LEARNING POLICY INSTITUTE

OCTOBER 2026

A Path to Teacher Workforce Transformation in New Mexico

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Acknowledgments

The authors thank Annie Armitage, Timothy Bedeaux, Ellen Bernstein, Denise Beutel, Jesse Chenven, Michael Dabrieo, Karen DeMoss, Chris Doliff, Daniel Espinoza, Candice Flint, Kristopher Goodrich, Erika Hunt, Gina Ikemoto, Divya Mansukhani, Efrain Mercado, Francheska Santos, Kristin Swenson, Kersti Tyson, Shophika Vaithyanathasarma, and Phoebe Walendziak, for their insights, feedback, and contributions, without which this report would not have been possible. We are also grateful to the members of the Educator Career Continuum Advisory Group, whose deliberations informed the development of the report. Finally, we thank our Learning Policy Institute (LPI) colleagues Jack Estes, Madelyn Gardener, Stacy Loewe, Hanna Melnick, Ryan Saunders, and Elena Silva for assistance and feedback. We also thank the members of the LPI communications team for their invaluable support. AI tools, specifically Claude, were used to assist with reference formatting and proofreading. All content was reviewed, verified, and revised by the authors, who take full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of this work.

This research was supported by the Thornburg Foundation. Core operating support for LPI is provided by the Heising-Simons Foundation, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Raikes Foundation, Sandler Foundation, Skyline Foundation, and MacKenzie Scott. We are grateful to them for their generous support. The ideas voiced here are those of the authors and not those of our funders.

External Reviewers

This report benefited from the insights and expertise of three external reviewers: Timothy Hand, Founder at Ocotillo Strategies and former New Mexico Deputy Secretary of Education; Melissa Lyon, Assistant Professor at University at Albany, State University of New York; and Glenabah Martinez, Professor at University of New Mexico and Director of the Institute for American Indian Education. We thank them for the care and attention they gave the report.

Suggested citation: Sorensen, L. C., Kini, T., Pedersen, M., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2026). *A path to teacher workforce transformation in New Mexico*. Learning Policy Institute. https://doi.org/10.54300/731.876

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Executive Summary

New Mexico is at an important juncture in building a strong and sustainable teacher workforce. The state serves a student population that is geographically dispersed and rich in cultural and linguistic diversity. This diversity is a major strength, one that calls on schools and educators to respond effectively to varied local contexts and languages while addressing the economic and educational barriers many students face.

The 2018 *Martinez/Yazzie v. State of New Mexico* decision found that the state had failed to provide a constitutionally sufficient education to Native American students, English learners, low-income students, and students with disabilities, with particular concern about access to qualified and effective educators. New Mexico remains under court order to address these inequities. The New Mexico Public Education Department's (PED) 2025 Action Plan positions the teacher workforce as central to the remedy, as it identifies equitable access to well-prepared, culturally and linguistically responsive teachers as one of four critical needs.

Since the ruling, the state raised minimum teacher salaries, expanded paid residencies and other high-quality clinical pathways for teachers, provided scholarships to support school paraprofessionals to pursue teaching credentials, and revamped licensure for school and district leadership. Several indicators have improved. Teacher vacancies declined from their postpandemic peak, pupil-to-teacher ratios fell, educator preparation completions rebounded, the incoming teacher pipeline grew more diverse, and beginning salaries became nationally competitive.

At the same time, shortages remained concentrated in particular fields, positions, and regions. Hispanic, Native American, and Black students continued to have less access than their peers to experienced and fully qualified teachers. Teacher turnover remained substantial, working conditions varied widely, and the rapid growth of alternative preparation pathways reinforced the importance of ensuring that accessible routes into teaching provide strong preparation and support. These challenges were central to the *Martinez/Yazzie* litigation and remained a core element of the remedy and state action sought by the plaintiffs.

This report reviews research on effective approaches to recruiting, preparing, supporting, and retaining teachers; examines New Mexico's recent investments across the educator career continuum; and assesses the condition of the state's teacher workforce. The findings point to an opportunity to align these investments into a coherent system that supports teachers throughout their careers.

Key Findings

Staffing indicators improved, but shortages remained concentrated and unequally distributed. Teacher vacancies rose to 5.1 unfilled positions per 100 teachers in fall 2021 before declining to 2.9 in fall 2025. Shortages remained especially persistent in special education, math, and science. Districts also reported high vacancy ratios among guidance counselors,

paraeducators, and instructional assistants, and administrator vacancies increased over the past several years.

The effects of these shortages were not evenly distributed. Native American students had the greatest exposure to out-of-field and emergency or provisionally licensed teachers. Black and Hispanic students attended schools with the largest shares of teachers with 5 or fewer years of experience.

The statewide pupil-to-teacher ratio declined from 15.9 in 2018–19 to 13.1 in 2024–25 after nearly 2 decades of relative stability. Yet disparities remained. Hispanic students and English learners attended schools with higher pupil-to-teacher ratios. Because teacher experience, preparation, and class size can influence student learning, how these staffing resources are distributed across schools matters as much as statewide averages.

The teacher preparation pipeline recovered and diversified, but over 40% of candidates entered as teachers of record while still completing their training. Educator preparation program (EPP) completions fell from 1,413 in 2011–12 to 733 in 2017–18, then rose each year after 2019–20 to reach 1,347 in 2023–24, a 74% increase in 4 years. The pipeline also became more diverse: Between 2018–19 and 2023–24, the White share of completers fell from 57.8% to 38.9%, while the Hispanic or Latino/a share rose from 37.5% to 49.7%.

Much of this increase in teacher supply came through candidates who served as the teacher of record while still completing their training. This path was especially common in the state's highest-shortage fields, where 66% of special education completers and 53% of secondary education completers entered this way, compared with 44% of completers statewide. Research has found that teacher-of-record entry pathways can expand access for career changers, paraprofessionals, and candidates who cannot forgo earnings, but are also associated with higher average attrition and wide variation in program quality. The growth of teacher-of-record pathways reinforces the importance of substantial clinical experience, practice-based coursework, skilled mentoring, and early-career support.

Teacher residencies offer a promising and growing model for combining accessibility with strong preparation. New Mexico moved from supporting approximately 40 residents at two universities in 2020 to operating a statewide initiative across a majority of preparation providers. By 2024–25, around one in five EPP completers (and one in four EPP completers at eligible institutions) fulfilled their clinical requirements through a paid residency placement.

Research has suggested that well-designed, paid residencies can address several workforce needs at once. They reduce candidates' financial barriers, provide a yearlong apprenticeship alongside an experienced mentor, and allow districts to target recruitment and placements around anticipated vacancies in high-need schools and fields. Several studies have shown that residency graduates demonstrated stronger initial classroom performance and higher retention in their schools and in teaching, and residency programs nationally enrolled substantially larger shares of candidates of color than traditional preparation programs. These benefits depended on program

design, including strong EPP–district partnerships, effective mentor teachers, coursework aligned with clinical practice, and financial support, often tied to continued service.

Teacher compensation became more competitive, but disparities remained across districts and career stages. Minimum salaries by licensure level increased to $40,000, $50,000, and $60,000 in 2019–20; $50,000, $60,000, and $70,000 in 2022–23; and $55,000, $65,000, and $75,000 in 2025–26. In 2024–25, New Mexico ranked 7th nationally in average starting salary and 24th in average top salary.

Research has consistently linked higher salaries to stronger recruitment and retention, especially in rural and high-poverty schools, and has found that targeted incentives can improve retention in hard-to-staff settings. In New Mexico, however, average salaries still varied widely across districts; with the lowest average pay, the Northeast region had the state's highest teacher vacancy rate in 2025. Statewide minimums also did not fully address local staffing challenges or limited earnings growth later in the career.

Retention depends on working conditions, leadership, and professional growth as well as compensation. Before recent statewide initiatives, among teachers employed in 2020–21, about one in five was no longer in the same school after 1 year, and nearly one in three was no longer there after 2 years. National survey data similarly estimated that roughly 18% of New Mexico teachers left their schools between 2020–21 and 2021–22.

Teachers in lower-turnover districts in New Mexico reported stronger leadership continuity, better administrative support, and more time for planning and collaboration. These patterns aligned with broader research linking supportive school leadership and working conditions to teacher retention. Evidence was particularly strong for some supports, including sustained induction and mentoring for beginning teachers, while teachers also reported valuing opportunities for collaboration and relevant, job-embedded professional learning.

New Mexico has put many elements of a strong educator system in place. The next challenge is to coordinate and sustain them—work that takes time to show results, making it essential to stay the course. Research has suggested that strong preparation must be paired with induction and leadership; competitive starting pay must be complemented by supportive working conditions and advancement opportunities; and, consistent with concerns raised by *Martinez/Yazzie* plaintiffs about the limits of universal approaches, statewide investments must be targeted to the students, schools, and communities with the greatest needs.

Policy Considerations

These findings point to a need for greater coherence and alignment across New Mexico's educator workforce system. The state has made ambitious investments across the teacher career continuum, but many policies, programs, and pathways have developed separately over time. The next phase should focus on aligning these efforts within and across key areas of the system so they reinforce one another rather than operate in isolation. Three priorities can help advance

that work: (1) strengthening and coordinating preparation; (2) supporting teachers to stay, grow, and lead; and (3) building enabling infrastructure to support the educator ecosystem. Based on emerging local evidence and research on effective practices in other contexts, we offer the following specific recommendations.

Strengthen and Coordinate Preparation

Continue to broaden access to high-quality preparation pathways, including through teacher residencies and Grow Your Own programs. With residencies and other paid clinical pathways now serving a substantial and increasingly diverse share of candidates, New Mexico should provide stable, predictable funding for teacher residencies, paid student teaching, registered apprenticeships, and Grow Your Own programs. Sustained funding will give these initiatives time to strengthen implementation and generate evidence about their effects.

Ensure a common set of standards for all pathways into teaching. As alternative teacher-of-record and portfolio pathways account for a growing share of new teachers, the state should use the common standards recently developed by EPPs and other interest holders to align expectations for high-quality preparation across undergraduate and postbaccalaureate programs and across student teaching, residency, portfolio, and teacher-of-record pathways. These standards emphasize better preparing teachers to meet New Mexico students' diverse cultural and linguistic needs. PED could require programs to demonstrate alignment through a redesigned approval or reauthorization process.

Scale and stabilize educator scholarships and loan forgiveness programs. Financial barriers are a well-documented factor in teacher entry and retention. New Mexico should provide recurring funding to expand the Teacher Preparation Affordability Scholarship and Teacher Loan Repayment Program so that eligible aspiring and current teachers can reliably count on and access support over time.

Support Teachers to Stay, Grow, and Lead

Attend to competitive compensation and career pathways to support a more equitable distribution of qualified teachers. Recent salary increases improved New Mexico's wage competitiveness, but did not eliminate pay disparities across districts or address limited salary growth later in teachers' careers. The state should maintain competitive minimum salaries, evaluate the Teacher Cost Index and targeted incentives, including their effects on staffing in high-need schools and fields, and build on National Board stipends and innovative staffing pilots to expand compensated roles for accomplished teachers in mentoring and instructional leadership.

Strengthen principal preparation and retention, especially in high-need, high-turnover schools. Given the close connection between leadership, working conditions, and teacher retention, New Mexico should support strong implementation and evaluation of its new principal and superintendent preparation, residency, coaching, and licensure initiatives. Sustained funding would give these programs time to become fully operational, refine their design and implementation, and

evaluate results. Once the principal residency is fully developed, the state could explore whether a registered apprenticeship model might open additional funding opportunities.

Implement regular statewide surveys of teacher and other staff perceptions of working conditions. Because turnover varies widely across districts and the state lacks consistent information on workplace conditions, New Mexico should regularly survey teachers and other school staff about leadership, collaboration, planning time, professional support, and other aspects of teaching and learning conditions. Results should be reported in ways that help state and district leaders target improvement efforts.

Build Enabling Infrastructure to Support the Educator Ecosystem

Strengthen educator workforce data and research infrastructure. New Mexico should publish consistent turnover measures, strengthen classroom-level student-teacher data linkages, continue developing cradle-to-career data infrastructure, and build rigorous evaluations into major educator workforce initiatives. Evaluation should support continuous improvement and examine effects on recruitment, retention, equitable access to qualified teachers, and student outcomes. The limited state-specific causal evidence that is currently available should not obscure encouraging educator workforce trends or the broader research supporting many of these investments; instead, it underscores the importance of sustaining reforms long enough to assess and improve them.

Foster alignment and coherence across the interconnected components of New Mexico's educator ecosystem. Since preparation, licensure, hiring, professional learning, compensation, career pathways, and working conditions are shaped by multiple policies and institutions, New Mexico should work to better align these efforts and strengthen coordination among the diverse set of actors who design, implement, and experience these components.

Policy design and implementation should meaningfully involve educators, EPPs, districts, the state's 23 Native Nations and Native communities, professional associations, students, and families, especially through evidence and priorities provided by communities at the center of the *Martinez/Yazzie* decision. Policies are more coherent, effectively implemented, and durable through political transitions when they are embedded in educator ecosystem considerations. These considerations should take place within broader education governance and long-term planning while also sustaining coordination through existing and emerging advisory structures. Adequate staffing and capacity at PED will be needed to achieve these outcomes.

Building a Sustainable Teacher Ecosystem

A Systems View of the Teacher Workforce

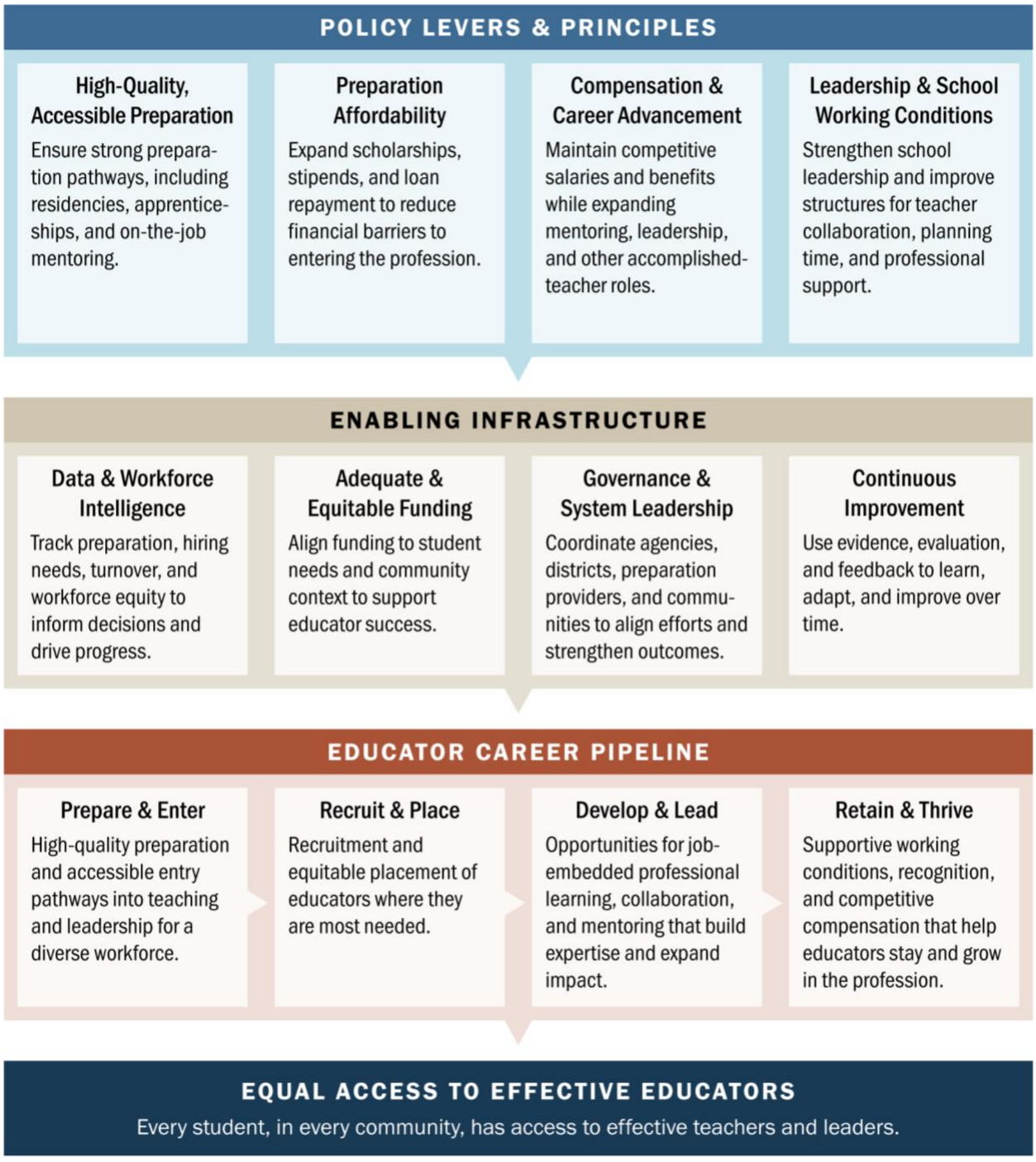
There are no silver bullets or quick fixes for strengthening the teaching profession. Building a high-quality teacher workforce requires sustained policy attention to the conditions that shape teachers' experiences across the full span of their careers. As noted in the 2026 Policy Framework for a Cohesive and Sustained Educator Workforce Ecosystem commissioned by the New Mexico Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, an education workforce system refers to the "formal policies, structures, and processes that govern the workforce," whereas an education workforce ecosystem refers to the "broader set of stakeholders, relationships, and contextual factors that collectively shape the workforce's health and functioning."[1]

Figure 1 illustrates one possible model of such an ecosystem in New Mexico, in which infrastructure, systems, and policies are aligned to support a high-functioning educator workforce. In this model, the ultimate goal is equal access to effective educators: Every student, in every community, should have access to effective teachers and school leaders. Achieving that goal requires support across four broad stages of the teacher career:

1. **Prepare and enter**, which includes building robust preparation and accessible pathways into teaching and leadership that support a diverse workforce;
2. **Recruit and place**, which involves attracting educators and equitably assigning them to positions that fit the needs of teachers, schools, and districts;
3. **Develop and lead**, which focuses on job-embedded professional learning, collaboration, mentoring, and leadership opportunities that build expertise and expand impact; and
4. **Retain and thrive**, which emphasizes supportive working conditions, recognition, and competitive compensation that help educators remain and flourish in the profession.

At the top of the ecosystem model is a non-exhaustive set of state investments and policy levers that can support teachers across these four stages of their careers. These include high-quality preparation pathways, financial support for preparation, compensation and career advancement opportunities, and strengthened principal preparation. For these investments to translate into improved educator and student outcomes, however, the state's public education system also needs key enabling infrastructure. This includes a reliable, comprehensive, and accessible data system; adequate and equitable school funding; stable governance and system leadership; and a culture of continuous improvement.

Figure 1. Policy Foundations for a High-Functioning Educator Ecosystem in New Mexico



Source: Learning Policy Institute. (2026).

This framework emerges from collaborative discussions of the Educator Ecosystem Working Group convened by the Thornburg Foundation. It aligns with the Legislative Education Study Committee's Roadmap for public education improvement, specifically its educator ecosystem focus area, one of four alongside whole-child supports, academic design, and overarching systems.[2] It also aligns with statements from the Tribal Education Alliance on the need for certain initiatives—such as pay equity for Native language teachers, local collaborations between EPPs and schools, Native teacher pipelines, and anti-racist training—as part of a "vibrant educator ecosystem."[3]

Although this ecosystem model encompasses a broad set of educators, the current report focuses on the circumstances of K–12 teachers. Fully transforming a teacher workforce requires structural changes that extend beyond any single program, funding stream, or legislative session. Nonetheless, New Mexico can take action now on a range of practices, policies, and investments that are supported by rigorous research. The state and its districts and schools have existing models of policy success in contexts with similar teacher workforce challenges on which to build. Sustaining a strong teacher workforce requires coordinated investment across all four career stages, not only in a single area. This section therefore reviews the current evidence on what works to recruit, prepare, retain, and develop effective teachers.

Recruiting and Preparing Excellent Teachers

Attracting Teachers to the Profession

The first step to building an educator ecosystem that sustainably provides all students with access to effective teachers is to recruit highly capable individuals into the profession and ensure they receive excellent training and preparation. For prospective teachers to choose teaching as a career path, they must view the profession as worthwhile based on some combination of intrinsic, extrinsic, and altruistic factors. Current and prospective teachers have often cited motivations such as interest in a subject area, a desire to work with children or youth, and belief in the value of teaching.[4] However, among groups that are underrepresented in teaching—including men; racial and ethnic minorities; and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) graduates—prior research has found that extrinsic considerations such as professional status, working conditions, and long-term compensation were especially salient.[5] Attention to school working conditions, compensation, and the broader effort to strengthen teaching as a stable, respected career is therefore essential for building a robust and diverse teacher pipeline.

Nationally, student-reported interest in teaching fell to very low levels in the 2010s and has shown only limited recovery, while teacher preparation completions remained well below prior peaks.[6] One potential contributor was stagnant teacher pay. Over the last decade, inflation-adjusted weekly wages declined by $46 for teachers while increasing by $220 for other college graduates.[7] As a result, teachers continued to earn less than similarly educated workers, even after adjusting for demographic differences. The size of this gap varied widely across states:

teachers earned approximately 10% less than comparable nonteacher workers in Rhode Island and nearly 40% less in Colorado; in New Mexico, the gap was 17.3%.[8] These wage penalties matter: Research has shown that prospective teachers are more likely to enter the profession when salaries are competitive with those of other college-educated workers.[9] Compensation can also shape the quality, not just the quantity, of the teacher pipeline. For example, a recent study in New Jersey found that the average effectiveness of new teacher entrants increased significantly after the state raised its minimum beginning teacher salary to $50,000, an average increase of about $1,500 for each teacher.[10] Taken together, this evidence suggested that competitive teacher compensation is not simply a benefit for current teachers, but a necessary condition for making teaching a high-status, attractive profession that can draw and keep the talented educators students need.

Balancing Access and Quality in Teacher Preparation

Compensation is one important lever for making teaching more attractive, but states and districts are also experimenting with different pathways into the profession, particularly as traditional preparation enrollments decline. These pathways vary widely in their design, quality, and outcomes. Policymakers have pursued them for several overlapping reasons, including addressing immediate shortages in fields such as special education, bilingual education, and STEM, as well as in hard-to-staff schools and regions.[11] They are also viewed as a potential means of diversifying the teacher pipeline by reducing the financial and logistical barriers that traditional preparation can pose for some prospective teachers of color and low-income candidates.[12]

Alternative pathways can also provide more flexible entry points for paraprofessionals, mid-career professionals, subject-matter experts, and others who may not be able to easily pursue traditional preparation. Some programs, such as Teach For America and TNTP Teaching Fellows, use a distinct model that selectively recruits candidates and places them in high-need schools while they complete certification. Yet, selectivity and flexibility alone provide limited information about the quality of candidates' preparation or about the pathway's effects on teacher and student outcomes.

Despite the potential benefits of alternative preparation pathways, these approaches also raise concerns about their long-term implications for the teaching profession. Research has shown that alternatively prepared teachers tend to turn over and leave the profession at higher rates than traditionally prepared teachers on average.[13] This attrition can disrupt student learning and school stability while also exacerbating future shortages, given the cyclical nature of teacher turnover.[14] In addition, the quality of alternative preparation varies widely across program types, and its effectiveness depends in part on the prior qualifications of the candidates entering through these routes.[15] Many alternative programs also lack key elements of high-quality preparation, including meaningful clinical experiences, sustained mentoring, and applied coursework connected to classroom practice.[16]

These concerns point to a broader lesson from the teacher preparation literature: Expanding access to the profession is most promising when new pathways preserve the core features of high-quality preparation. A review of research was conducted as part of a National Academy of Education consensus report on teacher preparation, and it found that both the quality of clinical experiences and quality of coursework predicted candidates' readiness for the classroom. Coursework appeared particularly valuable when it is practice-based and includes carefully designed simulations that pair opportunities to rehearse teaching with individualized coaching.[17] These kinds of practice-based learning opportunities have demonstrated positive effects on candidates' feelings of preparedness and efficacy, as well as on their observed classroom performance. Similarly, a study of a national sample of beginning teachers found that those who received more preservice pedagogical preparation—including methods courses, selecting materials, learning theory, and teaching observation—had significantly lower rates of attrition.[18] This finding was especially relevant for STEM teachers, who were less likely to enter teaching with general pedagogical training. In each of these cases, however, the research concluded that practical teaching experience under the guidance of an expert mentor teacher was the most important element of high-quality preparation.

Promising Models: Teacher Residencies, Apprenticeships, and Other Grow Your Own Programs

Teacher Residencies

Teacher residencies build on this emphasis on practical teaching experience by pairing intensive clinical preparation—typically with financial support for candidates—with a targeted approach to district staffing needs.[19] In residency programs, candidates typically complete a yearlong preservice apprenticeship alongside an experienced mentor teacher in a classroom setting.[20] Because residents often receive financial support during preparation in exchange for a commitment to teach in a partner district, residencies can reduce barriers to entry while helping districts recruit candidates for high-need subjects and schools. These features have also helped residencies bring a more racially diverse set of teachers into the profession. Among programs in the National Center for Teacher Residencies network, 69% of the residents in 2022–23 identified as people of color, compared to 32% of preservice teachers nationally.[21] Residencies also appeared well aligned with districts' staffing needs: Among 2021–22 graduates of the 47 programs in the same network, 25% taught in math, science, or technology fields; 25% taught special education; 18% taught English learners; and 83% taught in Title I schools.[22] Residencies therefore offer a promising pathway for building a more inclusive teacher workforce while helping districts address shortages in the schools and subjects where staffing needs are greatest.

A growing body of research across contexts has suggested that teachers who complete residencies are more likely to remain in their schools and districts, rate their preparation experiences more favorably, and perform better in the classroom.[23] For example, a study of Boston Public Schools found that 80% of Boston Teacher Residency teachers remained teaching

in the district for at least 3 years, compared to 63% of non-residency teachers. After 5 years, 75% of the residency teachers remained in the district compared to 51% of non-residency teachers.[24] A recent large-scale study in Tennessee found that new teachers who completed yearlong field placement during preparation, a feature commonly associated with residency programs, initially outperformed peers who completed traditional student teaching placements on both classroom observation ratings and value-added estimates of student achievement growth.[25] These teachers also improved more rapidly during their first 5 years in the classroom.[26] The magnitude of these differences was substantial: Teachers with prior yearlong field placements entered their first year of teaching with performance ahead of their peers by the equivalent of around 4 years of average teacher growth.[27]

These benefits, however, have depended heavily on program design. Research has suggested that residency programs are most likely to deliver these benefits when they include:

- strong partnerships between local educational agencies (LEAs) and educator preparation programs;
- full-year residency coteaching alongside an expert mentor teacher;
- coursework that is tightly integrated with clinical practice;
- cohorts of residents placed in schools that model good practices with diverse learners;
- ongoing mentoring and support for graduates;
- high-ability, diverse candidates recruited to meet specific LEA hiring needs; and
- financial support for residents in exchange for a 3- to 5-year teaching commitment.[28]

Reflecting growing interest in this model, as of summer 2025, 27 states had created or supported teacher residency programs through statute or regulation, and 3 additional states provided funding for teacher residency initiatives.[29]

Grow Your Own Initiatives

Many residencies have an explicit Grow Your Own (GYO) focus, aimed at recruiting and preparing future teachers from within the local community who will remain and serve there. However, the GYO model is a more encompassing term—inclusive of, but going beyond, residencies. GYO programs are typically designed to "recruit, prepare, and place community members to become teachers through partnerships between educator preparation programs, school districts or local educational agencies, and community-based organizations."[30] The conceptual underpinning of these programs is that teachers with deep roots in a community may bring important knowledge of students' needs, circumstances, and strengths. This can be particularly valuable for students of color, who may otherwise have limited access to educators who share their racial or ethnic identities, understand their community contexts, and affirm their cultural backgrounds and lived experiences.[31]

Because GYO is an umbrella term rather than a single program model, the evidence base is still emerging and varies by pathway type. GYO initiatives have varied widely in their stated purposes, targeted participants, and program design, making generalizable evaluation

challenging.[32] Some programs train paraprofessionals to become teachers; others use "2+2" models in which candidates begin teacher preparation at a community college and complete their degree at a 4-year institution; and still others embed education-focused career pathways into high school coursework.[33] One recent study examined the Teacher Academy of Maryland (TAM), a high school GYO model that provided early exposure to teaching through a course-based career and technical education sequence. Through TAM, students could earn an industry-recognized certificate that made them immediately eligible to work as instructional assistants in public schools, as well as college credits that could transfer toward a degree. Overall, TAM increased high school graduation, 4-year college enrollment, entry into teaching, and average adult wages for participants. These positive impacts were concentrated among White and Black female students. However, the pathways differed by race: TAM increased White girls' likelihood of pursuing a bachelor's degree in teaching, while increasing Black girls' likelihood of pursuing alternative certification.[34]

Another GYO model, the Pathways to Teaching Careers Program (Pathways), was an earlier national initiative that recruited paraprofessionals and returning Peace Corps volunteers to teach in hard-to-staff urban and rural schools. An evaluation found that Pathways was highly effective at filling needed positions in targeted districts.[35] Participants completed the program at higher rates than the national average for students in traditional teacher education programs. Pathways graduates were also perceived as more effective than typical beginning teachers and were more likely to remain in teaching for at least 3 years.[36] In combination with high-quality preparation and mentoring, GYO programs have the potential to shore up teacher supply, diversify the profession, and strengthen community-level connections between students and their classroom teachers.

Teacher Apprenticeships

Registered teacher apprenticeship programs represent a relatively new pathway into teaching that is growing in popularity. Apprenticeships share the following features: a paid job and progressively increasing wages; structured on-the-job mentorship from an experienced mentor; supplemental instruction that builds on on-the-job training; portable, nationally recognized credentials, such as a teaching license; and a design intended to meet the needs of the communities in which programs operate and support diversity, equity, and inclusion.[37] These apprenticeships are formally registered with the U.S. Department of Labor or a state apprenticeship agency. They follow the same framework used for skilled trades, with the state or another designated entity acting as the official sponsor overseeing participating district and university partners. As of summer 2025, a national scan identified 157 teacher degree apprenticeships across 44 states and Washington, DC.[38]

Because registered teacher apprenticeship programs are so new—the first federally registered teacher apprenticeship launched in Tennessee in 2022—there is not yet a body of direct evidence on their effects. Early experience in Tennessee has nevertheless suggested that the model can reduce financial barriers by allowing candidates to earn wages while completing preparation, while also reaching a more diverse and nontraditional pool of prospective teachers than the

state's existing workforce.[39] As of August 2025, Tennessee's Grow Your Own Center reported total enrollment of 1,118 across the teacher apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship, and instructional leader residency programs in 96 approved districts, with an 86% retention/completion rate. This included 277 teachers who completed licensure, 318 instructional leaders who completed their program, 464 teacher apprentices still enrolled, and 73 pre-apprentices enrolled in the community college pipeline.[40] Following an initial $20 million federal investment to launch the center, Tennessee increasingly combined grant funding with state workforce development funds, financial aid, and district contributions to support the model.[41]

Evidence from related pathways has also provided reason for optimism. Registered apprenticeships share core features with teacher residencies, including extended clinical preparation, close mentorship, and coursework integrated with classroom practice. Research on residencies has found benefits for teacher recruitment, diversity, and retention.[42] Apprenticeships also overlap with GYO approaches in their emphasis on creating accessible, locally rooted pathways into teaching; emerging GYO research has likewise indicated these approaches can increase entry into the profession and broaden the pool of prospective teachers.[43] The strong resemblance to residencies and GYO models makes apprenticeships a genuinely promising addition to the pipeline, even as direct evidence for the approach is still being built.[44]

Supporting Teachers to Stay, Grow, and Lead

Building a robust supply of well-qualified teachers begins with recruiting a strong pool of candidates into preparation pathways and providing them with rigorous preparation and classroom training. But recruitment and preparation alone are not enough. States and districts must also retain teachers in the profession and in the schools where they are needed most; support ongoing professional learning and development; and create opportunities for teacher leadership that foster collaboration, mentoring, and collective improvement. This section describes evidence on how policy can best support these goals.

Mentoring and Induction of Novice Teachers

Teachers often face their steepest challenges with classroom instruction and behavior management in their first few years of teaching—the same period when they are most likely to leave their schools or the profession.[45] This early-career turnover can destabilize instructional quality in ways that harm student learning, impose financial costs for districts, and weaken schools' social networks and institutional knowledge.[46] Although 44% of beginning teachers leave in their first 5 years, research has documented that those who receive mentoring or induction support are significantly less likely to turn over or leave the profession.[47] These programs have helped counter an often isolating culture in teaching in which new teachers may be left "on their own and presumed expert" by their colleagues.[48]

Induction can be defined as "the multi-faceted process of teacher development and novice teachers' continued learning-to-teach through an organized professional development program of

educative mentor support and formative assessment."[49] Induction programs can serve multiple purposes, including support, socialization, development, and assessment. They can also encompass a range of activities such as orientations, seminars, workshops, classes, and mentoring.[50] Mentoring, or the provision of guidance in schools from veteran teachers to beginning teachers, has become the most common form of induction. As of 2025, 32 states require some amount of induction and mentoring support for new teachers, though the required length of support varies. Fourteen states require only 1 year of support or do not specify a length of time; nine states require 2 years; and nine states require 3 or more years.[51] Some states provide dedicated funding for induction and mentoring through different mechanisms, including Michigan's district grants of up to $10 million annually and Texas's allotment of $3,000 per eligible first- or second-year teacher in participating districts.[52]

A 2011 review of empirical research conducted since the mid-1980s found that beginning teachers who participated in some form of induction performed better across multiple dimensions of teaching, including "keeping students on task, using effective student questioning practices, adjusting classroom activities to meet students' interests, maintaining a positive classroom atmosphere, and demonstrating successful classroom management."[53] Most of the 15 studies reviewed found that beginning teachers who received induction or mentoring support reported higher commitment to teaching and had higher retention rates. Nearly all found that students of beginning teachers who participated in induction had higher achievement or achievement growth than students of other beginning teachers.[54] One comprehensive randomized controlled trial in elementary schools in a large urban district found that 2 years of comprehensive induction improved student achievement, though its impacts on teacher retention were more limited.[55]

A more recent 2023 review synthesized research on novice teacher mentoring and induction programs published between 2010 and 2019.[56] Using meta-analytic techniques, the authors found that induction and mentoring programs had statistically significant positive effects, on average, on both teacher and student outcomes. These included effects on teacher retention, student achievement, and other teacher outcomes related to efficacy. Among intervention studies, positive effects of mentoring and induction were largest in elementary schools, though effects remained positive across other school levels.

The induction programs that most strongly reduced beginning teacher turnover tended to share several features. These included matching teachers with mentors from the same field, providing common planning time with teachers in the same subject, scheduling regular collaboration with other teachers, and connecting beginning teachers to an external network of educators.[57] Yet research has found that access to these favorable conditions is uneven. A study of randomly selected first- and second-year teachers in Florida, Massachusetts, and Michigan concluded that beginning teachers in schools serving high proportions of low-income students, as well as beginning teachers in STEM subjects, were much less likely to have mentoring relationships with these supportive features.[58] Beginning teachers of color were also less likely to receive

formal induction or mentoring support, a disparity that may have contributed to their higher attrition rates.[59]

In sum, this evidence suggests that mentoring and induction are most effective when they are treated not as brief orientation activities, but as structured, sustained supports for novice teachers' instructional development, professional integration, and long-term retention.

Compensation, Working Conditions, and Retention

Financial Conditions of Teaching

Beyond induction, a range of working conditions can shape whether teachers remain in their schools and in the profession. Compensation is one important factor. Several recent studies have demonstrated that raising teacher salaries can improve retention, especially when increases are meaningful. Targeted incentives can also be a useful strategy for addressing persistent staffing challenges in particular schools, regions, or subjects. Prior research has long linked teacher turnover to both the absolute level of teacher pay and teachers' wages relative to other labor-market opportunities. Teachers were more likely to leave when salaries were lower or less competitive with plausible alternatives outside their current position.[60]

One recent study examining Arkansas's LEARNS Act, which increased the minimum teacher salary from $36,000 to $50,000 and guaranteed all teachers a minimum $2,000 raise, found that teachers who received raises were about 2 percentage points more likely to remain in their schools. These gains were driven by reductions in voluntary departures and retirements from the Arkansas public school system.[61] The effects were concentrated among teachers receiving larger increases: Raises of less than $4,000 had no significant effect, while increases of $4,000 to $6,000 raised retention by 1.4 percentage points; increases of $6,000 to $8,000 raised it by 2.2 percentage points; and increases exceeding $8,000 raised it by 3.1 percentage points. Because the policy-induced raises were concentrated in rural and high-poverty districts, correspondingly, teacher retention improved most in those communities.[62]

Research on state school finance reforms pointed to a similar relationship between teacher salaries and retention. One national study found that school finance reforms increased teacher salaries by approximately $4,000, on average, and reduced teacher turnover by 3 percentage points, though the retention gains from salary increases emerged gradually.[63] Districts that increased teacher salaries more following state school finance reforms also experienced larger student achievement gains in subsequent years.[64]

Targeted salary incentives have also improved retention for teachers in specific schools or subjects. For example, a $5,000 bonus provided to effective teachers in Tennessee's lowest-performing schools increased the likelihood that teachers in tested subjects remained in those schools by approximately 20%.[65] Similarly, Georgia provided math and science teachers with salary supplements equivalent to additional years of experience on the statewide salary schedule—6 years for beginning teachers—and reduced attrition in those subjects by 18%–

28%.[66] Overall, this evidence indicated that compensation matters for retention when salary increases are large enough to affect teachers' real economic choices, especially in the schools, regions, and subjects where staffing challenges are most acute.

Social Conditions of Teaching

At the same time, compensation is only one part of the broader set of working conditions that shape whether teachers remain in their schools and in the profession. Nguyen and Springer identified three sets of interacting factors that can influence a teacher's likelihood of turnover: external or policy factors, personal factors, and school factors.[67] External or policy factors included the accountability environment, such as teacher evaluation systems; workforce policies, such as compensation and union status; and school improvement policies, such as reform interventions. Personal factors included demographic characteristics; intrinsic factors, such as career satisfaction and motivation; and qualifications, such as experience, educational attainment, and certification type. Finally, school factors included organizational conditions such as the work environment, administrative support, teacher collaboration, classroom autonomy, professional work time, induction and mentoring, access to resources, and student body characteristics.

These authors identified several clear policy levers for reducing teacher turnover. They noted that new teachers, as well as those in STEM and special education, were at the highest risk of leaving the profession. Improving school working conditions—such as strengthening administrative support, enhancing teacher collaboration, providing targeted professional development, reducing student disciplinary disruptions, and expanding classroom autonomy—could significantly reduce attrition.[68]

Workload and the allocation of teachers' time are also important dimensions of working conditions. U.S. teachers reported working more than 45 hours per week on average, compared with fewer than 41 hours across other countries that participated in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, while spending roughly 6 additional hours per week actively teaching.[69] This left comparatively less time for planning, collaboration, professional learning, and other responsibilities outside the classroom. Between 2018 and 2024, the United States was also the only participating country in which teachers reported a decline in time spent collaborating with colleagues. These differences may have mattered for retention: Nearly 30% of U.S. middle school teachers under age 30 reported planning to leave teaching within the next 5 years, compared with about 20% across participating countries.[70]

Across this body of research, school leadership emerged as the most critical element of working conditions.[71] Effective principals played a central role in shaping school environments that are characterized by collaboration, trust, and continuous improvement, with effects that extend to all teachers. These dynamics were particularly pronounced in schools serving large numbers of disadvantaged students, where the relationship between principal effectiveness, teacher satisfaction, and retention is especially strong.[72]

Other summaries of the research pointed to several practical strategies for improving working conditions and retaining educators.[73] These included:

- investing in the development of high-quality principals who engage teachers in decision-making and foster positive school cultures;
- systematically surveying teachers to assess the quality of the teaching and learning environment and guide improvement efforts; and
- supporting professional development and school redesign strategies that create greater opportunities for collaboration.

Community schools by design partner with families and community organizations to provide expanded, enriched learning opportunities; rigorous, community-connected classroom instruction; a culture of belonging, safety, and care; integrated systems of support (e.g., mental health services, meals, health care); powerful student and family engagement; and collaborative leadership and shared power and voice. As a school redesign strategy, community schools have strengthened teacher working conditions and student learning conditions, increased teacher retention, and improved student outcomes.[74] New Mexico has made substantial investments in community schools since 2019, and early research on implementation suggested high rates of retention in community schools.[75]

Educator Leadership Pathways

A strong educator workforce system gives teachers meaningful opportunities to take on leadership roles. High-performing education systems such as Finland and Singapore offer prominent examples of this approach.[76] These roles may involve instructional leadership, such as serving as a mentor teacher, lead teacher, or instructional coach; they may also involve administrative leadership, such as becoming an assistant principal, principal, or district leader. (See Investing in School Leaders to Empower Teachers.)

Instructional Leadership

Research supported the value of instructional leadership pathways for both teacher retention and student achievement. New York City's Teacher Career Pathways initiative improved English language arts (ELA) and math achievement in schools that staffed formal teacher-leader roles, with gains increasing over time in both subjects.[77] An evaluation of the Leading Educators Fellowship, which provides sustained, collaborative, job-embedded professional development to instructional leaders, likewise found significant increases in ELA and math proficiency.[78] Chicago's Teacher Advancement Program produced no immediate effects on student achievement but substantially increased retention, with teachers in participating schools being 20% more likely to remain in the same schools 3 years later.[79]

National Board Certification offers another approach to recognizing accomplished teachers and positioning them to assume broader instructional leadership responsibilities. A substantial body of research found that National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) are more effective than

otherwise similar teachers. One study from Texas estimated that students taught by NBCTs gained approximately 3.5 additional months of learning in math and 1.5 additional months in ELA.[80] The same study found that these students were 18% less likely to be suspended and 10% less likely to be chronically absent than similar students taught by other teachers. NBCTs can also serve as mentors, instructional coaches, team leaders, and facilitators of professional learning, allowing their expertise to extend beyond their own classrooms. In a study in San Francisco, beginning teachers mentored by NBCTs demonstrated stronger emotional-support and classroom-organization practices and produced higher student achievement than beginning teachers mentored by non-NBCTs, although the small sample warrants some caution.[81]

Across these different models, providing accomplished teachers with formal, compensated leadership consistently improved either retention or student achievement—often both.

Strategic Staffing

Schools, districts, and states have increasingly sought out innovative approaches for organizing instructional staff within and across classrooms. Often called "strategic staffing," these models aimed to address several well-documented challenges with the traditional one-teacher-per-classroom structure. In the traditional structure, teachers frequently reported feeling isolated in their classrooms, and beginning teachers in particular reported that they could benefit from more regular observation and modeling by experienced colleagues.[82] The traditional model also offers teachers only two paths for career advancement: remain in the classroom with limited pay growth or leave the classroom entirely for administrative or nonteaching roles. This structure is also inflexible: Research has identified teacher absences as a constant challenge to cover with substitutes, often resulting in lost instructional time for students.[83] The growing share of students with individualized education plans learning in inclusive classrooms has increased the need for additional instructional personnel to support them.[84] Strategic staffing models aim to address these challenges by organizing teachers into teams that are responsible for larger groups of students, with roles and responsibilities differentiated by expertise and an emphasis on collaboration and mutual support.[85] These teams typically combine licensed educators with paraeducators.

Research on the effectiveness of strategic staffing is still emerging, but the evidence to date is encouraging. Two evaluations of Public Impact's Opportunity Culture initiative, which extends the reach of highly effective teachers by placing them in multi-classroom leadership roles, found that students taught by participating teams and multi-classroom leaders performed better in math and reading.[86] These studies examined implementation in Charlotte and Cabarrus County, North Carolina; Syracuse, New York; and Ector County, Texas. Most recently, an evaluation of the Next Education Workforce team-teaching model in a large Arizona district found that teachers working in teams had significantly lower turnover rates and higher evaluation ratings, consistent with the possibility that greater collaboration, specialization, and decision-making authority may strengthen teachers' working conditions.[87] The study also found gains in math achievement in middle schools, though not in elementary schools. The authors suggested that the middle school gains may reflect improved instructional differentiation, while in elementary schools the benefits

of team teaching may be partly offset by the added coordination demands of introducing greater specialization into traditionally self-contained classrooms.[88]

A qualitative study conducted 42 interviews with education leaders and technical assistance providers across six school systems that implemented strategic staffing initiatives. The findings help illuminate both the mechanisms that may underlie these positive quantitative findings and the challenges involved in implementation.[89] All leaders who were interviewed strongly supported their strategic staffing initiatives. Some reported fewer vacancies, lower staff stress and burnout, and greater comfort among teachers in raising concerns; others described stronger communities and more robust collaboration that led to more effective teaching.[90]

At the same time, leaders emphasized that existing education systems are often poorly configured for these kinds of structural changes. State policies governing accountability, licensure, class size, and salary schedules can constrain districts' flexibility to adopt team-based staffing models. Implementation may also require changes to core district processes, including data systems, scheduling, hiring and training, and collective bargaining arrangements. Making these changes can demand substantial time and capacity from district leaders.[91] Overall, strategic staffing initiatives have shown real promise, but realizing them may require redesign of state and district administrative systems to better support team-based models.

For New Mexico, the evidence from this section provided a foundation for assessing the teacher workforce policies through an ecosystem lens: considering how conditions shaping preparation, recruitment, and retention interact rather than operate in isolation. The following section examines where New Mexico's recent investments and policy choices align with this evidence, where progress is underway, and where opportunities for further development remain.

Investing in School Leaders to Empower Teachers

Recruiting and developing highly effective administrative leaders is also critical to school improvement. A synthesis of research on principals found that replacing a below-average elementary school principal with an above-average principal would, on average, result in gains equivalent to an additional 2.9 months of learning in math and 2.7 months in reading for students in that school. It concluded that principals shape far more than academic outcomes, however. More effective principals improved school climate, increased teachers' job satisfaction, protected teachers' time, and expanded access to physical resources and professional development opportunities. These conditions, among others, helped explain the strong relationship between effective school leadership and lower teacher turnover.

The same research synthesis identified several important ways principals contribute to school improvement. Effective principals engaged teachers in instructionally focused interactions, cultivated a productive school climate, facilitated collaboration and professional learning communities, and managed personnel and resources strategically. They also shaped the equity

of school practices through decisions about student discipline, the implementation of culturally responsive teaching, and the recruitment and hiring of teachers of color.

Because effective principals influence so many dimensions of school performance, states and districts need systems that reliably identify, prepare, support, and retain effective school leaders. Strong school leadership systems build coherent pipelines that identify accomplished teachers with leadership potential, provide them with high-quality preparation and induction, and continue to develop them throughout their careers. Studies have shown that principal preparation programs with the strongest outcomes tend to include substantial internships under experienced principals, applied learning opportunities, and extensive preparation in instructional leadership, school climate, staff development, and the needs of diverse learners. Research has also indicated that principals are more likely to remain in their positions when they receive early-career mentoring and support and when districts provide adequate resources, autonomy, manageable workloads, and opportunities for input into decision-making.

A large-scale California study found that principals who received higher-quality preservice preparation had better teacher retention outcomes than otherwise similar principals with weaker preparation experiences. Higher-quality internships were also associated with increased retention and student academic outcomes. States can support these practices by underwriting rigorous preparation and clinical experiences. North Carolina's Principal Fellows program, for example, funded master's level preparation and yearlong internships, and Mississippi has allowed teachers to retain their salaries while completing an administrative credential in exchange for a service commitment. Collectively, this evidence underscores the importance of treating principal recruitment, preparation, development, and retention as integral parts of the broader educator ecosystem.

New Mexico has made school leadership a central focus of its recent policy efforts to strengthen the quality of public K–12 education. The state has supported principal residency programs that provide aspiring school leaders with extended practice-based preparation. Additionally, the state has continued to invest in development for current leaders, including a $5 million fiscal year (FY) 2026 appropriation for school leader professional development. In 2025, H.B. 157 established the School Administrator Development Act, creating distinct preparation and licensure pathways for school-site administrators and superintendents, as well as strengthening expectations for clinical experiences, mentoring and coaching, and partnerships between preparation programs and school systems. The law also established an aspiring superintendent academy and more explicit induction and support structures for new administrators. These statewide efforts are complemented by locally rooted preparation models such as University of New Mexico's Promoting our Leadership, Learning and Empowering our Nations program, which prepares educators for leadership in Native-serving schools through a cohort-based, culturally grounded pathway.

Within an educator ecosystem framework, investments in school and district leadership shape teachers' working conditions, effectiveness, and well-being, just as investments in

teachers help develop the next generation of education leaders. The sections that follow focus primarily on the K–12 teacher workforce, but these investments are likely to have the greatest impact when paired with policies that support the broader educator workforce, including school and district leaders, early childhood educators, higher education faculty, counselors, librarians, educational assistants, and others.

Sources: Burkhauser, S. (2017). How much do school principals matter when it comes to teacher working conditions? *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *39*(1), 126–145; Campoli, A. K., & Darling-Hammond, L. (with Podolsky, A., & Levin, S.). (2022). Principal learning opportunities and school outcomes: Evidence from California. Learning Policy Institute; Darling-Hammond, L., Fitz, J., Giani, M. V., Gordon, M. F., & Wechsler, M. (2026). *The principal effect: How investing in school leaders is key to solving education's challenges*. Learning Policy Institute; General Appropriation Act of 2025, H.B. 2, 57th Leg., 1st Sess., 2025 N.M. Laws ch. 160.; Grissom, J. A., Egalite, A. J., & Lindsay, C. A. (2021). *How principals affect students and schools: A systematic synthesis of two decades of research*. The Wallace Foundation; New Mexico Legislative Education Study Committee. (2024). 2024 annual report. New Mexico Legislature; School Administrator Development Act, 2025 N.M. Laws ch. 148.

New Mexico's Teacher Workforce Policy Landscape

The New Mexico Context

New Mexico, which became the 47th state in 1912, is among the nation's most geographically, culturally, and linguistically diverse states and has a governance tradition rooted in strong local control. Its public school system spans 89 districts and 99 charter schools spread across a vast, largely rural state. Albuquerque Public Schools alone serves more than one quarter of the state's approximately 300,000 students.[92]

New Mexico's students bring substantial cultural and linguistic diversity to the state's schools. Students represent 23 sovereign Native Nations and speak a wide range of languages, including eight Indigenous languages.[93] Research on New Mexico schools has documented how close community ties, family engagement, student voice, and locally rooted knowledge can serve as resources for learning and school improvement.[94] The student population is majority Hispanic or Latino/a, at 65%, with another 10% of students being Native American.[95] By contrast, the teacher workforce remains majority White and non-Hispanic, creating a substantial demographic mismatch between students and teachers.[96]

New Mexico's schools also serve many students with substantial educational and economic needs. English learners represent 18% of students, while 75% of students come from low-income backgrounds.[97] The state has the nation's fourth-highest child poverty rate, at 22% compared with 15% nationally, heightening the demands placed on schools and educators.[98] Schools must also navigate broader demographic and institutional constraints. Enrollment is declining in many districts, and some rural communities have lost more than half of their students over the past decade, placing pressure on staffing and finances.[99] Frequent turnover in state education leadership, including six New Mexico Public Education Department (PED) secretaries in the past 7 years, has further complicated sustained policy implementation.

Martinez/Yazzie and the Ongoing Pursuit of Educational Equity

Since the landmark 2018 case *Martinez/Yazzie v. State of New Mexico*, the state has been under a constitutionally based court order to take action to provide a sufficient education to Native American students, English learners, low-income students, and students with disabilities.[100] In the wake of the *Martinez/Yazzie* decision, policymakers and practitioners have sought to expand access to an equitable and adequate education for all students.

The case consolidated two suits filed in 2014 by the New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund on behalf of the four student groups listed above. In July 2018, Judge Sarah Singleton ruled that New Mexico had violated the rights of these student groups by failing to provide them with a uniform statewide system of free public schools that were sufficient for their education, including the programs, services, and funding necessary to prepare them for college and career.[101]

The ruling also reinforced the state's obligations under several existing laws that were designed to address the educational needs of New Mexico's diverse student population. The Indian Education Act established responsibilities for providing Native American students with culturally and linguistically responsive educational opportunities, preserving Native languages, and strengthening tribal involvement in education. The Bilingual Multicultural Education Act provided the framework for bilingual and multicultural programs to be designed to promote bilingualism, biliteracy, and academic achievement. The Hispanic Education Act established state structures and strategies that were focused on the academic success of Hispanic students and preservation of New Mexico's heritage Spanish language and culture. The Black Education Act, enacted in 2021, similarly aimed to improve educational experiences and outcomes for Black students through culturally relevant curricula, anti-racism training, and efforts to increase the representation of Black educators.[102]

These statutory commitments have been an important part of the continuing debate over what a sufficient remedy requires. Following a May 2025 finding of continued noncompliance, the court ordered PED to draft a comprehensive remedial action plan. PED filed the plan in November 2025 after developing it in partnership with the LANL Foundation, Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC), and WestEd, as well as through statewide community engagement. In February 2026, plaintiffs and several tribal governments challenged the plan as insufficiently specific and actionable, citing the absence of cost estimates and a funding strategy, measurable benchmarks, clear accountability mechanisms, sufficient tailoring to the four student groups, and adequate tribal consultation.[103] In March 2026, PED opposed the motion and defended the plan's adequacy. The following month, plaintiffs asked the court to authorize them to develop a revised plan—funded by PED—in collaboration with experts in areas including multilingual and English learner education, special education, school finance, and teacher workforce development.[104] As of early fall 2026, the court had not yet ruled on this request.[105]

New Mexico has historically struggled to raise academic achievement and narrow disparities between student groups. As of 2024–25, 65% of economically disadvantaged students performed below the 25th percentile in 4th grade math, compared to only 30% of non-economically disadvantaged students, and the gap between these two groups has remained essentially unchanged since 2016–17.[106] The *Martinez/Yazzie* ruling directly connected these persistent differences in student outcomes to the quality and distribution of the state's teachers. It identified teacher quality as a critical educational input, emphasizing that "highly effective teachers are key to improving proficiency."[107] It found high-poverty schools were disproportionately staffed by lower-paid, less experienced teachers and faced persistent challenges recruiting and retaining qualified educators.[108] These findings make access to well-prepared and effective teachers—including teachers who reflect and understand the communities they serve—central to improving educational opportunities and outcomes for historically underserved students in New Mexico.

A Window for Teacher Workforce Transformation

New Mexico has in turn made significant investments in educator compensation and pipeline development. Since 2022, minimum teacher salaries have risen to $55,000, $65,000, and $75,000 across the state's three licensure levels, most recently in 2025 through H.B. 156.[109] In the Albuquerque area, starting salaries grew by nearly 60% between 2019 and 2025—more than double the 24% average growth seen nationally over a comparable period.[110]

The state has also built a multipronged pipeline of preparation pathways to recruit and retain teachers from diverse entry points. The Teacher Residency Act, piloted in 2020 and expanded statewide in 2022, supports paid teacher residencies across the state.[111] The Educator Fellows Program, launched in 2021, supports school employees in earning teaching credentials while they work.[112] Registered teacher apprenticeships provide a cohesive earn-while-you-learn pathway that integrates Grow Your Own (GYO) programs and teacher residencies.[113] Additionally, the state offers a paid student teaching option, giving prospective teachers multiple ways to earn income while completing licensure requirements.[114]

Early evidence suggests that these investments are beginning to expand and diversify the state's teacher preparation pipeline.[115] More recent policy developments, including a $60 million allocation from the Government Results and Opportunity (GRO) Trust for clinical preparation and a newly legislatively funded principal residency program, signal continued commitment to invest in developing the full educator pipeline, from initial preparation through advancement into leadership roles.[116] The following section examines the state's recent educator workforce policies and investments in greater detail.

The current moment presents a unique opportunity for sustainable policy change. An unusually broad coalition is aligned around shared educator workforce priorities.[117] The coalition includes the PED, LESC, Legislative Finance Committee, educator preparation programs (EPPs), professional associations, philanthropic foundations, and advocacy organizations. With a gubernatorial transition underway and state revenues strong, this inflection point offers a critical opportunity to build lasting change for New Mexico's teacher workforce. The remainder of this section describes in more detail New Mexico's current teacher workforce policy environment, highlighting both the foundations already in place and the gaps that remain. It focuses on three domains: pathways into teaching, compensation and funding, and professional growth and advancement.

Expanding and Strengthening Pathways Into Teaching

Since the *Martinez/Yazzie* decision, New Mexico has taken substantial action to expand, strengthen, and diversify the pipeline into teaching. Key programmatic investments include efforts to broaden access to strong clinical training through residency programs and paid student teaching; expansion of GYO pathways, including the Educator Fellows Program; teacher apprenticeships; and teacher scholarship and loan forgiveness programs. At the same time, state leaders have sought to strengthen teacher preparation quality by revising standards for all EPPs

and implementing a new institutional data portal to support EPP accountability and continuous improvement. This subsection describes the state's investments in these initiatives and synthesizes available information on each program's reach and impact.

Growth of Teacher Residency Programs

New Mexico has built one of the most ambitious state-funded teacher residency systems in the country, expanding on the success of the Albuquerque Teacher Residency Partnership and an early 2019–20 teacher residency pilot to launch a statewide program that was opened to all candidates at EPPs in public institutions of higher education (IHEs) and tribal colleges in 2022.[118]

Program Design

The program provides a substantial stipend to teacher residents to support a full year of coteaching alongside a mentor teacher, initially funded in 2022 at $35,000 and, in 2026, indexed to 65% of beginning teacher salaries for undergraduates ($35,750) and 80% of beginning teacher salaries for postbaccalaureates ($44,000).[119] It also provides funding to support $2,000 stipends for mentor teachers and principals and $50,000 to help fund residency directors in every participating IHE.[120] In return for the state's investment in their training, residents commit to serving in a New Mexico public school, ideally in their sponsoring district, for at least 3 years following completion of the residency. Programs must be designed such that teaching residents reflect the diversity of students in the state or local area and fill high-need teaching positions.[121] Charged with oversight of the initiative, PED hired a statewide coordinator to oversee residency program implementation and—with support from an intermediary support partner, Prepared to Teach—launched a Community of Practice to support EPPs and local educational agencies (LEAs) to design, implement, and expand residency programs. A federal Education Innovation and Research grant from the U.S. Department of Education has also provided support for implementation and evaluation.[122]

Early Impact

The number and geographic reach of New Mexico teachers prepared through the residency model has grown substantially as a result of the state's residency investments, reaching 335 teacher residents in fiscal year (FY) 2026.[123] Based on PED's Educator Accountability Report (see Table 2), 25% of completers from eligible EPPs and about one in five completers overall in New Mexico graduated from residency programs, or 224 residents total, in 2024–25—the most recent data available.[124] Residency pathways are offered at 8 of 12 eligible IHEs with state-approved educator preparation programs in New Mexico, with an additional IHE—New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology—adding a residency in 2026–27.[125] In the 2024–25 academic year, 145 schools in 34 of New Mexico's 89 traditional districts hosted residents.[126] Teacher residents were also hosted at charter schools, Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools, and early education centers.[127]

Early data have revealed that New Mexico's teacher residencies are contributing to a more racially and ethnically representative educator pipeline.[128] In 2024–25, 58% of teacher residency completers were Hispanic or Latino/a, compared with 52% of other EPP completers. The racial composition of residents was otherwise broadly similar to that of other completers: 35% were White, compared to 34% of other completers; 4% were American Indian or Alaska Native, compared with 5%; and 1% were multiracial in both groups. Earlier residency cohorts were similarly diverse and, in some respects, even more representative of the state's student population, including a larger share of American Indian or Alaska Native completers in 2023–24.[129]

The residency program has also helped to address critical teaching needs. In 2024–25, the number of teacher resident completers was equivalent to 128% of reported vacancies in early childhood, 73% in elementary education, 28% in secondary education, and 31% in special education.[130] While data limitations make it difficult to track candidates over longer periods, early employment outcomes were promising. Among 2023–24 completers, 80% of teacher residents were employed by PED within 2 years of completion, compared with 61% of student teachers. Looking at retention, among those employed after completion, 93% of residency completers remained as teachers 1 year later, compared with 91% of student teaching completers.[131]

Accounts from educators and district leaders have illustrated how these early outcomes are playing out locally. One teacher resident described the stipend as making preparation financially possible: "As an EA [educational assistant], I have always dreamed of having my own classroom but could not afford to pursue school full time and support my family. The generous stipend provided by the residency program has given me the financial freedom to complete my degree."[132] District leaders also described residencies as a way to build a more locally rooted workforce. As one explained, "Many of them are alumni—they want to stay home, they want to serve the community they live in."[133]

These early results indicated that the state's residency investments are translating not only into a larger supply of new teachers, but also into teachers who enter the classroom better prepared. While more research is needed, a PED employer survey conducted in summer 2026 found that principals rated first-year teachers who had completed residencies as more prepared than other first-year teachers across 9 of the 10 measured dimensions. For example, 82% of principals reported that residency graduates were better at building relationships with students, 73% said they were more receptive to feedback, and 71% said they were better at creating inclusive classroom environments.[134]

Funding and Expansion Into Registered Apprenticeship

In total, New Mexico has invested nearly $70 million in teacher residencies over the past 8 years, growing a modest early investment into an annual investment of between $12–15 million. (See Figure 2.) The state has extended the model to school leadership through a principal residency pilot and H.B. 157 (2025), which established new licensure pathways and strengthened preparation and development requirements for principals and superintendents. Funding has come

through a patchwork of annual legislative appropriations under H.B. 13 and the GRO Trust, as well as individual governmental agreements between EPPs and districts when the district has paid for a portion of the resident's salary and/or benefits. The absence of stable, recurring legislative funding is the central policy vulnerability.

Recently, New Mexico's PED and Department of Workforce Solutions, again with support from intermediary Prepared to Teach, collaborated to secure a federal U.S. Department of Labor grant to expand New Mexico's teacher residency model into an approved registered apprenticeship program.[135] Residencies and apprenticeships are similar in policy design, offering an earn-while-you-learn approach while working under the guidance of an expert mentor. Since the first federally registered teacher apprenticeship program was approved in 2022, the model has expanded to more than 40 states across the country.[136] The PED-sponsored registered apprenticeships into teaching are a mechanism for cohesion and sustainability, offering a competency-based preparation system with multiple points of entry. The expansion of residencies into a registered apprenticeship model may enable braided funding (e.g., state, LEA, and labor/workforce development dollars) to support teacher preparation, including through pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs.

Paid Student Teaching

In addition to its investment in teacher residencies, New Mexico has, beginning in FY 2023, supported enhanced clinical practice by providing paid student teaching stipends, with funding varying annually between $10,000 and $12,000 for a 16-week experience. The program is designed to ensure candidates receive a stipend to support their financial needs while they meet clinical practice requirements. In addition to stipends for student teachers, the program provides a $1,000 stipend for cooperating teachers. The program supported 446 student teachers in FY 2024 at a cost of $6.5 million (see Figure 2).[137]

Beginning in FY 2025, the PED received $20 million per year for 3 years to fund educator clinical practice. Teacher residency, principal residency, and paid student teaching programs are funded as part of this broader allocation from the GRO fund.[138]

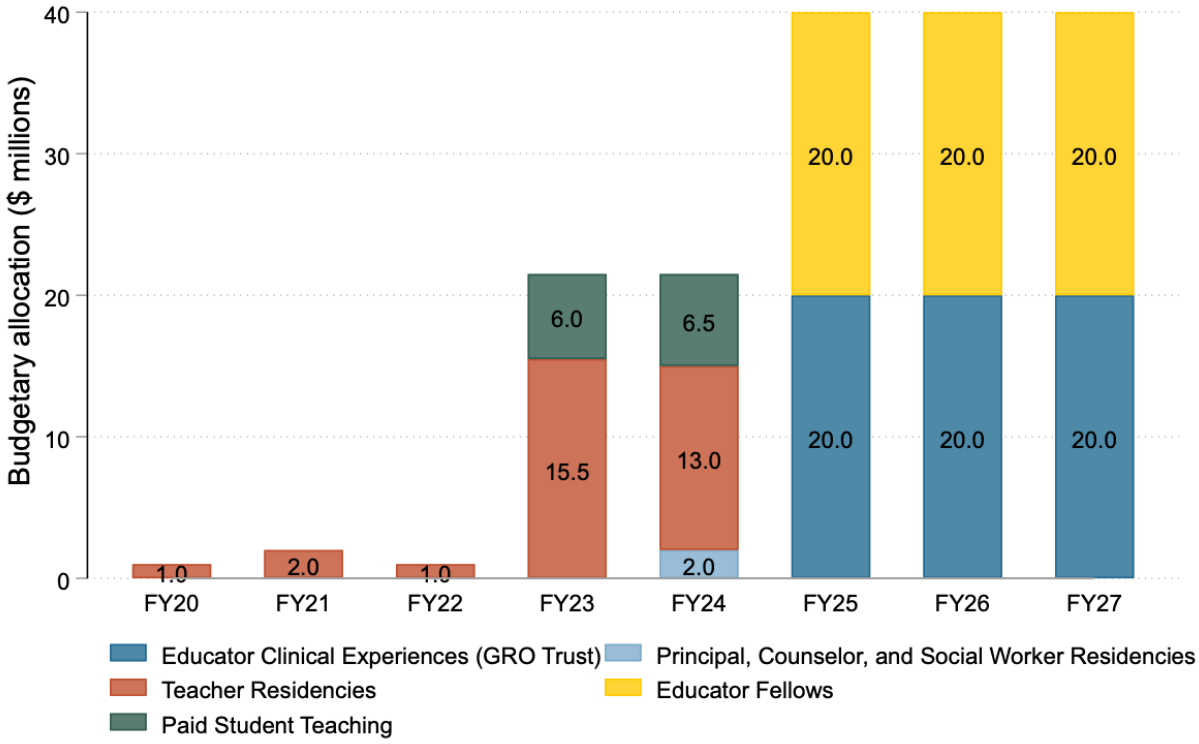
Grow Your Own Pipeline Programs

In recent years, New Mexico has invested in several GYO-style programs that were designed to recruit individuals from the local community and support them to become teachers.

The largest program is the **Educator Fellows Program**, administered by PED, which creates a paid pathway into teaching for anyone with a high school diploma, allowing them to earn bachelor's degrees while supporting instruction in classrooms (e.g., through high dosage tutoring and targeted small group instruction). Fellows are paid a minimum salary of $25,000 plus benefits, provided release time for coursework, and receive supplemental small group support under the guidance of a mentor teacher. The program was launched with $37 million in federal COVID relief funds and continued through $20 million in annual state funding in 2025–2027

(see Figure 2).[139] Over the 2022–23 and 2023–24 academic years, 250 Educator Fellows completed teacher preparation.[140] As of December 2025, 370 fellows were enrolled across 86 LEAs and approximately 180 schools. Approximately 70% of fellows were people of color—including 11% who were Native American—and 60% were first-generation college students.[141]

Figure 2. Legislative Investments in Educator Clinical Experiences, Fiscal Years 2020–2027



Notes: GRO = Government Results and Opportunity program. The legislature appropriated $5.6 million to support school leader preparation and support in FY 2027, including principal residencies.
Source: Adapted from Legislative Education Study Committee. (2026). *Post-Session Review*.

A prior program, the **Grow Your Own Teachers Scholarship Program**, administered by the New Mexico Higher Education Department (HED), provided funds for school employees to pursue bachelor's degrees in education at a public or tribal higher education institution, up to $6,000 per year.[142] While this program is still on the books, HED reports indicated that funds have not been awarded under this program since 2022, when 49 students were awarded scholarships. (See Table 1.)

Finally, **dual enrollment partnerships** introduce high school students to education careers and enable them to begin their journey toward teacher licensure while still in high school. New Mexico's dual credit opportunities have grown in recent years, including through $1 million

provided in FY 2025 to HED to support the Dual Credit Program.[143] Enrollments in education courses grew from approximately 1,000 in 2020–21 to 1,500 in 2024–25.[144] These programs are being integrated into new pre-apprenticeship programs, in which students enroll in dual credit courses and participate in education-focused high school programs while working with youth in tutoring, before/after-school programs, or other qualifying on-the-job learning programs.[145] In particular, two programs can provide students with opportunities to gain this on-the-job learning experience in the field of education: (1) Near Peer Tutoring, which supports high school students to work as paid peer reading and math tutors to elementary or middle school students, and (2) Innovation Zone grants, which support career technical education and work-based learning.[146] New Mexico also benefits from philanthropically funded early teacher pipeline programs, including Educators Rising, which introduces middle and high school students to careers in education through school-based chapters, and the Golden Apple Scholars Program, which provides up to $15,000 in paid summer professional development for high school seniors through college sophomores in New Mexico who want to become teachers. In 2022, Golden Apple received a $1 million grant from PED to support teacher recruitment, and 96 Golden Apple Scholars were recruited in 2022–23.[147]

Financial Aid/Loan Forgiveness for Teachers

New Mexico currently has two primary financial aid and loan forgiveness programs targeted to teachers: the Teacher Preparation Affordability Scholarship Program and the Teacher Loan Repayment Program. Both have been modest in scope. (See Table 1.)

The **Teacher Preparation Affordability Scholarship Program** is a need-based program targeted to individuals who are completing teacher preparation at a New Mexico public or tribal EPP, offering scholarships up to $6,000 per year.[148] The scholarship is intended to help defray educational expenses, including tuition, fees, books and course supplies, and living expenses. In FY 2025, HED awarded 1,455 Teacher Preparation Affordability Scholarships totaling approximately $5.5 million (see Table 1).[149]

The **Teacher Loan Repayment Program** is designed to increase the number of teachers in high-need fields by providing for repayment of principal and reasonable interest on federal student loans.[150] Eligible teachers are those licensed and teaching in bilingual education; early childhood education; special education; science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); or career and technical education, or those teaching in a low-performing school serving 40% or more economically disadvantaged students, with at least 3 years of experience teaching in New Mexico. Preference for the competitive program is given to graduates of New Mexico public postsecondary institutions and candidates of color. Recipients commit to serving for an additional 2 years following the award. In FY 2025, HED awarded repayment to 529 teachers, totaling nearly $5 million (see Table 1).[151]

Table 1. New Mexico Higher Education Department Teacher Scholarship and Loan Forgiveness Programs, 2020–2025

Year	Candidates / recipients funded	Total amount awarded in year
Teacher Preparation Affordability Scholarship		
FY 2020	677	$1,861,635
FY 2021	677	$3,596,816*
FY 2022	1,080	$3,686,830
FY 2024	1,302	$3,949,497
FY 2025	1,455	$5,553,616
Teacher Loan Repayment Program		
FY 2022	445	$2,960,890
FY 2024	Not reported	
FY 2025	529	$4,997,000
Grow Your Own Teachers		
FY 2020	37	$113,275
FY 2021	46	$103,313
FY 2022	49	$155,507

Notes: *May be a reporting error. Teacher Loan for Service Program was excluded, as it had only 0–3 recipients each year between FY 2020 and FY 2025. The annual report for 2023 is not available.
Source: New Mexico Higher Education Department. (2025; 2024; 2022; 2021; 2020). *Annual Reports*.

In addition to these two teacher-specific programs, other state-funded scholarships are also available to teacher candidates, including Opportunity Scholarships and New Mexico Legislative Lottery Scholarships. In addition, the Early Childhood Education and Care Department Comprehensive Early Childhood Scholarship Program provides scholarships to existing early childhood education employees to help them afford college classes that lead to certificates,

credentials, and degrees. (See The Early Childhood Educator Landscape.) Together, these programs enable most in-state undergraduate teacher candidates to get 100% of tuition costs for their bachelor's degrees covered, though additional advising and guidance for teacher candidates around accessing these resources may be helpful.[152]

Aligning Preparation Standards

Notwithstanding these investments, approximately half of new teachers still enter classrooms without full credentials due to alternative preparation pathways in which candidates serve as the teacher of record prior to licensure.[153] As we show in the following section, teachers without full credentials disproportionately served in the schools and for the student populations identified in the *Martinez/Yazzie* ruling. The proportion of teacher preparation completers entering through these teacher-of-record licensure pathways has grown substantially, though it has begun to decline as New Mexico has expanded investments in a broader range of pathways into teaching, including residencies, paid clinical experiences, and apprenticeships.

Within this context, standards across pathways vary widely. As noted in a recent report from the New Mexico Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (NMACTE):

> Expectations for what teachers should know and be able to do are not defined through a single, coherent framework. Instead, they are distributed across multiple policy structures—including licensure requirements, program approval criteria, assessment systems, and pathway-specific guidance—which vary in specificity and are not consistently aligned across traditional, alternative, and portfolio pathways. This fragmentation creates challenges for preparation programs, candidates, and policymakers, and can lead to uneven expectations and inconsistent preparation experiences.[154]

As a key step toward aligning standards across programs, the NMACTE convened the New Mexico Teacher Preparation Standards Task Force. The task force brought together teacher educators from a cross-section of New Mexico EPPs, including colleges, universities, tribal colleges, community colleges, and alternative programs, with input from state agencies, state and national policy organizations, philanthropies, nonprofit organizations, and birth–12th grade educators.[155] Released in summer 2026, the shared set of standards defined the knowledge and skills all entry-level teachers should demonstrate by the completion of their preparation, regardless of pathway. (See Figure 3.)

Figure 3. New Mexico Association of Colleges for Teacher Education Teacher Preparation Standards



Source: New Mexico Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. (2026). *New Mexico Teacher Preparation Standards*.

These standards provide an opportunity to improve culturally relevant teacher training through their attention to cultural, linguistic, tribal, historical and community contexts; recognition of students' assets; and emphasis on partnerships with families and communities. This emphasis aligns with the original *Martinez/Yazzie* judgment and with priorities advanced in subsequent plaintiff- and community-developed frameworks for culturally and linguistically responsive education.[156] The NMACTE report included a set of recommendations for implementation, including calling on both the legislature and the PED to establish and implement a common review framework across all pathways that includes alignment to the teacher preparation standards and clarified shared responsibilities between preparation programs and employing districts in pathways where candidates are simultaneously serving as teachers of record. Such a framework could also help integrate evolving educator preparation requirements, including structured literacy, biliteracy and English learner methods, math instruction, Universal Design for Learning, and trauma-informed practices, within a more coherent approach.[157]

Strengthening Funding and Compensation

New Mexico public schools are funded through a combination of federal, state, and local revenues. In FY 2024, federal sources accounted for 19.7% of revenues, state sources for 63.6%, and local sources for 16.7%.[158] Unlike in many states, local property tax revenues play a limited role in funding school operations and are used primarily to support capital expenses. Operating funding instead comes predominantly from the state: By the 2025–26 school year, approximately 67% of school funding came from the state general fund, most of it distributed as unrestricted operating aid through the State Equalization Guarantee (SEG), reflecting a 42% increase in appropriations between FY 2020 and FY 2026.[159] New Mexico's revenue structure is also distinctive for its substantial reliance on oil and gas. Taxes on oil and gas production support the state general fund, while royalties from production on state trust lands flow into the Land Grant Permanent Fund, where they are invested to generate long-term returns. A portion of the fund's value is distributed annually to public schools and other beneficiaries (see The Early Childhood Educator Landscape).

State funding is distributed to districts and charters through the Public School Funding Formula. Established in 1974, the formula created the SEG to promote more equitable distribution of operating funds across the state. It was built around "program units," which represent student enrollment adjusted by a range of weights and additional funding factors.[160]

Students first generate different program units according to grade level, with weights ranging from 0.72 to 1.44. These units are then adjusted by the Teacher Cost Index, which accounts for differences in the experience and licensure levels of teachers. Additional program units are generated for:

- student level of need for special education services;
- elementary bilingual and multicultural programs;
- elementary fine arts and physical education programs;
- K–12 Plus programs with additional school days;
- small district or school size;
- higher proportion of at-risk students;
- enrollment growth;
- number of National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs); and
- charter and home school students participating in district activities.

Each year, the SEG appropriation is divided by the projected statewide total number of program units to establish the unit value, which is then used to calculate each district's and charter school's allocation. [161]

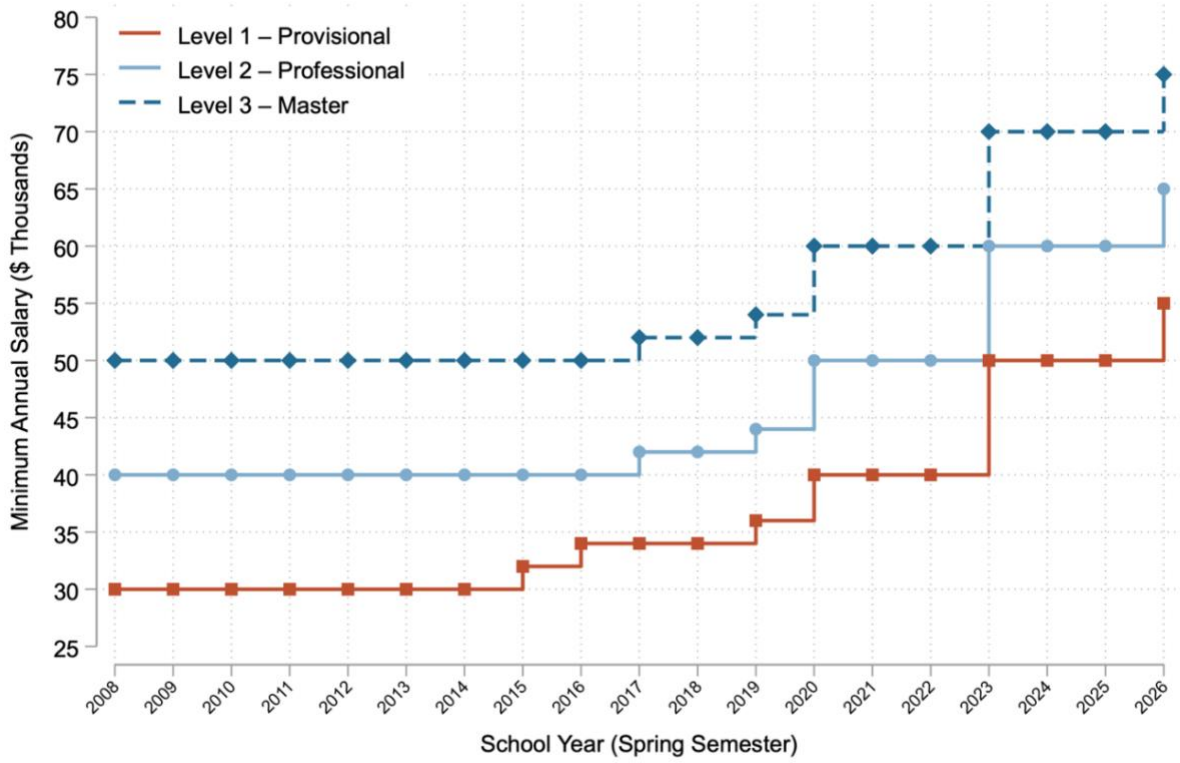
This formula was revised substantially beginning in FY 2026. Previously, the at-risk index incorporated the share of students receiving means-tested benefits, share of English learners, and student mobility. The revised formula replaced the at-risk index with the Family Income Index,

which is based on the percentage of students from very low-income and extremely low-income households. It also established English learners as a separate program unit component and increased the basic program unit weights for students in grades 6–12.[162] This formula remains the subject of active policy discussions and an ongoing area of focus in the *Martinez/Yazzie* remedy.[163]

School spending has risen considerably over the past 2 decades as New Mexico has sought to address the educational inadequacies identified in the *Martinez/Yazzie* decision and make general investments in its public education system. According to the Census Bureau's Annual Survey of School System Finances, current per-pupil spending increased from $10,177 in FY 2019 to $17,664 in FY 2024—a nominal increase of nearly 75%, or 42% after adjusting for inflation.[164] By comparison, average current per-pupil spending nationwide increased by only about 34% over the same period, or 9% after adjusting for inflation.[165] In 2024, New Mexico ranked 21st in the country in per-pupil expenditures and 6th in per-pupil expenditures relative to average personal income. Of total expenditures, 57% supported instruction, 39% supported student and administrative services, and 4% went toward other functions.[166]

Much of New Mexico's recent growth in education spending has been directed toward teacher compensation, reflecting the state's efforts to improve recruitment and retention and rebuild the educator workforce after years of comparatively low pay. New Mexico introduced its three-tier salary system in 2003, but minimum teacher salary levels stayed largely unchanged for more than a decade. (See Figure 4.) The state made modest increases between 2015 and 2020, but this was reflected only in General Appropriation Act language rather than statutory amendments. More substantial increases followed in 2019, 2022, and 2025. Minimum salaries for the three levels rose to $40,000, $50,000, and $60,000 in 2019–20; to $50,000, $60,000, and $70,000 in 2022–23; and to $55,000, $65,000, and $75,000 in 2025–26. The state also enacted H.B. 60 in 2022, requiring certified Native American language and culture teachers—some of whom had previously earned as little as $14,000—to receive pay comparable to licensed public school teachers.[167]

Figure 4. State Minimum Teacher Salaries by Level, 2007–08 to 2025–26



Note: These salaries are presented in nominal dollars, not adjusted for inflation.
Source: Legislative Education Study Committee. (2025; 2024; 2023; 2022; 2021; 2020; 2019; 2018). *Post-Session Memos*.

Because the $10,000 gap between salary levels remained fixed over time, minimum salaries changed unevenly in real terms between 2007–08 and 2025–26. After adjusting for inflation, the Level 1 minimum increased by about 18%, the Level 2 minimum increased by about 4%, and the Level 3 minimum decreased by about 4%.[168] This seemingly neutral salary schedule design choice has therefore contributed to salary compression across the three tiers over time.

As a result of increases in both minimum teacher salary levels and across-the-board raises, New Mexico's average teacher salary grew substantially over the past decade, even as average teacher pay fell nationally in real terms. Specifically, New Mexico's average teacher salary rose from $45,453 in 2012–13 to $69,736 in 2024–25.[169] This represents growth of 53.4% in nominal terms and 11.2% after adjusting for inflation.[170] Nationally, by comparison, average teacher salaries declined by 4.2% in inflation-adjusted terms over the same time period.[171]

Beyond increases in average and minimum salaries, New Mexico uses some targeted compensation incentives to recognize advanced credentials and support retention in hard-to-staff

positions. NBCTs, who research has shown are particularly effective at raising student achievement, receive a salary differential funded through 1.5 program units for each eligible teacher.[172] The value varies with the annual SEG unit value and amounted to $10,316.65 in the 2025–26 school year.[173] The state also introduced a Hard-to-Staff Differential Retention Stipend that provides $2,500 to eligible certified special education teachers who have remained in the same school district since the 2022–23 school year.[174]

The Early Childhood Educator Landscape

New Mexico's K–12 and early childhood education workforces are closely connected. The two sectors draw from overlapping pools of educators, and differences in compensation, credential requirements, and working conditions can influence whether educators remain in one setting or move between them. Recognizing the importance of a more coordinated early childhood system, New Mexico consolidated most early childhood programs and services within the Early Childhood Education and Care Department, which began operating in 2020.

The state has also established several dedicated funding streams for early childhood education. These include distributions from the Early Childhood Education and Care Fund, established in 2020, and, since 2024, from the long-standing Land Grant Permanent Fund, supplemented by annual general fund appropriations. These sources provide comparatively stable support for New Mexico's two largest early childhood initiatives: Child Care Assistance and NM PreK. In 2025, New Mexico became the first state in the country to provide free, universal child care for children from birth through age 13—regardless of income—including before- and after-school and summer care for school-age children. The program has expanded in phases since 2020 from an income-capped assistance program to a universal one. NM PreK offers preschool through both public schools and community-based providers. These investments have substantially expanded access to early learning. In 2024–25, New Mexico ranked 7th nationally in the percentage of 3-year-olds enrolled in state-funded preschool.

The educators serving young children work in settings with different governance arrangements and qualification requirements. Teachers in school-based NM PreK programs generally hold state teaching licenses and bachelor's degrees and are employed through public schools. By contrast, community-based programs employ teachers with a wider range of credentials and educational backgrounds; state licensing requirements generally emphasize introductory early childhood training and ongoing professional development rather than a college degree or teaching license. Federally funded Head Start programs operate under separate federal qualification standards. These differences have contributed to substantial variation in compensation and career opportunities across settings.

A 2020 workforce survey illustrated the extent of these disparities. Nearly half of employees in public prekindergarten programs earned more than $45,000, while almost three quarters of employees in community-based prekindergarten programs earned less than $30,000. Only 28%

of the early childhood workforce reported being satisfied with their pay. These differences also matter for K–12 workforce policy because public schools and early childhood providers may draw from overlapping pools of educators, while districts often offer higher salaries, stronger benefits, and more structured career opportunities. This can create incentives for qualified educators to move from community-based settings into school-based roles.

New Mexico has recently taken steps to increase compensation and create more structured career pathways for early childhood educators. The Comprehensive Early Childhood Scholarship Program provides scholarships to existing early childhood education employees to help them afford college classes that lead to certificates, credentials, and degrees, reducing a key barrier to professional advancement. The FY 2027 budget included $60 million intended to support a professional wage scale and career lattice for early childhood educators through the state's child care reimbursement system. The emerging framework is intended to establish higher base compensation; recognize educators' experience, education, and credentials; and create a more unified career and compensation structure across early childhood settings. By linking accessible preparation and credentialing opportunities with clearer prospects for higher pay and advancement, these investments represent an important step toward improving the quality and stability of New Mexico's early childhood system while extending the state's broader educator workforce strategy across the full continuum from early learning through K–12.

Sources: Fisher, K. (2026). Lessons from the first state in the nation to offer universal child care. *The Hechinger Report*; Growing Up New Mexico. (2020). *New Mexico early childhood workforce survey report: An expanded analysis of income levels in New Mexico*; National Institute for Early Education Research. (2026). *State of preschool 2025 yearbook: New Mexico*; New Mexico Early Childhood Education & Care Department. (2025). *Wage scale and career lattice framework and implementation recommendations*; New Mexico Legislative Education Study Committee. (2020). *Annual report to the second session of the 54th New Mexico legislature*.

Providing Opportunities for Development

Over the past decade, New Mexico has adopted several policies intended to provide teachers with greater opportunities for professional growth, advancement, and leadership.

The state has taken some modest steps to strengthen mentoring for beginning teachers. This is a consequential part of the workforce: As of 2023–24, roughly 8% of New Mexico teachers were in their first year and 14% in their first or second year of teaching.[175] PED's Office of Special Education recently began partnering with the Region 9 Education Cooperative to provide a statewide mentorship program targeted to new teachers in special education, inclusion classrooms, and classrooms or schools serving Native American students. For all beginning teachers, state law sets forth a fairly robust framework for teacher mentoring, requiring all beginning teachers to participate in a teacher mentorship program and providing up to $2,000 per beginning teacher.[176] School districts and charter schools must submit descriptions of teacher mentorship programs to be approved by PED annually. The department must regularly review and evaluate teacher mentorship programs. PED regulations, in turn, set forth the requirements

for teacher mentorship programs and require that mentoring be provided to all first-year teachers.[177] The program received fairly substantial funding in FY 2021 ($11 million) and FY 2023 ($10 million) through the State Equalization Guarantee. However, funding has been unstable, and there remains a substantial gap between the requirements set forth in statute and regulations and implementation. A recent LESC report notes that "the state does not monitor program outcomes nor evaluate effectiveness" and "PED has not disclosed any information about the performance of these programs."[178] The *Martinez/Yazzie* action plan outlined several actions to strengthen mentoring for beginning teachers, including passing legislation that requires all districts and charter schools to provide high-quality mentorship to teachers during their first 3 years of teaching.[179]

New Mexico has also created a new competency-based pathway for teachers to advance through the state's three-tiered licensure system. Beginning in 2022, the Advancement Program Level micro-credentials began replacing the Professional Development Dossier with a series of applied courses aligned with the state's evaluation framework, allowing teachers to demonstrate mastery of specific instructional competencies as they advance from Level 1 to Level 2 and from Level 2 to Level 3.[180] New Mexico has also supported National Board Certification as another pathway for licensure advancement and professional learning, including through scholarships that offset certification costs and an annual funding formula additive for each NBCT employed by a district or charter school.[181] In 2025, through the Public Education Reform Fund, the state also invested in innovative staffing models, which are currently being piloted in seven LEAs with support from Public Impact.[182] Most recently, LESC convened an advisory group that included representatives from PED, Early Childhood Education and Care Department, HED, Department of Workforce Solutions, school district leaders, principals, teachers, collective bargaining units, EPPs, LESC staff and lawmakers, Legislative Finance Committee staff and lawmakers, and other state education partners. Informed by this group, LESC recommended creating an instructional leadership endorsement and pathway for highly effective teachers that would allow them to remain connected to the classroom while extending their expertise through mentoring, coaching, and other leadership responsibilities, with corresponding release time and compensation.[183]

The state has also invested in principal residency pilots that provide prospective school leaders with intensive, practice-based preparation alongside experienced principals, as well as continued professional learning for current school leaders (see Investing in School Leaders to Empower Teachers).[184] These initiatives provide educators with some opportunities to deepen their expertise and move into mentorship or leadership roles, although New Mexico has not yet developed a coherent statewide system of teacher-leader roles that allow teachers to assume greater responsibility while remaining connected to classroom instruction. There are also opportunities to provide more sustained, collaborative professional learning and to ensure that teachers have the dedicated time and structures needed to integrate it into their regular work.[185]

The Current State of New Mexico's Teacher Workforce

New Mexico has historically faced challenges in ensuring that every student is taught by fully prepared and highly effective educators, regardless of geographic region or socioeconomic background. However, recent indicators suggest improvement in several dimensions of the teacher workforce, including teacher supply, preparation pathways, and compensation, even as challenges related to working conditions and equitable access to qualified and experienced teachers persist. Against the policy backdrop described above, this section draws on multiple data sources to assess the current status of New Mexico's teacher workforce across three dimensions: (1) shortages and unequal access; (2) the teacher preparation pipeline; and (3) compensation, working conditions, and teacher retention.

To conduct these descriptive analyses, we relied on several publicly available state data sources: the New Mexico State University Southwest Outreach Academic Research (SOAR) Educator Vacancy Reports (2019–2025), the New Mexico Public Education Department (PED) Employee Position Directory (2025), PED School and District Accountability Data (2025), and PED STARS Student Enrollment Data (2025). We also drew on federal data sources, including the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Common Core of Data District Directory and Membership Data (1995–2025), NCES School District Finance Data (1995–2025), U.S. Department of Education Title II Reports (2004–2024), the National Teacher and Principal Survey (2021), and the Office for Civil Rights Civil Rights Data Collection (2024).

Many of the analyses that follow focus on students attending traditional public schools in regular school districts. As a result, students attending private schools, Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools, and/or charter schools are excluded from some analyses because of data availability and comparability limitations (see Bureau of Indian Education and Tribally Controlled Schools). These exclusions limit the extent to which certain findings capture New Mexico's full student and educator populations.

Patterns of Teacher Shortage and Unequal Access

Teacher shortages arise when the available supply of qualified educators is insufficient to meet districts' hiring needs. Such shortages have tangible consequences for students. When teacher demand outpaces supply in a particular region, school, or subject area, districts may leave teaching positions unfilled—resulting in combined classroom sections and larger class sizes—or fill those positions with teachers who are uncredentialed, inexperienced, or less fully prepared. Research has indicated that both larger class sizes and less experienced or less prepared teachers can reduce student achievement growth, linking teacher shortages directly to schools' and districts' ability to provide high-quality instruction.[186] This subsection documents where and for whom teacher shortages are most acute in New Mexico, examining geographic and subject-area vacancy patterns over time, as well as whether students in higher-need schools have comparable access to qualified teachers.

Trends in School Staffing Vacancies

Because true labor demand and supply are difficult to observe directly, researchers typically rely on proxy measures of teacher shortage. One common proxy is the share of teaching positions left unfilled by the start of the school year. This measure underestimates the full extent of shortages because it does not include positions that were filled by less prepared educators, such as long-term substitutes or provisionally licensed teachers, but it nonetheless captures the most severe form of shortage. New Mexico State University's SOAR Evaluation and Policy Center has produced an annual report since 2018 that tracks teacher vacancies across the state. To calculate vacancies, the research team collected information on school district job postings from all 89 public school districts and reported vacancy counts by region, subject area, and position type.

Figure 5 tracks trends over time in unfilled fall vacancies per 100 positions for teachers, aides and paraeducators, school administrators, and guidance counselors. For each vacancy ratio, the numerator comes from the corresponding SOAR report, while the denominator comes from the number of staff positions reported in the NCES Common Core of Data district directory from the prior academic year. Among teachers, vacancies spiked following the pandemic, reaching 5.1 unfilled positions per 100 teachers in fall 2021. Since then, vacancies declined, falling to only 2.9 unfilled positions per 100 teachers in fall 2025. The Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC) attributed the 2021 vacancy increase in part to pandemic-related burnout and departures that exacerbated existing staffing challenges.[187] Excluding the postpandemic spike, however, teacher vacancy rates appear to have been relatively stable over time.

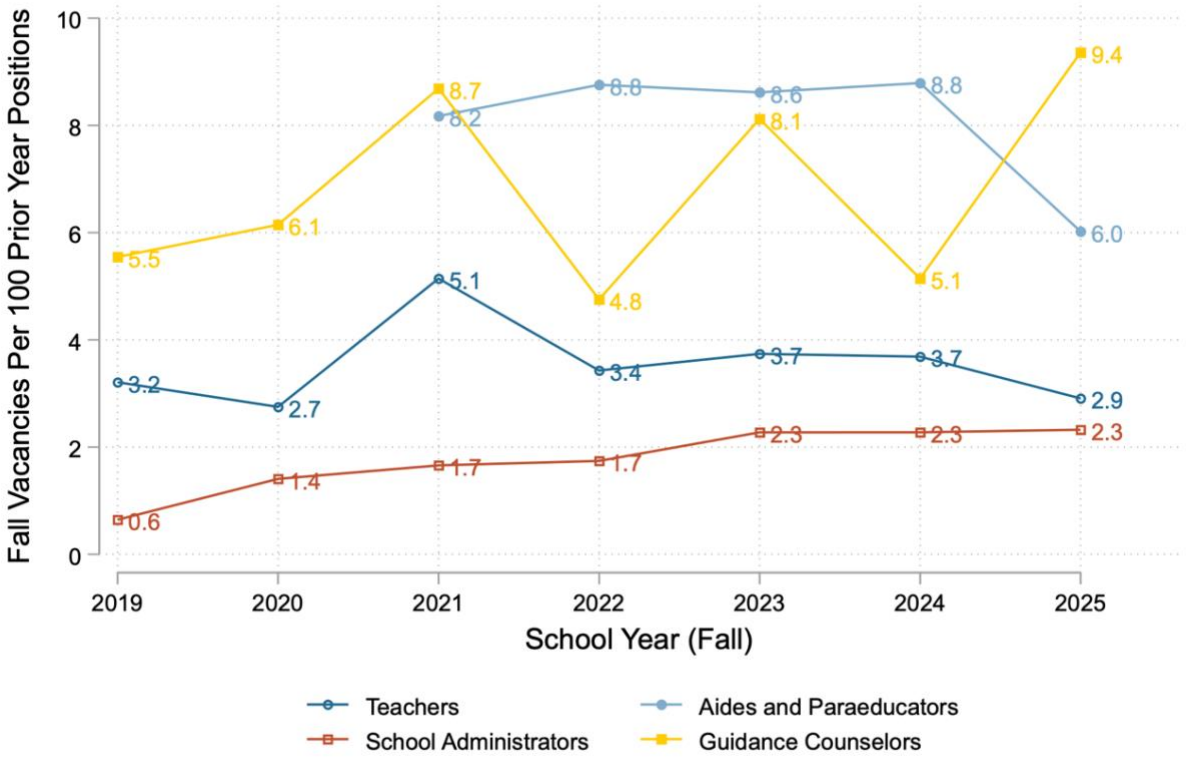
Teacher shortages also varied considerably across the state. In fall 2025, regional vacancy rates ranged from fewer than 1 unfilled position per 100 teachers in southwestern New Mexico to more than 4 per 100 in northeastern New Mexico. Survey evidence from northern New Mexico pointed to similar recruitment and retention challenges. A 2020 LANL Foundation study found that 135 classrooms in its seven-county northern New Mexico service area were staffed by unlicensed teachers at the beginning of the 2019–20 school year.[188] The report described one small rural district where a secondary science teacher left mid-year and the superintendent received no applicants to fill the vacancy. It also documented the persistent strain of relying on substitutes to cover vacancies and repeatedly replacing teachers in high-turnover schools.

While teacher vacancy rates have declined from their postpandemic peak, districts appeared to be experiencing increasing difficulty filling school administrator positions, including principals and assistant principals. School administrator vacancies trended upwards over the past 6 years, growing from 0.6 vacancies per 100 positions in fall 2019 to 2.3 vacancies per 100 positions in fall 2025. Although superintendent vacancies are not tracked in SOAR reports, high superintendent turnover has been a long-standing concern.[189] More than four in five New Mexico districts experienced turnover of their superintendents between 2021 and 2023.[190]

Districts have also faced persistent challenges hiring enough guidance counselors, paraeducators, and instructional aides. Because these positions were less common than classroom teaching

positions, vacancy ratios were noisier from year to year. Even so, vacancy rates for these roles remained notably high. In the most recent school year, there were 6.0 unfilled paraeducator and instructional assistant positions and 9.4 unfilled guidance counselor positions per 100 full-time equivalent (FTE) prior-year positions.

Figure 5. School Staff Vacancy Ratios by Position Type, 2019–2025



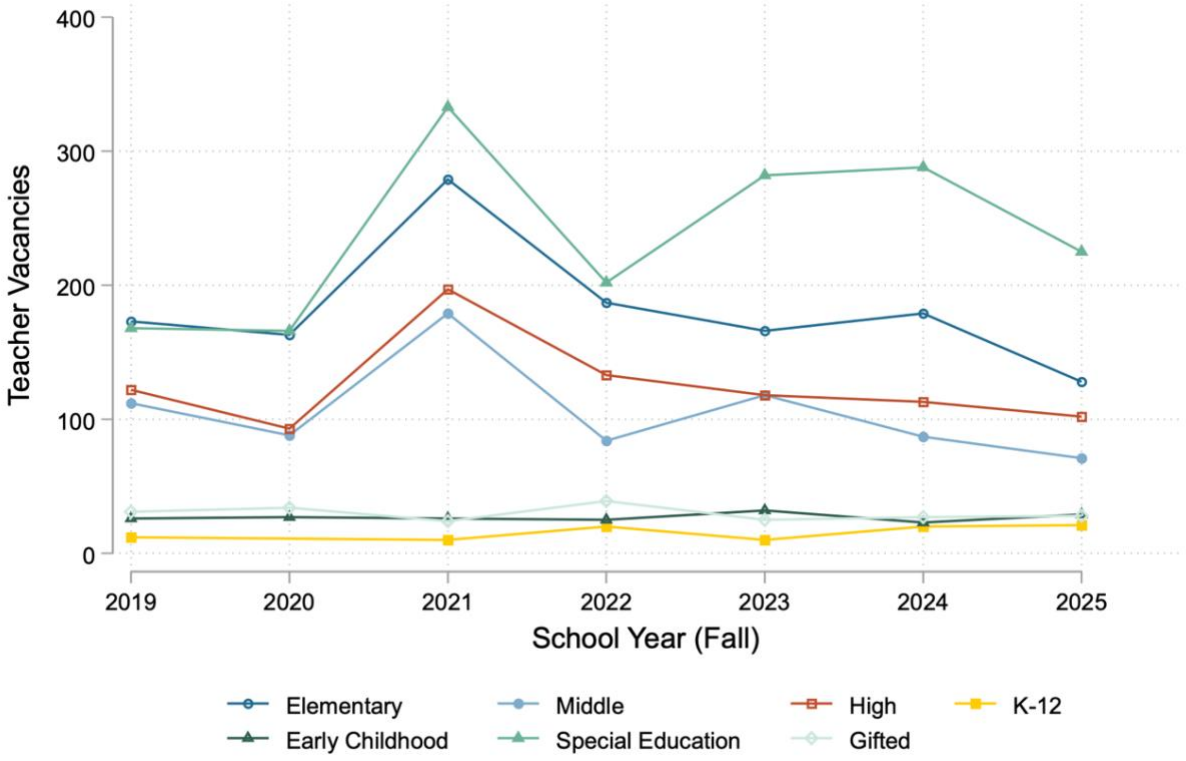
Note: Tracking of paraeducator vacancies began in fall 2021.
Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of New Mexico State University College of Education Southwest Outreach Academic Research Evaluation & Policy Center. (2025; 2024; 2023; 2022; 2021; 2020; 2019). *New Mexico Educator Vacancy Reports*; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2024; 2023; 2022; 2021; 2020; 2019; 2018). *Local Education Agency Universe Survey Data*. Common Core of Data.

The fall 2025 counts provide another way to gauge the scale of these staffing challenges across a wider range of positions. New Mexico had 604 unfilled teacher positions, equivalent to 2.9% of the filled teacher FTE positions in 2024–25, along with 289 unfilled instructional assistant positions (5.6%) and 21 unfilled instructional coach positions (5.8%). Beyond the roles shown in Figure 5, districts reported notable vacancies in positions that support students with disabilities, including speech-language pathologists (36; 4.5%), emotional and behavioral disorder support providers (18), educational diagnosticians (13; 4.0%), interventionists (10), and school psychologists (10; 5.1%). Percentages are only shown for categories with available total FTE position counts.

According to PED data on registered school psychologists and social workers, New Mexico schools also fell short on recommended behavioral health staffing levels.[191] These professionals play a critical role in the broader educator ecosystem, helping schools meet students' academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs while reducing the extent to which teachers must absorb responsibilities beyond instruction. Shortages may be especially consequential for students with disabilities and intersect with *Martinez/Yazzie* concerns about access to needed supports. The PED action plan identifies counseling, social work, behavioral health, and other wraparound services as a core remedial need, while the Tribal Remedy Framework calls for strengthening pipelines of Native American social workers, counselors, health professionals, and other support staff.[192]

Teacher vacancy trends can also be examined by school level and area of specialization. As shown in Figure 6, New Mexico faced its most acute shortages in special education. With 225 vacancies in fall 2025 and approximately 3,939 teachers with special education certification working in New Mexico schools in 2023–24, this equated to about 5.7 vacancies per 100 teachers—roughly twice the vacancy rate for teachers overall (Figure 5). Unlike other teacher groups, special education vacancies declined only modestly since their peak in fall 2021. In raw vacancy counts, the next largest category was elementary school teachers, followed by high school and middle school teachers, with far fewer vacancies in early childhood and gifted education. Across these school levels, 29 teacher vacancies had positions with "bilingual" in the position title in fall 2025. The trends in bilingual teacher vacancies followed trends for other groups in Figure 6, reaching a peak of 98 vacancies in fall 2021 before declining.

Figure 6. Teacher Vacancies by School Level or Specialization, 2019–2025



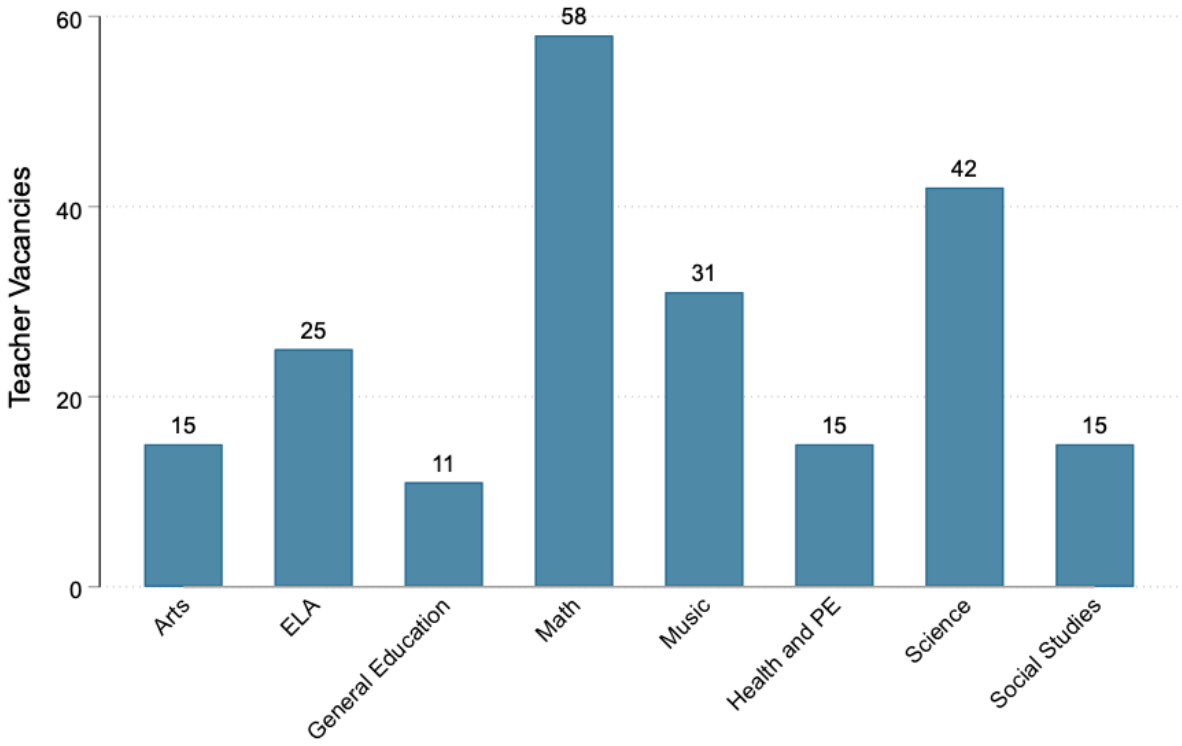
Notes: The special education category includes resource teachers. K–12 teacher vacancies, referring to vacancies in schools with K–12 grade levels, were not collected in 2020.
Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of New Mexico State University College of Education Southwest Outreach Academic Research Evaluation & Policy Center. (2025; 2024; 2023; 2022; 2021; 2020; 2019). *New Mexico Educator Vacancy Reports*.

One important caveat is that these counts are not scaled to the total number of teachers in each school level or specialization, so they are not directly comparable in the same way as the vacancy ratios shown in Figure 5. These counts are therefore best interpreted as showing where districts report the largest number of open positions, rather than where the vacancy rate is necessarily highest relative to the size of the workforce.

Figure 7 focuses on subject-area shortages in general education, showing the number of unfilled teacher positions in fall 2024 by listed subject area. Math and science have consistently ranked among the state's most common shortage areas in recent years, and this pattern continued in 2024, when districts reported 58 math vacancies and 42 science vacancies. Among other subject areas, regular school districts reported 31 vacancies in music; 25 in English language arts; 15 each in arts, health and physical education, and social studies; and 11 listed as general education. Overall, efforts to strengthen New Mexico's teacher pipeline would benefit from targeted

attention to special education and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) teaching positions, where shortages have remained especially persistent.

Figure 7. Teacher Vacancies by Subject, Fall 2024



Note: Fall 2025 has incomplete subject coverage for vacancies.
Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of New Mexico State University College of Education Southwest Outreach Academic Research Evaluation & Policy Center. (2024). *New Mexico Educator Vacancy Reports*.

Equity in Access to Qualified and Experienced Teachers

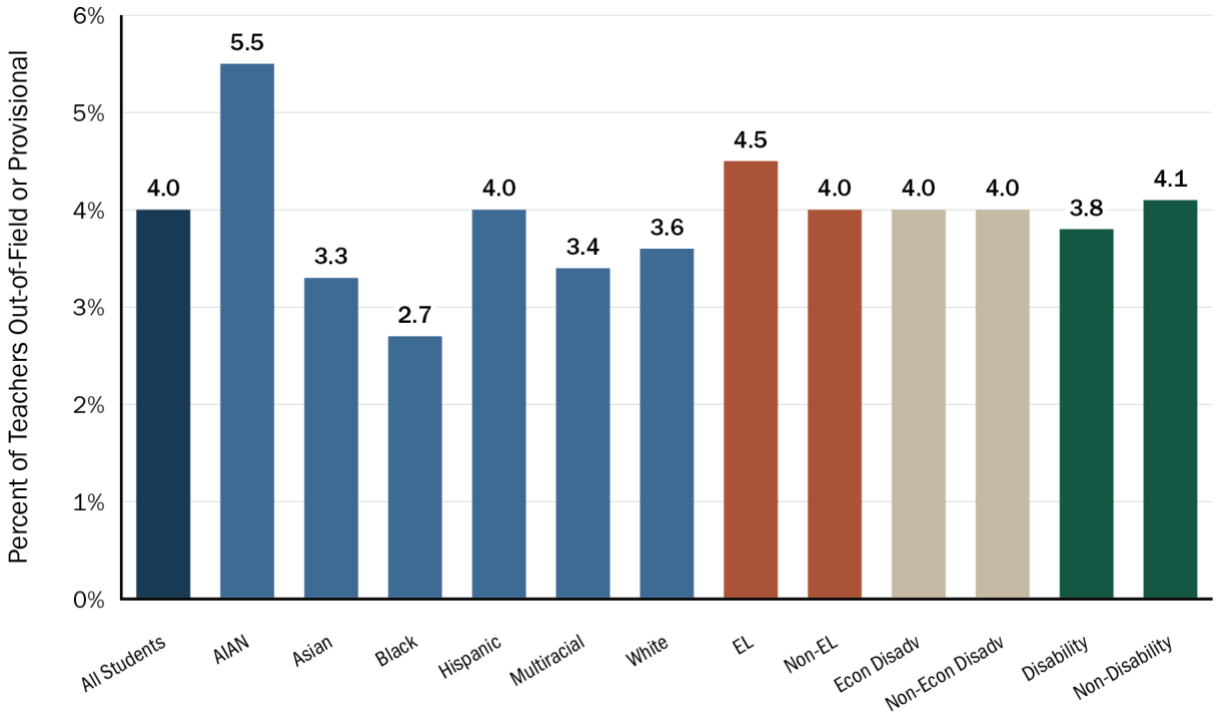
When school districts experience staffing difficulties, they often resort to filling classroom positions with less experienced or less fully prepared teachers. Prior research has shown that this reliance on less experienced and less fully prepared educators is more common in schools serving disadvantaged student populations, including students of color and students from low-income families.[193] This has been the case previously in New Mexico, as unequal access to teacher quality played a key role in the original *Martinez/Yazzie* determination.[194] In this subsection, we will therefore pay particular attention to the student groups identified in the *Martinez/Yazzie* ruling, including Native American students, English learners, low-income students, and students with disabilities.

Figure 8 documents the average share of teachers who are either teaching outside of their certified subject area or under an emergency or provisional license in the schools attended by students with different characteristics. Teaching outside one's certified subject area is a common indicator that schools are unable to fill classrooms with appropriately prepared educators. Although less common—about 1% of New Mexico's teachers fall into this category—reliance on teachers with emergency or provisional licenses is another indicator of shortage and may also have consequences for students, as these teachers tend to have higher turnover and, on average, produce weaker learning outcomes.[195] Here, "emergency or provisionally licensed" refers to teachers who are permitted to teach temporarily or under a waiver because they have not yet met all state licensure requirements.[196] This includes teachers who are in alternative preparation programs while they serve as teachers of record.

Looking first by student racial or ethnic identity, Native American students attended schools with the highest share of teachers who are teaching out-of-field or with only an emergency or provisional license, at 5.5% of their teachers. Hispanic students experienced the second-highest exposure, at 4.0% of their teachers. Asian, Black, multiracial, and White students all attended schools with lower shares of teachers who are teaching out-of-field or teaching with only an emergency or provisional license, on average.

English learners also had modestly higher exposure to out-of-field and emergency or provisionally licensed teachers, at 4.5% compared with 4.0% for non-English learners.[197] By contrast, there was essentially no difference by student economic disadvantage and only small differences between students with and without disabilities. This school-level pattern does not mean that special education faces fewer preparation challenges: Among 2024–25 completers of special education teacher programs, 66% were prepared through alternative licensure teacher-of-record pathways, compared to 40% of elementary teachers and 53% of secondary teachers. (See Table 3.) Overall, ongoing teacher staffing challenges appear to have the greatest instructional-quality implications for Native American students, Hispanic students, and English learners, who were most likely to attend schools with out-of-field or provisionally licensed teachers.

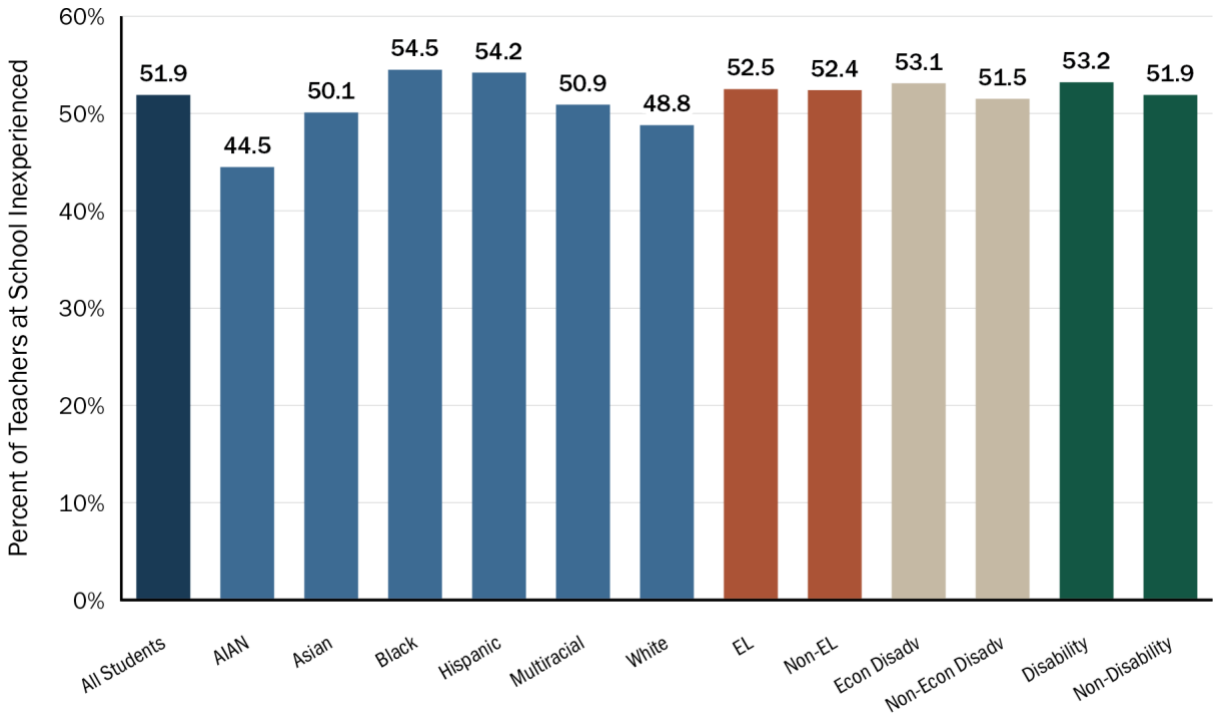
Figure 8. Exposure to Out-of-Field Teachers or Teachers with Emergency or Provisional Licenses by Student Characteristics, 2024–25



Notes: AIAN = American Indian or Alaska Native; EL = English learner. This figure calculates the average percent of teachers in schools attended by students with a given characteristic who only have an emergency or provisional teaching license or who teach outside their subject of certification.
Sources: Learning Policy Institute analysis of New Mexico Public Education Department. (2025). *2024–2025 Federal and New Mexico State Accountability Data*; New Mexico Public Education Department. (2025). *STARS Enrollment Data: 2024–25 Enrollment Subgroup Percentages*.

Shifting to experience as a proxy measure for teacher quality, Figure 9 uses school-level educator qualifications data from the 2024–25 school year to assess the average exposure to teachers with 5 or fewer years of experience by student characteristics. As can be seen in this figure, Black and Hispanic students attended schools with the highest share of inexperienced teachers. The average Black student attended school with 54.5% of the teachers with 5 or fewer years of experience, a rate over 5 percentage points higher than schools attended by the average White student. Economically disadvantaged students also attended schools with a higher share of inexperienced teachers than did students who were not economically disadvantaged (53.1% vs. 51.5%). Finally, students with disabilities had higher exposure to inexperienced teachers than their peers without disabilities (53.2% vs. 51.9%). There were no meaningful differences in access to experienced teachers by English learner status.

Figure 9. Exposure to Inexperienced Teachers by Student Characteristics, 2024–25



Notes: AIAN = American Indian or Alaska Native; ELL = English learner. This figure calculates the average percentage of teachers who have 5 or fewer years of experience in schools attended by students with a given characteristic.
Sources: New Mexico Public Education Department. (2025). *2024–2025 Federal and New Mexico State Accountability Data*; New Mexico Public Education Department. (2025). *STARS Enrollment Data: 2024–25 Enrollment Subgroup Percentages*.

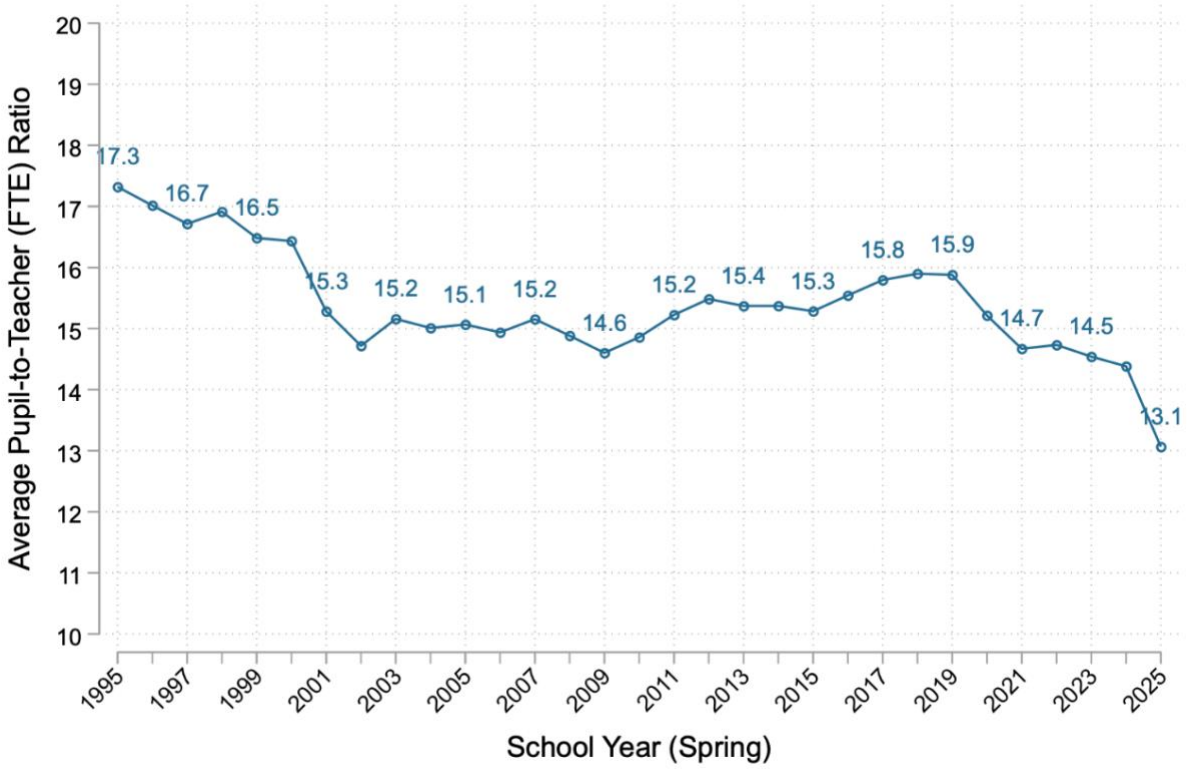
These gaps matter because teachers generally become more effective with experience, particularly during their early years in the classroom, which improves both student academic achievement and behavioral outcomes.[198] Gaps in access to experienced classroom teachers can translate into gaps in educational outcomes, thereby widening educational inequality in the state.

State Investments and Pupil-to-Teacher Ratios

Another common indicator of instructional quality is the number of students per teacher. Smaller classes can create more manageable working environments for teachers and promote better short- and long-term outcomes for students.[199] Conversely, larger class sizes may indicate that a school or district lacks the necessary resources or pool of prospective teachers to fully staff classrooms with qualified instructors. Although pupil-to-teacher ratios are not the same as actual class sizes, they offer a useful statewide proxy for whether schools have enough teachers relative to student enrollment.

New Mexico's increased investments in public education are beginning to show up in this measure. As shown in Figure 10, the average pupil-to-teacher ratio was 17.3 in 1994–95, declined through 2001–02, and then remained relatively stable for roughly 2 decades. Since 2018–19, however, the ratio dropped from 15.9 students per teacher to 13.1 in the most recent school year. This ratio reflected wide variance across districts, with the lowest pupil-to-teacher ratios concentrated among very small, rural districts and higher ratios more common in larger districts and regional population centers.

Figure 10. Statewide Average Pupil-to-Teacher Ratio Trends, 1994–95 to 2024–25

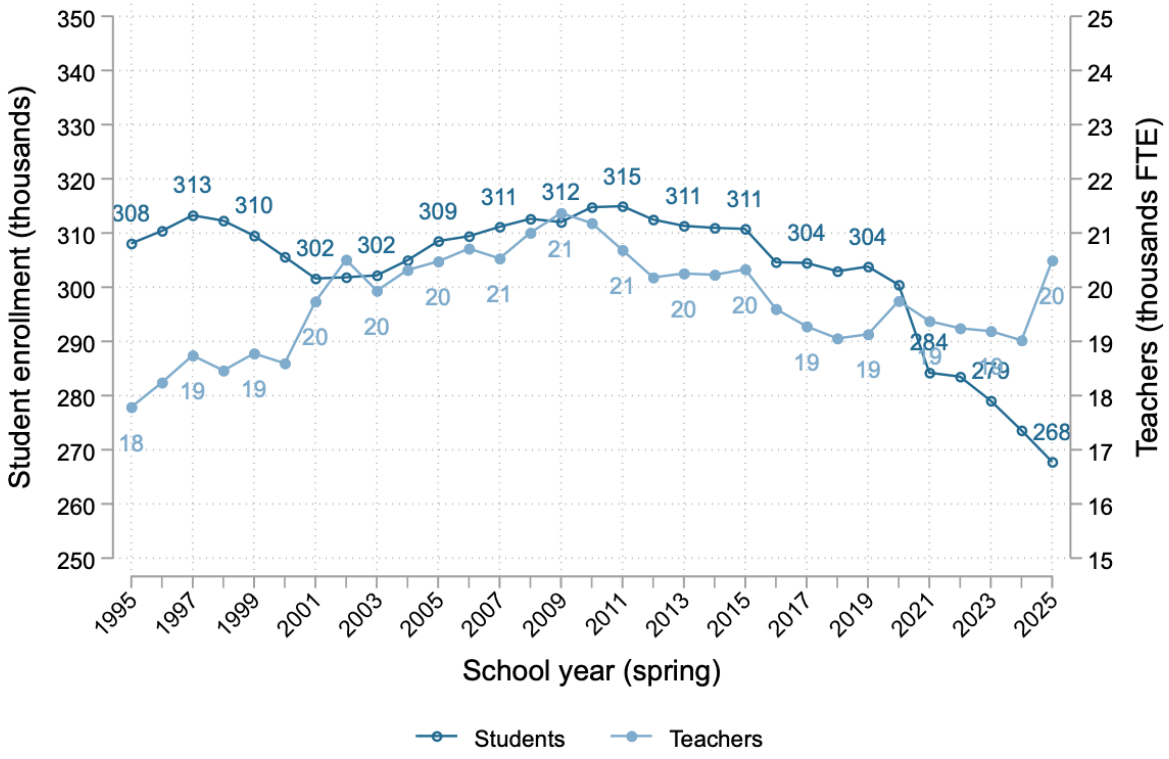


Notes: FTE = full-time equivalent. These pupil-to-teacher ratios are calculated as total enrollment divided by total FTE teachers in the 82 public school districts for which both measures were reported in all 31 school years. Averages are identical in most years when instead calculated across all 89 public school districts.
Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (1994–2024). *Local Education Agency Universe Survey Data*. Common Core of Data.

This decline reflected two converging trends rather than staffing growth alone. As Figure 11 shows, statewide enrollment fell every year since 2018–19, from roughly 304,000 students to about 268,000 in 2024–25, a decline that on its own would push the ratio down even with no change in teacher hiring. At the same time, the teacher workforce—after gradually shrinking for

most of the 2010s to a low of around 19,000—rose sharply in the most recent year, reaching approximately 20,500, its highest level in nearly a decade. The largest 1-year drop in the pupil-to-teacher ratio, between 2023–24 and 2024–25, coincided with both this uptick in teacher hiring and New Mexico's allocation of a historic $4.7 billion budget to education, accounting for more than 46% of the total state budget.[200]

Figure 11. Statewide Enrollment and Teacher Workforce Trends, 1994–95 to 2024–25



Notes: FTE = full-time equivalent. These student enrollment and total FTE teacher counts are summed for the 82 public school districts in which both measures were reported in all 31 school years.
Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (1994–2024). *Local Education Agency Universe Survey Data*. Common Core of Data.

As with measures of educator quality, student groups may also differ in the average number of students per teacher in their schools. In New Mexico, Hispanic students were enrolled in schools with substantially higher pupil-to-teacher ratios than students from other racial or ethnic groups, suggesting lower staffing levels and potentially larger average class sizes. For every other racial or ethnic group, the average ratio was at least 2.5 students lower per teacher. English learners faced a similar pattern: The schools serving these students had, on average, more than three additional students per teacher compared with the schools serving non-English learners. This

pattern is concerning given that English learners often need supplementary instructional support for language acquisition.

Economically disadvantaged students were also concentrated in schools with higher pupil-to-teacher ratios—about one additional student per teacher compared with their non-economically disadvantaged peers—suggesting somewhat lower staffing levels in the schools serving these students. For students with disabilities, the pattern ran in the opposite direction, with lower average ratios that may reflect greater access to additional instructional staffing or smaller instructional settings. These staffing measures reflect only students enrolled in New Mexico's public school districts and charter schools. They do not capture staffing conditions in BIE or tribally controlled schools, which serve many of the state's Native American students. (See Bureau of Indian Education and Tribally Controlled Schools.)

Overall, New Mexico's recent investments appear to be improving some statewide measures of educator staffing, including lower pupil-to-teacher ratios and reductions in reported vacancies. Yet shortages remained concentrated in key areas, especially special education and STEM fields, and unequal access persisted across student groups. Native American students, Hispanic students, English learners, economically disadvantaged students, and students with disabilities continued to experience higher exposure to one or more indicators of staffing strain, underscoring the need to ensure that educator workforce investments reach the students and schools most affected by shortages.

Such shortages can have both immediate and longer-term consequences for student learning by disrupting school operations and increasing reliance on a teacher workforce that is more temporary, less experienced, and often less well prepared.[201]

Bureau of Indian Education and Tribally Controlled Schools

Apart from charter schools and public school districts overseen by PED, over 6,200 students in New Mexico attend one of 23 schools operated by the BIE or 21 operated by federally recognized tribes or tribal organizations. Of these, 31 schools serve elementary or middle school grades, including K–6 and K–8 configurations, while 13 serve high school grades, including K–12 and other configurations. Nearly one quarter of all BIE and tribally controlled schools nationally are located in New Mexico, most in the state's Northwest region.

Federal involvement in Native American education has a long history shaped by policies that sought to suppress Indigenous languages, cultures, and identities. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the federal government established off-reservation boarding schools as instruments of forced deculturation, Americanization, and assimilation. For instance, at the Santa Fe Indian School, opened in 1890, children from reservations across Arizona and New Mexico divided their time between classroom instruction and so-called vocational training that largely consisted of washing dishes, scrubbing floors, and working in the field. The Snyder Act of 1921 authorized federal funding for Native American education; the Indian Reorganization Act of

1934 first permitted the teaching of Native history and culture in Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools; and the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 gave federally recognized tribes the authority to contract with the BIA to operate their own schools and determine appropriate educational programs for their children. Subsequent amendments permitted BIA-funded schools to hire local teachers and staff.

Students in BIE and tribally controlled schools. About one in five students in New Mexico's BIE or tribally controlled schools is an English learner, one in seven has an identified disability, and nearly all come from low-income backgrounds. These schools therefore play an important role in providing culturally and linguistically responsive education and coordinating supports for students with varied learning needs. An on-track student attendance rate of 54% also points to the importance of addressing barriers to consistent attendance, including long travel distances; transportation challenges; health and economic hardship; and the need for strong relationships among schools, families, and tribal communities. Many students on reservations must navigate major school transitions, such as moving after 8th grade from a BIE or tribally controlled school to a public high school in a border town or a Native-serving residential school.

Educator workforce and resources. These schools employ 622 teachers and 248 other school staff, including 72 principals and 176 paraprofessionals. Among teachers, 34% have 4 or fewer years of experience and may therefore benefit from sustained mentoring and early-career support. More than one quarter of principals and paraprofessionals also have 4 or fewer years of experience in their roles. In 2022–23, the BIE-operated schools in this group reported average per-pupil expenditures of $16,747, similar to average education spending in New Mexico's public school districts.

The staffing patterns and distinctive governance context of these schools underscore that New Mexico's educator workforce policies must be developed in partnership with the state's 23 sovereign Native Nations—consistent with the government-to-government relationship established in the Indian Education Act—and be tailored to the geographic, cultural, and linguistic contexts of the communities they serve.

Sources: New Mexico Indian Education Act, N.M. Stat. Ann. §§ 22–23A-1–22–23A-12; New Mexico State Library. (n.d.). Bureau of Indian Affairs records created by the Santa Fe Indian School. M-1473; Oakes, J., Espinoza, D., Darling-Hammond, L., Gonzales, C., DePaoli, J., Kini, T., Hoachlander, G., Burns, D., Griffith, M., & Leung-Gagné, M. (2020). *Improving education the New Mexico way: An evidence-based approach*. Learning Policy Institute; U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Indian Education. (2026). *BIE school directory*; U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Indian Education. (2025). *BIE local education agency / school report cards: School year 2023–24*.

The Changing Teacher Preparation Pipeline

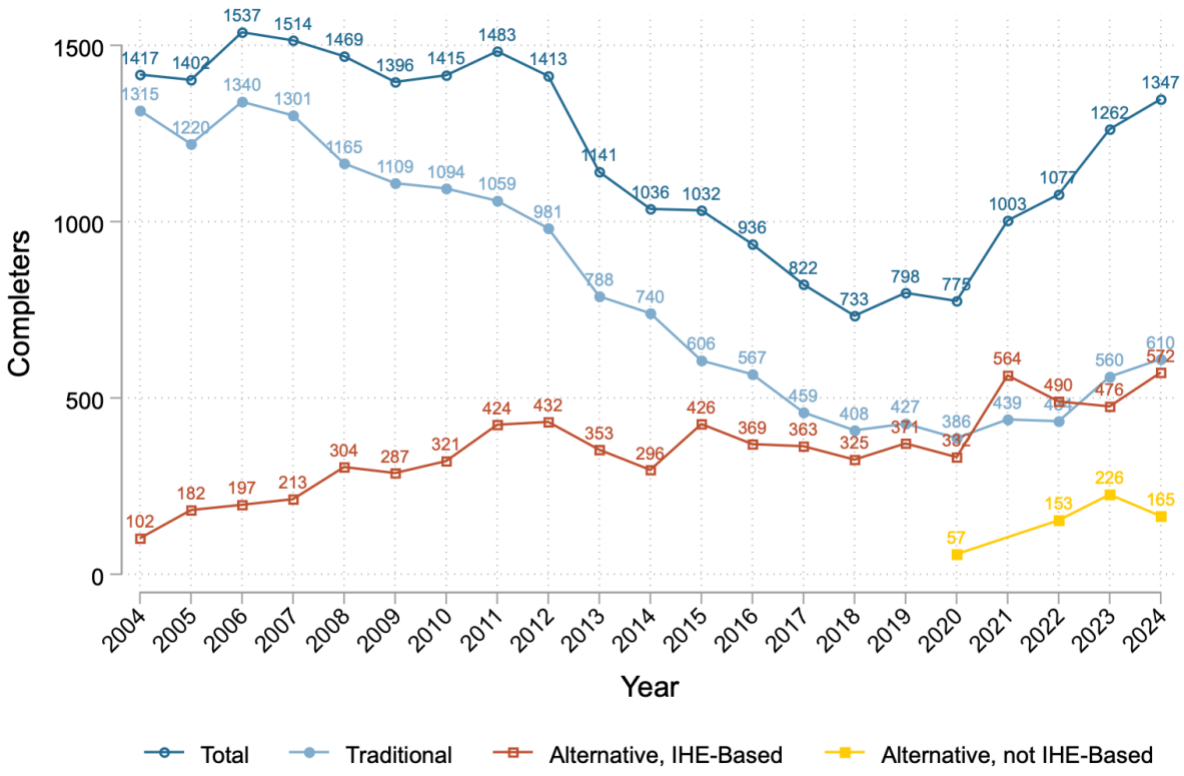
One direct path to easing teacher shortages is to strengthen the pipeline into the profession. New teachers can enter New Mexico's workforce through several routes, including preparation within the state, relocation from other states, and reentry after time away from the classroom. The

largest and most dependable source of new supply, however, is the state's educator preparation programs (EPPs). This section examines trends in the size and composition of that pipeline, including differences across preparation pathways, institutions, and candidate characteristics.

Taking a high-level view of the pipeline, New Mexico has experienced a substantial contraction followed by a strong recovery in the number of candidates completing EPPs. According to the U.S. Department of Education's Title II reporting system, 1,417 candidates completed an EPP during the 2003–04 academic year. This number fluctuated year to year but stayed relatively stable through 2011–12, when 1,413 candidates completed teacher preparation. (See Figure 12.) This number then declined steadily over the next 6 years, reaching a low of 733 completers in 2017–18 and remaining relatively low through 2019–20, when 775 candidates completed an EPP. Since then, the trend reversed: The number of completers grew each year, reaching 1,347 completers in 2023–24—a 74% increase in just 4 years and nearly a return to the 2011–12 level. As discussed in the New Mexico's Teacher Workforce Policy Landscape section, this recovery occurred alongside significant state investments in teacher compensation, teacher residency and other pipeline programs, and other supports for the teacher workforce.

These overall trends coincided with a notable shift in the composition of teacher preparation in New Mexico, from traditional programs toward alternative routes. Traditional EPPs are based at institutions of higher education and combine academic coursework with supervised clinical experience before candidates become teachers of record. Alternative-route teacher programs are designed to provide another pathway to certification for candidates who already hold a bachelor's degree and who may begin teaching as the teacher of record while completing program and licensure requirements. These programs may be based within or outside of an institution of higher education (IHE).

Figure 12. Educator Preparation Program Completers by Program Type, 2012–2024



Note: IHE = Institution of higher education.
Source: U.S. Department of Education. (2013–2025). *Title II Report: New Mexico State Report*. National Teacher Preparation Data.

As a definitional note, New Mexico typically classifies postbaccalaureate preparation programs as alternative, even when candidates do not serve as teacher of record during their preparation.[202] As a result, the alternative category encompasses substantially different preparation experiences. Some candidates enter classrooms as teachers of record after relatively limited preservice preparation, while others complete student teaching or residency placements with intensive mentoring and aligned graduate coursework before assuming full responsibility for a classroom. Distinguishing among teacher-of-record, student teaching, and residency models therefore provides a more informative picture of candidates' clinical preparation than the traditional/alternative distinction alone. In 2024–25, teacher-of-record placements were the most common model among alternative completers, accounting for 76%.

Figure 12 shows that programs classified as alternative accounted for a growing share of completers over time, although the diversity of programs within this category makes that trend difficult to interpret. One clear development was the emergence of alternative preparation operated outside IHEs, particularly through Cooperative Educational Services–LEAP (CES–

LEAP), which launched in 2019 as the first statewide program of this kind. CES–LEAP produced 57 completers in 2019–20, peaked at 226 in 2022–23, and produced 165 completers in 2023–24—about 12% of all EPP completers statewide.[203] Traditional programs also grew substantially in the past 2 years.

To examine preparation more directly by type of clinical experience, Table 2 presents the number of candidates completing at each institution by clinical preparation pathway in the 2024–25 academic year, based on PED's Educator Accountability Report. The University of New Mexico and New Mexico State University produced the largest number of completers, with 210 and 190, respectively, followed by CES–LEAP, the state's largest alternative-route program, with 160.

Table 2. Educator Preparation Program Completers by Institution and Clinical Preparation Pathway, 2024–25

Educator preparation program	Completers	Student teacher count (%)	Teacher of record count (%)	Resident count (%)
Cooperative Educational Services – LEAP	160	NA	160 (100%)	NA
Central New Mexico Community College	95	22 (23%)	54 (57%)	19 (20%)
Eastern New Mexico University	127	31 (24%)	76 (60%)	20 (16%)
New Mexico Highlands University	77	18 (23%)	31 (40%)	28 (36%)
New Mexico Junior College	13	NA	13 (100%)	NA
New Mexico State University	190	115 (61%)	42 (22%)	33 (17%)
New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology	9	2 (22%)	7 (78%)	NA
Northern New Mexico College	66	46 (70%)	NA	20 (30%)
Santa Fe Community College	59	NA	59 (100%)	NA

Educator preparation program	Completers	Student teacher count (%)	Teacher of record count (%)	Resident count (%)
San Juan College	28	NA	28 (100%)	NA
University of New Mexico	210	143 (68%)	NA	67 (32%)
University of the Southwest	18	16 (89%)	2 (11%)	NA
Western New Mexico University	139	48 (35%)	51 (37%)	37 (27%)
Statewide	*1,191*	*441 (37%)*	*523 (44%)*	*224 (19%)*

Notes: Statewide totals reflect the sum of all 13 educator preparation program rows rather than the totals as printed in the source report (431, 523, and 223, respectively), which do not sum to the reported completers total of 1,191. Western New Mexico University's pathway values are reported as they appear in the source, although these sum to 136, three fewer than the institution's reported completers total of 139.
Source: New Mexico Public Education Department. (2026). *Educator Accountability Report: Academic Year 2024–25*. Educator Pathways Bureau.

Across the state, 44% of candidates completed their clinical preparation as teachers of record, 37% through student teaching, and 19% through teaching residencies. Residency placements were especially prevalent—accounting for between 27% and 36% of all completers—at New Mexico Highlands University, the University of New Mexico, Northern New Mexico College, and Western New Mexico University. The share of completion through residencies is also likely to grow: San Juan College launched a residency program in 2024–25, meaning its first residency completers will appear in future cohorts, and New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology added a residency program in 2026–27. Research has generally found stronger instructional effectiveness and retention among teachers who completed substantial preservice clinical experiences, particularly residencies, than among those who served as teachers of record while completing their preparation.[204]

Table 3 further breaks down EPP completer counts by licensure area and degree or credential type. In 2024–25, 177 candidates completed a degree or credential in Early Childhood: Birth–PreK or Early Childhood PreK–3; 359 in Elementary Education: K–8; 306 in Secondary Education: 7–12; 204 in Special Education: PreK–12 or Blind and Visually Impaired; 98 in Dual – Special Education and Elementary: K–8 or Dual – Special Education and Secondary: 7–12; and 46 in a Specialty Area: PreK–12. Licensure area was unreported for one completer.

Table 3. Educator Preparation Program Completers by Licensure Program, Degree or Credential Type, and Clinical Placement Pathway, 2024–25

	Early childhood	Elementary	Secondary	SPED	Dual (SPED)	Specialty area	Statewide
Total completers	177	359	306	204	98	46	1,191
Clinical placement pathway							
Student teacher	100 (57%)	148 (41%)	95 (31%)	29 (14%)	28 (29%)	43 (93%)	443 (37%)
Teacher resident	37 (21%)	68 (19%)	48 (16%)	41 (20%)	26 (27%)	3 (7%)	224 (19%)
Teacher of record	39 (22%)	142 (40%)	162 (53%)	134 (66%)	44 (45%)	0 (0%)	521 (44%)
Degree or credential type							
Undergraduate	127 (72%)	171 (48%)	89 (29%)	15 (7%)	53 (54%)	44 (96%)	499 (42%)
Graduate	7 (4%)	3 (1%)	10 (3%)	34 (17%)	1 (1%)	2 (4%)	57 (5%)
Certificate	43 (24%)	185 (52%)	207 (68%)	155 (76%)	44 (45%)	0 (0%)	634 (53%)

Notes: SPED = special education. SPED's teacher resident count was corrected from 47 to 41 based on a contradiction in the source report. There was one completer with degree/credential type not reported. There were three completers with missing clinical pathway information. Therefore, numbers may not sum perfectly by column/row.
Source: New Mexico Public Education Department. (2026). *Educator Accountability Report: Academic Year 2024–25*. Educator Pathways Bureau.

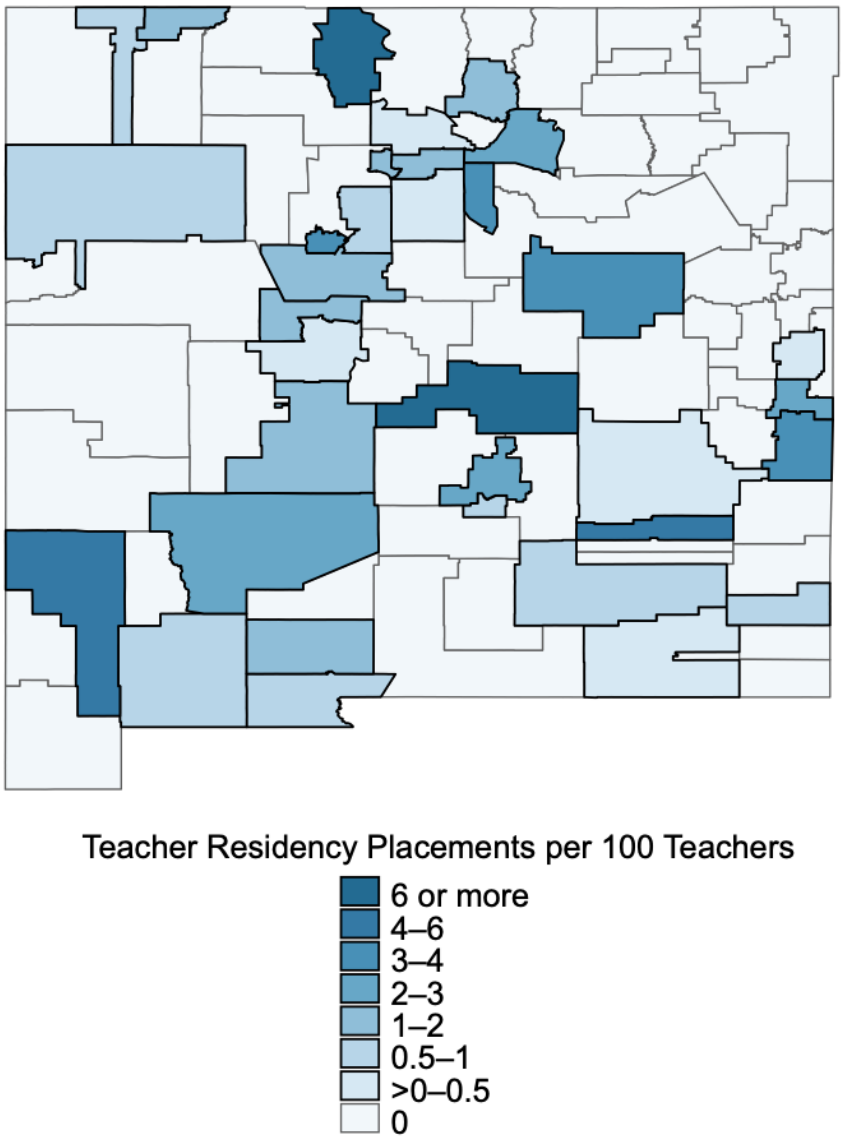
The type of clinical preparation also varied considerably across licensure areas. Teacher-of-record pathways accounted for 66% of special education completers, followed by 53% of secondary education completers, 45% of dual licensure completers, 40% of elementary education completers, and 22% of early childhood completers. No specialty area completers pursued a

teacher-of-record pathway. Residency placements were represented across licensure areas but were particularly common among dual licensure (27%), early childhood (21%), and special education (20%) completers, indicating that residencies were effectively reaching several areas with high staffing needs.

Programs also differed in the credentials they awarded. Nearly all specialty area completers earned undergraduate degrees (96%), as did 72% of early childhood completers. By contrast, special education completers were concentrated in graduate and certificate programs, which accounted for 17% and 76% of completers, respectively.

Figure 13 presents the distribution of teacher residency placements across New Mexico school districts, based on PED's 2024–25 Teacher Residency Report. Of the state's 89 public school districts, 55 reported no residency placements. The districts with the highest placement rates were Chama Valley Independent Schools (6.9 residents per 100 teachers), Corona Municipal Schools (6.7), Dexter Consolidated Schools (5.8), and Silver City Consolidated Schools (4.5). Because several of these districts are relatively small, their rates may have been elevated by small denominators. Among larger districts—those employing at least 200 FTE teachers—relatively high placement rates were reported in Rio Rancho Public Schools (3.0 residents per 100 teachers), Portales Municipal Schools (2.8), Los Alamos Public Schools (1.7), Las Cruces Public Schools (1.4), Albuquerque Public Schools (1.2), and Los Lunas Public Schools (1.1). As discussed in the final section of this report, A Policy Agenda for a Stronger Teacher Workforce, expanding existing teacher residency partnerships could extend residency opportunities to more areas of the state.

Figure 13. Teacher Resident Placements Per 100 Teachers by School District, 2024–25



Note: Residency placements scaled by the 2024–25 total number of full-time equivalent teachers in the district, except for Gallup–McKinley County Schools and Melrose Public Schools, where only 2023–24 teacher counts were not suppressed.
Sources: New Mexico Public Education Department. (2026). *Teacher Residency Report: Academic Year 2024–25*. Educator Pathways Bureau. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2025). *Local Education Agency Universe Survey Data*. Common Core of Data.

Teacher residencies are one policy initiative with evidence of increasing the racial and ethnic diversity of the teacher pipeline.[205] A more diverse teacher workforce matters both because teachers of color improve achievement and long-term outcomes of students of color and because

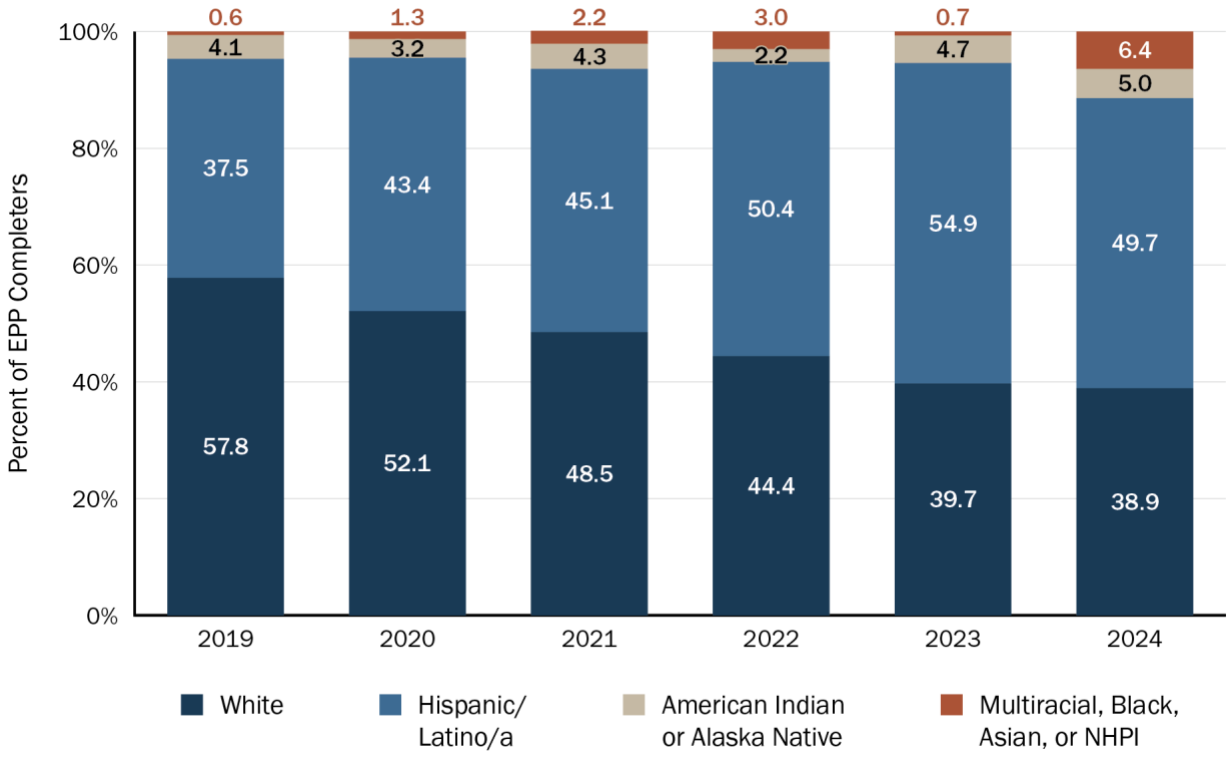
the racial and ethnic composition of the U.S. teacher workforce remains far less diverse than that of the student population.[206] This disparity is also evident in New Mexico, where the Indian Education Act, Hispanic Education Act, and Black Education Act each include provisions aimed at increasing the number of Native American, Hispanic, and Black teachers, respectively.

In 2023–24, the racial and ethnic composition of New Mexico's teacher workforce differed substantially from that of its student population. White students accounted for only 20% of enrollment, compared with 56% of teachers. Among teachers, 33% were Hispanic, 4% Asian, 4% American Indian or Alaska Native, 2% Black, and less than 1% multiracial or Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.[207] By comparison, 57% of students were Hispanic or Latino/a, 10% American Indian or Alaska Native, 2% Black, 2% multiracial, 1% Asian, and less than 1% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.[208]

The teacher preparation data present a promising picture, however, of the racial and ethnic diversity of New Mexico's incoming teacher supply. Figure 14 shows the distribution of EPP completers' race and ethnicity from 2018–19 through 2023–24. For visual clarity, the categories with the smallest numbers of completers—multiracial, Black, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander—are combined into a single category in the figure, but the values are still provided in the text.

In 2018–19, 57.8% of EPP completers were White, 37.5% were Hispanic or Latino/a, 4.1% were American Indian or Alaska Native, and 0.6% belonged to other racial groups, primarily Multiracial. Over the next 5 years, the share of White completers declined steadily, while the share who were Hispanic or Latino/a increased. By 2023–24, Hispanic or Latino/a candidates constituted the largest group of EPP completers, at 49.7%, compared with 38.9% who were White. Several smaller groups also increased their representation, most notably multiracial candidates, whose share rose to 5.1%. In 2023–24, 5.0% of completers were American Indian or Alaska Native, 0.9% were Asian, and 0.3% were Black. Because of Title II data suppression at the institution level, this figure likely understates the representation of candidates in smaller racial and ethnic groups.

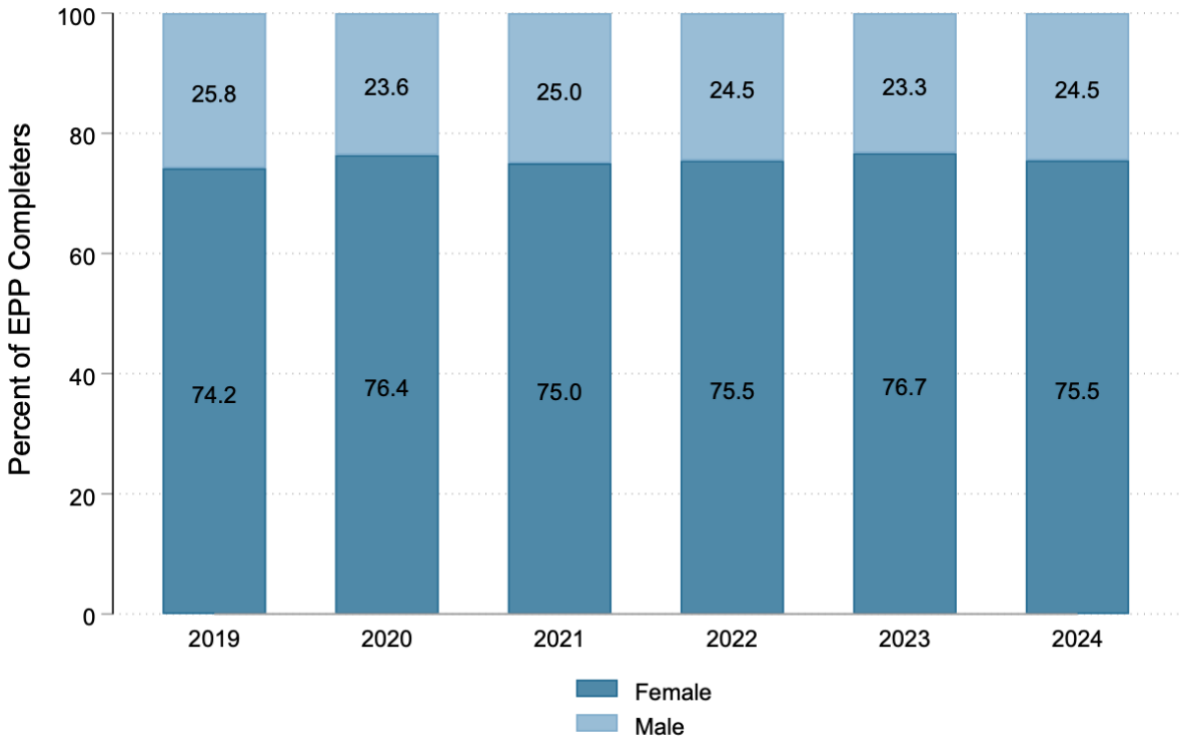
Figure 14. Educator Preparation Program Completers by Race/Ethnicity, 2019–2024



Notes: EPP = educator preparation program; NHPI = Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. multiracial, Black, Asian, and NHPI completers are combined into a single category due to small cell sizes. Shares are calculated as percentage of completers with reported race/ethnicity. Program-race/ethnicity cells with only one or two completers are suppressed in the source data. In the most recent year of data, 11% of completers either had race/ethnicity not reported or were excluded due to data suppression.
Source: U.S. Department of Education. (2020–2025). *Title II Report: New Mexico State Report*. National Teacher Preparation Data.

As shown in Figure 15, EPP completers were predominantly female, accounting for approximately three quarters of teacher candidates, while male completers accounted for approximately one quarter. This distribution remained stable from 2018–19 to 2023–24.

Figure 15. Educator Preparation Program Completers by Gender, 2019–2024



Notes: EPP = educator preparation program. Program-gender cells with only one or two completers are suppressed in the source data. In the most recent year of data, 2.7% of completers were excluded from gender counts due to data suppression.
Source: U.S. Department of Education. (2020–2025). *Title II Report: New Mexico State Report*. National Teacher Preparation Data.

Overall, these trends indicate that New Mexico's incoming teacher pipeline is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse, broadening the backgrounds and experiences represented among new educators. Despite these gains, the teacher workforce does not yet approach the diversity of New Mexico's student population.

Compensation, Working Conditions, and Teacher Turnover

Efforts to build a strong educator pipeline must be matched by equal attention to retaining and supporting those already in the profession. In this section, we examine the state of the current teacher workforce in terms of compensation, working conditions, and retention, drawing on publicly available data sources from New Mexico and beyond.

Descriptive Summary of Teacher Salaries

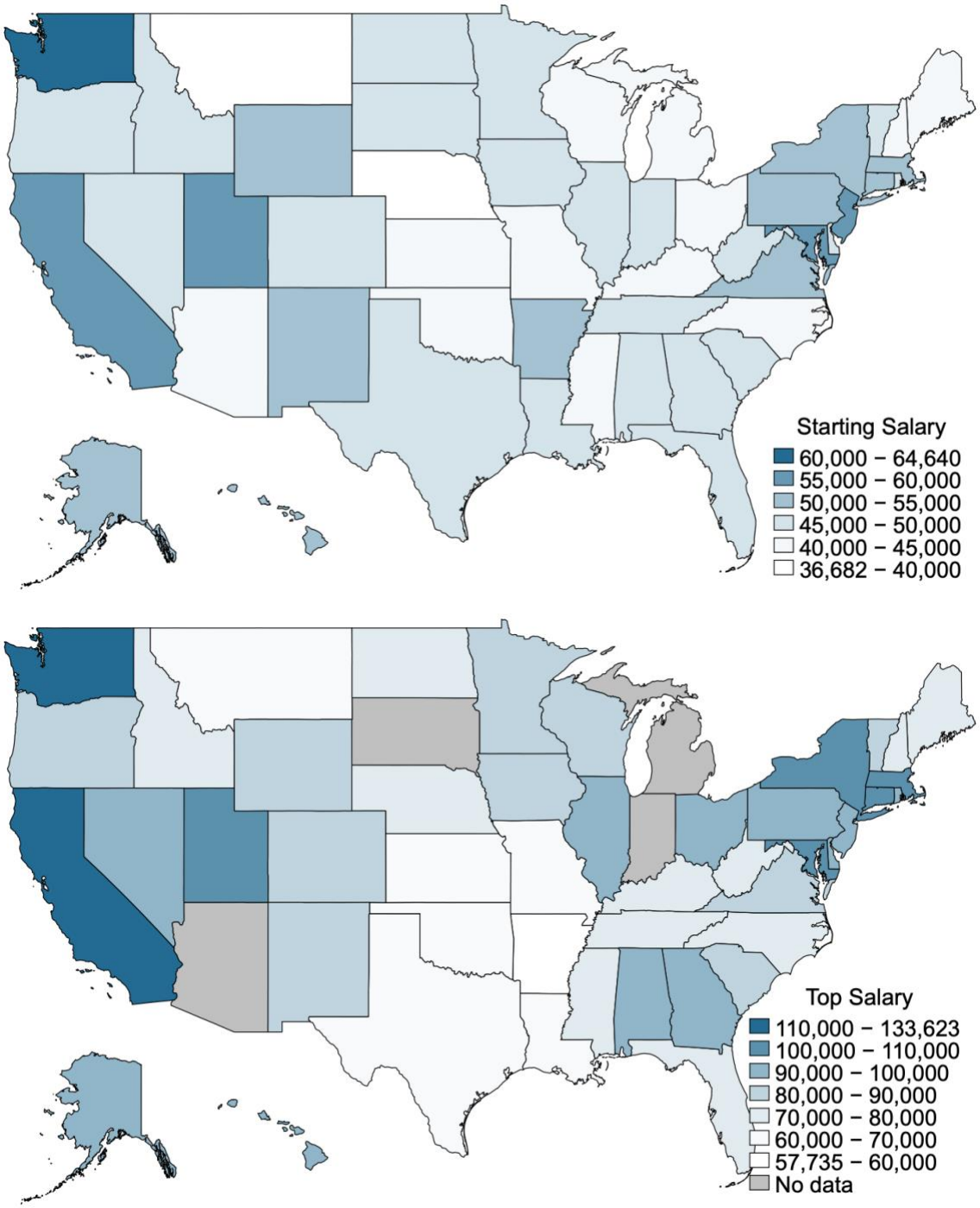
Research has indicated that compensation is an important factor in teachers' decisions to enter, remain in, and commit to the profession.[209] Accordingly, teacher salaries have received considerable state policy attention in recent years. Over the past 6 years, New Mexico made substantial investments in raising minimum salaries for teachers at licensure levels 1, 2, and 3. Minimum salaries for the three levels rose to $40,000, $50,000, and $60,000 in 2019–20; to $50,000, $60,000, and $70,000 in 2022–23; and to $55,000, $65,000, and $75,000 in 2025–26. (See Figure 4.)

These investments moved New Mexico from the lower half of states in teacher pay to a more competitive national position. Figure 16 maps average starting and top teacher salaries among reporting public school districts in each state, based on the National Education Association's 2024–2025 Teacher Salary Benchmark Report. According to these data, New Mexico ranked 7th nationally in average starting salary, at $54,372, and 24th in average top salary, at $83,534.

New Mexico also compared favorably with most neighboring states. Its average starting salary exceeded those in Arizona ($44,869), Colorado ($45,489), Oklahoma ($41,294), and Texas ($49,465), although it remained below Utah's average of $57,849. New Mexico's average top salary was likewise higher than those in Colorado ($81,181), Oklahoma ($63,952), and Texas ($69,404) but lower than Utah ($100,465). Comparable top salary data were unavailable for Arizona.

New Mexico's relatively strong position represents a substantial change from a decade ago. The state most recently ranked 24th among the 50 states and the District of Columbia in average teacher salary, at $69,736. In 2014–15, before the major legislative salary increases, New Mexico ranked considerably lower—44th nationally, with an average teacher salary of $46,625.[210]

Figure 16. Average Teacher Starting Salaries and Top Salaries by State



Notes: The National Education Association tracks teacher salaries from a variety of data sources, with 87% of all teachers and 80% of all school districts in the U.S. covered in salary reporting. New Mexico averages reflect 75% of districts and 88% of teachers reported.
Source: National Education Association. (2026). *2024–2025 Teacher Salary Benchmark Report*. Table ST-1.

Within the state, we can examine how teacher salary varied across position types, experience levels, and school districts. PED's 2024–25 Employee Position Directory provides individual-level information on district, hire date, hourly wage, position description, and full-time equivalency. Restricting the data to teachers, Table 4 shows the distribution of annual FTE wages across position types, not adjusted for average differences in experience, education, or licensure levels.

At the 10th percentile of the salary distribution, annual wages ranged from $50,532 for gifted education teachers to $56,547 for bilingual education teachers. Differences across position types were generally modest at the lower end of the salary distribution, although bilingual and special education teachers appeared to receive a small salary premium relative to their peers. Median salaries varied somewhat more. Elementary classroom, secondary classroom, special education, and bilingual education teachers all earned median annual salaries of approximately $69,000, compared with approximately $77,000 for gifted education teachers and $79,000 for librarians. At the 90th percentile of the salary distribution, librarians again had the highest salaries, while bilingual education teachers had the lowest.

Table 4. Teacher Salary Distributions by Position Type, 2024–25

Position	10th percentile annual FTE salary	Median annual FTE salary	90th percentile annual FTE salary
Elementary classroom	$55,416	$69,156	$83,731
Secondary classroom	$54,889	$69,242	$83,771
Special education	$55,620	$69,154	$84,214
Gifted education	$50,532	$77,234	$84,807
Librarian	$54,865	$78,933	$90,370
Bilingual education	$56,547	$69,257	$82,215

Notes: FTE = full-time equivalent. All reported wages converted to FTE annual salaries, excluding $0 values. These averages do not account for any differences in experience, education, or certification across position types.
Source: New Mexico Public Education Department. (2025). *2024–2025 Employee Position Directory*. Accessed through the Sunshine Portal.

Although these differences may have partly reflected variation in experience, educational attainment, geography, or other factors, teachers in high-need fields such as special education and bilingual education appeared to earn little more than teachers in other assignments. This

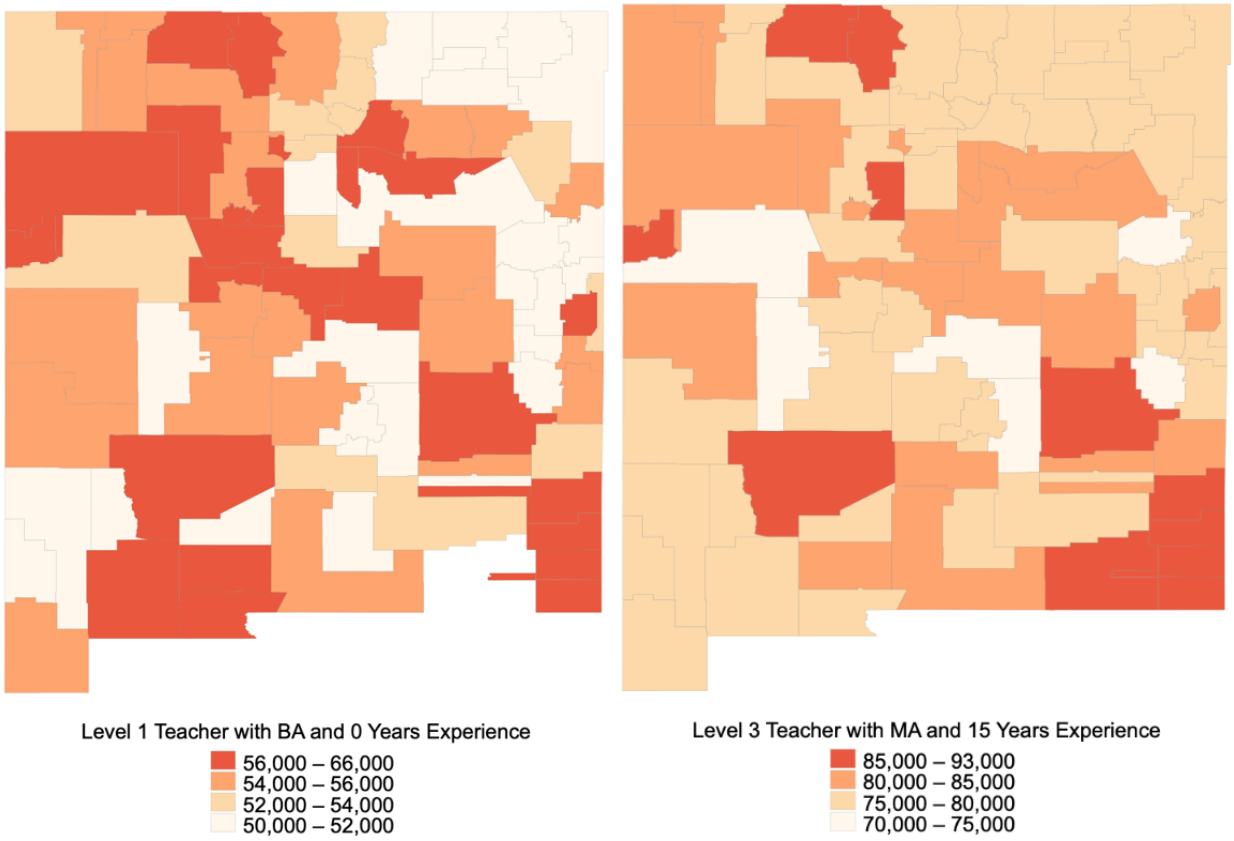
suggests a potential role for targeted financial incentives, such as loan forgiveness or tuition assistance, to support recruitment and retention of teachers in high-need fields.[211]

Because districts can set their own salary schedules above the statewide minimums, teacher pay also varied considerably across New Mexico. Figure 17 maps district-set teacher salaries from two distinct career stages across the state's 89 public school districts in 2024–25. The map on the left presents district salary levels for licensure Level 1 teachers with a bachelor's degree and no teaching experience, while the map on the right presents district salary levels for licensure Level 3 teachers with a master's degree and 15 years of teaching experience. Lighter shading indicates lower salaries, while darker shading indicates higher salaries.

For entry-level teachers, the highest salaries were offered by Jal Public Schools ($65,295), Carlsbad Municipal Schools ($64,377 in 2023–24), Roswell Independent Schools ($63,600), Dulce Independent Schools ($63,000), and Chama Valley Independent Schools ($62,169). Salaries for teachers with greater education, qualifications, and experience were also highest in Jal Public Schools ($92,130), Lovington Public Schools ($89,496), Roswell Independent Schools ($88,982), Carlsbad Municipal Schools ($88,940 in 2023–24), and Dulce Independent Schools ($87,986). These districts included several with substantial local oil and gas revenues, as well as remote communities and districts serving tribal communities where higher pay may help attract and retain teachers.

At the other end of the distribution, 18 school districts set entry-level teacher salaries at exactly $50,000, the minimum required by state policy in 2024–25. Another 37 districts set entry-level salaries between $50,000 and $55,000, the new minimum salary for licensure Level 1 teachers beginning in July 2025. Among licensure Level 3 teachers with a master's degree and 15 years of experience, salaries were lowest in Magdalena Municipal Schools ($70,075), Hondo Valley Public Schools ($70,900), Corona Municipal Schools ($70,009 in 2023–24), Tucumcari Public Schools ($72,250), and Elida Municipal Schools ($72,750). The lowest salaries for experienced teachers were therefore concentrated largely in small, rural and remote districts, four of which enrolled fewer than 300 students.

Figure 17. Annual Teacher Salary Levels by New Mexico Public School District, 2024–25



Notes: BA = Bachelor of Arts; MA = Master of Arts. Where 2024–25 schedules were unavailable, salaries were inflation-adjusted to fall 2024 dollars: Carlsbad, Carrizozo, Corona, San Jon, Socorro, and Wagon Mound (adjusted from 2023–24); Zuni (adjusted from 2025–26); and Eunice and Mora (adjusted from 2026–27). Only Gadsden's Level 3 salary was adjusted from 2026–27.
Source: New Mexico Public Education Department. (2025). *2024–2025 Salary Schedules*. Accessed through the Sunshine Portal.

These differences in compensation may have important consequences for districts' ability to staff classrooms. Although vacancy data were available only at the regional level, the Northeast region had both the lowest average teacher salaries and the highest teacher vacancy rate in 2025, at more than four vacancies per 100 teacher positions.[212] This pattern is consistent with evidence that less competitive salaries make it more difficult to recruit and retain qualified teachers.[213] Statewide salary minimums therefore provide an important floor but do not eliminate substantial differences in districts' capacity or willingness to offer compensation that is competitive enough to meet their staffing needs.

Although salaries are the most visible component of teacher compensation, they do not fully capture educators' overall financial well-being. Data from the 2020–21 National Teacher and Principal Survey indicate that 15% of New Mexico teachers worked outside the school system,

33.9% had outstanding student loans, and New Mexico teachers spent an average of $570 of their own money each year on classroom supplies.[214] While the first two figures are similar to national averages, teachers' out-of-pocket spending on classroom supplies was higher than the national average of $470. Across New Mexico's roughly 22,000 teachers, this amounted to more than $12 million in personal spending on classroom resources each year. Even as salaries have become more competitive, education debt and the need to personally subsidize classroom resources can create additional financial pressures for teachers entering and remaining in the profession.

Teacher Turnover and Working Conditions

Schools with greater year-to-year teacher stability, more supportive leadership, and more collaborative working environments tend to produce higher student achievement and greater teacher improvement over time.[215] However, assessing teacher retention and working conditions in New Mexico is challenging given limitations in currently available public data. Several indicators nonetheless provide insight into different aspects of teacher stability and working conditions across the state, which we examine below.

Teacher Mobility and Attrition

Data presented by LESC suggest substantial movement across schools and districts, as well as departures from the New Mexico teacher workforce.[216] Of teachers employed in the 2020–21 school year, about one in eight were no longer working in the same district 1 year later, and about one in five were no longer in the same district after 2 years. Movement across schools was even more common: Approximately one in five teachers teaching in the 2020–21 school year were no longer working in the same school by 2021–22, rising to nearly one in three by 2022–23.[217]

These estimates are consistent with other evidence of substantial teacher turnover in the state. The national Teacher Follow-Up Survey found that approximately 18% of New Mexico teachers left their school between the 2020–21 and 2021–22 school years, compared with 16% nationally.[218] Seven percent of New Mexico teachers left teaching altogether, while another 12% reported plans to leave the profession, compared with 9% who planned to leave teaching nationally. A recent study by New Mexico researchers Erica Zito and coauthors provided additional evidence of high turnover over a longer period, although the data predated the state's more recent salary increases and other workforce investments.[219] Using district rosters of certified teaching staff and exact name matching, the researchers calculated annual and longer-term district turnover between 2013–14 and 2018–19. The researchers estimated an average annual turnover rate of 20.1% between the 2017–18 and 2018–19 school years and a cumulative turnover rate of 56.6% over the full period from 2013–14 to 2018–19. These statewide averages masked substantial variation across districts: Six districts had annual turnover rates below 10%, while 11 had rates above 30%. Smaller districts were more likely to exhibit such extreme values.

School Climate and Working Conditions

Perceptions of working conditions also contributed to differences in district teacher turnover rates. As part of the same study, Zito and colleagues administered a 34-item working condition survey in spring of 2020 to approximately 4,500 certified teachers and compared satisfaction across multiple dimensions in low- and high-turnover districts. Table 5 summarizes the findings.

Four working condition measures differed significantly between the low- and high-turnover groups. In low-turnover districts, 64.0% of teachers reported satisfaction with leadership continuity, compared with 57.6% in high-turnover districts. This pattern is consistent with prior research identifying principal turnover as a predictor of teacher turnover.[220] Teachers in low-turnover districts also reported greater satisfaction with administrative support, at 69.5%, compared with 66.5% in high-turnover districts. This finding likewise aligns with a broader body of research showing that principal support and leadership shape teachers' decisions to remain in a school.[221] Satisfaction with planning, preparation, and collaboration time was also higher in low-turnover districts, at 62.8%, than in high-turnover districts, at 60.3%.

One result ran in the opposite direction: Teachers in high-turnover districts reported greater satisfaction with class size. The authors attributed this pattern to the concentration of high turnover among smaller, rural districts, which may have smaller classes because of their geography and enrollment patterns. Taken together, the findings reinforce the importance of school leadership and working conditions, alongside compensation, in future efforts to improve teacher retention across New Mexico.

Table 5. Average Workplace Satisfaction Scores by District Turnover Rate

Working condition	Low-turnover districts (Mean satisfaction)	High-turnover districts (Mean satisfaction)	Significance of difference
Salary and compensation	63.5	64.3	
Parent support	55.1	53.9	
Teacher workload	55.5	55.4	
Induction and mentoring programs	54.9	54.0	

Working condition	Low-turnover districts (Mean satisfaction)	High-turnover districts (Mean satisfaction)	Significance of difference
Leadership continuity	**64.0**	57.6	***
Student behavior	56.2	57.3	
Administration's role in student discipline	59.2	57.3	
Class size	62.3	**68.6**	***
Administrative support	**69.4**	66.5	**
Planning, preparation, and collaboration time	**62.8**	60.3	*
Teacher decision-making power	56.0	54.4	

Note: The final column presents significance level from means difference t-tests.
*p <.05. **p <.01. ***p <.001.
Source: Zito, E., Samuels, M., & Khandelwal, M. (2026). Beyond teacher shortages: Structural turnover and workforce instability in New Mexico schools. *Education Sciences*, *16*(5), 773.

The National Teacher and Principal Survey provides additional insight into working conditions in New Mexico's public schools. The most recent available state-level estimates come from the 2017–18 and 2020–21 waves, so they may not fully reflect current conditions. Relative to teachers in other states, New Mexico teachers reported comparatively favorable conditions in several areas, including leadership support, collegiality, time for professional development, and test-related job insecurity. Approximately 58% strongly agreed that school administrators are supportive and encouraging toward staff, while 42% strongly agreed that there is a great deal of cooperation among staff members. In addition, 67% received release time from teaching to attend professional development, and only 5% strongly agreed that they worry about their job security because of student or school test performance.[222]

New Mexico compared less favorably on measures of classroom autonomy, teacher involvement in school policymaking, and perceptions of evaluation. Only 45% of teachers reported having a great deal of control over classroom planning and instruction, while 26% reported having no influence over a range of school policies. In the 2017–18 survey, the most recent year for which this indicator is available, only 16% strongly agreed that the teacher evaluation process was fair. Because this question predated the implementation of Elevate NM, it did not capture perceptions of the current evaluation system, which places greater emphasis on classroom observation, professional growth, and actionable feedback. More recent data are needed to determine whether these changes have improved teachers' views of evaluation. The findings on autonomy and policymaking nevertheless pointed to clear opportunities to involve teachers more meaningfully in school and classroom decision-making.

Teachers' experiences with professional learning pointed to another important dimension of working conditions and professional growth. In a recent statewide survey of more than 2,000 K–12 teachers, 43% of respondents said that most of their professional learning experiences felt like a waste of time. The most commonly reported topics included data-driven instruction, social-emotional learning, differentiated instruction, assessment, culturally responsive teaching, and structured literacy. In addition, 32% were dissatisfied with the amount of professional learning available, and 35% were dissatisfied with its quality.[223] At the same time, more than 80% viewed professional learning as an essential part of teaching and expressed interest in more sustained opportunities for professional learning that were relevant to their roles and embedded in their daily work. The report identified several structural barriers to strengthening professional learning, including inflexible staffing models, weak connections to licensure and career advancement, mismatch between state-mandated training requirements and educator needs, and constraints on teacher time.[224]

How schools structure teachers' time is an important dimension of both student learning and teachers' working conditions. A recent Legislative Finance Committee report found that, despite substantial state investments intended to extend learning time, the amount of instructional time available to New Mexico students has changed little in recent years.[225] The report emphasized that additional instructional time can improve student outcomes when it is well-designed and effectively used. At the same time, maximizing student learning does not necessarily mean maximizing the time of teachers' workdays spent in direct instruction. Teachers also need time for planning, collaboration, coaching and observation, and job-embedded professional learning, all of which can strengthen instruction and improve working conditions.[226]

Recent survey evidence from Albuquerque Public Schools illustrated the pressures that demands on teacher time can create. In a 2025–26 Albuquerque Teacher Federation survey of approximately 2,000 Albuquerque Public Schools employees, nearly half of respondents described their workloads as unmanageable, rising to two thirds among special education teachers. Respondents pointed to insufficient planning time, paperwork and administrative requirements, testing, large class sizes or caseloads, and staffing shortages as contributors to workload pressures.[227]

New Mexico has made substantial investments in teacher compensation and preparation pathways, but the broader workforce picture remains uneven. Persistent vacancies, unequal access to qualified educators, high turnover, and wide variation in working conditions point to challenges that cannot be addressed through any single policy lever. The next section draws from the educator ecosystem framework, research base on best practices, and analysis of New Mexico's teacher workforce conditions to make a series of policy recommendations.

A Policy Agenda for a Stronger Teacher Workforce

New Mexico has made marked progress in strengthening its teacher workforce in recent years. The state's investments in broadening access to high-quality preparation through teacher residencies, Grow Your Own (GYO) programs, and other investments have helped to diversify New Mexico's workforce. Teacher vacancies are also down. Compensation and working conditions—notably pupil-teacher ratios—have also improved.

Despite this progress, large numbers of teachers in New Mexico continue to enter the classroom without a license, and acute vacancies continue in special education and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Student access to qualified teachers—particularly for Native American students, Hispanic students, and English learners, student groups identified in *Martinez/Yazzie*—continues to be highly unequal.

New Mexico leaders recognize this need and are seeking policy strategies, grounded in evidence, to continue to strengthen New Mexico's education workforce ecosystem. Returning to the educator ecosystem framework introduced earlier in the report (see Figure 1), findings from this study point to several potential approaches that New Mexico leaders can take to recruit, prepare, and retain a strong teacher workforce, building on recent progress. As described in detail below, potential policy actions fall into three broad areas:

1. Strengthen and coordinate preparation;
2. Support teachers to stay, grow, and lead; and
3. Build enabling infrastructure to support the educator ecosystem.

The state's recent investments are moving in the right direction, and yet findings from this study illustrate that new policies take time—and focused implementation—to yield improved educational opportunities on the ground for students. Sustained commitment (e.g., over the next 5 to 7 years)—along with active coordination to weave recent initiatives into a more coherent system—will be important to preserving and extending New Mexico's recent gains.

Strengthen and Coordinate Preparation

- **Continue to broaden access to high-quality preparation pathways, including through teacher and principal residencies and GYO programs, with the goal of providing residency-quality paid clinical preparation to a large and more diverse pool of aspiring teachers.** New Mexico has built several strong models to provide aspiring teachers with financial support while they engage in clinically rich teacher preparation in New Mexico's classrooms. Teacher residencies are perhaps the most well-developed and sustained investment, one that is beginning to have statewide impact. Residencies now prepare about one in five new educator preparation program (EPP) completers in New Mexico (and one in four completers at eligible EPPs), nearly two thirds of whom are teachers of color. Early data also indicate that residency graduates enter teaching in New Mexico schools and are retained at high rates. The recent

expansion of New Mexico's teacher residency model into two stackable, registered apprenticeship programs sponsored by the New Mexico Public Education Department (PED) offers the potential to scale residencies even further and provide a cohesive earn-while-you-learn pathway from high school through licensure. Other programs are promising and reaching a substantial number of candidates, including paid student teaching and Educator Fellows. Together, these programs are contributing to a more diverse teacher workforce, with half of new EPP completers Hispanic or Latino/a and 5% American Indian or Alaska Native. However, despite these gains, the teacher workforce has not yet approached the diversity of New Mexico's student population.

To continue to expand the reach of these programs, the state's recent approach to providing more sustained, predictable funding for educator clinical practice through the Government Results and Opportunity (GRO) fund provides a strong model. Early data are promising, and if ongoing data point to positive results, GRO may offer a pathway to recurring funding. In addition to stable funding, interest holders in New Mexico have elevated other policy strategies to support strong implementation of residencies that could be considered, including opening residency funding to all PED-approved EPPs—not just public institutions of higher education (IHEs) in New Mexico—and ensuring that PED has adequate staffing to support strong implementation.[228] Additionally, with two thirds of new special education teachers entering the classroom through alternative-route teacher-of-record pathways, continued attention is needed to increase the reach of residencies and other clinically rich preservice pathways to prepare special education teachers.

- **Ensure a common set of standards for all pathways into teaching, including undergraduate and postbaccalaureate, student teaching, residency, and teacher-of-record.** As described above, 44% of all preparation program completers entered through alternative-route teacher-of-record pathways, where candidates serve as teacher of record while undergoing preparation and in which candidate licensure and program approval requirements vary widely.[229] In addition, New Mexico offers a portfolio-only pathway with 179 participants in 2024–25, in which candidates serve as teacher of record for 2 years while receiving mentoring from their district and completing an online portfolio to earn licensure.[230] New Mexico EPPs and other interest holders have recently developed a common set of standards that policymakers and practitioners can use to support alignment and implementation across the state.[231] PED could, for example, require all EPPs to redesign and reapply for PED approval—an approach that Illinois took for its principal preparation programs that resulted in substantial improvements in quality and which New Mexico is undergoing with its Site Administrator Preparation Programs.[232]
- **Scale and stabilize educator scholarship and loan forgiveness programs.** Student loans continue to be a major barrier both to entry into the teaching profession as well as a burden for the existing workforce, with beginning teachers, special education teachers, and Black teachers disproportionately affected.[233] A third of New Mexico's teachers

carry student loan debt, which research has shown is associated with higher rates of turnover.[234] While New Mexico has made modest investments in scholarship programs for aspiring teachers and loan forgiveness for current teachers, just 1,455 candidates received a Teacher Preparation Affordability Scholarship in 2025 and just 529 teachers (~2%) of New Mexico's teacher workforce received loan forgiveness through New Mexico's Teacher Loan Repayment Program in 2025. The legislature, in collaboration with the New Mexico Higher Education Department (HED), could scale and stabilize both programs with recurring funds, ensuring eligible aspiring and current teachers can access these programs and rely on payments over time. The programs could also be further leveraged to incentivize teachers to prepare for and serve in high-need fields at the heart of *Martinez/Yazzie*, such as bilingual and special education—an approach that other states and the federal government have taken. For example, the Teacher Loan Repayment Program could be structured to offer loan repayment to such teachers once they are fully licensed and complete their first year of teaching (rather than requiring 3 years of experience), or to offer heightened repayment to candidates who serve both in a high-need field and a high-need school.

Support Teachers to Stay, Grow, and Lead

- **Attend to competitive compensation and career pathways to support more equitable distribution of qualified teachers both within and across districts.** New Mexico's substantial recent investments in raising minimum teacher salaries for licensure levels 1, 2, and 3 teachers have helped to move New Mexico from the lower half of states in teacher pay to a leader nationally in starting salary (7th) and middle of the pack in top salary (24th)—salaries that now stretch further following reforms in 2026 to require employers to cover 80% of health care premiums. At the same time, teachers continued to earn less than similarly educated workers, with a 17.3% gap between the weekly wages of teachers and college graduates working in other professions in New Mexico.[235]

  Additionally, because many districts set their own salary schedules above the statewide minimums, teacher pay varies widely across the state. Many of the districts with the lowest salaries serve remote, rural communities, placing them at a disadvantage in recruiting and retaining qualified teachers. While the Teacher Cost Index was intended to enhance equity in New Mexico, further study may be needed to better understand how it has affected the distribution of qualified teachers and whether additional changes may be needed since it was fully implemented in 2023.[236] A long-term goal for achieving more competitive compensation is to close the 17.3% pay penalty relative to other New Mexico college graduates, assessed regionally. The state has also invested $15 million over 3 years in providing Hard-to-Staff Differential Retention Stipends to eligible experienced special education teachers who have remained in their same district since the 2022–23 school year, though data on the impact of the program are limited.[237]

At the same time, salaries plateau for more experienced teachers. Many of these teachers may seek opportunities for continued career growth, including through leadership roles that carry greater responsibility and higher pay. National Board stipends are one form of differential compensation, which can recognize and reward accomplished, experienced teachers who have undergone the rigorous National Board Certification process, which research has shown is associated with greater instructional effectiveness. New Mexico provides a stipend of approximately $10,000 to National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs), as well as modest scholarships to support approximately 350 New Mexico teachers who are undergoing certification; as a result, the state now has more than 1,600 NBCTs.[238] The contribution of these stipends to a more equitable distribution of accomplished teachers could be strengthened by sustaining the investments, expanding access to certification support, and considering incentives that encourage NBCTs to serve and remain in high-need schools.

The state recently invested in innovative staffing pilots, which provide another opportunity to create roles for expert teachers to take on greater leadership and responsibility over multiple classrooms, accompanied by increased compensation. The Legislative Education Study Committee's (LESC) recent report on the Educator Career Continuum—part of its 2026 workplan—recommended the development of an instructional leadership endorsement, along with a framework for instructional leadership that defines enhanced roles and responsibilities, as well as provides enhanced compensation for teacher leaders.[239] These emerging efforts could be more explicitly connected: National Board Certification can serve as a pathway into expanded instructional leadership roles as it did in Maryland's recent career ladder reforms.[240]

- **Provide high-quality mentoring to all beginning teachers.** Research has pointed to the importance of high-quality mentoring and induction both for retaining new teachers as well as helping them to more rapidly increase their effectiveness in their first few years in the classroom. The need for high-quality mentoring for beginning teachers is particularly important given that roughly 14% of New Mexico teachers are in their first or second year of teaching, and 44% of new EPP completers in the state are coming through alternative-route teacher-of-record pathways having received little if any preservice preparation. New Mexico has established requirements in statute and regulations that all beginning teachers receive mentoring, yet there remains a substantial gap between the law's requirements and how it has been both funded and implemented. As the LESC has noted, "the state does not monitor program outcomes nor evaluate effectiveness." The *Martinez/Yazzie* action plan set forth several actions to strengthen mentoring for beginning teachers, including passing legislation requiring all districts and charter schools to provide high-quality mentorship to teachers during their first 3 years of teaching.[241] Research has identified several features of high-quality mentoring and induction programs, including matching teachers with mentors from the same field, providing common planning time with teachers in the same subject, and scheduling

regular collaboration with other teachers.[242] Importantly, providing all beginning teachers with high-quality mentoring also provides opportunities for expert, experienced teachers to serve as teacher leaders with greater responsibilities and compensation. Several states, including most recently Texas, provide ongoing funding for beginning teacher mentoring, including compensation for those who serve as mentors.[243]

- **Strengthen principal preparation and retention, especially in high-need, high-turnover schools.** Research has emphasized the importance of principal preparation and ongoing professional learning for teacher retention, as this supports principals' ability to create the positive working conditions and collaborative, supportive learning environments that play a critical role in attracting and retaining qualified teachers.[244] Additionally, higher principal turnover is associated with higher teacher turnover.[245] Data from New Mexico on teacher working conditions—while limited—were consistent with these broader research findings. Teachers in lower-turnover districts reported greater satisfaction with administrative support; leadership continuity; and planning, preparation, and collaboration time. Moreover, school leader vacancies were on the rise over the past 6 years. New Mexico has taken recent action to strengthen school leadership, including through investments in principal and superintendent preparation, coaching, and residencies, as well as revamping of principal and superintendent licensure.[246] Because these policies are fairly new—enacted in 2025—attention to implementation and evaluation is warranted, alongside sustained funding that gives the initiatives sufficient time to become established and demonstrate results. Much as New Mexico has expanded its teacher residency model into an approved registered apprenticeship program, the state's principal residency model—once fully established—may be able to broaden funding sources by expanding into a registered principal apprenticeship model.[247]
- **Implement regular, statewide surveys of teacher and other staff perceptions of working conditions.** New Mexico faces high rates of teacher turnover overall, with substantial variation across districts. One study found that 6 districts had annual turnover rates below 10%, while 11 had rates above 30%. However, because New Mexico lacks consistent statewide data on teaching and learning conditions in schools, state and district leaders are limited in their understanding of which conditions are most important to teacher retention and student outcomes, as well as their ability to implement responsive policies and practices. Several states, including Colorado, Kentucky, Nevada, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Utah, have implemented regular statewide surveys to better understand and address the influence of working conditions on teacher retention.[248] New Mexico could take a similar approach, administering such a survey through a state agency like PED—perhaps in conjunction with the annual school culture survey set forth in PED's *Martinez/Yazzie* action plan—or by contracting with an external provider, like an institution of higher education, to administer and analyze. A statewide working conditions survey could be part of a set of broader actions to strengthen educator

workforce data and research infrastructure, as discussed further below. Additionally, the LESC has conducted a study on teacher workload pursuant to House Memorial 47 which may provide useful data to inform policy development and implementation related to teacher working conditions.[249]

Build Enabling Infrastructure to Support the Educator Ecosystem

- **Strengthen educator workforce data and research infrastructure, a critical step in assessing compliance with the** *Martinez/Yazzie* **decision.** There is still much to learn about New Mexico's educator workforce. The collection, validation, aggregation, and reporting of key indicators related to educators, educator quality, and educator preparation programs have improved, but many of these advances are recent and remain works in progress. For example, PED has restarted and improved reporting through the Educator Accountability Reporting System annual report, and the Nova data system, which collects information on staffing and vacancies, was launched in 2024–25. However, both LESC and PED staff have found data in Nova to be "unreliable and incomplete."[250] One notable gap in the data is that the state does not currently publish calculated teacher turnover rates, an important indicator of educators' experiences in their current schools and careers and a critical input for forecasting future staffing needs. Greater capacity to link student and teacher records at the classroom level would also allow the state to assess and report more clearly which teacher policies and practices are working to increase access to qualified teachers and improve student outcomes, particularly for the student groups at the heart of the *Martinez/Yazzie* suit. Finally, continued collaboration around cradle-to-career data systems, such as RISE NM, could support the study of long-term pathways into teaching and illuminate connections between the K–12 teacher workforce and employees across other public systems.

  Additionally, there remains little experimental or quasi-experimental evidence on the effects of New Mexico's teacher workforce investments over the past decade. As the state considers whether to sustain, modify, or expand these initiatives, stronger causal evidence will be important for assessing their effects on teacher turnover and attrition, the distribution of teacher quality across schools and students, and students' academic and behavioral outcomes. Such evidence could help New Mexico demonstrate the value of its policies with the same rigor that is available for similar initiatives in other states and contexts, while also identifying where implementation or program design could be improved. Evaluation of the many pathways into teaching in New Mexico, for example, can guide future policy development and investments. The absence of state-specific causal studies should not obscure the encouraging workforce trends that are already visible or the broader research supporting many of these investments; rather, it points to an opportunity to build evaluation into the next phase of policy development.

- **Foster alignment and coherence across the interconnected components of New Mexico's educator ecosystem.** This includes preparation, licensure, and hiring; professional learning; compensation, career pathways, and working conditions; policy alignment; and alignment among the diverse set of actors who shape, implement, and experience these components. This is not a new recommendation, but it is one that bears repeating here.[251] House Memorial 30 (2026) directs the LESC to study statewide education governance and long-term planning—including how New Mexico can sustain its *Martinez/Yazzie* response across administrations—and it provides an opportunity to consider how education governance can foster coherence within the educator ecosystem.[252] As examples in this report illustrate, good policy intentions can be overshadowed by funding instability, leadership turnover, the inability to track and continuously improve implementation, inattention to diverse community contexts, and conflicting policies—to name just some of the potential challenges. A core element of fostering alignment and coherence across the interconnected components of the educator ecosystem is ensuring adequate staffing and capacity at PED.

  The *Martinez/Yazzie* decision made clear that policies in New Mexico must be informed by the students and families at the heart of the decision, namely Native American students, English learners, students with disabilities, and low-income students. New Mexico has correspondingly taken steps to implement collaborative structures for informing policy and practice decisions—some created at the legislative or administrative levels and others created through an identified need in the field. For example, the New Mexico Association of Colleges for Teacher Education has brought together a task force to develop a set of shared teacher preparation standards. The LESC—in collaboration with the Thornburg Foundation—has convened an advisory group of interest holders representing EPPs, professional associations, legislative staff, philanthropy, and education leadership to develop recommendations related to the educator career continuum, with a focus on instructional leadership pathways. While task forces and advisory groups can take time as they deliberate over various substantive and political issues, in the end they can produce approaches that are better grounded in the practical realities of schools and more durable than what might be developed behind closed doors. Sustaining the policy gains described in this report will require continued coordination across the actors who have driven progress to date, including PED, the legislature through the LESC and the Legislative Finance Committee, the state's 23 Native Nations and Native communities, EPPs, professional associations, district leaders, educators, students and families, and philanthropy. Particular attention will need to be paid to maintaining coalition coherence through the upcoming gubernatorial transition and building implementation capacity at the district level.

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