

Title: **Ensure new funds go to classroom**
 Author:
 Size: 35.65 column inches
 Las Cruces, NM Circulation: 28086



EDITORIAL

Ensure new funds go to classroom

One of the bills we will be keeping an eye on when the 2019 legislative session begins Tuesday is HB 77, which would ensure that the new money that will be allocated for education this session goes to the classroom and not to administration.

A district court judge ruled last year that the state was not adequately funding education for at-risk students. That ruling, along with an infusion of new money this year thanks largely to increased oil and gas production, will almost certainly result in a hefty increase in education spending. But if that spending does not reach the classroom, it will not achieve the results demanded by the courts.

The bill, which originated from the public policy group Think New Mexico and is sponsored by Rep. Bobby Gonzales, a former school district superintendent, would seek to limit future growth of school administrations.

Like all school funding bills, this a bit complicated. It would link any increases in administrative spending to either the consumer price index or the state's total distribution for education, whichever is less. Waivers would be available for districts that rank in the top 10 percent in school performance or where the administrative expenditures are lower than 90 percent of similarly sized districts.

We became more interested in this issue following reporting in 2018 that showed Las Cruces Public Schools was projected to increase administrative salary and benefit costs by \$2 million, or 60 percent, in comparison to the year before Greg Ewing took over as superintendent. District officials disputed that

number, but after making the adjustments they requested, administrative expenses were still up by \$1.9 million.

In a guest column published in the Sun-News in August, Think New Mexico Executive Director Fred Nathan cited a report by the National Center on Education Statistics that showed New Mexico only spends an average of 57 percent of its education dollars on instruction. Another 13 percent goes to student and instructional support. The rest – 30 percent – goes to administration.

And it's getting worse. In the decade between the 2006-07 school year and 2016-17, 61 of the 89 school districts in the state increased spending in the central office at a faster rate than they did in the classroom, according to data from the Legislative Finance Committee.

We are strong believers in local control of our schools, and view any infringement by the state with great suspicion. But as we go into this session, the state is under court order to improve its education system. And, one of the things specifically mentioned by the judge was the need for additional funding on classroom instruction programs.

The bill does not seek to address past spending decisions made by districts. But, it does seek to ensure that, as the state increases funding for education, that money is being spent in the classroom, where it will have the most impact.

We believe the constraints imposed by the bill are reasonable, and that its passage would result in better classroom instruction for New Mexico children.