



High School Completion in New Mexico and Doña Ana

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New Graduation Requirements Signed into Law and Community Organizations Aim to Improve Student Engagement

CCA data dashboard update: 2023 High School Graduation Rates

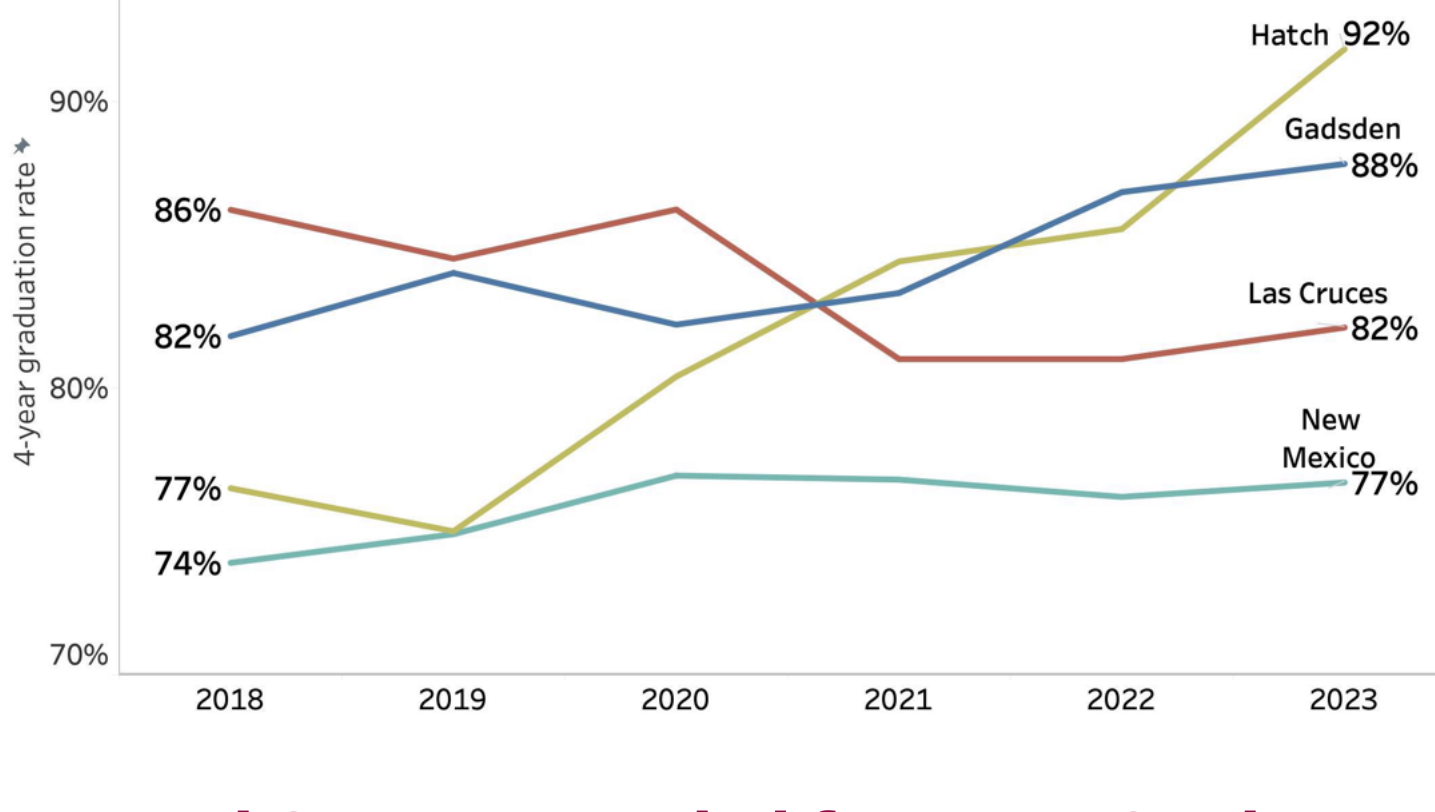
For many years, New Mexico has struggled with low high school graduation rates, consistently ranking among the lowest in the nation. A recent Legislative Finance Committee (LFC) report shows that over the past four years, only 75% of students statewide have graduated annually. (1) The report also found that a third of students who drop out do so by the end of 10th grade, highlighting the urgent need to engage students and make school more relevant to them. Fortunately, the New Mexico Public Education Department (PED) recently updated graduation requirements and is working with statewide organizations such as Future Focused Education, the LANL Foundation, and Ocotillo Strategies to develop innovative ways to engage students and ensure they graduate ready for college and careers. (2) (3) These changes are significant statewide and important for Doña Ana County, where the Success Partnership's K-Career Coalition is working to ensure students succeed in healthy schools and have equitable access to college and careers. (4)

Where are we now? Doña Ana County Districts Exceed Statewide Rates

Recent graduation rate data shows shifts in 4-year high school graduation rates across Doña Ana County and New Mexico from 2018 to 2023. Hatch Valley Public Schools (HVPS) shows the highest rate change in the county, climbing from 77% in 2018 to 92% last year. Gadsden Independent School District (GISD) steadily progressed from 82% to 88% over five years. Las Cruces Public Schools (LCPS) has faced challenges since the pandemic, with a notable drop between 2020 and 2021, despite having a strong graduation rate of 86% in 2018. Last year, LCPS had a graduation rate of 82%, highlighting areas for renewed focus and improvement. Meanwhile, New Mexico's overall rate has increased from 74% to 77%, reflecting gradual statewide progress. In addition, a recent press release indicates promising outcomes for students in Career Technical Education (CTE). (5)

[Click here to see the High School Graduation Dashboard](#)

4-Year High School Graduation Rates in Doña Ana County and New Mexico, 2018-2023

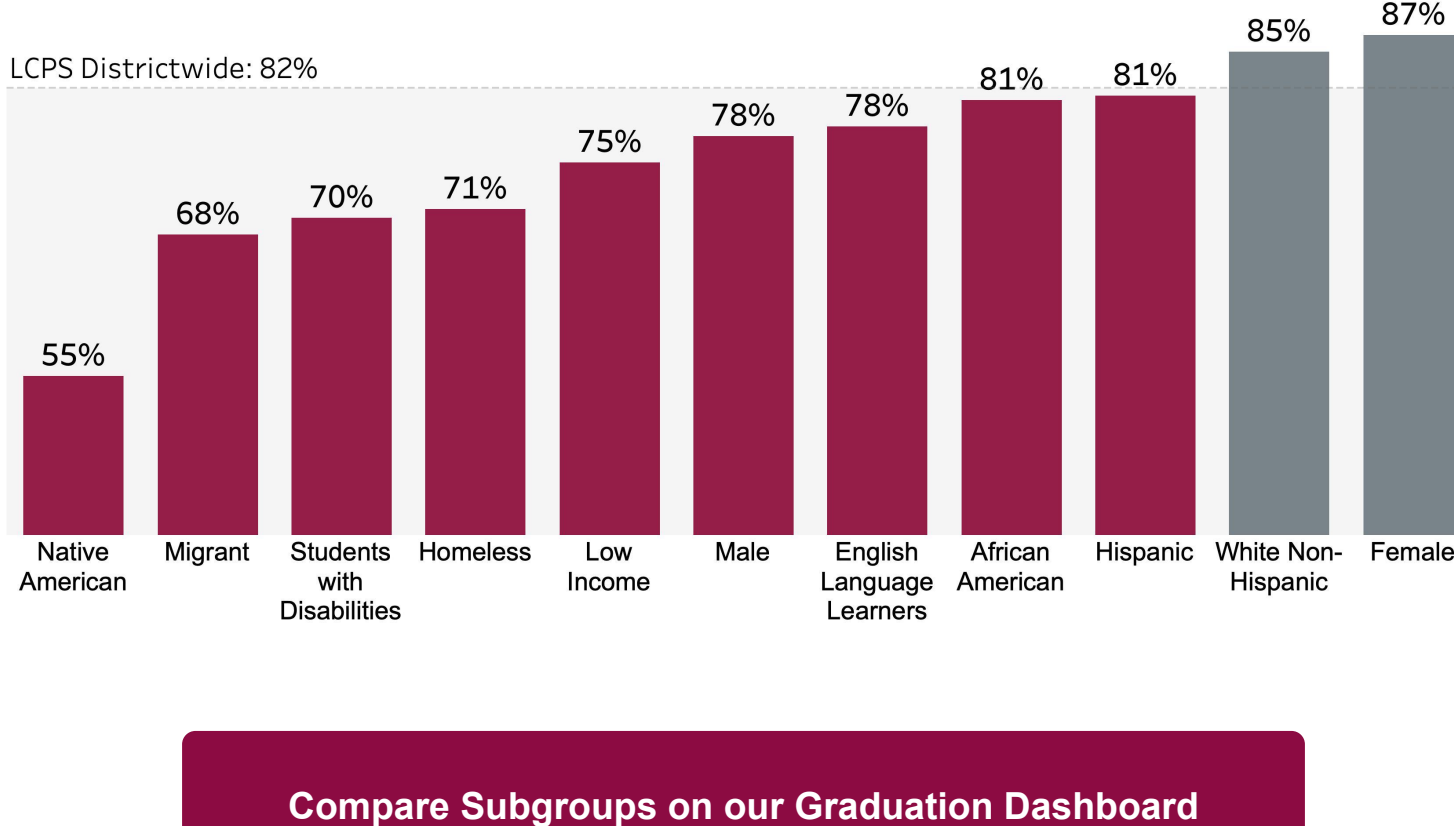


Targeted Support Needed for Many Students

The Yazzie-Martinez lawsuit shed light on the inequalities that Native Americans, low-income, English language learners, and students with disabilities are experiencing. (6) While graduation rates have improved for some, many students are still left behind. Data reveals significant disparities in 4-year high school graduation rates among many subgroups, particularly in LCPS and GISD. (7) Migrant and homeless students in both districts graduate at much lower rates than their peers. The greatest disparities are in LCPS. Native American students have the lowest graduation rate at 55%, followed by migrant students at 68% and students with disabilities at 70%. Homeless and low-income students also fall below the district average of 82%.

In contrast, female students (87%) and White Non-Hispanic students (85%) have the highest graduation rates, above the district average. These disparities highlight systemic inequities in educational outcomes, suggesting that certain groups face greater challenges in completing high school. The data highlights the need to provide targeted support to student populations, particularly those likely to be disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

4-Year High School Graduation Rates in Las Cruces Public Schools by Subgroup, 2023



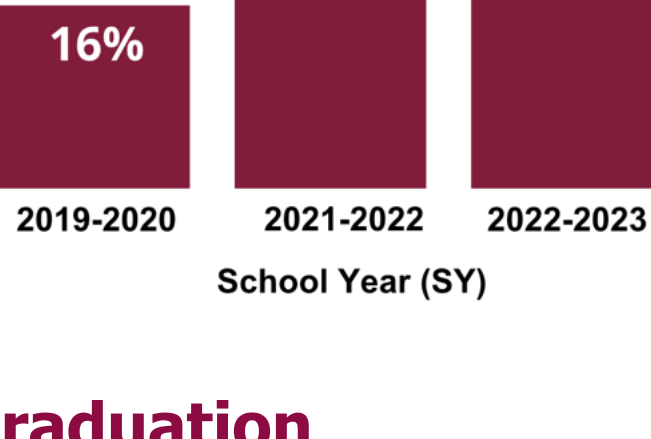
[Compare Subgroups on our Graduation Dashboard](#)

Chronic Absenteeism and the Pandemic

The LFC reported chronic absenteeism in schools hit an all-time high during the pandemic, reaching 41% in SY 2021-2022 and 39% in SY 2022-2023. (8)

Chronically absent students are 5.5 times more likely to drop out than their peers. As schools across the state struggle to keep students in school, stakeholders have successfully advocated for changes in the graduation requirements and have launched initiatives to engage students through community-based capstone projects and work-based learning. (9)

Percentage of New Mexico Students Chronically Absent in 2019-2023



Changes in High School Graduation Requirements

Organizations highlight that community-based projects and internships make education relevant to students, are better measures of success, and prepare students for the future, leading to their efforts to change graduation requirements. (10) The updated requirements aim to promote flexibility and enjoyment in the learning experience for both teachers and students. Highlights of the changes include (11):

- Career technical education (CTE) courses and work-based learning (WBL) can count toward core credits (English, math, and science), promoting practical skill development and career readiness.
- AP, honors, or dual credit classes are no longer a graduation requirement.
- Algebra II is no longer a graduation requirement but must still be offered.
- Financial literacy coursework must be offered in every high school.
- Students no longer have to pass standardized tests to graduate high school.
- More flexibility: School districts can decide on two credits for their graduation requirements (in addition to the state requirements).

The new graduation requirements are expected to motivate students to graduate while pursuing careers that benefit the community (12) Students are excited about having more control over their schedules and focusing on subjects of interest. Teachers are optimistic about new opportunities to assess student skills and anticipate improved engagement. (13) Schools will use teacher-based assessments alongside standardized tests like the SAT, giving educators greater authority in evaluating student knowledge and abilities.

Innovation Zones are Transforming the High School Experience in New Mexico

Initiatives like the PED's Innovation Zone are funding schools and enhancing education. This program, supported by Future Focused Education and partners, promotes capstone projects, graduate profiles, internships, WBL, CTE, and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). Innovation Zones align students' interests with career pathways, addressing local needs and emphasizing transferable skills and academic competency through community engagement. WBL and CTE initiatives offer practical career skills via internships, apprenticeships, and community partnerships. By integrating these initiatives into graduation credits, students gain opportunities to explore higher education or career paths while contributing to their communities. (14) The initiative provides schools with professional development, guidance, technical assistance, and funding, reimagining the school experience with leadership teams and work-based learning opportunities. (15)

“Our goal is to identify best practices that can spread across the state over time to improve graduation rates by making high school more relevant and exciting to students and their families.” says Education Secretary Arsenio Romero. **“It is exciting that the zones expand educational pathways to college and career.”**



47 high schools and districts were awarded Innovation Zone grants in SY 2023-2024.

Data Source: <https://dailypost.com/ped-innovation-zones-in-new-mexico-high-schools/>

The Success Partnership Aims to Increase Equitable Access to College and Career

Locally, the Success Partnership's Kinder-Career Coalition is also working to help students succeed academically in healthy schools and to have equitable access and success in higher education and careers. The Kinder-Career coalition recently completed Conversation Cafes, which brought together students from various schools in the county to share their needs, hopes, and visions regarding their education. The Success Partnership will use the information gathered to assist students and inform those in the county about student needs.

To Learn More...

The new graduation requirements, as well as state and local initiatives, reflect a forward-thinking approach that is aligned with the evolving needs of our students and the demands of today's world. Initiatives like capstone projects, career technical education, and personalized assessments foster an environment where students can thrive academically. These changes, pursued by state organizations, adopted by the state government, and applied to the school system, demonstrate a collective commitment to meaningful reform. As we push for educational improvement, we must ensure every student is supported and equipped with the necessary resources to succeed. To learn more about Future Focused Education's work, check out their [blog](#). Sign up [here](#) to join our local Kinder-Career Coalition.

[Click here to see New Mexico High School Graduation Rates](#)

Sources:

- (1) [New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee Program Evaluation: High School Graduation](#)
- (2) [Future Focused Education](#)
- (3) [Transforming New Mexico's High Schools](#)
- (4) [Kinder-Career Coalition](#)
- (5) [New Mexico sees consistent graduation rates, CTE students excel](#)
- (6) [Yazzie-Martinez v. State of New Mexico Decision](#)
- (7) [High School Graduation Rates in Doña Ana County Dashboard](#)
- (8) [What is the New Mexico Graduation Equity Initiative?](#)
- (9) [New Graduation Requirements Will Empower Students and Teachers](#)
- (10) [2024 Quick Guide to New Mexico Education Laws and Budget](#)
- (11) [Governor signs bill modernizing graduation requirements – Requirements not updated since 2009](#)
- (12) [New Graduation Requirements Will Empower Students and Teachers](#)
- (13) [Innovation Zones Initiative](#)
- (14) [PED: New Mexico Sees Consistent Graduation Rates](#)