

The Learning Policy Institute, a national nonprofit research organization focused on research- and evidence-based policies to improve student outcomes nationwide, [published a report](#) in September 2020 emphasizing the need for New Mexico to construct strong, supportive accountability systems that build state and local capacity to enact education reforms. As their name suggests, “accountability systems” are systems established to hold schools, districts, and the state accountable for effectively educating students. Since 2019, New Mexico has relied on the statutory framework laid out in the School Support and Accountability Act—alongside federal accountability requirements in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)—to identify schools in need of support.

However, with significant turnover at the Public Education Department (PED), the implementation of the accountability system has faced challenges, particularly in continuity of measurements and the ability of the department to meet statutory requirements. While tools like the New Mexico Vistas dashboard aim to provide stakeholders with access to detailed school performance data, gaps in required reporting and inconsistencies in methodology have raised concerns about the system’s effectiveness.

This brief examines the evolution of New Mexico’s accountability system, assesses its successes and shortcomings, and offers recommendations to ensure the system fulfills its promise of targeted, meaningful support for schools in the greatest need.

## School Accountability in New Mexico

Historically, New Mexico used an A through F school grading system to measure school performance. Over time, concerns about the fairness of school grading led to the enactment of the School Support and Accountability Act in 2019, representing a shift in philosophy from measuring failure to identifying schools in critical need across the state. To implement the School Support and Accountability Act, PED maintains a dashboard known as New Mexico Vistas, or simply as Vistas, to summarize school performance in terms of both academic and nonacademic indicators of student success.

### Background: New Mexico’s A-F Grading System

Under New Mexico’s former A through F grading system, each school was assigned a letter grade based on student achievement, student growth, attendance, opportunity to learn, and for high schools, graduation rates, and college and career readiness metrics. Over time, researchers and stakeholders began to recognize school grades placed too high an emphasis on student performance on reading and math exams and did not build a holistic picture of school performance. Schools with a large number of economically disadvantaged students, English learners (ELs), or special education students were disproportionately likely to receive an “F” grade. Rather than measuring school performance, school grades became viewed as a mechanism to measure the level of poverty in New Mexico communities.

In 2017, the Legislature passed [Senate Memorial 145](#), asking LESC to convene a diverse work group to study the school grading system. The work group consisted of representatives from various education stakeholders, including public schools, charter schools, PED, teachers’ unions, community organizations, and Native American

### Key Takeaways

- State law requires schools to be identified for support based on academic and nonacademic indicators of student success (*Page 2*).
- The revised New Mexico ESSA State Plan changed how school designations were calculated in SY24 (*Pages 3-6*).
- Many schools exited their support status in SY24, but this is likely due to changes in methodology rather than genuine improvement (*Pages 6-7*).
- PED should ensure that the accountability system is celebrating success when appropriate and targeting support when necessary (*Page 8*).

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tribes, nations, and pueblos. By 2018, the work group developed four recommended changes to the state's accountability system:

- Shift philosophy from labeling failure to providing support;
- Provide an opportunity for schools to share their story with their community;
- Rely on an assessment system that supports student learning; and
- Expand information available on college, career, and civic readiness, indicators of whether students are on-track to graduation, and school climate and culture.

LESC endorsed legislation for the 2019 session based on the work group's recommendations, which became known as the School Support and Accountability Act (Section 22-2F-1 NMSA 1978).

## The School Support and Accountability Act

The School Support and Accountability Act was designed to meet the requirements of ESSA, which requires states to create a uniform system to evaluate school performance and hold schools accountable for improving student achievement. New Mexico's law aligns with federal law on the designation of three separate categories for school support:

1. **Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI):** Schools in which one subgroup of students performs at or below a threshold set by PED to identify the lowest performing five percent of schools.
2. **Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI):** Schools in which the entire school performs at or below a threshold set by PED to identify the lowest performing 5 percent of schools, or schools with a graduation rate below 66.6 percent.
3. **More Rigorous Interventions (MRI):** Schools that fail to exit TSI or CSI status after a number of years determined by PED (currently, three years).

School support ratings must be based in substantial part on academic indicators, including student proficiency on standards-based assessments, student growth, both for all students and disaggregated by student subgroups, progress of ELs toward English language proficiency, and, for high schools, the four-, five-, and six-year adjusted cohort graduation rates. In addition to academic indicators, state and federal laws also require school support ratings be based on indicators of school quality and student success, including chronic absenteeism, college, career, and civic readiness metrics, and the educational climate of the school.

The School Support and Accountability Act requires PED to publish all data used to calculate each school's support ratings on a public-facing "dashboard." The dashboard is also required to display other information, including the per-pupil instructional expenditures, the percentage of teachers with three or more years of experience, the number of hours of training attended by school board members, and a narrative section including each school's mission, vision, goals, strengths and opportunities for improvement, and programs the school offers corresponding to the data used to calculate schools' support designations.

The School Support and Accountability Act envisioned a deliberate system in which schools' data was intrinsically linked to their local context. By placing school performance data side-by-side with contextual information about the school's programs and practices, stakeholders should be better able to understand the root causes of low performance and the steps schools are taking to address performance.

## New Mexico Vistas

To implement the School Support and Accountability Act, PED published New Mexico Vistas, a dashboard located at [nmvistas.org](http://nmvistas.org) that includes data used to calculate school support ratings. Vistas includes numerous data points on academic achievement, including student proficiency rates, student academic growth, progress of ELs toward English language proficiency, and, for high schools, the four-, five- and six-year adjusted cohort graduation rates.

Since the dashboard's creation in 2019, Vistas has seen three separate iterations. Each year, Vistas has failed to fully meet the requirements of the Student Support and Accountability Act. While the most recent version of the dashboard is a marked improvement from previous iterations, the dashboard continues to lack the information required by state statute. Currently, Vistas does not include required information on school missions,

visions, and goals, educator qualifications, per-pupil expenditures, or school climate. Information on Vistas indicates PED plans to update the dashboard with some of the required information by January 2025. However, it is unclear whether the department has plans to include other contextual information required by the School Support and Accountability Act, including a description of each school’s mission, vision, and goals.

## New Mexico ESSA State Plan Accountability Provisions

To maintain compliance with Title I, Part A of ESSA, states are required to submit a plan to the U.S. Department of Education (ED) describing how the state will identify schools for support and improvement. In March 2024, ED published a [122-page report](#) detailing how New Mexico had failed to effectively implement several federal programs, including many specific findings about the state’s assessment and accountability system. The findings prompted PED to undertake an in-depth review of the New Mexico ESSA State Plan. In a revised accountability plan approved by ED in October 2024, PED made substantial adjustments to how schools were identified for TSI, CSI, and MRI. The changes included several significant shifts in methodology regarding how schools’ performance affected their support ratings, the use of a proficiency index instead of proficiency rates, and the use of student growth percentiles to calculate student growth.

**School Identification.** Schools are identified for support and improvement based on the number of “points” they achieve on each of several accountability measures. Points are calculated at the overall school level, as well as for individual subgroups of students, including racial and ethnic subgroups, economically disadvantaged students, ELs, and students with disabilities. Schools with an overall score below a threshold describing the lowest-performing 5 percent of schools are identified for CSI. Schools with a subgroup of students scoring below that threshold are identified for TSI or ATSI (additional targeted support and improvement). Schools that are unable to exit CSI status after three years are identified for MRI. Schools that earned points above the top 75th percentile are considered “spotlight schools,” while all other schools are identified for “traditional support.”

**Table 1: Overview of School Support Indicators, Measures, and Points**

Overall Indicator	Measure	K-2 (Feeder) Schools	Elementary and Middle Schools	High Schools
Academic Achievement	Math proficiency index		20	15
	Reading proficiency index	25	20	15
Academic Progress	Student growth in reading		15	5
	Student growth in math		15	5
EL Progress	EL progress toward English proficiency	10	10	5
Graduation Rate	Four-year graduation rate			10
	Five-year graduation rate			8
	Six-year graduation rate			7
School Quality and Student Success	Growth in graduation rate			5
	Science proficiency points		10	10
	Attendance and chronic absenteeism	10	10	10
	College and career readiness			5
<b>TOTAL POSSIBLE POINTS</b>		<b>45</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: PED

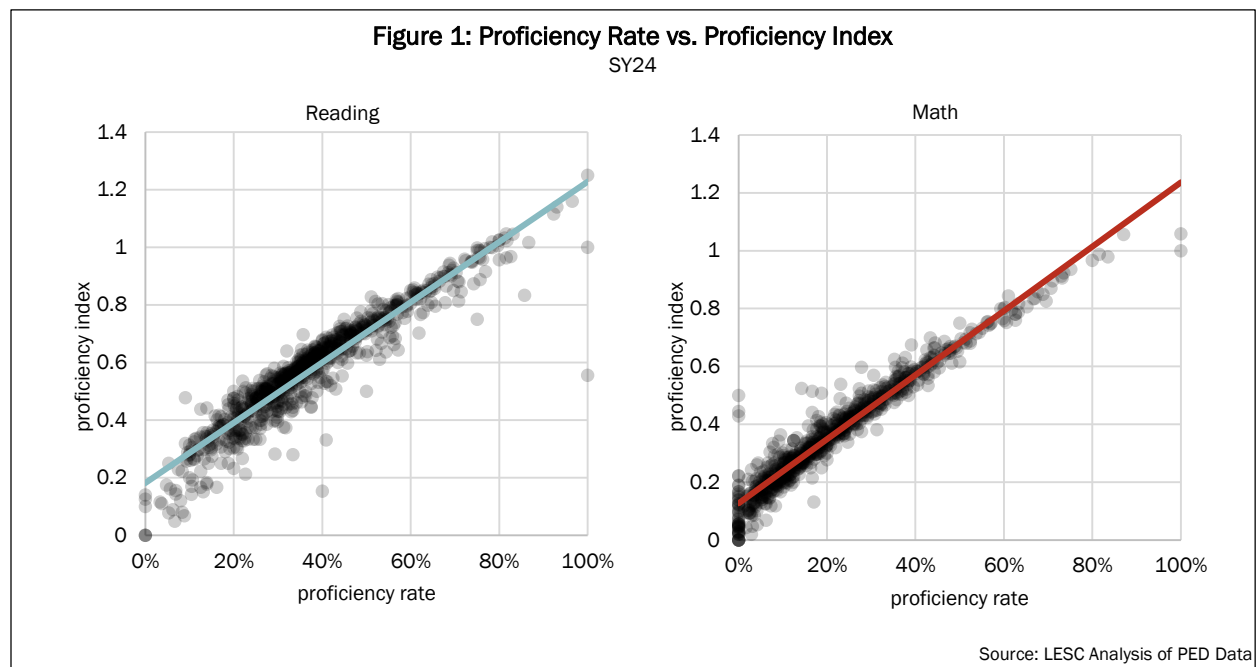
**Cohort-Based Identification with Annual Opportunities to Exit.** With the approval of the revised ESSA plan, schools will be identified for support and improvement in three-year cohorts, rather than on an annual basis. Annually, schools will be able to exit their support status if they improve performance in the metric that identified them for support. For instance, a school can be identified for TSI if its ELs score below a threshold representing the lowest performing 5 percent of students in the state. The school can exit TSI status by improving its EL proficiency to a level above the 5 percent threshold in the next year. While schools will be able to exit their support status annually, no new schools will be identified for support outside of the three-year cycle.

The current cohort of schools was identified for support in the 2022-2023 school year (SY23) and will continue to receive targeted and comprehensive support unless they are able to exit their status by the end of SY25. New identifications will be made at the end of the SY26. While no new schools were identified for support this year, a large number of schools were able to exit their support status. LESC staff analysis indicates that this mass-wave of exits may be due to changes in accountability indicators, rather than substantial improvements in student outcomes (see **“Trends in School Identifications”**).

**Proficiency Level Index.** Beginning in 2024, Vistas designations will no longer consider school proficiency rates. Instead, PED used student assessment results to calculate a “proficiency level index,” assigning weighted points to students at higher levels of proficiency. Under the index, students scoring at each performance level on statewide standardized assessments earn a corresponding number of points:

- PL1: 0 points
  - PL2: 0.5 points
  - PL3: 1 point
  - PL4: 1.25 points
- } Students at PL3 and PL4 are considered proficient.

School-level proficiency rates and proficiency indices tend to be very similar; as shown in Figures 1 and 2, the proficiency index is highly correlated with proficiency rates in both reading and math. However, with some exceptions due to low testing participation rates, the proficiency index model generally exceeds proficiency rates by providing partial credit for students who score below proficiency and providing extra credit for students who excel beyond proficiency.



**Table 2: Example of School Proficiency Rates and Proficiency Indices** shows the amount of variation that is possible in the proficiency index given a single proficiency rate. While each of the schools listed in Table 2 have a reading proficiency rate of 40 percent, the proficiency indices for each school generally range from 0.547 to

0.678, enabling a more nuanced understanding of how the schools are performing relative to one another. One outlier in Table 2, Rio Grande Preparatory Institute, shows a proficiency index of 0.153, far below its proficiency rate of 40 percent. This school failed to reach the required participation threshold of 95 percent of students tested, resulting in an amended calculation to account for students that were not tested. In effect, the calculation reduces the school's proficiency index by assuming that students who were eligible to be tested but did not participate are not proficient.

**Table 2: Example of School Proficiency Rates and Proficiency Indices**  
SY24

School Name	School District	Reading Proficiency Rate	Reading Proficiency Index
RIO GRANDE PREPARATORY INSTITUTE	LAS CRUCES	40%	0.153*
TUCUMCARI HIGH	TUCUMCARI	40%	0.547
NEW MEXICO CONNECTIONS ACADEMY	STATE CHARTER	40%	0.571
POJOAQUE INTERMEDIATE	POJOAQUE	40%	0.577
SANTA ROSA ELEMENTARY	SANTA ROSA	40%	0.611
JORNADA ELEMENTARY	LAS CRUCES	40%	0.612
MACARTHUR ELEMENTARY	ALBUQUERQUE	40%	0.612
EXPLORE ACADEMY LAS CRUCES	STATE CHARTER	40%	0.618
DEL NORTE ELEMENTARY	ROSWELL	40%	0.620
A. MONTOYA ELEMENTARY	ALBUQUERQUE	40%	0.629
CHAPARRAL ELEMENTARY	SANTA FE	40%	0.631
GRANT MIDDLE	ALBUQUERQUE	40%	0.633
HERMOSA MIDDLE SCHOOL	FARMINGTON	40%	0.644
HOUSTON MIDDLE SCHOOL	HOBBS	40%	0.648
MESA MIDDLE	LAS CRUCES	40%	0.653
G.W. STOUT ELEMENTARY	SILVER CITY	40%	0.664
HOUSE JUNIOR HIGH	HOUSE	40%	0.675
MOUNTAINAIR JR HIGH	MOUNTAINAIR	40%	0.678

Source: LESC Analysis of PED Data

\*Note: Rio Grande Preparatory Institute failed to meet a requirement that 95 percent of students participate in standardized assessments. The school's proficiency index was adjusted to include students who were eligible for testing but not tested in the denominator of the calculation, operationalizing the assumption that these students did not reach proficiency.

**Student Growth Percentiles.** Also beginning in 2024, Vistas designations were calculated using a valid and reliable measurement of student growth known as “[student growth percentiles](#)” (SGPs). SGPs measure how much each student grew relative to that students’ peers with similar demographic characteristics and prior year performance. The measurement is widely accepted as a strong measure of student growth that accounts for students’ individual backgrounds and potential growth trajectories. However, rather than considering each student’s SGP, growth points are allocated based on the median SGP, both at the overall school level, as well as in each student subgroup. The use of SGPs is a significant improvement to former iterations of growth in Vistas; prior to this methodology, support designations for student growth were calculated using change in overall proficiency rates, an unreliable measure of the individual growth of students.

The SGP methodology differs from the LESC framework for student growth, which was used during the 2024 interim to evaluate the [family income index](#) and [structured literacy](#) programs. The LESC framework for student growth uses two years of prior assessment results to establish growth targets for every student, then calculates the percentage of students who met those growth targets.

**What Happens After Identification?** Every school in New Mexico is required to submit a [New Mexico School DASH plan](#), also known as a 90-day plan or the educational plan for student success. For schools identified in TSI, CSI,

and MRI, School DASH plans include specific components and additional monitoring designed to help the school improve the metric with which it is struggling. For schools undergoing monitoring, PED provides regular check-ins related to data and goals established in the School DASH plans, which are structured using six components:

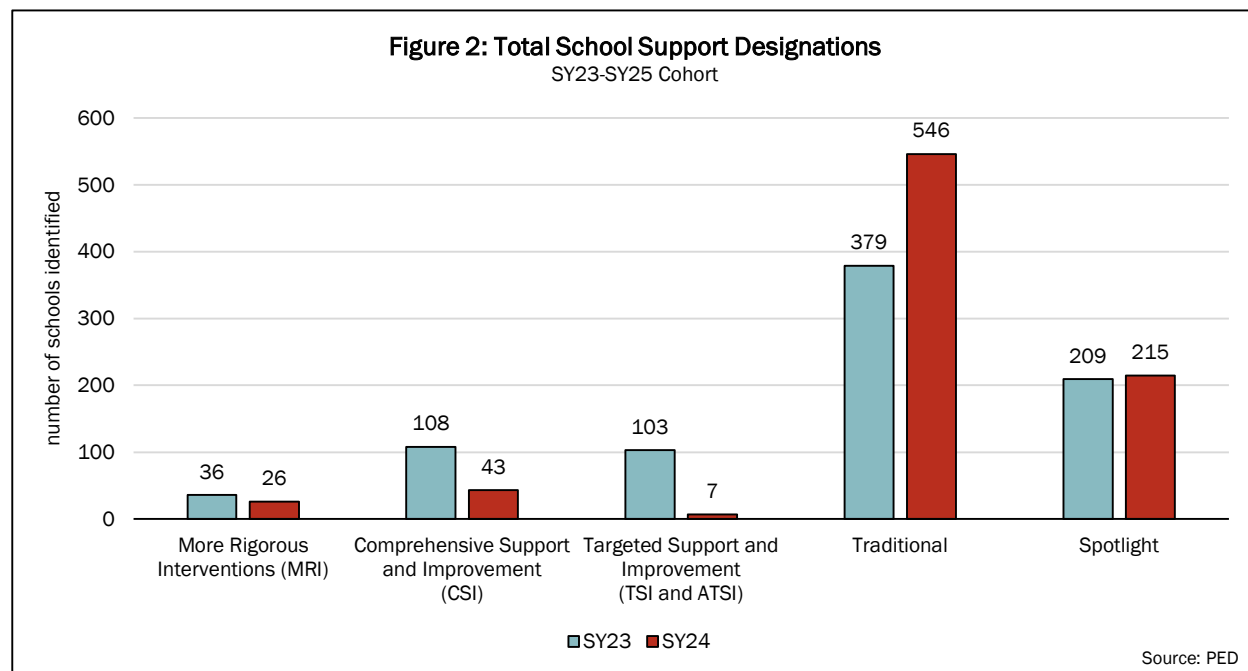
1. Build a school core team;
2. Set student achievement goals;
3. Conduct data analysis and identify a single performance challenge;
4. Conduct root cause analysis and select focus areas;
5. Create desired outcomes, develop progress indicators, and define critical actions; and
6. Implement the plan and regularly monitor progress.

School DASH plan goals are published on a [public dashboard](#) separate from Vistas. While the dashboard includes schools' current goals, the tool does not allow users to understand whether the previous year's goals were met, or whether the school is making progress toward its current goals.

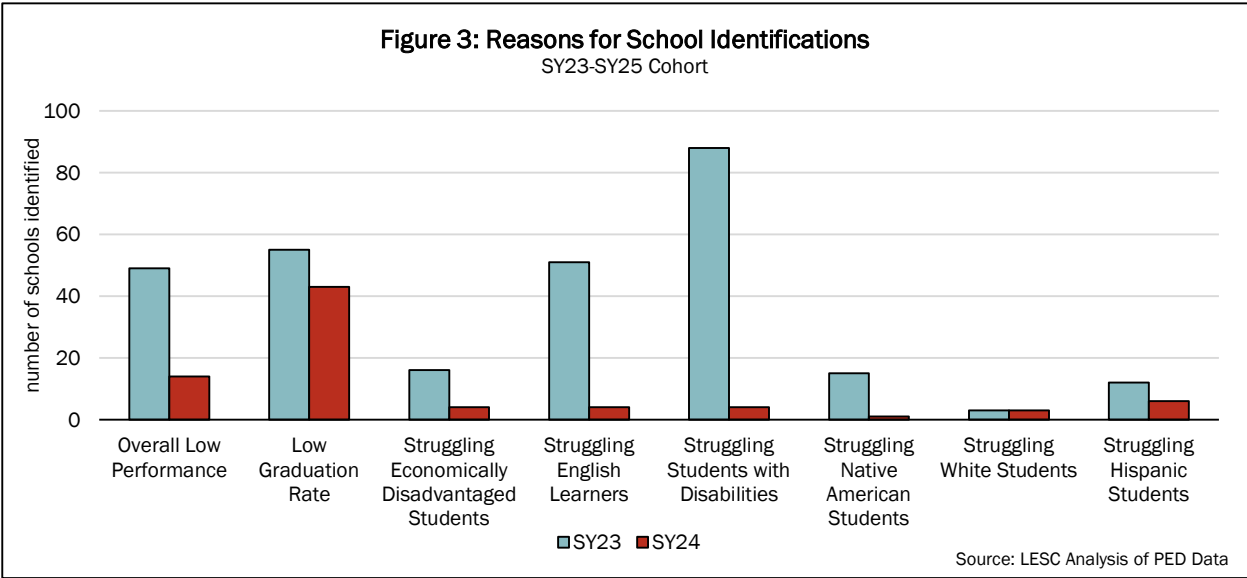
Schools identified for CSI are also eligible for federal Title I funding for school improvement. The funds are designed to support “evidence-based interventions” to improve student achievement. Under ESSA, the term “evidence-based” has a [specific definition](#); interventions can be sorted into three categories—strong evidence, moderate evidence, and promising evidence—based on the level of scrutiny the intervention received in peer-reviewed studies. PED makes Title I awards at the school district level, with districts responsible for developing a mechanism to distribute school improvement funds to individual schools. In FY24, \$10.6 in federal Title I school improvement funds were allocated to school districts with CSI schools and state-chartered charter schools designated for CSI. In FY25, this amount will increase to \$16.1 million.

## Trends in School Identifications

Following changes to the methodologies used to identify schools for support and improvement, a significant number of schools identified in the SY23-SY25 cohort exited support status in SY24. As shown in **Figure 2: Total School Support Designations**, after initially identifying 108 schools in CSI and 103 schools in TSI in SY23, the total number of schools in each of these categories decreased to 43 and 8, respectively. In MRI, 10 schools exited their support status. These schools exited to traditional and spotlight statuses and will remain there until the next cohort of support schools is identified in SY26.





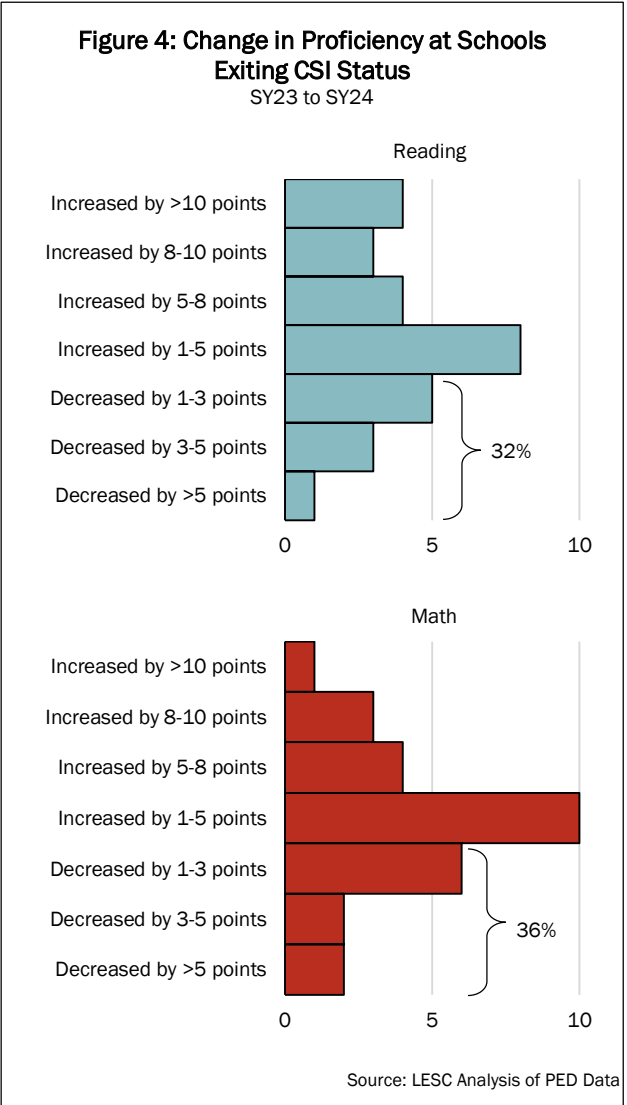


A closer examination of the reasons schools were identified for support appears to show growth for a number of schools that struggled to serve students identified in the *Martinez-Yazzie* lawsuit. As displayed graphically in **Figure 3: Reasons for School Identifications**, almost every school identified in SY23 because of its struggling economically disadvantaged students, ELs, students with disabilities, and Native American students exited their support status in SY24.

While overall statewide proficiency rates in SY24 showed some evidence that achievement gaps are beginning to close, it seems unlikely almost every school identified for support was able to improve the performance of its lowest performing students in one year. Indeed, LESC staff analysis of proficiency rates in exited schools suggests that, on average, schools that exited support status this year may not have improved overall proficiency rates.

**Figure 4: Change in Proficiency at Schools Exiting CSI Status** describes the year-over-year change in reading and math proficiency rates in schools identified for CSI for overall low school performance in SY23, then later exited from CSI in SY24. The analysis indicates that about one in three schools exited from CSI status decreased in either reading proficiency, math proficiency, or both.

Given the recent methodology changes, it is possible exited schools are seeing some improvement among students that are not captured in overall proficiency rates. PED staff explained that, because calculating and validating school ratings is a significant investment of time and resources, PED was unable to recalculate SY23 designations using the updated SY24 methodology. For this reason, the comparison



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of SY23 ratings to SY24 ratings is not an apples-to-apples comparison, and schools may have exited their support status due to methodological changes alone. In future school support cohorts, PED plans to make minimal changes to the methodology, ensuring similar metrics are used to identify and exit schools every year.

On the whole, the presence of fewer TSI and CSI schools is not necessarily problematic; the state should celebrate the success of schools that are able to close achievement gaps and improve the performance of their lowest performing students. With fewer identified schools, PED may be able to better target resources to schools that are in dire need of support. The department notes that schools exited from TSI and ATSI may voluntarily elect. However, if the goal of the School Support and Accountability Act is to consistently provide resources to the schools in greatest need of support, PED should take extreme caution that it is not prematurely exiting schools that still need support.

## Policy Considerations and Recommendations

Overall, recent changes to Vistas and school support designations represent a positive step toward effective and nuanced use of student achievement data, creating a more detailed understanding of school performance and student growth. However, as metrics improve over time, it becomes difficult to compare school performance year-over-year, challenging the state's vision in the School Support and Accountability to identify and meaningfully support schools with the greatest needs. To ensure New Mexico continues to serve its schools effectively, LESC staff recommend the following policy considerations:

### The Public Education Department should...

- Fully meet the requirements of the School Support and Accountability Act, including requirements to report on chronic absenteeism, college and career readiness, school climate, per-pupil expenditures, and the local mission, vision, and goals of every school.
- Maintain continuity by using consistent measures of school performance over time.
- Carefully study why schools are exiting support status, including...
  - Determining whether changes in methodology are prematurely exiting schools that still need support;
  - Include DASH plan goals on the Vistas dashboard to better contextualize whether the DASH plan was effectively implemented and responsible for school improvement; and
  - Build a community of practice around strong interventions that helped schools exit their support status.
- Determine the supports schools exited in SY24 will lose, and whether the loss of those supports will impact their performance in future years.

### The Legislature should...

- Consider whether the statutory framework in the School Support and Accountability Act needs adjustment to better reflect the state's long term vision for education.
- Revise the state equalization guarantee (SEG) to better target general operational funding for students in the greatest need of support, including more targeted funding for economically disadvantaged students and ELs.
- Consider whether a formal data governance structure can improve the calculation of school designations and the efficacy of the Vistas dashboard.