

Per-student and teacher funding in New Mexico lower than a decade ago

Written by Sharon Kayne NM Voices for Children
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ALBUQUERQUE - New Mexico is one of several states that have failed to increase their total per-student funding compared to a decade ago, according to a new report from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP). While 26 states have made larger investments in their K-12 students since 2008, per-student funding in New Mexico remained 9 percent less in 2016 than in 2008, after adjusting for inflation.

The report found that New Mexico ranks 33rd in per-pupil funding, after adjusting for the cost of living, poverty, and other factors among the 50 states.

“Even with the small increases made over the past two years, we’re still way behind in providing the funding necessary to build a world-class school system,” said James Jimenez, executive director of New Mexico Voices for Children. “We’ve not properly funded our schools or adequately paid our teachers in more than a decade, as is evident by the judge’s ruling in the Yazzie/Martinez lawsuit.”

Teacher pay is also highlighted in the report, which shows that only nine states have increased teacher salaries above the 2009-10 levels, when adjusted for inflation. In New Mexico, teacher pay remained 8.3 percent lower than pre-recession levels in 2016-17. (2016 is the latest year for which comprehensive data on total state/local funding is available.)

“The effects of state funding cuts are evident in teacher pay,” said CBPP Senior Director of State Fiscal Research Michael Leachman. “Some 42 states – including New Mexico – cut the average teacher’s salary relative to inflation between 2010 and 2017. That is why teacher

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protests emerged in many states recently.”

The report noted, however, that three of the states that raised pay in response to teacher strikes, failed to do so in a way that is sustainable over the long-term - meaning these states will either need to find other ways to fund higher pay or make cuts.

“Having sustainable revenue is a huge issue for New Mexico,” said Jimenez. “We’ve been on the boom-and-bust cycle of oil and gas prices for the past 15 years and it’s time to break that cycle. The time to do it is now rather than waiting until oil prices have dropped again,” he added.

Adequate school funding can improve student outcomes and strengthen state economies, while steep funding cuts make it hard for states to improve teacher quality, reduce class sizes, extend learning time, and enact other reforms that can improve student outcomes, according to the report.

New Mexico’s Legislature is currently considering several ways to raise new revenue, including closing a loophole out-of-state corporations use to avoid paying taxes on their New Mexico profits, and significantly decreasing an income tax deduction that overwhelmingly benefits those with the highest incomes while providing no economic benefits.

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