



New Mexico Rising

Engaging our Communities for Excellence in Education

ALBUQUERQUE MEETING REPORT

- Community meetings on the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) occurred throughout New Mexico in fall 2016.
- This report summarizes the Albuquerque meetings, held October 18, 2016.
- A separate, statewide report includes all community feedback.

CONVENER

New Mexico Public Education Department

FACILITATOR

New Mexico First



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

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New Mexico students have made gains in test scores for math and reading, and recently 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 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 140 people attended the Albuquerque meetings held on October 18, 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 Albuquerque, two positive themes that emerged from the meetings included:

- Community collaboration and family support in some schools
- Committed teachers and administrators

Major concerns included:

- A perceived lack of support for teachers, including concerns about the evaluation system
- The amount of student testing required by school accountability systems
- Community support needs for the "whole child"
- Funding limitations

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.

The 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.

Albuquerque

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

A diverse array of stakeholders took part in the three meetings held in Albuquerque. Participants included teachers, school and district administrators, parents and families, community, tribal and civic leaders, and economic development advocates. The rich cultural diversity of the region was reflected in both the mix of participants as well as the range of ideas shared. Approximately 140 people attended the Albuquerque meetings held on October 18, 2016.

New Mexico First facilitated all three ESSA meetings in Albuquerque. Participants offered input on what 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 learners (ELs)
- 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?” Those responses were submitted into a “word cloud” application that makes the most frequent submissions larger. Above is the word cloud from the combined Albuquerque meetings.

Communication and Coordination

Overwhelmingly, people attending the Albuquerque meeting had much to say about communication and coordination. Some communities lauded the work their districts and other education leaders had 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. Comments about communication and coordination cut across almost all other issues and are thus included under the more specific themes in the sections below.

What Works Well

Community members identified several areas that are working well in the Albuquerque region, with top priorities falling into the following themes:

- Community collaboration and family support in some schools
- Committed teachers and administrators

COMMUNITY AND SCHOOL SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES

People shared innovative models and examples of teachers, schools and nonprofits successfully serving the whole child and their families (e.g. National Dance Institute). Some participants reported improved awareness about the need for increased systemic support for children dealing with inequity (e.g., poverty, access issues, disabilities). People also noted that choices in types of school (public, charter, etc.) help meet the needs of some students and families. Participants also noted that some school programs (i.e., truancy prevention, K-3 Plus) provided additional support families valued. Some students, families and volunteers are highly dedicated and engaged, participants reported.

COMMITTED TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

All groups expressed appreciation for teachers, with one lauding them as being “the heart of the schools.” Everyone agreed that teacher dedication makes the education system work. District learning plans provide a useful guide for some teachers, focusing on common core standards. In addition, participants indicated that some administrators are supportive, and that many educators carry strong commitments to effective collaboration between classrooms.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ON WHAT IS WORKING WELL

Beyond the priority themes above, participants offered additional comments:

- Some schools secured helpful funding such as PED Initiative Grants, Results-Driven Accountability (RDA) grants for low-performing schools, and grants through the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.
- The use of technology in some schools to community with families and other stakeholders.
- There is some availability of culturally relevant curricula, participants said, including curricula honoring Hispanic and Native American traditions.

What Needs Improvement and Suggestions

People attending the Albuquerque meeting identified several areas that are not working well in the Albuquerque region, with top concerns including:

- A perceived lack of support for teachers, including concerns about the evaluation system
- The volume of student testing required by school accountability systems
- The structure and use of school report cards
- Community support for the “whole child”
- Funding limitations

TEACHER MORALE AND EVALUATION

Participants commented that an overall culture of respect for teachers is lacking. All groups shared concerns about teacher evaluations contributing to teachers’ feeling demoralized and unsupported. Some commented that the overall education assessment system is overly focused on student test scores and their impacts on teacher evaluations. Large class sizes were another concern, rendering it difficult for teachers to provide individualized instruction. Participants were also concerned about financial shortfalls preventing teachers from receiving the professional development they need. All of these matters impact teacher retention, participants reported.

Many suggestions were offered to address teacher support issues:

- Offer various types of professional development, including teacher-led models, peer-to-peer training, corrective feedback approaches for students who are acting out, collaboration across grades, strategies for different learning styles, and mentorship programs that incentivize experienced teachers to support less experienced teachers.
- Provide teachers with a better understanding of the evaluation system as well as interpreting data and using it to inform instruction.
- Include teachers in determining how to meet the standards.
- Identify best practices (e.g. for programs, instruction, or strengthening community and parent collaborations) on the state, nation and world-wide levels and customize to New Mexico.
- Allow more flexibility for teachers and administrators in course delivery (e.g. online + classroom).
- Improve teacher retention and morale through clear and supportive communication that is not perceived as punitive.

SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY AND REPORT CARDS

Participants in every group indicated that there are too many demands placed on teachers. From changes to curricula prompted by Common Core, to online PARCC tests, to mid-cycle assessments, teachers reported that the focused on testing is excessive. They are consistently worried that nothing “falls through the cracks.” The issue is heightened, said teachers, for students in high-risk schools. Teachers stated that these students often need more customized instruction, but the time devoted to student testing makes it challenging to deliver individualized approaches.

Regarding school report cards, participants perceived that the current platform and metrics do not work consistently and should not be factored into teacher evaluations. Teachers reported a lack of participation among some administrators regarding the implementation of policy and accountability measures.

Many suggestions were offered regarding accountability and school report cards:

- Rather than large-scale changes to education systems and processes, begin with pilot projects. Do not implement any changes widely until thoroughly studied.
- For example, run pilot projects on alternative models for school accountability. Consider organizations like FairTest to review or develop alternative assessments.
- Create an analysis of a teacher's day including what they are expected to accomplish and how long each task reasonably takes. Use this list to help guide classroom time management and determine what can be removed from educational system requirements.
- Replace PARCC as the primary assessment tool (suggested by some people), or research ways to improve schools' roll-out and use of the PARCC exams.
- Give professors in the colleges of education opportunities to design assessments and assessment plans.
- Address concerns about accuracy and use of student data including race and economic data.
- Keep school boards and districts accountable, especially since ESSA puts more control in the hands of local districts. Ideas included:
 - Research true assessments of school districts' efficacy.
 - Add the rate of superintendent and administrator turnover into the district grading system.
 - Limit board terms and creating job descriptions for school board positions.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR THE "WHOLE CHILD"

As mentioned above, participants reported pockets of progress in addressing the needs of the "whole child" including his/her family. However, attendees repeatedly said that, in general, schools are not taking a holistic approach. Counselors are reportedly overwhelmed and do not have enough time to guide the number of students who have multiple needs. Access and opportunity is not always equally available to all. In addition, people said that teachers lack the time to both instruct students' in cognitive abilities and foster other important life skills like resilience.

Participants also voiced concerns about offering students options for their futures. Students must be prepared for whichever track they choose (i.e. college, vocational or career). However, people were concerned that Students interested in vocational programs have a few choices due to those teachers retiring and not being replaced.

Every group offered suggestions for supporting the whole child and their families, including:

- Implement year-round instruction (increasing teacher pay accordingly).
- If year-round school is not possible, partner with community entities (e.g. universities and local businesses) to create more educational opportunities and paid internships outside of the classroom.
- Ensure that students in need can access essential safety net services (either from outside providers or on campus). Concerns included:
 - Poverty and hunger
 - Providing healthy and flavorful school lunches
 - Mental health
 - Desire for more school-based health centers
 - Need for more diverse training and multicultural curricula
 - Interest in more community school models with wrap-around services (e.g. leadership, family dinners, dental clinics, health centers)
 - Lack of parental training on how best to support their children
 - A need for mentorship and caring adult role models
 - Combatting the damaging myth that low-income students have lower abilities
- Expand access to PreK education.
- Leverage available resources and support (especially given ESSA's encouragement of community partners), including: Girl Scouts, Teach Strong, and the University of New Mexico (UNM).
- Regarding English learners and advancement of dual-language education:
 - Expand the number of bilingual teachers
 - Establish more bilingual schools
 - Focus on the unique needs of English learners
- Regarding coursework:
 - Protect the arts in schools.
 - Support physical education in schools.
 - Implement community college offerings of "coding classes" in high schools.
 - Add the following materials to the curriculum: resilience, citizenship and apprenticeship programs.

FUNDING

Participants at the Albuquerque meetings also offered concerns and suggestions regarding funding. Some suggested the state or district identify funds to recruit additional teachers, thus enabling schools to reduce class sizes. Others were concerned about fairly compensating current teachers and hiring new ones at more competitive rates. One group expressed concern about whether funds intended for gifted and talented students are being used appropriately. Identifying any new funding would be difficult, participants recognized; some suggested reviewing the state funding formula to potentially raise more money and disseminate dollars more equitably between districts.

Conclusion

Implementation of ESSA provides an opportunity for education stakeholders throughout New Mexico to continue to work together to provide all students a quality education that will shape their futures, allow them to reach their potential, and support 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 Albuquerque 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 statewide report. All reports are available on nmfirst.org.