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New Mexico’s Deaf School Has a Deaf Regent by Law and a 100 Percent ASL Target. Almost No One Else Mentions It.

Heather Grizzle · November 27, 2026

New Mexico's deaf school board must include a deaf regent, and its budget sets a 100 percent ASL target. One of 167 school units names the school.

Waxyaabaha ku jira

1. A board with deaf seats in the statute
2. Money from somewhere else
3. Two targets at 100 percent
4. Reaching the state
5. Ten units on the record
6. A state record that would not load
7. A workforce no one can count
8. A toddler can attend. She cannot stay.
9. How the state pays everyone else
10. Laws on the shelf
11. Questions New Mexico is positioned to answer

A grandmother in Clovis, near the Texas line, is raising a deaf grandson who turns five next spring. She has heard that the state school in Santa Fe is free, that it teaches in American Sign Language and English, and that it has dormitories for children who live too far to commute. Clovis is a little over three hours from Santa Fe. She looks at the Clovis Municipal Schools website for information about deaf education. She looks

at the regional education cooperative that serves her corner of the state. She tries the state Public Education Department. Nothing on any of them mentions the school.

She is a composite. The silence is not. Version 2.0 of the National Deaf Education Data Index read all 168 of New Mexico's school districts, charter schools, state schools and regional cooperatives, twice, six days apart, in November 2026. Of the 167 units other than the state school, only one names the New Mexico School for the Deaf at all, a cooperative that listed it as a presenter at a training.

New Mexico has a school with an unusually strong governing structure, a statutory deaf seat on its board and a budget that comes mostly from somewhere other than the state's general fund. It also has a public record so thin that even the federal government suppressed the state's school workforce numbers for data quality concerns.

SI KOOBAN

- The New Mexico School for the Deaf in Santa Fe is governed by a five-member Board of Regents. State law requires that at least one regent be deaf and at least one be the parent of a deaf child.
- Its fiscal 2025 budget was $30,627,800. Only $5.5 million came from the state general fund; $25.1 million came from "other state funds" the appropriation act does not identify.
- The Legislature set two performance targets for the school at 100 percent, including the rate of improvement in ASL for first-year signers. No report of results was found.
- Of 168 units read, 10 publish a deaf or hard of hearing program or staff, including the Albuquerque Sign Language Academy, a public charter school that teaches in ASL and English. One of 167 names the state school.
- The federal file suppresses every New Mexico cell in its school personnel table for "data quality concerns," and the state education department's website did not answer on either day the Index tried it.

HOW THIS WAS MEASURED

The National Deaf Education Data Index reads what a state and its schools publish about deaf and hard of hearing students. It does not visit classrooms, survey families or rate services. For New Mexico, version 2.0 of the state file read 168 units on 4 and 10 November 2026: 89 school districts, 63 state-chartered charter schools, 6 state-supported schools and state agency education units, and 10 regional education cooperatives. The school's statute and the appropriation acts were read as original documents.

Each unit receives one code. PROGRAM means the unit publishes something specific to deaf and hard of hearing students: a named program, a service, or a named post. A PROGRAM row resting on a single staff line carries a weak-evidence flag, and five of New Mexico's ten do. MENTION means hearing appears only in a general way. NONE FOUND means the pages were read and nothing specific was published. Five units could not be read.

The codes measure publication, not service. The state school's outreach staff may serve a district's students without the district saying so. The Index never estimates a missing figure. Before release, the bodies the file names receive notice and ten business days to correct it.

A board with deaf seats in the statute

The New Mexico School for the Deaf is governed under Chapter 21, Article 6 of the New Mexico statutes. Section 21-6-1 says the school "shall be under the control and management of a board of regents consisting of five members, at least one of whom shall be a deaf person and at least one of whom shall be the parent of a deaf child, to be appointed by the governor, by and with the advice and consent of the senate for a term of six years." The board hires the superintendent.

That is a stronger statutory guarantee than many states provide. A deaf regent and a parent regent on a board of five is two-fifths of the votes. The school describes itself as providing "statewide quality educational, early intervention, and outreach programs serving children and youth, birth through 21, who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing," with residential programs in Santa Fe, accreditation from the national association of deaf school administrators, and an approach it states plainly: "an American Sign Language

and English bilingual learning environment that includes direct, ongoing access to language and communication in and out of the classroom with a wide range of peers and adults."

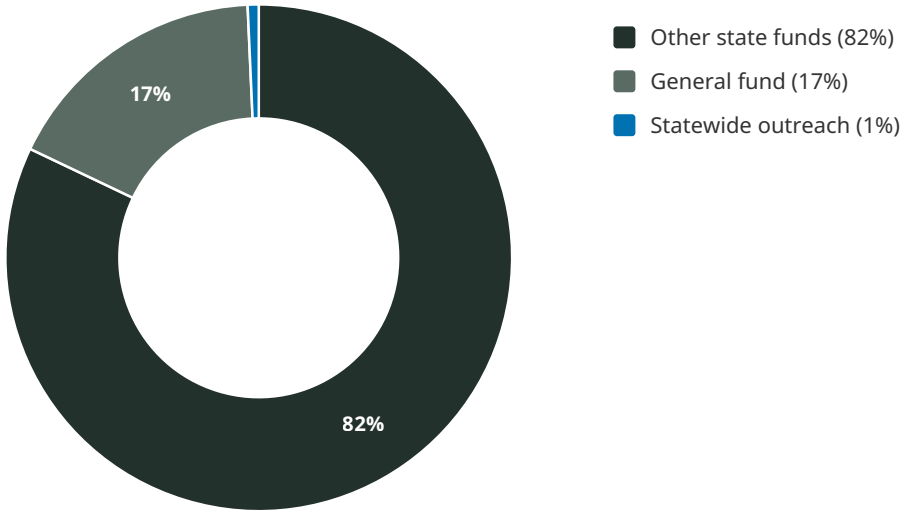
Section 21-6-2 sets who may attend: residents from age five to the age of majority who are deaf or hard of hearing, with younger children from age one admitted "for daytime care and instruction, but not for residential purposes." "All instruction shall be free." Enrollment is "a coordinated effort involving parents and their child, the child's Local Education Agency (LEA) and the New Mexico School for the Deaf."

No enrollment figure was found on the school's pages.

Money from somewhere else

The General Appropriation Act of 2024 gives the school $30,412,100 for instruction and general purposes and $215,700 for statewide outreach, $30,627,800 in all for fiscal 2025. The fiscal 2026 act raises it to $31,551,100 and adds a line for teleaudiology screening.

What stands out is the source. Only $5,275,200 of the instruction line comes from the state general fund. The other $25,136,900 is "other state funds." The act does not say what those funds are, and the Index does not say either.



New Mexico School for the Deaf, FY2025 appropriation by source

Fiiri xogta

Qaybta	Dollars
Other state funds	25136900
General fund	5275200
Statewide outreach	215700

Most state schools for the deaf in the series are funded mainly by general fund appropriations that legislators debate every year. New Mexico's is funded mainly by something else, in a line the public cannot trace from the appropriation act alone. That is worth a reader's attention whatever the explanation turns out to be.

Two targets at 100 percent

The appropriation act also sets two performance measures for the school, each with a target of 100 percent. One is the rate of transition for graduates. The other is the rate of improvement in American Sign Language for first-year signers.

That second measure is unusual. Few states in the series set any language outcome for their deaf school at all. New Mexico has written one into its budget and set the bar at every child. The Index did not find a published report of the results.

NEW MEXICO SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF IN THE FY2025 BUDGET

$30.6M
total FY2025 appropriation

18%
share from the state general fund

100%
target: ASL improvement for first-year signers

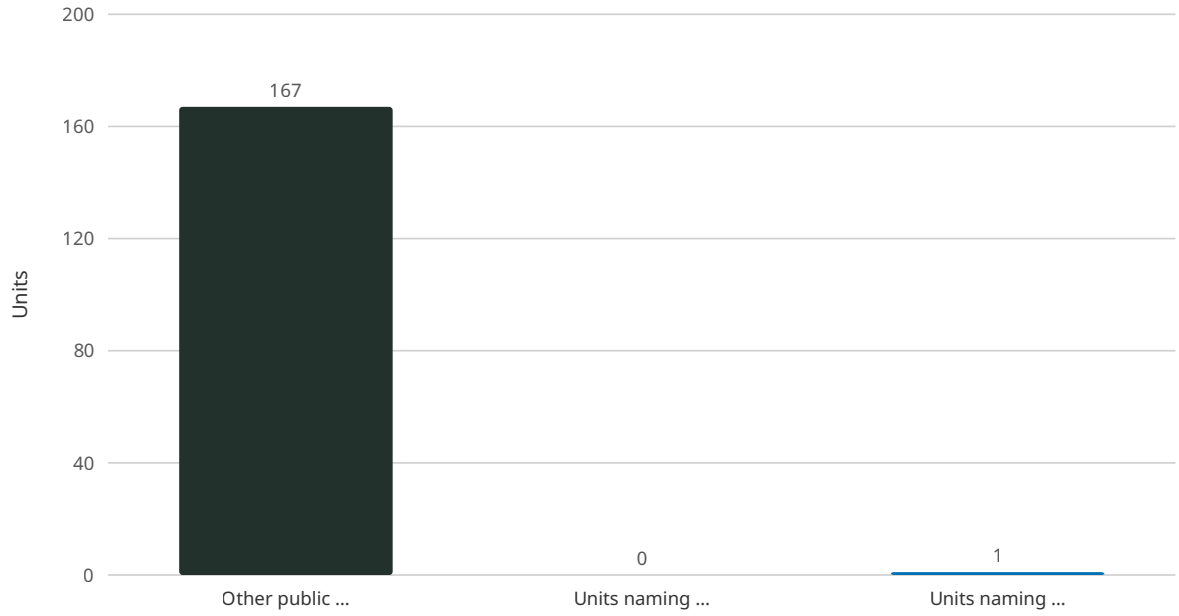
100%
target: transition rate for graduates

Source: General Appropriation Act of 2024 (HB 2)

Reaching the state

The school runs statewide outreach. Its outreach team "provides specialized educational services and support to Deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) students, their families, and the school professionals who work with them across New Mexico." It provides "specialized IDEA Part C entitled early intervention services" for babies. On 25 September 2026 it opened its fourth regional infant hearing testing center, in Las Cruces.

But the school publishes no list of the districts it serves. And of the 167 other units in the frame, one names it: a regional cooperative that listed the school as a presenter at a training. No unit names it as a provider. The New Mexico Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons, a state commission with a $3.2 million budget, is named on no unit's pages.



Who names the New Mexico School for the Deaf

Fiiri xogta

Qaybta	Unugyo
Other public education units	167
Units naming the school as a provider	0
Units naming it at all	1

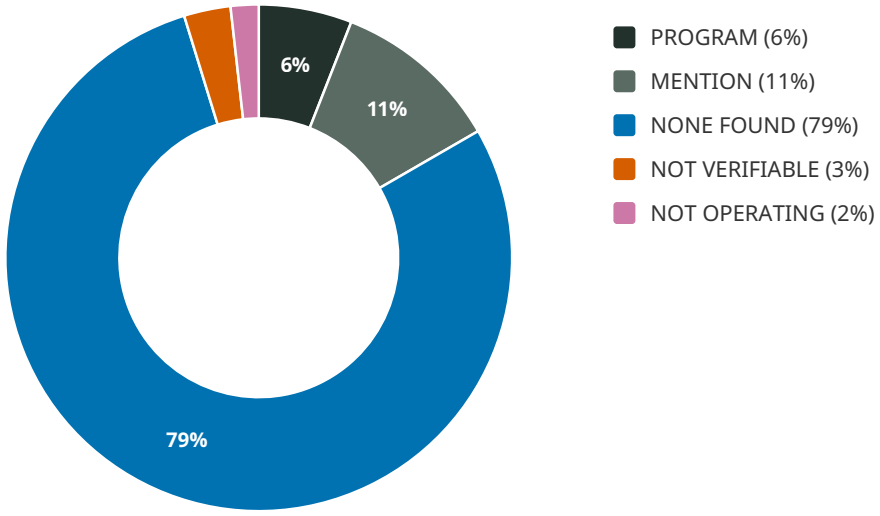
Ten units on the record

Ten of the 168 units publish something about their own program or staff for deaf students. The state school is one. The Albuquerque Sign Language Academy, a state-chartered public charter school, publishes "ASL/English Dual Language Education." It is one of the few public charter schools in the series built for deaf students.

Three districts describe a program. Albuquerque Public Schools describes itinerant teachers of the deaf and "direct instruction in American Sign Language in one of the district specialized classrooms" at three named schools. Las Cruces describes a Deaf

Education Program with a feeder pattern of three schools and a district audiologist. Rio Rancho describes an audiology department serving all its schools.

Five more rest on a single post: an audiologist in Aztec, Los Lunas or Artesia, a job description in Hobbs, two interpreters at the New Mexico School for the Arts. Eighteen units mention hearing. One hundred thirty-two publish nothing. Five could not be read. None of the ten regional education cooperatives describes a deaf service of its own.



New Mexico's 168 school units, by what they publish

Fiiri xogta

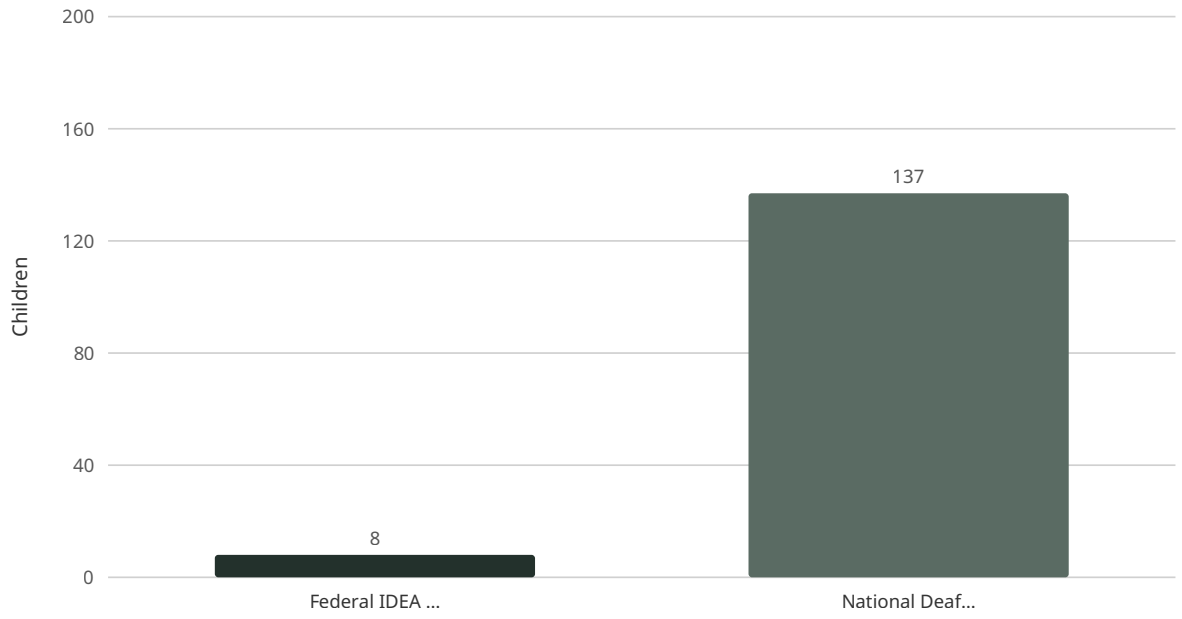
Qaybta	Unugyo
PROGRAM	10
MENTION	18
LAMA HELIN	132
MA XAQIIQSANAYN	5
MA SHAQEYNAYO	3

The one listening and spoken language program in the state is private. The Presbyterian Ear Institute in Albuquerque, New Mexico's only member of the OPTION Schools network, describes "The only Listening and Spoken Language Oral Deaf Education program in the state," with a parent-infant program and a school for oral deaf education.

A state record that would not load

The Public Education Department's main websites did not answer from the Index's network on 4 November or 10 November 2026. Its special education pages and its child count were not read, and whether it publishes a count of deaf students by district was not established. The Index's publication measure was not run.

The federal file fills part of the gap. It counts 420 New Mexico children with hearing impairment in fall 2024, 397 of school age and 23 in early childhood. Of the 397, 114 were in a separate school, more than a quarter. That 114 is not the state school's enrollment and is not presented as such.



New Mexico children with combined vision and hearing loss, two counts

Fiiri xogta

Qaybta	Carruurta
Federal IDEA deaf-blindness category	8
National Deafblind Child Count, 2024	137

The deafblind numbers are among the widest gaps in the series. The federal category counts 8 New Mexico children with deaf-blindness. The national deafblind count, which counts every child with combined vision and hearing loss whatever their primary label, counts 137. The state's deafblind project sits at the University of New Mexico's Center for Development and Disability.

A workforce no one can count

The federal personnel table for 2023-24, which in most states counts interpreters, audiologists and special education teachers, prints an asterisk in every New Mexico cell. The table defines the asterisk as "Data suppressed due to data quality concerns." No state table was read. So no count of interpreters, audiologists or teachers of the deaf in New Mexico schools is available from any source the Index could reach.

The appropriation act moves $25,000 from the Commission to the state interpreter board "for interpreter licensure services." The licensure rule itself was not read.

Public school funding runs through the state equalization guarantee, $4.17 billion in fiscal 2025, where special education counts as program units in four classes set by how much service a student needs, not by disability. Senate Bill 38 of 2025, a special education act, was postponed indefinitely.

A toddler can attend. She cannot stay.

The statute that governs the School draws a line most readers would miss. The School "shall be devoted exclusively to the care and instruction of persons … who are residents within the state and between the ages of five years and the age of majority and who are deaf or hard-of-hearing." Then it opens a door below that line: the board "may admit residents of this state who have attained the age of one year for daytime care and instruction, but not for residential purposes."

Put plainly, a deaf one-year-old in New Mexico can go to the state school, but only if her family can get her to Santa Fe and back each day. The dormitories wait until she is five. For a family in Santa Fe or Albuquerque, the early years at the School are a commute. For a family in Farmington, Hobbs or Gallup, they are not a realistic option at all, and the years between one and five are when a deaf child's access to a full language matters most.

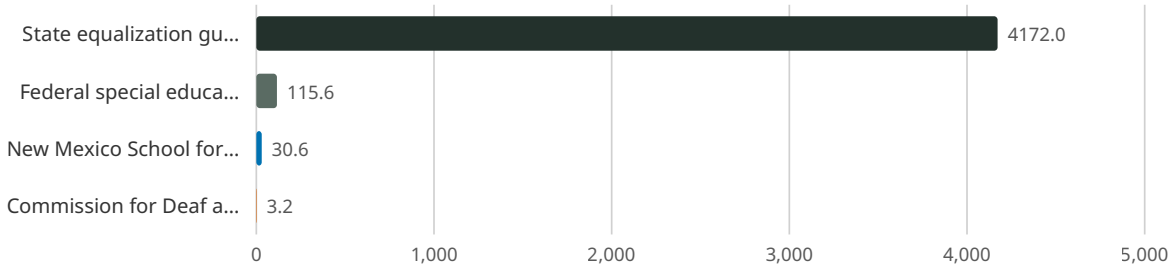
That is why the School's outreach and its regional infant hearing testing centers carry so much weight in this state. The fourth of those centers opened in Las Cruces in September 2026. Outreach is how the School reaches the children its daytime-only rule keeps at home. The statute and the outreach program fit together, but they leave the rural family dependent on a visiting service rather than a classroom.

The School's enrollment page says enrollment "is a coordinated effort involving parents and their child, the child's Local Education Agency (LEA) and the New Mexico School for the Deaf." The file records a plain promise beside it: "All instruction shall be free." What no page read says is how many children of each age attend, how many live in the dormitories, or how many come from outside the Santa Fe and Albuquerque area. The federal count's 114 school-age pupils in a separate school is the closest figure there is, and it is not the School's enrollment.

How the state pays everyone else

The School is one line in the budget. Every other deaf child in New Mexico is paid for through the state equalization guarantee, the formula that carried 4,171,971,200 dollars to districts and charter schools in fiscal 2025. Special education enters that formula as program units in four classes, set by how much service a pupil needs (section 22-8-21). The classes do not know what the disability is. A deaf child who spends most of the day with an interpreter and a deaf child who sees a teacher of the deaf once a week fall into different classes because of the hours, not because of the deafness.

Federal special education grants to New Mexico for the same school year were 115,584,692 dollars.



New Mexico money for deaf children, fiscal 2025 (millions of dollars)

Fiiri xogta

Qaybta	Millions
State equalization guarantee, all pupils	4172.0
Federal special education grants	115.6
New Mexico School for the Deaf	30.6
Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons	3.2

The Index's interpretation, marked as such. A formula that pays by hours of service is neutral on paper, but it leaves a district with one deaf child and a district with forty to solve the same staffing problem on their own. Albuquerque can run specialized classrooms at three schools. A small district in the northwest cannot, and nothing in the formula pays it to buy a share of someone else's. The ten regional education cooperatives are where that kind of sharing would usually live, and none of them publishes a deaf service of its own.

Laws on the shelf

Three pieces of New Mexico law sit just outside what version 2.0 read, and each could change the picture.

The first is the 2004 statute on the educational rights of deaf and hard of hearing children, in Chapter 28 alongside the Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons. Laws of this kind elsewhere usually require IEP teams to consider a child's

language, communication mode and access to peers. Whether New Mexico's version is enforced, and how, was not read.

The second is Chapter 61, interpreter licensure. The budget act moves 25,000 dollars from the Commission to the interpreter board "for interpreter licensure services," which confirms the board exists and is funded. The federal personnel table cannot say how many interpreters work in New Mexico schools, because it suppresses every New Mexico cell for data quality. The licensure rule would at least say what level an educational interpreter must hold.

The third is a bill that did not pass. Senate Bill 38 of 2025, a special education act, shows "Action Postponed Indefinitely" as its last action. The file records it because it shows the Legislature has looked at special education structure recently, and stopped.

None of these is a finding. Each is a place the next version will read.

Questions New Mexico is positioned to answer

1. What are the "other state funds" that pay 82 percent of the school's budget, and how are they governed?
2. What were the results on the two 100 percent performance targets, especially ASL improvement for first-year signers?
3. How many students attend the school, day and residential, and from which districts?
4. How many deaf and hard of hearing students does each district and charter serve?
5. Why did the federal government suppress New Mexico's school personnel data, and how many interpreters and teachers of the deaf work in the state's schools?
6. Which districts does the school's outreach team serve?

Go back to the grandmother in Clovis. New Mexico built her grandson a school with a deaf regent and a parent regent written into law, a budget that sets a language goal for every new signer, and a fourth infant hearing center in Las Cruces. Those are real commitments. None of them appears anywhere she would think to look. Her district does not name the school. The state's education website would not load. The

workforce that would teach her grandson is a column of asterisks. New Mexico's school has more promise on paper than most. It needs a public record to match.

The full New Mexico file covers all 168 units, each row with its source link, retrieval date and method, and is available under the Index's licensing terms. Corrections are welcome and are published with the next version.

Heather Grizzle-Odland is the founder of Novara Consulting Group and principal investigator of the National Deaf Education Data Index. She is DeafBlind and lives in Minnesota.

> **TIPS**
>
> Know something about a sign language AI system that the public should know? Send it to tips@novaracg.com. Every tip is read by me and kept confidential. If you work in the UK, writing to us is not by itself a protected disclosure under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, so before you share employer information, check your options with Protect (protect-advice.org.uk), the free whistleblowing advice line.

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