



For Immediate Release
December 2, 2008

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Governor Bill Richardson Announces His Education Legislative Initiatives

SANTA FE - Governor Bill Richardson today outlined his education initiatives for the 2009 legislative session including his support for changing the state's school funding formula. The funding change will require a significant state investment which Governor Richardson wants voters to decide on, possibly through a referendum or constitutional amendment.

"We must ensure that we are funding our classrooms at a level that guarantees success for all New Mexico children, in particular, taking another look at how we fund our rural, smaller and poorer schools," Governor Richardson said. "Ultimately, I believe the decision on making this major investment should be up to the voters. Our citizens must have the power to shape the future of New Mexico and to decide where our priorities lie."

While the state has invested more than \$600 million in reforms since Governor Richardson took office, a Funding Formula Study Task Force found that New Mexico schools are under funded by \$350 million. It also found that the funding formula the state has used for more than 30 years does not adequately invest in rural, smaller and poorer school districts.

Governor Richardson directed Education Secretary Veronica Garcia to develop a plan for strong accountability to coincide with any changes to the funding formula. The Governor's proposal requires every school to revise its Educational Plan for Student Success and to tie those plans to their requested budgets. Before every school year, the Secretary of Education will give the Governor's office a certified report for each school district and every charter school that will show how their funding is being used to best assist the achievement of all students and provide accountability for all required programs. Three school districts and two charter schools will take part in a pilot project this year.

Governor Richardson also today proposed imposing sanctions on school districts or charter schools that fail to submit timely financial audits, including local school boards losing their financial autonomy. Currently, the Public Education Department has no authority to require districts to complete timely financial audits making the state unable to intervene if a district finds itself struggling financially.

The Governor is also proposing a measure ensuring that students are in the classroom the full 180 days required by the state and that teacher in-service time is held outside of the instructional

day. A recent review of time spent by students in New Mexico schools found that many students were only in class for 165 to 170 days per year.

“These measures assure strong accountability for instructional time and for tax payer dollars,” Education Secretary Veronica Garcia said. “I am pleased that Governor Richardson remains a strong champion of public education.”

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