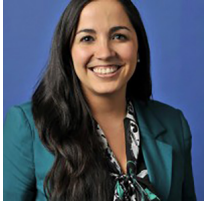


Our state must continue its historic investments in families, kids

Written by Gallupsun Staff
Friday, 22 September 2023 02:18



By Amber Wallin, Executive Director of New Mexico Voices for Children and James Jimenez, Executive Director of New Mexico Voices for Children Action Fund

With great opportunity comes great responsibility.

As was the case earlier this year, the Governor and Legislature will again have significant revenue to allocate once they meet in January of 2024. At a recent legislative hearing, Secretary of Taxation and Revenue Stephanie Schardin Clarke spoke eloquently about both the opportunity and the responsibility. She said the state is “building a bridge from peak oil” to income that is more predictable and sustainable. Such a bridge is built on investments in our people – what economists refer to as our human capital.

In fact, the state has already begun work on that bridge. In 2023, our New Mexico Legislature, under the incredible leadership of Speaker of the House Javier Martinez, Senate President Pro Tem Mimi Stewart, and Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham enacted several measures that will make a noticeable difference in the lives of people across the state.

Among those measures were the historic investments they made in the lives of New Mexico kids, specifically our youngest learners. They set aside more funding for child care, universal Pre-K, and early childhood development programs. They made school meals free for everyone and increased a state Child Tax Credit that benefits every child in the state.

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New Mexico's children deserve every opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential. With the critical funding our Legislature appropriated, these programs will reduce childhood poverty and improve educational outcomes for children. They will also expand economic opportunities for families across New Mexico. And we know that kids do better when families have the resources they need.

Progress like this doesn't come easily. It is an important reminder that voting matters. Last November, by an overwhelming margin of 70%, voters approved constitutional amendment 1, which directs the state to use an additional 1.25% from the \$24 billion Permanent School Fund for early childhood care and K-12 programs.

Research shows that these kinds of long-term investments in our children and families lead to generational improvements in health, education, and economic outcomes, but they must be given time to work. Fortunately, the resources will be available to continue building on the work done in 2023 and prior years.

So, as the Legislature and Governor craft the budget for next year, we encourage them to frame each decision around how the expenditures will help provide better opportunities for our children. In other words, we must continue building the bridge and ensure that no one is left behind. Further investments in human capital could include baby bonds, paid family and medical leave for all workers, supporting a career ladder for early childhood professionals, continuing to rebuild behavioral health services, fully funding environmental cleanup and pollution enforcement, and significantly boosting wages for Child Protective Services workers and other hard-to-fill vacancies within state government.

We hope everyone will join us in thanking our legislators for their incredible work during the 2023 legislative session. Next time you see your state representatives around town, take a moment to say thanks. And then encourage them to keep investing in our children, families and communities.