

NEW MEXICO SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION



EDUCATION IN OUR STATE
Summer 2018

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New Mexico School Boards Association (NMSBA) efforts spring from the conviction that excellence in public education must be the state's top priority. As the leading advocate for local public school boards, NMSBA represents 89 school districts statewide with over 450 elected school board members. The Association is committed to ensuring that the voice of local schools is heard in the education debate whenever critical decisions are made or influenced. NMSBA advocates for policies and practices that build a comprehensive approach grounded in principles of excellence, diversity, inclusivity, and collaboration.

New Mexico public education is at a crossroads. With an economy that is still struggling to recover from the national economic recession, investments in NM education were not made for seven years. Many critical programs and services were reduced or eliminated. Only last year, with slightly increased revenues, was funding available to offer public school districts a salary increase for teachers, principals and staff.

At the same time, the education workforce has been decimated. The number of students completing a degree in education from 4-year universities in NM has decreased 27.7% over the past six years¹. Public schools have significant vacancies for teachers at all levels, particularly in special education (SPED) and science and technical fields (STEM). The ability of districts to recruit and retain high quality teachers is in jeopardy. With teaching salaries less than in neighboring states and overall state funding proportionally lower (adjusted for inflation) than it was pre-recession², many public schools face the real possibility they will open in August with long-term substitutes filling vacant teaching positions.

Unfortunately, New Mexico ranks last in the nation for child well-being. The state has the highest rate of childhood poverty (30%), with the rate for children less than five years of age even worse (36% in 2016). Poverty is a multidimensional issue—it affects not only New Mexico families, but also New Mexico educators. These effects include economic inequality, high rates of working poor, high unemployment rates, lack of funding for early childhood education and K-12 public schools, and lack of funding for higher education.

Often, high-poverty children enter the classroom unprepared to learn, and other challenges of poverty weaken or eliminate the support system that they need outside of the classroom. Faced with the consequences, teachers lack the resources (staff and programs) and professional development necessary to help these struggling students overcome the issues that impact their learning.

¹ New Mexico State University. 2017 Educator Vacancy Report. Retrieved: <https://alliance.nmsu.edu/files/2017/11/2017-Educator-Vacancy-Report-Final.pdf>

² New Mexico Public School Funding through the Great Recession and Beyond. New Mexico Voices for Children. <https://www.nmvoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/K-12-Funding-report-web.pdf>

Compounding these challenges is the erosion of the ability of local boards of education to govern effectively. The authority of school boards to make critical decisions that have significant impact on their districts and the students, teachers, and educators they represent is the key to a successful education system. Rather than diminish that authority, local control must be preserved and expanded appropriately.

NMSBA fully understands the need for a comprehensive, well-aligned education system that begins with early childhood education and prepares students for success in higher education or in a career pathway. To that end, we rely on three guiding principles:

- *Adequate Funding:* We advocate for a quality teaching profession that includes support professionals and staff, with adequate funding at every level to assure every student receives a quality education based on individualized student needs.
- *Local Control:* Accountability and governance are the bedrock of public education. NMSBA ranks student achievement and quality learning as the number one priority of local school boards and believes the accountability for meeting state standards is the responsibility of local school boards, staff members, parents, students and the community at large. Local control and decision-making are how local boards of education meet this priority.
- *No Unfunded Mandates:* Requiring districts to implement new programs or activities without providing necessary financial resources to support that effort is an ‘unfunded mandate’. NMSBA opposes these additional mandates as they erode the ability of public school districts to provide core academic instruction and interventions for struggling students that currently lack sufficient funding.

NMSBA has served New Mexico School Boards for 60 years and has established a reputation of respect and support providing leadership and services statewide that enable local boards of education to govern effectively. Through NMSBA, local boards of education are involved in the legislative process to achieve needed school and program reforms. Each effort is focused on the belief that every student is entitled to a free and quality public education. New Mexico’s School Boards Association is affiliated with the national organization (NSBA) that represents state school board associations and their more than 90,000 local school board members.

We believe that education is a constitutional right and a civil right, and public education is America’s most vital institution.