



So, What Happens Now? *Mary Parr-Sánchez, NEA-NM President*

The recent 30-day legislative session provided the perfect opportunity for policy makers to put forward a new vision for education in New Mexico. The Governor's education budget, now passed by the legislature, is a bold first step. New Mexico's education system sits at an intersection of what has been- juxtaposed with what could be: circumstances ripe for transformative change.

While we continue to grapple with the destructive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our schools, students, and communities, we are also seeing federal stimulus dollars and profits from the volatile oil and gas industry flow into our state, presenting new opportunities to invest in our schools. We must continue to act boldly if we wish to make substantive, long-term changes that address the lessons learned from the pandemic and lay the foundation for a more sustainable, equitable public education system for future generations.

For months in the run-up to the session, NEA-NM lifted the voices of educators, students, and community members to highlight our education system's most pressing problems, including an acute educator staffing crisis which [stalled efforts to address the findings of the Yazzie/Martinez lawsuit](#). Shaped by direct feedback from our members, NEA-NM laid out what practicing teachers and all education employees needed to move a pro-education agenda.

NEA-NM members were active in the social studies standards revision process, stressing the importance of adopting new standards that create space for engaging critically with our history. In January, we hosted Community Art Builds in Las Cruces and Santa Fe and led the [Rally at the Roundhouse for Public Schools](#), where over 800 educators, students, and community members called for decisive legislative action to support educators and fund our schools. During the session, as well, NEA-NM members showed up in person and online to testify in support of numerous bills. Now, [as an impressive slate of pro-education legislation heads to the governor's desk](#), there is indeed much to celebrate. However, there also remains a great deal to do if we are to fulfill our promise to provide a sufficient education to every New Mexican child.

New Mexico is enduring an educator staffing crisis the likes of which we have never seen – [a crisis that has resulted in the National Guard being called in to fill classrooms](#). Exhausted from the demands of the pandemic and fed up with low pay, rising health insurance costs, lack of planning time, and unmanageable class sizes, [educators are leaving the profession in droves](#). Many of the bills passed this session will prove critical to addressing this crisis. HB 2, the budget bill, mandates a \$15 minimum wage for all public-school employees. All educators, including higher education staff at public postsecondary institutions, will also receive a 7% average raise. SB 1 will fully fund tier minimums to \$50,000 for Level 1, \$60,000 for Level 2, and \$70,000 for Level 3 educators, bringing educator salaries up to a competitive level. The fight for fair compensation is not over, however. Bills that would have provided relief to educators from ever-increasing healthcare premiums were tabled this session and must be a priority soon to ensure salary increases are truly felt by educators.

Other bills that will likely have a positive impact on the educator staffing crisis include:

- HB 13, which makes changes to teacher preparation programs, including raising stipends for participating new educators.
- SB 36, which increases employer contributions to the educational retirement fund by 2% over two years.
- HB 73, which allows retired educators to return to the classroom after a 90-day layout period.

The legislature also took steps to ensure our education system is more equitable and meets the needs of our state's diverse student body. HB 60 will issue a certificate to Native American language and culture teachers in our schools that recognizes their expertise and ensures they are compensated fairly. HB 2 allocates \$8 million to expanding the Community Schools strategy in the state, an effort that NEA-NM has supported for years. SB 243 also allows schools to use Family Income Index funds on Community Schools and other interventions for students experiencing poverty.

So where do we go from here? First, it is important that school districts get these funds, along with federal ESSER funds, to classrooms and educators as quickly as possible. Second, NEA-NM is preparing to bring a revised set of priorities to policymakers, highlighting issues that were not adequately addressed this session. Third, in November 2022, New Mexicans will be able to vote on a constitutional amendment that would increase the allocation to early childhood education and K-12 education from the Land Grant Permanent Fund. All New Mexicans must send a clear message to policymakers that, while we have come a long way this session, our advocacy for the schools our students deserve is far from over.

Join NEA-NM in continuing to advocate for students, educators, and communities by signing our [Respect New Mexico Educators petition](#) and by liking our NEA-New Mexico Facebook page to receive updates on our ongoing legislative action. You may also visit our website at www.neanm.org for valuable resources and information.

Together we organized, advocated, rallied and lobbied at the Roundhouse demanding a quality public education for all students. We were very clear on our legislative priorities; Respect, Recruit and Retain educators to benefit all students. And we delivered! Legislators approved a 7% pay raise, increased Tier minimums by \$10,000, set a \$15 an hour minimum and invested an unprecedented \$3.8 billion in our public schools.

[Legislative Updates](#)



Putting Kids First • Promoting Professional Excellence • Improving the Well-Being of School Employees
