

Dear Editor,

Our education reform agenda now includes six bills! Here are descriptions of the final two that were introduced the week of Feb. 13, as well as an update on our bill to reform school boards, which received a strong endorsement from the Santa Fe New Mexican and passed its first committee by 7-1 on Feb. 18.

IMPROVING THE COLLEGES OF EDUCATION

Over the past decade, the number of people completing traditional teacher training programs at New Mexico's colleges of education have fallen by 75%. Graduates of New Mexico's colleges of education report that the programs too often emphasize abstract theory over the practical, skills-based learning that is most valuable to future teachers. They also note that not all faculty have strong backgrounds as classroom teachers themselves.

House Bill 460 would convert the final year of a four-year teacher training program into a teacher residency, a paid year-long experience in a classroom alongside an experienced teacher. Residencies have been shown to enhance teacher skills and reduce attrition, better preparing incoming teachers and keeping more of them in the profession.

The bill also requires future faculty hires by the colleges of education to have at least five years of experience as classroom teachers. In addition, it ensures that the state's public schools of education receive national accreditation and that their curricula are grounded in current best practices, including evidence-based math and literacy instruction.

SMALLER CLASSES

Final education bills introduced, update on school boards bill

Written by Think New Mexico
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Smaller class sizes allow teachers to provide more personalized instruction, which is particularly important for the at-risk students who need the most support. Since 1986, New Mexico has capped class sizes in statute, but the Public Education Department has frequently provided waivers allowing for larger classes.

House Bill 413, which was developed in collaboration with our Education Reform Director Mandi Torrez, proposes an innovative approach that sets lower class size limits for schools that have high populations of at-risk students. It also restricts the use of waivers to exceed class size limits for all students.

UPDATE ON SCHOOL BOARDS BILL

House Bill 325 received its first hearing in the House Government, Elections, and Indian Affairs Committee on Feb. 18. We are pleased to report that the bill passed 7-1!

As a reminder, this bill would ensure that school board members receive training in topics including public school finance; the role of school boards in improving student achievement; and best practices for supervising and supporting a superintendent. It would also require all school board candidates to disclose their campaign contributions, ensure that meetings are webcast, and require members who violate the prohibition against nepotism to step down from their position.

During the committee hearing, the New Mexico School Boards Association strenuously opposed the provisions requiring campaign finance disclosures and adding a penalty for nepotism. Standing in support of the bill alongside Think New Mexico were the American Federation of Teachers New Mexico, Common Cause New Mexico, the League of Women Voters New Mexico, the Greater Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce, and reform-minded school board members from across the state.

House Bill 325 now heads to the House Education Committee, where it will continue to face active opposition from the School Boards Association.

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Please contact your legislators and the governor and urge them to support House Bill 325!

Sincerely,

Think New Mexico Staff

