



New Mexico Rising

Engaging our Communities for Excellence in Education

FARMINGTON MEETING REPORT

- Community meetings on the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) occurred throughout New Mexico in fall 2016.
- This report summarizes the Farmington meetings, held October 14, 2016.
- A separate, statewide report includes all community feedback.

CONVENER

New Mexico Public Education Department

FACILITATOR

New Mexico First



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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..... 8

What Works Well 8

 Community Collaboration..... 8

 Communication and District Leadership..... 8

 Teacher Collaboration..... 8

 Coursework Options 9

What Needs Improvement and Suggestions 9

 Teacher Morale..... 9

 Truancy and Challenges with Family Engagement 10

 Coursework and Educational Programs..... 11

 School Report cards 12

 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 Farmington with one session tailored for teachers. Approximately 75 people attended the Farmington meetings held on October 14, 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 Farmington, the most common concerns included:

- Teacher morale
- Truancy and challenges with family engagement
- Coursework and school programs
- School report cards
- Funding

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. Before 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 the 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 support our students and teachers better. 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.

Farmington

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

A diverse array of stakeholders took part in the three meetings held in Farmington, 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 75 people attended the Farmington meetings held on October 14, 2016.

New Mexico First facilitated all three ESSA meetings in Farmington. 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 provided their one-word responses that were submitted into a “word cloud” application that makes the most frequent submissions larger. Above is the word cloud from the combined Farmington 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 specific topics in the sections below.

What Works Well

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

- Community collaboration
- Communication and district leadership
- Teacher collaboration
- Coursework options

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

Participants reported good collaboration between educational institutions, including the region's four school districts and San Juan College. They also pointed to specific community projects that were effective, such as the Intermediate Access Program (IAP), Truancy Task Force, emergency management, and programs for gifted students. Participants praised the sense of overall community support for students and families as a whole.

COMMUNICATION AND DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

Communication skills were lauded by every group, with participant acknowledgment of the districts' great improvements in that area. Participants felt that those working in the school districts are open, approachable and welcoming to parents. They appreciated that parents have email access to teachers. Participants said that they appreciated when district leaders listen to parental concerns and acts accordingly, upon which they pointed to a real-life example (e.g. after receiving feedback, a district chose not to have a delayed start on Mondays). Participants appreciated that new district leadership supports the district's vision, superintendents feel aligned, and that there is space for collaboration.

TEACHER COLLABORATION

Teachers having time to work together during the school day was a positive development mentioned at every session. Offering peer-to-peer support, teachers reportedly plan alignment and co-create plans for individual students. Parents also stated that they appreciate the open lines of communication and the alignment between the teachers, board members, and the principal. Participants noted that block scheduling is very helpful when larger periods of time (e.g. 90-minute class periods) are used. According to educators and employers, WorkKeys Assessments are being used effectively to determine if a student is ready for courses and career training, and could be used in another areas, like being added to graduation requirements.

COURSEWORK OPTIONS

Participants commented that they found it encouraging that the Four Corners Economic Development Council's promotion of workforce education and preparing students for college as a foundational component is driving economic development. Specific programs and courses that garnered attention include gifted programs, fine arts, music, golf, writing, and PreK. PreK programs reportedly are helping children develop empathy and address speech and other developmental issues early on, thanks to the highly regarded and well-trained staff.

While not identified as top priorities, participants also mentioned other areas in education that were going well:

- Some elements of the student assessment systems were favored, including consistency between curriculum and standardized tests.
- One group expressed approval of the PARCC test.
- The Teachers Pursuing Excellence (TPE) and Principals Pursuing Excellence (PPE) programs offer an effective methodology to analyze data and modify instruction accordingly.
- Some community and family members established high expectations for students, setting them up for academic and professional success.
- One group noted that school infrastructure was in good shape.

What Needs Improvement and Suggestions

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

- Teacher morale
- Truancy and challenges with family engagement
- Coursework and educational programs

TEACHER MORALE

Participants reported problems with teacher morale, with a number of factors cited as contributing to this challenge: teacher's frustration with heavy workloads, large class sizes that do not allow for individual instruction, fewer resources, salaries that are not competitive, an inconsistent teacher evaluation system, a lack of appreciation for educators who make a long-term commitment to teaching, and constant change in policies without time and training to adjust to the changes. For these reasons, participants said it 's hard to recruit and retain good teachers.

All groups in all sessions had suggestions for supporting and retaining current teachers as well as recruiting new ones:

- Increasing teacher pay
- Streamlining and reducing paperwork so that teachers can focus more fully on students
- Offering statewide incentives to exceptional teachers
- Creating a comprehensive state-wide professional development program (with offerings throughout the summer)

- Training in different learning styles that would deepen teachers' ability to support students, including modules and resources that could be made available online
- Create an educator mentorship program to enable the community to grow its teachers. Ensure there is time for teachers to participate in mentorship opportunities
- Identifying and disseminating the best practices of master teachers
- Encouraging more engaging teaching methods and hands-on/project based learning
- "Growing your own" teachers and principals through mentorship
- Adopting creative incentives to recruit teachers from other states
- Establishing a teacher endorsement process with the universities that could improve the ability of prospective teachers who are English language learners (ELLs) to become licensed teachers
- Extending the student-teacher program to a year, as opposed to six months, which would allow teachers to learn how to manage the classroom better
- Providing teachers from alternative licensing programs with more tools and skills training before entering the classroom

Participants also offered suggestions on how to improve teacher evaluation systems:

- Adjusting evaluations to reflect better the time teachers spend with students in the classroom, rather than just on academic growth
- Enabling administrators to support, observe, and validate teachers' abilities, including more time to deeply evaluate and have a constructive conversation with each teacher individually rather than a form-based evaluation
- Adding mid-year teacher reviews, and year-end evaluations delivered before the summer allowing teachers the time to reflect and engage in professional development
- Eliminating provisions in the teacher evaluation system that penalizes teachers for taking time off for professional and family needs

TRUANCY AND CHALLENGES WITH FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Concerns over student truancy surfaced in all sessions and groups. Participants recognized that students are truant for many reasons and that there is a need to address the issue in a coordinated way. Reasons highlighted by participants included: family economic challenges; a lack of communication between family, schools and law enforcement; ineffective laws regarding students who quit school or are suspended, and not being able to break a pattern of truancy within a family.

Suggestions for addressing these types of challenges included:

- Allow for in-school suspension to address behavioral issues at school
- Encourage home visits to better ascertain issues affecting the "whole child," and connect with parents to navigate and encourage any necessary treatment
- Utilize schools as community centers, promoting lifelong learning for parents and children with a goal toward bringing the family together. Based on the neighborhood and needs, the community can decide what its school offers

- Develop a resource list of community people who are passionate about engaging with the school and students
- Allow for optional assessments for graduation for those students who should not or cannot take PARCC
- Allow for portfolio and performance-based assessments
- Support parents in advocating for their children and working with the schools, in part through creating a welcoming school environment
- Develop a home-to-school connection model that: permits parents to access grades, provides information about avoiding summer regression, and clarifies how parents can be involved remotely
- Establish parent advisory committees in each school and district

For Native American students:

- Improve educator cultural competency and culturally informed instruction
- Build a better understanding of Native American historical issues for improved cultural awareness
- Identify teaching styles from the pueblos and tribes to better understand those styles and cultural backgrounds
- Obtain more support for mental health service staff, as well as culturally relevant counseling

For English language learners:

- Eliminate timed testing, especially for English learners
- Ensure inclusion of families, for whom English is not their first language

COURSEWORK AND EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

People identified concerns about the types of classes and programs available to students. Some participants perceived that significant differences between schools in the district have led to weak competition for resources, affecting the availability of courses and programs.

Suggestions for addressing coursework and educational program issues included the following:

- Encourage multi-lingual and multicultural teaching, treating all languages as equally important, and promote culture and language in the schools, especially those that are part of the local culture
- Add technology-based education, as well as information technology support and training for teachers.
- Use WorkKeys assessments to address graduation and career readiness as well as engender student interest and engagement.
- Expand allowance of electives, focusing on a “whole education” (e.g. industrial arts).
- Ensure the types of math being taught are the most relevant to the students’ academic and career interests.
- Develop a curriculum that better fits indigenous nations, offering more flexibility for diverse learning styles.
- Hire a state coordinator that manages all San Juan county partnerships and coordinates programs (e.g. robotics). This position can be the clearinghouse for obtaining funds, securing guest speakers and launching innovative projects.
- Offer more information about graduation requirements.

Additional areas needing improvement were highlighted by participants, as detailed below.

SCHOOL REPORT CARDS

Many participants found that challenges with the current school report card system have had negative consequences on teachers, parents, and students. They felt that inconsistencies in graduation requirements and different amounts of training were factors in the school report card equation.

Suggestions to address challenges regarding school report cards included the following:

- Align curriculum, coursework, and assessments with the skills and knowledge needed by business interests
- Revise school report cards to be more qualitative and less quantitative

FUNDING

Participants in all groups stated that schools need more monetary resources. Participants suggested that stable, increased funding fosters a spirit of consistent innovation for both teachers and administrators. Funding suggestions included:

- Establish a partnership between the Four Corners Education Leadership Group and PED that would find ways to allow more flexibility in the use of funding, including reducing paperwork and streamlining certification requirements
- Fund education to enable all districts to receive adequate funding regardless of a school's rating.
- Develop or expand an Educational Resource Services Center to assist educators with a myriad of needs, including obtaining grants, hiring behavioral specialists and doctors, and providing teacher training and parenting classes.
- To better support low-performing schools, schools rated as "failing" need more support in all areas.

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 Public Education Department and New Mexico First appreciate the time, effort and commitment to education of those who participated in the Farmington 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 those ideas that received the most support throughout the full community meeting process. All reports are available on the New Mexico First website at nmfirst.org.