Report
to
The LEGISLATIVE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Public Education Department
Performance and Improvement Trends:
A Case Study of Elementary Schools in New Mexico

October 30, 2014

Report #04-11

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October 30, 2014

Ms. Hanna Skandera, Secretary-Designate
Public Education Department
Jerry Apodaca Education Building
300 Don Gaspar
Santa Fe, NM 87501

Dear Ms. Skandera:

On behalf of the Legislative Finance Committee (Committee), I am pleased to transmit the *Improvement Strategies: A Case Study of Elementary Schools in New Mexico.* The evaluation review team assessed governance, resource allocation, and student performance in Albuquerque, Central Consolidated, Española, Gadsden, Gallup, Las Cruces, Ruidoso, and Santa Fe. The report will be presented to the Committee on October 30, 2014. An exit conference was conducted on October 24, 2014 with the Public Education Department to discuss the contents of the report. The Committee would like a plan to address the recommendations within this report within 30 days from the date of the hearing.

I believe this report addresses issues the Committee asked us to review and hope New Mexico's public schools benefit from our efforts. We very much appreciate the cooperation and assistance we received from your staff.

Sincerely,

David Abbey, Director

Cc: Representative Luciano "Lucky" Varela, Chairman, LFC
Senator John Arthur Smith, Vice-Chairman, LFC
Dr. Tom Clifford, Secretary, DFA
Senator John M. Sapien, Chairman, LESC
Representative Mimi Stewart, Vice-Chairman, LESC
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Statewide student performance levels have remained disappointing for many years and do not meet performance targets. In FY14, only about half of elementary students were reading at grade level and less than half performed at grade level in math. Since 2010, success rates in both reading and math have declined, and in some cases by as much as seven percentage points.

Some children fare worse than others, resulting in a large achievement gap. New Mexico has high rates of students "at-risk" of academic failure, primarily students from low-income families and students learning English. Children from low-income families disproportionately start school far behind and generally do not catch up to their peers. Other research has shown many students are not proficient in either their home language or English, creating unique challenges. Previous Legislative Finance Committee (LFC) evaluations and other research have shown the achievement gap is largely a function of poverty and language.

Given the need to close the achievement gap and recent attention on early literacy and investments to help struggling schools, this evaluation focused on elementary school performance. The evaluation assessed factors making some high-poverty schools more successful than others through an in-depth case study of 15 elementary schools across New Mexico. The evaluation assessed how school leadership, the use of staff, funding, and programming impacted student achievement. Schools were selected based on performance, whether high-performing, struggling or implementing turnaround programs.

Overall, schools consistently implementing best practices achieved better results. Research has shown eight common characteristics of high-performing schools. These high-performing schools also strategically used financial resources, including grants for prekindergarten and K-3 Plus. Student mobility and chronic absenteeism, common among high-poverty schools, was also a challenge for schools in this study. Not surprising, students staying at the same school and attending regularly do far better than their peers. High-performing schools employed effective leaders and a better mix of beginning and veteran teachers. Struggling schools did not use best practices and had disproportionate numbers of beginning teachers and teachers with low licensing exam scores, which has been shown as a predictor of effectiveness. Finally, turning around chronically low-performing schools is inconsistent, sometimes costly, and results are mixed.

The report recommends continued expansion funding to reduce the achievement gap, including formula funding for at-risk students and expanding intervention programs such as prekindergarten and K-3 Plus. The state needs a new approach to ensure more effective teachers and leaders are at high poverty schools through a combination of financial incentives, state guidance on best practices for districts, and more purposeful hiring decisions of teachers locally. Finally, Public Education Department (PED) needs to ensure, through the budget review process, school districts are taking action to develop school leadership, using best practices, and using available funding in effective ways at underperforming schools.

One out of four students in high-poverty schools enters kindergarten unable to identify a single letter, and over 80 percent enter school behind academically.

Eight Characteristics of High-Performing Schools:

1. ***High expectations and standards;***
2. ***High levels of collaboration and communication;***
3. ***Strategic assignment of principal and staff;***
4. ***Focused professional development;***
5. ***Regular and targeted parent and community involvement;***
6. ***Caring staff dedicated to diversity and equity;***
7. ***Curriculum, instruction, and assessment aligned with core standards; and***
8. ***Data-driven focus and frequent monitoring of student achievement.***

Among high- and low-performing schools:

- ***Reading proficiency rates varied by 57 percentage points.***
- ***Math proficiency rates varied by 70 percentage points.***

High-performing schools are able to move a population of low-income students toward proficiency, effectively overcoming the impact of poverty, while students at low-performing school lag far behind desired results.

KEY FINDINGS

High-performing schools target funding and resources and use best practices to effectively maximize student achievement. Despite similar at-risk student demographics, schools in this case study had different performance results. High- and low-performing elementary schools vary dramatically in student performance.

Schools in the case study implementing best practices demonstrate better results. Research indicates high-performing, high-poverty schools exhibit a number of best practices differing significantly from practices in low-performing, high-poverty schools. National and state research shows eight characteristics common at high-performing schools. These characteristics drive school leaders and teachers and affect school climate and culture.

High-performing, high-poverty elementary schools in this evaluation were proficient in all or nearly all of the eight characteristics or indicators of high-performing schools. The fifteen schools evaluated in this study are at different stages of demonstrating proficiency in the eight characteristics of high-performing schools. The differences between high- and low-performing schools were measurable and evident. Two of the 15 evaluated elementary schools are currently proficient in all eight characteristics of high-performing schools and two others are nearly proficient. At these high-performing schools the eight characteristics have become the norm and are ingrained in the school culture. High-performing schools utilize different curriculum and programs yet share similar delivery methods, embed interventions in the daily schedule, and target human and financial resources to close the achievement gap.

High-performing schools promote urgency around continual use of assessments and data which have proven to pay off in student growth. According to national research and best practices of high-performing schools, a data-driven focus in instructional practices and continual assessment of student performance are key factors in the success of higher performing elementary schools. High-performing schools in this study effectively used data to drive instruction, including state test-data and local short-cycle test data.

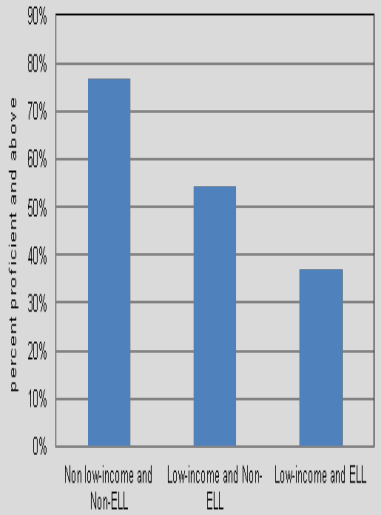
School districts often rely on federal funding to improve student performance. Federal Title I funds allow districts to provide well-trained teachers who specialize in student interventions. In this study, higher achieving schools and schools making significant gains allocated higher percentages of funding to direct instruction and job-embedded, teacher-specific professional development. These districts indicated departments and school leaders worked together collaboratively on the budget allocation process, therefore avoiding working in "silos."

Schools in this study had a high at-risk index, but received the same per pupil funding allocation as other school districts with a lower at-risk index and lower-poverty rate. Continuing to increase the at-risk index would provide high-poverty school districts additional resources to invest in interventions and turnaround strategies for students.

Despite similar rates of poverty:

- ***In high-performing schools, over 70 percent of third grade students in were proficient in reading.***
- ***In low-performing schools less than 30 percent of third grade students were proficient in reading.***
- ***Proportionally fewer students are habitually absent among high-performing schools, compared to low-performing schools.***

Third Grade Reading Achievement Gap, FY14



Source: LFC Analysis

In FY14 statewide, the majority of elementary students in New Mexico did not make a full year of academic growth.

Many schools face challenges associated with student poverty but can still attain high levels of achievement with modest improvements in performance. Outside circumstances, including a high concentration of poverty, English language learner (ELL) populations, student mobility, and chronic absenteeism present high-poverty schools with additional challenges. Previous LFC evaluations have noted student performance is highly influenced by student economic and language status, attendance, and mobility rates.

Nationally, research suggests mobility is more prevalent among low-income students and negatively affects student and school performance. Frequent school changes have a cumulative effect on student achievement and can place students years behind their peers and at greater risk of dropping out. An LFC analysis showed New Mexico students who remained in the same school between kindergarten and third grade were 120 percent more likely to be proficient in reading and math in third grade. However, only about half remain at the same school statewide. Some schools in this study had upwards of 70 percent of students changing schools.

In FY14, the majority of elementary students statewide did not make a full year of academic growth. A year's worth of growth, as measured by the student based assessment (SBA), is a scaled score change of zero or more points from one year to the next. In FY14, 49 percent of fourth and fifth graders made a year's worth of growth in reading and 44 percent of fourth and fifth graders made a year's worth of growth in math.

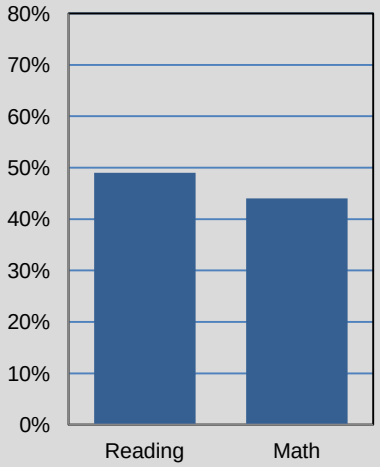
Students tend to fall behind between third and fifth grades. Statewide, students in fifth grade in FY14 grew an average of 0.9 scaled score points after having made less than an year's worth of growth (-1.6 scaled score points) in third grade. In math, scaled scores declined from 42 points in third grade to 39 points in fifth grade. Among the evaluated schools, low and high-performing schools generally reflect similar trends.

Many students are one question away from scoring proficient on the SBA. Statewide, roughly 7 percent of third grade students are only a few points away from proficiency, which may translate to one question away from proficiency, when raw scores are translated into scaled scores. While the SBA is a criterion-referenced assessment, the student results appear to reflect a normal distribution.

In FY14, 1,899 third graders statewide were within two points of scoring proficient in reading, and 1,595 students were within two points of scoring proficient in math. Modest learning gains among these students could produce significant improvements in school performance. High-performing schools have capitalized on this fact and have targeted instruction and interventions to assist students achieve proficiency.

While high-performing schools have moved the majority of their students toward proficiency, many students in low-performing schools tend to be clustered in the beginning-steps range, many points from grade-level performance. SBA scaled score distributions among high-performing

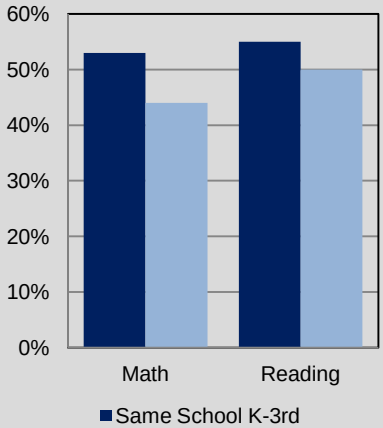
Percent of Fourth and Fifth Graders Making a Year+ of Growth, FY14



Source: LFC Files

Many elementary students in New Mexico are one question away from scoring proficient on the state assessment.

Third Grade Proficiency by Student Mobility, FY13



Source: LFC Files

schools in this study suggest these schools have been able to move the majority of students toward proficiency. In contrast, not only are the majority of students in low-performing schools not proficient, but large numbers of students are many points away from proficiency and clustered toward the beginning-step end of the scaled score distribution.

Effective leadership and teachers are key factors in creating a framework for improved student performance at high-poverty schools. A National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) study concluded nearly 60 percent of a student's performance is attributable to teacher and principal effectiveness. A 2003 Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning study concluded school leadership, effective or ineffective, accounts for up to 25 percent of student outcomes. Ninety-six percent of teachers say the number one factor in staying at a particular school is their principal.

Effective teachers can have a positive impact and narrow the achievement gap. A high-performing teacher, one at the 84th percentile of all teachers, when compared with just an average teacher, produces students whose level of achievement is at least 0.2 standard deviations higher by the end of the school year. In New Mexico, a 0.2 standard deviation increase translates to about a two point increase in proficiency on the SBA.

In a 2014 LFC survey of elementary principals in New Mexico, 61.6 percent agreed the job of principal has become too complex, yet nearly the same amount 61.4 percent agreed they would not like to work in a field outside of public education. Almost 60 percent said they intended to stay at their present schools for more than five years.

Low-performing schools in the study had higher levels of beginning teachers and fewer teachers with students achieving academic growth. Low-performing schools tend to have more beginning teachers and attract teachers less likely to be effective. Further, teachers at high-poverty schools had lower licensure exam scores than their peers in low-poverty schools. Previous LFC analysis found teachers who score higher on the basic skills assessment improve student achievement at higher levels. A standard deviation increase in teacher test performance corresponds to a one to four percent increase in student achievement. Such an increase could move a student from nearing proficiency to proficient on the state exams.

Teacher and principal recruitment and retention continue to be a challenge in New Mexico. Principals in this study, particularly those close to the Arizona, Colorado, and Texas borders reported highly qualified teachers leave the state or commute to higher paying jobs across the state-line. In addition, New Mexico lacks a sustainable pipeline for aspiring leaders. The internship process, salary, and extra duties are cumbersome and a disincentive for aspiring principals, according to a LFC survey and interviews.

State and school district policies generally do not support placement or hiring of effective teachers at high-poverty schools, impeding efforts to close the achievement gap. The state's public education funding formula

One high-performing school district in this study surpassed the state-wide average in school grades and math proficiency percentage points by 14.5 in FY14 despite a district-wide at-risk population 23.5 percent higher and low-income rate 20 percent higher than the state-wide average.

In schools with a highly effective principal:

- *Students perform 5 to 10 percentage points higher than a school led by an average principal.*
- *Students and teachers have fewer absences.*
- *Effective teachers stay longer.*
- *Ineffective teachers are replaced.*
- *Principals stay at least three years.*

Source: Center for Public Education, 2012

A standard deviation increase in teacher test performance corresponds to a one to four percent increase in student achievement. Such an increase could move a student from nearing proficiency to proficient on the state exams.

"There wasn't any support, formal support. My first year was a very lonely and scary year. You are given keys to a building and told this is how we all started out."
Source: LFC Principal Survey

does not align the training and experience (T&E) index to the three-tiered licensure system. There is limited or no extra incentive pay for teachers at high-poverty schools however, some schools offer stipends for endorsements or extracurricular activities. Schools, particularly low-performing schools, have not been purposeful either in using evaluations or other proxy information such as national board certification (NBCT) to place teachers.

Implementation of turnaround strategies in schools statewide are varied and costly. The evaluation found turnaround programs in New Mexico were costly, unsustainable, and difficult to maintain once the funding sources were depleted. PED turnaround initiatives target schools after they are failing for a number of years and PED does not hold school districts accountable for implementing turnaround initiatives in all low-performing schools. Schools with turnaround programs may find it difficult to sustain initial gains in assessment scores or school grades once funding is reduced or eliminated.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Legislature.

- Prioritize K-3 Plus funding and pilot a fourth and fifth grade plus program in high-poverty schools and prekindergarten for districts willing to implement in all high-poverty schools.
- Continue to increase formula funding for at-risk students.
- Modify the public school funding formula to align the training and experience (T&E) to the 3-tiered licensure system; and add an adjustment factor for effective teachers and leaders at high-poverty schools ($5 thousand to $15 thousand stipend) or factor an extra weight in T&E matrix for teachers at high-poverty schools.

PED.

- Use the budget process to hold districts accountable for using best practices at high poverty and under performing schools, as authorized in the School Finance Act.
- Create guidelines for placing highly-effective teachers and principals at low-performing schools.
- Collapse a number of initiatives aimed at targeting under-performing, high-poverty schools to a streamlined program providing flexible assistance, reinforcing best practices, and requiring district support.

New Mexico public school districts.

- Require low-performing schools to follow characteristics of high-performing schools.
- Adopt district-wide curriculum and enrollment and transfer policies to decrease issues associated with student mobility.
- Make a concerted effort to distribute level one teachers across schools to avoid concentrating them in low-performing schools.

Overview. While overall student achievement levels in New Mexico have remained relatively flat and do not meet performance targets, school performance fluctuates widely. Given recent attention on early literacy and investments to help struggling schools, this study focused on elementary school performance. For several years, many New Mexico students have failed to meet proficiency in math and reading on the state's standards based assessment (SBA). Both math and reading scores declined state-wide between FY10 and FY14.

Table 1. SBA Reading Proficient and Above
Third, Fourth, and Fifth Grades FY10 - FY14

NM Public Schools	Grade	Group	Proficient and Above 2010	Proficient and Above 2011	Proficient and Above 2012	Proficient and Above 2013	Proficient and Above 2014
All Schools	3	All Students	57%	53%	52%	55%	52%
All Schools	4	All Students	45%	46%	50%	46%	44%
All Schools	5	All Students	59%	52%	55%	51%	53%

Source: PED

Table 2. SBA Math Proficient and Above
Third, Fourth, and Fifth Grades FY10 - FY14

NM Public Schools	Grade	Group	Proficient and Above 2010	Proficient and Above 2011	Proficient and Above 2012	Proficient and Above 2013	Proficient and Above 2014
All Schools	3	All Students	58%	51%	53%	51%	49%
All Schools	4	All Students	50%	44%	44%	45%	43%
All Schools	5	All Students	45%	42%	43%	43%	44%

Source: PED

New Mexico, compared nationally, has very high rates of students from low-income families, who are English language learners (ELLs), and high rates of mobility and chronic absenteeism. These factors put students "at-risk" of academic failure. Previous LFC evaluations and other research have shown the achievement gap is largely a function of poverty and language and at-risk students require additional targeted resources to achieve the success of their more affluent peers. Many Hispanic and Native American students in New Mexico have a limited use of cognitive and academic language in English outside of the school and are not proficient in Standard Spanish or a Native American pueblo language. The influence of the home language and a lack of rich academic language in the home have led students to become inter-lingual.

This evaluation sought to assess factors making some schools more successful than others in educating at-risk students, as well as identifying trends in schools trying to achieve higher student performance. Schools with high concentrations of at-risk students tend to show lower performance. However, some schools have found ways to effectively educate at-risk students.

High- and Low-Performing Schools. A report commissioned by the New Mexico Funding Formula Study Task Force performed by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) listed common themes to improve student performance such as:

- A highly-qualified, dedicated, and collaborative teaching staff;
- Vertically aligned instruction tied to state standards and goals;
- Sensitivity to the cultural and community context; and
- Additional wraparound resources are essential.

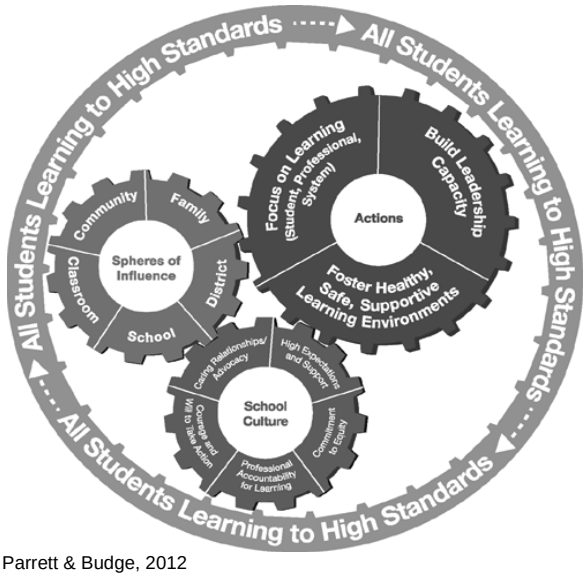
The Consortium on Chicago School Research studied schools attempting reform in Chicago and found schools with similar demographics ended up with dissimilar outcomes. Schools that showed success implemented essential supports:

- *Leadership*—principals organized staffs and community assets in support of student learning;
- *Improved community ties*—staff made school more welcoming for parents and created links to other community institutions;
- *Increased professional capacity*—focus on professional development and continuous improvement;
- *Student-centered learning environment*—safe and engaging student environment; and
- *Instructional guidance*—common vision of curriculum and instruction promoting academic achievement.

Some New Mexico high-poverty schools are "beating the odds" out-performing schools with similar demographics. These schools have been able to place the right leader, hire and train highly effective teachers, and utilize and manage resources efficiently to achieve positive student outcomes. It takes multiple factors coming together to significantly improve student achievement on a large scale, according to the Wallace Foundation.

Why are low-performing elementary schools low-performing? A framework for action in leading high-poverty schools to high performance is a complex interaction among three areas: spheres of influence; actions; and school culture. When any one of the three areas is not functioning properly or the three areas are not interacting together, student achievement suffers and schools remain low-performing or may tumble from high-functioning to low-functioning. From those three areas come characteristics high-performing schools have in common. The LFC compiled a list of eight characteristics high-performing schools have realized and maintained.

Chart 1. Framework for Action:
Leading High-Poverty Schools to High Performance



Source: Parrett & Budge, 2012

Evaluated Schools. Fifteen schools in eight school districts were chosen from among 440 elementary schools in 89 school districts in New Mexico. Schools were initially chosen using a performance model to examine the difference between predicted and actual performance. Other criteria included: at-risk population over 60 percent and over 50 percent low-income students, as measured by free and reduced lunch (FRL) percentages. In the evaluated schools, the average at-risk student population, English language learner (ELLs), students with disabilities (SWD), and low-income rates surpassed state-wide averages.

Table 3. Evaluated School Profiles

School Districts	Elementary School	Hispanic	Native American	Free and Reduced Lunch	English Language Learners	Students with Disabilities	Total Student Population
Albuquerque Public Schools	Emerson	80%	7%	96%	50%	8%	490
Albuquerque Public Schools	Griegos	100%	0%	56%	50%	16%	378
Albuquerque Public Schools	Lowell	82%	5%	96%	50%	8%	395
Central Consolidated Schools	Kirtland	6%	81%	64%	20%	16%	540
Central Consolidated Schools	Mesa	0%	100%	87%	30%	30%	411
Española Public Schools	Hernandez	100%	0%	87%	0%	16%	178
Española Public Schools	San Juan	79%	0%	78%	11%	13%	444
Gadsden Independent Schools	Anthony	100%	0%	98%	11%	11%	437
Gallup-McKinley County Schools	David Skeet	0%	100%	93%	59%	16%	220
Las Cruces Public Schools	MacArthur	97%	0%	91%	38%	15%	395
Las Cruces Public Schools	Sunrise	87%	0%	85%	24%	10%	450
Ruidoso Municipal Schools	White Mountain	49%	19%	76%	9%	18%	512
Santa Fe Public Schools	Kearny	84%	0%	79%	32%	13%	524
Santa Fe Public Schools	Piñon	79%	0%	74%	32%	11%	522
Santa Fe Public Schools	Ramirez Thomas	93%	0%	93%	66%	15%	451
State-wide averages	**N/A**	**59%**	**10%**	**72%**	**16%**	**14%**	**371**

Source: LFC Files

Leadership. School leadership and highly-effective teachers impact student learning and are strong indicators of student success. Various studies have concluded school leaders and teachers directly and indirectly influence learning. A 2003 Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning study concluded school leadership, effective or ineffective, accounts for up to 25 percent of student outcomes. A 2014 National Conference of State Legislators (NCSL) study concluded nearly 60 percent of a student's performance is attributable to teacher and principal effectiveness with principals accounting for about a quarter of a school's total impact on a student's academic success.

Table 4. Highly Effective Principal

In schools with a highly effective principal:
• *Students perform 5 to 10 percentage points higher than a school led by an average principal.*
• *Students and teachers have fewer absences.*
• *Effective teachers stay longer.*
• *Ineffective teachers are replaced.*
• *Principals stay at least three years.*
Source: Center for Public Education, 2012

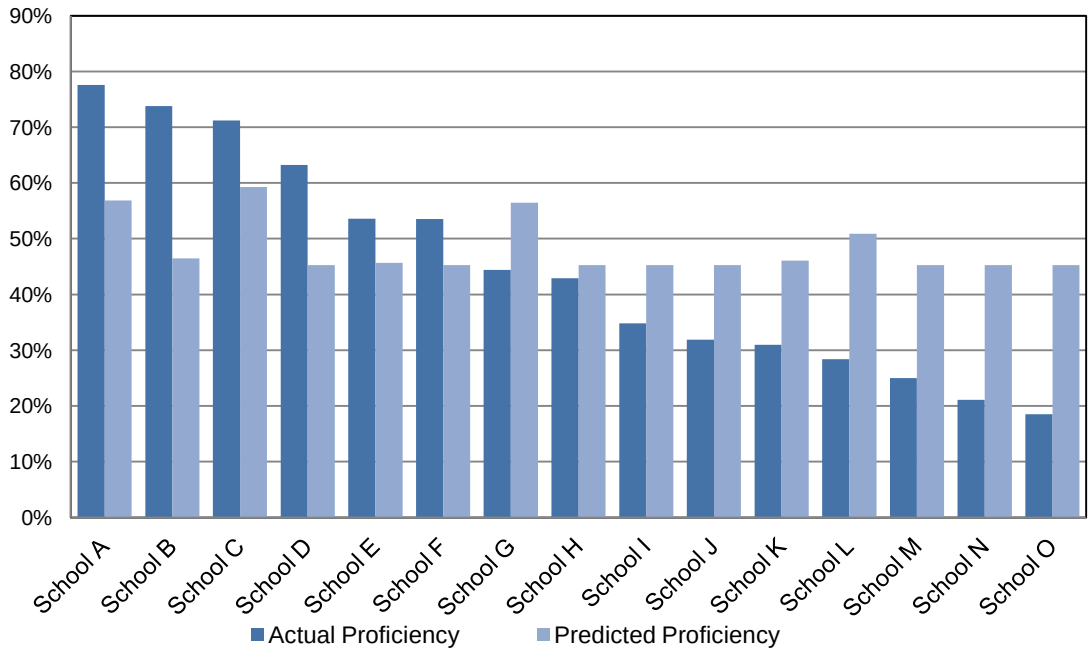
Turnaround Movement. A turnaround movement is taking shape in New Mexico in the form of federal initiatives such as the School Improvement Grants (SIG), district-based programs, and PED initiatives such as the school turnaround specialist program at the University of Virginia Darden-Curry School and the Priority Schools Bureau principals pursuing excellence program. Research prescribes five phases of turnaround for districts:

1. Pursue quick wins or highly visible cosmetic changes to obtain stakeholder buy-in such as upgrading technology (computers, laptops, or tablets) or re-modeling facilities including grounds, and publicizing district achievements (Appendix B).
2. Re-structure or build a staff committed to improvement through collaboration and a common vision.
3. Urgent analysis of what is working and not working, measuring results frequently, and discarding failed tactics and programs not tied to goals.
4. Set measurable goals, communicate goals district wide, and provide professional development.
5. Provide a year for planning prior to reform including strategies for sustaining resources and support for years after initial gains and targeted funding subsides.

HIGH-PERFORMING SCHOOLS TARGET FUNDING AND RESOURCES AND USE BEST PRACTICES TO EFFECTIVELY MAXIMIZE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Despite similar at-risk student demographics, schools in this case study had different performance results. High- and low-performing elementary schools in this study vary dramatically in student performance. For example, among high- and low-performing schools, reading proficiency rates varied by 57 percentage points, while math proficiency rates varied by 70 percentage points. Despite similar rates of poverty, over 70 percent of third grade students in high-performing schools were proficient in reading, while less than 30 percent of third grade students were proficient in reading in low-performing schools. These disparities suggest school-level practices are leading students to overcome the challenges of poverty, including chronic absenteeism and high levels of student mobility. For example, one high-performing elementary school, which reported one of the highest rates of student mobility among the evaluated schools, outperformed predicted student proficiency by over 10 percent.

Chart 2. Actual and Predicted Proficiency Third Grade Reading, FY13



Source: LFC Analysis

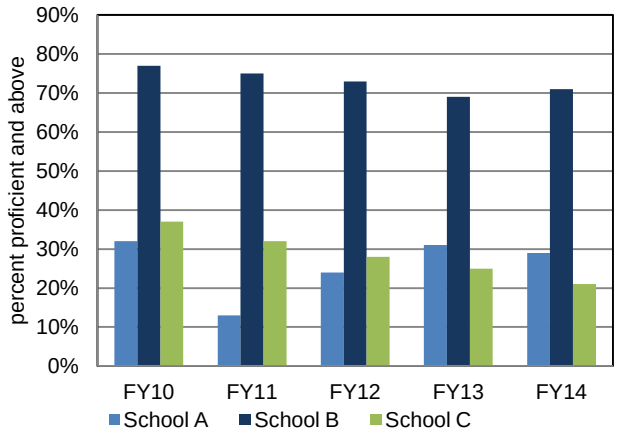
The fifteen schools in this study had similar percentages of at-risk and low-income students. The schools were placed in categories of high-performing, turnaround, and low-performing based on performance measures such as predicted test scores, FY12 through FY14 SBA proficiency scores, and school grades (Appendix C).

- High-performing schools had higher than predicted test scores, higher SBA proficiency scores than the statewide average in reading and math (reading >55 percent, math >50 percent), and school grades of "A" or "B";

- Turnaround schools participated in federal, state, or district turnaround programs, but had lower than predicted test scores and fluctuating SBA scores and school grades; and
- Low-performing schools had lower than predicted test scores, SBA proficiency scores lower than the statewide average in reading and math (reading <30 percent, math <30 percent) and school grades of "D" or "F".

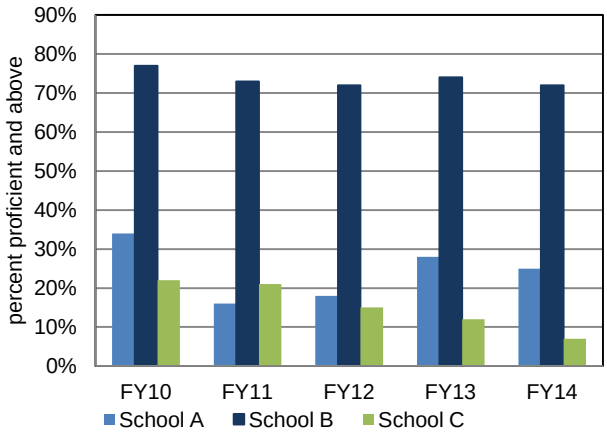
Observed performance disparities among high- and low-performing elementary schools persist across multiple years, even in the same school district. Between FY10 and FY14, the majority of students in high-performing, high-poverty schools have consistently outperformed state averages, while student performance in low-performing schools has remained stagnant. In one school district, three high-poverty elementary schools with similar student demographics have dissimilar results.

Chart 3. Percent Proficient in Reading
District A, FY10-FY14



Source: PED

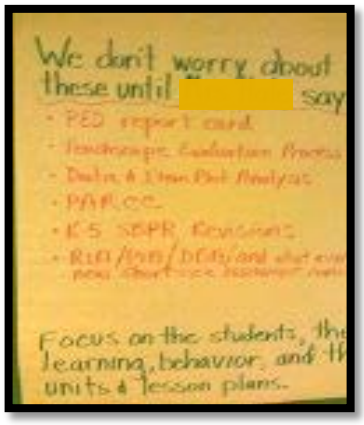
Chart 4. Percent Proficient in Math
District A, FY10-FY14



Source: PED

In a side-by-side comparison of high- and low-performing schools with similar student demographics (94 percent to 100 percent at-risk population and 96 percent to 98 percent low-income) there is a startling difference in student results. At one school, 68 percent of students read at grade level and 80 percent are proficient in math. While at the other school 21 percent read at grade level and 7 percent are proficient in math. The difference in culture and climate, leadership, and the use of best practices between schools may explain the differences in student performance.

Table 5. High- and Low-Performing School Comparison

High-Performing Elementary School	Low-Performing Elementary School
National blue-ribbon school: • 100 percent at-risk population • 98 percent low-income • 11 percent students with disabilities (SWD) • 11 percent English language learners (ELL) • FY14 SBA 68 percent proficient and above in reading • FY14 SBA 80 percent proficient and above in math • School grade "A" • District grade Average for elementary schools "B"	PED priority school, district staff labeled "truly urban school": • 94 percent at-risk population • 96 percent low-income • 8 percent students with disabilities (SWD) • 50 percent English language learners (ELL) • FY14 SBA 21 percent proficient and above in reading • FY14 SBA 7 percent proficient in math • School grade "F" • District grade average for elementary schools "D"
Principal noted outside challenges with high-poverty, high ELL student population, and high mobility as a fact. Noted staff is data, assessment, and collaboration driven. Acknowledges importance of school district and PED initiatives. Recognizes challenges in school and community, firmly believes education is the way out of poverty, labeled the school "college bound," and identified five strategies for achieving and sustaining success: high expectations, common vision and mission, data-driven focus, individualized and differentiated instruction, and no excuses.  	Principal noted overwhelming challenges with high poverty, high ELL student population, high mobility, and PED and district "program drowning" (too many initiatives at once). Principal stated data "too complicated and takes time from teaching." Teachers were not to "worry about" PED initiatives (report card, evaluation system, new state assessment, and SBA data analysis) but were asked to focus on student learning, behavior, and the units and lesson plans. 

Source: LFC Files

Schools in the case study implementing best practices demonstrate better results. Research indicates high-performing, high-poverty schools exhibit a number of best practices differing significantly from practices in low-performing, high-poverty schools. National and state research shows eight characteristics common at high-performing schools. These characteristics drive school leaders and teachers and affect school culture and climate.

This study looked at the proficiency level of the eight characteristics in each evaluated of the 15 elementary schools. High-performing, high-poverty elementary schools in this evaluation were proficient in all or nearly all of the eight indicators of high-performing schools. The fifteen schools evaluated in this study are at different stages of demonstrating proficient at the eight characteristics of high-performing schools. The differences between high- and low-performing schools were measurable and evident. Two of the 15 evaluated elementary schools are currently proficient in all eight categories of high-performing schools and two others are nearly proficient. At these high-performing schools the eight characteristics have become the norm and are ingrained in the school culture. High-performing schools utilize different curriculum and programs yet share similar delivery methods, embed interventions in the daily schedule, and target human and financial resources to close the achievement gap.

Chart 5. Eight Characteristics of High-Performing Schools

Source: LFC Files

The other 11 schools are at different stages of proficiently implementing some of the strategies. During interviews, some of the school district staff and principals talked about the characteristics of high-performing schools, yet teachers could not explain how they were being implemented in the classroom. At low-performing schools, principals and staff had difficulty articulating the characteristics of high-performing schools or were not aware best practices could affect student achievement.

For example, at two low-performing schools the teachers (novice or veteran) could not explain the response to intervention (RtI) process and could not express why interventions were important for struggling students. RtI was mandated by PED in 2006 to provide interventions to struggling students before they were recommended or assessed for special education. Less than 50 percent of all evaluated schools achieved high levels of collaboration and communication. At 60 percent of all evaluated schools, the principal was strategically placed at the school by the school district; however the teachers were not placed strategically. One third of schools were data-driven and used curriculum and instruction aligned to the CCSS. The leadership team at a low-performing school stated data analysis and continual assessments were a hindrance to teaching.

Table 6. Characteristics of High-Performing Schools In Evaluated Elementary Schools

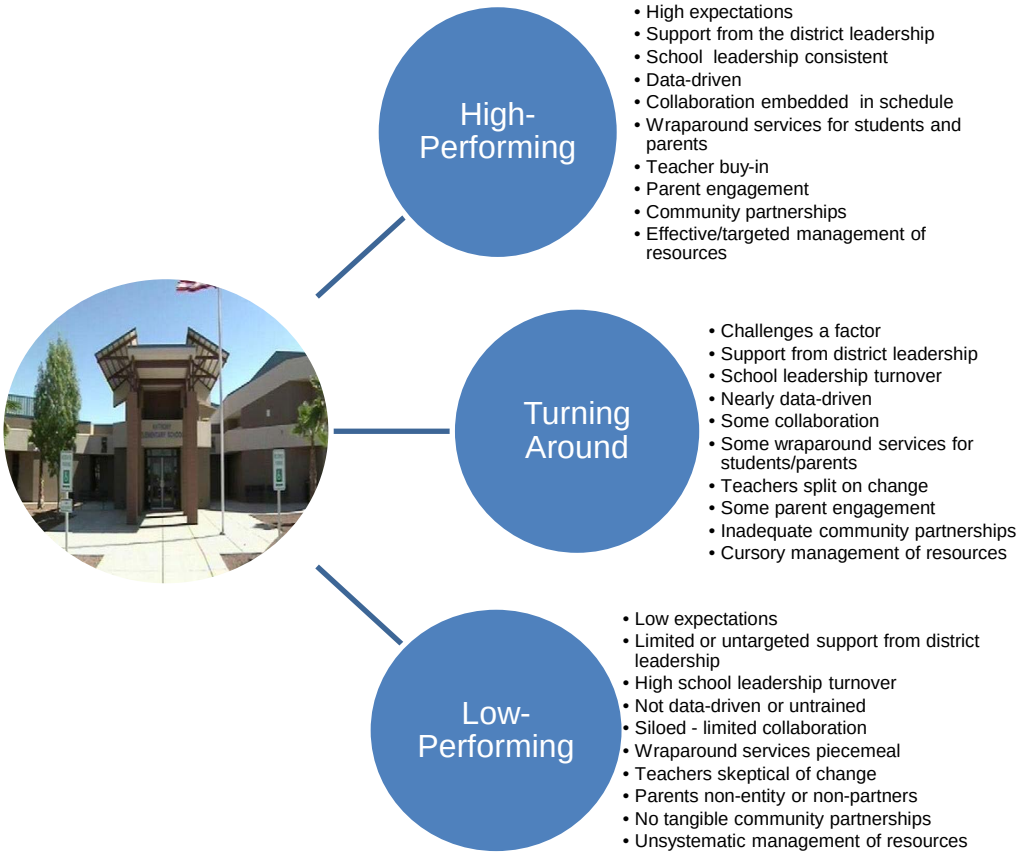
Characteristics	Category	Number of Competent Schools	Percentage
High standards and expectations	Principal and Staff	9	60%
High levels of collaboration and communication	District and School	6	40%
Strategic assignment of principal and staff	Principal and Staff	5	30%
	Principal	9	60%
	Neither	1	10%
Focused professional development across district and school	District and School	6	40%
	District	8	50%
	Neither	1	50%
Regular and targeted parent and community involvement	Regular and Targeted	6	40%
	Regular	9	60%
Caring staff dedicated to diversity and equity	Staff	15	100%
Curriculum, instruction, and assessment aligned with common core state standards (CCSS)	School	5	33%
Data-Driven, focus and frequent monitoring of student achievement	District and School	5	33%

N=15

Source: PED Instructional Audits and LFC Analysis

Schools in the case study implementing best practices demonstrate better results. Research indicates high-performing, high-poverty schools exhibit a number of best practices differing significantly from practices in low-performing, high-poverty schools. High-performing schools utilize different curriculum and programs yet share similar delivery methods, embed interventions in the daily schedule, and target human and financial resources to close the achievement gap. No trends were identified among evaluated schools concerning the purchase of specific textbooks or curriculum, but there were trends in utilizing core and supplemental programs. High-performing schools specifically noted using curriculum and textbooks tied to the common core state standards (CCSS) and objectives were clearly posted in classrooms. At some low-performing schools principals spoke about CCSS, yet the standards had not been aligned to the curriculum or classroom instruction and teachers stated during interviews they were not trained in using CCSS. A similar trend among high-performing and turnaround schools was embedding intervention time into the daily schedule. High-performing schools created time in the daily schedule to have interventionists push-in, students pulled-out of classrooms, or students participate in teacher created centers-based classrooms to support differentiated instruction or teacher collaboration time.

Chart 6. Observed Practices at Evaluated Elementary Schools

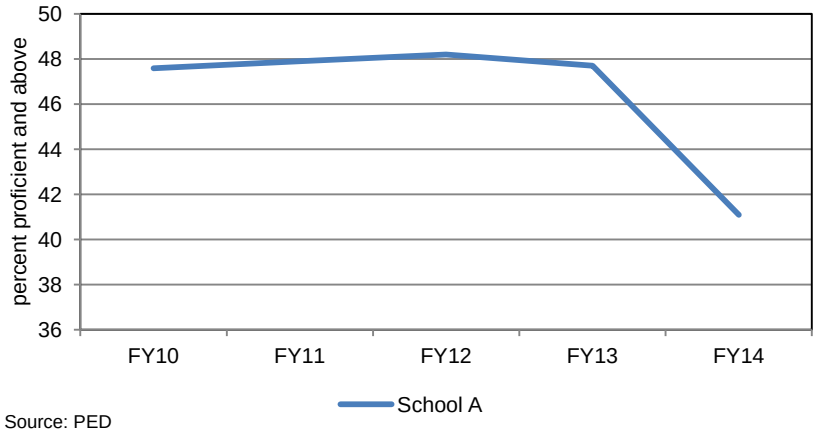


Source: LFC Files

At one high-performing school, non-core curriculum teachers referred to as specials teachers (music, physical education, librarian, and computer) taught small group intervention classes during the day while classroom teachers had structured collaboration time by grade-level or in professional learning communities (PLCs). At all evaluated schools, teachers stated they collaborated either through grade-level or leadership teams and belonged to PLCs, yet at low-performing schools PLC meeting times were fluid, agendas for meetings were unstructured or not in place, and minutes or notes from the meetings were not readily available or archived. High-performing schools met at regularly scheduled times, set meeting goals in advance, and generated minutes, notes, or reports to document the meetings.

High-performing schools also recognized the importance of implementing below-the-line initiatives such as reads to lead (PED early literacy intervention program in place to assist schools increase the quality of reading instruction funded by General Appropriations Act), K-3 Plus, and prekindergarten in bolstering student achievement as noted in previous LFC studies (Appendix D). In two schools, K-3 Plus was extended to fourth and fifth grades in the summer of 2014. In one school's K-3 plus (plus fourth and fifth grade) struggling fourth and fifth graders were chosen to participate in the program and in the other school's program any fourth or fifth grader could attend the extended school-year summer program. Preliminary achievement data was unavailable; however both principals noted students were better prepared for the start of FY15. All school districts receive reads to lead, early literacy funding, yet one low-performing school principal noted the proficiency levels for reading at the school declined in the last three years and the school was yet to receive additional support from the school district. Although some schools in the school district were participating in reads to lead, the principal was unfamiliar with the PED early literacy program.

Chart 7. Percent Proficient in Reading Scores at one Low-Performing School FY10-FY14



Source: PED

In FY15, all 89 school districts in New Mexico received early literacy, reads to lead funding based on the size of the school district; however, the award per-student is inconsistent statewide and not specifically tied to low-performing or low-income schools. For example, Los Alamos with a 10 percent low-income rate receives a total reads to lead award of $130 thousand which translates to $129 per-student, an amount greater than the per-student funding of seven of the eight school districts in this study.

Table 7. Reads to Lead, Early Literacy Funding, FY15

School District	Total FY15 Award (in thousands)	Total K-Third Grade Students	Award per K-Third Grade Student (in dollars)
Ruidoso	$98	677	$144
Española	$180	1488	$121
Central Consolidated	$163	2010	$81
Gallup	$195	3398	$57
Santa Fe	$245	4973	$49
Gadsden	$195	4382	$45
Albuquerque	$1.26	29,993	$42
Las Cruces	$260	7838	$33

Source: PED

High-performing schools create a culture and climate of high achievement in addition to expectations and increasing student engagement and performance. Parents and community members know a school's reputation and seek-out the high-performing schools because of the culture and climate. School leaders have schoolwide and

community buy-in and support for new initiatives. Research suggests support is not attained overnight and must be built and sustained over years. Parental involvement is expected and parent organizations raise much needed money for field trips, supplies and materials, and professional development. Many high-performing schools are multi-generational where students, parents, and grandparents have all attended the same school and know the school has created a culture of high expectations. Research indicates new principals at high-performing schools should come into those schools without making major reforms for at least one school year. One principal at a high-performing school did not make any major changes for an entire school year and maintained a high level of student performance. During an interview, the principal stated the first year was spent getting to know the faculty and staff, analyzing data and programs, and understanding the dynamics of the school culture and climate.

Table 8. Establishing School-wide Support

New Mexico Elementary School Principals' Quotes: How do you establish school-wide support for successful programs?		
"Our school is built on a strong foundation centered on team work. The culture of our building is inviting and safe. We begin each day with a morning assembly which builds cohesiveness and a sense of family. Our theme is 'if you work hard and you are kind, amazing things will happen.' Because of these two things centered on rigor and respect, our programs succeed."	"I like to have a teacher that is having success with a particular program discuss within a staff meeting how and why this program is working successfully. Teachers seem to listen to their peers who are successful more than if I just tell them to use a particular program. I like to present the research that supports the program. I also make sure that teachers have the materials; as a former teacher, I have been told to use/apply a program, yet not been given the total amount of materials in order to use the program successfully (a path to failure)."	"I have not learned this. I have tried to use my 28 years of teaching experience to provide professional development for the teachers. I am trying an outside expert this year to teach, support, and mentor teachers for improved math instruction."

Source: LFC Survey

High-performing schools promote urgency around continual use of assessments and data which have proven to pay off in student growth. According to national research and best practices of high-performing schools, a data-driven focus in instructional practices and continual assessment of student performance are key factors in the success of higher performing elementary schools. In interviews most principals agreed since state assessment data is received at the end of the school year it is imperative for school districts to use short-cycle assessments or periodic measurements to track student performance throughout the school year (Appendix E).

At high-performing schools and at some turnaround schools, principals and teachers expressed a need to disaggregate and analyze the data in a targeted manner and utilize short-cycle assessments. Leadership or data teams met at a set time during the day either weekly or bi-weekly. Teachers and students had access to data and students maintained data folders to track their own progress. At turnaround schools teachers developed their own data-driven weekly and quarterly assessments. Principals and teachers at low-performing schools could not explain the relevance of obtaining and assessing data or stated SBA data arrives too late to be a benefit to modifying instruction. At one school, a federal school improvement grant (SIG) grant paid for teacher collaboration time for one hour a day. Since the SIG grant ended at the end of FY14, the teachers have had little collaboration time and no collaboration time embedded in the school day.

For example, in a FY13 PED instructional audit, one low-performing school was flagged at a level one (concern) for not using data derived from short cycle assessments to refocus or modify instruction at the class or individual level to help all students meet high standards. In FY14, the principal started to see an increase in assessment scores when the school began a systematic effort to assess students frequently and to track their scores. The superintendent suggested posting scores outside of classrooms and began a "friendly" competition among teachers and students.

High-performing schools purposefully focus curriculum, instructional time, and funding to vocabulary and literacy instruction to educate ELLs and inter-lingual students in New Mexico. A majority of the students in the evaluated schools face the same issues as other ELLs throughout the state and nationwide. Three schools in this evaluation have required all or most of their teachers to acquire teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) or bilingual endorsements and one school's turnaround model required all teachers to have TESOL or bilingual endorsements.

TESOL and bilingual strategies not only benefit ELL students, but many students in New Mexico schools. Research suggests many students in New Mexico do not appear prepared to confront cognitive and academic language in the classroom. During interviews, principals and teachers in the evaluated schools noted inter-lingual students, both Hispanic and Native American, lag behind their peers in student achievement. Inter-lingual refers to utilizing two or more languages and not being literate in either of the languages cognitively or academically. Throughout the United States and particularly in states with a large percentage of ELL students, California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and New York, researchers noted "students who appeared to have good conversational English skills were not necessarily capable of using the language in cognitively demanding ways in the classroom," according to Gándara and Contreras.

Two of the evaluated schools have concurrent dual-language programs in a Native American language and Spanish. In FY13 and FY14, PED instructional audits indicated lower performing and turnaround schools in this study had findings concerning the areas in which ELL students would need extra assistance, including:

- Acquisition of academic vocabulary;
- Differentiated instruction;
- Scaffolding (segmenting instruction);
- Implementation of CCSS;
- Monitoring data;
- Interventions; and
- Other instructional strategies known to support ELLs.

PED conducts instructional audits of priority schools. The audits list a finding and then the level of concern. Level zero indicates no concern, the school excels in the aspect of instruction; level one signifies an aspect of instruction is a concern needing to be addressed but not necessarily with great haste; and level two indicates an aspect of instruction is of great concern and needs to be addressed immediately.

Table 9. PED Instructional Audits of Evaluated Schools

Evaluated School	Audit Period	Finding	Level of Concern	Evidence
Low-performing school	FY13	• Academic vocabulary is not effectively incorporated in planning and used during instruction. • Lack of planning for differentiated Instruction. • No scaffolding.	2	Teacher observations, teacher interviews and student interviews
Turnaround school	FY13	• Staff and parents have varied levels of knowledge understanding and implementing district/school CCSS implementation plan.	2	Staff interviews and classroom observations
Low-performing school	FY13	• Implementation of appropriate instructional strategies. • No differentiated instruction could be observed. • Adequate and Effective Instruction for Multilingual/Multicultural students. • No bilingual curriculum in place. • Supplemental bilingual materials not located.	2	Leadership team, student, and teacher interviews and classroom observations
Low- performing school	FY14	• Effective teaching strategies including differentiated instruction such as sheltered instruction to meet the needs of ELLs not evident.	2	Observations and interviews.
Low-performing school	FY13	• A systematic process for using data to monitor the effectiveness of interventions and improved academic outcomes was not evident.	2	Leadership team interviews and document review
Turnaround school	FY13	• Team observed interventions, including interventions for ELL and special education (SPED) students, and programs that ensure quality teaching and learning to meet student academic needs.	2	Principal, leadership team, and teacher interviews.
Turnaround school	FY13	• Implementation of curriculum and classroom assessment aligned with CCSS not evident. • Low level of academic vocabulary used in classrooms. • Lack of instructional strategies known to work for ELLs, especially Native American students.	2	Observations and staff interviews.

Source: PED

High-performing schools provide wraparound services for parents and students to reduce the negative effects of high-poverty. High-performing elementary schools hire full-time staff such as full-time counselors, nurses, social-workers, and instructional coaches to work with at-risk students and teachers of high-risk students. Wraparound services also assist parents who have limited time and resources. Some evaluated schools maintained parent rooms where parents could use computers to check their child's grades.

Research shows extended school year and after school programs assist in increasing student performance. Two schools using federal Title I funds have broadened the K-3 Plus program to include fourth and fifth grade students in an extended school year. One turnaround school has an after-school program sponsored by the Boys and Girls Club and another school has a program sponsored by the local Native American tribe. Two high-performing schools have volunteer teachers stay after school with students.

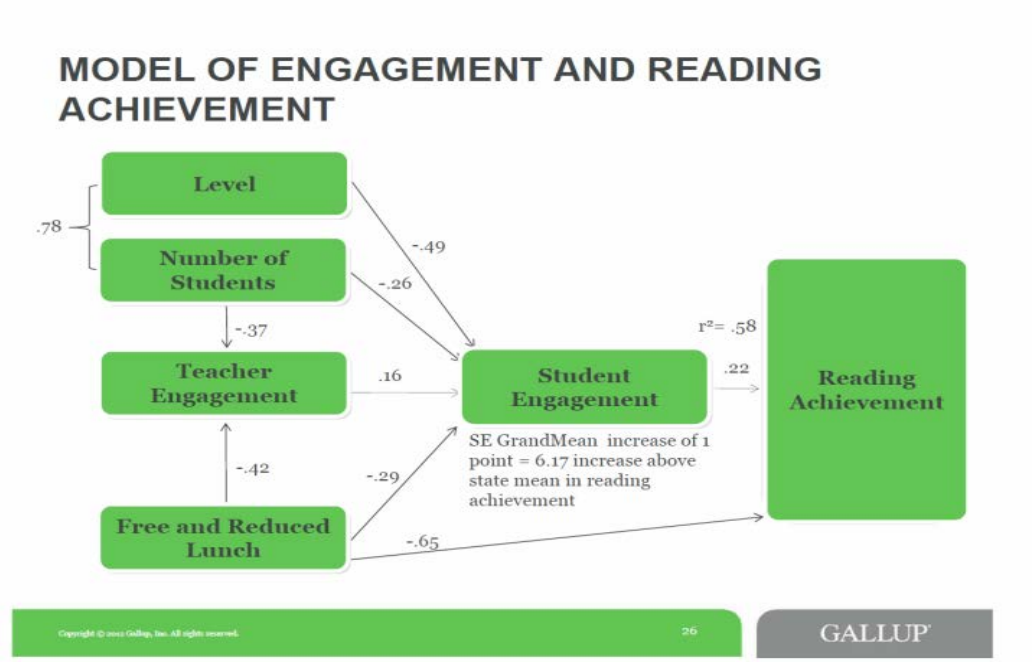
Since research and previous LFC evaluations indicate parent involvement is essential to academic success, high-performing schools have reached out to help parents gain more educational and social capital. Several schools provided evening training and classes for parents such as general equivalency diploma (GED), parenting, or academic nights and health service nights. A high-performing school assisted parents in completing the federal Affordable Care Act applications. Nearly all the evaluated schools participated in the weekend back-pack food program providing food to students. Some schools maintained a clothing bank and food pantry for students and parents. One high-performing school has a parent ambassador program to assist parents register their children for school or other programs like free and reduced lunch, fill-out paperwork, and meet with teachers. Another school has a parent out-reach coordinator to address parental needs and concerns. At one turnaround school, teachers canvassed the neighborhood at the beginning of the year to meet parents and other community members.

Non-standardized measures of school performance such as a positive school culture and climate, student engagement, and resiliency are essential to student achievement. Gallup Poll research concludes hope, engagement, and well-being are equally as important as academic performance to gauge student achievement.

- *Hope - the ideas and energy we have for the future.* Hope drives attendance, credits earned, and Grade Point Average (GPA) of high school students. Hope scores are more robust predictors of college success than are high school GPA, SAT, and ACT scores.
- *Engagement - the involvement in and enthusiasm for school.* Engagement distinguishes between high-performing and low-performing schools.
- *Well-being - how we think about and experience our lives.* Well-being tells us how our students are doing today and predicts their success in the future.

A 2009 Gallup study found teachers' engagement levels are directly related to the engagement levels of their students, which are also tied to student achievement outcomes. A percentage-point increase in a school's average student engagement level was associated with reading and math achievement gains of six percentage points and eight percentage points, respectively.

Chart 8. Student Engagement



Source: Gallup Poll

School districts critical of PED roll-outs and stated PED support is inconsistent. Many of the high-performing schools became pilot schools for one or both of the following PED initiatives, including the teacher evaluation system tool, Teachscape; and computer-based administration of the NMSBA. Low-performing schools tended to focus on the negative aspects of the new systems or programs required by PED and described ways of circumventing requirements. At one high-performing school, a pilot assessment school, some computer time is spent on learning skills required for the new state evaluation, partnership for assessment of readiness for college and careers (PARCC) such as scrolling, cutting and pasting, and keyboarding. The pilot program also gave the district the opportunity to upgrade technology and test band-width requirements.

In particular administrators praised the new teacher evaluation rubric and the professionalism the tool brings to teaching. However, evaluated school districts did describe the roll-out of recent PED programs as "haphazard," "disjointed" or "terrible." Administrators also noted necessitating improved, on-going professional development and "more support" from PED staff. Several administrators referenced a summer 2014 PED training in which principals attending the last session of the training were asked to complete an on-line certification exam for PED evaluation system, Teachscape by the following day.

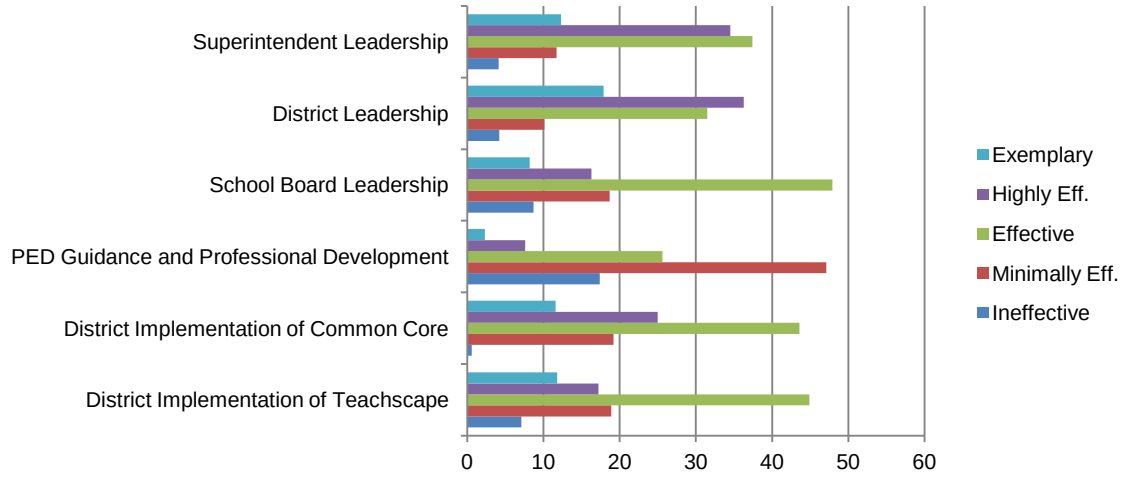
Table 10. PED Initiatives and Support

PED Initiatives and Support		
New evaluation system (Teachscape)	Rubric. School district administrators laud as professional evaluation tool.	Roll-out. PED staff support. Professional Development. Districts lack technology to upload artifacts.
New state assessment (PARCC)	A few school districts chosen to pilot the assessment.	Pilot-year at all schools to address issues such: Functional computers and bandwidth. Students lack of technological skills to complete assessment.
Below –the-line programs	Well targeted. K-3 Plus students show growth. Significant differences in academic growth and readiness between prekindergarten and non-prekindergarten students. Reads to lead, early literacy.	Requirements not well communicated. Deadlines among programs not well coordinated. Allocations not timely. Some principals did not know school district received reads to lead, early literacy funding.
Professional Development	Targets all administrators.	Timeline for proficiency unrealistic. Requirements and deadlines not well planned or communicated.
PED staff	Supportive (if/when reached)	Inconsistent support. High-turnover of PED staff. Different answers from different people across departments.

Source: LFC Files

LFC surveyed principals statewide on a variety of topics. Using a five point scale (ineffective to highly effective) principals were asked to rate school district and state leadership utilizing the state's teacher evaluation rankings. Principals were generally satisfied with superintendents and rated their leadership as 68 percent effective to highly effective and 18 percent exemplary. School district leadership came in four points higher at 72 percent effective to high effective and 12 percent for exemplary. School board leadership received the highest ranking at 48 percent effective. PED guidance and professional development opportunities received the lowest effective rating from principals at 26 percent and 65 percent for minimally effective to ineffective.

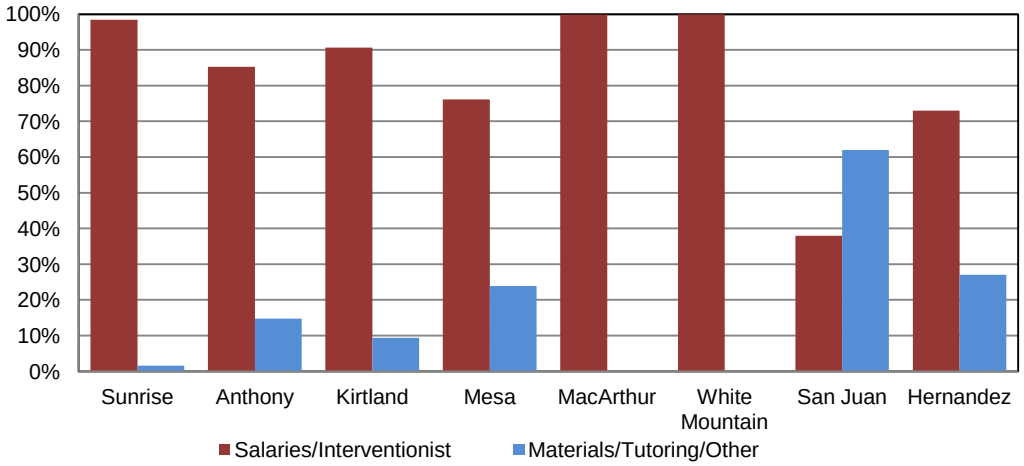
Chart 9. Leadership Practices



Source: LFC Survey

School districts often rely on federal funding to improve student performance. Federal Title I funds allow school districts to provide well-trained teachers who specialize in student interventions. Districts and schools focused on addressing and identifying priorities and areas of need through multiple routes to provide enforce school effectiveness and support school turnaround. Higher achieving schools and schools making significant gains allocated higher percentages to direct instruction and job-embedded, teacher-specific professional development. These districts indicated departments and school leaders worked together collaboratively on the budget allocation process, therefore avoiding working in "silos."

Chart 10. Percentage of Federal Title I Funds Used by Activity



Source: LFC Files

Continuing to increase the at-risk index would provide school districts additional resources to invest in interventions and turnaround strategies for students. High-poverty school districts in this study with over 60 percent of students from low-income families have similar at-risk index figures with the exception of Gallup-McKinley County Schools (0.095) and Gadsden Independent Schools (0.111). Nearly all receive the same per-student formula funding. Santa Fe Public Schools (SFPS) receives less per-student than Albuquerque Public Schools (APS), Las Cruces Public Schools (LCPS), and Ruidoso Municipals Schools with an at-risk index rating

and free and reduced lunch percentage nearly the same as the other three school districts. Los Alamos Public Schools with the lowest at-risk index rating and low-poverty percentage in the state receives higher per-student funding than APS, Gadsden Independent Schools, Gallup-McKinley County Schools, LCPS, Ruidoso Municipal, and SFPS.

Table 11. At-risk Index of Evaluated Schools, FY14

Evaluated Districts	Per-Student Formula Funding	At-risk Index	High-Poverty
Albuquerque	$7,112	0.058	62%
Central Consolidated	$7,418	0.086	77%
Española	$7,629	0.068	70%
Gadsden	$7,024	0.111	93%
Gallup	$7,053	0.095	82%
Las Cruces	$7,111	0.058	65%
Ruidoso	$7,004	0.059	70%
Santa Fe	$6,833	0.062	67%
Statewide	**$7,300**	**0.060**	**66%**

Source: PED

Table 12. At-risk Index of Other Districts, FY14

School District	Per-Student Formula Funding	At-risk Index	Low-Poverty
Artesia	$7,230	0.042	48%
Cloudcroft	$9,465	0.034	41%
Dora	$10,778	0.047	39%
House	$14,596	0.096	38%
Los Alamos	$7,232	0.014	10%
Melrose	$10,454	0.050	41%
Rio Rancho	$6,570	0.031	43%
Statewide	**$7,300**	**0.060**	**66%**

Source: PED

Recommendations

Legislature.

- Prioritize K-3 Plus funding and pilot a fourth and fifth grade plus program in high-poverty schools.
- Prioritize prekindergarten for districts willing to implement in all high-poverty schools.
- Continue to increase formula funding for at-risk students.

PED.

- Use the budget process to hold districts accountable for using best practices at high-poverty and under performing schools, as authorized in the School Finance Act.
- Target early reading funding to high needs schools and districts.

New Mexico public school districts.

- Require low-performing schools to follow characteristics of high-performing schools.
- Embed interventions into daily schedule in the classroom.
- Provide targeted and on-going professional development to teachers in strategies to educate at-risk and ELL students.
- Provide wraparound services to parents and students to combat disruptions in student learning.

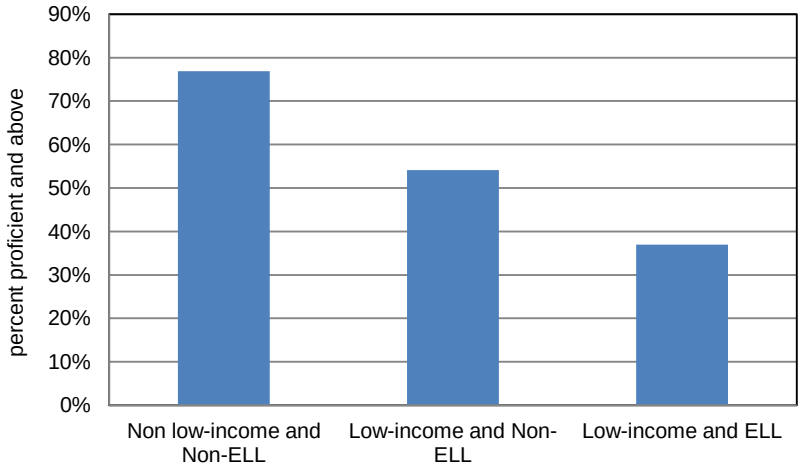
PED and school districts.

- Increase professional development for teachers and principals in data-driven instruction, analysis, and on-going progress monitoring.

MANY SCHOOLS FACE CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH STUDENT POVERTY BUT CAN STILL ATTAIN HIGH LEVELS OF ACHIEVEMENT WITH MODEST IMPROVEMENTS IN PERFORMANCE

Research shows impacts of student poverty create school challenges, such as high student mobility and absenteeism and students beginning school academically behind their peers. Outside circumstances, including large high concentrations of low-income students, ELL population, student mobility, and chronic absenteeism present high-poverty schools with additional challenges. Previous LFC evaluations have noted student performance is highly influenced by economic and language status and student attendance. Nationally, research suggests mobility is more prevalent among low-income students and negatively affects student and school performance. Frequent school changes have a cumulative effect on student achievement and can place students years behind their peers and at greater risk of dropping-out. Additionally, schools may implement interventions in the early grades students miss as a result of mobility, and teachers may be held accountable for the performance of students who previously attended multiple schools. Similarly, research suggests low-income students miss more days of school than their more affluent peers, which can have an impact on student performance.

Chart 11. Third Grade Reading Achievement Gap, FY14



Source: LFC Files

Children from low-income families often start school behind their more affluent peers and frequently do not receive the academic stimulation or do not learn the social skills required to prepare them for school. Poverty decreases a child's readiness for school through aspects of health, home life, schooling, and neighborhoods, according to National Institutes of Health. A 2013 LFC evaluation noted over 80 percent of children from low-income families are behind on the first day of school, and one quarter of New Mexico children enter kindergarten unable to read one letter at high-poverty schools. These factors contribute to the persistent achievement gap in New Mexico, whereby low-income and ELL students lag behind their more affluent, non-ELL peers.

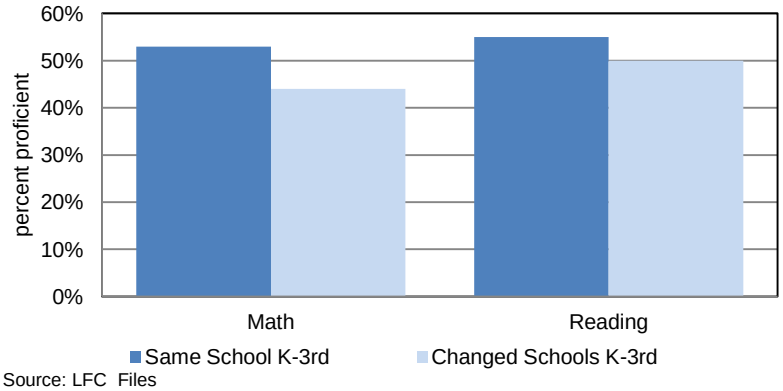
A clear relationship between third grade reading proficiency and poverty exists, and schools with larger populations of low-income students had fewer students proficient in reading in FY13. However, even among schools in which 100 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, proficiency rates vary dramatically.

Chart 12. Third Grade Reading Proficiency by School Poverty Level, FY13

Source: LFC Analysis

Student mobility negatively impacts student performance in low-performing schools, but not all low-income schools experience high student mobility. Nationally, research suggests mobility is more prevalent among low-income students and negatively affects student and school performance. New Mexico students who remain in the same school from kindergarten through third grade are more likely to be proficient in reading and math, even after controlling for the effects of poverty. Students who remained in the same school between kindergarten and third grade were 120 percent more likely to be proficient in reading and math in third grade, compared to students who changed schools. Of the students who remained in the same school between kindergarten and third grade, 53 percent were proficient in math and 55 percent were proficient in reading, compared with 44 proficient in math and 50 percent proficient in reading among students who changed schools. These differences are statistically significant.

Chart 13. Third Grade Proficiency by Student Mobility, FY13

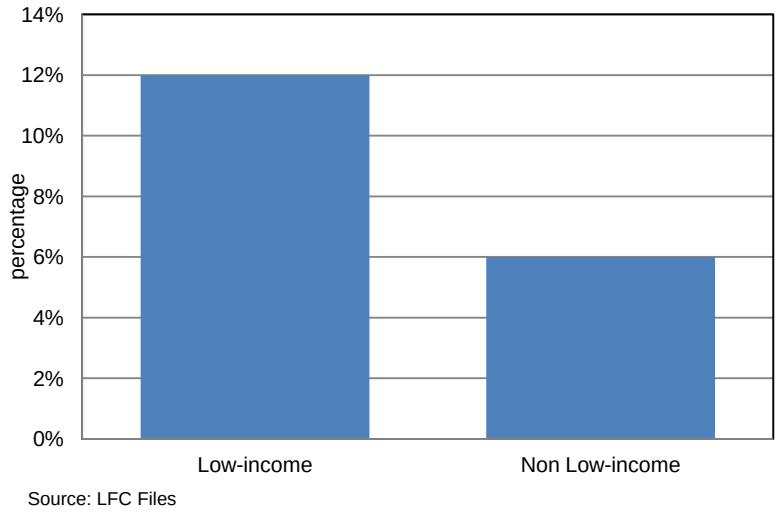


Source: LFC Files

However, while the association between student mobility and performance exists at the state level, such a relationship was not present among the evaluated schools; suggesting high-performing schools may be able to counteract the impact of mobility on student performance.

Statewide, approximately half of all students attend the same school in which they attended kindergarten by the time they reach third grade, though rates among high-poverty schools vary. High-poverty schools experience high rates of chronic absenteeism, but some of these schools have improved student attendance. A previous LFC evaluation noted a significant relationship between student attendance and performance. On average, each one percent increase in attendance equated to a 0.43 point scaled score increase. Based on this relationship, improving a student's attendance rate by 2.3 percent, roughly four school days per school year, corresponds with a one-point increase on the reading SBA scaled score. Statewide, low-income students miss an average of 4.5 days of school annually, compared to 3.2 days among elementary students non low-income elementary students. Similarly, 12 percent of all low-income elementary students missed 10 or more days in FY14, compared to six percent of non-low income elementary students.

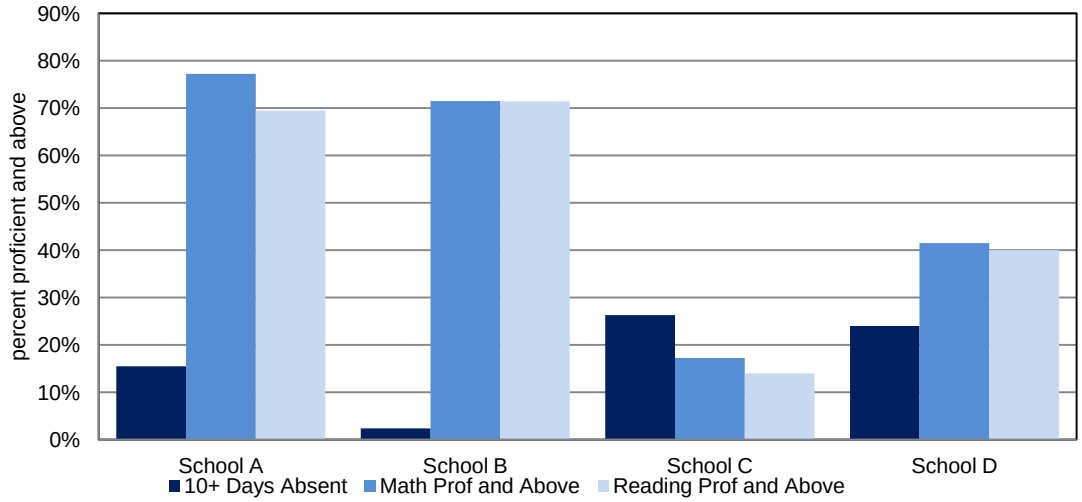
Chart 15. Elementary Students Statewide Absent 10 or More Days, FY14



Source: LFC Files

Despite similar rates of poverty, proportionally fewer students are habitually absent among high-performing elementary schools, compared to low-performing elementary schools in this study. Fewer than 20 percent of all students in two high-performing elementary schools missed 10 or more days of school, whereas more than 20 percent of students in two low-performing elementary schools missed ten or more days of school annually.

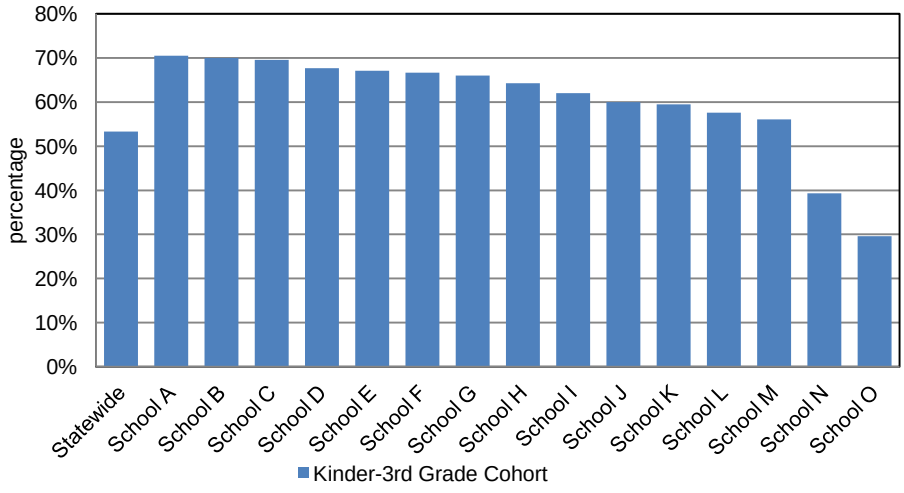
Chart 16. Comparison of Absences with Math and Reading Performance, FY14



Source: LFC Files

High-performing elementary schools report systematic efforts to reduce absences. For example, these schools conduct routine home visits; educate parents on the importance of school attendance, and direct school resource officers to focus on truancy. One new principal is attempting to tackle absenteeism by placing a ticket on doors at students' homes that are missing more than three days of school as part of an early-warning system.

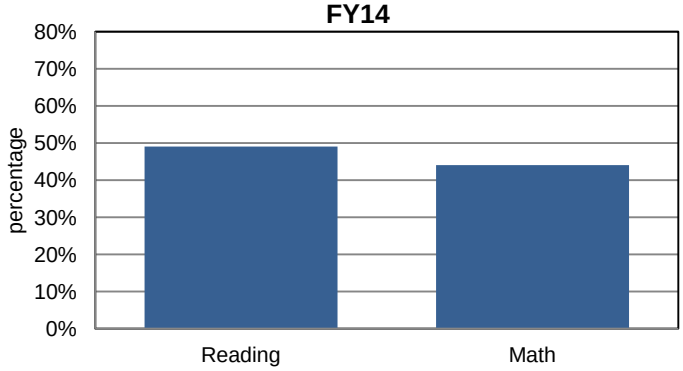
Chart 17. Percent of Students Remaining in Same School Kindergarten-Third Grade



Source: LFC Analysis

<u>In general, elementary students in FY14 did not make a full year of academic growth.</u> A year's worth of growth, as measured by the SBA, is a scaled score change of zero or more points from one year to the next. In FY14, 49 percent of fourth and fifth graders made a year's worth of growth in reading and 44 percent of fourth and fifth graders made a year's worth of growth in math.

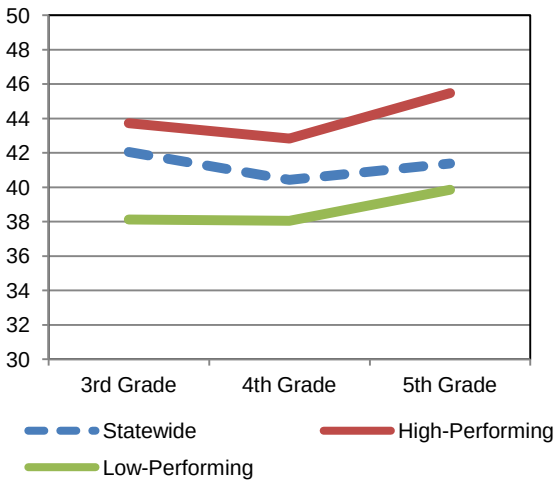
Chart 18. Percent of Fourth and Fifth Graders Making a Year Plus of Growth, FY14



Source: LFC Files

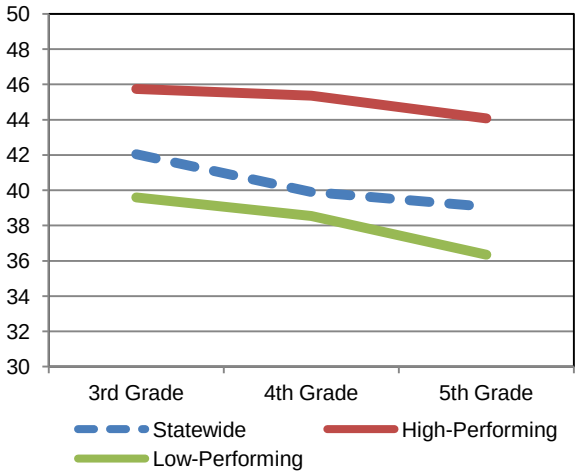
Students tend to fall behind between third and fifth grades. Statewide, students in fifth grade in FY14 grew an average of 0.9 scaled score points after having made less than an year's worth of growth (-1.6 scaled score points) in third grade. In math, scaled scores declined from 42 points in third grade to 39 points in fifth grade. Among the evaluated schools, high- and low-performing schools generally reflect similar trends.

Chart 19. Reading SBA Scaled Scores of Fifth Grade Cohort, FY14



Source: LFC Files
Note: outliers removed

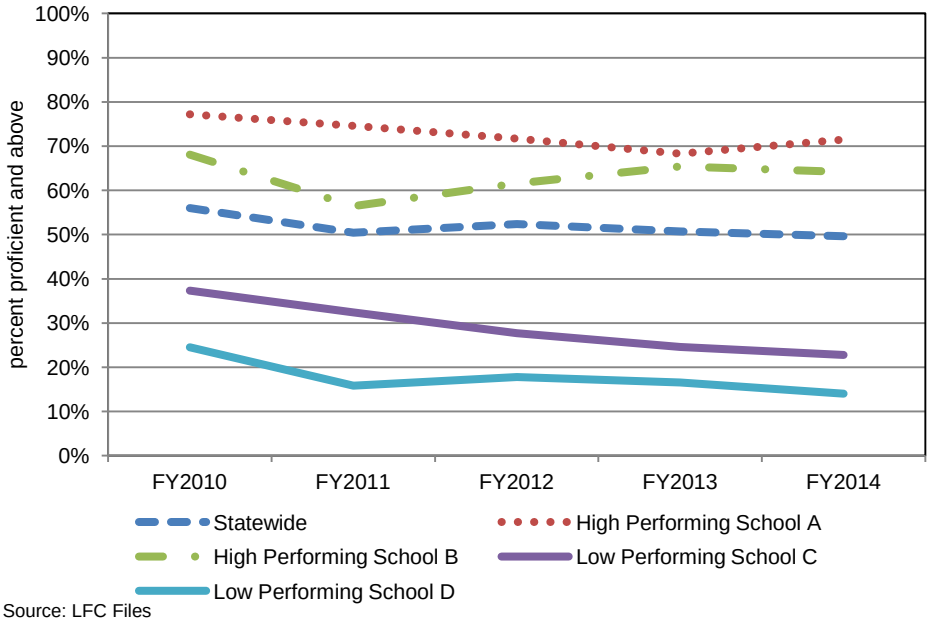
Chart 20. Math SBA Scaled Scores of Fifth Grade Cohort, FY14



Source: LFC Analysis
Note:outliers removed

Elementary school performance declined significantly in recent years, and gains at some schools are offset by performance declines at other schools. At some schools, this performance has been similarly consistent, with high-performing schools continually outperforming the state average, and low-performing schools falling far below the state average (Appendix F).

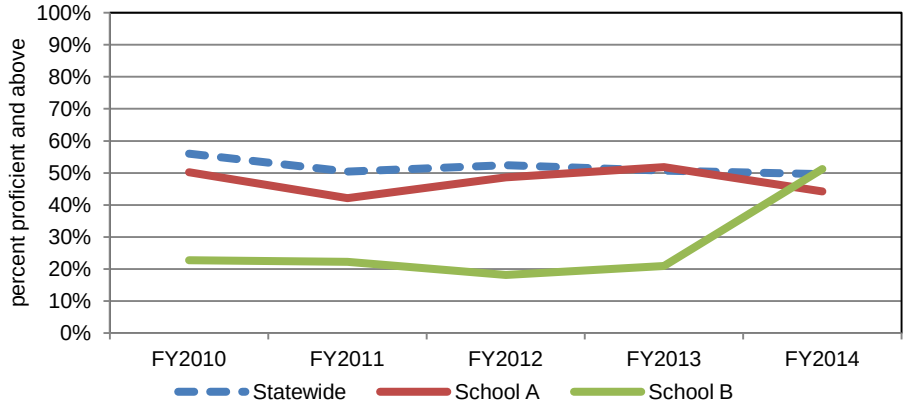
Chart 21. Reading Proficiency
Third-Fifth Grades, FY10-FY14



Source: LFC Files

In other cases, school performance has fluctuated, reflecting school-level changes producing corresponding changes in student performance. For example, a high turnover of leadership affects student performance. During interviews principals noted their arrival at their schools. New principals coming into high-performing schools maintained the status quo and sustained and even improved student performance. New principals attempting reforms without a concrete plan or changing best practices saw a decline in student performance indicators. One of the evaluated school principals made sweeping changes to the school staff and curriculum without a research-based turnaround program, thus shifting the culture and climate and consequently the SBA scores and school grade declined. The school went from a model school in the district to a low-performing school. Another principal of a model, high-performing school became complacent and lax on state and district-wide initiatives, also seeing the school's grade and SBA scores decline. Student performance gains at one school may cancel out losses at another, and the net result for New Mexico public schools is stagnant student performance.

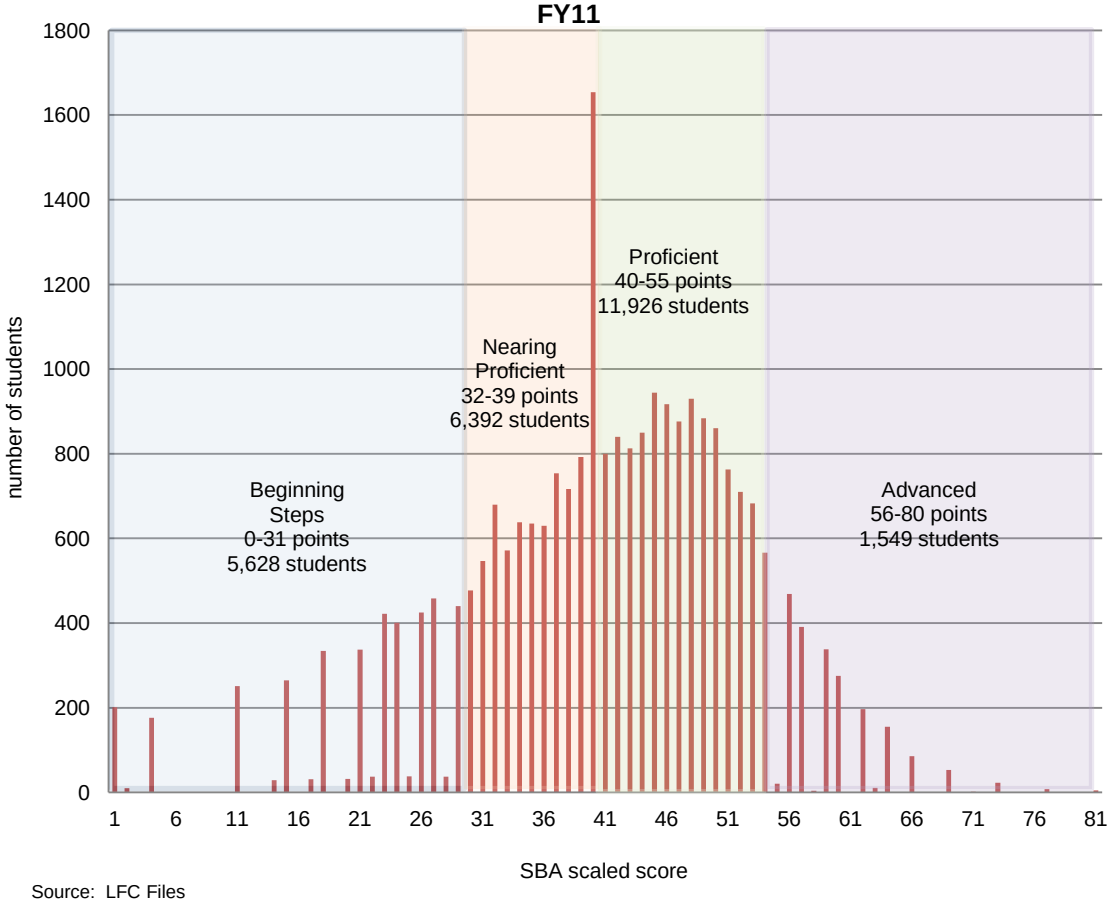
Chart 22. Reading Proficiency Third-Fifth Grades for
Schools that Experienced
Significant Leadership Change, FY10-FY14



Source: LFC Files

Many students are one SBA question away from scoring proficient on the state assessment. Statewide, roughly seven percent of third graders are only a few points away from proficiency, which may translate to one question when raw scores are translated into scaled scores. While the SBA is a criterion-referenced assessment, the student results appear to reflect a normal distribution. The 2012 LFC evaluation of early literacy noted large numbers of elementary students lag behind proficiency by only a few points, and minimal improvements on the SBA would significantly improve New Mexico's achievement levels.

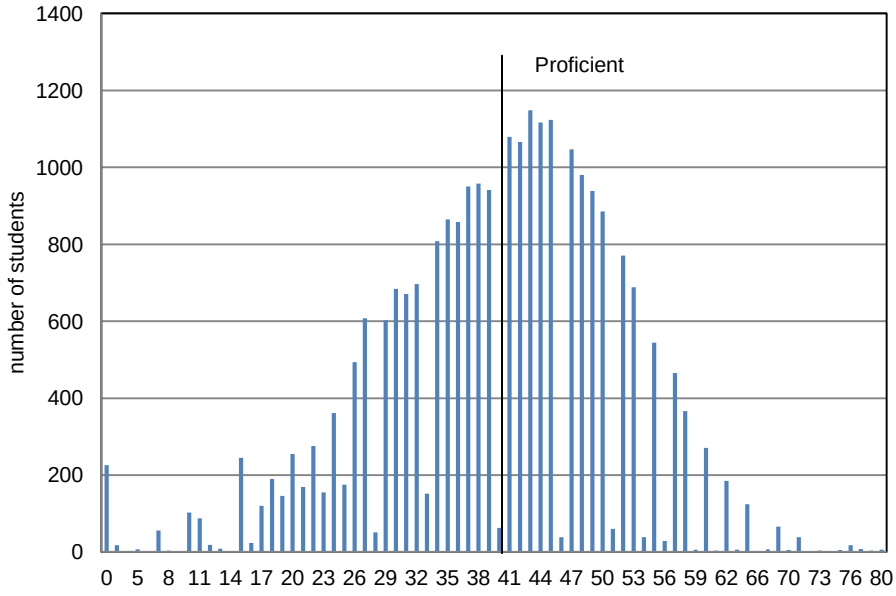
Chart 23. Frequency of Third Grade Reading SBA Scaled Scores, FY11



Source: LFC Files

Though the spike in students scoring 38 or 39 points was not present in the FY14 distribution of student SBA scores, many students remain clustered on the cusp of proficiency. In FY14, 1,899 third graders were within two points of scoring proficient in reading, and 1,595 students were within two points of scoring proficient in math. Modest learning gains among these students could produce significant improvements in school performance. High-performing schools have capitalized on this fact and have targeted instruction and interventions to assist students achieve proficiency (Appendix G).

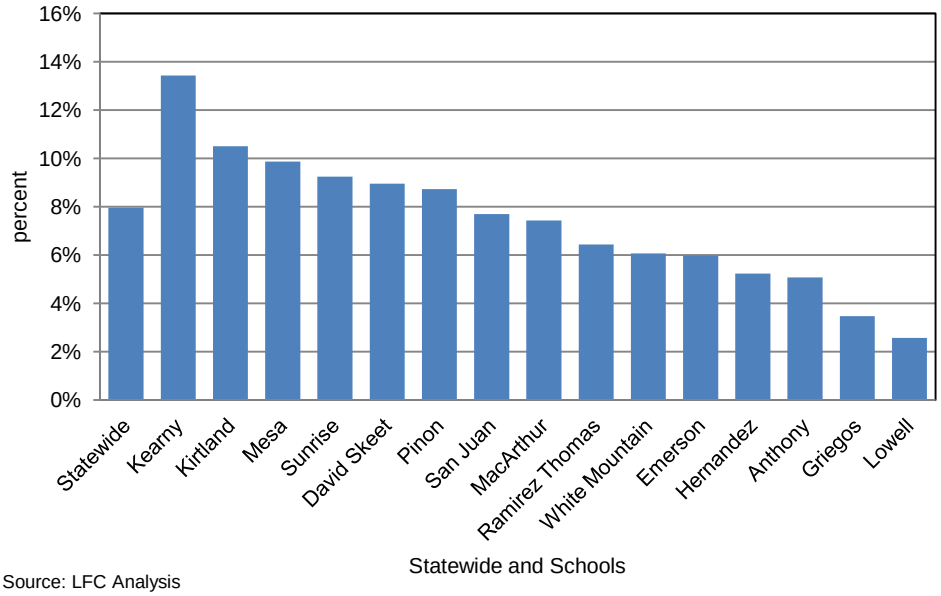
Chart 24. Frequency of Third Grade Reading SBA Scaled Scores, FY14



Source: LFC Analysis

Low-performing schools may experience dramatic improvements in performance by identifying students within a few points of proficiency and targeting interventions to these students. For example, roughly 10 percent of students at three elementary schools were two points from reading proficiency in FY14. Interventions associated with small improvements in reading scaled score growth, such as efforts to reduce student absenteeism, could produce significant academic improvements if focused on the students nearing proficiency. Disaggregating data at the school-level allows school leaders to identify the students who may benefit from such interventions.

Chart 25. Percent of Elementary Students 1-2 Points from Proficiency on SBA, FY14

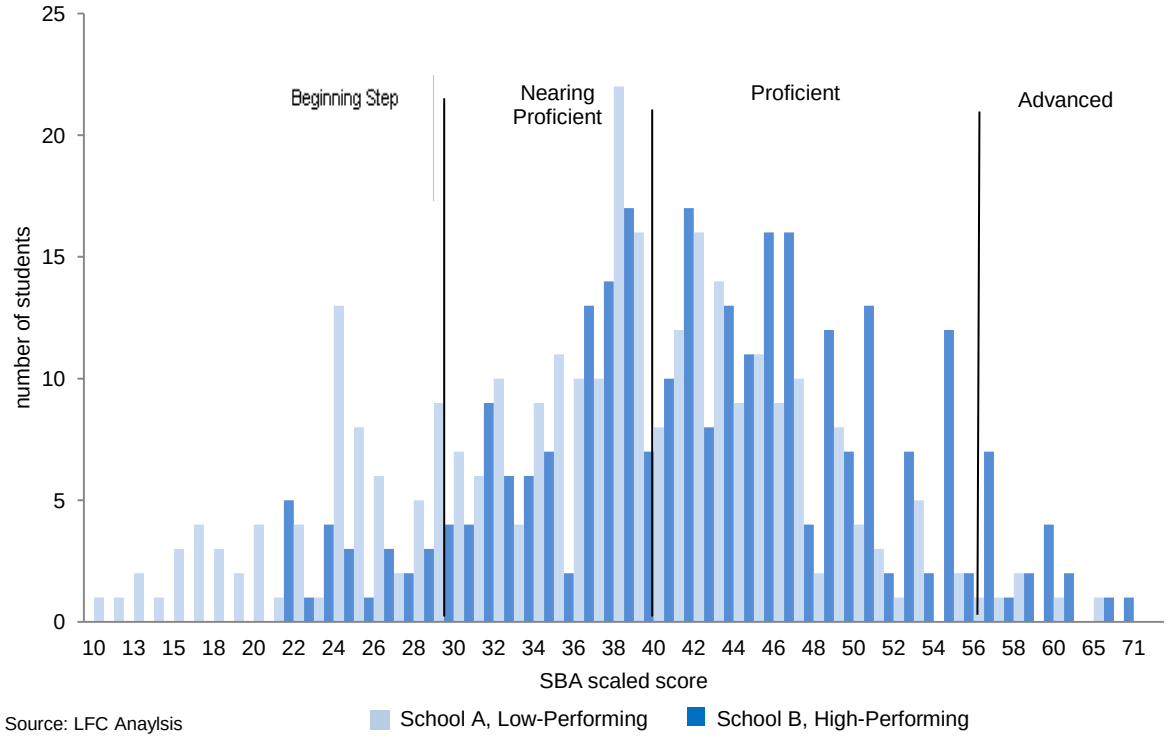


Source: LFC Analysis

While high-performing schools have moved the majority of their students toward proficiency, many students in low-performing schools tend to be clustered in the beginning-steps range, many points from grade-level performance. SBA scaled score distributions among high-performing schools suggest these schools have been able to move the majority of students toward proficiency. In contrast, not only are the majority of students in low-performing schools not proficient, but large numbers of students are many points away from proficiency and clustered toward the beginning-step end of the scaled score distribution.

Two schools in one school district, one low-performing school, and one high-performing school, highlight this trend. While the scaled distribution for the high-performing school is centered at 40 with few students scoring in the beginning-step range, the distribution of third grade scaled scores at the low-performing school is skewed toward lower scaled scores, with many students scoring in the beginning-step range. These data reveal high-performing schools are able to move a population of low-income students toward proficiency, effectively overcoming the impact of poverty, while students at low-performing school lag far behind desired results.

Chart 26. SBA Reading Comparison Between School A and School B, FY14



Source: LFC Anaylsis

Recommendations

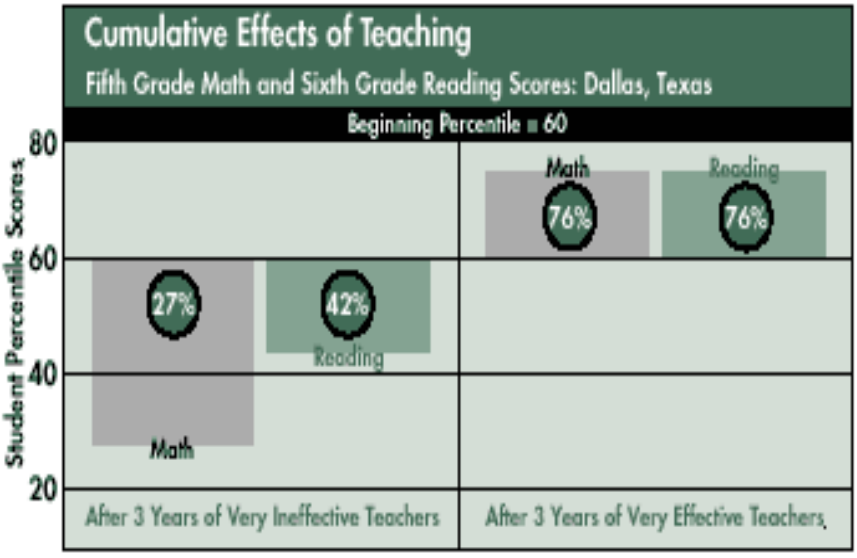
New Mexico public school districts with high-mobility rates should adopt district-wide curriculum, enrollment, and transfer policies to decrease issues associated with student mobility and reduce distractions to student learning.

EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP AND TEACHERS ARE KEY FACTORS IN CREATING A FRAMEWORK FOR IMPROVED STUDENT PERFORMANCE AT HIGH-POVERTY SCHOOLS

Research indicates the combination of effective teachers, principals, and district leadership implementing best practices can result in high-performing, high-poverty schools. A NCSL study concluded nearly 60 percent of a student's performance is attributable to teacher and principal effectiveness. A 2003 Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning study concluded school leadership, effective or ineffective, accounts for up to 25 percent of student outcomes. Ninety-six percent of teachers say the number one factor in staying at a particular school is their principal according to NCSL. Teachers in this study were willing to follow their principals to new schools. Principals at elementary schools are more impactful as they spend more time in classrooms providing instructional support than at middle or high schools.

Effective teachers can have a positive impact and narrow the achievement gap. Empirical evidence shows the impact of a more-effective teacher is substantial. A high-performing teacher, one at the 84th percentile of all teachers, when compared with just an average teacher, produces students whose level of achievement is at least 0.2 standard deviations higher by the end of the school year, according to Hanushek. In New Mexico a 0.2 standard deviation increase translates to about two points increase in proficiency on the SBA. Effective teachers also have an economic impact on a student's lifetime income, according to Hanushek.

Table 13. Impact of Effective Teaching



Source: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory

Effective principals account for retention of highly qualified teachers and are critical to the vision and implementation of school-wide reform policies. Effective school principals are crucial to raising student outcomes and improving schools. Principals rank second to teachers as the factor most influencing student performance. Principals play a crucial role in hiring and retaining highly qualified teachers.

Targeted placement of a principal is essential to creating a high-performing school. Finding the right principal for the right school is critical to creating and sustaining a high-performing school. Research states high-performing schools maintain the same principal for at least three years. Consistency is a key ingredient in maintaining a stable learning environment for students. In a 2014 LFC survey, one principal stated:

"We need to stop non-renewing contracts due to politics. No one can turn a school around in one year. It feels like the term "one and done" is the typical process for hiring principals. We must stop undermining their importance to the stability of schools." Source: LFC Elementary Principal Survey

Leaders of high-performing elementary schools in this study share a similar focus and vision. The leaders are data-driven; collaborative; recognize poverty and diversity in the district/school as fact not an excuse; understand state and federal laws and regulations; consider below-the-line programs an asset; and manage their resources, funding, and grants in a cost-effective manner. Programs vary, yet fidelity and consistency in the curriculum is evident and teachers receive adequate and on-going professional development.

In a 2014 LFC survey, 97 percent of principals surveyed noted fostering a school culture of high expectations, rigor, and academic success was critical to school improvement and student success. Equally important at 90 percent was establishing a clear and positive vision, mission, and direction for the school; and at 89 percent was analyzing and using formative and summative achievement and growth data to plan school curriculum and instruction.

Table 14. LFC Survey of Leadership Practices

Rate how critical the following leadership practices are to school improvement or school turnaround and student learning.	***Percentage**
Foster a school culture of high expectations, rigor, and academic success for student learning.	97%
Establish a clear and positive vision, mission, and direction for the school	90%
Analyze and use formative and summative achievement and growth data to plan school curriculum and instruction.	89%
Engage faculty and staff in planning and decision making.	83%
Engage students in an environment of hope and well-being.	79%
Create a climate hospitable to education.	77%
Cultivate leadership in others.	75%
Engage parents and community in planning and decision making.	74%

*N=188 Source: LFC Survey

High-performing school districts create a strategic plan for student success and place the right people in administrative and school principal positions. Administrators are collaborative and are often cross-trained. For example, one superintendent conducts monthly breakfast meetings with principals district-wide, goes out into "the trenches" to meet with teachers and students, and hired parent-outreach ambassadors. Principals in the district follow district and PED initiatives, engage teachers and parents, and seek community partnerships.

One high-performing school district in this study surpassed the state-wide average in school grades and math proficiency by 14.5 percent in FY14 despite a district-wide at-risk population 23.5 percent higher and low-income rate 20 percent higher than the state-wide average. In three years the district's total elementary school average grades have increased from a "D" to a "B."

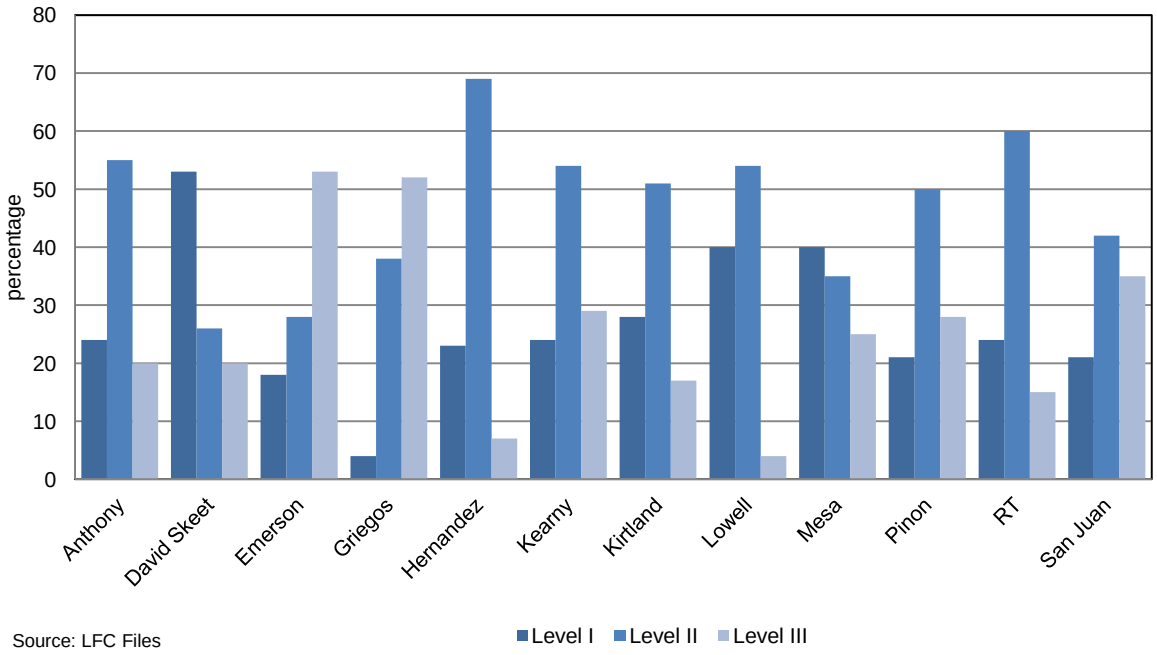
Low-performing schools in the study had higher levels of beginning teachers and fewer teachers with students achieving academic growth. Low-performing schools tend to have more beginning teachers and attract teachers less likely to be effective. In an analysis of New Mexico Teacher Assessment (NMTA) data of low versus high-poverty schools, schools with a low-income level above 85 percent were placed in a low-poverty group. Teachers at high-poverty schools scored an average of 266.6 on the basic skills exam compared to teachers at lower poverty schools who scored an average of 270.0. A 2012 LFC report on teacher preparation noted, NMTA basic skills scores and a teacher's VAM score are highly correlated. Teachers who score higher on the basic skills assessment improve student achievement at higher levels. Research indicates a standard deviation increase in teacher test performance corresponds to a one to four percent increase in student achievement. Such an increase could move a student from nearing proficiency to proficient on the state assessments.

Low-performing schools have almost double the percentage of level one teachers than high-performing schools. Although teacher experience is not a direct measure of teacher effectiveness, research indicates experienced teachers on average perform better than their non-experienced colleagues. As in any other profession, teachers gain skills and proficiency with each year of their careers (Appendix H).

High-performing elementary schools in this study had from 75 percent to 90 percent level two and level three teachers combined while lower-performing schools had from 46 to 60 percent level two and level three teachers combined. High-performing schools in this study had a higher percentage of level two and level three teachers than low-performing schools. Nearly all the schools in the study had a higher percentage of level two teachers with the exception of two schools at those schools, the principals made a concerted effort to hire more experienced level three teachers.

At a turnaround school, all teachers were fired and were asked to reapply; of the original teachers at the school, only three were re-hired. One principal stated, "Our district has a mentorship program for new teachers. The workload on teachers is tremendous and teachers are not prepared for everything expected of them by PED and the school district. A good support system is helpful but does not guarantee a teacher will remain in the position."

Chart 27. Teacher Licensure Levels of Evaluated Schools



Source: LFC Files

Teacher and principal recruitment, retention, and preparation programs to address working at high-poverty schools continue to be a challenge in New Mexico. Public school district administrators concluded college fairs were disappointing as was using the cooperative education services employment tool New Mexico regional education application placement (NMREAP) which was categorized by interviewed administrators as time consuming and with a primary focus on administrative positions. Other school districts have relied on hiring non-US citizens to fill hard-to-staff positions such as math and science. Principals, particularly those close to the borders with Arizona, Colorado, and Texas, saw highly qualified teachers leave the state or commute to higher paying jobs across the state-line. In an interview, one principal described the recruiting as "difficult and minimally effective due to the cost of living and the availability of better jobs in the energy fields" and described retention of highly effective teachers as "basically a reflection of an individual school's positive student environment." In a 2014 LFC survey another principal said, "I do not recruit very well, as I still have three openings. I strive to develop and maintain a positive school climate so that my teachers want to come to work and engage students in rigorous learning every day."

Most administrators in the evaluated schools concurred teacher preparation programs are not doing enough to train new teachers in classroom management skills and data analysis. A 2012 LFC evaluation of teacher and administrator preparation in New Mexico found educator preparation programs generally fail to meet standards of high quality regarding data and assessment preparation. Furthermore, a 2012 LFC survey found new teachers believed they were not sufficiently prepared in data analysis or classroom management. One superintendent stated the district assumed new teachers did not know anything so training and professional development were essential and conducted before school started. A principal said,

"We actively seek out teachers who have shown results, who are passionate and demonstrate a knowledge base and urgency to teaching. We have specific questions we ask, have candidates discuss data sets, etc. Then we support the teachers and teams to be able to do their job. We provide consistent feedback to individuals and teams. We encourage and engage our teachers in meaningful work." Source: LFC Survey

Although LFC survey results showed the majority of principals, 74 percent, were satisfied with their administrative preparation programs, many principals noted more valuable and practical knowledge was learned from on-site training. While state universities received praise from principals, principals also noted "interns being prepared today do not have the practical application realistic to the serious scenarios occurring every day" like "dealing with conflict resolution with staff members, teacher evaluation, and time management."

Table 15. In-State Administrator Preparation Programs

New Mexico Elementary Principal Responses: Do you feel satisfied with your university administrator preparation program?		
Yes - 74 percent (125/168)	*No* - 22 percent (38/168)	*Partially* - 2 percent (5/168)
Principal Quotes:		
"UNM provided real life situations. The budget and law courses especially prepared me for my experiences."		
"NMSU had a great cohort program with our district that helped me get on the job training as well as application of programs and studies active in the district."		
"They did a great job in administration preparation at ENMU."		

N=188 Source: LFC Survey

State and school district policies generally do not support placement or hiring of effective teachers at high-poverty schools, impeding efforts to close the achievement gap. There are no statewide systematic incentives for highly effective teachers and principals to work at high-poverty schools with large at-risk populations. PED incentive pay pilot program offered effective teachers a $5 thousand stipend to transfer to "D" and "F" schools, but results are still unknown. There are no state guidelines for school districts requiring the placement of highly-effective teachers in high-poverty schools with the largest at-risk populations. In addition, previous LFC reports concluded the state's public education funding formula does not align the training and experience (T&E) to the three-tiered licensure system. Schools, particularly low-performing schools in general, have not been purposeful either in using evaluations or other proxy information such as national board certification to place teachers. Some evaluated high-performing and turnaround schools were making concerted efforts to hire highly effective teachers with multiple licensures such as special education, bilingual, and TESOL.

In addition, there are no state prescribed financial distinctions for becoming a principal or for working and remaining at a high-poverty school. The administrator internship process, salary, and extra duties are "cumbersome" and a "disincentive" for aspiring principals, according to a 2014 LFC survey of elementary principals. Since level three teaching salaries are often higher than principals' salaries, level two teachers with a master's degree should be allowed to obtain an administrative license.

In a LFC survey of elementary principals in New Mexico, 61.6 percent agreed the job of principal has become too complex, yet nearly the same amount 61.4 percent agreed they would not like to work in a field outside of public education. Almost 60 percent said they intended to stay at their present schools for more than five years. Nearly 80 percent of respondents agreed there are too many PED requirements placed on schools.

Table 16. 2014 LFC Survey of Principals

Survey Question	1 Completely Disagree	2	3	4	5 Completely Agree
The job of principal has become too complex.	41%	15%	20%	25%	37%
There are too many requirements placed on me by the district.	8%	20%	23%	24%	26%
There are too many requirements placed on my school by PED.	4%	4%	13%	22%	57%
I would like to work in a field outside of public education.	43%	18%	16%	8%	15%
I am satisfied with my job as a principal in the public schools.	8%	16%	21%	31%	24%
I feel validated by my teachers as a highly effective leader.	4%	8%	17%	45%	26%
I intend to stay at my school for more than five years.	17%	8%	17%	22%	37%

N=188 Source: LFC Survey

The majority of New Mexico principals, 70.7 percent surveyed saw themselves as the instructional leader of their schools followed by administrator, 17.3 percent; teacher mentor, 11.4 percent; and fiscal manager 3.8 percent. Principals said they spent an average of 61.6 hours on all school-related activities during a typical week including hours spent working during the school day, evenings, and on weekends. National research shows school principals work at least 10 hour days, for a 50 hour work week. In addition, principals spent 20 to 30 percent of their work day on evaluations and observations of faculty and staff and 10 to 20 percent of their time on instruction and curriculum development. The rest of their time, 5 to 10 percent of the day was spent on community outreach, data analysis, discipline, duty, facilities, and fiscal management.

"I was well prepared to be an instructional leader. Unfortunately, the opportunities for instructional leadership are outweighed by the requirements of daily building management and PED mandates." Source: LFC Survey

New Mexico lacks a sustainable pipeline for aspiring leaders. School district administrators have done little to identify or train aspiring leaders. One principal said teachers who are interested in becoming a principal go about obtaining licensure on their own. New Mexico coalition of educational leaders has a program for a few aspiring superintendents. Other leadership programs for administrators in New Mexico are limited to principals and not aspiring administrators.

For example, PED initiatives have targeted some administrative training through the UVA turnaround model and principals pursuing excellence program, but those efforts are limited and generally do not target all low-performing schools. None of the evaluated school districts had a concrete plan to identify or train aspiring principals showing proven results. One school district recently started an aspiring leadership academy.

"There wasn't any support, formal support. My first year was a very lonely and scary year. You are given keys to a building and told this is how we all started out." Source: LFC Survey

Recommendations

Legislature.

- Modify the public education funding formula to align the training and experience (T&E) to the three-tiered licensure system adding an adjustment factor for effective teachers and leaders at high-poverty schools ($5 thousand to $15 thousand stipend) or factor an extra weight in the T&E matrix for teachers at high-poverty schools.
- Allow level two teachers with a master's degree to obtain administrative licenses.

PED.

- Create viable professional development and resources for aspiring administrators.
- Create guidelines for placing highly-effective teachers and principals at low-performing schools.

PED in conjunction with New Mexico stakeholders.

- Create a pipeline of high quality aspiring administrator preparation programs.

New Mexico public school districts.

- Identify and train aspiring administrators who have attained a master's degree.
- Make a concerted effort to distribute level one teachers across schools to avoid concentrating them in low-performing schools.

IMPLEMENTATION OF TURNAROUND STRATEGIES IN SCHOOLS STATEWIDE ARE VARIED AND COSTLY

State turnaround programs vary in size and scope. Research indicates turnaround efforts intended to reverse chronically low-performing schools nationwide are varied and results are inconclusive. The same is true in New Mexico schools. There are pockets of school districts throughout the nation and in New Mexico turning low-performing schools around but the models are often not adaptable to all schools and all student populations. This case study evaluated three schools utilizing different turnaround strategies. One school used the UVA turnaround model sponsored by PED, one used a district turnaround re-design, and the third received funding through a federal school improvement grant (SIG). The evaluation found turnaround programs in New Mexico were costly, unsustainable, and difficult to maintain once the funding sources were depleted. PED turnaround initiatives target schools after they are failing for a number of years and PED does not hold school districts accountable for implementing turnaround initiatives in all low-performing schools.

Funding of turnaround programs is costly and often unsustainable. In school districts in this study some low-performing schools received additional funds for turnaround programs while other schools in the same district have not received additional funding or resources. At one school district where 30 percent of the elementary schools received a "D" or "F" grade, only one school has received funding for a complete turnaround. At another school district the funds were targeted according to performance categories (Appendix I), elementary schools received higher funding if they were lower performing. Schools in New Mexico struggle to get to the next phase (beginning steps to nearing proficient or nearing proficient to proficient on the state assessments) of student achievement either by raising SBA proficiency scores or raising the school grade. Sustainability of high performance measures is also difficult for turnaround schools in New Mexico as they are nationwide.

Evaluated schools in this case study pursuing turnaround were in the initial stages of turnaround so no tangible gains were observed, others made initial gains and then plateaued, and one school did not have the funds to sustain the turnaround initiatives. PED has sponsored two programs for turnaround schools. The first is the University of Virginia (UVA) Darden-Curry model and the other is principals pursuing excellence. Both programs are for schools receiving a "D" or "F" grade on the schools report cards. PED in conjunction with New Mexico public school districts develops an intervention plan focusing on seven turnaround principles:

1. Provide strong leadership;
2. Ensure teachers are effective and able to improve instruction;
3. Redesign the school day, week or year – additional time for student learning and teacher collaboration;
4. Strengthen the schools instructional program;
5. Use data to inform instruction;
6. Establish a school environment that improves safety; and
7. Engage families and communities.

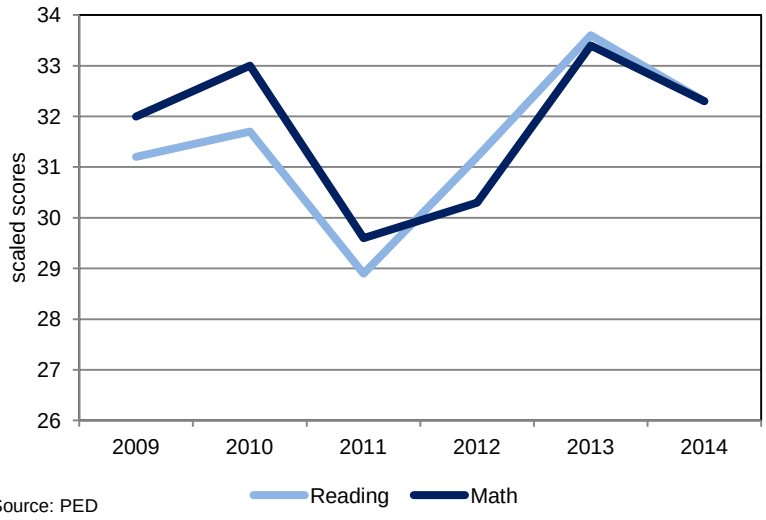
One school district has invested $350 thousand into a district-designed turnaround program despite having many other low-performing elementary schools. The district-designed turnaround school was classified as a chronically low-performing school. From FY09 to FY12 the mobility rates increased from 55 percent to 91 percent. In FY12, 96 percent of kindergarteners at the school scored at the lowest level of the language arts skills assessment. Violence-related events represented 61 percent of all office referrals. In FY10, a school district climate survey revealed half of the staff at the school believed every student can be a success compared to 80 percent of staff at all school district elementary schools. In FY12, the school district and the teachers' union released plans for the re-design. The school has shown a steady increase in SBA reading and math scaled scores from FY11 through FY13, but scores dipped again in FY14 despite the extra funding.

Table 17. School District Re-design

Input	Outputs	Short-team outcomes	Longer-term outcomes
Human Resources: 76% New leadership and staff – all teachers needed to reapply, three were re-hired. 90% Teachers with Bilingual/TESOL endorsements 52% Tier III Teachers **Curriculum and Instruction:** CCSS school-wide Complex text school-wide Bilingual classes at every grade level Specials: art, music, PE Pre-K **Professional Development:** Paid extra hour per day Interventions Behavioral training and support **Assessment & Continuous Improvement:** District Assessments Collaborative data reviews Walk-throughs & lesson plans **Parent Involvement** PTA Parent Liaison Community Event Organizer	• Exemplary CCSS practices • Integrated unit plans • Comprehensive bilingual program • ELL strategies • Positive school climate, unified vision, commitment • Clear expectations • Enhanced community and parent involvement • Coordinated support services	• Reduce student mobility • Improve student attendance and decrease truancy • Increase enrollment diversity • Reduce frequency and severity of behavioral problems • Decrease suspensions • Increase student Executive Function skills • Improve student communication skills and academic vocabulary • Increase percentage of student ready for kinder	• Significant growth in core academic skills • Increase student proficiency percentages in grade-level academic skills • Focus on Kinder and 1st grade proficiency

Source: School District Re-design Plan

Chart 28. SBA Scaled Scores Math and Reading
School District Re-Design, FY09-FY14



Source: PED

Turnaround measurable gains are costly and sustainability may decrease once the funding goes away, if a program is not carefully designed and maintained. Schools with turnaround programs may find it difficult to sustain initial gains in assessment scores or school grades once funding is reduced or eliminated. The schools may see a gain in school grades from an "F" to a "C," as experienced by three of the evaluated schools, but those gains may begin to plateau or the grades may decrease once the funding has subsided and the initiatives are withdrawn. At one evaluated school, once federal SIG monies were depleted the school grade went from a "C" to "D," although SBA scaled scores and proficient and above percentages increased in FY14. Teachers stated it has been difficult to sustain collaboration and intervention time since the extra time after school was eliminated due to funding. In addition to pre-planning, post planning must also be part of the turnaround process. Neither collaboration time nor intervention time was built into the FY15 school schedule and teachers find it difficult to meet during the school day.

Table 18. SIG Allocation FY11-FY13 (in millions)

Year	Allocation
FY11	$1.250
FY12	$1.075
FY13	$1.020

Source: PED

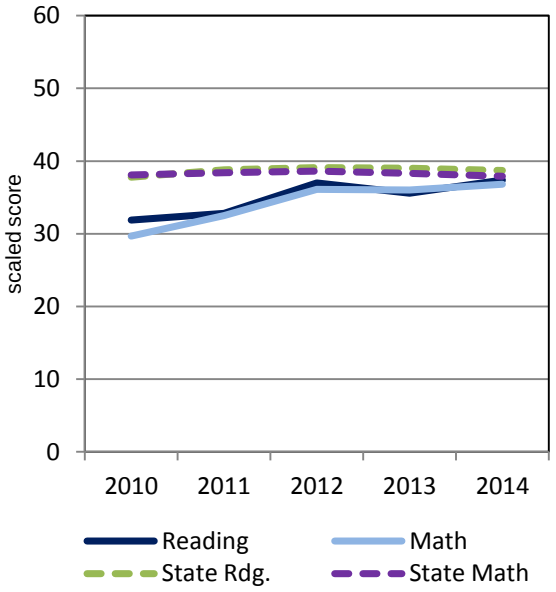
Over three million of federal SIG funding was provided to a low-performing school over a three year period to increase scaled scores. In FY10 before federal SIG funding, the student's scaled scores showed a 31.0 in reading and a 29.7 in math. In FY13, the last year federal SIG funding was awarded, the scaled scores moved up to 35.6 in reading and 36.0 in math. The scaled scored increased 3.7 points in reading and 6.0 points in math in three years, yet the school has failed to meet the scaled score proficiency target of 40 points or surpass state averages. The scaled scores continued to increase in FY14 to 37.4 in reading or 1.8 scaled score points higher and 36.8 in math or 0.8 scaled score points higher. SBA proficient and above scores took a dip in the initial year of SIG funding and then rebounded in FY13 to scores above the FY10 baseline percentage. In FY14 the scores decreased slightly but the school failed to surpass state proficient and above averages in both reading and math for the last five years and the school is not exceeding expected performance.

Table 19. SIG School Scaled Scores FY10-FY14

Year	Reading	*State Reading	Math	*State Math
FY10	31.9	37.8	29.7	38.1
FY11	32.8	38.8	32.5	38.4
FY12	37.0	39.1	36.1	38.6
FY13	35.6	39.0	36.0	38.3
FY14	37.4	38.7	36.8	37.9

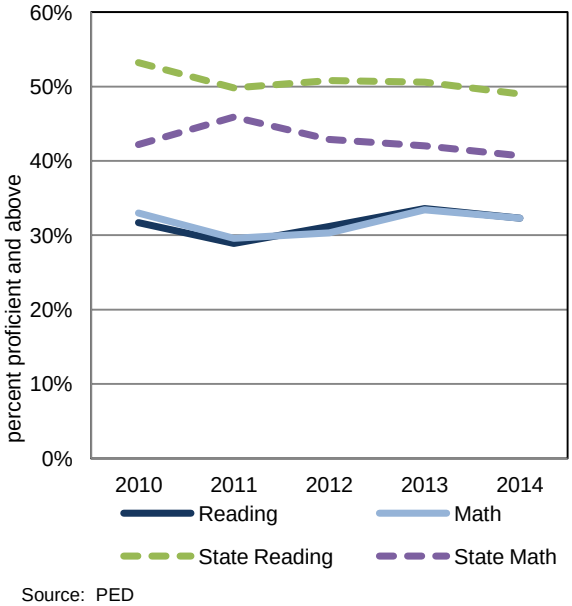
*Third-Fifth Grades Source: PED

Chart 29. SBA Scaled Scores SIG School FY10-FY14



Source: PED

Chart 30. SBA Reading and Math Proficient SIG FY10-FY14



Source: PED

Recommendations

PED.

- Collapse a number of initiatives aimed at targeting under-performing, high-poverty schools to a streamlined program providing flexible assistance, reinforcing best practices, and requiring district support.
- Use the budget process to hold school districts accountable for implementing turnaround initiatives in all low-performing schools.

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HANNA SKANDERA
SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

SUSANA MARTINEZ
GOVERNOR

October 30, 2014

David Abbey, Director
Legislative Finance Committee
325 Don Gaspar, Suite 101
Santa Fe, NM 87501

Dear Director Abbey:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the draft report: *Improvement Strategies: A Case Study of New Mexican Elementary Schools.* Please accept my compliments to your staff for their professionalism and collaborative approach throughout the evaluation process. As always, the Public Education Department (PED) is committed to continuous quality improvement, best practices, and improving outcomes for all New Mexico students.

To that end, we appreciate the report's findings regarding the vast differences that exist in student performance between schools that serve similar, high-need populations. We have long believed at PED that all of our students, no matter their background or circumstance, can achieve academically, and that the quality of classroom instruction and school leadership truly matters in unlocking our students' potential. The "best practices" implemented by high-performing schools that your report highlights – namely, creating a culture of high expectations and achievement, promoting urgency around continual use of assessments and data, and targeting instructional time and funding to programs and strategies proven to produce results – are foundational elements of PED's ongoing strategy for reform and improvement.

Our review of the report, however, also raises several concerns regarding what we believe are inaccurate representations. First, the findings and recommendations overall, which are generalized for the entire state, are based on a sample size of 15 – or a mere three percent of the 440 elementary schools in the state. This hardly represents a significant sample of all schools or even only the high poverty schools, and we question whether the findings and recommendations can reliably be generalized across the state with such a small sampling.

To illustrate the issue of inadequate sample size, the report addresses current turnaround efforts by focusing primarily on absolute proficiency rates, using the 50 percent threshold to make judgments about the efficacy of various turnaround programs. While ultimately we share the goal of achieving higher absolute proficiency rates, PED respectfully argues that current state-supported turnaround programs are in fact demonstrating significant positive results in improving student achievement, as measured by year-over-year growth. The report downplays the growth component, a critical metric in evaluating whether or not programs are effective. For example, recent efforts in the PED's Real Results program at Santo Domingo Elementary yielded growth in

reading proficiency of more than 1,000 percent in targeted populations. Santo Domingo was not included in this study, nor were these types of efforts, which are yielding significant results for our at-risk populations.

There are several other concerns that PED has with regard to the report findings. These include:

- There is a lack of acknowledgement that districts have a distinct and critical role in supporting schools as they work towards turnaround and improvement. Schools that have been most successful in significant and sustained improvement have been those with strong district support. In these instances, districts have removed barriers and provided the support schools needed to make tough decisions that are ultimately in the best interest of students.

- The report makes a number of inaccurate comments and recommendations regarding what is authorized in the Public School Finance Act, particularly with regard to "holding districts accountable for using best practices at high poverty and under performing schools." The Public School Finance Act specifically directs the PED to ensure districts are prioritizing resources at schools earning a D or F rating for two years. Poverty is not a criteria and "underperforming" as used in the evaluation can encompass a number of schools not meeting the statutory definition.

  As such, the budget review process is used to ensure funds are budgeted for a particular purpose at a district level, but how these funds are distributed to schools during the school year is determined by the district to meet the unique needs of individual schools in a dynamic environment. PED staff works closely with struggling schools and districts to assist and encourage focused funding to meet student need.

- The report comments on the lack of sustainability in turnaround programs without any evidence to support the finding. Without evidence, PED must disagree with the finding in general but recognizes that to sustain improvement, funding needs to be sustained as well.

- Similarly, there is a finding in the report that states "PED initiative roll-outs are haphazard and support is inconsistent." This statement is of concern as there is no detail provided regarding the context in which the data that led to this finding was shared, nor does it identify what programs are being labeled in this manner. If data collection was based on survey results, PED questions whether the responses to the survey truly represent the state as a whole.

  In the past three years PED has provided more support to educators than ever before. The majority of support and training provided has been *optional*, and every session has been full, with many oversubscribed. As such, we question if the finding included is truly representative of the state as a whole.

With regard to the recommendations in the report, there are several items that PED would like to clarify.

Two of the recommendations related to PED – 1) Increase professional development for teachers and principals in data-driven instruction, analysis, and on-going progress monitoring, and 2) Create a pipeline of high quality administrator preparation programs – fail to recognize that this work has already begun.

For the past three years, PED has provided direct training and support on data-driven instruction, effective data analysis, and the benefits of progress monitoring. To date, more than 2,000 educators have participated and the demand has always exceeded the space available at these trainings. Specific feedback on this training has included comments such as:

"Thank you for the comprehensive and exhaustive presentation. The principals at Zuni Public School District reported to the Superintendent that was the BEST PED Training they have attended."

"I am very excited to start looking at my data through a new lens. I appreciate the training...it was very powerful."

As such, PED intends to continue this support and further assist schools and districts refine their practice in these areas.

With regard to the recommendation related to building a pipeline of high quality administrators for the state, New Mexico is in the process of finalizing awards to three New Mexico institutes to do just that through the NMLead initiative. These innovative preparation programs will prepare the next generation of leaders to serve in New Mexico schools as they work towards excellence.

A third recommendation relates to developing one streamlined turnaround program. This is cause for concern as it is highly unlikely that a uniform turnaround program will be able to meet the specific needs of individual schools. Schools in an extremely rural setting will need different support when compared to schools in a more urban environment. Only implementing a single program and expecting it to meet the needs of all of our schools in need of intensive support is short-sighted.

Further, PED supports schools through Principals Pursuing Excellence and the UVA School Turnaround Specialist Program, as you are aware. The case study makes no mention of the promising results shared with the LFC staff. Specifically:

- **Principals Pursuing Excellence (PPE) –** 53 percent of participating schools moved one or more grades, while 18 percent moved two or more grades. 3 percent (one school) moved from an F to a B.

- **UVA School Turnaround Program** – Schools in the UVA program had a net gain of 11.8 percent in the number of students in participating schools who moved up at least one proficiency level in reading, and a net gain of 8.6 percent in the number of students who moved up at least one proficiency level in math. This represents over ten times and seven times more progress, respectively, in these struggling schools, when compared to all other schools.

Finally, PED agrees with the recommendation regarding accelerating the ability of some Level II teachers to become administrators. The mechanism for how this kind of advancement is implemented is important, however. PED supported a bill in the last legislative session to accomplish this but was unsuccessful in getting the Legislature to pass the bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the report. We look forward to continuing to partner with the LFC as we work to improve outcomes for New Mexico's more than 336,000 students.

Warm regards,

Hanna Skandera

Hanna Skandera

APPENDIX A: Project Information

Evaluation Objectives.

- *School Leadership* – Assess school leader (s) and oversight of school. Is leadership effective and efficient?
- *Staffing* – Review the utilization of faculty and staff to promote student performance and achievement.
- *Resources and Programmatic Variance* – Review the use of funding and cost-effectiveness of financial and programmatic allocation.
- *Student Performance* – Review student achievement and the extent to which school leadership, resources, and programmatic decisions have affected student performance.

Scope and Methodology.

This evaluation was a case study of high- and low-performing elementary schools. The evaluation was a multi-site study within the bounded system of elementary schools in several school districts in New Mexico. The study primarily used qualitative research strategies, although quantitative measures were used and the study employed multiple sources of information such as documents, reports, interviews, observations, and New Mexico Public Education Department (PED) data sets. The initial selection criteria utilized a regression analysis model and then become purposeful in order to select an equal amount of high- and low-performing schools with a high diversity, economically disadvantaged population from urban and rural districts throughout New Mexico. Although all eight school districts have incorporated turnaround models, three of the fifteen schools were identified as turnaround schools. Fifteen New Mexico elementary schools in eight school districts were chosen to participate in this study.

Participants. Eight New Mexico public school districts: Albuquerque Public Schools (APS); Central Consolidated Schools; Española Public Schools; Gadsden Independent Schools; Gallup-McKinley County Schools; Las Cruces Public Schools; Ruidoso Municipal Schools; and Santa Fe Public Schools (SFPS) were contacted and visited. Fifteen public elementary schools: Anthony Elementary, David Skeet Elementary, Emerson Elementary, Griegos Elementary, Hernandez Elementary, Kearney Elementary, Kirtland Elementary, Lowell Elementary, Mac Arthur Elementary, Mesa Elementary, Piñon Elementary, Ramirez Thomas Elementary, San Juan Elementary, Sunrise Elementary, and White Mountain Elementary.

Data Collection.

- A survey of elementary principals was conducted between August and September of 2014. Eighteen multiple choice, open-ended, and scale questions were asked. Forty-two percent of all elementary school principals in New Mexico responded.
    - The average experience of the respondents as principal was 7.8 years.
    - Fifty-two percent of the respondents have been principals 0 to 5 years.
    - Seventy-seven percent of the respondents received their administrative degrees in-state universities.
- The procedures for data collection in each of the elementary schools were replicated in each of the elementary schools for continuity of analysis.
- A list of questions by job category were electronically forwarded to superintendents before site visits and subsequently asked at the interviews.
- Six of the eight superintendents were interviewed; the APS superintendent resigned before our interview and the Española Public Schools superintendent was unavailable for an interview.
- District administrators: Associate Superintendents, Finance Directors, Human Resources Directors, Special Education Directors, Directors of Instruction and Curriculum among other administrative personnel were interviewed as part of a roundtable group or individually.
- School board members were invited to be interviewed. Three board presidents from three school districts participated and were interviewed: Gadsden Independent Schools, Gallup-McKinley County Schools, and Santa Fe Public Schools.
- Every evaluated elementary school received site visits and each of the fifteen principals were interviewed.
- Teachers chosen by the principal were interviewed.

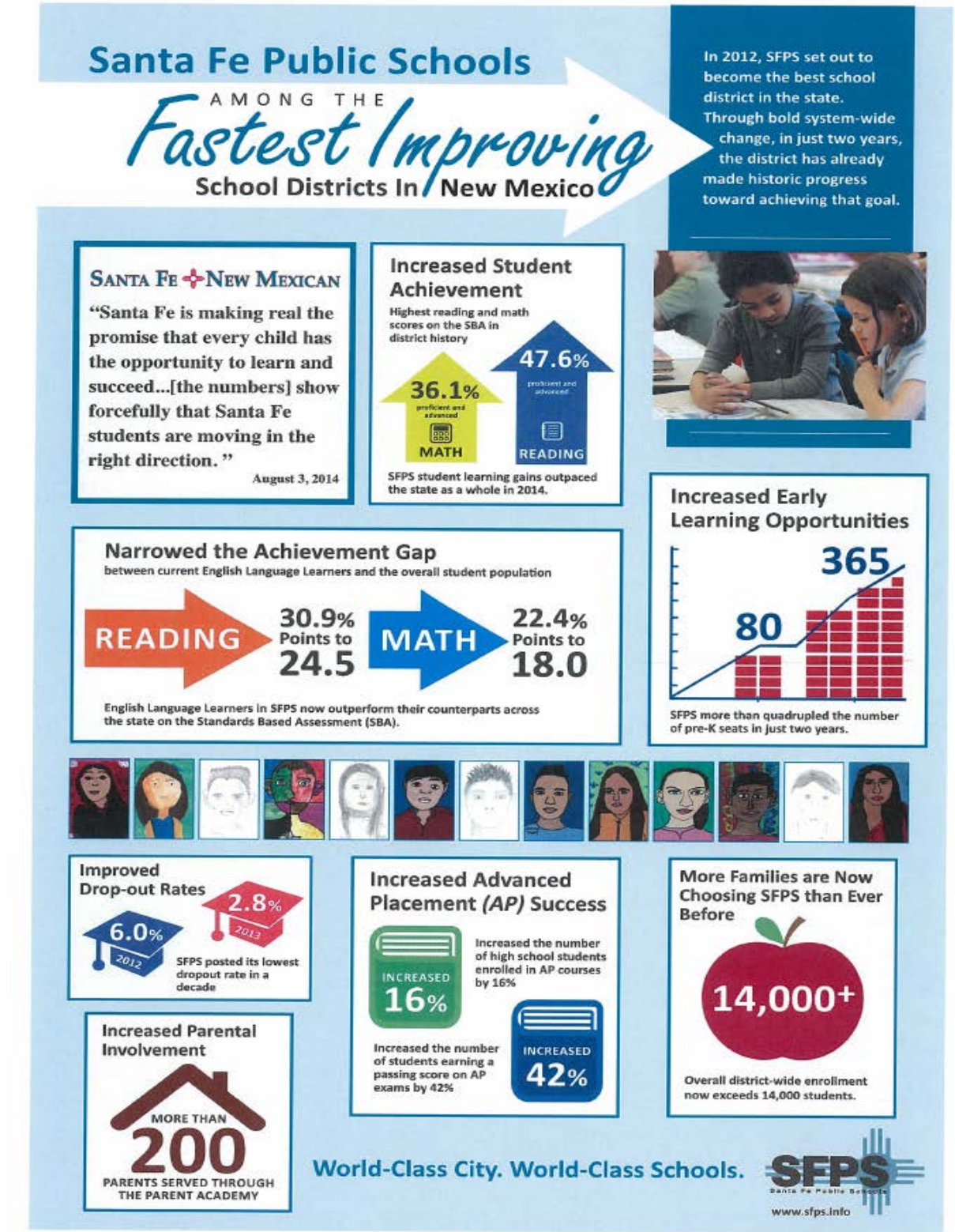
Evaluation Team.
Madelyn Serna Mármol, Lead Program Evaluator
Yann Lussiez, Program Evaluator
Rachel Mercer-Smith, Program Evaluator

Authority for Evaluation. LFC is authorized under the provisions of Section 2-5-3 NMSA 1978 to examine laws governing the finances and operations of departments, agencies, and institutions of New Mexico and all of its political subdivisions; the effects of laws on the proper functioning of these governmental units; and the policies and costs. LFC is also authorized to make recommendations for change to the Legislature. In furtherance of its statutory responsibility, LFC may conduct inquiries into specific transactions affecting the operating policies and cost of governmental units and their compliance with state laws.

Exit Conferences. The contents of this report were discussed with xx on xx.

Report Distribution. This report is intended for the information of the Office of the Governor; the Public Education Department; Office of the State Auditor; and the Legislative Finance Committee. This restriction is not intended to limit distribution of this report, which is a matter of public record.

Charles Sallee
Deputy Director for Program Evaluation



Source: Evaluated School District

High-Performing, Turnaround, Low-Performing Indicators, FY12-FY14

Category	High-performing	Low-performing	Turnaround
SBA proficiency	Reading >55% Math >60%	Reading <30% Math <30%	Fluctuating
Predicted proficiency residual	>.12	-.06 to -.30	-.04 to -.38
School grade	A or B	D or F	Fluctuating
At-risk population	>60%	>60%	>60%
Low-income	>50%	>50%	>50%

Source: LFC Files and PED

Below-the-line Funding Programs, FY14

Elementary	Reads to Lead	K-3 Plus	Prekindergarten
Anthony	District	Yes	Yes
David Skeet	District	Yes	Yes
Emerson	District	Yes	Yes
Griegos	District	No	No
Hernandez	District	No	No
Kearny	District	Yes	Yes
Kirtland	District	Yes	Yes
Lowell	District	No	No
MacArthur	District	No	No
Mesa	District	No	No
Piñon	District	Yes	Yes
Ramirez Thomas	District	No	No
San Juan	District	No	No
Sunrise	District	No	No
White Mountain	District	No	*N/A

*Not at school site

Source: Evaluated School Districts

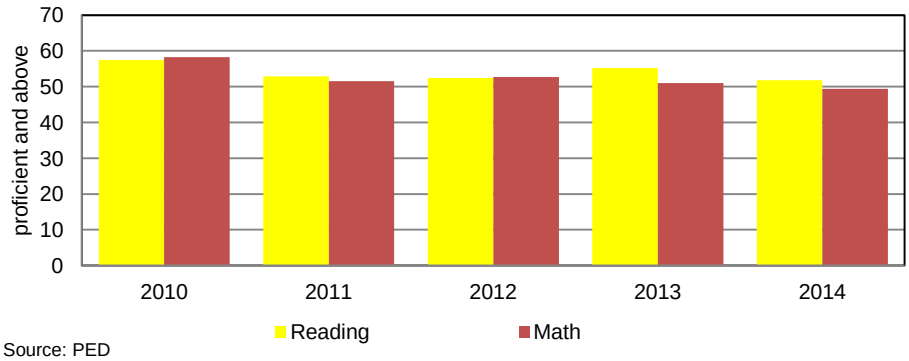
EVALUATION CALENDAR / TIMELINE
Gadsden Independent School District
NM TEACH
August 19, 2013

Date	Action Required	Person(s) Responsible	Due in Human Resources
July 10-11,2013	NM Teach	NM Teach	
August 29, 2013	Presentation of Modules 1 , 2, 3 and 4 to Teachers at School	Campus Administrators	
October 1, 2013	**Due:** Professional Development Plan	Campus Administrators	**October 1, 2013**
October 15, 2013	Distribution of forms from HR for Annual Evaluation of all employees (exception Teachers)	Human Resources	
By October 15, 2013	**DUE**: Upload Observation # 1—Teacher Evaluation to NMTEACH Online System **(Domains 2 and 3)**	Campus Administrators	NMPED Requirements
By December 13, 2013	**DUE**: Upload Submission #1--**Domains 1 & 4** to NMTEACH Online	Campus Administrators	
By December 13, 2013	**DUE**: Upload Observation# 2—Teacher Evaluation to NMTEACH Online System **(Domains 2 and 3)**	Campus Administrators	
By March 28, 2014	**DUE**: Upload Submission #2—**Domains 1 & 4** to NMTEACH Online	Campus Administrators	
By March 28, 2014	**DUE**: Upload Observation# 3—Teacher Evaluation to NMTEACH Online System **(Domains 2, and 3)**	Campus Administrators	
	Submit all Certified Transfer Request	Campus Administrator	**April 18, 2014**
	Completed Evaluations on Support Staff	Campus Administrator	**April 18, 2014**
By April 25, 2014	DUE: Printed copies of Completed Evaluations and Growth Plans for Poor Performance (I or ME)	Campus Administrators	**April 25, 2014**
	Final list of Non-Renewals and Terminations with **Written Records.** (All employees on this list must have completed the evaluation process by this date.)	Campus Administrators	**April 28, 2014**
	Letter of Reemployment to be Distributed	Human Resources	**May 5, 2014**

Source: Evaluated School District

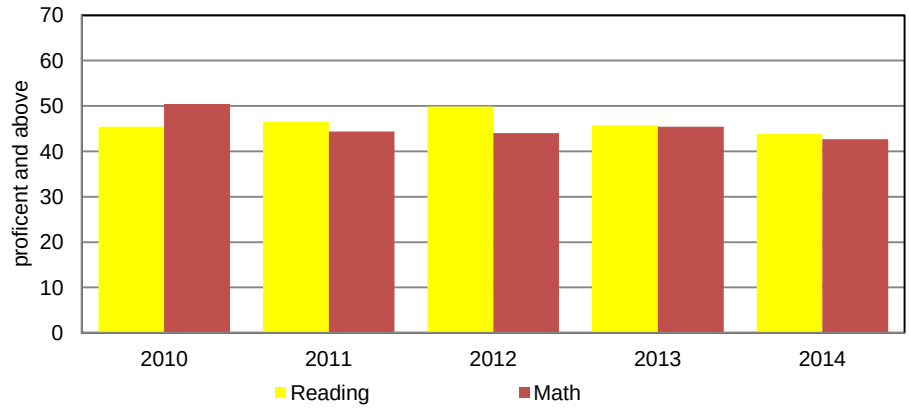
APPENDIX F: Statewide SBA Scores Third Grade to Fifth Grade

Statewide Third Grade SBA Scores, FY10-FY14



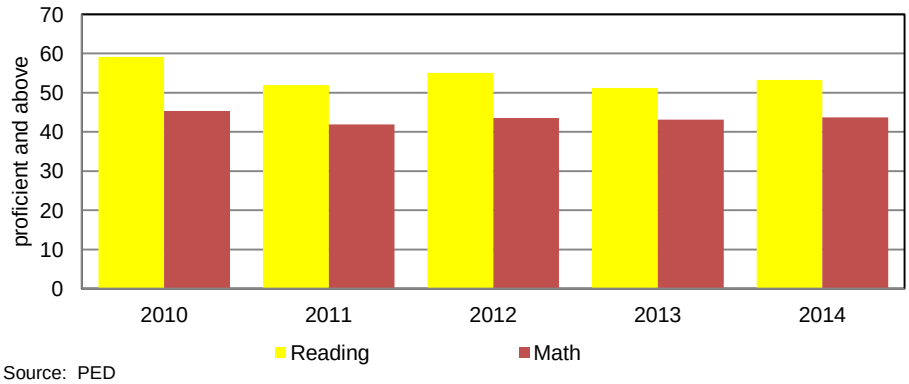
Source: PED

Statewide Fourth Grade SBA Scores, FY10-FY14



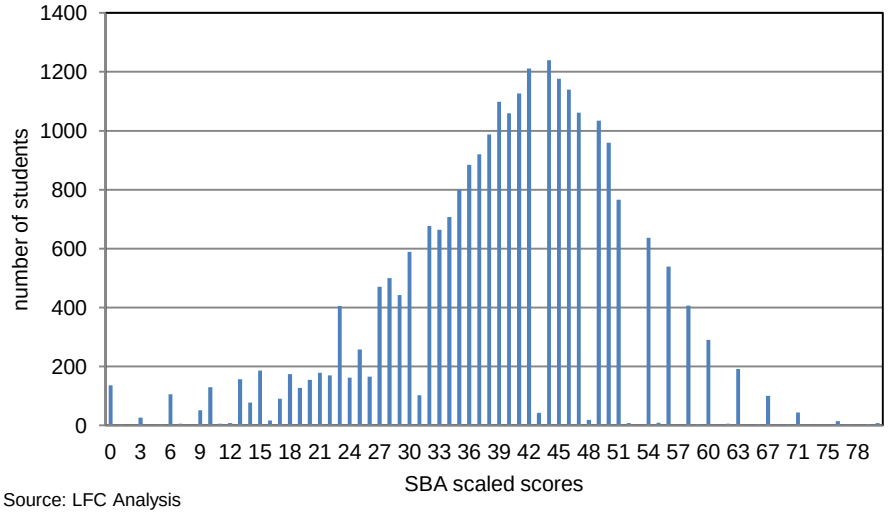
Source: PED

Statewide Fifth Grade SBA Scores, FY10-FY14



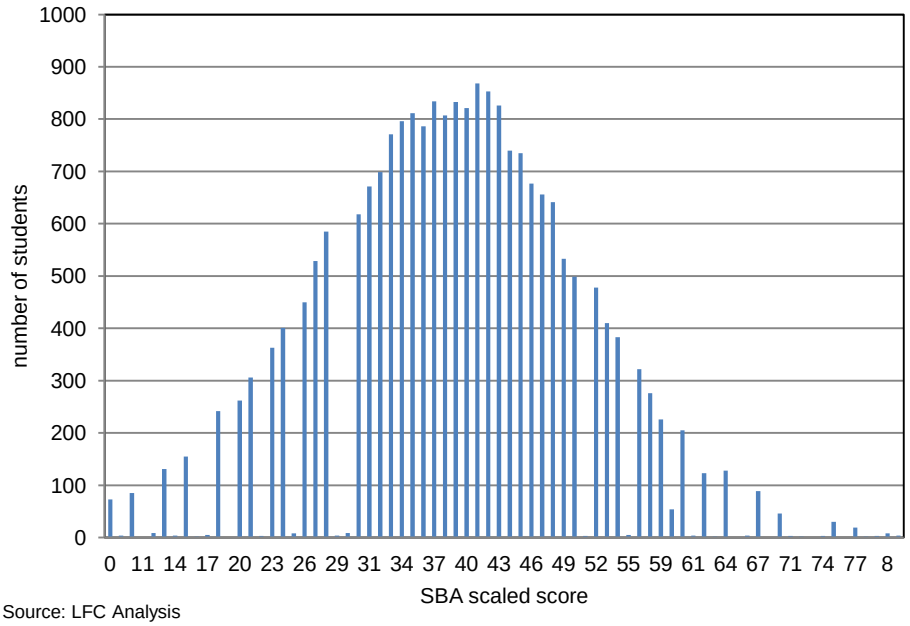
Source: PED

Frequency of Fifth Grade Reading SBA Scaled Scores, FY14



Source: LFC Analysis

Frequency of Fifth Grade Math SBA Scaled Scores, FY14



Source: LFC Analysis

APPENDIX H: Teacher Profiles

Teacher Profile of Evaluated Schools, FY15

School	Teachers	Level I	Level II	Level III	BA	MA	Bilingual	TESOL	SPED	Teacher Prep	Average years experience
Anthony	29	7	16	6	19	10	7	29	5	16NM 12Border 1Other US	9.5
David Skeet	15	8	4	3	9	6	N/A	1	1	5NM 3Border 5Other US 2Outside US	7.7
Emerson	32	6	9	17	N/A	N/A	14	25	5	N/A 17 NCLBs	N/A
Griegos	21	1	8	11	N/A	N/A	0	13	3	N/A	N/A
Hernandez	13	3	9	1	9	4	8	7	1	10NM 2Border 1Outside US	14.5
Kearny	41	10	19	12	27	14	N/A	N/A	N/A	40NM 1Other US	9.8
Kirtland	35	10	18	6	25	9 1PhD	3	23	5	18NM 10 Border 5Other US 2Outside US	N/A
Lowell	22	9	12	1	N/A	N/A	5	8	1	N/A	N/A
MacArthur	32	N/A	N/A	N/A	16	16	6	6	2	27NM 4 Border 1Other US	N/A
Mesa	20	8	7	5	12	8	3	14	3	4NM 10Border 5Other US 1OutsideUS	N/A
Piñon	38	8	19	11	24	14	N/A	N/A	N/A	38NM	N/A
Ramirez Thomas	33	8	20	5	27	6	N/A	N/A	N/A	33NM	N/A
San Juan	28	6	12	10	13	13	6	7	2	18NM 4Border 2 Other US 2Outside US	13.0
Sunrise	29	N/A	N/A	N/A	16	12 1PhD	9	4	2	24NM 1Border 4Other US	N/A
White Mountain	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Source: PED and Evaluated School Districts

State/Federal/Private/City/County Funding by Site
2014-2015
September 5, 2014

	Site:	Title I 24101	21st Century 24119	Title III 24153	Acceleration/ Transformation Zone 14000/24101/24154	Carl Perkins 24174	ROTC/ Gear Up 25200/5	LANL 26113	Pre K 27149	K3 Plus 27166	GRADS/ GRADS-Plus 28189	City/ County Grants 29107	Percent of Total	Total by Site	Total by Designation
Innovation	Amy Biehl	$65,155		$1,290				$11,357					1.30%	$77,802	
	Carlos Gilbert	$37,078		$220									0.62%	$37,298	
	Pinon Elem	$62,283		$1,360					$70,105				2.23%	$133,748	
	Wood Gormley			$110									0.00%	$110	4.15%
													0.00%	$0	$248,958
Acceleration	Academy a Larragoite	$5,325		$114	$15,000								0.34%	$20,439	
	Acequia Madre			$70	$15,000								0.25%	$15,070	
	Atalaya	$16,334		$150	$15,000				$112,090				2.39%	$143,574	
	Capshaw	$48,642		$550	$15,000			$3,282					1.12%	$67,474	
	Capital High	$185,952		$3,510	$15,000	$44,148	$124,466				$24,000		6.62%	$397,076	
	Chaparral	$46,667		$450	$15,000				$107,906	$109,909			4.66%	$279,932	
	E.J. Martinez	$39,667		$380	$15,000					$53,750			1.81%	$108,797	
	El Camino Rael Community	$112,181		$2,970	$15,000			$95,919	$135,657			$25,000	6.44%	$386,727	
	El Dorado Community			$330	$15,000			$73,328					1.48%	$88,658	
	Gonzales Community	$54,026		$240	$15,000					$52,636			2.03%	$121,902	
	Nina Otero	$81,847		$1,080	$15,000			$19,586	$269,005				6.44%	$386,518	
	Ramirez Thomas	$97,220	$76,634	$2,460	$15,000					$110,516			5.03%	$301,830	
	Salazar	$69,642		$1,850	$15,000			$5,907		$58,000		$20,000	2.84%	$170,399	
	Santa Fe High	$74,850		$2,120	$15,000	$83,504	$74,944				$24,000		4.57%	$274,418	
	Sweeney	$100,694		$3,340	$15,000				$75,643	$182,180		$59,000	7.26%	$435,857	
	Tesuque	$14,539		$270	$15,000				$53,983				1.40%	$83,792	54.69%
													0.00%	$0	$3,282,463
Transformation	Aspen Community	$85,437		$1,070	$125,000					$52,718			4.40%	$264,225	
	Cesar Chavez	$80,187	$105,113	$1,590	$125,000				$88,155	$112,975			8.55%	$513,020	
	De Vargas (IB)	$61,206	$184,959	$1,170	$62,500								5.16%	$309,835	39.29%
	Kearny	$74,309		$1,240	$125,000			$89,064	$78,158	$60,930			7.14%	$428,701	
	Nava Elem	$49,719	$97,965	$850	$125,000			$76,870	$90,130				7.34%	$440,534	
	Ortiz	$122,592	$61,839	$2,760	$125,000		$89,917						6.70%	$402,108	$2,358,423
Unzoned													0.00%	$0	
	International Baccalaureate												0.00%	$0	0.00%
													0.00%	$0	$0.00
Charter Schoo	Academy for Technology & the Classics			$1,331									0.02%	$1,331	
	Monte Del Sol	$39,488		$5,467									0.75%	$44,955	
	Tierra Encantada			$5,152									0.09%	$5,152	1.87%
	Turquoise Trail	$54,565		$6,308									1.01%	$60,873	$112,311
	Total by funding source	$1,079,605	$526,510	$49,802	$927,500	$127,652	$289,327	$375,313	$1,080,832	$793,614	$48,000	$104,000	100%	Grand Total	$6,002,155

Source: Evaluated School District