

This report was commissioned by



and authored by the



BACK TO SCHOOL:

NEW MEXICO STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT 2022

Introduction:

As stakeholders across New Mexico work to move our state forward, it is vital that we name student achievement—how much our children are learning each year—as the barometer for our success and critical to building a stronger New Mexico. Recently released state assessment data suggests that we have large amounts of work to do in ensuring our youngest residents are prepared to support the growth, development and prosperity of the Land of Enchantment.

COVID-19 interrupted schooling in New Mexico and across America, exacerbating New Mexico’s languishing educational outcomes. With the release of national and local data about academic learning from school year 2021-2022, we are starting to understand just how disruptive the pandemic has been for students. Nationally, students are performing significantly below pre-pandemic levels as demonstrated by the National Assessment for Educational Progress which showed that math and reading scores are at the lowest point in decades. In New Mexico 2022 state assessment data is the first valid indicator statewide we have of how students are performing since before COVID, a 3-year gap.

The latest data shows that New Mexico is no exception to these national trends. New Mexico’s overall academic performance is deeply concerning, especially in math. New Mexico also has large gaps among different groups of students, especially students with disabilities, emerging multilingual students, and students qualifying for free and reduced price lunch (FRL).¹ There are some Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and schools that can serve as bright spots, but, overall, the state results raise concerns about the quality of education currently being offered in New Mexico.

In addition to the resuming of statewide assessments, 2022 also brought the long awaited implementation of the state’s new primary assessment, the New Mexico Measures of Student Success and Achievement (NM-MSSA). This report digs into the results of the NM-MSSA and other assessments used to monitor statewide academic achievement. Because this is the first year NM-MSSA was utilized, only baseline understanding of academic performance in the state can be gleaned and no analysis of the historical trends of the data can be completed. This assessment transition follows multiple years of detrimental testing disruptions, including an abrupt end to the former testing system in 2019 by executive order, a federal waiver due to COVID in 2020 (like most states), and, in 2021, testing less than 10% of students statewide despite a federal directive to test as many students as possible. The state summative assessments administered in 2021-22 were:

- I-Station to measure early literacy in grades K-2
- The New Mexico Measures of Student Success & Achievement to assess English language arts and math performance in grades 3-8;
- The New Mexico Assessment of Science Readiness in grades 5, 8 and 11
- The SAT in grade 11

Following the disruptions in schooling since the 2020 onset of COVID-19, it is critical that policy makers and other stakeholders develop a deep understanding of results from these assessments and ensure students have what they need to recover from lost learning.

¹ Defined by qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch. FRL status is used in this report as a measure of a student’s economic status.

Key Findings:

Participation rates rebounded statewide in 2022, but we do not know what variation exists across the state.

Participation rates in state assessments are an important data point in interpreting proficiency data to understand whether the students who took the assessments represent all students, which is why the federal government requires a 95% participation rate for states. In 2022, statewide participation rates were above 90% in all grades and subjects. However, participation rates are not publicly reported for schools or districts which means we do not have a clear understanding of whether there was wide variation across the state.

New Mexico lacks high quality, consistent data reporting.

The analyses included in this report were limited due to the lack of quality data released by the New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED). Demographic data is challenging to locate and, in most cases, is provided only at the school level and not for Local Education Agencies overall.² New Mexico has many small and homogeneous schools which results in suppressed data reporting that does not allow schools are small and homogeneous, this results in a lot of suppressed data that does not allow stakeholders to understand how a school's demographics compare to an overall LEA's population.

Academic achievement data is also limited. First, due to the implementation of a new assessment, only proficiency rates are reported without any sense of academic growth. Secondly, it is challenging to understand how valid entity scores are because test participation rates are not reported for individual schools or LEAs. Finally, when looking at the reported proficiency data there are numerous limitations to using and analyzing this data:

- For any school or LEA in which the proficiency rate is below 20% or above 80%, it is only noted as such without specifics. This limits our ability to understand performance at these poles, although the quantity of entities with proficiency rates below 20% is alarming on its own. (Eleven percent of LEAs have less than 20% of students proficient in ELA. Twenty-four percent of LEAs have less than 20% of their students proficient in early literacy and 40% of LEAs have less than 20% of students proficient in math).
- Proficiency rates are not reported at all when the number of students who took an assessment is small. This is often to protect individual student privacy, but it is particularly prevalent when looking at subgroup data, limiting our ability to fully understand how different groups of students perform, and the extent of academic gaps between groups of students.
- As it relates to subgroups, while data is reported on the performance of free and reduced price lunch eligible students, English Language Learner (ELL) students, and special education students (and other student groups) there is not data reported on comparison groups to understand the gaps between these students and their peers who do not qualify for these programs. This forces us to compare subgroup performance to overall state performance, which hides some proportion of the performance gaps.
- Data is not reported by grade level and many assessments are grouped together in much of the data reporting, making it challenging to use data for improvement efforts at any level including classroom, school, and LEA.

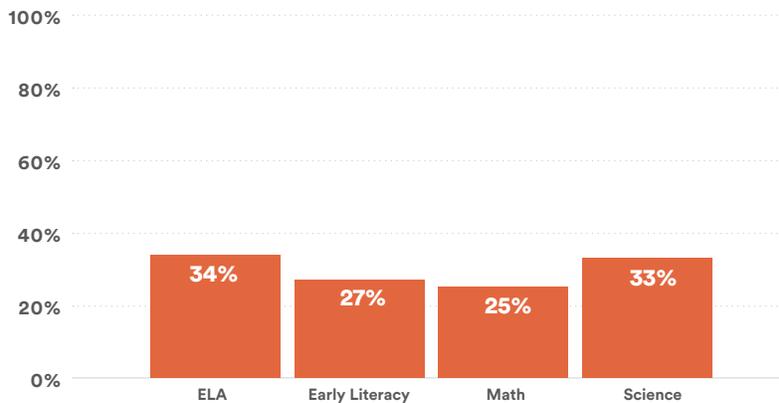
These data issues limit the ability to analyze performance as thoroughly as has been done in other states, including correlations between performance and demographics and shifts in performance over time.

² Note that for the purpose of this report, "LEA" includes both school districts, and charter schools authorized by the Public Education Commission who are considered separate LEAs with only one school entity.

Overall proficiency rates are low, especially in math, and particular subgroups perform even lower across the state.

When looking at all students, only one quarter of New Mexico students are proficient in math and 34% in ELA. Additionally, in early literacy, which research shows is a strong leading indicator of future performance, only 27% of students are proficient.

STATEWIDE PROFICIENCY RATES



<20%
of Native American Students and English Learners are proficient in each subject

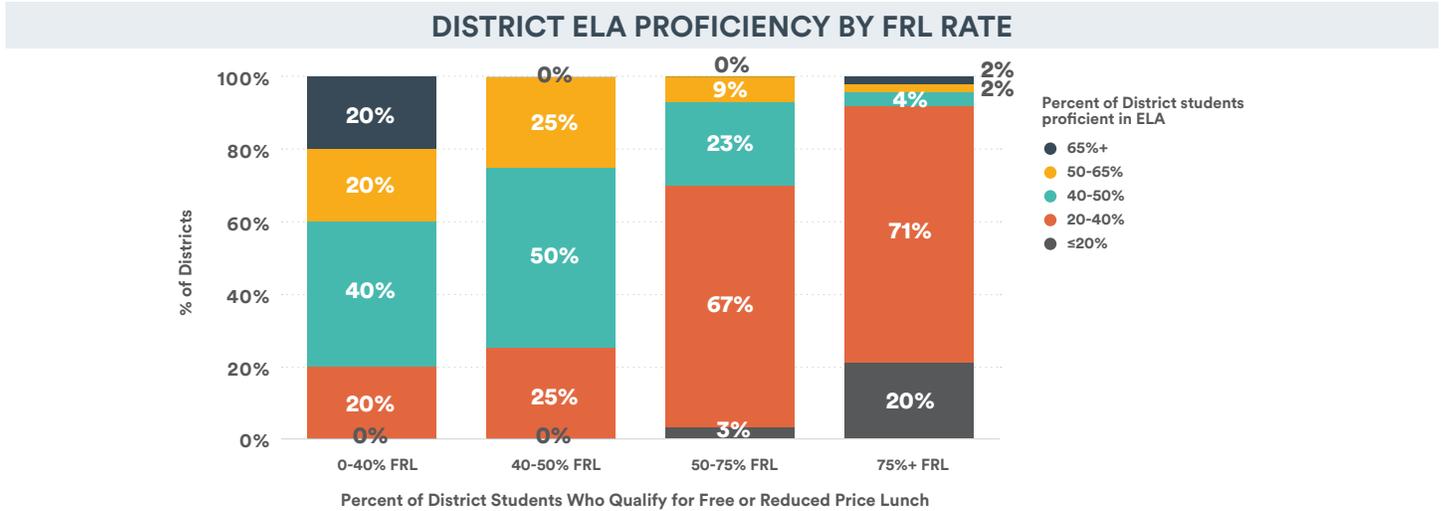
There is cause for even greater concerns when looking at the performance of individual student demographic groups across the state. It is challenging to fully understand performance given how the data is reported, but in all subjects English Learners and Native American Students have a proficiency rate of under 20% across the state. Free and reduced lunch eligible students have a proficiency rate of under 20% in math, and rates of 26% in ELA and 22% in early literacy. While comparison group data is not available, we know that these student groups are performing significantly below the state averages and even further below their peers in other demographic groups.

Underneath low statewide proficiency rates, there is wide variation in District³ performance.

- In ELA, there are 51 districts with proficiency rates below the state rate of 34%, 10 of which have proficiency rates below 20%. Thirty-nine districts have proficiency rates equal to or greater than the state average.
- In early literacy, there are 42 districts with proficiency rates below the state average of 27%, 22 of which have proficiency rates below 20%. Forty-six districts have proficiency rates greater than or equal to the state average.
- In math, there are 55 districts with proficiency rates below the state rate of 25%, 35 of which have proficiency rates below 20%. Thirty-five districts have proficiency rates greater than or equal to the state average. Said differently, over 35% of New Mexico districts have fewer than 20% of students proficient in math.

³ This section refers only to geographic school districts, not all LEAs which would include state authorized charter schools.

While data reporting limits our ability to dig deeply into the relationship between demographics and proficiency rates, when looking at all districts we can see that those with a higher rate of students who qualify for free or reduced price lunch rate are more likely to have lower proficiency rates. For example, among districts with students who qualify for free or reduced price lunch rate of 75% or higher, 20% have proficiency rates under 20%. This is not to say there are not bright spots amongst high poverty districts; some of which are highlighted below.



Concerns emerge about academic gaps when looking at LEA⁴ level performance for particular demographic groups. There are some outliers that do achieve strong results with particular groups.

While statewide performance for subgroups is cause for action, performance levels among subgroups varied widely among LEAs. Some examples of these trends:

- Only 14 LEA entities have free and reduced lunch eligible students ELA proficiencies at or above 50%. Most of these are charter schools.
- In early literacy, 65 LEAs have ELL proficiency rates below 20% (of 82 with reported data).
- In math, 75 LEAs have Native American student proficiency rates below 20% (of 105 with reported data).

There are some bright spots at the LEA entity level, though many of these are charter schools. School level outliers are included as call-outs throughout this report. When looking solely at school districts some outliers include the following:

- Corona with 78% of free and reduced price lunch eligible students proficient in ELA and 65% in math
- Texico and Ft Sumner both with 67% of Native American students proficient in ELA; Fort Sumner also has 56% of ELL students proficient in math
- Maxwell and Mosquero with 67% of free and reduced price lunch eligible students proficient in early literacy
- Springer with 50% of ELLs proficient in early literacy
- Lovington with 67% of Native American students proficient in math

New Mexico should dig into and learn from these results. Though, many of these LEAs have relatively small numbers of students in these subgroups. There are no strong outliers that also serve large proportions of these subgroups.

⁴ For these analyses all LEAs, including state authorized charters, are included in contrast to the prior section focused on geographic school districts only.”

School Level Spotlights: ELA Performance

These schools had **over 80%** of their free and reduced price lunch eligible students proficient in ELA:

- Corona Elementary in Corona
- Quemado High in Quemado
- Datil Elementary in Quemado
- Penasco Elementary in Artesia

There are not large differences in performance distribution based on governance type, although there tend to be more charter schools on the higher performing end of the distribution.

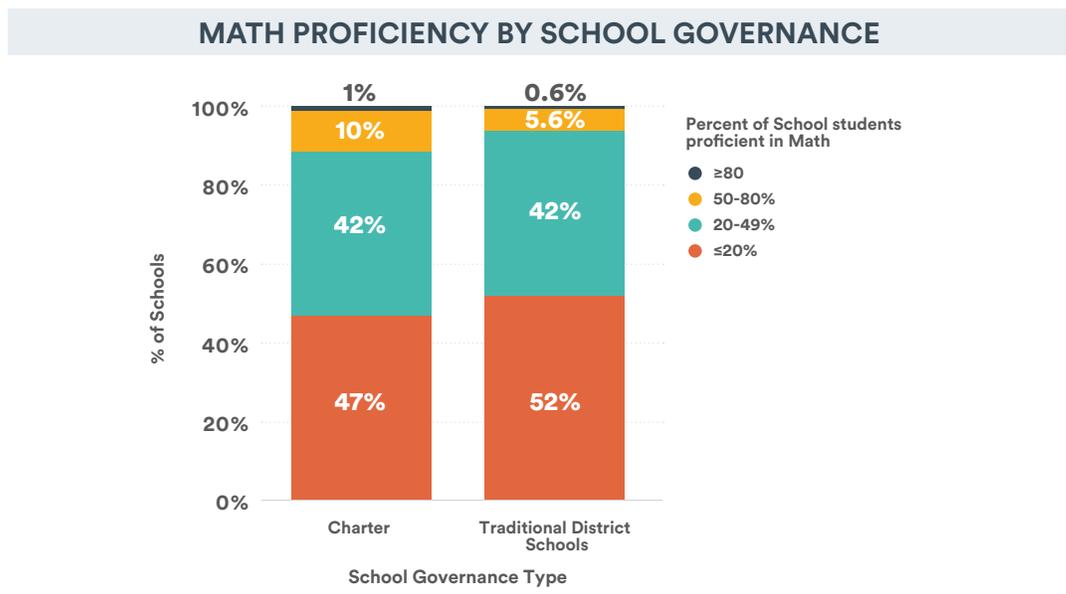
Because of how data is reported, we cannot aggregate performance at the student level by governance type without excluding a large numbers of schools. Therefore, to get a sense of how charter schools⁴ are performing compared to traditional district schools, we have looked at how schools are distributed across proficiency bands. It is important to note that some schools of both governance types are excluded because of the low number of students tested.

As an example, in math, 52% of traditional district schools have a proficiency rate below 20% compared to 47% of charter schools. At the other end of distribution, 12% of charter schools have proficiency rates over 50%, compared to only 6% of traditional district schools.

School Level Spotlights: Math Performance

Many schools had **over 80%** of their Native American students proficient in Math; including:

- Albuquerque Institute of Math and Science
- Amy Biehl Community School in Santa Fe
- Capitan Middle School in Capitan
- Centennial High School in Las Cruces
- Chaparral Elementary in Gadsden
- Cottonwood Classical Prep in Albuquerque
- East Mountain High School in Albuquerque
- Estancia Middle School in Estancia

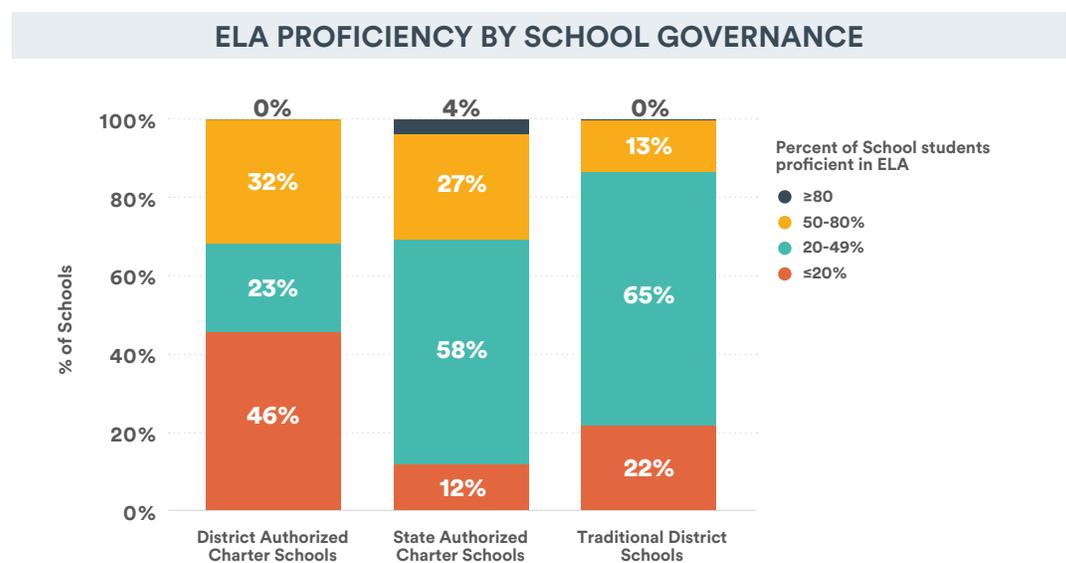


In addition, we can analyze charter school performance based on their authorizer. Here we can see that in both ELA and math state-authorized charter schools have more schools above the 20% threshold. District-authorized charter schools have a higher proportion of schools with proficiency rates above 50%, though state authorized charter schools also out-perform traditional district schools in this area.

School Level Spotlights: Early Literacy Performance

These schools had **over 80%** of their ELL students proficient in early literacy:

- Estancia Valley Classical Academy
- G.W. Stout Elementary in Silver City
- Hurley Elementary in Cobre
- La Luz Elementary in Alamogordo
- Montessori of the Rio Grande in Albuquerque
- Peralta Elementary in Los Lunas



⁴ For this purpose, charter school includes charter schools authorized at both the state and district level.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

This data makes clear that New Mexico must act with urgency to improve outcomes for our students. We must also increase transparency of data to help understand where the greatest needs are and where there are bright spots to learn from. Some specific recommendations and areas for exploration:

- **Alignment of Reporting:** Different reports from different departments at NMPED report data in different ways and use different terminology which makes it challenging to understand. A core function of State Education Agencies is clear and transparent reporting of data to the public which must be improved in New Mexico. Common terminology, classification and format of reporting will assist stakeholders in understanding the data; NMPED must become a leader in this area.
- **Increased Data Transparency:** In addition to creating more clarity around data being reported, NMPED should revisit its rules around what and how data is reported to ensure data is reported in sufficient detail to help families, educators, researchers, and other community stakeholders truly understand what is happening in our schools. Current reporting structures do not allow for analyses done in other states such as correlations between demographics and performance.
- **Continuity of Assessments:** One challenge in looking at New Mexico performance is the inability to compare performance over time given the consistent transitions in assessment providers. Other states who had consistent assessments over the past several years have a clearer picture than New Mexico does of the impacts of COVID-19.
- **Introduction of Growth Measures:** Another byproduct of the inconsistent assessments is that there is not a growth measure reported by NMPED. Growth is a critical measure of student, school and LEA performance, especially given the correlation between demographics and proficiency, but we are unable to measure this currently in New Mexico. There are a range of models used nationally for New Mexico to consider, including median growth percentiles and value-added models.
- **Learning from Bright Spots:** Despite the overall challenges in New Mexico with student performance, there are some schools and LEAs with strong results. Policymakers and educators should ensure we are systematically working to understand what is happening in these schools and sharing them so that these practices can spread.
- **State Guidance on Best Practices:** NMPED should be supporting implementation of best practices statewide, either through professional learning, funding related to implementation, or dissemination of the research. This could include understanding best practices for ELLs in high performing schools, research-based reading practices or many other practices.
- **School Funding:** Finally, while funding is not the cure-all for the issues that exist, we must ensure we are allocating resources to support the students who need the most support and ensure the increased funds in New Mexico's education system are getting to where they can make the most impact – the classroom.
- **A New Mexico Plan for Improvement:** There has been endless conversation on what New Mexico should do to improve achievement and yet there have not been transformational gains in performance (in some cases there have been declines). There remains no state-wide plan with measurable goals for what the state can and should do to support more students to live up to their full potential.

As students have returned to in-person learning and the recovery from COVID-19 continues, it is essential that stakeholders in New Mexico understand how students are performing and act with urgency to ensure we are able to support all New Mexico students moving forward. We encourage policy makers to closely consider this year's academic results and ensure that their priorities are informed by this data and are focused on increasing the percent of students reaching proficiency for all student groups moving forward.

This report was written by the Keystone Policy Center and commissioned by NewMexicoKidsCAN! The research, analysis and writing of the report was performed by Maya Lagana, Lisa Berdie and Van Schoales. All data utilized for this report was publicly available with most of it coming from the New Mexico Public Education Department and can be provided upon request of the Keystone Policy Center.



nmkidscan.org



KEYSTONE
POLICY CENTER

keystone.org