

## How are N.M. students doing?

Written by Staff Reports

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### **N.M. educators create new assessment system to find out**

SANTA FE – With the release of spring 2022 student assessment data on Sept. 1, the Public Education Department has established a new baseline for student academic achievement and fulfilled Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham’s executive orders to create an assessment system that better serves New Mexico students, families and educators. The new assessment tool, the New Mexico Balanced Assessment System, delivers on empowering educators and families to better inform decisions that will yield stronger outcomes for students, and will ensure that PED’s policies are data-driven and targeted toward improving academic proficiency for every New Mexico student.

“The New Mexico Balanced Assessment System has been a stakeholder driven, multi-year, disciplined process to move away from an unpopular, ineffective test used previously in New Mexico to one that will better serve our students, educators, families and policy-makers from here on out,” PED Cabinet Secretary Kurt Steinhaus said.

The new assessment tool equips educators, students and parents to identify key areas where students need additional educational support throughout the entire school year so corrective action can be taken before the end of the school year. As parents and teachers partner to support each student’s educational journey, they can now take a data-based approach with mid-year assessments to collectively work with local school districts to connect and implement educational programs to the individual student’s actual needs in real time.

This new assessment and the proficiency levels were created by New Mexico educators from

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every corner of the state for all New Mexican students. The spring 2022 data went through a rigorous procedure involving 89 New Mexico educators called “standard setting,” which is used to define achievement or performance levels on the test to help clarify and communicate student expectations.

New Mexico’s student population has unique educational needs; the one size fits all approach like the former national standard test has, historically, proven to be ineffective in supporting New Mexico students make meaningful progress in educational outcomes.

Moreover, the new assessment tool highlights what tactics are proving to deliver achievement results for school districts so these best practices can then be shared and implemented at the local level across the state at the discretion of the local school districts. In spring 2023, results will be returned to school the fastest in recent history - within 10 days of the closing of the window. Timely access to the results allows the education system to take a data-based approach in preparing for the next school year.

Finally, new student testing only takes 3.25-5 hours per grade, compared to 8-11 hours per grade under the previous assessment. This gives New Mexico students more time in the classroom and teachers more time to do what they do best, teach.

“[The National Education Association New Mexico] has long advocated for a fair student assessment system that both promotes positive student outcomes and enhances the ability of educators to provide quality instruction. We believe these efforts by the governor and the Public Education Department go a long way towards meeting those goals,” Mary Parr-Sanchez, President of NEA New Mexico, said.

“The New Mexico PED has centered the unique needs of our students in creating this balanced assessment. The data collected in this system will inform, guide, and empower New Mexico educators to give the high-quality education our students and families deserve,” Whitney Holland, a spokesperson for the New Mexico branch of the American Federation of Teachers, said.

“We now have a solid new measure of student achievement in New Mexico that will serve as a benchmark for measuring academic progress in math, language arts and science,” Steinhaus

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said. “With this reset, we’re going to be able to gauge the direct effect of our tremendous investments and efforts to improve student achievement.”

In the 2021-2022 school year, PED deployed the first assessments of New Mexico’s Balanced Assessment System, which includes both within-year state assessments (e.g., dyslexia screening for all first graders, K-2 monthly progress monitoring for early literacy and math skills, interim mathematics and language arts assessments) and federally required end-of-year summative assessments. These end-of-year assessments measure proficiency in content standards of English/language arts and mathematics in grades three through eight and science in grades five, eight and high school.

34% of students assessed were proficient in language arts

33% of students assessed were proficient in science

25% of students assessed were proficient in mathematics

“Generally, coming out of the pandemic, most states are seeing student performance is higher in language arts compared to math, but still lower than both had been prior to the onset of the pandemic,” Lynn Vásquez, PED’s Assessment & Learning Management Systems Division Director said. “Accelerating student learning will require continued investments in innovative approaches to learning.”

In the coming weeks, PED will be communicating with districts on how best to use the results to improve learning and teaching for students. PED will also host town halls for parents in the coming weeks to ensure they understand how the test scores will be used and how to interpret their child’s results.

“It’s been a long road, but we are excited to introduce the New Mexico Balanced Assessment System in which testing is used to measure student achievement and data is used to support learning objectives all school year,” Vásquez said.

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In addition to the historic generational education investments since 2019, PED implemented several strategies this year to immediately address student outcomes. PED expanded family literacy training in English and Spanish, as well as assembled a Math Tutoring Corps of current and retired teachers. PED's recruitment efforts resulted in 300 additional teachers for the current school year. This fall, the department is providing teachers with three math-related professional development training opportunities.

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