

Report takes in-depth look at state K-12 spending

Written by By New Mexico Voices for Children
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Increases don't match inflation, student population growth

ALBUQUERQUE— When funding is adjusted for inflation, New Mexico was still spending less per student on K-12 public education in 2015 than it did before the recession. In the two years since then, funding increases — which amounted to less than 1 percent a year — have still been too low to keep pace with inflation and student population growth.

A report released Aug. 31 by New Mexico Voices for Children takes an in-depth look at K-12 spending in New Mexico — both the funding that is funneled through the state equalization guarantee and so-called “below-the-line” spending going to specific programs that are not available at all schools.

What's more, the funding problem predates the recession. The report shows that SEG funding rose steadily between the 1984-85 school year and the 2008-09 school year, but when that same funding is adjusted for inflation, a very different picture emerges.

“Inflation-adjusted SEG funding actually shows periods of decrease that are not evident in the nominal funding,” James Jimenez, executive director of New Mexico Voices for Children, said. “This means that spending was not keeping pace with inflation in those years so the money that districts had to spend had lost some of its value.”

The report also shows that while funding was being significantly cut during the peak years of the recession, student population was slowly growing.

“When the state funding doesn't keep up with inflation and student enrollment, our schools end up having to do more with less money, and that means fewer resources in the classroom,” Charles Bowyer, executive director of NEA-New Mexico, said.

The report also touches on a lawsuit before district court alleging that the state has not been meeting its constitutional obligation in funding public schools.

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“Our schools lack the resources necessary to provide children with the opportunities they need to succeed—such as universal early childhood care and education, extended learning opportunities, reading and math coaches, and summer school programs,” Gail Evans, the legal director of the New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty — which filed the lawsuit on behalf of parents — said. “This is true particularly for children who live in poverty, or are English language learners.”

Another notable conclusion in the report is that the growth in below-the-line funding has increased far more significantly than growth in SEG funding since fiscal year 2012.

“The state equalization guarantee was really put in place because children in low-income school districts don’t always have access to the kinds of learning supports that all kids need to be successful,” Jimenez said. “Given that New Mexico has the highest child poverty rate in the nation, it’s more critical than ever to ensure that all of our children have the best chance at success. But in education, as in many aspects of life, you get what you pay for. When we try and provide education on the cheap we sell not only our children short but our state’s economic future as well.”

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