



# State of New Mexico

## *Office of the Governor*

**Bill Richardson**  
Governor

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### **Governor Bill Richardson signs historic school construction bill – paves way for \$90 million for new schools**

*Governor also strengthens Charter Schools Act, Support for Kindergarten*

ALBUQUERQUE - Governor Bill Richardson today signed a historic bill that paves the way for an investment of \$90 million for modern new schools in New Mexico's fastest-growing communities.

The Governor signed **Senate Bill 450** during a history class at Cibola High School in Albuquerque. The legislation, sponsored by Sen. Cynthia Nava, makes \$90 million available for new schools in growing communities like Albuquerque's West Side, Rio Rancho, Los Lunas, Las Cruces, Gadsden and Deming. The \$90 million is included in the capital funding bill, which the Governor will sign next week.

"Overcrowded schools are a statewide issue – not just a West Side issue, or a Rio Rancho issue, or a Las Cruces issue," Governor Richardson said during the signing ceremony. "Research says that overcrowding has a greater impact on student achievement than the combined influences of family background, socioeconomic status, student attendance and behavior. As a community, we must not tolerate overcrowded schools."

The bill makes several changes to the way the state contributes to school construction projects. Most notably, it allows the state to make state money available for high-growth communities to help build new schools.

### **Charter Schools**

Governor Richardson on Friday also signed **Senate Bill 600**, also sponsored by Sen. Cynthia Nava, which makes major changes to the way the state deals with charter schools.

Starting in 2007, organizers will have the option of applying to start a new charter school through the Public Education Commission, or continue to apply through a local school district. This is important because it provides more opportunities for innovative charter schools. The legislation also increases funding to allow charter schools to participate in athletics, and includes more accountability in the charter school law – by requiring charter applicants to demonstrate how they can be fiscally responsible with taxpayer money.

“I’m a major supporter of charter schools. I believe the changes that Secretary Veronica Garcia pushed through will strengthen the law and create new opportunities for innovation,” Governor Richardson said.

### **Kindergarten Plus**

Finally, Governor Richardson signed **House Bill 43**, sponsored by Rep. Mimi Stewart, which extends the kindergarten year by up to four months. That gives children extra time to adjust and excel.

“Kindergarten Plus has been successful, and this bill ensures it will continue to thrive,” Governor Richardson said. “This program is the perfect compliment to our successful Pre K program for four-year-olds. We are expanding Pre K to provide access to another 1-thousand children.”