

Here's how Deming Cesar Chavez plans to benefit from New Mexico's new charter school law



DEMING – The former Martin Elementary School has stood on East First Street longer than nearby Interstate 10, [having opened for students in 1953](#).

Today, high school students walking the building's halls pass beneath the original ceiling-hung clocks, which still work, although principal Noel Nuñez says, "Sometimes they run slow."

Deming Cesar Chavez Charter High School, the only charter school in Luna County, has made the building its home for more than a decade. It was originally housed in a downtown storefront and later a former drug store on Spruce Street before leasing the Martin Elementary site from Deming Public

Schools.

"It is an aged building, but we've maintained it the best we can," Nuñez said.



He was encouraged a week ago when Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham signed [HB 43](#) into law, aiming to ease the way for charter schools — public schools that do not have the taxing authority exercised by school districts — to raise capital for facility improvements.

On Tuesday, two members of the state Senate Finance Committee, including a co-sponsor of HB 43, visited his school to learn how one school would put such resources to work.

State Sens. Crystal Diamond, R-Elephant Butte, and Siah Correa Hemphill, D-Silver City, took a tour of the school and learned of the school's offerings,

where a majority of students come from low-income households and/or have struggled at district schools. Some of them are parents themselves. A daycare center is among the community services provided at the school, in addition to food and clothing distribution.

There are plumbing problems — including a current lack of hot water in the restrooms — yet Nuñez said DCCCHS' main struggle is not with the age of the main building so much as a lack of space to grow.



The school has added portable structures to its campus, one of which houses a cosmetology classroom, but the school has ambitions of adding more career and technological offerings, including automobile maintenance, a culinary arts centers, and training in plumbing and electrical work.

The trailers are "cost effective," Nuñez said, "but we eventually would like to have something more permanent."

HB 43 seeks to help charter schools fund improvements by establishing a revolving fund overseen by the New Mexico Finance Authority to facilitate loans for charter schools that have had their charters renewed at least once.

Charter schools are public schools governed by their own boards of directors. Like other New Mexico public schools, charter schools depend on distributions from the State Equalization Guarantee for much of their funding.



The bill also requires school districts to make property not being used for education, including land holdings, available for lease or purchase by charter schools. They will also be required to include charter schools in local school bond elections for facility improvements.

Diamond remarked that some district administrators "see new charters as

competition and not as complementary to their programs. That's a mindset that we really need to start to change."

Correa Hemphill, an educator who has served as a school psychologist and special educator director and has been employed in district schools and charters, agreed. "There's a place for all of us," she said. "We can support charter schools and that helps (public schools) to be able to do their job."

More: [Legislation streamlines state funding for charter school facility improvements](#)

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