

B i t e - S i z e

 The Public Education Department is asking school districts for ideas on individualized extended learning programs, a new approach intended to help the department understand what districts need to implement extended learning. Enrollment in the K-5 Plus program, which adds 25 days to the school year, has shrunk over the last three years, despite a quadrupling of available funding. While participation in Extended Learning Time, which adds 10 days, has increased, enrollment still falls short of capacity.

 November 2021 revenues transferred to the lottery tuition fund totaled \$2.9 million, a decrease from October 2021 revenues of \$3.29 million. To date, FY22 proceeds total around \$16.8 million compared with \$16.3 million in the same period last year, an increase of about 3 percent. The fund, partially supported with annual legislative appropriations, pays for tuition scholarship for many New Mexico high school graduates who attend in-state public college.

 Eight families in Taos have been given a receiver kit that allows students without internet connections to receive schoolwork directly onto their electronic devices. The pilot project is funded by a \$1 million award from the governor's emergency education relief fund and will serve 400 families in Los Lunas, Pojoaque, Silver City, and Taos. The pilot districts, all identified as "focus districts" in the *Martinez-Yazzie* education sufficiency lawsuit, can request additional kits if the initial implementation is successful.



i n f o r m E D

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Senator William P. Soules, Chair / Representative G. Andrés Romero, Vice Chair / Vanessa K. Hawker, Acting Director / January 2022

From the Chairman

Recovery

Even as we recognize that mental health issues have been exacerbated by the isolation and anxiety of the pandemic, that the workforce is going through a transformation of expectations that baffles employers and policymakers, that a little-understood explosion in violent crime means something is tragically off in our communities—even as we recognize the depth and breadth of the impact of the pandemic on our society and our psyches, we seem to forget our children have been through traumatizing times as well.

The pandemic slammed the emotional health of all our children. Educators describe them as traumatized and in crisis. Many are anxious, some disengaged and withdrawn, after more than a year of remote and hybrid learning and in-person classroom instruction punctured by periodic quarantines and complicated by public health safety routines.

Teachers of young elementary students talk of children who went from the gentle expectations of second grade to the independence of fourth grade without access to the social-emotional lessons that would have helped them with the transition.

Junior high teachers talk of eighth graders who don't know how to act like older students because their last school experience was in grade school.

High school students talk of loss, not of classroom time, but of the time they would have spent in extracurriculars like music and sports, hanging with friends with similar interests and building their college applications.

It took more than a year to get here—indeed, the pandemic is ongoing—we can't expect to recover all that was lost in just a year or even a few years. We can and must continue the long-term work of transforming New Mexico's schools, but we can continue that critical work even as we give students and educators the time and space to take a breath. We need, as one educator told the committee, patience and grace for staff, students, and families. We need to look forward, not with a singular, hard focus on recovering lost learning, but through a lens of compassion.



Little Overlap on Lists Except for Pay Raises

The legislative wish lists from groups representing school administrators, local school boards, educators, and charter schools, as well as a coalition of groups, differ on the details, but all support raising educator pay, position papers submitted by the groups show.

While the professional organizations vary on their priorities, with lists that generally reflect their special interests, all have included pay raises for teachers and educators in the materials provided to the committee for a hearing scheduled for 1:30 p.m. January 6.

While the groups propose different levels and approaches for increasing salaries for teachers and other school employees, the New Mexico Education Partners has perhaps the most aggressive plan for school staff pay, with a proposal that would raise the minimum annual pay for teachers at the three licensing levels to \$60 thousand, \$70 thousand, and \$80 thousand by the 2024-2025 school year.

The partners—the Albuquerque Teachers Federation, American Federal of Teachers-New Mexico, National Education Association-New Mexico, New Mexico Coali-

tion of Education Leaders and Superintendents Association, New Mexico Parent Teacher Association, and New Mexico School Boards Association—also propose a \$30 thousand annual minimum for education assistants, secretaries, clerks, cafeteria staff, custodians, and bus drivers; pay increases for counselors, social workers, special education therapists, and nurses; and minimum annual salaries for principals ranging from \$80 thousand to \$100 thousand.

Notably, the member groups of coalition did not include the same specifics on raising salaries in their separate legislative wish lists.

While some other issues are supported by multiple groups—the NEA-NM, AFT-NM, and school administrators support health insurance reforms and cost controls and the teachers organizations and the education partnership support higher per-pupil funding to support needs generally—most of the some 30 items on the lists reflect the needs of the organizations.

In addition to educator salary increases, the school administrators and local school board organizations also overlap on preserv-

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Rural CTE Works but Programs Struggle

Career and technical education has been successful in rural areas in engaging students, upping graduation rates, and helping graduates into careers, but has struggled with attracting qualified teachers and maintaining funding, speakers told the committee during the November meeting.

Bryan Dooley, executive director of the region 9 educational cooperative, and Milo McMinn, career technical education director for Aztec Municipal Schools, said CTE programs offer students options outside the traditional classroom but qualified teachers and funding are hard to get.

Dooley said New Mexico's regional education cooperatives relied for many years on federal Perkins Career and Technical Education Act funds to implement welding, culinary, and other programs but that funding has historically been difficult for small districts to access.

The region 9 co-op, serving part

of south central New Mexico, has since taken on an administrative role to access federal Perkins funds for member school districts, in addition to using clean energy funds and the state's Next Gen CTE pilot program to fund career and technical education programs, he said. However, funding is inconsistent and isn't usually available until October, making planning difficult.

In addition, he said, programs have struggled to pay teachers with the right industry experience enough to lure them away from their professions.

Further, even though high school programs often successfully work with colleges, high school students engage differently, and high school instructors need training on how to successfully interact with the younger students.

Dooley suggested policymakers consider diverting some of the new state and federal funding for green energy and cybersecurity into CTE programs,

providing rural students with a broader range of career choices.

He described programs that introduce students, often with agricultural backgrounds, to wind turbines and how they work.

McMinn from Aztec indicated career and technical education can be an important part of mitigating the impact of a collapse in a local industry, like the decline of coal mining in northwest New Mexico. Wages for many jobs in infrastructure, information technology, and other technical fields are projected to grow, and preparing students for those fields is a good investment.

However, he said, some of the area's most promising students are lured away by college opportunities in more urban areas, adding to the impression that young people must leave to succeed.

The early college high school model, which emphasizes CTE, creates a college experience in a place that does not necessarily have college opportunities, and many students graduate with technical degrees.

Students, partly because they are exposed to a broader range of skills and activities than in a traditional classroom, are engaged, he said, and graduation rates are higher than average.

Educator Salaries Common Cause

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ing local autonomy, preserving local school board reserve funds, protecting local schools from funding cuts related to declining enrollment, and expanding social workers and other behavioral health services.

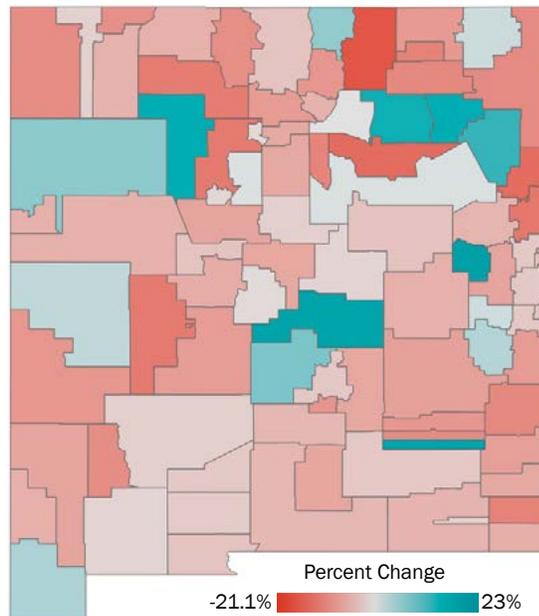
Other positions that have support from more than one group:

- Increasing the weight of the funding formula factor for services for at-risk students and tweaking the distribution;
- Creating greater flexibility in K-5 Plus and other extended learning programs;
- Expanding community schools, which include extensive wraparound services for students and families;

- Allowing for retired teachers to re-enter the education workforce earlier; and
- Expanding teaching staffs, partly to allow for smaller class sizes.

Enrollment Remains Below Prepandemic Levels

Enrollment Changes
October 2019 to October 2021



The number of students in New Mexico's classrooms remains well below the count prior to school closures in spring 2020, although enrollment for the current school year is flat with last year's enrollment, Public Education Department data shows.

Total enrollment in public schools in October was 316,464, only 30 students fewer than in October 2020 but 14,388 students fewer than in October 2019.

Of the 89 school districts, 71 had fewer students enrolled than in October 2019. Year over year, most school districts saw modest enrollment increases, with 48 school districts growing and 41 school districts continuing to decline.

Enrollment and its impact on funding will be discussed in the LESC annual report when it's released in January.

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