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Budget Proposals All Cut, Cut, Cut

The budget recommendations of the Governor, the Legislative Finance Committee (LFC), and the Legislative Education Study Committees (LESC) all recommend cuts to public school spending.

Although the LESC budget for basic school funding through the State Equalization Guarantee is slightly higher than the other two, it still recommends a cut of \$26.8 million plus an additional cut of \$27.7 million to force school employees to pay an additional 1.75% of salary as retirement system contributions for total cut of \$54.5 million.

The LFC budget cuts \$47.6 million plus the \$27.7 in the retirement increases for a total \$75.3 million cut.

The Governor cuts \$29.5 plus a new twist on the retirement increase by holding classroom personnel (teachers and educational assistants) harmless from the increase that is estimated as between \$10 million and \$16 million. So the Governor's cut is between \$39.5 million and \$45.5 million. The Governor asserts that \$30 million of her proposed cut can come out of public school "administration."

While all the cuts are unconscionable, the Governor does at least attempt to prioritize public school funding.

Governor's State of the State

The Governor's State of the State address continued the conservative line of her campaign statements and resolutely refused to consider any new revenues other than cutting the film industry's tax credit. Read the address at this link. Her educational proposals include several items we about which we have great concern and is summarized below, with the Governor's proposals in Bold and our response in italics:

A Smarter Return on New Mexico's Investment: An initiative to prioritize classroom spending over bureaucracy and return fiscal discipline to our Department and to local school districts. The needs of students must drive education policy and spending. We don't believe that \$30 million dollars can be cut from administrative and bureaucratic waste. We fear that this cuts will heavily impact support services such as counselors, ancillary, nurses and others.

Real Accountability. Real Results.: To provide maximum transparency when it comes to the quality of our schools, this initiative creates an easy to understand A, B, C, D, F school grading system. Real accountability in our schools will recognize and reward progress, reverse failure and help struggling schools and students. While we welcome an accountability system that takes more into account more indicators than the current federal AYP scores, we don't understand how stigmatizing struggling schools as failures helps them improve how simple letter grades will recognize and reward progress.

New Mexico's "Ready for Success" Initiative: To prepare students to succeed throughout their academic careers, this initiative ends social promotion – the practice of passing children from one grade to the next before they have mastered the basics – in the gateway years of 3rd, 5th and 8th grades. A command-focus on reading and literacy initiatives will ensure all students have the foundation for success in school and life. The evidence simply doesn't support this approach. We do need a focus on providing support to struggling students, but retention has been found to contribute to increasing the dropout rate and leading to other problems for those students who are retained.

Rewarding Effective Educators and Leaders: To ensure all students have access to great teachers, this initiative will create a blueprint for evaluating, rewarding and incentivizing effective teaching and leadership in our schools and districts. There is no evidence that merit pay improves instruction. We stand ready to create a well-thought out system of employee evaluation that includes evaluating teachers for their influence on student achievement growth. We support extra pay for extra responsibility, credentials, and extra work.

We, of course, stand ready to collaborate in areas of agreement and to advocate change where we disagree.

Contact Legislators and the Governor Now

Many Legislators will likely return home this weekend, perhaps as early as Friday. Contact them there to tell them that public education should be spared from any additional cuts.
