

Newsletter | May 2026 | Edition 33

## High School Graduation Rates & Equity in New Mexico

*Who Is Graduating, Where Gaps Remain, and Why It Matters*

Each year, thousands of students across New Mexico graduate from high school, marking an important milestone in their educational journey. A high school diploma means more than just a moment of celebration; it is a critical gateway to college, career training, and economic potential.

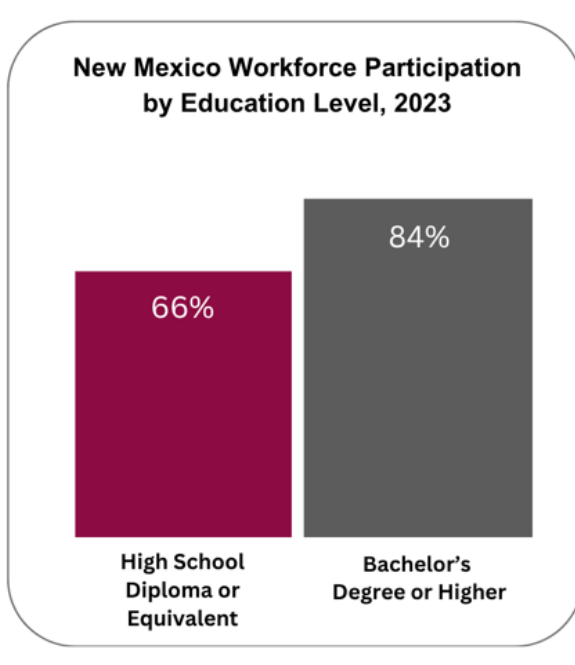
In our [previous newsletter](#), we focused on students with disabilities and the support that makes graduation possible. In this issue, we take a system-wide look at high school graduation across New Mexico.

### Graduation as a Key Milestone

A high school diploma is a key stepping stone for students entering adulthood and the workforce. Educational attainment is strongly associated with economic stability in Doña Ana County. Among adults age 25 and older, 35% of individuals without a high school diploma live below the poverty line, compared to 18% of high school graduates, and just 6% of adults with a bachelor's degree or higher (1). The same American Community Survey (ACS) data estimates show that median annual earnings increase substantially with education, rising from approximately \$26,000 for adults without a high school diploma to more than \$61,000 for those with a bachelor's degree. These patterns highlight how high school completion can influence long-term economic opportunity and mobility.

In 2021, with 156 million jobs in the United States, only 32% of jobs typically required a high school diploma or less, and that number is only expected to decrease over the next 10 years (2). As a result, residents with higher levels of education have access to a broader range of opportunities and compete in a less crowded labor market.

We also see this gap in workforce participation rates. In 2023, just 66% of New Mexicans with a high school diploma or equivalent were participating in the workforce, compared to 84% of those with a bachelor's degree or higher (3). Ensuring students graduate from high school and have access to meaningful pathways afterward is essential to expanding opportunity and long-term economic mobility across the state.

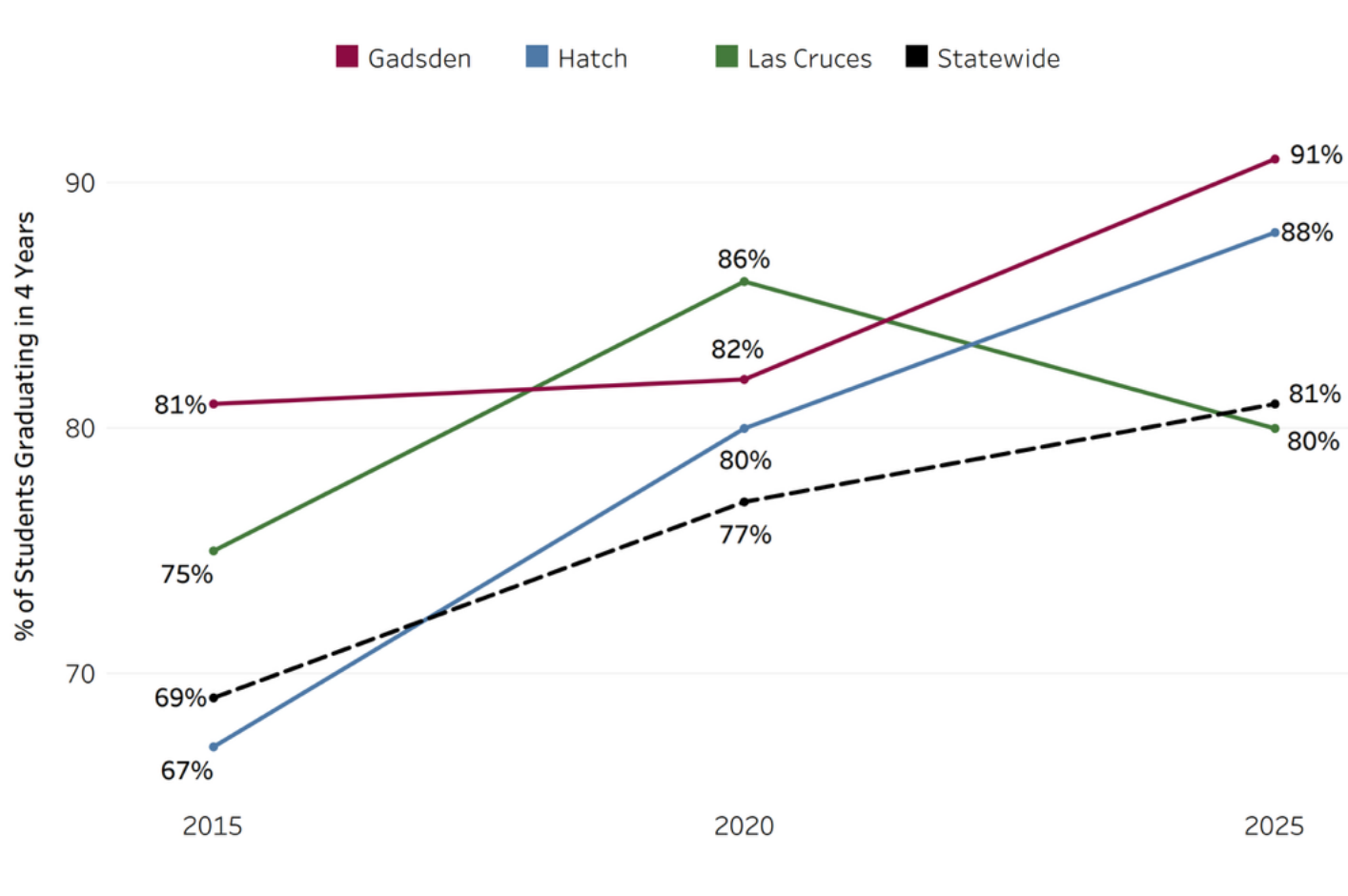


Source: New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions, 2025 State of the Workforce Report.

### Statewide Graduation Trends: Progress and Persistent Gaps

Over the past decade, New Mexico's four-year high school graduation rates have increased significantly. In 2015, the New Mexico graduation rate sat at 69%. By 2025, it rose to 81%, the highest rate the state has seen in more than 10 years. While still below the national graduation rate of approximately 87% reported in 2023, New Mexico has narrowed the gap considerably over the past decade. This upward trend is mirrored in Doña Ana County school districts, where local schools have shown even more dramatic gains. Between 2015 and 2025, Gadsden Independent School District (GISD) saw its graduation rate climb from 81% to 91%, Hatch Valley Public Schools went from 67% to 88%, and Las Cruces Public Schools increased from 75% to 80%.

Doña Ana County School District Graduation Rates, 2015-2025



Source: New Mexico Public Education Department, Webfiles 2012-2025, and National Center for Education Statistics.

The New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) attributes this meaningful progress to statewide efforts focused on strengthening student outcomes, including improved monitoring of course completion and credit accumulation, enhanced cross-district data sharing, and strategic school improvement planning (4). These gains reflect the collective efforts of students, families, educators, and communities across the state. Still, statewide averages do not capture the full picture.

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Despite overall improvement, graduation outcomes remain uneven across student populations. While 81% of students graduated in 2025 statewide, only 74% of students with disabilities did so, highlighting the continued need for inclusive instruction and coordinated supports. Graduation rates were also lower among English Language Learners, at 78%. This difference may reflect variation in educational supports for multilingual learners, including instruction that builds on students' home languages and aligns with their goals.

Economic factors also play a role. In 2025, 76% of New Mexico students from low-income households graduated on time, highlighting the connection between economic conditions and educational opportunity.

Graduation disparities are also evident across racial and ethnic groups, with Native American students graduating at 78% and Black students at 76%. Importantly, many students belong to more than one of these groups or experience multiple barriers, such as disability, economic hardship, or language-related challenges. These overlapping factors can affect educational opportunities and outcomes, reinforcing the need for coordinated strategies that expand access to supports and opportunities across contexts.

**In 2025, only 76% of students from low-income households graduated on time.**



### What's Driving These Patterns?

Recent improvements in New Mexico's graduation rates reflect a combination of statewide policy shifts, expanded career-connected learning opportunities, and targeted supports for students most at risk of falling behind. Research suggests that access to career technical education (CTE), work-based learning (WBL), and capstone projects is associated with stronger on-time graduation outcomes (5). State data show that students who attend schools that focus on CTE graduate at substantially higher rates than their peers, with CTE concentrators graduating at rates above 95%. New Mexico has also expanded flexible graduation pathways designed to support student engagement and postsecondary readiness (6).

New Mexico's revised graduation requirements emphasize student choice, pathway alignment, and Next Step Plans beginning in middle school, helping students stay on track through intentional course planning and postsecondary goal setting (7). While chronic absenteeism remains a statewide challenge, New Mexico has also expanded re-engagement strategies such as the Graduation Re-Engagement Internship Program (GRIP) (8).

### Local Insights: What's Happening in Districts and Schools

New Mexico has reached its highest high school graduation rate in more than a decade, signaling real momentum across the state. GISD has maintained graduation rates above the statewide average over time. In 2025, Gadsden High School and Santa Teresa High School students graduated at 90% and 95%, respectively (9). District leaders attribute these outcomes in part to strong data practices, attendance supports, and career-connected learning through Perkins and NextGen CTE programs. At the same time, statewide and community-based efforts, including the [Success Partnership's](#) Supported Success Internship Program (SSIP), are helping students stay engaged through meaningful, paid learning experiences. As New Mexico continues to modernize graduation requirements, the state is well-positioned to build on recent gains and expand pathways that keep students on track for graduation and prepared for what comes next (10).

[View the High School Graduation Rates Dashboard](#)

Sources:

- (1) U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 American Community Survey (ACS) 1-Year Estimates, Doña Ana County
- (2) [After Everything: Projections of Jobs, Education, and Training Requirements through 2031](#)
- (3) [NM State of the Workforce 2025](#)
- (4) [Cohort 2025 Graduation Rates](#)
- (5) [NM high schoolers excel in Career Technical Education](#)
- (6) (10) [A Bold Legislative Shift to Redefine Graduation](#)
- (7) [New Mexico Public Education Department reports an increase in graduation rates](#)
- (8) [2024-2025 GRIP Evaluation Report](#)
- (9) [NM public schools achieve highest graduation rates in over a decade](#)



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