

New Mexico School Superintendents' Association (NMSSA)
and New Mexico Coalition of Educational Leaders (NMCEL)
Legislative Priorities for the 57th Legislature (24-25)

The New Mexico School Superintendents' Association (NMSSA) and the New Mexico Coalition of Educational Leaders (NMCEL) platform champions the principle of local control: *the authority granted to school districts to make decisions tailored to their specific communities' needs. This includes the discretion to allocate funds for particular and individualized needs, such as addressing unique educational challenges or enhancing specific programs. Additionally, local control encompasses the ability of districts to create their own school calendars, provided they adhere to state law, ensuring that these decisions align with broader educational standards and legal requirements.*

By acknowledging the distinct needs and strengths of each school district in New Mexico, we believe decisions are most effective when made close to the heart of learning. Addressing the multifaceted challenges and seizing opportunities in our educational sector requires collaboration among school boards, educators, policymakers, communities, and legislators. With a focus on local expertise and self-governance, together, we can shape a vibrant, inclusive, and equitable education system for New Mexico.

○ **Local Control and Sufficiency:**

The primary focus of our legislative priorities regarding local control is centered on defining “sufficiency” in relation to State Equalization Guarantee (SEG) unit value and the autonomy of local districts. We propose the following sub-topics for consideration:

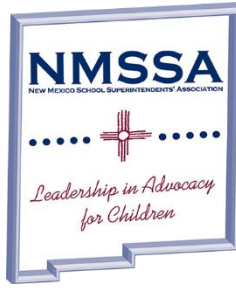
- **Cash/Operational Reserves:** Education is inherently non-partisan. As such, districts need to be able to support the operations within their jurisdiction in a manner that is sufficient – that is, no “winners” nor “losers”. Simply, sufficiency varies by district and is not an *average*. Operational Cash Reserves are necessary for Requests for Reimbursement (RFRs) and the daily operations of the district. Though NMPED has gotten marginally better with the processing of RFRs, often districts are left waiting more than 90 days for funds.
- **Transportation:** Addressing the adequacy of funding for student transportation. In the last session, there were significant “winners” and “losers”. Each district has specific needs to adequately fund transportation, a service that is guaranteed by law on behalf of the State, not districts.
- **Insurance Costs:** Evaluating the true cost of insurance and ensuring they are fully covered.
- **Foundational/Open Door Budget:** Advocating for a budget model where the legislature fully funds all fixed costs (e.g., salaries, health insurance, etc.) before allocating additional resources for At-Risk students, Special Education, English Language Learners (ELL), Instructional Materials, etc. and providing for districts to make use of these allocations in meaningful ways specific to each district.
- **Return-to-Work:** Extending the return-to-work regulation from 36 months to 72 months, helping to mitigate the teacher shortage within individual districts.

○ **Attendance, Social & Emotional Learning, & Behavioral Supports and Resources**

There is a critical need for additional funds to support the Multi-Layered Systems of Support (MLSS), the Attendance for Success Act (ASA), and the ever-present Social & Emotional Learning (SEL) and behavioral crises across the nation. Schools are facing increased demands without necessary funding to implement district- and school-specific interventions effectively or, at the cost of other necessary programming.

○ **Reinstitution of the State Board of Education**

With the recent resignation of the fifth Secretary of Education under the current Administration, as an organization we continue to advocate for the reinstatement of the State Board of Education. While not perfect, the State Board of Education, as opposed to the Governor-appointed Secretary, would provide for the necessary continuity and transparency needed for effective governance of the PreK-12 educational systems of our State. Our association strongly advocates for increased transparency from the Public Education Department, focusing on clear communication of initiative timelines, equitable and predictable program funding, and hold-harmless provisions. We also emphasize the need for closer collaboration between LEAs, the Legislature, and the Department in the rule-making process, something that can certainly come to fruition through the State Board of Education.



In the face of budget challenges, protecting school operational reserves is crucial for helping districts manage unexpected issues and maintain local control. These reserves are essential for several reasons:

- They prevent cash flow problems, especially when there's a delay in reimbursements for federal grants, allowing districts to have continuous services despite hardships from NMPED.
- They ensure that funds meant for specific purposes aren't swept away, which could destabilize district finances and collapse programs necessary for student success. The NMSSA/NMCEL recognizes that the SEG is at a historic high; however, so too are the mandates associated with the SEG, resulting in less autonomy to serve the various youth of our State.
- Districts that have saved money for specific projects could be severely impacted if these reserves are taken. Currently, many districts must use operational cash reserves to adequately meet legislative mandates such as health insurance, ensure that transportation services are not impacted despite insufficient funding, and to address area-specific recruitment and retention efforts.
- Low reserves can hurt a district's bond ratings, making it harder to borrow money in the future and/or impact current or future capital projects.
- These funds are also vital for starting new schools and covering initial costs.
- Importantly, safeguarding reserves allows districts to make quality fiscal decisions tailored to their unique needs, preserving the principle of local control.

Overall, maintaining operational reserves is key to effective financial management, providing a safety net during emergencies and supporting districts' ability to make decisions that best serve their communities.

The aforementioned priorities reflect the *collective voice* of New Mexico's School Superintendents' Association and New Mexico Coalition of Educational Leaders, emphasizing the need for local control, adequate funding, transparency & partnership, and a strong governance structure to support our schools.

