



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Nationwide, the pool of teacher candidates has been shrinking over the last decade, and states have responded by increasing teacher salaries and establishing pipeline programs to sustain the education workforce. New Mexico is no different. Since FY19, New Mexico has made investments aimed at increased recruitment and retention in the teaching profession, including changes to licensure and evaluation requirements, increased salaries for teachers, and investments in residency and financial aid programs.

However, declining student enrollments will require schools to be strategic about staffing levels, and recent growth in teacher licensure in shortage areas, like special education, may be alleviating chronic areas of need. Since FY11, enrollment in educator prep programs has declined by nearly 75 percent from nearly 6,000 students enrolled to 1,596 students in FY21, and findings in the *Martinez-Yazzie* lawsuit pointed to the lack of adequately-trained educators or school leaders teaching the most at-risk students. Given these complexities, without strategic support systems for both educators and school leaders, and a targeted approach to recruiting hard-to-staff positions, New Mexico will continue to experience inefficiencies and high costs, such as high teacher turnover, in providing students appropriate instruction and support services.

Teacher Workforce

While enrollments have decreased over the past 5 years, the total number of public school teachers in New Mexico grew by 996 from 23,314 teachers in FY17 to 24,310 teachers in FY21, including 470 teachers in charter schools. Teachers licensed in high-priority areas have risen, including an increase of more than 1,300 teachers with special education licenses.

However, the Southwest Outreach Academic Research (SOAR) center at New Mexico State University reported 1,078 teacher vacancies across New Mexico in 2021, an increase of more than 500 teacher vacancies from FY19. While the report implies the state had a teacher shortage, it does not show how long vacancies went unfilled, or average vacancies over months. Given a statewide student-to-teacher ratio (STR) well below statute, the exponential increase in vacancies reported by SOAR might not clearly reflect each district's unique needs for teachers in the short-term or long-term. Importantly, the report does not show which districts had the greatest staffing needs. Albuquerque Public Schools, for example, has begun to cut hundreds of funded but vacant positions.

Currently, the Public Education Department (PED) does not track teacher turnover, or principal turnover. Data from the Learning Policy Institute in FY12 and FY13 showed a 24 percent teacher turnover rate, the second-highest rate in the country and nine points above the national average.

AGENCY: Public Education Department (PED)

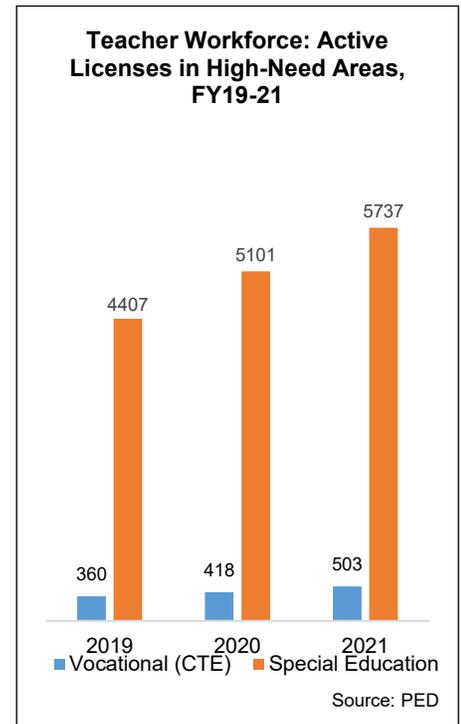
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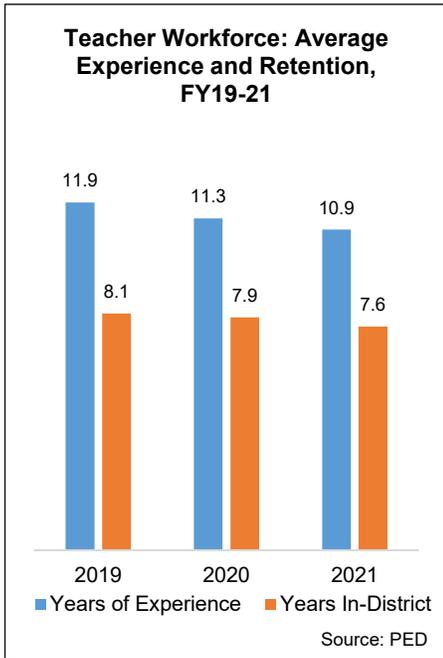
PURPOSE OF HEARING:
State of the Education Workforce and Pipeline

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EXPECTED OUTCOME:
Informational





Preliminary data shows a slight decrease from FY19 to FY21 in working teacher experience and in years retained in-district, suggesting the overall pool of educators is becoming less experienced and leaving earlier in their careers.

Previous LFC reports indicate data from a state-wide exit survey could help address why teachers in unique districts leave the profession, as current reasons cited range from leadership to housing or financial reasons. New Mexico would benefit from linking data on teacher demand needs to EPP candidate supply in order to address vacancies in high-need areas and hard-to-staff schools.

Investments In and Limits of Wage Competitiveness

During the 2022 legislative session, the Legislature increased minimum teacher salaries to \$50 thousand for level 1 teachers, \$60 thousand for level 2 teachers, and \$70 thousand for level 3 teachers. The Legislature also appropriated \$196 million for a 7 percent average salary increase for all public school employees, providing a 3 percent salary bump in the fourth quarter of FY22 and an additional 4 percent in FY22.



Additionally, national research notes while teacher compensation is important for teacher recruitment, other factors beyond pay are important to consider, including investing in school leadership, investing in programs providing high-quality preparation, and investing in more intensive mentoring for new teachers.

Trends in Student-Teacher Ratios

From FY12 to FY23, student enrollments decreased by 8 percent, with sharper declines in the last 5 years. With declining enrollments, statewide student-to-teacher (STR) ratios decreased slightly from 15.2 in FY17 to 14.9 in FY21. However, seven districts saw significant increases in student-to-teacher ratios over the same period.

District	FY17	FY21	Change
Jemez Mountain	12.3	19.4	7.0
Dexter	14.5	19.0	4.5
Questa	11.5	15.6	4.1
Mesa	15.8	19.3	3.5
Jemez Valley	10.9	14.0	3.0
Dulce	11.9	14.8	2.8
Aztec	15.8	18.4	2.6

Source: PED

	FY21	FY22
Teacher	2869	5197
Native Language and Culture Certificates (520)	25	58
Administrators	410	399

Source: PED

Microdistricts often maintain one teacher per subject or grade level across elementary, middle, and high schools. From FY17 to FY21, microdistrict student-teacher ratios were roughly constant at 8-to-1. Microdistricts do not considerably lower statewide STR values, as they constitute only less than 1 percent of the student population.

Investments and Needs in Teacher Preparation

Trends Across Educator Preparation Programs and the Teacher Workforce. Educator preparation program (EPP) enrollments

have decreased 75 percent over the past 10 years, and educators are increasingly getting their highest degree from outside states.

In recent years, the Legislature has implemented multiple strategies to improve recruitment of high-quality teachers, including “grow-your-own” programs designed to recruit teachers from the community, financial assistance to college students pursuing education degrees, and teacher residencies. As the state continues to fund these initiatives, PED should monitor for impact.

Recent data from the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) shows program diversity in New Mexico EPPs is either within 5 percent, or broadly surpassing, diversity in New Mexico’s teacher workforce, it is often less diverse than the local population where programs are located. New Mexico’s EPPs fall behind national averages in elementary reading and math, which can help programs evaluate their levels of teacher preparation.

In FY22, the Legislature appropriated \$250 thousand for a teaching college consortium focused on course alignment across their programs. The Higher Education Department (HED) is currently requesting applications for the funds.

Investments in Residencies and Scholarships. National research indicates 80 percent of teacher residency program graduates remain in the teaching profession after 5 years, compared to 50 percent of non-residency program graduates. Additionally, researchers found statistically significant increases in teacher retention and student performance for residency graduates. National research further indicates the importance of underwriting the cost of teacher preparation as a key strategy to diversify the teaching workforce.

The Legislature significantly increased support for educator preparation programs in FY22. Programs now include:

\$15.5 million for teacher residency programs; PED has awarded grants to eight higher education institutions to fund 374 teacher residents, increasing teacher resident stipends from \$15 thousand to \$35 thousand;

1,880 need-based scholarships awarded by HED under the Teacher Preparation Affordability Act, which provides need-based scholarships up to \$6,000 per year for up to 5 years to pay for educational expenses in pursuit of a teaching license; and

35 scholarships via HED’s Grow Your Own scholarship; this program began in FY21 with preliminary costs for FY22 at \$73 thousand.

Currently, demographic data on teacher residency program participants is unavailable. Reporting on demographics, student outcomes, and teacher retention would inform knowledge of program efficacy and future funding decisions.

Recruitment at the High School Level. Building a sustainable pipeline includes recruiting students early. Educators Rising, an organization at NMSU supporting students interested in education careers, offers a “grow-your-own” strategy for high schools. In FY22, 554 students enrolled in an Educators Rising

New Mexico Teachers Highest Degree by Institution			
	FY19	FY21	% Change
New Mexico	69%	62%	-7%
Border States	14%	17%	3%
Other States	13%	16%	3%
Outside USA	4%	5%	1%

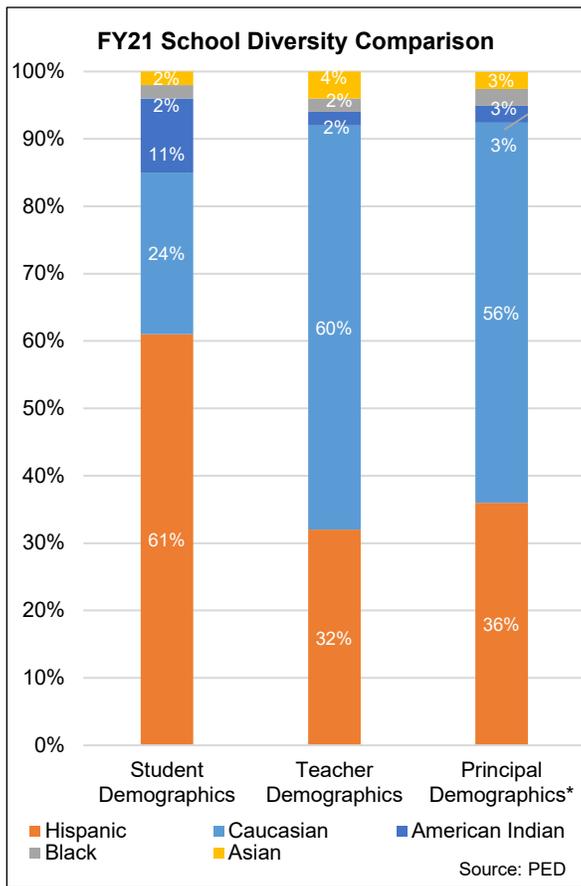
Source: PED

Undergraduate EPPs: Elementary Math Program Ranking				
Grade	NM	OK	AZ	US
A	0%	29%	17%	15%
B	60%	29%	67%	38%
C	20%	29%	0%	13%
D	20%	0%	0%	13%
F	0%	14%	17%	21%

Source: NCTQ

Graduate EPP: Elementary Math Program Ranking				
Grade	NM	OK	AZ	US
A	0%	0%	0%	2%
B	0%	0%	0%	7%
C	0%	0%	0%	2%
D	33%	0%	0%	4%
F	67%	100%	100%	85%

Source: NCTQ



chapter in 35 high schools participating in teaching internships. However, the program has been unable to recruit teachers to sponsor new chapters, leading to slowed expansion. Educators Rising should begin to track outcomes to determine how many participants are effectively funneled into teaching programs or other programs contributing to school support. Strategies for expanding access to the Educator’s Rising program could include a guaranteed stipend for teachers sponsoring an Educators Rising chapter, the creation of a new scholarship for college-bound students, and additional staff to support statewide coordination.

Licensure Requirements in New Mexico

The licensure application process in New Mexico and other states is intended to ensure a level of quality but could provide barriers to entry potentially dissuading qualified applicants. Praxis exams, currently required by 48 states to gain licensure, show significant disparities in pass rates across demographic groups. Data from Educational Testing Service (ETS), which creates and administers Praxis exams, showed 92 percent of white test-takers passed the reading test, versus 80 percent of Hispanic test-takers and 68 percent of African American test-takers in 2019. Altogether, exams cost upwards of \$700, which may be a financial barrier for some applicants.

As of Spring 2024, New Mexico will no longer require the Praxis exams, except for elementary reading. PED will shift to a portfolio-based system. Removing testing requirements for licensure will likely increase the number of eligible candidates eligible but eliminate information showing whether candidates are proficient in the content knowledge they will be teaching. According to NCTQ, out of 15 research studies, 11 find a positive correlation between testing rates and student outcomes, with only one study finding a negative correlation. Additionally, creating and staffing a statewide portfolio review system could be more expensive than offering waivers or additional support programs for Praxis exams or other content-based tests. A rigorous portfolio system risks even longer wait times. As most other states still require Praxis exams, changes to teacher licensing in New Mexico may affect reciprocity in other states.

To improve access, the state could cover fees for the Praxis exams, or pay for preparation courses for qualifying applicants. There could also be stipends for hours spent needing to study for the exam, off-setting some of the loss in income that applicants already experience in waiting during the licensure process.

Assessing Teacher Quality

When teachers wish to advance in license level, they submit a dossier which PED approves or denies based on several indicators including performance data and mentorship requirements. However, PED contracts with evaluators to review the dossiers, and evaluators often rely heavily on the quality of writing in the dossier. Out of 2,259 dossiers processed from April 2020 to July 2022, PED rejected 133 dossiers (5.8 percent) in 39 districts. Dossier approvals were not more or less likely in high-performing districts. Because PED does not track teacher retention at the district or school level, it is not possible to link dossier outcomes to retention levels, and the dossier may not reflect teacher quality as intended.

By statute, every teacher in the state is required to participate in mentorship, but the quality of mentorship is not evaluated and can vary widely by school and district.

Supports for Leadership and Educators

Principal turnover can lead to higher teacher turnover, which negatively affects student achievement. Research from the Learning Policy Institute finds the relationship between principal turnover and teacher turnover is stronger in high-poverty schools. Survey data shows New Mexico teachers ranked school leadership as a top reason for leaving the profession. This mirrors a growing body of national research showing principal support is often the top reason teachers choose to leave or stay in the profession.

Investments in Principal Salaries and Professional Development

During the 2022 legislative session, the Legislature raised minimum principal salaries. A high school principal minimum salary is approximately 45 percent higher than a level 3 teacher salary and high school principal contracts are 250 days on average compared to the statewide average teacher contract of 190 days.

For FY23, the Legislature also appropriated \$2.5 million to PED to support principal professional development at different levels of their career. Approximately 270 principals, 20 percent of principals in the state, participated in one of PED's three programs in FY21.

Teacher Burnout and School Social Supports

Enhanced teacher support systems, including support for school leadership and addressing needs in student mental health, can improve teacher retention. Recent Gallup polls show high levels of teacher burnout nationwide, with 36 percent of surveyed teachers reporting burnout in 2020 rising to 44 percent in 2022. Seventy percent of public schools report increased requests for mental health service in schools, and a University of Michigan poll shows 99 percent of teachers surveyed feel they are a first defense for student mental health.

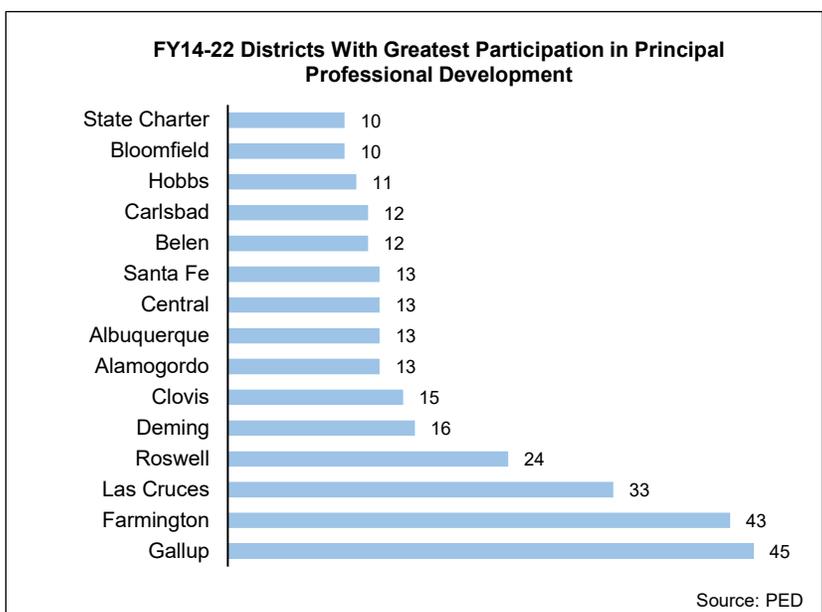
New Mexico's social worker to student ratio is 127-to-1 for school districts, or 2,453 total social workers, and 46-to-1 for state-authorized charter schools. 17

PED Programs for Principals, FY14 to FY22			
Program	Description	Funding	Participants
Lead	1-year program; provides early-career principals with best practices identified by experts' experiences working in New Mexico	\$2.5 million special appropriation to PED	31
Thrive	1-year program focused on developing essential competencies addressing needs in diverse student populations		132
RISE	2-year program; builds competencies of school leaders to assess school needs and establish effective Annual and 90-Day Plans (including data-driven instruction and school culture)		386

Source: PED

Changes in Principal Salaries, FY22 to FY23		
Principal Position	FY22 Minimum	FY23 Minimum
Elementary School	\$72,000	\$84,000
Middle School	\$84,000	\$98,000
High School	\$96,000	\$112,000

Source: PED



Source: PED

districts, representing 1.3 percent of the student population and 15 percent of the state’s geographic area, do not have a social worker at all. Districts that have social workers show a high variance, ranging from 1,544-to-1 in Grants to 26-to-1 in Cobre, and even smaller in some microdistricts.

Research on the 100 largest school districts shows schools with higher levels of social workers have higher graduation rates, which may correlate to stronger support systems in the school. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) cites an ideal ratio of students to social workers as 250-to-1, with that ratio reduced to 50-to-1 for students with intensive needs.

Social Worker Distributions, FY22			
Lowest (Best) Student to Social Worker Ratio		Highest Student to Social Worker Ratio	
Cimarron	14:1	Los Lunas	313:1
Magdalena	22:1	Gallup	357:1
Clayton	25:1	Alamogordo	362:1
Cobre	25:1	Belen	444:1
Espanola	28:1	Grants	1544:1

Source: PED

Social Worker Geographic Distribution, FY22			
Densest Geographic Coverage		Least Dense Geographic Coverage	
Los Alamos	0.4 student-social worker per sq. mile	Clayton	106 student-social worker per sq. mile
Ruidoso	0.6	Cimarron	101
Rio Rancho	1	W. Las Vegas	81
Pojaque	1.4	Socorro	74
Los Lunas	2.1	T or C	74

Source: PED

While NASW does not define “intensive needs” qualifying for their 50-to-1 ratio, student populations in New Mexico have higher-than-national rates of poverty and homelessness. Rates of student mental health disorders, homelessness, and household income insecurity increased after the Covid-19 pandemic. Students in New Mexico are also more likely to have lost a guardian during the pandemic than students nationally; in New Mexico specifically, American Indian children were 10 times more likely to have lost a caregiver from Covid-19 than their white peers.

The NASW-recommended ratio does not define social worker case load. For example, teacher unions in Santa Fe negotiated the maximum *case load* for a social worker would be 40 students, and Santa Fe’s ratio of social workers to total students is 164-to-1.

Given higher rates of at-risk students in New Mexico, more supports for student services are likely needed and could alleviate burden on teachers, in addition to creating programs supporting teacher mental health.

Guidance counselors and social workers are often grouped together, yet they have distinct responsibilities and different advanced degrees. Guidance counselors are likely to handle social-emotional conflict at the school level, whereas social workers have a broader outreach into community and social services, family, and overall student wellbeing. As such, the actual level of social support provided locally may vary, depending on the type of FTE available in certain communities. Despite significant investments in funding for at-risk students, which includes funds for social support services, rural schools and communities continue to struggle to attract and find appropriate providers.