

**OPINION** *This piece expresses the views of its author(s), separate from those of this publication.*

## Lawmakers' priorities will guide them through special session

**Bill Soules** Your view

Published 5:33 p.m. MT Jun. 14, 2020

As a state senator, public school educator and father, I have my priorities clear. They have become even clearer and more urgent with the events of the past months: COVID-19, the economic disruption, and the killing of an unarmed black man. My priorities are education, empowerment, and building a society where everyone, especially in times of crisis, survives and thrives.

New Mexico will have a special legislative session beginning June 18 to deal with the budget and economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic. Budgets are moral documents that reflect what we value. My priorities will guide me and my votes.

Two legislative sessions ago, together with Rep. Gail Armstrong I secured funding for the Anna, Age Eight Institute for the Data-Driven Prevention of Childhood Trauma. The health and education of children, including all students in public school, is the priority that motivated me to create this state entity committed to strengthening local systems of health, safety and learning. The institute is working to prevent childhood trauma and abuse by building healthy communities.

When COVID-19 hit, the Anna, Age Eight Institute was already working in the counties of Doña Ana, Socorro, Rio Arriba, San Miguel and Taos Pueblo. These communities were already establishing ways to ensure timely access to medical care when the pandemic escalated. And these strategies to keep children safe from trauma are the very same ones needed to ensure that all families have the resources and supports to manage during a pandemic and economic downturn. One solution to help solve many interrelated problems.

The Institute's work is guided by the new book, "100% Community: Ensuring Ten Vital Services for Surviving and Thriving," by institute co-directors Katherine Ortega Courtney, PhD, and Dominic Cappello. It is a blueprint and manual for guiding community initiatives. The counties of Otero, Santa Fe and Valencia are now talking with the institute to ensure vital

services are available to their communities through the 100% Community framework. Through a process of assessing, planning, action and evaluation, the framework empowers local leaders to identify gaps in vital services, like health care, and address them through collaboration and technology.

Healthy communities have all 10 of the surviving and thriving services outlined in the 100% Community. Five of the services, coined the “services for surviving,” include medical and mental health care, food and housing security programs, and transport to services. The five “services for thriving” include parent supports, early childhood learning, fully-resourced community schools with health clinics, youth mentors and job training aligned with the job market. Getting the 10 services up and running to serve 100% of county residents is the goal. 100% Community is a groundbreaking model for addressing all sorts of disparities and challenges that have held back New Mexicans for decades.

When I meet with people and talk about ensuring safe childhoods and strengthening schools, I always ask a simple question. How many of our students should be safe from trauma and empowered to succeed? The answer is simple: 100%. I then ask, what percentage of New Mexicans should have access to the services for surviving and thriving? Same answer: 100%

As the special session approaches, we can reflect on what matters most in times of insecurity. Is it health care, education, job readiness or economic development leading to good jobs? It comes back to priorities, and those of your lawmakers. Connect with your state lawmakers and share what matters most and why. What we decide in the special session will impact the direction New Mexico takes. I will be voting to support children and budget adjustments that I feel give the best chance of ensuring that 100% of New Mexicans have the resources to survive and thrive.

*New Mexico Sen. Bill Soules is a Democrat from Las Cruces.*