




## B i t e - S i z e

 A look at North Central New Mexico teacher shortages found teachers who grew up in the area are more likely to stay in the job and recommends local colleges work with local schools to recruit and prepare a home-grown workforce. The study of the regional workforce by the Los Alamos National Laboratory Foundation and Learning Alliance New Mexico found 57 percent of surveyed teachers who grew up in the area have taught for six or more years, compared with 39 percent of nonlocal teachers.

 Funded student enrollment for the 2020-2021 school year has dropped to its lowest level in 15 years. The preliminary figure for “membership,” an average of enrollment figures from December and February from the prior school year, is 321,411 for this school year, down 1,690 students from the membership for the 2019-2020 school year. With both enrollment figures collected before school buildings closed, the decline does not reflect pandemic-related enrollment changes.

 Public Education Department figures shows 11 thousand students have registered for home schooling for the 2020-2021 school year, up 24 percent from last year. Education advocates and administrators indicate enrollment has increased because parents are fearful of sending their children to school buildings during the pandemic. The number of home-school students might drop when school buildings reopen.



# i n f o r m E D

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

### From the Chairwoman

#### Missing the Mark

Standardized tests, a disputed and incomplete measure of student achievement and a demonstrably poor predictor of college success, were a widely used tool for assessing teachers for many years, in New Mexico and throughout the country. But you won't find nary a mention of test scores in the new New Mexico teachers evaluation system, Elevate New Mexico. Our state, like almost half of all states, has decided test scores tell us little about the quality of teachers or the impact they have on their students. While 37 states used test scores in their teacher evaluation systems in 2015, that figure dropped to 26 by 2019.

The use of test scores to predict future student performance and, through that, determine whether a teacher “added value” was perhaps the most contentious element of NMTech, the state's now defunct teacher evaluation system. Teachers complained too many factors affecting student performance are outside their control. Indeed, most research indicates half of a student's performance is dependent on factors outside the classroom. Further, the policy expert who developed New Mexico's teacher assessment tool, an expert witness in the *Martinez/Yazzie* school sufficiency lawsuit, said the tool was wrong at least 15 percent of the time.

While test scores generally reflect student academic learning, they are less capable of reflecting a student's social-emotional learning or critical thinking skills. Other factors – on-time graduation, special education interventions, absenteeism, and others – are better measures of student success. And tests say nothing about the quality of teacher engagement or ability to build strong relationships that make children excited to learn. Yet the state used test scores for years, allowing them to label teachers as good or bad and affecting pay and professional development.

The state will be “test driving” Elevate New Mexico over the next year to see if its use of professional development plans, administrator observations, and family and student surveys does a better job of measuring teacher quality. The new system might need to be tweaked, but its heavy reliance on reviewing what teachers actually DO in the classroom, how they plan lessons and classroom space and interact with students, along with its requirement that administrators provide teachers with feedback and tools for improvement, should result in a system that works better for teachers and our children.



## NM Diversity, Poverty Complicate Reform

Improving New Mexico's schools is “extraordinarily complex” because a diverse student population mostly from low-income families is spread over a large geographic area, and reform is hindered by a failure to properly fund the higher cost of educating students facing poverty and other barriers and a long history of local control, a national education think-tank concludes.

In *Improving Education the New Mexico Way: An Evidence-Based Approach*, the Learning Policy Institute concludes New Mexico needs to design a system that puts marginalized students – what the report calls the “norm” in New Mexico – “at the center and builds the state and local capacity to meet their diverse needs.”

The study, scheduled for a hearing at 1 p.m. on September 23, says New Mexico differs from other states because of its geographic, cultural, and linguistic diversity – “its most valued attribute” – and persistent widespread poverty – “its most troubling.”

The study says New Mexico's failure to improve its schools, despite 50 years of effort, is the result of inadequate resources and failure to implement policies effectively.

New Mexico was making progress before the pandemic- and oil-bust-related economic decline with better teacher pay and other efforts to retain a high-quality workforce; investments in extended learning time; expanded services for low-income, English-learner, and mobile students; a community school initiative; and a more supportive accountability system, the report says.

However, that progress is now threatened, with the most vulnerable children most at risk.

Nevertheless, New Mexico has the resources to make certain improvements now and should plan a strong system in anticipation of stronger revenue in the future, it says.

For the long-term, New Mexico should focus on developing the five elements common to successful systems in other states and nations: “(1) meaningful learning goals, supported by (2) knowledgeable and skillful educators, (3) integrated student supports, and (4) high-quality early learning opportunities, all made possible with (5) adequate and equitably distributed school funding.”

In addition, the report finds, continued on back

# Per-Pupil Spending Data Shows Size Matters

A snapshot of per-pupil spending suggests average costs are highest in the state's smallest school districts, but its a state-authorized charter school that is spending the most per student, LESC analysis indicates.

In [materials prepared by staff and](#)

[Santa Fe and Albuquerque school district staff](#) for the August hearing, figures indicate economies of scale play a part in the average per-pupil costs. The average per-pupil spending is \$14,395 in the 20 districts classified as small and \$26,619 in the 18 districts classified

as very small, compared with \$9,421 in the 15 large districts and \$10,848 in the 35 medium large districts.

The size of New Mexico's school districts varies greatly, from 34 students to about 90 thousand.

The 51 state-authorized charter schools had an average close to that of large districts – \$9,756 – but topped the list of entities with the highest cost per student at a single school – \$59,835.

The data shows fairly consistent costs across school types, with the average per-pupil spending in high schools and elementary schools slightly higher than that in middle schools.

Staff analysis of the federally required data warns the figures might not be comparable because districts choose how to allocate centralized cost.

In addition, the figures on site spending include the higher cost of special programs and populations, such as special education, which can skew the cost per student.

Staff also notes schools only began collecting per-pupil spending information in FY19, providing analysts with just one year of data.

Representatives from Santa Fe and Albuquerque school districts told the committee the state's existing funding formula is a good starting point for equity and funding follows the needs of each student.

## NM Needs to Focus on Marginalized

continued from front

the state should work on an effective accountability system that promotes successful practices and supports for the state's diverse educators, school boards, and tribal partners.

New Mexico has a strong vision of a rigorous academic system responsive to cultural and linguistic differences, but has failed to fund or implement its vision, focusing until recently on test results, the report says.

The study recommends New Mexico, as part of developing a meaningful learning system, create opportunities for students to engage in critical and creative thinking as they develop high-level cognitive skills, implement culturally and linguistically responsive instruction, build social and emotional learning into the curriculum, and develop high school paths to college and career.

The report states New Mexico could take immediate steps toward improving its learning system with existing resources. It could close the digital divide between students with useful access to the Internet and those without by expanding broadband access, establish a state online hub for high-quality, comprehensive instructional resources, and convene a task force on college and career pathways.

Immediate, low-cost steps for creating a strong workforce include expanding programs that recruit potential teachers as early as high school and under-

writing training for teachers who plan to stay in their communities.

The study also recommends expanded use of community schools, which include integrated supports for students and their families and have been shown to improve student performance when implemented properly.

The study notes nearly half of New Mexico schools serve large concentrations of low-income students, and while the tie between a student's family income and performance is widely understood, research also finds that concentrated poverty exacerbates the achievement gap.

The report emphasizes the need to continue to increase the funding formula differential for students at risk of failure but suggests the state create an additional factor for schools in communities with high concentrations of traditionally underserved students.

## Most Districts Can Reopen Elementaries

More than 800 schools in 67 school districts are eligible to begin part-time in-person classes for prekindergarten through fifth grade, Department of Health data from September 15 indicates.

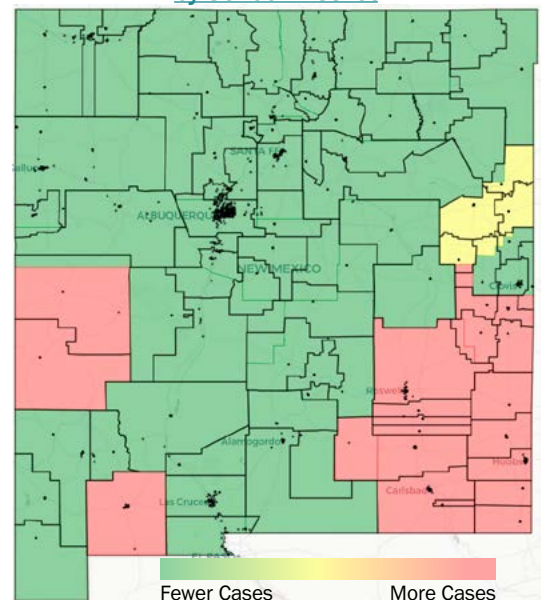
Under the allowed hybrid learning plan, schools can hold staggered classes in school buildings; however, 24 districts have announced they will stay with full-time remote learning until after winter break.

Counties must have less than an average of eight positive daily cases per 100 thousand people and a test positivity rate of less than 5 percent to be rated green. In addition, the Public Education Department must approve each reentry plan, which must include cleaning supplies and procedures and a rapid response plan for responding to cases.

If a county is no longer rated green, PED has said it will work with local school agencies to keep schools open, employing partial closures and quarantines.

The Health Department's [Covid-19 map](#) is updated every two weeks.

[Health Department Covid-19 Map by School District](#)



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325 Don Gaspar, Suite 200  
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(505) 986-4591 [www.nmlegis.gov/lesc](http://www.nmlegis.gov/lesc)

Chelsea Canada, Staff Editor | Helen Gaussoin, Editor