

Learning Time

Academic learning time is quality, engaged time that results in learning—it is more than just allotted time that is available in a school day. Comprehensive, quality learning time necessitates honoring the various needs and learning styles of students through initiatives like career and technical education, enrichment programs, fine arts, physical education, afterschool programs, culturally responsive instruction, extended learning time, and targeted interventions. Quality learning time also requires recognizing the need to support principals and teachers as continuous learners and professionals through professional development, residencies, coaching, mentorship, and protected time for planning and collaboration. By acknowledging and sufficiently funding these essential components of learning time, the Legislature can create an environment in which high quality academic learning is most likely to occur.

This holistic understanding of learning time is crucial as the Legislature considers how to best leverage nearly \$300 million in funding for K-5 Plus and Extended Learning Time programs.

Features of Extended Learning Programs Effectiveness

| Features | Most Effective | Less Effective |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| Curriculum | Aligned, individualized & high-quality curriculum | Clear program goals not aligned to curriculum |
| Training and Coaching | Pre-service & ongoing training, & coaching | Pre-service training only |
| When and Where | During the regular school year | Mandatory summer programs |
| Attendance | Mandatory during the school day | Mandatory other times |
| Total Annual Hours | Significant time (45 - 100 hours) | Too little time (less than 44 hours) |
| Class Sizes | 10 - 15 students | 15 - 20 students |
| Teachers | Certified teachers | Non-certified instructors |

Source: The Education Trust

Although the quantity of time is a primary focus in education policy, time allotted is only as good as what occurs within that time. According to a 2016 Legislative Finance Committee (LFC) report, *Time-on-Task*,

Time for learning is important, but more time alone will not increase academic achievement. Additional time must be used efficiently and effectively. Schedules should optimize to allow for the maximum amount of academic learning time. In schools where allocated time is not used properly, adding time to the day is ineffective, costly, and a poor use of scarce resources. Without efficient planning, the addition of an additional hour of instruction will not increase student achievement.

K-5 Plus and Extended Learning Time Programs

In 2019, the New Mexico legislature funded and established the K-5 Plus and Extended Learning Time (ELT) programs. The K-5 Plus program allows schools to add 25 days of instruction, while the ELT program allows schools to add 10 days, afterschool programming, and 80 hours of professional development.

The Legislature funded these programs in response to findings of the 2008 American Institute for Research (AIR) [study](#), which determined that districts needed support to extend the school year, add afterschool hours, provide summer programs, reduce class sizes, and hire appropriate personnel. The legislature also drew on

findings in the SmartStart K-3 Plus Pilot and ensuing 2015 Utah State [study](#) that found students in elementary grade levels have the greatest amount of summer learning loss, with that loss disproportionately impacting students from lower socioeconomic statuses. According to the SmartStart K-3 Plus project evaluators, “the logic behind the original K-3 Plus program was that it not only minimizes summer learning loss (by putting students in an enriching environment during summer) but also helps students to experience gains during the summer to propel them forward in their achievement.”

Martinez-Yazzie Lawsuit

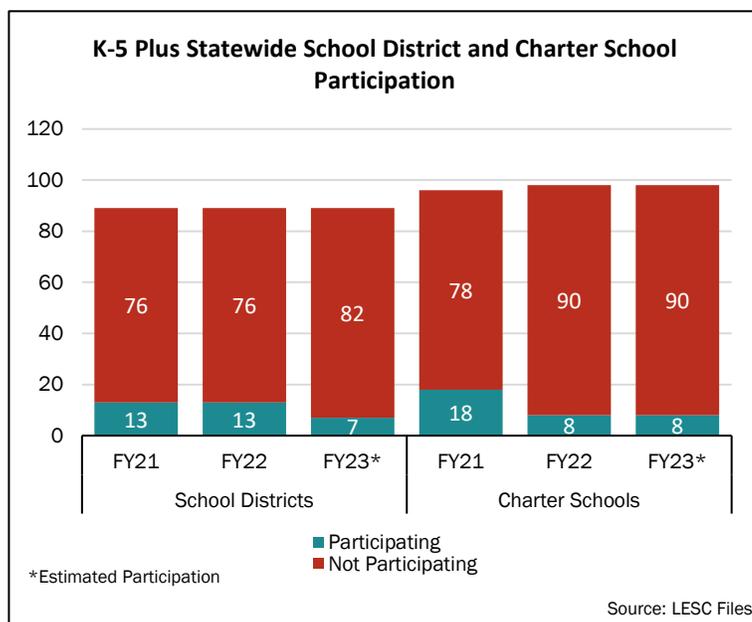
The need for additional learning time was among the findings of the 1st Judicial District court in the consolidated *Martinez-Yazzie* lawsuit. The court found K-3 Plus, the predecessor of the K-5 Plus program, had positive effects on student outcomes, particularly for low-income students. In its findings, the court noted, “it would be beneficial for all students enrolled in high poverty schools to be enrolled in the K-3 Plus program.”

The court’s findings in the *Martinez-Yazzie* lawsuit cited an adequate education as one that prepares schoolchildren to be functioning members of the civic, cultural and economic aspects of our society, and determined education inputs to be a primary measure of adequacy.

In response, the Legislature expanded the K-3 Plus program to K-5 Plus and provided funding for all high-poverty elementary schools to participate in the program. Additionally, the Extended Learning Time program added instructional time for students in all grade levels. To provide year-to-year funding stability, these programs were added to the public school funding formula.

Legislative changes to K-5 Plus and Extended Learning Time Programs

Based on the Utah State study and LFC analysis of FY22 interim Istation data, K-5 Plus, when administered to fidelity, has shown some success in improving student academic outcomes, with a growth rate of approximately .01 to .04 above students not participating. The state continues to provide funding for every low-income, low-performing school to provide K-5 Plus to all elementary students. However, several of the statutory requirements of the original K-5 Plus program proved challenging for schools to implement and participation in the program has been decreasing. In FY23, the Public Education Department (PED) estimates 4,394 students, or 1.4 percent of all elementary school students, will participate in a K-5 Plus program.



School districts cited the requirement that students stay with their K-5 Plus cohort during the regular school year, short implementation periods, challenges with adjusting the school calendar, and lack of interest in extending the school year from parents and teachers as factors leading to the low uptake of K-5 Plus programs in FY20.

During the 2021 regular session, the Legislature sought to address these concerns by providing greater flexibility. These amendments to the K-5 Plus Act were developed with input from school district and charter schools:

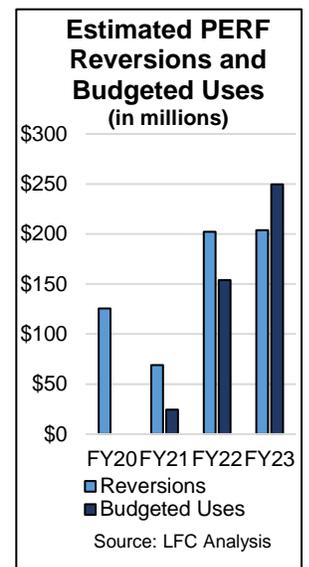
- Allowing school districts and charter schools to add additional days at any time during their school year, rather than prior to the start of the school year;

- Requiring all K-5 Plus programs to be implemented school-wide for all students attending a school;
- Allowing four-day school districts to add 20 days or reach a minimum of 175 calendar days; and
- Softening a strict interpretation of the K-5 Plus cohorting requirement.

Some school districts noted the requirement to add 25 instructional days was burdensome and instead advocated for instructional hours to be allowed in lieu of days. The Legislature addressed this concern by allowing school districts and charter schools to generate K-5 Plus program funding by adding equivalent hours once a minimum number of total instructional days was met. This program provides grants to elementary schools for an additional 140 hours of instructional time.

During the 2021 Legislative Session, the Legislature also addressed implementation concerns for the Extended Learning Time program by allowing schools to either add instructional days or instructional hours to qualify for the program. In addition, the changes provided accommodation for four-day school weeks by lowering the number of days required for these school districts.

Despite these legislative changes, for FY23, K-5 Plus programs are expected to use \$7.2 million of the \$119.9 million appropriation and ELT programs are expected to use \$75.4 million of the \$95 million appropriation.



Policy and Budget Considerations: How to Make Best Use of Funding

The New Mexico Legislature should continue to invest in learning time. Quality learning time is the foundational input needed for students improvement. By embedding additional time into the minimum instructional hours required within the school year and funding components crucial to high-quality instruction, the legislature can ensure funding for quality learning time does not continue to go unused by districts and charter schools. To provide local flexibility for program designs and ensure quality instructional time is added throughout the school year, the Legislature could consider:

- Providing flexibility through instructional hours to districts and charter schools to meet local needs for students and educators throughout the school year;
- Expanding learning opportunities for students by embedding enriched instruction in school-directed programs; and
- Embedding and funding comprehensive professional work time for New Mexico’s educator workforce.

House Joint Resolution 1 will ask voters to increase annual distributions from the land grant permanent fund by 1.25 percent, about \$211.5 million, for the following purposes:

- 60 percent, or \$126.9 million, for early childhood education
- 40 percent, or \$84.6 million, to enhance instruction for at-risk students, extend the school year, and increase teacher compensation

Increasing Instructional Hours and Local Flexibility

Current school-directed program hourly minimum requirements for elementary are 990 hours and 1080 hours for secondary schools. By increasing the minimum number of school-directed program hours, the legislature can ensure every elementary student has a greater opportunity to avoid summer learning loss and support students with recovering from the academic and socioemotional consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. By converting hours previously embedded in school-directed programs for parent teacher conferences and next step plans for students to professional work hours, secondary students will also gain an additional 28 hours of instruction, or approximately 4 days.

On average, the statewide cost for one instructional hour at every school is approximately \$3.3 million.

Most schools provide professional work hours in concurrence with school-directed programs and many districts and charter schools choose to provide students with more than the minimum of school-directed program hours. By funding all districts and charter schools for school-directed program hours and professional work hours, dependent on the needs of the school and community, schools would be able to ensure quality instruction.

Expanding learning opportunities for Students through School-Directed Programs

New Mexico schools must reserve 20 percent of the \$979 million received in American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds for evidence-based extended day, comprehensive afterschool, summer enrichment, or extended school year interventions to address learning loss for at-risk students.

To support the authentic engagement necessary for academic learning, which comes when students are immersed in work with clear meaning and immediate value, school-directed programs should include:

- Teaching and learning aligned with content and performance standards;
- Enrichment programs that focus on problem solving and cognitive skills development directly aligned to academic content and performance standards;
- Research-based or evidence-based social, emotional, or academic interventions;
- Content that provides technical knowledge, skills, and competency-based applied learning.

Professionalizing the New Mexico Educator Workforce

Of the over [250 distinct factors](#) or activities that influence student achievement identified in a 2019 report by Hanover Research and the Utah State Board of Education, educators were identified as the most impactful school-based factor. This indicates that educator quality should be a primary focus for stakeholders working to improve student outcomes. [National Research](#) also indicates effective professional work to improve educator quality incorporates: specific content supports, hands-on experience, collaboration, modeling of instruction, coaching support, built-in time for reflection, and providing teachers adequate time to implement a new skill. Although national data consistently emphasizes a need for quality professional learning supports over quantity, [research](#) is mixed on the number of hours required to provide supports within components of high-quality professional work, especially since many components commonly overlap.

Based on a survey of national research and state requirements, recommended allotted time for components of professional work throughout a calendar year range from:

- Professional Development: 49 to 91 hours
- Mentorship: 35 to 50 hours
- Coaching: 21 to 54 hours
- Collaboration: 18 to 54 hours
- Planning Time: 130 to 190 hours

Depending on the needs of the school, professional work time should include a combination of time for licensed school employees to participate in educator professional development, mentorship, coaching, collaboration, planning, home visiting, parent teacher conferences and consulting with parents to develop next step plans for students. By incorporating time provided by public schools for professional work, the Legislature can support the continuous improvement of New Mexico educators while leading the nation in building the most professionalized educator workforce in the country.