K12 ACADEMICS — STATE EDUCATION SERIES



New Mexico Education Guide

A complete profile — schools, testing, graduation, accountability, school choice, teacher certification & financial aid, each in depth.

K12 ACADEMICS

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2026 EDITION

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Everything about school in New Mexico.

This guide profiles **New Mexico**'s education system in seven parts, each a two-page deep dive with the key facts, plain-English explanations, and a link to the full, regularly-updated guide online. From K12 Academics, the world's largest education resource, online since 2004.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Education Overview · State Testing · Graduation Requirements · Accountability & Report Cards · School Choice · Teacher Certification · Financial Aid

SEARCH 200+ DIRECTORIES

K-12 Schools · Colleges & Universities · Vendors · Summer Programs · International Programs · Performers

NEW MEXICO — PART 1 OF 7

Education Overview

EDUCATION IN NEW MEXICO

New Mexico educates roughly 320,000 public K–12 students across about 89 school districts , overseen by the New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) and coordinated with a cabinet-level early-childhood department. New Mexico serves a richly diverse student population, including large Hispanic and Native American communities. New...

WHO MUST ATTEND SCHOOL

- **Start age** — 5 — kindergarten required
- **End of compulsory age** — 18
- **Districts** — ~89 school districts
- **Satisfying it** — Public, private, or home school

A NATIONAL LEADER IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

New Mexico has become a national leader in early-childhood investment. It created a cabinet-level Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD) , established an Early Childhood Trust Fund (and a 2022 constitutional measure dedicating permanent-fund revenue to early learning), and made child care free for most families (broad...

AT A GLANCE

Compulsory	**Ages 5–18**
Districts	**~89**
Testing	**NM-MSSA · SAT**
Diploma	**24 units**
Choice	**Charters**

DISTRICTS & CHARTERS

New Mexico's largest districts include Albuquerque Public Schools (by far the largest), Las Cruces , Rio Rancho , Santa Fe , and Gadsden . New Mexico has a substantial charter-school sector — charters are authorized either by the state Public Education Commission or by local districts, and serve a meaningful share of students. Much of...

PRIVATE & INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS IN NEW MEXICO

- **Independent schools** — Nonprofit, board-governed schools such as Albuquerque Academy , Sandia Preparatory School, and Bosque School (Albuquerque), and Santa Fe Prep
- **Catholic & parochial schools** — Archdiocese of Santa Fe and diocesan schools (such as St. Pius X in Albuquerque)
- **Other religious schools** — Christian, Presbyterian (Menaul School), and other faith-based options
- **Specialty schools** — Montessori and schools for specific learning needs

READ NEW MEXICO'S FULL EDUCATION OVERVIEW GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

State Testing

WHAT YOUR STATE TESTS

New Mexico uses the NM-MSSA (New Mexico Measures of Student Success and Achievement) in grades 3–8 for ELA and math, the NM-ASR science test, and the SAT in grade 11. Run by the New Mexico Public Education Department. There's no exit-exam gate.

WHICH TESTS, WHICH GRADES

- **NM-MSSA (grades 3–8)** — English language arts and mathematics
- **NM-ASR (Science)** — Science in grades 5, 8, and 11
- **SAT (grade 11)** — The statewide high-school test — a real, college-usable score
- **NM-DLM** — Alternate assessment for eligible students

FORMAT & SUBJECTS

NM-MSSA is online ; the grade-11 SAT follows the national digital SAT format.

IS PASSING REQUIRED TO GRADUATE?

No exit-exam gate. New Mexico doesn't require passing a state test to graduate; students complete course and credit requirements. The grade-11 SAT provides a college-usable score.

HOW IT 'S SCORED

NM-MSSA reports performance levels; the grade-11 SAT is scored 400–1600.

AT A GLANCE

Grades 3–8	**NM-MSSA**
Science	**NM-ASR gr 5, 8, 11**
High school	**SAT (grade 11)**
Grad requirement?	**No exit-exam gate**
Format	**Online**
Standards	**NM Content Standards**

TESTING WINDOWS

Testing runs in a spring window set by each district.

HOW TO PREPARE

- **SAT prep for grade 11** — Our SAT guide and free Khan Academy Official SAT Practice apply to the grade-11 test
- **State practice tests** — The state provides free practice tests matching the real format

PARTICIPATION & OPTING OUT

Students in tested grades participate. Ask your district about make-up windows and any questions.

ACCOMMODATIONS & MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

Accommodations follow a student's IEP or 504 plan ; eligible students take the state's alternate assessment. Multilingual learners take an English proficiency test (WIDA ACCESS or the state equivalent) and may receive designated supports.

READ NEW MEXICO'S FULL STATE TESTING GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

Graduation Requirements

AT A GLANCE

New Mexico requires 24 units and a demonstration of competency in core areas — but there's no single pass-or-fail exit exam . Students show competency through multiple measures and complete a yearly Next Step Plan .

CREDIT & COURSE REQUIREMENTS

New Mexico's 24 units include 4 English, 4 math (including Algebra II), 3 science, 3.5 social studies, 1 PE, 1 CTE/world language/fine arts, and electives (with a dual-credit, distance, AP, or honors course, and financial literacy embedded).

TESTING TO GRADUATE

No single exit exam. Students demonstrate competency in required subjects through multiple measures (state assessments, end-of-course exams, or approved alternatives). Confirm the current measures with your district.

DIPLOMA TYPES & HONORS

New Mexico issues a standard diploma, with the State Seal of Bilingualism-Biliteracy available. Districts may add honors.

ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS

Students complete a Next Step Plan each year mapping their path to graduation and beyond.

AT A GLANCE

Units	24
Exit exam?	No single exit exam
Competency	Demonstrated via multiple measur...
Also	Next Step Plan each year
Confirm with	Your district

OTHER REQUIREMENTS

New Mexico embeds financial literacy and requires a college/career-focused course. Confirm details with your district.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **How many credits does New Mexico require?** — The state sets a minimum, but your district may require more — confirm locally.
- **Does New Mexico require a test to graduate?** — No single exit exam — students demonstrate competency through multiple measures.
- **Are there different diploma types?** — Yes — plus honors designations and seals; see the diplomas section.
- **What if my student is behind on credits?** — Talk to the counselor about credit recovery and alternative pathways.
- **Where do I confirm the exact requirements?** — Your school counselor, district, and the state department of education.

READ NEW MEXICO'S FULL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

Accountability & Report Cards

AT A GLANCE

New Mexico moved away from A-F grades to the New Mexico Vistas dashboard, which shows performance and highlights schools for support — rather than assigning a single letter grade.

HOW THIS STATE RATES SCHOOLS

NM Vistas reports performance across proficiency, growth, graduation, English-learner progress, attendance, and readiness , and spotlights schools for support (comprehensive/targeted). There's no single grade — read across the measures and any support status.

WHAT GETS MEASURED

- **Academic achievement** — How students score on state tests (proficiency in reading/ELA and math)
- **Academic growth / progress** — How much students improve year to year — not just where they land
- **Graduation rate** — For high schools (the 4-year cohort rate)
- **English-learner progress** — How English learners are progressing toward proficiency
- **School quality / student success** — An extra indicator — often attendance/chronic absenteeism, college/career readiness, or similar

FINDING & READING THE REPORT CARD

Look up any school on New Mexico Vistas (newmexicoschools.com) . Review the measures (especially growth) and the trend.

AT A GLANCE

Format	**NM Vistas dashboard + support**
Note	**Moved away from A-F**
Tool	**New Mexico Vistas**
Look up at	**newmexicoschools.com**

HOW FAMILIES SHOULD USE RATINGS

- **Read it in context** — A school's score reflects its students' circumstances too, not only its quality
- **Look at growth, not just scores** — Growth shows how much a school moves students — often more telling than raw proficiency
- **Check the trend** — Is the school improving over time?
- **Look past the summary** — Dig into the underlying data (subgroups, attendance, readiness)
- **Then visit** — Data raises questions; a visit answers them (see our guide on evaluating a school)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **How does New Mexico rate schools?** — New Mexico uses the NM Vistas dashboard and support designations (it moved away from A-F).
- **What do the ratings measure?** — Test scores, growth, graduation rate, English-learner progress, and a school-quality indicator.
- **Where do I look up my school?** — On the state's official report-card portal (see below).
- **Should I choose a school by its rating alone?** — No — use it as a starting point, weigh growth and context, and visit.
- **What are CSI and TSI?** — Federal labels for schools flagged for Comprehensive or Targeted Support and Improvement.

READ NEW MEXICO'S FULL ACCOUNTABILITY & REPORT CARDS GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

School Choice

AT A GLANCE

New Mexico does not have a private-school-choice program (no ESA, voucher, or tax-credit scholarship). It offers public choice through statewide open enrollment and a well-established charter-school sector.

THIS STATE'S CHOICE PROGRAMS

There is no ESA, voucher, or tax-credit scholarship for private school in New Mexico. Families seeking a private school pay tuition (with financial aid often available). New Mexico's open-enrollment law lets students attend public schools outside their district, space permitting.

PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE, TOO

- **Open enrollment / transfers** — Attend a public school outside your zone, where allowed (see our finding-your-school guide)
- **Charter schools** — Tuition-free public schools of choice (where available)
- **Magnet schools** — Tuition-free public schools with a specialized focus
- **Homeschooling** — Legal in all 50 states (rules vary)

LEGAL & LEGISLATIVE STATUS

Private-choice proposals have not been enacted in New Mexico. Confirm the current status if you've heard of a new proposal.

AT A GLANCE

Private choice?	**No statewide program**
Public choice	**Open enrollment & charters**
Charters	**A well-established charter secto…**
Homeschool	**Legal (registered with the state…**
Confirm with	**Your district**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **Does New Mexico have a private-school-choice program?** — No — New Mexico has no private program, but offers open enrollment and a strong charter sector.
- **What's the difference between an ESA and a voucher?** — A voucher pays a private school directly; an ESA is a flexible parent-managed account for many approved expenses.
- **What is a tax-credit scholarship?** — Donors get a tax credit for giving to organizations that fund private-school scholarships.
- **Is there public school choice too?** — Yes — open enrollment, charters, and magnets (plus homeschooling).
- **Where do I confirm the details?** — On the official state program site (see below).

READ NEW MEXICO'S FULL SCHOOL CHOICE GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

Teacher Certification

HOW LICENSURE WORKS HERE

New Mexico licenses teachers through the New Mexico Public Education Department (PED) . You complete an approved program, pass the required NMTA exams, and earn a Level 1 license, advancing to Level 2/3 with experience.

WHICH TESTS THIS STATE USES

- **NMTA Basic Skills** — Reading, writing, and math
- **NMTA Content Knowledge** — Content test(s) for your licensure area
- **NMTA Assessment of Professional Knowledge** — A pedagogy exam for your grade band
- **Note** — Requirements vary by license — confirm your specific tests

WHAT YOU NEED TO GET LICENSED

- **A bachelor's degree** — From an accredited college or university
- **A state-approved teacher-preparation program** — Completed at a college or through an approved alternative route
- **Student teaching / clinical practice** — Supervised classroom experience
- **Pass the required exams** — See the exams section above
- **A background check** — Fingerprint-based criminal background check
- **Apply to the state** — Submit your application and documents to the licensing agency



AT A GLANCE

Agency	New Mexico Public Education Dept...
Basic skills	NMTA Basic Skills
Content	NMTA Content Knowledge
Pedagogy	NMTA Assessment of Professional...

OTHER PATHS INTO TEACHING

Most states offer alternative routes for career-changers and those with a degree in another field. In New Mexico, these typically let you start teaching while completing licensure requirements — through district or university alternative-certification programs, residencies, or emergency/provisional permits. Requirements (and the exams)...

RECIPROCITY & OUT-OF-STATE LICENSES

- **Interstate agreements** — Most states participate in the NASDTEC Interstate Agreement, which eases (but doesn't guarantee) recognition of an out-of-state license
- **You may still owe exams** — States often require you to meet their own testing (or coursework) requirements, sometimes within a grace period
- **Check both states** — Confirm the specific steps with New Mexicos agency and your current state

READ NEW MEXICO'S FULL TEACHER CERTIFICATION GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

NEW MEXICO — PART 7 OF 7

Financial Aid

THE STATE AID PICTURE

New Mexico offers one of the nation's most inclusive free-tuition programs, administered by the New Mexico Higher Education Department (NMHED) — the Opportunity Scholarship covers tuition at all 29 public colleges with no income requirement .

NEED-BASED STATE GRANTS

- **College Affordability Grant** — Need-based aid for New Mexico residents with financial need not covered by other aid.

MERIT & LOTTERY SCHOLARSHIPS

- **Legislative Lottery Scholarship** — A merit award for recent New Mexico high-school graduates (with a minimum GPA) — historically covered much of tuition; the Opportunity Scholarship...

PROMISE & FREE-COLLEGE PROGRAMS

The New Mexico Opportunity Scholarship covers 100% of tuition and required fees (plus up to $50/credit for course fees) at New Mexico's public colleges and universities — for certificate, associate, and bachelor's students, full- or part-time, with no income limit (maintain a 2.5 GPA). There's no separate application beyond the FAFSA.

COLLEGE SAVINGS (529 PLAN)

New Mexico's The Education Plan (529) offers a state income tax deduction for contributions.

AT A GLANCE

Free tuition	Opportunity Scholarship (no inco...
Merit	Legislative Lottery Scholarship
Need-based	College Affordability Grant
529 plan	The Education Plan
Agency	NMHED

APPLYING & THE STATE AGENCY

- **File the FAFSA early** — It's the trigger for state grants and many scholarships
- **Register with New Mexico Higher Education Department** — Create the state agency's student account to track and claim awards
- **Confirm your details** — Verify residency, GPA, and enrollment as required
- **Meet any extra requirements** — Some programs need a separate form, GPA, or service commitment
- **Reapply every year** — State aid is awarded annually

DEADLINES & TIMING

State deadlines are typically much earlier than the federal FAFSA deadline , and some aid is first-come, first-served until funds run out. File the FAFSA as soon as it opens (in the fall) and confirm the state's specific priority date.

READ NEW MEXICO'S FULL FINANCIAL AID GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

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