, not acute. While teachers and school administrators continue to scramble everyday to solve the problems with educating our young people under almost impossible circumstances, education policymakers and lawmakers must start thinking ahead, to when we emerge from this crisis and start to rebuild.

Stakeholders Seek Review of At-Risk Student Factor

The funding formula multiplier for students at risk of failing has more than tripled in less than a decade in an effort to steer more resources to struggling students, but critics say the method for calculating need falls short.

In a staff brief for a committee hearing on the at-risk factor, scheduled for 1 p.m. on November 5, LESG analysts report stakeholders have argued the method for calculating a school district’s at-risk “index” undercounts low-income students and mishandles charter schools.

While other factors in the public school funding formula take the specifics of student enrollment, such as the number of students in each grade or the number with special needs, and multiply that number by a cost differential, funding for at-risk students is based on a complicated calculation to determine the index, which is then multiplied by total student enrollment.

The index is based on the percentage of students who are English learners, the percentage of students who frequently change schools – student mobility – and the district’s eligibility for federal “Title I” funds, a figure based on U.S. Census data on poverty, foster

homes, and similar demographics.

The result is a districtwide figure, and school district officials are expected to distribute the money to district schools as needed, presumably sending more to schools with a greater number of at-risk students.

However, charter schools in the district qualify for the same index as district schools, no matter the need of their students.

LESG analysis notes the Albuquerque Institute of Math and Science, with 6 percent of its students identified as economically disadvantaged and essentially no English learners, gets the same funding boost per student as Robert F. Kennedy Charter School, also in Albuquerque but with essentially all students classified as economically disadvantaged and 17 percent of its students identified as English learners.

Because Title I eligibility is only calculated on a districtwide basis, some stakeholders have argued for an alternative method for identifying low-income students individually or at the school site level.

Student eligibility for free and reduced-fee meals is often used as

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Indian Education Money Left on the Table

The Legislature has more than doubled the amount available for Indian Education Act grants in FY20, but a delay in the award letters meant about a quarter of the money went unspent, LESC staff report.

As part of [a hearing on supports for Native American students](#) in September, staff noted most eligible districts and charter schools applied for and received grants, but the Public Education Department did not notify the schools until mid-year, making it difficult for them to spend the money within the school year.

Nearly \$1.1 million of the \$3.9 million

in grants remained unspent at the end of the fiscal year.

All but three of the 22 tribes, 23 school districts, and seven charter schools identified as “Native-serving institutions” applied for and received grants, with award amounts ranging from \$36.4 thousand to \$100 thousand. Tribes received an average grant of \$90 thousand, while the average award for school districts and charter schools was \$72 thousand.

The state’s roughly 34 thousand Native American students, 10.4 percent of the public school student population, trail statewide averages in rates of atten-

dance, high school graduation, and reading and math proficiency. Historically, Native American students have experienced the largest gap in achievement when compared with other ethnic groups.

The state district court in the *Martinez-Yazzie* education sufficiency lawsuit court specifically noted the poor performance of Native American students.

For FY21, the Public Education Department awarded \$4.8 million in Indian Education Act grants, with schools reporting they intended to focus on indigenous languages and supports for college and career readiness.

The department also indicated it would award \$800 thousand in indigenous education initiative grants to the Bernalillo, Cuba, Santa Fe, and Taos school districts, the only grantees in FY20, the inaugural year of the program.

The Legislature during the 2020 regular session appropriated \$5.5 million to the initiative but earmarked all but \$2.9 million to specific uses. During the special legislative session, lawmakers cut \$1 million as a solvency measure, leaving \$1.9 million for the initiative.

The department recently announced the appointment of a new assistant secretary of Indian education, a position that has been vacant since March 2018.

Critics Say Factor for At-Risk Student Fails

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a proxy for identifying low-income students, but the LESC brief notes it has become a less reliable measure since the federal law guiding the program created options for community eligibility, which expanded access and reduced paperwork.

According to staff, 43 of New Mexico’s 89 school districts participate districtwide in community eligibility, placing 100 percent of their students in the program for free or reduced-fee meals, regardless of their actual percentage of low-income students.

Thirty-two states use the meal program to determine funding for at-risk students, but states vary in the way they use it, with some providing funding based on the percentage of free meals and others providing funding when the percentage reaches a certain threshold.

Funding for at-risk students was a key finding of the 2018 ruling in the *Martinez-Yazzie* educational sufficiency lawsuit, with the district court judge defining at-risk students as those who

come from economically disadvantaged homes, English learners, Native Americans, and those with disabilities.

Before the ruling, the Legislature increased FY19 at-risk funding by \$22.5 million, with additional increases to be phased in over time. Following the court’s decision, the Legislature increased funding by \$113.2 million for FY20 and \$50.2 million for FY21. The three-year total of \$185.9 million more than doubled the amount available from FY18.

PERA Retirees Fare Better Than Those at ERB

Employees of similar education levels who are members of the Public Employees Retirement Association have higher pension benefits than members of the Educational Retirement Board, even though they contribute as much or less to the retirement fund throughout their career, the Bureau of Business and Economic Research at the University of New Mexico concludes in a study commissioned by ERB.

The study found state employees classified as education administrators who began in 1958 made roughly the same contributions as public school teachers but earned an additional \$24 thousand, or 7 percent, in retirement, adjusted for inflation each year. This disparity increased over time, although pension reform plans adopted in the last decade have narrowed the gap.

The study found cost-of-living adjustments are a major driver of the disparity. During the study period, PERA’s COLA averaged 3 percent, while ERB’s averaged 2 percent. In addition, PERA retir-

ees waited only two years before benefits were adjusted, while ERB retirees waited between 12 years and 15 years, depending on the cohort.

Notably, in addition to getting less of a return on their pension investment, education employees generally are paid less than employees in other fields with similar education.

Cumulative Benefits for Members of PERA and ERB
(in thousands)



Source: Bureau of Business and Economic Research

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