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NEWS RELEASE

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New Mexico Public Education Department Announces Initial Audit Findings

SANTA FE – Over the last 10 days, auditors from the New Mexico Public Education Department (PED) have poured through 10,000 files from 34 school districts as part of an unprecedented audit to ensure accurate reporting in enrollment. Over the last year, the number of new students in New Mexico has increased by about 1% and the same time, the number of funding units associated with those students increased 116%.

“This audit is about transparency for our taxpayers and appropriate services for our students,” said Secretary-designate Hanna Skandera. “What we found in this audit is what we expected to find. Many of the districts had legitimate numbers with only a few small, understandable errors. However, we also found large, systemic problems that we need to examine further.”

Based on a review of records and additional accountability measures established by the Department’s auditing team, eight school districts were cleared of all issues regarding special education, special education services and expenses for teacher training and experience. In the majority of cases, these districts exhibited exemplary data quality, accurate record keeping, strong accountability and no compliance infractions. These districts include:

- Aztec
- Des Moines
- Los Alamos
- Maxwell
- Portales
- Rio Rancho
- Santa Rosa
- Silver City

Districts Cited for Minor Compliance Issues (13 Districts):

Based on a review of records and additional accountability measures established by the Department’s auditing team, 13 school districts were cited for minor compliance issues not consistent with state or federal laws. Minor compliance issues identified include poor data quality, inaccurate or delayed record keeping, discrepancies between data submitted to the Department and data included in a student’s Individualized Education Program and potential additional questions regarding the level of services provided to a special education student. The Department will follow up with these districts within the next two weeks outlining specific remedies and a

timeline for coming into compliance. In many cases, this may be as simple as correcting unintentional technical errors. The districts identified include:

- Albuquerque
- Bloomfield
- Clayton
- Clovis
- Fort Sumner
- Gadsden
- Hagerman
- Hobbs
- Moriarty
- Roswell
- Socorro
- Tularosa
- Vaughn

Districts Cited for Major Compliance Issues (4 Districts):

Based on a review of records and additional accountability measures established by the Department's auditing team, 4 school districts were cited for major compliance issues not consistent with state or federal laws. In addition to minor compliance issues, these districts also may have misidentified special education students, did not follow federal law on the transition of young children from Part C Early Intervention into IDEA Part B special education preschool services, showed unusually high rates of ancillary services provided or failed to provide services to children despite receiving dollars for these services from the state. The Department will follow up with these districts within the next two weeks, outlining specific remedies and a timeline for coming into compliance with state and federal laws. These districts include:

- Cimarron
- Dulce
- Santa Fe
- Tucumcari

Districts Selected for Additional Audit Measures Based on Initial Findings (9 Districts):

Based on a review of records and additional accountability measures established by the Department's auditing team, 9 school districts were identified as needing a more intensive and expansive audit to determine the extent of their infractions. In addition to the major compliance issues identified above, in many cases, these districts exhibited severe data quality issues or could not verify data reported to the Department, could not validate records and provider service logs, could not verify students were receiving services showed unusually high rates of ancillary services provided, overbilled the state for services provided or showed unusual trends needing additional review. These districts include:

- Alamogordo
- Cobre
- Espanola
- Gallup
- Grants
- Las Cruces
- Melrose
- Pojoaque
- Taos

The New Mexico Public Education Department has requested the services of the 'Technical Assistance for Excellence in Special Education' group based out of Utah to work with the 9 school districts selected for additional audit measures. The TAESE group is expected to visit those districts to work with them over issues of compliance and present recommendations back to the department by the end of October.

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