



New Mexico Rising

Engaging our Communities for Excellence in Education

ROSWELL MEETING REPORT

- Community meetings on the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) occurred throughout New Mexico in fall 2016.
- This report summarizes the Roswell meetings, held October 27, 2016.
- A separate, statewide report includes all community feedback.

CONVENER

New Mexico Public Education Department

FACILITATOR

New Mexico First



NEW MEXICO FIRST

Copyright 2016

New Mexico First
P. O. Box 56549
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87187
Phone: 505-225-2140
Website: www.nmfirst.org

New Mexico First typically grants permission to reproduce all or part of this document for educational or public policy purposes. Contact us for reproduction authorization.

CONTENTS

Executive Summary 4

Forward..... 5

Purpose of the Community Meetings 5

What Happened at the Meetings? 5

What Happens Next? 5

Convener 5

Facilitator..... 6

Community Feedback 7

 Word Cloud 7

Communication and Coordination..... 7

What Works Well 8

 Devoted Educators..... 8

 Effective Classroom Techniques and Coursework..... 8

 Student Assessments 9

What Needs Improvement & Suggestions 9

 Teacher Evaluation System 9

 Student Testing 10

 Truancy and Lack of Attention to the “Whole Child” 11

 Funding 12

Conclusion 12

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New Mexico students have made gains in test scores for math and reading, and since 2003 more students are graduating from high school. These achievements, while positive, have not yet moved the state's near-bottom ranking in the U.S. for student performance including some of the lowest math and reading scores in the nation.

Providing all New Mexico children with a quality education is the key to our state's future. In a continuing effort to ensure better student outcomes, the federal government passed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This new law replaces the federal law "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB) in governing K-12 education.

The New Mexico Public Education Department (PED) convened six regional meetings throughout the state in Gallup, Farmington, Santa Fe, Albuquerque, Rowell and Las Cruces as well as a Tribal Government to Government session, to solicit input about how to best implement the state's ESSA plan to support student learning. The PED partnered with the nonpartisan, nonprofit New Mexico First to facilitate the meetings.

Participants received information on the following main areas of potential ESSA reform:

- School accountability and report cards
- Student assessment and coursework requirements
- English language learners
- Support for low-performing schools
- Support and evaluation of teachers and other school leaders

Keeping those main topics in mind, participants were asked what was working well in their school or district, not working well, and how to improve.

Three facilitated meetings occurred in Albuquerque with one session tailored for teachers. Approximately 100 people attended the Roswell meetings held on October 27, 2016. They represented a diverse array of stakeholders including teachers, school and district administrators, parents and families, community, tribal and civic leaders, and economic development leaders.

In Roswell, the most common themes included:

- Teacher and administrator support and evaluations
- Whole child and community support and collaboration
- School accountability and report cards
- Student assessment and graduation requirements
- Funding
- Effective classroom techniques and course offerings

PED will use the input received from the community meetings to inform the development of its ESSA plan for improving education in New Mexico.

Individual reports for each community, along with a statewide summary report, are published at nmfirst.org.

FORWARD

Purpose of the Community Meetings

The federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is the primary law governing K-12 education in the United States. Passed in December 2015, the new law replaces the previous federal education policy known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Throughout the country, states are holding public meetings about ESSA – providing an opportunity for parents, educators, district leaders, employers and other community members to offer input on education systems.

In fall 2016, the New Mexico Public Education Department (PED) partnered with New Mexico First to facilitate a series of 19 meetings in six communities throughout the state, including a Tribal Government to Government session. The goal was to solicit input about how New Mexico's future ESSA plan could best support student learning, teachers and schools. New Mexico First also issued an online survey in English and Spanish for those unable to attend a community meeting. Prior to the meetings all participants received a background report on ESSA and the status of student learning in New Mexico; it can be accessed at nmfirst.org.

PED engaged in additional outreach activities, including district visits and meetings, teacher feedback through summit and advisory groups, and technical working groups.

What Happened at the Meetings?

These meetings provided participants a chance to learn about ESSA and share with PED their priorities, expectations and concerns. In each community, three meetings took place throughout the day and evening, thus accommodating different schedules of community members. One of the three meetings was specifically designed for teachers. Each meeting offered some brief opening remarks to set context, but the bulk of the time was devoted to small group discussions about how to ensure educational success for New Mexico students.

What Happens Next?

PED will use the input received to inform the development of its ESSA plan for improving education in New Mexico. According to PED, participants' suggestions will play an important role in guiding the state public education system to better support our students and teachers. Suggestions will also inform which aspects of New Mexico's existing system should be retained or revised.

Convener

The ESSA community meetings were convened by PED. The department serves as New Mexico's State Education Agency (SEA) and provides oversight to New Mexico's Local Education Agencies (LEAs). The series is funded by the Council of Chief State School Officers and administered by HCM Strategists, LLC.

Facilitator

New Mexico First engages people in important issues facing their state or community. Established in 1986, the public policy organization offers unique forums that bring together people to develop ideas for policymakers and the public. New Mexico First also produces nonpartisan public policy reports on critical issues facing the state. These reports – on topics like education, healthcare, the economy, water and energy – are available at nmfirst.org.

Our state's two U.S. Senators, Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich, serve as New Mexico First's honorary co-chairs. The organization was co-founded in 1986 by retired U.S. Senators Jeff Bingaman and Pete Domenici.

The community reports were prepared by Elizabeth Perrachione and the tribal government to government report was prepared by Sharon Berman. All reports were edited by Pamela Blackwell and Heather Balas.

Roswell

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

A diverse array of stakeholders took part in the three meetings held in Roswell, NM. Participants included teachers, school and district administrators, parents and families, community, tribal and civic leaders, and economic development leaders. The rich cultural diversity of the region was reflected in both the mix of participants as well as the range of ideas shared. Approximately 100 people attended the Roswell meetings held on October 27, 2016.

New Mexico First facilitated all three ESSA meetings in Roswell. Participants offered input on what they felt was working well, areas in need of improvement, and suggestions for ESSA implementation. They were asked, where possible, to focus on the essential variables associated with ESSA reform:

- School accountability and report cards
- Student assessment and coursework requirements
- Identification and support for English language learners (ELLs)
- Support for low performing schools
- Support and evaluation of teachers and school leaders



WORD CLOUD

At the beginning of the community meetings, participants were asked to answer the question, “In one word, what does education mean to you?” Participants submitted their responses into a “word cloud” application that makes the most frequent submissions larger. Above is the word cloud from the combined Roswell meetings.

Communication and Coordination

Overwhelmingly, community members had much to say about communication and coordination. Some communities lauded the work their districts and other education leaders have done in this arena while others called for improvements. For participants, optimal communication meant that information is transparent, informative, accessible, appropriate, applicable and consistently provided. Because of how cross-cutting these two themes were, any comments and suggestions about communication and coordination are included under the more specific themes in the sections below.

What Works Well

Community members identified several areas that are working well in the Roswell region, with top priorities including:

- Devoted educators
- Effective classroom techniques and course offerings
- Positive aspects of student assessment changes

DEVOTED EDUCATORS

High and frequent accolades for the strong commitment, resilience and hard work of teachers – and the ways teachers need to be supported so they can continue their great work – topped the list of comments made across groups in all sessions. Most expressed was the power of the teacher-student relationship and how that relationship sustains and inspires students. Teachers were also recognized by participants for their “coachability” and peer-to-peer mentorship both within the established Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and more informally.

According to community members, alignment between teachers and administration has resulted in an improved ability of educators to understand student test scores and teacher evaluation data and use this information to inform classroom instruction.

Specific, positive activities included:

- District level efforts to develop the capacity of teachers as educational leaders (e.g. increased opportunities for teachers to be involved in decision-making, including being in the textbook adoption committee and the development of standard-based guides)
- An emphasis on growing teachers via programs such as Teacher Ladder and Next Step
- Coverage of fees for college degrees for full-time education professionals
- Providing teachers the opportunity to collaborate, including collaboration between “regular” and “gifted” education teachers
- Educators having the discretion to use the resources they choose and create individualized instruction and time parameters based on the common core standards
- Implementation of 90-minute meetings once a week to discuss student data and application
- An improved teaching induction program, including alternative teacher licensure
- Targeted support for teachers (including PED supports), demonstrating that teachers’ time is respected

EFFECTIVE CLASSROOM TECHNIQUES AND COURSEWORK

Advanced placement classes, dual credit courses, less remediation and the ability to support gifted students were all mentioned as successes in supporting the comprehensive needs of students. However, it was effective application of education best practices like educator collaboration, differentiated instruction, small group instruction, and intervention strategies that garnered comments from every group. Specifics included:

- Data folders that help engender student accountability
- Small groups that help students master concepts
- Cooperative learning and after-school tutoring that contributes to student achievement

- Collaboration within educator teams that work across disciplines, including special education teachers, to ensure consistency
- Positive behavior support systems
- Smaller class size in some schools (i.e. 18 students was identified as the optimal classroom size)
- Interactive reading notebooks
- Art and music instruction that support language development and social skills
- Processes for individualizing each student's abilities to close learning gaps
- Working with parents, if needed, on the Individualized Education Programs (IEP) for their children
- Principals Pursuing Excellence (PPE) program

Despite significant challenges (described below), participants reported that districts are coming together to work as a unit, parental involvement is increasing, and schools enjoy the support of communities filled with dedicated, hardworking professionals. These connections produce essential resources, such as the special education help received by the New Mexico School for the Deaf and the New Mexico Department of Health. Collegial collaboration among superintendent, school board, community and staff was cited, as was the New Mexico College Board Partnership, as being helpful to schools in supporting their students. In addition, people commented that PreK and STEM programs are providing helpful to students.

STUDENT ASSESSMENTS

Some participants were pleased with the changed practices regarding dissemination of data to teachers and parents. Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) data, specifically, was mentioned as helping students, parents, and teachers. Some felt the data informed what students need to do to progress in school, and some teachers found it useful to take the first few minutes of a period to focus on test preparation questions – thus giving students daily reinforcement.

What Needs Improvement & Suggestions

Community members identified several areas that are not working well in the Roswell region, with top priorities including:

- The teacher evaluation system
- Student assessments and graduation requirements
- Whole child/community support and collaboration
- Funding

TEACHER EVALUATION SYSTEM

Every group had something to offer about teacher evaluations. Overwhelmingly, participants expressed concern about student test scores accounting for 50 percent of teacher evaluations, citing many factors outside of a teacher's control that impact a student's performance. Participants expressed concerns about the fairness of student test scores being used in special education teachers' evaluations. Because many parents of children in special education opt their children out of the tests, teachers' evaluations may not be a fair representation of the teacher's students and her or his work.

Many at the community meeting expressed concern about the reliability of evaluation data and postulated that impactful decisions are being made based on an unreliable process. Participants worried that this could translate into lost opportunities for students and funding. They also called for teachers to have better training to understand the data.

Low teacher morale remains an issue, shared participants, with reasons including dedicated teachers receiving evaluation ratings of “minimally effective” and a lack of adequate pay for teachers. Participants believed the resulting low morale impacted retention rates for highly qualified teachers, especially in rural communities.

All groups felt it important to lower the percentage that student test scores factored into the rubric of teacher evaluations. Other suggestions include:

- Provide a clear, concise explanation of how teachers are being evaluated, including how student progress is determined.
- Ensure EOC and PARCC data is accurate or fixed and then disseminated in a timely manner.
- Provide complete data for all students attached to the evaluation.
- Reevaluate the attendance portion of teacher evaluations, explaining how attendance points are earned, or remove this portion from the assessment.
- Use a different evaluative standard for teachers working at schools in lower socioeconomic areas.
- Increase principal walk-throughs and add their insights to teacher evaluations.
- Return focus back to the everyday process and progress in the classroom, rather than relying so heavily on student test scores and teacher evaluations.
- Choose a kindergarten through third grade evaluation (i.e. IStation), provide adequate training, and commit to it.
- Increase teacher pay and compensation according to a teacher’s level of expertise and dedication, and for additional education related work outside the classroom.
- Treat all subjects as being important including those that are not assessed (e.g. science and social studies).
- Provide teachers with more time to collaborate and prepare.
- Provide teachers with more consistent communication, training and support.
- New teachers need more focused support.
- Provide additional training in classroom management to teachers with alternative licensure.
- Honor exemplary teachers.
- Require teachers to earn a master’s degree within the first five years of teaching.
- Establish teacher mentorship programs in which teachers lead trainings on best practices in the state.
- Increase communication between districts, PED and universities to better align around teacher recruitment.
- Provide teachers with professional development in managing severe behavioral issues.

STUDENT TESTING

Overall, comments from each of the groups focused on the amount of testing for students, expressing that the time spent on testing is more than necessary and takes time away from teacher collaboration and classroom instruction, including classroom instruction in other subjects that provide for a well-rounded education. Many of the groups understood the need for data; however, some found that PARCC data is reported too late to drive

instruction. Others felt that too much emphasis is placed on PARCC results. Some commented that test scores do not adequately measure the whole student – who they are, what they are interested in and in which areas they excel.

Participants expressed specific concerns about end of course (EOC) testing, including:

- A lack of adequate alignment exists between EOCs and PARCC, as well as between EOCs and actual course content.
- Results are not easy to tie into student instruction or to customize to better meet a student’s needs.
- EOCs are unfair for monolingual students, citing that language should not be a barrier for children to show what they know.

Every group suggested that a reduction of time devoted to student testing would be beneficial, thereby increasing instruction time and improving teacher and student morale.

- For PARCC testing, ensure that it is developmentally appropriate, that results are sent out sooner (before school starts), and place less emphasis on the test results.
- Failing students should not be made to take PARCC.
- As an alternative to PARCC, select one test (e.g. final exams, EOC) for the end of the year, and also allow ACT/SAT scores to function as graduation exit tests.
- Participants from rural schools expressed concerns that schools do not have the proper infrastructure, such as an adequate number of computers and broadband access for online-based assessments.

TRUANCY AND LACK OF ATTENTION TO THE “WHOLE CHILD”

Truancy was commented upon frequently by participants, with all groups citing poor attendance among students as a serious concern. Participants identified many underlying causes of truancy including economic challenges, a student’s home life difficulties, inconsistent truancy rules, and a lack of effective consequences and strategies at school and home.

Participants are concerned that the needs of the whole child - the child’s academic and wellness needs - are not being met. Ways in which their needs are not being met, noted participants, included: the use of a one-size fits all model of instruction, a lack of differentiated resources for different learning styles, lack of resources for gifted and special education students, an over emphasis on math and reading that means students are not as well-rounded, and not enough time and/or customized time for students to master concepts.

Overall, participants agreed that schools need the support of the community. They offered the following suggestions:

- Increase professional development and support for early childhood education, as well as access to PreK programs including Head Start.
- Provide early training (e.g. during pregnancy) for “Parents as Teachers” to teach important skills and support parents from the onset.
- Early identification of special education, gifted, low performing and ELL students.
- Offer more electives by offering an extended school day option.

- Provide families with more wrap-around support services.
- Increase vocational and career readiness classes and training.
- Ensure that graduation requirements for vocational classes are not tied to PARCC graduation scores (e.g. a student studying to be a mechanic should be able to graduate, even if they cannot pass Algebra II).
- Find alternative ways to better support students as they navigate graduation requirements.
- Draw on best practices from other districts.
- Provide more support for ELL students.

FUNDING

The need for more funding is critical, one group explained, so that support staff and teachers can be better compensated, negating the necessity for many teachers to have multiple jobs, and also so the region can retain its teachers rather than teachers moving to Texas where compensation is higher. More funding is needed for students – “regular,” special education and bilingual students as well, shared community members. Participants noted that with unstable financial support, schools must utilize grant-writing as a substitute for long-range funding. Reportedly, this approach makes it challenging to plan and continue good programs.

In addition, the need for more equitable distribution among schools of existing resources was touched upon by most groups. There are schools with substantial support materials, yet teachers lack the time to review the materials to determine what will work best in their classroom, commented some participants.

One group felt it necessary to find a new stable revenue source to support schools, given the extreme fluctuations in the oil and gas industry, which directly effects funding. Other suggestions include:

- Eliminate “below the line” funding that limits a school’s ability to effectively utilize existing funding to meet local needs.
- Avoid creating new charter schools, at least for a few years, and provide that funding to the traditional public school system.
- Recognize that different structures and supports are required for rural and urban school districts, and that small districts need equitable support to meet New Mexico’s education standards.

Conclusion

Implementation of ESSA provides an opportunity for education stakeholders throughout New Mexico to continue to work together to provide all New Mexico children with a quality education that will shape their future, allowing students to reach their full potential, and our state’s economic future for decades to come.

The PED and New Mexico First appreciate the time, effort and commitment to education of those who participated in the Roswell community meetings. The PED will use the input received from the community meetings to inform the development of its ESSA plan for improving education in New Mexico.

Comments from these meetings will be combined with the other community engagement meetings into a final statewide report. The final report highlights ideas that received the most support throughout the full community meeting engagement process. All reports are available on the New Mexico First website at nmfirst.org.