

Date: October 13, 2022

Prepared By: Tim Bedeaux, Senior Policy Analyst II, PED

Witness: Jacqueline Costales, Deputy Secretary of Teaching, Learning, and Assessment (Interim), Public Education Department (PED); Matt Goodlaw, Director of Research, Evaluation, and Accountability, PED.

School Year 2021-2022 Statewide Assessment Results

The 2021-2022 school year marked the first year of statewide participation in standardized assessments since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. After two years with sparse participation, third grade through eighth grade students across New Mexico took part in a brand new summative assessment, the New Mexico Measures of Student Success and Achievement (NM-MSSA), students in fourth, eighth, and 11th grades took the New Mexico Assessment of Science Readiness (NM-ASR), and students in 11th grade took College Board's SAT.

The results of the assessments suggest about one-in-three students is proficient in English language arts, one-in-three is proficient in science, and one-in-four is proficient in math. The results also confirm the presence of a broad achievement gap for economically disadvantaged students, English learners, and special education students.

A New Baseline

In April 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic put a halt to New Mexico's system of assessments. The United States Department of Education waived federal testing requirements in every state during the spring of 2020; school closures presented challenges to the normal administration of standardized tests, most of which have strict rules designed to keep test results valid, reliable, and comparable year over year. In the following year, Spring 2021, USDE issued a separate waiver, this time waiving the 95 percent participation requirement for states but still requiring states to test. As a result, Spring 2021 testing occurred in only a limited number of New Mexico schools which elected to participate.

In addition to the lapse in assessments, the Public Education Department (PED) has been working to overhaul New Mexico's system of assessments in an attempt to reduce the amount of time students spend testing. Over the past few years, PED has adopted new statewide assessments, the NM-MSSA in third grade through eighth grade, and the SAT in 11th grade, to test whether students are proficient in grade-level content.

Given the difficulties posed by the gap in assessments and the adoption of new assessments, PED is characterizing this year's assessment results as "a new baseline." The department has explained that the comparability of brand new assessments to historic data is nearly impossible, but data from new assessments can be used to begin tracking trends in the future.

Key Takeaways

Due to the adoption of new assessments and a two-year gap in assessment data, the results of Spring 2022 assessments are best understood as "a new baseline."

Page 1

The new results suggest about one-in-three students is proficient in ELA and science, and about one-in-four in math.

Page 2

There is a wide achievement gap affecting economically disadvantaged students, English learners, and special education students.

Page 2

In terms of actual students in classrooms, many students are "nearing proficiency". Teachers can target interventions to impact students in need of support.

Page 3

Data suggest increasing instructional hours increases student achievement, but the impact is modest and quality of instruction likely matters, too.

Page 4

Analysis of 2021-2022 Assessment Results

Figure 1: Statewide Proficiency Rates Before and After Covid 19.

After two years with no assessments, students participated in three brand new assessments in spring 2022, the NM-MSSA, the NM-ASR and the SAT. Because the assessments are new to the state, the results are not perfectly comparable to results from the PARCC assessment administered before the pandemic. The results of the new assessment suggest about one in three students is proficient in English language arts (ELA), about one in three students is proficient in science, and about one in four students is proficient in math.

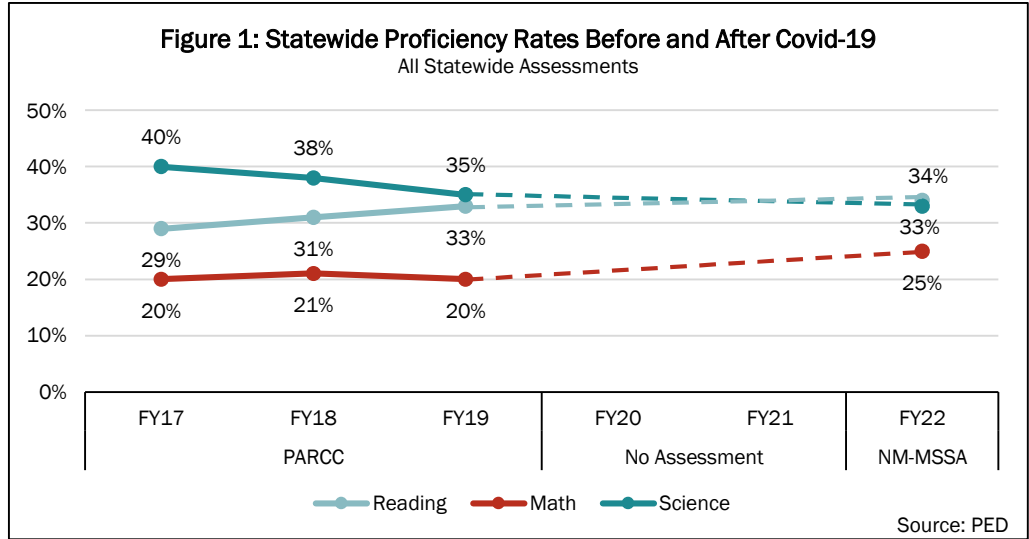


Figure 2: Percent Proficient by Student Subgroup.

Many factors independent of a school contribute to a student's academic achievement. As was the case in previous years, the percent of students proficient in each subject drops drastically when introducing factors that affect students' ability to learn. Students who are economically disadvantaged, English learners, and special education students are less likely to be proficient in all subjects. These factors are not independent of one another; a student who falls in all three of these demographic categories is far less likely to reach proficiency.

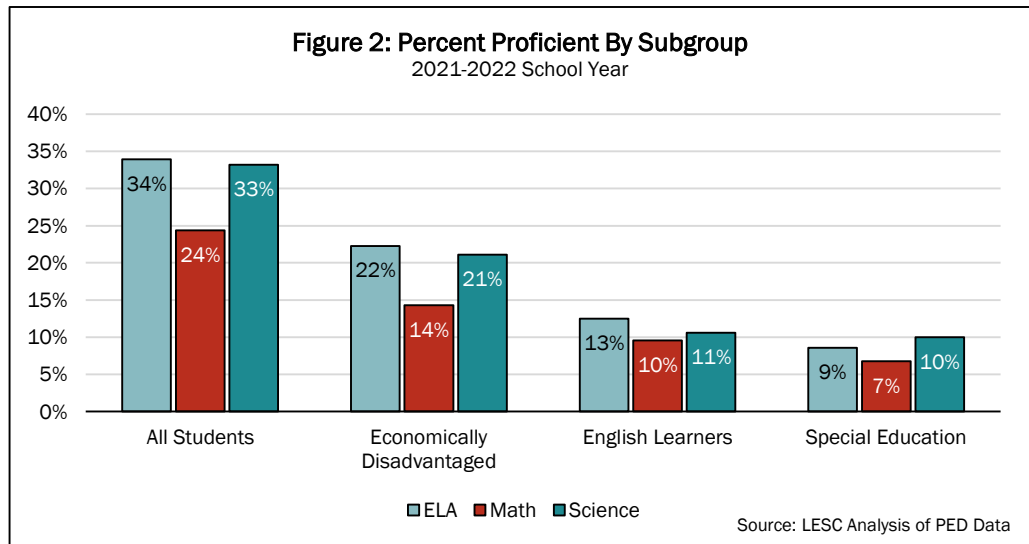


Figure 3: Achievement Gaps by Subgroup and Subject.

Another way to evaluate the impact of demographic factors is to evaluate the gap between students who fall into each category and those who do not. Figure 3 demonstrates the breadth of "achievement gaps" between economically disadvantaged students and their non-disadvantaged peers, English learners and native English speakers, and special education and non-special education students. The existence of this achievement gap is a main finding in the *Martinez/Yazzie* lawsuit, and a call to improve equity for all students.

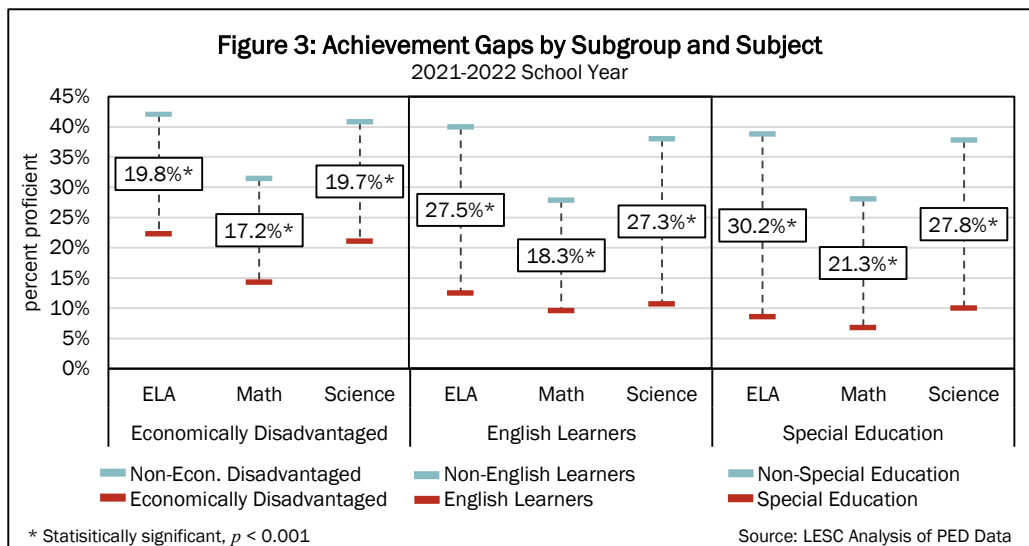


Figure 4: Proficiency Rates in Context

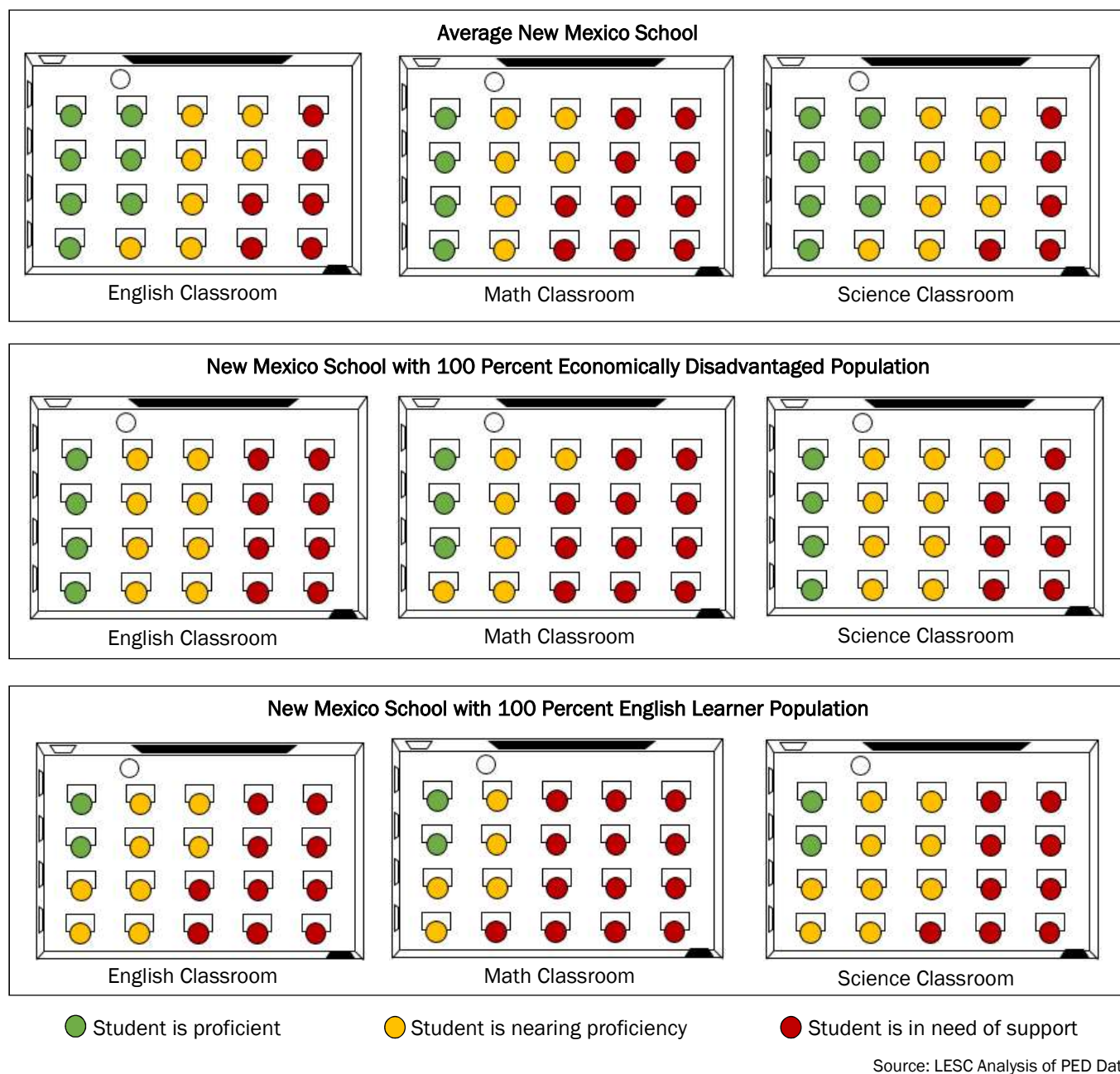


Figure 4: Proficiency Rates in Context. While proficiency rates are valuable snapshots of students’ content acquisition, it is sometimes helpful to understand these rates in terms of actual students in New Mexico schools. Figure 4 attempts to contextualize the state’s proficiency rates in three example schools. Each school shows an English, math, and science classroom of 20 theoretical students, each colored to indicate whether the student is proficient, nearing proficiency, or in need of support. In practice, teachers can use data analysis to target instruction to students who are below proficiency to help them reach the threshold for proficiency.

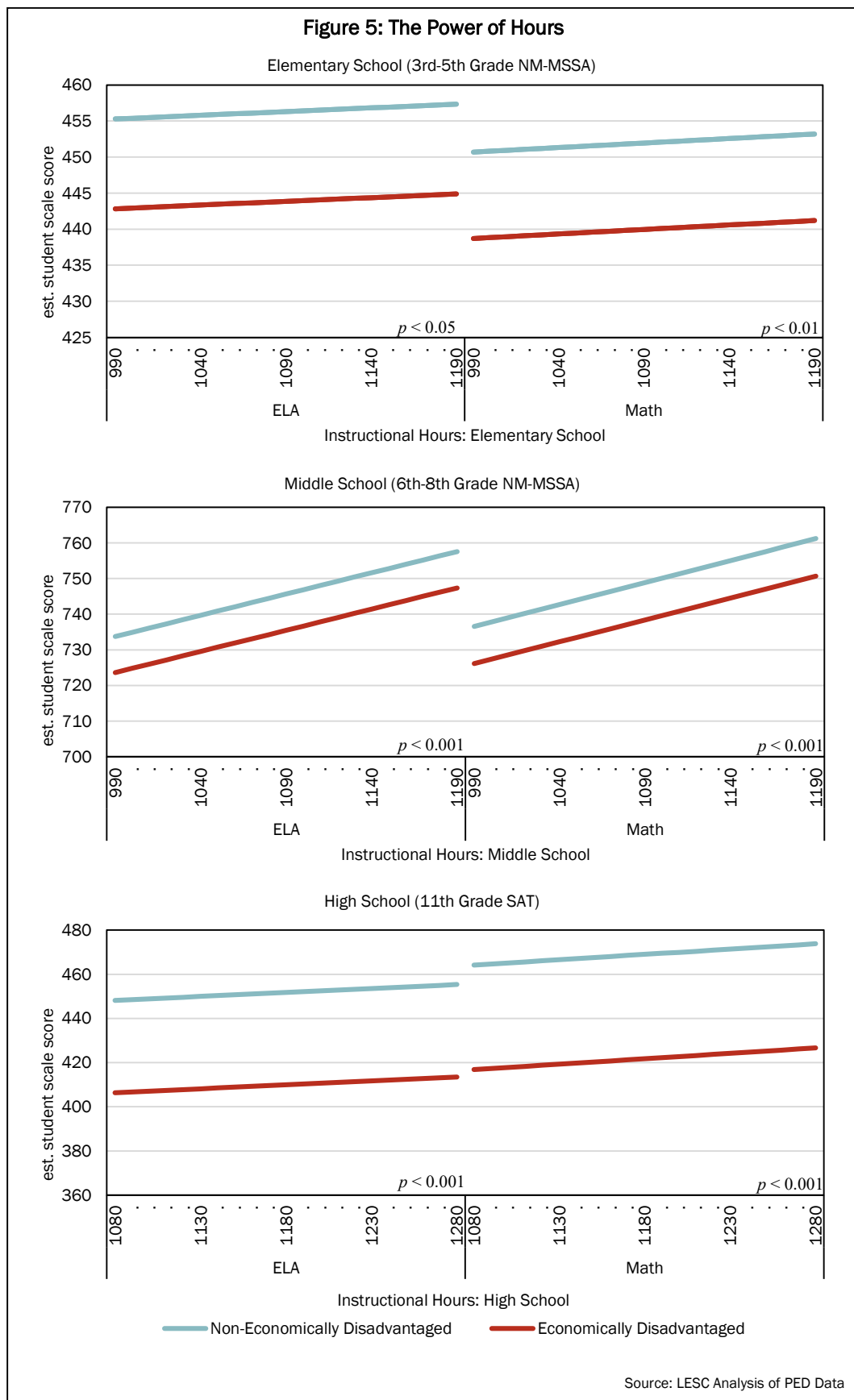
The first school, the “average New Mexico school,” shows about half of students in each classroom are proficient or nearing proficiency, while the remaining students are in need of support. The second school is an example of a school with 100 percent of students economically disadvantaged, which is the case for many New Mexico communities. In this school, the number of proficient students is lower. The third and final school is a hypothetical school made up of 100 percent English learners. This school has an even greater need of support than the economically disadvantaged school. While actual schools may not be as clear cut, the example schools show how resources, instruction, and interventions can be targeted to support students in need.

Figure 5: The Power of Hours. New Mexico school districts and charter schools are responsible for determining their own school calendars. Elementary schools are required to provide at least 990 instructional hours per year, while secondary schools must provide 1,080 instructional hours. Schools often provide above the minimum instructional hours, and the Legislature is considering increasing the minimum instructional hour requirements in statute.

A regression analysis of New Mexico students' standardized assessment scale scores by the number of hours schools provide reveals the more time students spend in school, the more likely they are to score higher on standardized assessments. Even when controlling for the impact of economic poverty, school districts and charter schools with more instructional hours are more likely to see higher academic outcomes.

The effects are more pronounced at certain grade levels. In elementary school, each additional hour increases students' estimated scale scores only modestly. In middle school, every 10 additional instructional hours increases students' estimated scale scores by 1 point. In high school, about every 20 instructional hours increases students' estimated scale scores by 1 point.

While these results are encouraging evidence of the impact of hours, they also confirm that additional hours generally have modest effects. As the Legislature considers increasing the minimum statutory instructional hours, it should also consider how the quality of those hours can also be improved, like by elevating education as a profession and including ample time for professional work during the course of a normal school day.



Policy Implications

Since 2019, the Legislature has made unprecedented investments in programs and funding designed to target the achievement gap. The unfortunate timing of the Covid-19 pandemic and its resulting two-year gap in assessment data has made it difficult to quantify the impact of those investments. However, data from the 2021-2022 summative assessments confirms the achievement gap remains wide; economically disadvantaged students, English learners, and special education students continue to need targeted supports and investments. The LESC budget recommendations particularly respond to the *Martinez/Yazzie* lawsuit, including several budget and policy considerations aimed to continue the Legislature’s efforts and investments towards systemic improvements that can impact both the quantity and quality of time spent at school.

Increase the quantity and quality of time spent at school. The Legislature has invested hundreds of millions of dollars into programs designed to increase the amount of time students spend at school, including the Extended Learning Time Program, the K-5 Plus Program, and the K-12 Plus Pilot. These programs have seen varying degrees of success in implementation, with a greater number of school districts and charter schools choosing to implement the Extended Learning Time Program due to its flexibility and the fact that it requires fewer instructional hours than K-5 Plus. The Legislature could consider providing funding to increase the minimum hours students spend in school, giving schools more discretion over how those additional hours are distributed. The Legislature could also work to ensure time spent at school is high-quality.

Relevant LESC Budget Items:	Relevant Policy Considerations:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional base funding for school hours in the state equalization guarantee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the statutory number of “minimum hours” students are required to attend school and provide sufficient funding for these hours. • Provide funding within the state equalization guarantee for educator professional work, like prep time, collaboration, and other administration, embedded in the course of a normal school day. • Reduce school district reporting requirements to allow schools to focus on the quality of education for students.

Reengage students. According to data from PED, the percent of students “chronically absent,” defined as missing 10 percent of the school year or more for any reason, skyrocketed from 15 percent to about 30 percent during the pandemic. For learning to be effective, students should be engaged and find value in the time they spend at school. Investments in making education relevant to students, culturally and linguistically, as well as making sure all students feel supported in their pathway to college or a career.

Relevant LESC Budget Items:	Relevant Policy Considerations:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culturally and Linguistically responsive instruction • Career-technical education • Elementary physical education • Fine arts education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve New Mexico’s graduation requirements to reflect the skills students want from education and the pathways students choose after graduation. • Create a broader definition of “school directed program” that incentivizes schools to pursue innovative and engaging teaching styles like project-based learning, inquiry-based learning, and career technical education.

Reengage Educators. Following landmark investments in educator compensation during the 2022 legislative session, New Mexico is poised to fill a number of vacancies across the state. As these vacancies are filled, the Legislature should begin to consider ways to ensure they are filled with the best educators possible. To this end, the state could consider greater use

of paid preparation time, supportive school leadership practices, and ongoing professional development to ensure every teacher feels supported. Moreover, the state could consider creating a pathway to mastery of the teaching profession, a career pathway that could keep high-quality teachers in the classroom for a longer period of time.

Relevant LESC Budget Items:	Relevant Policy Considerations:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher Professional Development • Principal Professional Development • School personnel compensation • Targeted compensation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide funding within the state equalization guarantee for educator professional work, like prep time, collaboration, and other administration, embedded in the course of a normal school day. • Create a pathway with incentives for high quality teachers to become “master teachers” and remain in the classroom. • Providing funding to allow districts to recruit and retain educators in hard-to-staff positions, including special education and STEAM teachers.

Continue focus on literacy, and renew focus on STEAM education. PED has concluded its “Year of Literacy,” a year-long push to improve student reading scores using awareness and targeted professional development focused on the science of reading. Educators have touted the effectiveness of recent “LETRS” professional development, with many stakeholder believing it should be an element of teachers’ initial training in their educator preparation programs. Now, with only about 20 percent of students in New Mexico proficient in grade-level mathematics, the state is poised begin a similar statewide initiative for science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics (STEAM) education. In addition to targeted professional development, the state should consider how STEAM education can be improved systemically within the state’s other initiatives, including building pathways to STEAM-related career technical education and creating graduation requirements with diverse and relevant math courses.

Relevant LESC Budget Items:	Relevant Policy Considerations:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructional materials within the state equalization guarantee • Literacy and STEAM initiative funding • Tutoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise New Mexico’s graduation requirements to afford students relevant and engaging pathways into STEAM fields, like statistics, computer science, financial literacy, career-related mathematics, and other relevant courses.

Improve New Mexico’s Data Collection and Dissemination. Using data to identify both gaps and effective strategies to close those gaps is a pivotal cornerstone in the state’s ability to respond to the needs of students identified in the *Martinez/Yazzie* consolidated lawsuit. If snapshot data provided at the end of the 2021-2022 school year establishes “a new baseline,” the state needs a consistent long-term assessment and accountability system that allows the state to track academic achievement over time. The state’s use of data can work to tie the Legislature’s investments directly to the students they are intended to support, and identify steps along the educational continuum where the system may not be working as intended.

Relevant LESC Budget Items:	Relevant Policy Considerations:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement a student-centered accountability system that identifies shortcomings in the educational continuum at the school district, school, classroom, or even parent level that may be contributing to each student’s academic challenges.