

**REPRESENTATIVES**

G. Andrés Romero, Vice Chair  
Brian Baca  
Joy Garratt  
Raymundo Lara  
Tanya Mirabal Moya  
Debbie Sariñana

*State of New Mexico*  
**LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY  
COMMITTEE**

325 Don Gaspar, Suite 100 • Santa Fe, NM 87501  
Phone (505) 986-4591

**SENATORS**

William P. Soules, Chair  
Craig Brandt  
Candy Spence Ezzell  
Mimi Stewart

**John Sena  
Director**



August 11, 2025

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** LESC Members

**FR:** John Sena, Director

**RE:** Activity Report for Week Ending 8/8/2025

---

**Martinez-Yazzie Regional Convenings**

- Regional convenings for community input into a statewide *Martinez-Yazzie* action plan began last week and are scheduled to continue over the next several weeks. Last week, meetings were held in Farmington, Española, Las Cruces, Raton, Clovis, Santa Fe, and Mescalero.
- This week, convenings continue in Carlsbad, Silver City, and Zuni. All events are open to the public and include free childcare and meals. Interpretation services are also provided. Meetings are scheduled from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m. and are structured in an open-house format, allowing attendees to arrive at any time their schedule allows and to depart in the time they have available.
- More information, including specific locations and information about convenings in future weeks, can be found at <http://martinezyazzieactionplan.org/>.

**New Mexico Awarded National Grant to Support Dual Enrollment**

- The Public Education Department (PED) and Higher Education Department (HED) [announced](#) New Mexico is one of seven states to receive a College in High School Alliance (CHSA) grant, intended to improve dual enrollment policies and expand access to college courses for high school students.
- PED and HED report the grant funding will focus on three goals: 1) Setting a statewide vision for dual enrollment; 2) Expanding dual enrollment access; and 3) Creating more structured dual enrollment experiences with structured pathways toward college credentials.

- The [Dual Credit Annual Report for Academic Year 2023-2024](#), produced jointly by PED and HED staff, reports just over 19 thousand unduplicated students enrolled in dual credit courses during the 2023-2024 school year, taking a total of nearly 51 thousand dual credit courses.

### **Updates on National Legislative Actions on Public Education**

- The Alaska State Legislature assembled for a special session on August 2, 2025 and voted to override the governor's veto of more than \$50 million in additional funding for public education. The governor of Alaska stated he vetoed the funding increase because it did not contain the policy revisions his administration had requested. The administration's policy goals were focused on literacy initiatives, the expansion of charter schools, and the creation of neighborhood schools.
- The Pennsylvania General Assembly has not passed an appropriations package for public education for fiscal year 2026 (FY26) and approximately \$2 billion in payments to school districts will be delayed as a result.
- The North Carolina General Assembly did not adopt a comprehensive appropriations package for public education before the start of FY26 and has instead passed a short-term appropriations bill as lawmakers continue negotiations on spending levels. The governor of North Carolina also vetoed a bill that would have opted the state into the private school scholarship tax credit program that was created by the recent enactment of the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act."
- The Michigan State Legislature did not adopt an appropriations package for public education by the beginning of FY26. The impasse has continued as the Michigan Senate has proposed additional funding for smaller class sizes, higher teacher pay, and mental health support for students, while the Michigan House has proposed reductions to school meals programs and transportation services for rural students.

### **Gender Gap in Math**

- A new study published in [Nature](#) suggests that boys and girls enter first grade with no significant differences in math ability, but within four months of formal schooling, boys begin outperforming girls. The gap continues to widen over the school year, regardless of socioeconomic status, family structure, or school type.
- The findings are based on nationwide assessments from 2018 to 2022, covering over 2.5 million children in France. Interestingly, during Covid-19 related school closures, the gap narrowed, only to widen again after schools reopened, suggesting that aspects of formal classroom instruction itself may be a contributing factor.

- Researchers suspect classroom practices, subtle gender biases, or differences in early childhood experiences—like boys more often playing with construction toys than girls—could influence how children respond to math instruction. Education experts are now calling for classroom-based studies to identify interventions that ensure equitable opportunity in mathematics from the very start of schooling.

### **Federal Private School Voucher Program**

- In July, Congress passed the first federal school voucher program, allowing states to opt in beginning with the 2027 tax year. The program provides taxpayers with a 100 percent federal tax credit for up to \$1,700 in donations to scholarship, granting organizations supporting kindergarten to 12th grade (K-12) private school expenses.
- According to a recent [article](#), the initiative, part of the larger “One Big Beautiful Bill Act,” mirrors existing state-level tax-credit scholarship programs in 20 states, and could cover tuition, tutoring, transportation, technology, and other education-related costs for students from families earning up to 300 percent of the area median income.
- According to the article, 50 governors and the District of Columbia (D.C.) mayor were contacted; of 24 responses, most said they were still reviewing the program, with Republican-led states generally more supportive and two Democratic-led states, including New Mexico, declining to participate.
- A spokesperson for Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham [said](#) New Mexico will not opt into the provision, citing concerns over accountability, potential public school funding losses, enrollment declines, possible exclusion of students with additional needs, and risks to education quality.

### **Bilingual & Indigenous Early Childhood Educator Grant Reopened**

- The Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD) reopened the application period for the Bilingual and Indigenous Early Childhood Educator Grant. This initiative provides a \$1,500 semester stipend to support bilingual and/or Indigenous students pursuing associate degrees in early childhood-related fields. The grant is part of ECECD’s broader effort to strengthen and diversify New Mexico’s early childhood workforce by investing in bilingual and indigenous students from New Mexico.
- The application period runs from Friday, July 25, 2025, through Monday, August 25, 2025. Eligible applicants must be enrolled in at least three credits at an approved New Mexico institution or Tribal College or University, have a GPA of 2.5 or higher, and be pursuing degrees such as Early Childhood Education or related fields. For more information or to apply, visit ECECD’s website at [nmececd.org](https://nmececd.org).

## **Federal and State Updates on Homeless Student Support and Education Initiatives**

- LESC staff listened to a [webinar](#) presented by Schoolhouse Connection and the National Network for Youth, two national organizations focused on child and youth homelessness, that provided federal policy updates on homelessness.
- Webinar presenters noted that for FY26, the Senate's bipartisan appropriations proposal preserves McKinney-Vento funding at \$129 million, maintaining education and early childhood programs, and protecting on-time fund releases, while the House has yet to release its bill. Speakers highlighted significant differences between House and Senate U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funding for youth homelessness programs, with the Senate maintaining youth-dedicated funding and the House proposing cuts.
- In New Mexico, LESC staff presented to LESC members on July 24 about the [public education reform fund \(PERF\)](#), which now operates as a targeted multi-year fund for evidence-based education initiatives, including \$6.3 million for an initiative focused on supporting students who are unhoused from FY26 through FY28. The initiative builds on promising outcomes from a pilot study conducted by New Mexico Appleseed, an Albuquerque-based nonprofit, which provided conditional \$500 payments to homeless junior- and senior-level students in Cuba and West Las Vegas, finding the cash payments improved engagement and retention. PERF-funded programs will undergo rigorous evaluation to determine their effectiveness and inform future recurring funding decisions.

## **Artificial Intelligence in Education**

- Google [announced](#) a three-year, \$1 billion initiative to provide artificial intelligence (AI) training, research resources, and tools to U.S. higher education institutions and nonprofits. Over 100 universities have joined the initiative, though it is unclear whether New Mexico institutions are among the grantees. Support will include direct funding, cloud computing credits, and free access for students to AI tools such as Google's Gemini chatbot.
- The program aims to reach every accredited nonprofit college in the U.S., with discussions underway to expand internationally. The investment comes amid rising questions about AI in education, from academic integrity concerns to its impact on critical thinking. An announcement from Google states the company hopes to work with schools to explore responsible use and inform future product development, while also building long-term user familiarity with its AI tools.

## **STEM Innovation Network Mini-grant Applications Now Open**

- The STEM Innovation Network (STEMinNM) has begun accepting [applications](#) for mini-grants to support high-quality mathematics instruction; out-of-school time science, technology, engineering, and

mathematics (STEM) programming; and improved connections between educational entities and New Mexico's STEM industry.

- Mini-grant amounts will range from \$5 thousand to \$20 thousand and can be used to cover costs related to personnel, materials and supplies, training, student programming, or evaluation.
- Eligible applicants include:
  - Kindergarten through 12th grade (K–12) schools, districts, and education cooperatives;
  - Tribally-controlled schools and Bureau of Indian Education schools;
  - Out-of-school time providers;
  - For profit and nonprofit organizations;
  - Higher education institutions;
  - Workforce and industry partners; and
  - STEM professional learning organizations.
- As a central aim of STEMInNM is increased collaboration between STEM entities in New Mexico, priority will be given to proposals involving partnerships between multiple eligible applicants. Additionally, award selection will prioritize rural and tribal communities.
- STEMInNM staff are hosting virtual information sessions to answer questions from prospective applicants on the following dates:
  - Wednesday, August 13, from 3:30 to 4:30 PM; and
  - Tuesday, August 19, from 4:00 to 5:00 PM.
- Applications must be submitted by 5:00 PM Mountain Time on Thursday, September 11, 2025.
- STEMInNM, a collaborative effort between the Public Education Department (PED) and New Mexico State University, among other partners, is the result of a \$3 million appropriation for fiscal year 2026 made by the Legislature in the 2025 General Appropriation Act.

### **Learning Policy Institute Report of Non-Certified Teachers and Teacher Vacancies By Each State**

- A 2025 [update](#) of state teacher shortages from the Learning Policy Institute, a national organization focused on independent education research, indicates 48 states and D.C. employed an estimated 366 thousand teachers who were not fully certified for their teaching assignments, an increase of 923 teachers from 2024. Additionally, 45.5 thousand teacher vacancies were estimated across 31 states and D.C., an increase of 3,662 unfilled teacher positions from 2024.
- Sourced from the [New Mexico Educator Vacancy Report](#) and [NM Vistas](#), New Mexico has 737 unfilled teacher positions and an estimated 3,253 teachers not fully certified for their teaching assignments for the 2024-2025 school year.

## **NWEA Offers Policy Recommendations for Addressing Middle School Reading Challenges**

- NWEA, a K-12 assessment and research organization, released a [report](#) addressing the literacy challenges of middle schoolers. The report described a five percentage point decrease in eighth grade reading proficiency (according to the National Assessment of Education Progress, or [NAEP](#), also known as the “Nation’s Report Card”) as the result of a decade long lack of policy and reading support for middle and high school students.
- The report recommends policymakers and district leaders adopt a systems-level approach that supports both early learners and the unique literacy needs of middle and high school students:
  - Policymakers and district leaders must consider the type of assessment and data utilized to understand, diagnose, and support middle school students, as part of a comprehensive approach in K-12 literacy.
  - State policymakers should encourage and support districts to use innovative approaches to build in additional instruction and interventions that support middle school literacy.
  - State policymakers and district leaders must approach literacy development for middle schoolers from a systems perspective and invest in teacher professional learning in all disciplines, including at the upper grades, in their state literacy plans.
  - State policymakers and district leaders must promote these partnerships that support literacy outcomes by incentivizing student participation and encouraging schools to host third-space programs.
- NAEP data shows [19 percent of New Mexico eighth-grade students](#) are reading at or above grade level. PED released a [guide](#) for secondary educators with strategies and resources to support reading and writing instruction that are focused on advanced, subject-specific reading and communication strategies and reflects the specialized conventions and methods used in disciplines like science, math, or history. Additionally, [PED’s Strategic Plan](#) includes training and coaching to all kindergarten through eighth-grade (K-8) teachers in the science of reading.