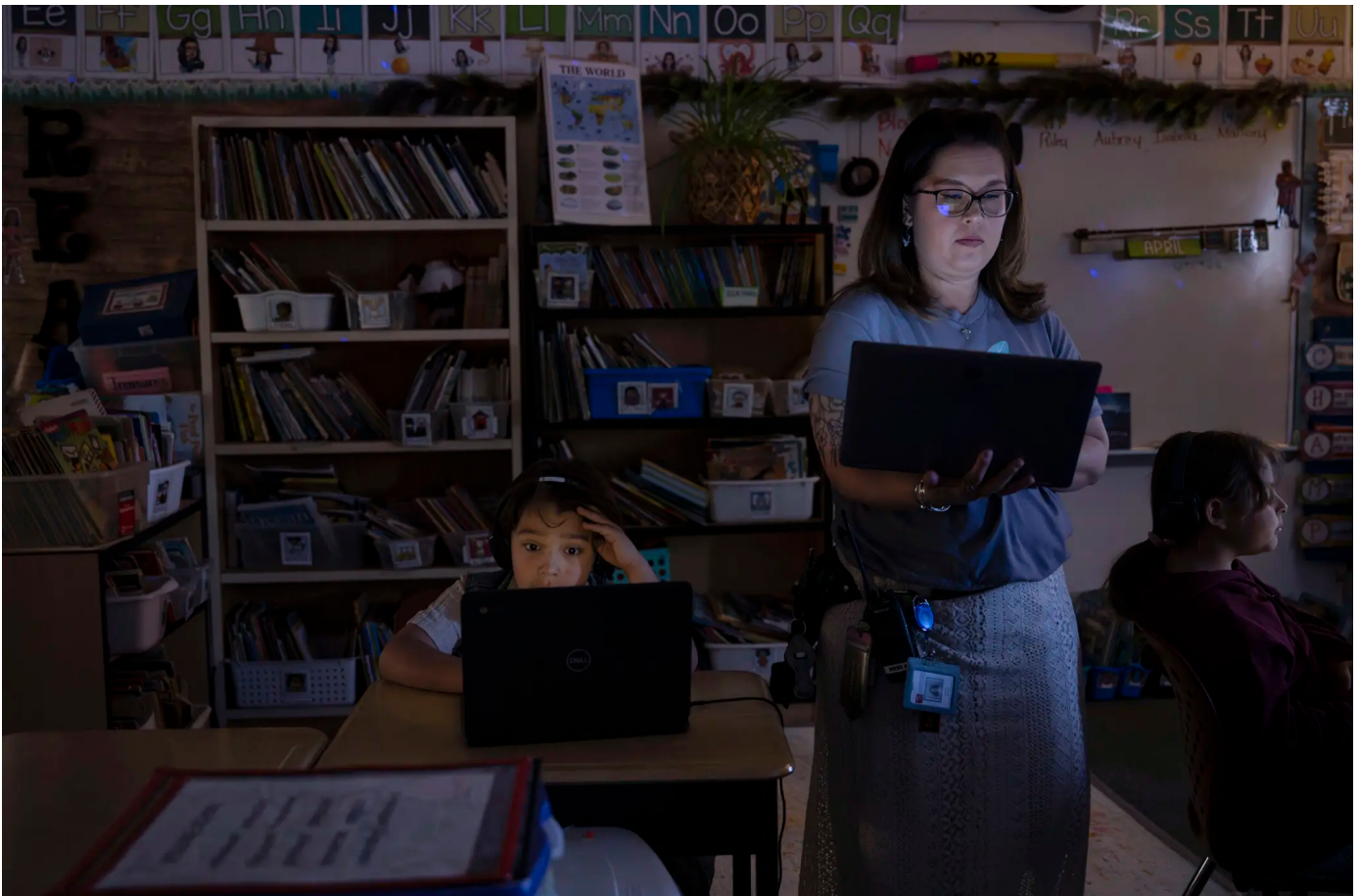


# Amid parent backlash, APS keeps AI reading program with changes

District will limit student voice recordings and delete data more frequently

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**New Mexico districts or charters that have opted out of Amira:**

- Clayton Municipal Schools

- Cuba Independent School District
- Española Public Schools
- Farmington Municipal Schools
- House Municipal Schools
- Los Alamos Public Schools
- Los Lunas Public Schools
- Maxwell Municipal Schools
- Melrose Municipal Schools
- Questa Independent School District
- Raton Public Schools
- Roswell Independent School District
- Santa Fe Public Schools
- Springer Municipal Schools
- Texico Municipal Schools
- Turquoise Trail Charter School in Santa Fe

Source: New Mexico Public Education Department

Amid mounting pressure to dump the software, leaders at Albuquerque Public Schools said Wednesday the district will continue to use the contentious artificial intelligence reading program Amira, but will scale back voice recordings and increase data deletion amid student privacy concerns.

Amira works by listening to students read aloud, noting incorrect pronunciations and scoring their performance. The program has been required for use by the state Public Education Department since the beginning of the 2025-26 school year and is used both for regular assessments and weekly tutoring.

In a [letter](#) to parents, APS Deputy Superintendent Randy Mahlerwein said Amira's leadership provided [documentation](#) certifying that all voice data from before the current school year had been deleted. Data from Amira's testing feature will be deleted every 48 hours so teachers have a chance to listen to the recordings, and Amira's tutoring component will continue to score and analyze student voices but will not record them.

The move comes after parents showed up en masse at school board meetings across the state, asking district leaders to reconsider using the program, worried about where their children's data goes and who sees it.

As the school year starts across New Mexico, several

districts have already opted out of the PED requirement in favor of non-AI programs. Since the beginning of the month, 15 of the state's 89 districts and one charter school have refused the program, some temporarily until further guidance is available, according to PED spokesperson Janelle Taylor García.

APS — the state's largest district — has [maintained](#) that it will continue to use the program, even in the face of mounting parental discontent, citing the progress its students have made using Amira.

Parents who don't want their children to use Amira can opt for a paper-and-pencil test, Mahlerwein said.

The program was approved for use after the non-AI software provider schools had been using for testing, Istation, was [acquired](#) by the San Francisco-based company Amira Learning in 2024.

New Mexico spends \$2.7 million on Amira yearly for software use, professional development, data analysis and other additional tutoring and support programs, Amira leadership told the Journal. The cost of the statewide assessment alone is \$1.4 million.

Amira is required for assessments in two states — New Mexico and Idaho — and is authorized for state use in

Oklahoma, Georgia, California, Texas, Michigan and Massachusetts.

The concerns about Amira, it seems, are spreading to state government. On Monday, a group of more than 30 lawmakers from both sides of the aisle signed a letter addressed to PED Secretary Mariana Padilla, requesting that the agency ask for parental consent before using Amira and provide the public information about its functionality.

"You're talking about the biometric data of children 5 to 8 years old," said Rep. Linda Serrato, D-Santa Fe, who led the group of signatories. "That's valuable stuff, and we know it, but we have to treat it as such."

Serrato said she worries about the consequences of not teaching children AI literacy when they interact with Amira, who appears on students' screens as a friendly purple-haired cartoon character in glasses.

"Our job right now is to be teaching every level of New Mexican, whether they're children all the way up to our elders, just what AI is and what it isn't," she said. "My concern is that it really is humanizing this tool."

Serrato said building stronger guidance for AI is a top priority at the next legislative session in January.

"As public servants, our job is to operate as transparently

about things that the public has questions on as possible," she said.

Taylor García said in a statement the PED had received the letter and that the agency "welcomes the opportunity to discuss these matters with the Legislature and to partner in creating clear safeguards, strong accountability measures, and transparent communication with families."

"The department will continue evaluating emerging technologies to ensure they are used responsibly, securely, and in the best interest of New Mexico students," she said.

Lawmakers also wrote of anxieties surrounding "model drift," the decline in an AI product's functioning or accuracy after it is launched to the public as it adapts to user behavior.

"The unfortunate reality is that once children's voices and other real-world data are used to train the model and influence its future output, the system's behavior and performance can change," the letter reads.

Amira CEO Mark Angel maintains that this is not an issue with the program, which does use student voices to "train" its performance, since the assessment does not change from the beginning of a school year to the end.

"This is a complete misunderstanding," Angel said. "If anyone on the Senate team or staff had talked to us, we

would have explained that any concern about model drift does not impact Amira's ability to accurately assess students. And I think if people think about it, we're approved by more than 30 state agencies. If there was any truth to what they're asserting, no state agency would be willing to rely on our data."

Amira does collect student data, but only under direction from the PED, so the state can produce its reading performance reports, Angel said.

"We don't want to collect this data; it's a nuisance," he said. "If the Legislature or PED tells us to stop collecting the data, we will stop instantaneously."

Recordings are stored so that teachers can listen back to them to hear student progress, Angel said, so a 48-hour deletion window means teachers have less time to listen to the recordings.

"People are confused about this. They think that we are keeping this audio because it's serving some interior purpose," he said. "It's actually serving the exterior purpose of helping teachers to benefit from the assessment process."

Angel insists the company does not sell or transmit data to any other agency or company.

"We have contractual obligations, civil penalties from the

Federal Trade Commission, and legal responsibilities to a wide range of government agencies that make it almost an absurdity to imagine that we would do something both as immoral or as suicidal as sell or provide this data," he said.

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