

NM teacher vacancy numbers drop 23% in two years

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More educators staying on the job

SANTA FE - New Mexico's teacher vacancy numbers have dropped for the second straight year as more teachers choose to stay in the classroom now that the education ecosystem has changed to one of respect and support.

New Mexico had 571 teacher vacancies as of Sept. 25 compared to 644 at the same time last year and 740 in September 2018, according to the 2020 New Mexico Educator Vacancy Report published Oct. 13 by the Southwest Outreach Academic Research Evaluation & Policy Center

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at New Mexico State University.

That is an improvement of 11 percent since last year and 23 percent since the 2018 study.

The study also found that enrollment in and graduation from higher education teacher programs has increased, which means more future teachers are in the pipeline.

In both her 2019 and 2020 executive budget recommendation, Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham moved aggressively to rebuild educator support systems, rapidly increase educator pay and improve recruitment and retention. Those measures and others were designed to address the state's teacher shortage.

"New Mexico educators are the finest in the entire country," Lujan Grisham said. "They are tireless advocates for their students, for their communities and indeed for our state. There is no question this is a challenging environment for educators and school communities – perhaps the most challenging of our lifetimes.

"But educators step up. They give their all for their students. And I'm grateful to them every single day – and I will never, ever stop fighting to make New Mexico the greatest state in the country to be an educator."

One of the first and most significant changes the governor spearheaded was doing away with the high-stakes standardized exam used to evaluate both teachers and students. The new teacher evaluation system, Elevate NM, which is being rolled out this year, is designed to support teachers and keep them on a path toward improvement.

Those changes and others renewed a sense of respect and appreciation for the teaching profession in New Mexico.

"The people who are drawn into teaching are people who care about making a difference. This

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administration has worked hard to tell them we appreciate them and we want to reward them for helping New Mexico's children succeed," Public Education Secretary Ryan Stewart said.

"We've given teachers a much friendlier environment to work in, and that's paying off," Gwen Perea Warniment, the Public Education Department's deputy secretary for teaching, learning and assessment, said. "We've moved away from high-stakes assessments, and we're investing in professional development for educators. We want to take care of our educators," she said.

In addition to hiring and keeping talented teachers, New Mexico is cultivating new ones. The Teacher Affordability Act provides scholarships to help college education majors complete degrees of study and become teachers. The Grow Your Own Teachers Act provides scholarships and leave time to complete coursework and student teaching requirements for educational assistants to help ease their path to becoming licensed teachers.