



NEWS RELEASE

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Sept. 8, 2021

Program to help education assistants become teachers

PED launches New Mexico Educator Fellows Program

SANTA FE – The Public Education Department has earmarked \$37 million in federal pandemic relief funding to ease New Mexico’s persistent educator shortage and improve student outcomes by building a pipeline that supports anyone interested in becoming a teacher.

The agency will use funds from the American Rescue Plan Act to create the new Educator Fellows Program, which will create opportunities for those interested in becoming educators by providing resources to districts and state charter schools. Those resources will help fund recruitment and retention of teaching assistant positions, with the ultimate goal of creating a workforce of highly trained and prepared teachers.

The program also aligns with Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham’s goal to get more highly trained educators into the field.

Following back-to-back pay raises in 2019 and 2020 initiated by the governor, teacher vacancies in New Mexico actually declined, but the shortage remains significant, with almost 600 teacher vacancies statewide in 2020. The problem is worse in some areas than in others.

“Our goal is to create one of the nation’s best educator ecosystems,” Public Education Secretary Designate Kurt Steinhaus said. “This program can serve as a pathway for more people to enter the education profession.”

In addition to improving workforce development around education, the program also would increase the ratio of adults to students within the classroom for more personalized learning. The

additional support for teachers and targeted small-group instruction would support students, especially as they continue to rebound from the pandemic.

“Support staff are key to making big improvements in schools,” said Deputy Secretary Gwen Perea Warniment, architect of the Educator Fellows Program. “Not only does this program provide support for existing teachers and students, it gets people into classrooms so that they know what it’s like. Then they can go on to become counselors, school nurses, and yes, teachers.”

“As schools return to the classroom after a year of online learning, teachers will need additional help to provide small group instruction and targeted tutoring,” said Sen. Martin Heinrich, who was on hand Wednesday in Las Cruces with the Public Education Department to announce the program. “We also have many caring, capable folks in our communities who are interested in the education field but who may lack classroom experience. I’m pleased that the New Mexico Public Education Department is using some of the over \$1 billion of federal funding that I helped secure in the American Rescue Plan for New Mexico’s public schools to stand up this new Educator Fellows Program. This is a promising solution for both our schools’ short-term needs and our state’s long-term educator workforce pipeline challenge.”

This program will help address one of the greatest challenges that have impacted our schools, even before the pandemic: teacher shortages,” said “As schools return to the classroom, teachers need this additional help. We need more adults in the room to deliver that extra help.”

School districts and state-chartered schools have until Sept. 20 to apply to participate. Those chosen will receive grants to cover these costs:

- An educational assistant’s full salary plus benefits
- A \$4,000 stipend to support each fellow’s postsecondary education
- All licensure and background fees.

Additionally, the department will provide a boot camp-style training before fellows start in the classroom, as well as coaching and support throughout their time in the program.

Any district or state-chartered school may apply by responding to this [Request for Information](#). Priority will be given to districts and schools with larger populations of at-risk students and elementary schools.

Many states, including New Mexico, continue to struggle with the recruitment and retention of teachers. Data show that fewer people are entering preparation programs, and those who do complete them often leave the profession in the first three years due to lack of training and support.

Of New Mexico’s 889 educator vacancies last year, 571 were teacher vacancies, according to the 2020 New Mexico Educator Vacancy Report compiled by the Southwest Outreach Academic Research Evaluation & Policy Center at New Mexico State University.

The 2020 report showed a statewide decrease in educator vacancies compared to 2019, when there were 1,054 total. Educator vacancies include counselors, administrators, instructional assistants and speech language pathologists.

Elementary teacher vacancies (163) and special education teacher vacancies (153) made up half the total teacher need in 2020, the report showed.

While total vacancies decreased statewide last year, northwest New Mexico saw an increase, with 113 in 2020 compared to 96 in 2019. Northwest New Mexico includes Farmington, Española, Gallup, Grants and the Jemez Valley.

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