

Despite a return to statewide testing after a three-year hiatus, changes to student academic outcomes remain unclear and present challenges for demonstrating progress on meeting deficiencies found in the *Martinez-Yazzie* education sufficiency lawsuit. Additionally, the state switched standardized tests from PARCC to MSSA and SAT in 2021 for federal testing requirements. While the new MSSA and SAT tests will provide more frequent assessment data, changing tests means a new baseline of performance and more years of waiting to understand how state investments and school closures affected student learning.

National research and other states reporting achievement data in FY22 suggest most students are performing at lower academic levels than before the pandemic, especially younger, at-risk students that received more remote learning. The national assessment, or NAEP, reported average reading and math scores for fourth graders in 2022 declined by 5 points and 7 points, respectively. This is the largest decline in reading scores since 1990 and the first drop in math scores ever recorded. Like the NAEP, which has been administered since the 1970s, New Mexico should consistently use one assessment over the long run to accurately compare longitudinal student performance.

The Public Education Department’s (PED) action plan to address *Martinez-Yazzie* findings and improve educational outcomes statewide includes ambitious performance targets for student academic performance. While these targets should be adopted as part of the Accountability in Government Act process, the plan should include frequent public reporting on student outcomes, alongside both PED and school actions and responsibilities when targets are not met.

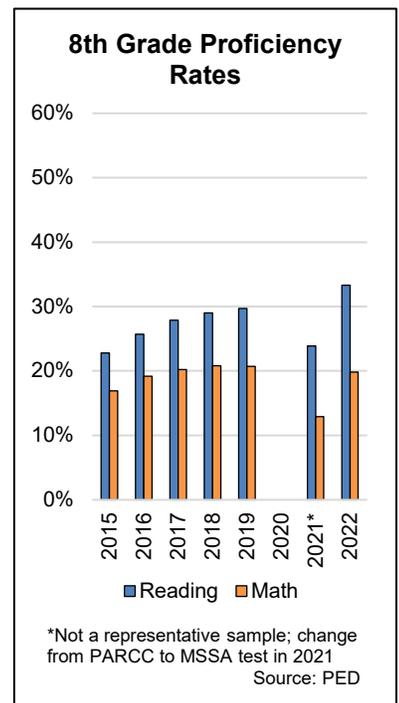
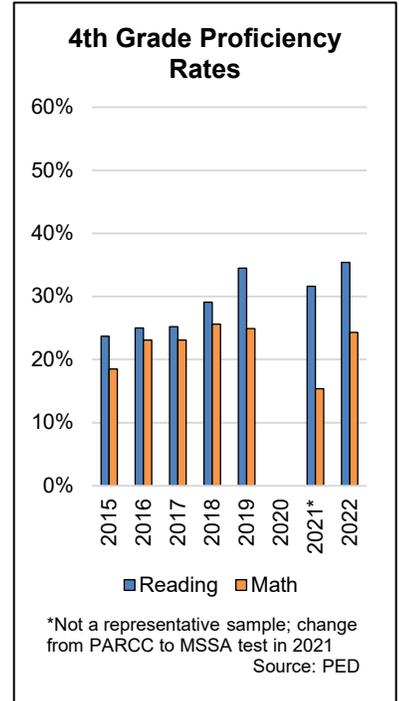
Student Achievement

Mixed Academic Performance. Changes in reading proficiency rates across the state in FY21 likely reflect the switch to a new assessment and the performance of a smaller pool of students that chose to take the assessment voluntarily. As such, the FY21 results are not a representative sample of the population and cannot be used to draw conclusions about statewide student outcomes during school closures. With the return to statewide assessment in FY22, the latest scores are more likely to reflect a new baseline of student performance levels, which show similar proficiency levels for fourth and eighth graders reported in FY19 under the PARCC test. PED notes the two tests are not comparable.

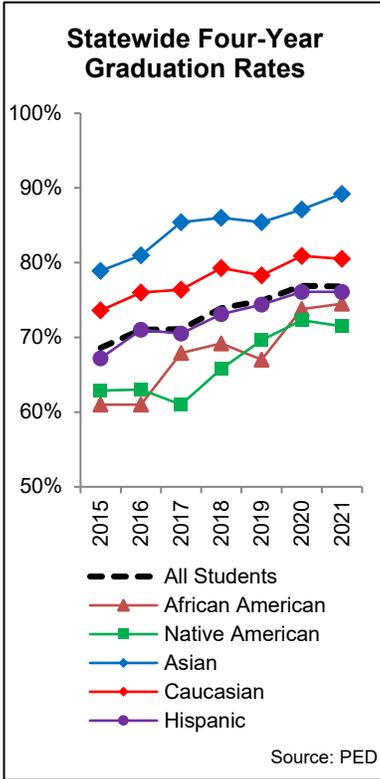
Graduation Rates Remain Flat. The state’s overall four-year high school graduation rate stayed flat for the class of 2021, dropping slightly to 76.8 percent. New Mexico still lags significantly behind the 2021 national graduation rate (85.3 percent). Graduation rates rose by 2 percentage points for the class of 2020, following PED guidance that allowed the passing of required coursework in lieu of standardized testing to meet graduation requirements. The latest PED guidance, issued in August 2021, extended this allowance to the class of 2022 and 2023 due to pandemic-related disruptions. As such, graduation rates could remain stable for

ACTION PLAN

Submitted by agency?	Yes
Timeline assigned?	Yes
Responsibility assigned?	No



two more years in spite of mixed student academic performance on state assessments.



PUBLIC SCHOOL SUPPORT

Budget: \$3,411,305.8 FTE: N/A

	FY20 Actual	FY21 Actual†	FY22 Target	FY22 Actual	Rating
Reading proficiency (4 th grade)	Not reported	31.6%	34%	35.4%	G
Math proficiency (4 th grade)	Not reported	15.4%	34%	24.3%	R
Reading proficiency (8 th grade)	Not reported	23.9%	34%	33.3%	R
Math proficiency (8 th grade)	Not reported	12.9%	34%	19.8%	R
High school graduation rate (4 year)	76.9%	76.8%	75%	N/A	G
Chronic absenteeism (elementary school)	New	New	<10%	38%	R
Elementary English learners exiting EL status	New	New	10%	3%	R
Teacher vacancies	New	New	N/A*	1,048	Y
Share of at-risk funds spent on at-risk services	New	New	N/A*	93%	G
Classroom spending in large districts	Not reported	Not reported	N/A*	73%	Y
	Program Rating				Y

*Measure is classified as explanatory and does not have a target.

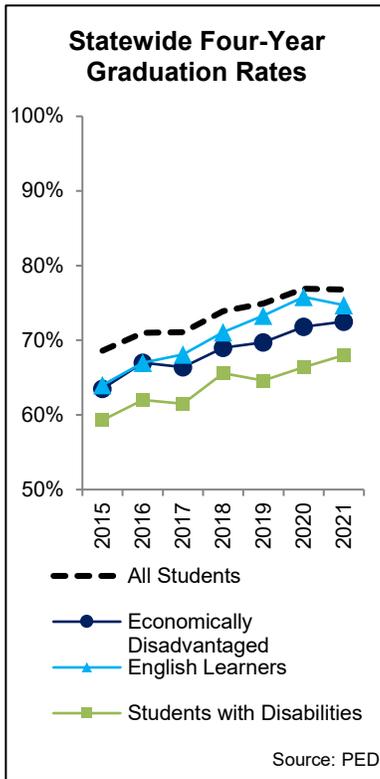
†Proficiency rates reflect students that opted to test in FY21, representing only about a tenth of each grade level

Student Engagement

Enrollment Remains Flat. Preliminary counts for FY23 show student enrollment hovering at 308.3 thousand students, an increase of 516 students, or 0.2 percent, from FY22. While these counts have recently stabilized, overall enrollment has decreased by nearly 13 thousand students, or 4 percent, since FY21 and fallen 8 percent since FY12. Alongside declining enrollments, statewide student-to-teacher ratios have also dropped from 15.2 in FY17 to 14.9 in FY21.

A 2022 LFC evaluation of Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) found the district’s enrollment decreased by 17 percent between FY12 and FY22, allowing the district to eliminate vacant positions and consolidate some classes. Rural districts with limited staff per subject or grade level (and already small class sizes) will struggle to downsize operations as students enrollments decrease.

Chronic Absenteeism Increases. To comply with the Attendance for Success Act, PED began measuring chronic absenteeism, defined as students missing 10 percent or more of instructional time in school, to include both excused and unexcused absences. Chronic absenteeism rates have increased in recent years, with the statewide average rate reaching 16 percent in FY20, 30 percent in FY21, and 40 percent in FY22. Consistently, the five student groups who are chronically absent more than 45 percent of the time include Native American students, students experiencing housing insecurity, students with disabilities, English learners, and economically disadvantaged students. Student mental health may be contributing to the growth in chronic absenteeism rates. On par with national trends, New Mexico saw a 13 percent increase from 2016 to 2020 in students suffering from anxiety and depression.



Dual-Credit Participation Falls. Participation in dual-credit classes decreased from 21.8 thousand students in FY20 to 16.6 thousand students in FY21. Most students participating in dual-credit programs signed up for English and math courses, which had the highest enrollments of 5,012 and 4,744, respectively. Some fields with less applicable degree pathways, such as personal awareness and self-improvement, also had high enrollments (2,034 students) compared to areas like education, which included 998 enrollees.

Dual-credit students in FY21 had a graduation rate of 89 percent, nearly 16 percent higher than the statewide average. This varies significantly by district, as low as a 74.5 percent graduation rate for dual credit students in Deming to much higher rates, such as 92.1 percent for students in Portales or 96.1 percent for students in Silver City. To improve college and career readiness outcomes, PED should monitor the quality and value of dual credit courses given to students and develop metrics to identify practices that improve these outcomes.

Instructional Quality and Quantity

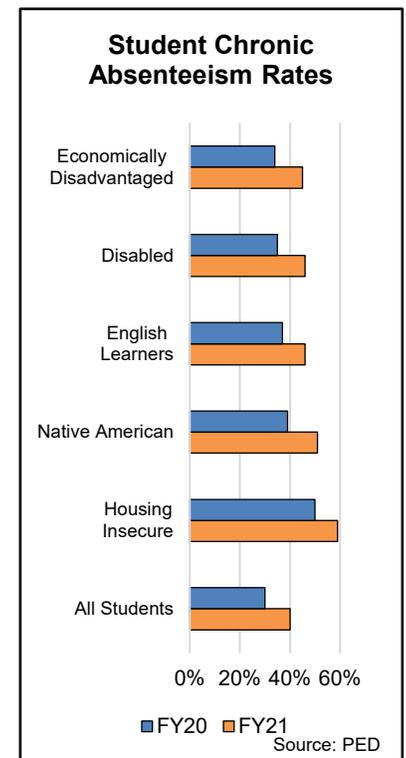
Mixed Participation in Interventions. Recent legislative investments in teacher residencies, educator pay, K-5 Plus, and Extended Learning Time (ELT) programs were intended to boost the quality of candidates entering schools and expand opportunities for student learning. While residency programs and increased pay are reducing vacancies and increasing interest in the teacher workforce, educator interest in a longer school year continues to wane. Following significant lost instructional time after the pandemic and findings of dismal student achievement levels in the *Martinez-Yazzie* sufficiency case, additional support for academic recovery has reached a critical juncture.

Preliminary surveys suggest New Mexico now has 635 teacher vacancies, down from the 1,048 vacancies in October 2021 reported by New Mexico State University. Additionally, of the \$15.5 million appropriated for teacher residencies in FY23, PED has allocated \$14.6 million for 374 residents. Out of the \$6 million appropriated for student teaching, PED has allocated \$5.7 million for stipends to 500 student-teachers and 500 mentors.

Findings in the *Martinez-Yazzie* education sufficiency lawsuit affirmed PED's authority to direct school spending on evidence-based supports for at-risk students. However, participation in K-5 Plus programs, which show evidence of closing student achievement gaps (even during the pandemic) has continued to drop each year. Since FY21, participation in K-5 Plus and ELT programs has decreased, and schools have forgone nearly \$400 million of available state funding for these interventions. School closures during the Covid-19 pandemic reduced instructional time for all students and further exacerbated existing achievement gaps for at-risk student groups. Despite this lost instructional time, attempts to require statewide participation failed, and schools continued to opt out of both programs.

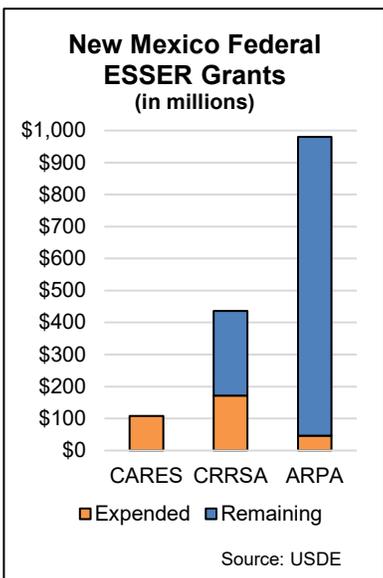
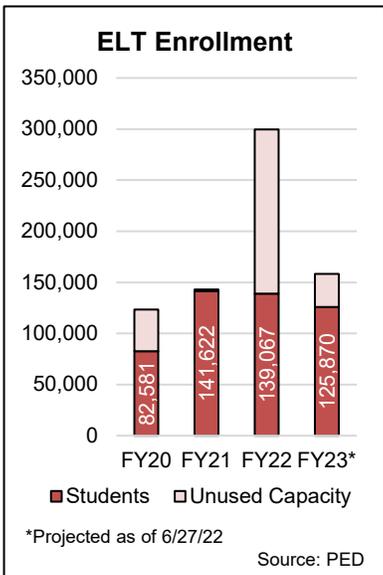
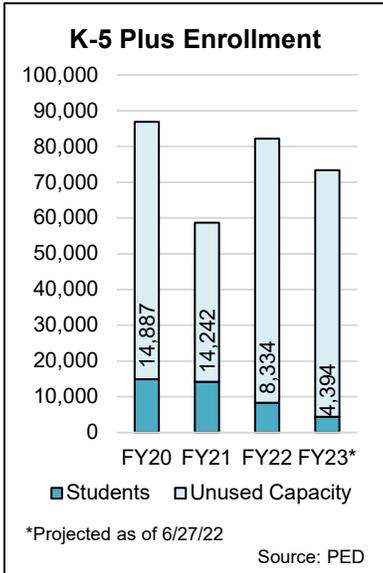
Public Education Department

The latest court order in the *Martinez-Yazzie* case requires PED to improve access to high-speed internet and digital devices for students. The department has leveraged federal emergency relief (ESSER) funds to expand access to students and mapped areas across the state needing additional support. PED estimates over



Teacher Licensure Changes

As of Spring 2024, New Mexico will no longer require the Praxis exams for licensure, except for elementary reading. PED will shift to a portfolio-based system based on key competencies. Praxis tests are still required by 48 states for licensure, and educators from out of state seeking a New Mexico license can still use Praxis scores to apply for licensure, despite this requirement being optional for in-state applicants.



90 percent of students now have access to the internet and a digital device, up from 63 percent of students having access in initial projections. The department continues to struggle with processing federal reimbursements, likely due to the substantial influx of ESSER aid.

At the end of the fourth quarter, PED held an 18 percent vacancy rate with 54 FTE positions unfilled. PED continues to contract with Regional Education Cooperatives (REC) for program implementation of federal and state programs. REC-5, the largest cooperative, employs close to 90 FTE. Given challenges with filling vacancies and the costs of outsourcing departmental work, PED should evaluate whether contractual services with RECs are the most efficient or effective strategy for rolling out programs and services.

Budget: \$15,097.5 **FTE:** 285.2

	FY20 Actual	FY21 Actual	FY22 Target	FY22 Actual	Rating
Students in Extended Learning Time Programs	82,581	141,622	N/A*	139,067	Y
Students in K-5 Plus Schools	14,887	14,242	N/A*	8,334	R
Average days to process reimbursements	31	40	22	40	R
Percent of students with a high-speed internet connection	New	New	100%	91%	Y
Program Rating	R	R			Y

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Federal and State Resources. Of \$1.5 billion from three rounds of federal ESSER funding, New Mexico has spent virtually all of the first round of ESSER, also known as the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) amount. Schools spent nearly one-third of CARES funding on educational technology; other expenditures include \$5 million for school leaders, sanitization, and planning.

At the end of FY22, nearly 40 percent of the second round of ESSER, the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA), was spent. Similar to CARES, schools purchased educational technology and sanitization supplies but also spent \$21.3 million to address learning loss and \$18.3 million for summer learning and afterschool. PED has directed schools to focus the third round of ESSER—American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)—funds towards closing the digital divide, accelerating instruction for at-risk student groups, social and emotional needs, and supporting students with disabilities.

In addition to federal relief, school districts and charter schools budgeted an all-time high of \$525.5 million in unrestricted cash balances carrying over from FY22 to FY23. Statewide cash balances grew by \$76.5 million, or 17 percent, from the prior year and now represent 14.3 percent of FY23 program cost.