

Title: **House Bill 180 would put money back in classrooms**
 Author:
 Size: 46.96 column inches
 Farmington, NM Circulation: 18952



House Bill 180 would put money back in classrooms



Your Turn

Fred Nathan
 Guest columnist

Growing evidence suggests that increasing funding for education can improve student outcomes if the money is targeted to the classroom, rather than to administration.

Two good illustrations are Texico, a district of 560 students in eastern New Mexico, and Gadsden, a district of 13,478 students south of Las Cruces. Both districts were highlighted in a recent report by the non-partisan think tank Think New Mexico, which noted that they consistently achieve strong student performance, even while educating a high percentage of students from low-income families. Both districts also spend a relatively high percentage of their budgets in the classroom.

Likewise, researchers at the nonpartisan South-west Educational Development Laboratory studied 1,500 school districts in Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas and New Mexico, and concluded that “student achievement is linked to spending patterns, and money matters when spent on instruction.” The study found that, in general, high-performing school districts spend a larger percentage of their budgets on instruction and a lower percentage on general administration than lower-performing districts. They also tend to employ fewer administrators.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, New Mexico spends an average of 57 percent of its education dollars on instruction. Another 13 percent goes to student and instructional support, which directly benefits students, but the remaining 30 percent of the education budget is spent on administrative costs. We can do better at getting dollars to the classroom. That is precisely what House Bill 180 does. It sets ambitious but achievable targets for districts and charters to maximize spending in the classroom. The targets are voluntary, but the bill provides an incentive by allowing districts and charters that meet classroom spending targets to keep their cash reserves (even in times of shortage like 2017,

when cash reserves were raided by the state).

HB 180 broadly defines “classroom spending” to include not only instruction, but also instructional support (e.g., librarians), student support (e.g., counselors, nurses), and principals, since the research suggests that investment in these areas has a positive impact on student achievement.

HB 180 helps districts and charters reach classroom spending targets by eliminating unnecessary reporting burdens. Every year, districts and charters must submit at least 140 reports to the Public Education Department (PED). That requires thousands of staff hours annually.

A better approach would be to eliminate those reports and move to an advanced data collection system. In 2011, Nevada implemented an advanced data collection system that reduced burdens on districts by allowing them to automatically upload the information they collect about things like student attendance, performance and demographics to the state.

HB 180 directs New Mexico’s PED to implement a system like Nevada’s. Based on a 2017 report commissioned by the Thornburg Foundation, an advanced data collection system would save New Mexico school districts more than \$46.5 million annually. Because the PED is already piloting an advanced data collection project, it is already in the budget and can be fully implemented at no additional cost to state taxpayers.

HB 180 was introduced by a bipartisan team of sponsors, including the chair of the House Appropriations and Finance Committee, Patty Lundstrom, D-Gallup; and the ranking Republican on that committee, Rep. Larry Larrañaga, R-Albuquerque; as well as multiple educators: representatives Bobby Gonzales, D-Taos, a former superintendent; George Dodge, D-Santa Rosa, a retired teacher and principal; Tim Lewis, R-Albuquerque, a teacher; and Dennis Roch, R-Logan, a superintendent; and Jim Smith, R-Sandia Park,, a teacher, among others.

Please contact your legislators and Gov. Susana Martinez, and urge them to support HB 180. Learn more and email your elected official from Think New Mexico’s website at thinknewmexico.org.

Fred Nathan is the executive director of Think New Mexico, an independent, nonpartisan think tank based in Santa Fe.