



No Teachers  
No Future

# EDUCATORS SPEAK OUT

NEA-NM LEGISLATIVE  
& POLICY PRIORITIES  
2023



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NEA-NM  
LEGISLATIVE & POLICY  
PRIORITIES 2023



## WHAT WE STAND FOR

The National Education Association of New Mexico has for 135 years sought to promote and advance the education profession, protect the rights and interests of our members, and secure an adequately funded and equitable public education system for all.

### Our Mission:

The NEA-NM and its affiliates will be the recognized advocate for students, public education, and public education employees in New Mexico. NEA-New Mexico will plan and implement its advocacy efforts using both traditional advocacy models as well as innovative approaches to our work.

### Our Commitments:

- **To assure equity and excellence in education**, NEA-NM will lead the movement to provide the best possible learning opportunities for every student to reach their maximum potential
- **To promote and defend human and civil rights**, NEA-NM will work independently and collaboratively to eliminate all forms of discrimination and to attain equitable treatment for all people, especially children
- **To provide a Great Public School for every student**, NEA-NM will work among the people of New Mexico to create broad support for increasing vital investment in our public education system
- **To inspire professional excellence among education employees**, NEA-NM will work towards promoting continuous improvement of instruction through professional learning
- **To secure a commitment to the intrinsic value of public education**, NEA-NM will unite educators for effective citizenship
- **To promote justice and unity**, NEA-NM will address professional concerns of all member categories while upholding the educator code of ethics
- **To secure for members the benefits of an independent, united education association**, NEA-NM will empower education employees through strong local affiliates and new approaches to advocacy that move beyond the traditional methods of bargaining and political advocacy into engagement with diverse communities and coalitions



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## OUR LEGISLATIVE & POLICY WINS IN 2022

**2022 was a year of great progress for New Mexico educators.** NEA-NM was at the forefront of the movement to improve educator's working conditions and address the staffing crisis that culminated in the *Rally at the Roundhouse for Our Public Schools* which was attended by hundreds of educators across the state and attracted local and national media attention.

**Some of our major legislative and policy wins from the past year include:**

**Educator Wages:** NEA-NM demanded and organized to win significant wage increases for educators across the state. In addition to a 7% across-the-board salary increase, the legislature passed much-needed increases to tier minimums for licensed teachers to \$50,000, \$60,000, and \$70,000 for levels one, two, and three. The legislature also passed a law requiring a minimum \$15 per hour for all hourly workers in New Mexico schools.

**Healthcare:** State leaders heard our concerns about the rising cost of healthcare in 2022. They passed a law capping premium increases at no more than six percent, the first in a long list of legislative and policy changes needed to protect educators from rising healthcare costs.

**Adequate Staffing:** Following calls from NEA-NM and educators to address the lack of a livable wage for those participating in teacher residency programs, the legislature passed a bill increasing stipends from \$20,000 to \$35,000 per year – an important step toward ameliorating new educator recruitment.

**Community Schools:** Through continuous activism from NEA-NM's Center for Community Schools, we won \$8 million for Community Schools and family engagement initiatives, with an additional \$15 million in Family Income Index funds for interventions for underserved students. We also won \$10 million to expand Career and Technical Education and fund additional community-based learning opportunities.

**Great Public Schools:** The legislature and governor have demonstrated their commitment to providing a high quality education to every New Mexico student by increasing annual spending on K-12 public education by \$425 million in FY2023 to \$3.87 billion total, a 12% boost.

**Early Childhood Education:** Nearly \$335 million in surplus dollars from FY2021 will flow to the Early Childhood Trust Fund, effectively doubling the fund set up to finance the Early Childhood Development and Care Department launched only one year ago.



# EDUCATORS SPEAK OUT!

## NEA-NM LEGISLATIVE & POLICY PRIORITIES 2023



**SUE HOLLAND**

EDUCATOR AT RATON INTERMEDIATE  
SCHOOL, RATON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

NEA-NM AWARD FOR  
TEACHING EXCELLENCE RECIPIENT 2022

## EDUCATOR WORKING CONDITIONS & STUDENT LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

### PLANNING TIME

- At minimum, double the amount of paid planning time for educators
- Ensure that educators' planning time is uninterrupted and self-directed
- Prioritize collaborative professional learning over external "experts" who may not understand the unique challenges faced by educators in New Mexico
- Revise the State Equalization Guarantee funding formula to allocate unit value for increased planning time

### CLASS SIZE & ADEQUATE STAFFING

- Statutorily prohibit blanket class size waivers and obfuscatory class size averaging loopholes like those that take into consideration specials/electives
- Create a reporting portal and enforcement mechanism by which breaches of statutory class size limits can be reported and addressed

## EDUCATOR RETENTION

### EDUCATOR WAGES

- Pass a 5% across-the-board wage increase for educators
- Value and retain all experienced educators – including teachers, ancillary staff, and para-professionals – by offering compensation commensurate with their years of experience

### HEALTHCARE

- Require districts to pay a minimum of 80% medical insurance benefit per monthly insurance premium to an employee's maximum payment of 20%
- Legislate a funding source to ensure the long-term solvency of the New Mexico Retiree Health Care Authority

## EDUCATOR VOICE

### FEDERAL COVID RELIEF FUNDS

- It's not too late to listen to educator voices – school districts must fulfill their federal requirement to meaningfully consult with education stakeholders, like educators and educator unions, when deciding how to allocate ESSER funds to best meet the needs of students and schools

### MENTAL AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

- Reallocate funds from the K-5 Plus program to finance a network of school-based mental and behavioral health support services for students and educators across the state to address the ongoing mental health crisis

## VISION FOR THE FUTURE

### COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

- Fully fund a statewide rollout of the Community Schools strategy for all schools with more than 50% of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch
- Enshrine categorical funding for Community Schools coordinators in the state budget
- Support Community Schools through the creation of an independent technical assistance center at an institution of higher education

### EXTENDED LEARNING TIME

- Ensure all efforts to provide extended learning time to students are educator- and community-driven and respond to the local context, instead of being mandated statewide

### EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

- Approve the constitutional amendment providing for additional annual distributions of the permanent school fund for underfunded early childhood education programs, K-12 programs for at-risk students, and public school educator compensation
- Convene education stakeholders to support administering the newly allocated funds



# EDUCATORS SPEAK OUT!

NEA-NM LEGISLATIVE & POLICY PRIORITIES 2023



EDUCATOR WORKING CONDITIONS  
& STUDENT LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

# PLANNING TIME



Educators are professionals and must have paid planning time that is uninterrupted and self-directed. To meet the diverse needs of New Mexico students, we must value educators' out-of-class time, where they are able to meet with students and parents, analyze student needs, and respond with targeted lesson plans and supports. Educators also need professional learning time where they can work collaboratively, observing one another's classes, planning and learning together, and developing high-quality curricula and best practices.

"Because we had no specials teachers (PE, ART, Music), teachers have not had any planning time for the whole first semester. We need consistent planning time to have materials ready for our students. When you have larger class sizes combined with little planning time, it creates a very difficult situation where teachers have to work late into their family time every day. This creates fatigue that impacts how teachers are able to work effectively with students during the day."

-Julie Uhl, Kindergarten Teacher at Santa Domingo Elementary School



## BACKGROUND

In 2021, for the fifth year in a row, the Annie E. Casey Foundation ranked New Mexico 50th in the nation for education, and 49th in the nation for overall child well-being. 25% of children in our state live in poverty – one of the highest rates in the country. Child poverty is shown to have long-lasting negative effects on child development and educational outcomes. Furthermore, poverty affects some students more than others. Even in our diverse state, child poverty rates are significantly higher for Hispanic (20%) and Native American children (29.4%) than for White children (7.5%). High child poverty for these groups is linked to markedly lower reading and math proficiency, lower graduation rates, and higher prevalence of chronic absenteeism. To meet the varied needs of our state's diverse student body, it is imperative that educators have additional non-teaching time built into their work day to learn about their students, to contact student families, and develop targeted, differentiated lesson plans.

Numerous studies of high-performing education systems across the globe show a link between ample paid non-teaching/planning time and improved educator effectiveness and student success. In these countries, educators spend only 30% to 60% of their total working time delivering instruction, compared to 80% or more in the United States. This means that educators in these countries have adequate time (as much as 25 hours per week) to work with colleagues on preparing and analyzing lessons, developing and evaluating assessments, observing other classrooms, and meeting with students and parents. Collaborative professional learning opportunities like these should be prioritized over training that brings in outside "experts" who may not understand the unique challenges of teaching in New Mexico schools.



# PLANNING TIME



Educators are professionals and must have paid planning time that is uninterrupted and self-directed. To meet the diverse needs of New Mexico students, we must value educators' out-of-class time, where they are able to meet with students and parents, analyze student needs, and respond with targeted lesson plans and supports. Educators also need professional learning time where they can work collaboratively, observing one another's classes, planning and learning together, and developing high-quality curricula and best practices.

While some effort has been made in recent years to implement professional learning communities and other collaborative professional practice strategies in New Mexico, these efforts often fall short of expectations because they merely add an obligation to educators' already packed schedules. To cultivate a culture of professional learning, we must address the root causes of the teacher shortage and reduce the workload of educators, not just to decrease stress levels and mitigate teacher burnout, but also to create the time and space for continuous improvement and targeted student support. The legislature has tools like the state equalization guarantee distribution which can be used to push districts to increase planning time, by modifying the funding formula to grant units for educator planning time in the same way that units are currently granted for bilingual programs, fine arts programs, etc.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further laid bare the need for adequate planning time for educators, especially those working with underserved student populations coping with poverty, lack of technology and other resources, and other out-of-school barriers to learning. More must be done to enshrine adequate planning and professional learning time into the law and give educators the time they need to do their jobs successfully.

## LEARN MORE

[NEA Teacher Professional Growth Resources](#)

[NEA COVID-19 and Educator Workload Resources](#)

## TAKE ACTION ON PLANNING TIME!

# CLASS SIZE & ADEQUATE STAFFING



Educators are better able to meet the needs of their students when they can provide more individualized attention with smaller class sizes. In addition to ending the educator staffing crisis that has led to an explosion of oversized and understaffed classes in New Mexico schools, the legislature must also statutorily prohibit blanket class size waivers and class size averaging that shorts students their time with educators. A reporting portal and enforcement mechanism must be enshrined in statute so that breaches of existing class size limits can be addressed.



Many core subject teachers resigned throughout the district and now elective/specials teachers are being transferred into the core subject positions. Core teachers quit, because of the demands made worse by the pandemic, substituting during their planning time for multiple classes and lack of support. They are working all hours to cover vacant positions that no one wants to fill...The teachers that have stayed are being punished with larger class sizes, no planning time and being forced to teach subjects they aren't qualified to teach."

-Denise Lopez Jaramillo, Counselor at Española Middle Schools

## BACKGROUND

According to data from the National Center for Education Statistics, the average class size across primary and secondary grades in New Mexico was approximately 20 students in 2017-2018. State law puts average limits of 22 students per class for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades; 24 students per class for 4th, 5th, and 6th grades; and 27 students per class for 7th through 12th grades. However, in recent years use and abuse of class size waivers and misleading class size averaging, as well as an overreliance on inexperienced teachers and "permanent substitutes," have obfuscated the true class loads of educators, which those on the ground are saying is only getting worse as a result of the pandemic and the teacher shortage. The mix of inexperience and permanent, rotating, and nonexistent substitutes creates stress on educators and students and leads to burn out and exodus from the classroom. Experienced educators have to teach additional classes when no teacher is available, they often provide lesson plans for the 600 classrooms that don't have a highly qualified teacher, and they have to supervise students in the halls, in the cafeteria, and on the playground.

Ample research demonstrates that educators and students benefit from the increase of individualized attention that accompanies smaller class sizes. It has been shown that smaller class sizes have positive long-term effects on college and career readiness, health, and economic security, and that these benefits are even more pronounced for ethnic minority and students from low-income backgrounds.



# CLASS SIZE & ADEQUATE STAFFING



Educators are better able to meet the needs of their students when they can provide more individualized attention with smaller class sizes. In addition to ending the educator staffing crisis that has led to an explosion of oversized and understaffed classes in New Mexico schools, the legislature must also statutorily prohibit blanket class size waivers and class size averaging that shorts students their time with educators. A reporting portal and enforcement mechanism must be created, so that breaches of existing class size limits can be addressed.

It is also clear that students learn more at school and do better in life when their schools are fully staffed with high-quality professionals who can give them individualized support, respond to their cultural and linguistic backgrounds, support their physical and mental health needs, and inspire joy, creativity, and critical thinking. New Mexico must therefore provide additional funding to recruit and retain educators and education support staff who give students a well-rounded school experience. This, in turn, will reduce overall class sizes, mitigate educator fatigue, improve the quality of student learning, and support the wellbeing of students at school and at home.

## LEARN MORE

[NEA Class Size Reduction Policy Brief](#)

## TAKE ACTION ON CLASS SIZE!

# EDUCATORS SPEAK OUT!

NEA-NM LEGISLATIVE & POLICY PRIORITIES 2023



EDUCATOR RETENTION



# EDUCATOR WAGES



NEA-NM asserts the right of all people to earn a living wage, and public school employees are no exception. We need to value and retain the educators we have to end the educator staffing crisis. Ancillary staff, service providers and teachers are ALL highly qualified professionals who deserve recognition – this means not just bumping teachers up to tier minimums, but also compensating them for their years of experience.

"I have been a teacher for 23 years and 21 of those years has been in the same district. I am a loyal, hardworking teacher who goes above and beyond for my students. I am tired of living paycheck to paycheck. I am relieved that teachers in NM will finally start receiving a salary we deserve. The new salary increases will help relieve pressure and stress in the life of my family so I can continue to service my students to the best of my ability."

-Stacy Herrera, Teacher at Central Elementary, Las Cruces



## BACKGROUND

In the 2021 New Mexico Educator Vacancy Report, there were a total of 1,727 educator vacancies across the state. These vacancies exist in virtually all subjects, grade levels, and regions of our state – a shortage that is sufficiently acute to be called a crisis. During the Omicron wave of the pandemic, New Mexico made national news for calling on the National Guard to cover classrooms as substitute teachers. While this allowed the state to keep some classrooms open in the short-term, it reveals the long-term implications of the unprecedented hemorrhaging of educators from the profession.

The scarcity of qualified educators in New Mexico can be attributed in large part to the lack of competitive compensation for those in the education profession. According to a report published by the Economic Policy Institute, in 2019 (the most recent year for which there is data) public school teachers in the U.S. earned on average about 20% less weekly than nonteacher college graduates. That year, New Mexico had the third highest teacher wage penalty in the country, with public school teachers earning nearly 30% less than nonteacher college graduates. While this gap is likely to shrink in the wake of considerable wage increases for educators passed by the legislature in early 2022, there remains much to do to attract and retain sufficient highly-qualified educators for our public schools.

# EDUCATOR WAGES



NEA-NM asserts the right of all people to earn a living wage, and public school employees are no exception. We need to value and retain the educators we have to end the educator staffing crisis. Ancillary staff, service providers and teachers are ALL highly qualified professionals who deserve recognition – this means not just bumping teachers up to tier minimums, but also compensating them for their years of experience.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated many of the factors pushing educators – especially Black and Hispanic/Latino educators, who are already underrepresented in the teaching profession – out of the profession. A nationwide survey of NEA members found that 55% of respondents had plans to leave the profession earlier than they anticipated as a result of the pandemic. This means an even greater crisis is looming on the horizon if swift action is not taken.

NEA-NM applauds recent efforts to bring educator compensation to an acceptable level, including a 7% across-the board wage increase for all educators, long-demanded increases to tier minimums, and liveable stipends for participants in teacher preparatory programs. Nevertheless, we assert the need to continue raising educator wages at pace with rising living costs through a 5% across-the-board wage increase for FY2024. Likewise, while raising tier minimums was an important step in the right direction, we also need to retain and value veteran educators by ensuring compensation commensurate with years of experience.

## LEARN MORE

[NEA Professional Pay Resources](#)

## TAKE ACTION ON WAGES!



# HEALTHCARE



NEA-NM continues to fight for the right of every American to access affordable, high-quality healthcare through a universal single-payer healthcare system. In the meantime, we call on the legislature to ensure that educators, as state employees and frontline workers who put their health on the line to serve their communities, can afford healthcare for themselves and their families by requiring districts to pay a minimum of 80% health insurance premium per paycheck to an employee's maximum payment of 20%. The New Mexico Retiree Health Care Authority must also be provided with sufficient funding to maintain the state's commitment to public workers.



After 17 years on the job I am barely making it. I can't even afford the health insurance and I have been without it for the last few years, so moving the minimum salary to \$15 for hourly employees like me will make a huge difference in my life.

-Shannon Facka, Educational Assistant at Ojo Amarillo Elementary School, Fruitland

## BACKGROUND

The issue of healthcare takes on new weight in the context of the ongoing pandemic: educators, as state employees and frontline workers, put their health on the line daily to serve their communities. Throughout the pandemic, educators have continued to go above and beyond to educate and support students. Despite this, many educators fear that, faced with rising health insurance premiums, expensive copays, and declining benefits, if they or someone in their family falls ill they will not be able to afford life-saving care. Is it possible to claim that New Mexico values the work of educators when the state does not take the necessary steps to ensure their health and wellbeing?

While recent wage increases for educators in our state are a welcome change after years of stagnation, this increase only goes so far toward making up for the exploding cost of rising health insurance premiums. In 2019, the New Mexico Public Schools Insurance Authority, which insures many educators and their families statewide, increased insurance premiums for its medical and dental plans by 3.1 - 5.9% mere months after educators were given 6% wage increases, and this trend is likely to continue. Accompanying this, rapidly inflating prescription drug and health service costs have resulted in educators paying more out-of-pocket for the same level of care.

# HEALTHCARE



NEA-NM continues to fight for the right of every American to access affordable, high-quality healthcare through a universal single-payer healthcare system. In the meantime, we call on the legislature to ensure that educators, as state employees and frontline workers who put their health on the line to serve their communities, can afford healthcare for themselves and their families by requiring districts to pay a minimum of 80% health insurance premium per paycheck to an employee's maximum payment of 20%. The New Mexico Retiree Health Care Authority must also be provided with sufficient funding to maintain the state's commitment to public workers.

Retired and retiring educators have also struggled to receive adequate coverage under the New Mexico Retiree Health Care Authority. The NMRHCA was not a pre-funded benefits program at its creation and, in an effort to cope with lack of funding, has required retirees be at least 55 years of age and have provided 25 years of service before accessing subsidized health insurance benefits.

The critical link between educator mental and physical wellbeing and student outcomes has been well established: when educators are happy and healthy they are better at their jobs, less likely to experience "burnout," and more likely to remain in the education profession. While recent efforts to improve educator wellbeing have largely focused on a teacher's responsibility for self-care, this does not address the root causes of stress and illness in the profession nor acknowledge the role that access to quality preventative care plays in staying well.

## LEARN MORE

[NEA Health Benefits & Policy Resources](#)

## TAKE ACTION ON HEALTHCARE!

# EDUCATORS SPEAK OUT!

NEA-NM LEGISLATIVE & POLICY PRIORITIES 2023



EDUCATOR VOICE



# FEDERAL COVID RELIEF FUNDS



More than \$1 billion has been and will continue to flow into New Mexico's public education system from the federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund. While hundreds of millions of these dollars from the CARES and CRRSA Acts have already been allocated and distributed, there remains time for school districts to listen to education stakeholders, like educators and educator unions, in order to identify the most effective way to allocate remaining funding so it best addresses the needs of students and schools.

## BACKGROUND

Following the passing of federal legislation – the CARES Act, the CRRSA Act, and the American Rescue Plan (ARP) – throughout the pandemic, over \$1 billion from the Elementary and Secondary Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund has been distributed to the state of New Mexico. These COVID relief funds are to be allocated to school districts across the state in order to "support safe in-person instruction and meet the social, emotional, mental health, and academic needs of students." While funds from the CARES Act and CRRSA Act have been almost completely allocated and distributed already, there is still time to ensure that ARP Act funds – the largest bucket of funding – are allocated following school districts' "meaningful consultation with students; families; school and district administrators (including special education administrators); and teachers, principals, school leaders, other educators, school staff, and their unions," as required by federal law. Our state's first-hand education experts – classroom teachers, support staff, parents, and families – know what students need following this pandemic in order to thrive and reach their highest potential. And yet, for too long the voices of these education stakeholders have been ignored in favor of the vision of bureaucrats who do not have an on-the-ground awareness of the problems facing students, educators, families, and communities on a day-to-day basis.

NEA-NM has listened to educators, and they have told us that remaining ESSER funds need to be spent on the following priority areas:

- Supporting students' academic growth and recovery
- Providing engaging out-of-school time and summer opportunities for youth
- Supporting the mental and emotional health of students and staff
- Investing in a robust educator workforce
- Purchasing and installing disease mitigation structures

These priorities are not listed in any ranked order because NEA-NM recognizes that the experiences of students and educators vary greatly across the state and even from school to school.

# FEDERAL COVID RELIEF FUNDS



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More than \$1 billion has been and will continue to flow into New Mexico's public education system from the federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund. While hundreds of millions of these dollars from the CARES and CRRSA Acts have largely been allocated and distributed already, there remains time for school districts to listen to education stakeholders, like educators and educator unions, in order to identify the most effective way to allocate the remaining American Rescue Plan ESSER funding so it addresses the needs of students and schools.

## BACKGROUND

School districts must conduct localized surveys of educators in their districts to inform their approach to allocating remaining ESSER funds so they best meet the needs of their students, schools, and communities. NEA-NM is prepared to support the effort to amplify educator voice by helping school districts draft and distribute online surveys to union member and non-member educators. School districts that are committed to centering educator voice in their planning for the use of federal funds should contact NEA-NM to receive support.

Listening to educator voices is critical not only now or in times of crises, but at all times. For decades, New Mexico educators have been blamed when policies or programs fail to deliver the results that are promised, even when funding decisions were made far above their heads. Educators are now bracing themselves for the inevitable backlash when ESSER funds, allocated following little or no consultation with school staff, fail to undo all the damage of the last two years. Educators see every day the impacts of the pandemic on their students' mental and behavioral health and academic achievement, and their expertise should be relied on when making funding and policy decisions that ostensibly aim to benefit their students.

## LEARN MORE

[NEA ESSER Funds Bargaining and Advocacy Guidance](#)

[TAKE ACTION ON  
FEDERAL FUNDING!](#)

# MENTAL & BEHAVIORAL HEALTH



In the wake of overlapping crises and the resulting social, emotional, and financial stressors that have exacerbated existing mental health inequities, our state is facing a mental and behavioral health crisis the likes of which it has never seen before. Students, families, and educators are all reeling from the last two years, and our schools are not prepared with the supports they need to achieve their highest teaching and learning potential. NEA-NM demands that unused funds from the underutilized K-5 Plus Extended Learning Time program be reallocated to build out a network of school-based mental and behavioral health support services to tackle this crisis head-on. Educators have spoken, this must be a priority in 2022.

## BACKGROUND

In December 2021, the U.S. Surgeon General issued an advisory calling for rapid action to address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the already devastating youth mental health crisis. In the decade before the pandemic, rates of poor mental health among young people, like persistent feelings of sadness and helplessness or suicidal ideation, were already on the rise. The pandemic compounded these issues by "disrupt[ing] the lives of children and adolescents, such as in-person schooling, in-person social opportunities with peers and mentors, access to health care and social services, food, housing, and the health of their caregivers." Pandemic era isolation, uncertainty, and fear coupled with the large-scale loss of loved ones (roughly 1 in 4 COVID deaths was the caregiver of a school-aged child) and unchecked abuse in the home (55% of high-school aged youth reported being victims of emotional abuse from an adult at home during the pandemic) will have long-term impacts on youth mental health that cannot go unaddressed. Already vulnerable student populations, like ethnic minority students, students with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ students will bear the brunt of this crisis if nothing is done.

Among his recommendations for dealing with the crisis, the Surgeon General called for "ensur[ing] that every child has access to high-quality, affordable, and culturally competent mental health care," "support[ing] the mental health of children and youth in educational, community, and childcare settings," and "expand[ing] and support[ing] the early childhood and education workforce. " It is critical that funds be invested in building out a network of mental and behavioral health services, like social workers, school psychologists, and other mental health and wellbeing professionals in our schools. The Community Schools strategy, with its comprehensive needs and assets assessment and its focus on creating partnerships with existing health care providers in the community presents an ideal model for integrating these mental health services into New Mexico schools.



# MENTAL & BEHAVIORAL HEALTH



In the wake of overlapping crises and the resulting social, emotional, and financial stressors that have exacerbated existing mental health inequities, our state is facing a mental and behavioral health crisis the likes of which it has never seen before. Students, families, and educators are all reeling from the last two years, and our schools are not prepared with the supports they need to achieve their highest teaching and learning potential. NEA-NM demands that unused funds from the underutilized K-5 Plus Extended Learning Time program be reallocated to build out a network of school-based mental and behavioral health support services to tackle this crisis head-on. Educators have spoken, this must be a priority in 2022.

## BACKGROUND

While the youth mental health crisis has been the subject of at least some political and media attention, few have acknowledged the outsized impact of the pandemic on educator mental and behavioral health. A national survey by NEA conducted in January 2022 found that 90% of educators reported that burnout and general stress from the pandemic were "serious" or "very serious" problems for them. Another national survey found that K-12 educators were much more likely than other public sector employees to report high levels of anxiety, stress and burnout. Pushed to their limits by the demands of pandemic-era schooling and the in-school behavioral manifestations of the worsening youth mental health crisis, many educators are looking to the exits. A staggering 55% of educators indicate being more likely to leave the profession or retire earlier than planned as a result of the pandemic, with rates being even higher for educators of color, whose communities have borne the brunt of worsening economic and health inequities. This mass exodus will only exacerbate existing staff shortages and drain our schools of young, diverse educators, resulting in a vicious cycle that threatens the very viability of our public education system.

Educators and students need to have their mental and behavioral health concerns taken seriously and addressed with high-quality, affordable care available in their schools or through referrals to providers in their community. Millions in unused funds from the K-5 Plus extended learning time program will soon revert to the Public Education Reform Fund. These unexpended state dollars must be used to address the student and educator mental health crisis, by building out a network of mental and behavioral health providers in New Mexico schools.

## LEARN MORE

[NEA Student and Educator Mental Health Resources](#)

## TAKE ACTION ON MENTAL HEALTH!

# EDUCATORS SPEAK OUT!

NEA-NM LEGISLATIVE & POLICY PRIORITIES 2023



VISION FOR THE FUTURE

# COMMUNITY SCHOOLS



Most New Mexico schools and classrooms are not set up to ensure educators can meet the needs of students and families. Many communities are struggling from historic marginalization, families often feel disconnected from our education system, and many of our students do not have their basic needs met and are struggling with mental and physical health issues. Community Schools are a vehicle for change that offer an opportunity for educators to get what they need for their classrooms. We need sustainable recurring funding to make the community school strategy accessible to all schools in our state and a core and permanent part of how our schools operate.

"Community schools are important in so many ways. I've seen first hand how community schools work to meet the needs of educators and students. This is something unique to community schools because so many times the mindset of a school is to solely focus on the students but when you also address the needs of the educators, staff, and student families it makes the experience all the more valuable. The vision of New Mexico should be to strive to have as many community schools as possible."

-Henry Jasso, Computer Lab Instructor at University Hills Elementary School



## BACKGROUND

The Community School strategy is “a research-based strategy for mitigating the educational disadvantages associated with poverty and for improving students’ attendance, behavior, and achievement by making schools the hub of community resources.” Community Schools are built with four pillars: integrated health and social supports, expanded learning time and opportunities, strong family and community engagement, and collaborative leadership and practice. These pillars are planned and managed by a full-time, site-based Community School Coordinator, who identifies the needs and assets in the school community and collaborates with the school leadership team, community partners, students, educators, and families to bring about grassroots change.

When well-implemented and fully funded, Community Schools have been shown to “lead to improvement in student and school outcomes and contribute to meeting the educational needs of low-achieving students in high poverty schools.” A cost-benefit study conducted in Community Schools in Albuquerque found a \$7.11 return on investment for every \$1 spent on the cost of a Community School Coordinator. Similar studies in other states have found returns on investment as high as \$15 for every \$1 invested in Community Schools, demonstrating that the strategy not only works, but that it is also more cost-effective than many other interventions.

While our state has come some way toward adopting the Community Schools strategy, efforts thus far have been piecemeal and inadequate.



# COMMUNITY SCHOOLS



Most New Mexico schools and classrooms are not set up to ensure educators can meet the needs of students and families. Many communities are struggling from historic marginalization, families often feel disconnected from our education system, and many of our students do not have their basic needs met and are struggling with mental and physical health issues. Community Schools are a vehicle for change that offer an opportunity for educators to get what they need for their classrooms. We need sustainable recurring funding to make the community school strategy accessible to all schools in our state and a core and permanent part of how our schools operate.

The Community Schools Act of 2013 first gave official recognition to the strategy in New Mexico. The act was updated in 2019 to appoint a NM Coalition for Community Schools and provide \$2 million in grant funding to be administered by the NM Public Education Department. Funding for this competitive grant system has increased ever since, to \$8 million in early 2022, however this still falls far short of the amount needed to ensure that all schools with students whose needs are not being met can implement the strategy. In addition, the Legislature has not allocated any funding to ensure the sustainability of Community School coordinators beyond the third year of implementation nor to providing the technical assistance that would ensure state-funded implementation is high-quality and sustainable.

Despite this, Community Schools in New Mexico have proven their resilience and effectiveness even in dire circumstances. In the aftermath of the Yazzie/Martinez lawsuit, Community Schools demonstrated how the strategy excels at closing educational opportunity gaps faced by at-risk students, promoting culturally and linguistically responsive practices that meet the need of our state's diverse student body, and re-engaging communities that were alienated from the education system by decades of social and racial injustice. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, too, Community Schools have shown themselves to be uniquely poised to respond rapidly to crises by leveraging strong family and community engagement to provide economic, social, and health services to students and families in need. Community Schools are the future of education in New Mexico and across the country, and it's time that we invest in that future.

## LEARN MORE

[NEA Community School Resources](#)

## [TAKE ACTION ON COMMUNITY SCHOOLS!](#)

# EXTENDED LEARNING TIME



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While longer school days/school years or other extended learning time (ELT) can benefit students in some circumstances, mandating extended time statewide without local input from students, educators, and families is not the best approach to closing opportunity gaps nor to increasing student achievement. Schools and districts must be given the power to shape what extended learning time looks like in their local contexts, in order to best meet the needs of their students and communities and avoid placing an undue burden on educators.

NEA-NM recognizes the importance of closing opportunity gaps, especially those stemming from summer learning loss and, now, pandemic learning loss that disproportionately impacts ethnic minority students and those from low-income backgrounds, keeping them at a disadvantage compared to their peers. While extended learning time (ELT) can undeniably have benefits for students, all ELT is not made equal. Research on the benefits of increasing or extending school days/school years is mixed, because approaches to ELT vary across states and districts. When ELT is poorly implemented and does not respond to the needs or wants of students, families, and educators, its potential benefits can easily be undermined by its costs.

American educators already spend more time in direct instruction with students than their peers in nearly every other OECD nation. For this reason, it is important to note that the most high-performing school systems worldwide are not necessarily those with the highest contact time between students and educators, but rather those that maximize instruction time by lowering class sizes, recruiting and retaining highly qualified educators, and ensuring ample planning time for assessing and responding to student needs and collaborating with peers. Increasing instruction time across-the-board without attempting first to make the most out of the contact time students already receive is counterproductive and may lead to student and educator burnout.

New Mexico's K-12 Plus and Extended Learning Time Programs are the state's most recent attempts to roll out ELT statewide with a one-size-fits-all model. When legislation in 2021 was proposed that would have made the K-5 Plus program mandatory for all districts – not just those that opt-in, as in years past – there was immediate backlash from students, families, and educators still reeling from an exhausting year of pandemic schooling. While the legislation did not pass, uptake of the program has been consistently low, with 43 of the state's 89 districts rejecting extending the school year through the program in 2021.

# EXTENDED LEARNING TIME



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NEA-NM advocates for a grassroots approach to designing and implementing ELT in schools. Community Schools, for example, survey the entire school community (students, educators, and families) and conduct a deep needs and assets assessment prior to implementing any extended learning time programs at the school. In general, these programs are focused on enrichment programming in the subject areas that motivate students to learn and attract parent buy-in, as opposed to overwhelming students with more core subject instruction than they can digest. The Community Schools approach also seeks to value educator time, by creating ELT opportunities that educators lead only on a voluntary basis and for which they are adequately paid. By incorporating community-based learning and culturally and linguistically responsive practices, ELT at Community Schools can also supplement classroom instruction with experiential learning that get students involved in their communities in a way that they may not be able to during their normal school day.

A report from the NEA Foundation that reviewed case studies of union-district collaboration to design and implement ELT programs included a list of "lessons learned" that includes "engaging union leadership in the EL[T] design process," "establishing school-based planning teams that...consider several options for redesigning the school day and schedule," and "determining compensation strategies for teachers and alternative approaches, beyond pay, that support teachers in staggering or extending their teaching time." It is collaborative practices like these that lead to successful and enduring ELT programs that close opportunity gaps and boost student achievement.

## TAKE ACTION ON ELT!



# EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION



All students should have access to successful programs that close educational opportunity gaps, including universal pre-K and other early childhood programs that are culturally and linguistically responsive, developmentally appropriate, and inclusive of students with disabilities. NEA-NM supports the proposed constitutional amendment allocating additional funds from the Land Grant Permanent Fund to early childhood education, K-12 programs for at-risk students, and educator compensation.

## BACKGROUND

Considerable research attests to the lifelong impact of early childhood education on everything from college graduation rates to health outcomes, and yet 55% of young children (ages 3-4) in New Mexico are not enrolled in school of any kind. In the landmark education equity lawsuit *Yazzie/Martinez v. State of New Mexico*, Judge Sarah Singleton ruled that our state has “violated the rights of at-risk students [children who come from economically disadvantaged homes, children who are English Language Learners, children who are Native American, and children with a disability] by failing to provide them with a uniform statewide system of free public schools sufficient for their education,” including by failing to provide them with programs and services such as quality Pre-K, K-3 Plus, extended learning, dual language, culturally and linguistically relevant education, and social services. The New Mexico Funding for Early Childhood Programs Amendment—which will go before voters in the November 2022 general election—will play a critical role in addressing the findings of this case by closing educational opportunity gaps that put students at a disadvantage from an early age, funding K-12 extended learning time opportunities and programs for at-risk students, and ensuring educators are adequately paid.

If the constitutional amendment is approved by voters, education stakeholders from across the state, including NEA-NM, should be immediately convened to determine how the newly allocated funds will be administered and to support the growth of the funded programs.

## LEARN MORE

[NEA Early Childhood Education Resources](#)

[Ballotpedia New Mexico Funding for Early Childhood Programs Amendment Summary](#)

## TAKE ACTION ON ECE!

## JOIN THE FIGHT TO PROTECT AMERICA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS!

If we want to give all of our students the leadership they deserve, we need to elect champions who will fight for our neighborhood public schools.

The **NEA Fund for Children and Public Education** is fueled by educators like you, coming together to fight for real leaders at the federal and state level, regardless of political party.

» [DONATE HERE](#)

## SUPPORT STUDENT SUCCESS. SUPPORT NEA-NM EDPAC!

Student success is at the heart of all we do.

The **Education Political Action Committee (EdPAC)** supports political activity that helps elect public education champions up and down the ballot to move policy in a positive direction for our members and the students we serve.

» [DONATE HERE](#)

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**TAMMIE YAZZIE**

EDUCATOR AT JUDY NELSON ELEMENTARY  
CENTRAL CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL DISTRICT

NEA FOUNDATION AWARDS FOR TEACHING  
EXCELLENCE RECIPIENT 2021

# EDUCATORS SPEAK OUT!

NEA-NM  
LEGISLATIVE & POLICY  
PRIORITIES 2023



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# EDUCATORS SPEAK OUT!

NEA-NM  
LEGISLATIVE & POLICY  
PRIORITIES 2023



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