



Office of the Governor

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Governor announces legislation to improve New Mexico special education

Bill will create dedicated office, increase supports for special education educators

SANTA FE – Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham on Thursday announced the introduction of legislation designed to support New Mexico students with disabilities and improve special education in schools across the state.

Sponsored by Representative Elizabeth “Liz” Thomson, House Bill 285 will create the Office of Special Education, attached to the Public Education Department with a director to be appointed by the governor, to expand special education oversight and ensure effective and timely delivery of special education services for students, in addition to increasing supports and establishing additional training for special education educators. Gov. Lujan Grisham’s executive budget recommendation includes an accompanying \$33.1 million increase for special education.

“We continue to build a robust foundation that delivers the world-class and cradle-to-career education that every New Mexico student deserves,” said **Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham**. “With more comprehensive, data-driven services for students with disabilities, support for their families, and expanded training for educators, we can strengthen special education throughout the state and ensure that New Mexico students and families receive the tools and programs they need to learn and thrive.”

“All of our kids deserve the best education possible,” said **Rep. Thomson**. “By creating the Office of Special Education, we will ensure that our schools are inclusive, and that children with disabilities and learning differences get the resources they need to succeed and thrive in the classroom and beyond.”

- In order to make meaningful strides in improving special education, the legislation proposes to:
- Expand oversight and ensure school and school district accountability for implementing federal and state special education laws;
- Increase transparency and data-driven services by requiring and publicizing data on student achievement, effectiveness and timeliness of services, school district transition plans for students, and all incidents of student restraint and seclusion;

- Provide training and professional development for special educators on required student protections, implementation of Individualized Education Plans, engagement and communication with parents, students and educational decision-makers, de-escalation practices, positive behavioral supports and other related interventions, and structured literacy;
- Transfer preschool special education to the Early Childhood Education and Care Department; and
- Initiate an educator-informed process to evaluate and identify appropriate increases salary levels for licensed school employees who support students with disabilities.

“The Special Education Act begins a long-awaited transformation for special education in New Mexico,” said **Katie Stone**, parent and vice-chair of the New Mexico Developmental Disabilities Council. “Empowering an Office of Special Education to provide oversight and accountability will lead to improved educational outcomes for disabled students, and more support for the teachers and schools who educate our kids.”

“This excellent bill will dramatically improve the lives of students with disabilities and their families. It addresses many of the issues in the Yazzie-Martinez decision, and, more importantly, addresses concerns raised for many years by families of special education students,” said **John Arango**, parent, chair of the New Mexico Civil Legal Service Commission, and immediate past chair of the New Mexico Developmental Disabilities Council. “We thank the governor for her commitment to transforming special education in New Mexico, and for her leadership in crafting this innovative bill. We urge every member of the House and Senate to support this important piece of legislation.”

The legislation and creation of the Office of Special Education will build on the progress made by the 2021 establishment of the Special Education Ombud within the New Mexico Developmental Disabilities Council, further prioritizing the needs of students with special education needs in the state’s public education system. The office will coordinate with other state departments, including the Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD); the Higher Education Department; the Children, Youth and Families Department; the Developmental Disabilities Council; and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to provide the best outcomes for students from cradle to career.

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