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ISSUE BRIEF
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SUCCESSSES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN NEW MEXICO’S EXPANDED CHILD CARE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Early care and learning play a key role in children’s early development, parental workforce participation, and the state’s economic productivity. Research shows that the experiences children have early in life, including safe and supportive environments and stable relationships with adults, are crucial for [brain development](#). Child care helps working parents stay employed and supports the economic security of families. Reliable child care can help workers avoid disruptions that can lead to [costly productivity losses](#) for employers and the state.

Recognizing the critical importance of early care and learning, New Mexico has worked extensively to create a [comprehensive and streamlined system](#) for its young children and families. New Mexico is home to over [140,500](#) children aged five and younger, and approximately [60 percent](#) of these children have all parents working. Consequently, nearly 85,000 children need care in a variety of public and private early childhood programs, such as Early Head Start, Head Start, Family Child Care (FCC) programs, and center-based programs. Despite these efforts, child care in New Mexico has become increasingly [expensive](#) and inaccessible for many families with young children. For instance, in 2024, a two-income family spent about 14 percent of their income on center-based infant care, and a single-income family spent almost 44 percent. These figures significantly exceed the Department of Health and Human Services’ affordability benchmark rate of [seven percent](#) of a family’s income.

To combat this lack of affordability, New Mexico recently expanded its [Child Care Assistance \(CCA\)](#) program in April 2022. Families earning up to 400 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) now qualify for assistance. CCA eligibility is contingent upon parents or legal guardians being employed, going to school, actively seeking employment, or participating in a job training program. In addition to the income eligibility expansion, co-pays are currently waived for the foreseeable future. With this expansion, New Mexico has made child care essentially free for families making up to [\\$128,000](#) (for a family of four).

Impact of CCA

The [University of New Mexico Cradle to Career Policy Institute](#) recently released [two studies](#) focused on the impact of the CCA expansion on families across the state. The studies established that families who received sustained benefits from CCA experienced enhanced economic stability. They were able to work more while their child received outside care and save money through subsidized, no cost childcare. Those who did not receive sustained benefits reported less economic stability. A pain point identified by parents was the annual recertification process. Subsidy recipients are required to recertify to maintain eligibility in the CCA program to renew their benefits. This process depends on the responsiveness of “eligibility workers” who handle each case and could be delayed by inefficiencies in recertification. The study also revealed that wider dissemination of program eligibility and benefits could significantly improve enrollment. Furthermore, administrative challenges and a preference for family-provided care were identified as key reasons for low enrollment among eligible families.

Table 1: The Estimated Affordability of Child Care in New Mexico

Affordability of licensed child care	Annual price of child care for an infant	As a proportion of median income (Single Income Family)	As a proportion of median income (Two Income Family)
Family Child Care (FCC)	\$11,564	37.5%	12.2%
Center-based child care	\$13,521	43.9%	14.3%

Another significant challenge families face is the limited supply of child care providers with availability. While New Mexico has [thoroughly](#) reformed its early care and learning programs there is a childcare provider deficit. It is estimated that the state has a shortfall of over [23,000 licensed slots](#). Without enough care, CCA is less effective, and families are discouraged from enrolling in the program.

Kinship Care

It is important to acknowledge the role of kin/familial care in New Mexico. From 2017-2023, kinship care, where grandparents or other kin are primary caregivers for children, increased by [20 percent](#). A total of about 36,000 children are raised by their grandparents or kin, although this is likely an underestimation due to challenges with collecting data. New Mexico is estimated to have a higher rate of kinship care when compared to other states. Familial care poses a unique challenge to the expanded CCA program, as the [definition](#) of families includes biological parents, step-parents, and legal guardians, but not grandparents. Due to the CCA's [activity requirements](#), grandparents and kin without legal guardianship who are not working or in school are currently ineligible.

Policy Considerations

- ❓ What strategies can policymakers implement to enhance the CCA program's outreach statewide and increase enrollment?
- ❓ Should policymakers consider expanding CCA eligibility to include grandparents and waiving the activity requirements for non-working grandparents and kin through a special eligibility category without altering existing eligibility criteria?
- ❓ What policy measures can be adopted to significantly expand the availability of child care providers for children and families throughout the state?

EMBEDDING QUALITY INTO EARLY LEARNING

The [first five years](#) of life set the foundation for future health and well-being. These years are a critical window of cognitive and social-emotional development, during which the fundamental architecture of the brain is wired. Experiences during this period- especially from prenatal to age three- significantly shape children's long-term success in school and life. [Research](#) shows that children who receive high-quality early learning experiences are more likely to perform well in school, graduate, and secure stable employment in adulthood. Conversely, children who lack access to quality early learning opportunities are at a higher risk for academic struggles, economic instability, and health challenges later in life. Ensuring that New Mexico's youngest residents receive quality early care and learning experiences is essential to fostering strong families, improving workforce outcomes, and reducing long-term government spending.

States across the country are investing in early childhood education (ECE) to maximize this developmental window and enhance overall prosperity. [High-quality early childhood programs](#) not only prepare children for academic success but also contribute to stronger communities by reducing crime rates and improving public health outcomes. [Studies](#) indicate that every dollar invested in early childhood education yields significant long-term returns, including increased earnings for individuals and cost savings for social services and criminal justice systems. Investing in high-quality early learning experiences aligns with broad-based [bipartisan support](#), demonstrating value to both primary voters and the general electorate.

New Mexico

New Mexico has made significant strides in strengthening its early childhood education system. Key policy advancements and increased funding have expanded access to high-quality early learning

opportunities, ensuring equity and better outcomes for young children. Some of the state's most notable investments include:

- **Creation of the Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD):** New Mexico established ECECD to centralize early learning efforts, creating a more cohesive and comprehensive system for children from birth to age five.
- **Historic Constitutional Amendment:** New Mexico voters approved a groundbreaking constitutional amendment to increase sustained funding for early childhood programs, reinforcing the state's commitment to high-quality early care and education.
- **Investment in Workforce Development:** Recognizing that well-prepared and well-supported educators are [the backbone of quality ECE](#), the state has prioritized initiatives to strengthen the early educator workforce through training, compensation improvements, and professional development opportunities.



State Examples

Across the United States, states are making significant investments in ECE to maximize the critical developmental window of a child's early years and drive long-term economic and social benefits. Recognizing these benefits, states like Illinois, Oregon, and North Carolina have implemented policies and funding initiatives to expand access to preschool, enhance child care quality, and support families with young children. These efforts demonstrate a growing commitment to ensuring that all children, regardless of background, have a strong foundation for lifelong success.

- **Illinois** | The state launched the [Smart Start Illinois initiative](#), which aims to provide universal preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds, increase wages for early childhood educators, and expand childcare access for low-income families. Illinois has also committed significant funding to its early childhood block grant program to support quality improvements and access.
- **Oregon** | Through the [Preschool Promise](#) program, Oregon offers free, high-quality preschool to families at or below 200% of the federal poverty level. The state has also invested in its Baby Promise program, which expands access to high-quality infant and toddler care, recognizing the importance of early brain development.
- **North Carolina** | The state has a nationally recognized early childhood system, with programs like [NC Pre-K](#), which provides free pre-kindergarten to eligible four-year-olds. North Carolina has also expanded home visiting and early intervention services to support families and improve school readiness outcomes.

Policy Considerations

- ❓ How can policymakers support increased wages, professional development, and credentialing pathways to address workforce shortages and improve the quality and availability of early care and learning in New Mexico?

- 🔗 What strategies can New Mexico implement to evaluate and improve access and equity in early learning, particularly for rural communities and historically underserved children?
- 🔗 What opportunities exist to foster public-private partnerships that encourage collaboration between government agencies, businesses, and community organizations to maximize resources and expand early learning opportunities?

EDUCATION SUPPORT FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

Military children move [three times](#) more often than non-military children, with transitions leading to challenges that affect students' academic performance. [Research](#) shows that military children succeed when there is close collaboration and support between schools and military bases across leadership and extracurricular opportunities. With nearly [8,000 children](#) of active-duty military members in the state, New Mexico is exploring how it can create educational opportunities that help military students succeed and make the state more appealing to military families.

New Mexico's Involvement in the Military Interstate Compact

The [Military Interstate Compact](#) creates a standard policy across all 50 states and Washington D.C. to limit the educational difficulties experienced by students from military families. The compact creates rules around educational transfers, enrollment, placement, attendance, eligibility, and graduation. The compact is managed by the [Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission](#) (MIC3). New Mexico is part of the compact and convenes a state council within the MIC3 that [coordinates](#) the compact and ensures compliance. New Mexico [Senate Bill 146](#) was introduced in January 2025 to align the compact to state law. The [bill](#) has passed both chambers of the legislature and was signed by the Governor on April 8.

New Mexico has school liaisons at four of the [five military installations](#): Kirtland Air Force Base (AFB), [Cannon AFB](#), U.S. Army Garrison White Sands Missile Range, and [Holloman AFB](#). School liaisons are appointed by the compact and are a point of contact for military families navigating the K-12 education system.

National Examples of Excellence at Installations

- **California - Coronado Unified School District Military Family Life Counselors** | The Coronado Unified School District uses [Military Family Life Counselors](#) to support military-connected students at three of the schools in the district. The counselors are a part of the larger [Military Family Readiness System](#) and are funded by the Department of Defense. [Counselors](#) provide counseling groups, individual counseling, grade-level clubs for students, and ambassador programs to welcome new students. Research shows that Military Family Life Counselors reduce stress and anxiety in [70 percent](#) of individuals.
- **Missouri - Knob Noster Public Schools - College and Career Readiness** | [Knob Noster Public Schools](#) serve a high proportion of students whose parents are assigned to the Whiteman AFB in Missouri. In collaboration with district leaders, the Air Force applied for and received [\\$3 million](#) in grants from the Department of Defense to create programs that expanded college and career readiness. These grants went directly toward [expanding](#) Advanced Placement (AP) courses, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) courses, leadership opportunities, cybersecurity, and virtual courses for students. As a result, Knob Noster High School was [ranked](#) first out of 157 Air Force installations and first for college and career readiness out of rural Missouri schools. The district is [currently](#) working on constructing the [Knob Noster High School Innovation Campus](#) and a Transitioning Veteran Training Center to use as a multi-use education center.

- Virginia - Virginia Beach City Public Schools - Military Student Counselors | [Military School Counselors](#) support elementary, middle, and high school students of both active and retired military families. [Counselors](#) support a range of challenges, including academic planning, transition, and post-secondary planning. Counselors run [college workshops](#) for military families to set up students for success outside of high school. Counselors also provide [professional learning](#) opportunities to teachers to help them support the needs of students from military families.

Policy Considerations

- What strategies can New Mexico implement to improve educational engagement for students from military families experiencing transitions?
- How can schools and military bases collaborate on STEM initiatives to utilize military expertise and enhance student engagement in STEM education?
- In what ways can New Mexico provide specialized help to prepare students from military families for life after high school?

SUPPORTING STUDENT ATTENDANCE AND ENGAGEMENT

Nationally, [11.4 million](#) students were considered chronically absent during the 2023–2024 school year, nearly double pre-pandemic numbers. Students are identified as [chronically absent](#) when they miss 10 percent or more of the school year. The impact of these absences also compounds over time; beginning in 9th grade, every week a student misses school reduces that student's chance of graduating by about [20 percent](#). School attendance matters even more for low-income students, as chronic absenteeism has been shown to have a stronger influence on their [literacy development](#) when compared to more affluent student groups. In recognition of this impact, [48 states](#), including New Mexico, and Washington D.C. now publish data on chronic absenteeism, up from nine states in 2021.

New Mexico

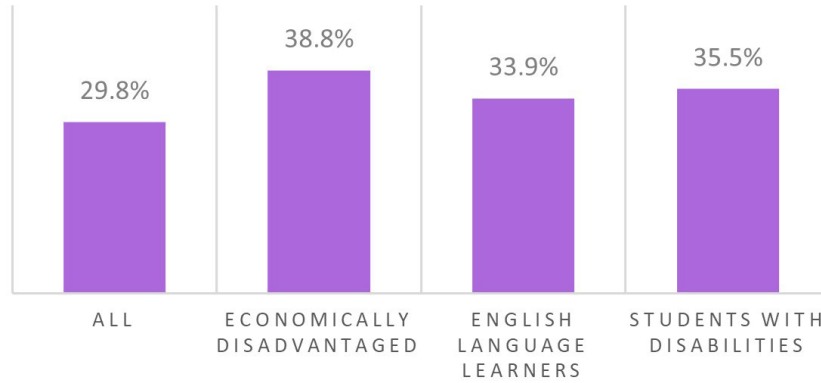
In New Mexico, nearly [30 percent](#) of all students are chronically absent; however, students of color, students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and those considered economically disadvantaged all show higher rates of chronic absenteeism than average. According to a state report, New Mexico saw a [119 percent](#) increase in chronic absenteeism between 2019 and 2023, the largest in the country during that period.

In 2019, the state enacted [New Mexico's Student Attendance Success Act](#) with the intent to increase student support and data collection regarding student attendance. The Attendance Success Act implemented early interventions for chronically absent students, developed systems for preventing absences, and created a referral process for students and families to target the root cause of absences.

However, the most recent [Legislative Finance Committee report](#) notes that there is a lack of clarity from the New Mexico Public Education Department on how school districts should implement the bill requirements. [Challenges with implementation](#) have included staff turnover, lack of strategic planning, and undefined roles related to addressing absenteeism on individual campuses.

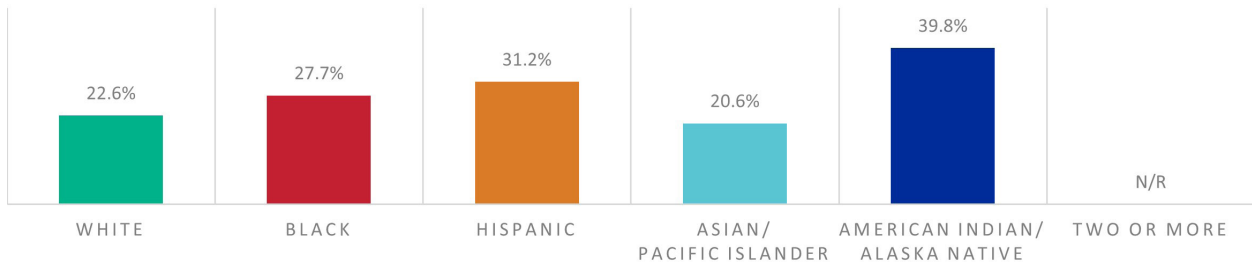


Figure 1: New Mexico Chronic Absenteeism by Student Groups | 2023-2024



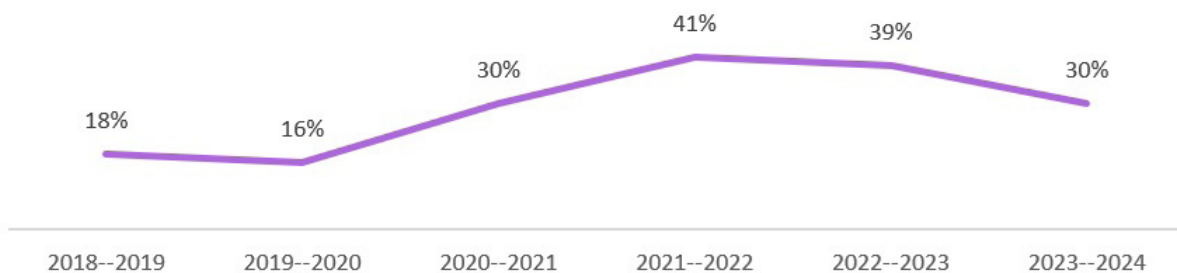
[Source](#)

Figure 2: New Mexico Chronic Absenteeism by Student Race/Ethnicity | 2023-2024



[Source](#)

Figure 3: Change in New Mexico Student Chronic Absenteeism Over Time | 2018-2024



[Source](#)

Federal Context Impacting Student Attendance

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which oversees the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agencies, previously restricted immigration enforcement in schools and other sensitive locations, however, a January 2025 directive from President Trump [rescinded](#) that protection. Students who are worried about family separation or deportation may [develop chronic absenteeism](#) or [not enroll in school at all](#). The creation of a climate of fear in schools has led to [attendance drops in various school districts](#) nationwide, undermining the academic achievement of all students, both [immigrant and non-immigrant](#), as it has created an environment of anxiety and instability.

The Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), as well as [Supreme Court rulings and federal statutes](#), prevents schools from asking about immigration status or providing student information to ICE without parental consent. Local decisions also influence protections for schools, for example, some schools opt to voluntarily share information with ICE even though this is not required by the federal government. Advocates recommend that all school employees are well-trained on the specific [plan of action](#) they should take if ICE comes to their school.

Students who are worried about family separation or deportation may [develop chronic absenteeism](#) or [not enroll in school at all](#).

Promising Practices in Attendance

Several states have implemented successful strategies to address absenteeism and increase student engagement. The following are promising practices:

- **Connecticut** | Connecticut launched the [Learner Engagement and Attendance Program \(LEAP\)](#) in 2021, targeting 15 school districts across the state to implement home visits with students and families. Home visits focused on improving school and family relationships to improve student attendance and assisting with student placement in learning and enrichment opportunities outside of school. Program participants experienced an increase in school attendance between 15 and 20 percent after nine months, regardless of whether home visits were conducted by someone from the school or by someone from their community. Conversely, in-person LEAP visits saw significantly larger impacts than virtual visits.
- **Oklahoma** | ImpactTulsa, is a collective organization founded by leaders across sectors, including the business, education, faith, nonprofit, civic, and philanthropy communities, to use data to create systemic change focused on ensuring that all children in Tulsa, Oklahoma have an opportunity to succeed. The [Indicator Dashboard](#) tracks a range of key indicators to measure and assess children's likelihood to thrive, including chronic absenteeism, to provide the Tulsa community with common information to drive conversations around continuous improvement. ImpactTulsa also engages partners through [Collaborative Action Networks \(CANs\)](#) by providing participants with tools and practices to improve community-level outcomes. An attendance focused CAN was launched at the end of 2022 to work towards understanding and addressing the barriers that impact the attendance of pre-K through 3rd grade students.
- **Washington** | In 2021, the Washington State Legislature passed [a bill](#) mandating juvenile courts and school districts to establish community engagement boards to help prevent

chronic absenteeism. Community engagement boards, comprised of local residents, are trained to identify barriers to school attendance and recommend interventions, such as community services, family therapy, or alternative education programs. An [evaluation](#) of the long-running West Valley Community Truancy Board, a collaboration between the Spokane County (WA) Juvenile Court and the West Valley School District, found that participating students were more likely to graduate high school or earn their GED than comparable students who did not have access to a similar intervention.

Policy Considerations

- 🔗 What specific clarifications are needed and how can policymakers support the implementation of the New Mexico Student Attendance Success Act?
- 🔗 How can policymakers support the development of partnerships between schools, social service agencies, and community organizations to provide meaningful interventions for students and families struggling with attendance?
- 🔗 What additional data should be added to the New Mexico Annual State, District, and Schools Attendance Report Card to create meaningful interventions at the district and local level?

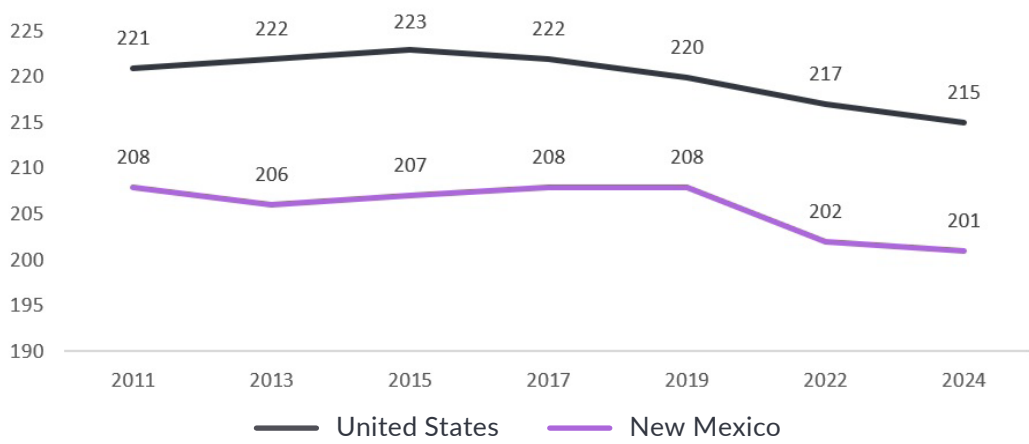
EMBEDDING EVIDENCE-BASED LITERACY INSTRUCTION IN K-12 EDUCATION

According to the Hunt Institute’s Across the Aisle Survey, [64 percent](#) of parents and voters strongly support implementing evidence-based literacy programs in classrooms to improve student reading levels, considering it a core educational priority. New Mexico’s [NAEP](#) reading scores (see Figure 4) are ranked last in the nation, and the 2024 data represents a further decline from pre-pandemic scores. As New Mexico works towards learning recovery, adopting evidence-based literacy instruction is essential to improving student literacy outcomes.

New Mexico Science of Reading

New Mexico is a part of The Hunt Institute’s [The Path Forward](#) and is working to advance evidence-based literacy practices in teacher preparation, licensure, and program approval. The state established the science of reading as the [primary literacy practice](#) in 2020 to abide with 22-13-32 of New Mexico Statute and [Rule 6.30.17](#) of the New Mexico Administrative Code (NMAC). These legislative rulings create requirements for schools to provide universal dyslexia screening, evaluation, intervention, parental notification, and literacy professional development for teachers.

Figure 4: New Mexico Grade 4 NAEP Reading Scores



Source

In 2021 to support classroom instruction, the New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) provided guidelines for high-quality instructional materials, including a [rubric](#) to grade materials and an [approved curriculum list](#) through the [Instructional Materials Bureau](#) established by the [Instructional Material Law](#). NMPED also created the [Language Arts Instructional Scope](#) in 2022, which includes grade standards, resources, planning guidance, assessment, culturally and linguistically responsive instruction, cross-curriculum connections, and guidance for acceleration. In 2022, NMPED released a [Biliteracy Guide](#) to adapt the science of reading for Multi-Lingual Learners (MLLs). In 2023, New Mexico began requiring the use of the online platform [Istation](#) for literacy screeners and progress monitoring for grades K-2 and optionally for grade 3. The [platform](#) integrates the science of reading, including phonemic awareness, letter knowledge, decoding, vocabulary, spelling, comprehension, and fluency while giving educators feedback on student progress.

Currently, the state is working on implementing literacy initiatives through the [Comprehensive Literacy State Development Grant](#) (CLSD), utilizing \$60 million (appropriated in 2024) from the U.S. Department of Education to support local literacy efforts and state technical assistance for local districts. The goal of the [grant](#) is to strengthen state and local literacy leadership, implement high-quality instructional materials, increase professional development, support local data-driven decision-making, and build family engagement. Also in 2024, New Mexico created a free [Summer Reading Program](#) to provide small group literacy interventions for 10,000 students in grades K-8. Building on these literacy initiatives, in February 2025, New Mexico [Senate Bill 242](#), also known as the Advancing the Science of Reading Act passed in the Senate. The [bill](#) proposes adding the science of reading to teacher licensing, training, instruction, and materials. [SB242](#) also creates additional guidelines for interventions and dyslexia screenings.

State Examples

- **Illinois | Comprehensive Literacy Plan:** Illinois is part of the Hunt Institute's The Path Forward. In 2022, the Illinois State Board of Education (IBSE) led a Statewide Literacy Summit to create a plan to strengthen and unify literacy efforts in the state. A year later, the Illinois General Assembly [commissioned](#) a comprehensive state plan with input from a diverse set of stakeholders. In 2024, IBSE created the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan to consolidate and improve statewide literacy efforts, using the feedback from the Summit, focus groups, and listening sessions as a guide. As part of IBSE's [2024-2027 Strategic Plan](#), Illinois plans to train all IBSE staff on the literacy plan, create a rubric to grade and select literacy curriculum, develop a district-wide literacy plan template, and provide a guidance document for equity-oriented literacy coaches on evidence-based instruction.
- **Texas | Science of Teaching Reading Exam and Texas Reading Academy:** Texas requires educators that teach grades PK-6 to pass the [Science of Teaching Reading](#) (STR) exam. K-3 teachers are also required to complete the [Texas Reading Academy](#) in their first year of teaching. The Reading Academy lasts 10 months and requires the submission of multiple artifacts related to teaching reading using evidence-based practices. The combination of the exam and academy helps ensure that educators know how to integrate the science of reading into their instructional practices.
- **Virginia | English Learner Network:** Virginia passed the comprehensive [Virginia Literacy Act](#) in 2022. This year, Virginia created the [Comprehensive Literacy Network](#) to support the integration of the science of reading into instruction to improve reading outcomes for all students. The [network](#) provides support through coaching, walkthroughs, trainings, progress monitoring, and regional convenings. As part of the Comprehensive Literacy Network, the Hunt Institute is providing additional support to MLLs through the [English Learner Network](#).

The English Learner Network currently provides 30 schools from across the Commonwealth with monthly coaching, and convenings focused on evidence-based literacy practices to best support MLLs. Additionally, the network allows time for schools and divisions to collaborate on a comprehensive action plan for MLL Literacy for 2025-2026.



Policy Considerations

- ❓ What professional development and training strategies can New Mexico implement to effectively integrate the science of reading into instruction for in-service educators?
- ❓ How can the state provide targeted support for struggling readers including students with disabilities and Multi-Lingual Learners?
- ❓ What mechanisms can New Mexico establish to align literacy initiatives and incorporate local feedback to develop a comprehensive, statewide approach to literacy?

PERSISTENCE AND SUPPORTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Over the past decade, policymakers and higher education leaders have made strides in raising the overall postsecondary attainment rate by over 16 percentage points, but racial equity gaps and students with some credits but no degree or credential still exist. As of January 2025, national undergraduate enrollment grew by over five percent, primarily due to community college growth. National enrollment has rebounded since pre-Covid levels but is still below 2019 numbers.

Postsecondary attainment significantly influences an individual's employment prospects and drives state economic growth. Research indicates a clear correlation between increased education levels and higher employment rates, as well as greater earning potential. Furthermore, a rise in the proportion of a state's population holding bachelor's degrees directly contributes to its economic expansion. Specifically, a one percentage point increase in bachelor's degree attainment growth is associated with a measurable increase in state GDP growth of approximately \$130.5 billion. These findings underscore the critical role of continued investment in higher education and student supports to bolster both individual employability and overall economic prosperity.

Student Supports

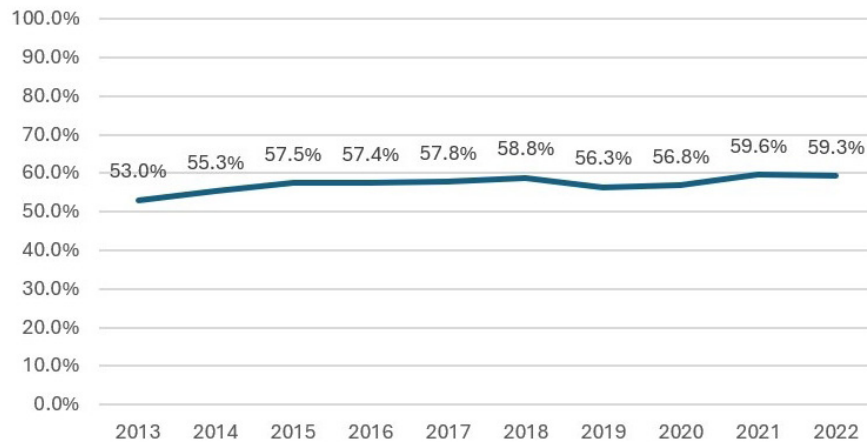
Wraparound services in higher education address students' holistic needs—academic, health, socioemotional, financial, and logistical—to support degree attainment. Originating from the [medical systems-of-care model](#), these services are especially vital for first-generation and adult learners facing barriers to education.

[Research](#) from the University of Chicago Poverty Lab found that community college students utilizing wraparound services experienced a 13 percent increase in full-time enrollment and an 11 percent rise in retention from term to term. Institutions use two main measures to determine if students are successful during their higher education journey:

- **Retention Rates** | Retention rates measure the percentage of students who are continually enrolled at the same higher education institution through the fall semesters of their first and second years.
- **Persistence Rates** | Persistence rates measure the percentage of students who are continually enrolled at any higher education institution through the fall semesters of their first and second years.

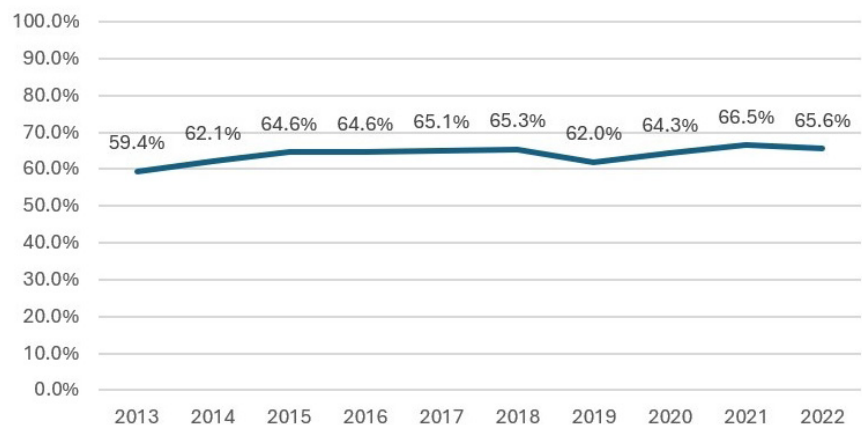
Recent figures from the [National Student Clearinghouse](#) detail New Mexico's overall retention and persistence rates for the eight academic terms from 2013-2014 to 2022-2023 (see Figures 5 and 6). Specifically, the year-to-year student retention in New Mexico increased six percentage points

■ **Figure 5: New Mexico Year-to-Year Retention Rate**



[Source](#)

■ **Figure 6: New Mexico Year-to-Year Persistence Rate**



[Source](#)

from 53 percent to 59 percent over the last eight academic terms, while the year-to-year student persistence rate also increased 6 percent to 65 percent.

Role of Wraparound Services

Providing wraparound services represents a key area of investment for New Mexico to enhance postsecondary attainment across its population of nontraditional students, students facing hardships, and adult learners. To better understand the extent of basic needs insecurity within the state's postsecondary student population, several statewide groups - the [New Mexico Higher Education Department](#), in collaboration with the [University of New Mexico's Basic Needs Project](#), and the [Governor's Food Initiative](#) - commissioned a [statewide survey](#) of students, faculty, and staff at New Mexico's public institutions of higher education.

The survey, which gathered responses from 10,000 students and approximately 4,000 faculty and staff respondents, showed that:

- 58% were food insecure
- 39% had very low food security, the most severe category of food insecurity
- 62% were housing insecure
- 14% were homeless in the past 12 months

To address student needs, New Mexico's proposed budget includes [\\$20 million](#) in new funding over the next three fiscal years for student retention initiatives. Continued support for students' basic needs could significantly improve program completion rates.

Credentials of Value in New Mexico

Higher education research from the Lumina Foundation notes that [nearly 40 percent](#) of New Mexico's Labor force has a credential of value – a post-high school degree, certification, or certificate.

These credentials correlate with a fifteen percent increase in median annual salary compared to high school graduates, highlighting the importance of higher education stakeholders creating effective pathways to boost the labor force's acquisition of these valuable credentials.

New Mexico ranks 39th nationally in post-high school credentials and wages, with the labor force's credential attainment 4.5 percentage points below the national average. By investing further in higher education, New Mexico can increase workforce participation and stimulate future economic growth.

National Supports for Postsecondary Persistence

Across the nation, innovative strategies to enhance postsecondary student persistence and completion have been implemented to meet the needs of diverse students. The following highlight the critical role of structured pathways, financial incentives, and targeted support services in improving outcomes in higher education.

- **California** | Community colleges adopted the [Guided Pathways](#) framework to improve student outcomes and persistence. By restructuring courses into coherent pathways aligned with career goals and integrating academic advising, the program has increased completion rates statewide. With over two million students impacted, this initiative is among the most comprehensive efforts in the country.
- **Georgia** | [HOPE](#) (Helping Outstanding Pupils Educationally) Scholarship in Georgia provides financial support for students achieving high academic standards. Since its inception, it has improved college persistence and degree completion rates, especially among underserved populations. This program showcases the importance of linking financial incentives with academic excellence.

- **Indiana** | The state supports low-income students through the [21st Century Scholars Program](#), which offers full-tuition scholarships and pre-college readiness activities. Scholars who participate in the program’s mentoring and academic support services are twice as likely to persist and graduate compared to their peers. This targeted approach has become a model for states aiming to close equity gaps in higher education.
- **Tennessee** | The state launched the [“Drive to 55”](#) campaign to ensure 55 percent of adults have a postsecondary credential by 2025. The Tennessee Promise program, a signature initiative of the campaign, provides tuition-free access to community colleges and technical schools, paired with mentoring and support services, significantly improving retention rates. The initiative has inspired other states to implement similar tuition-free models for community colleges.
- **Texas** | The state aims to have 60 percent of adults aged 25–34 earn a postsecondary credential by 2030 through its [“60x30TX”](#) initiative. The initiative focuses on strengthening workforce-aligned programs, providing financial aid, and improving postsecondary pathways for non-traditional students. Texas’s model demonstrates the importance of aligning educational goals with economic needs.

Policy Considerations

- 🔍 How can New Mexico leverage data and predictive analytics to identify at-risk students early and implement targeted interventions that improve postsecondary attainment rates?
- 🔍 What strategies can be implemented to reduce barriers to degree completion for non-traditional and part-time students, ensuring equitable attainment outcomes?
- 🔍 How can the state effectively address basic needs insecurity among students, such as food and housing instability, to increase retention and persistence rates?





Established in 2001, **The Hunt Institute** honors the legacy of James B. Hunt, Jr., the former governor of North Carolina who distinguished himself as an ardent champion of education.

The Hunt Institute brings together people and resources to inspire and inform elected officials and policymakers about key issues in education, resulting in visionary leaders who are prepared to take strategic action for greater educational outcomes and student success.

In 2016, The Hunt Institute became an independent, nonprofit entity and joined forces with Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy to pursue research, educational partnerships, and events related to improving education policy.

Learn more at www.hunt-institute.org.



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