

NMSU study finds 'staggering' increase in New Mexico teacher job vacancies



LAS CRUCES — The number of teacher vacancies in New Mexico has nearly doubled in the last year, according to a report by New Mexico State University's Southwest Outreach Academic Research Evaluation & Policy Center.

The report, which has been posted at the center's website and is available to the public, found that the number of teacher vacancies rose from 571 in 2020, to just more than 1,000 in 2021.

Rachel Boren, director of the center, also known as the SOAR Center,

described the number as “staggering.”

“This increase in teacher vacancies is nearly twice what we found last year, and an increase of 477 open positions is the largest change across one year’s time since the vacancy report was first published,” Boren said. “The numbers suggest that addressing teacher vacancies continues to be a challenge across the state.”

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Last year, there were 889 educator vacancies, with 571 total teacher vacancies. This year, the report found 1,727 educator vacancies, with 1,048 of those for teachers. The areas with the highest number of teacher vacancies are special education and elementary education, which were also the top areas in the prior two reports. The subjects with the largest needs include math, science and English language arts, which were also in high demand last year.

Rick Marlatt, interim director of the NMSU School of Teacher Preparation, Administration and Leadership, said teacher shortages are a problem nationwide due to factors such as lower compensation and fewer benefits when compared to other careers. In New Mexico, shortages have been worsened due to challenges brought on by COVID-19.

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“Locally, our statewide teacher shortage has been worsened by the pandemic and its socioeconomic fallout, which has disproportionately impacted students and communities of color and seems to have simultaneously triggered an exodus of teachers choosing to leave the

classroom while also creating new barriers of uncertainty for those potentially considering careers in education," Marlatt said. "Our teacher education program at New Mexico State University continues to approach these challenges with innovative solutions; and with the continued support from our stakeholders, we believe we can turn a corner in our mission to generate and sustain a robust, diverse teacher pipeline in New Mexico."

The report states that across all four-year and two-year higher education institutions and programs in New Mexico, 1,596 students were admitted to an educator preparation program during the 2020-21 academic year, while 979 students completed an educator preparation program. This is an increase of 169 admissions and a decrease of 51 program completions compared to last year.

"We are launching new recruitment and retention initiatives to allow students to re-imagine the work of the profession," said Henrietta Pichon, interim dean of the College of Health, Education and Social Transformation. "We don't want to miss the opportunity to put lessons learned during the pandemic to the test: using new technologies, alternating with instructional hours and days, creating culturally responsive teaching that addresses multiple needs of the student learner, engaging families, and so on."

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Overall, there was an 84 percent increase in total teachers needed this year according to last year's report.

The SOAR Center is housed in the NMSU College of HEST. Boren prepared the report using data she collected along with researchers Joshua Audu, Danish Baro, Germain Degardin, Jordan Kocon and Giovanna Perez. Methods for determining the number of educator vacancies include compiling the

number of job openings listed by every school district in New Mexico, as well as data provided by the state's colleges and universities.

To download the 2021 New Mexico Educator Vacancy Report, visit <http://alliance.nmsu.edu/soar/pubs>.

Read the full report here:

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