



Proposed budget shows commitment to education ‘moonshot’

SANTA FE — In a clear sign that Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham’s education “moonshot” remains a key priority amid this year’s economic and health crises, the Executive Budget Recommendation builds on recent investments and seeks innovative ways to support students who need it most.

The proposed Fiscal Year 2022 budget, released by the Department of Finance and Administration Jan. 18, recommends spending \$3.3 billion of the \$7.3 billion recurring general fund total on public education. That is a four percent increase from FY21 as the state moves aggressively to meet its legal and moral commitment to New Mexico students as outlined in the historic Yazzie-Martinez consolidated lawsuit.

“The wellbeing and education of New Mexico’s children continues to be a top priority for the state, despite the immense burden created by the pandemic,” the governor said. “That’s why this budget includes needed resources to meet the new challenge of getting children and students safely back to school and helping them excel.”

The Executive Budget Recommendation seeks to expand the public education moonshot, which was launched in FY20 with the largest increase in education funding in state history.

For FY22, the governor is asking the Legislature to expand the use of funds previously earmarked for K-5 Plus and Extended Learning Time Programs to allow school districts and charter schools access to that money to pay for career technical education and community school initiatives, in addition to paying for added learning time.

“We want more schools, more districts and more students to opt-in to programs designed to extend instructional time, and those that do will be eligible for additional resources for Career Technical Education and Community Schools,” Public Education Department Secretary Ryan Stewart said.

EQUITY FIRST BUDGET FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

Key to the governor’s plan are proposals to direct additional resources to schools and districts with the greatest proportion of low-income students. To that end, the budget proposes eliminating the practice of reducing state funding for districts that receive federal impact aid payments, funding that often supports the education of Native American students. This provision would cost \$35 million and would mean additional resources to school districts and charter schools.

Additionally, the budget includes a new “Family Income Index,” a proposal that would use more targeted tax and income data to identify schools that serve large populations of economically disadvantaged students and direct \$80 million from the Public Education Reform Fund over two years to schools that need it the most.

“The Family Income Index will let us better identify students who need the most support, and then direct more resources to their schools, which can decide how best to help them,” Stewart said. “At its heart, this is an equity budget designed to give all New Mexico children a better chance to learn and thrive.”

Equity is also behind the executive budget proposal to transfer \$30 million in unspent funds to

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the Indian Education Fund to support efforts to improve education in New Mexico's tribal communities. The appropriation would support implementation of the Tribal Remedy Framework, support tribal sovereignty and provide resources for locally-determined needs.

CLOSING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

The Executive Budget Recommendation also requests \$10 million to provide digital devices and extend internet connectivity to remote parts of New Mexico to give all students access to the tools they need to access digital content and instruction both during the health pandemic and in the future.

State agency budgets for FY22 will be finalized during the 2021 legislative session.