



New Mexico Rising

Engaging our Communities for Excellence in Education

SANTA FE MEETING REPORT

- Community meetings on the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) occurred throughout New Mexico in fall 2016.
- This report summarizes the Santa Fe meetings, held October 17, 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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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

 School Programs 9

What Needs Improvement and Suggestions 9

 Support for the “Whole Child” 9

 School Accountability..... 10

 Teacher Support and Evaluations 11

 Student Assessments 11

Additional Suggestions..... 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 Santa Fe with one session tailored for teachers. Approximately 100 people attended the Santa Fe meetings held on October 17, 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 Santa Fe, the most common themes included:

- Support for the whole child
- Community collaboration
- School accountability systems
- Teacher support and evaluation
- Student assessments
- School programs

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.

Santa Fe

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

A diverse array of stakeholders took part in the three meetings held in Santa Fe, 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 Santa Fe meetings held on October 17, 2016.

New Mexico First facilitated all three ESSA meetings in Santa Fe. 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 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 Santa Fe 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 Santa Fe region, with top priorities including:

- Community collaboration
- Several examples of effective school programs

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

According to participants, parental and community involvement in the schools – both informally and through specific partnerships – has been increasing in Santa Fe and the surrounding areas. It was noted that community organizations help provide volunteers, mentors and tutors who are able to help support students. Participants noted that through various partnerships and volunteer hours, schools are receiving ELL support, Native American wrap-around support especially in urban areas, music and art, and extended learning opportunities (after school and during the summer). One group noted that ESSA is an opportunity to capitalize on assets in communities.

Participants shared that the need for, and subsequent conversations regarding “whole-level engagement” as a strategy to create improvement throughout the entire community, has increased, especially in rural areas. According to participants, many good resources already exist, including the library and increased kindergarten through third-grade programming, as well as other collective impact work. The reorganization of high schools has been successful and is appreciated by many community members. Additionally, participants shared that students have benefited from specialized instruction and art classes.

For the first time, one group noted, people are coming together to discuss what the industry needs from the educational system. Participants shared that investing in STEM areas is particularly helpful for the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL), which is set to hire 2,000 additional employees over the next two years. Graduation rates are up overall according to community members, and one community (Cloudcroft) has zero percent truancy.

SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Many specific programs and initiatives were cited as being particularly impactful, including:

- Inquiry Science Education Consortium (ISEC) organized by the LANL Foundation, a K-6 program that trains teachers in the summer with every student in the program focusing on hands-on science. This inquiry-based instruction model applies to other subjects as well.
- Pacing Program, which addresses common core, breaking the more detailed standards into essential questions. This rigorous program enables teachers to better identify students' achievement and mastery of different subjects.
- Career Pathways, which exposes students to real-life work experiences with business owners, is receiving positive feedback. The program has engendered more focus from students in their studies, and students within the program have a high graduation rate.
- Extracurricular activities, in the form of classes that fall outside the scope of English and math (e.g. outside classes, vocational courses), receive high marks.
- The Dual Credit Program is working well in certain areas of the state.
- The three-year professional development program for teachers in mathematics. This program is supported by Los Alamos National Laboratory.
- The Career Pathways program (Capital High School) was highlighted for providing resources outside of reading and math via dual credit and technology courses that benefit teachers and students.

What Needs Improvement and Suggestions

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

- Support for the “whole child”
- School accountability systems
- Teacher support and evaluation
- Student assessments

SUPPORT FOR THE “WHOLE CHILD”

Participants suggested that schools currently concentrate more on requirements and less on students as individual learners. As a result, individual students' needs are not met, said community members. According to some community members, it is necessary to understand the context in which New Mexico students live, and address the root causes of the poverty. They added that many children lack access to necessary family support services (e.g. a lack of nonprofits in rural communities means few, if any, wrap-around services to support students and their families). Some participants expressed concerns that English language learners (ELLs) do not receive the same level of support as other students. Overall, participants commented that increased community collaboration and improved channels of communication with education stakeholders is needed to support the “whole child”.

Suggestions for addressing these issues include:

- Use PED community meetings as the beginning of an ongoing conversation that engages teachers, parents and students so that everyone works together rather against each other.
- Support individualized learning with more flexibility for each student’s learning levels. This can include multi-level classes (e.g. advanced placement for kindergarteners), students mentoring each other (older to younger) and customized learning for ELL and early learning students.
- Consider the needs of the child in terms of the most effective number of learning hours. Options to assist students who need more learning hours could include extended teaching days and year-round schools – with Santa Fe piloting two, year-round schools so that data can be collected and reviewed.
- Consider adding after-school and summer programs.
- Increase wrap-around services to address the needs of students and their families so students can focus on education. One way to do this could be via the expansion of community schools to offer wrap-around services.
- Build a strong foundation that leads to educational successes, including universal PreK (with flexible funding, full-day and half-day programs).
- Promote more community engagement with educators, district administration and PED working together on a strategic, long-term program statewide.

SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY

Participants shared the concern that state accountability systems have unintended consequences and continued confusion exists around school grades and evaluation scores. Participants perceived that districts are trying to sort through these issues, but a lack of transparency – for the grading system and teacher evaluations – seems to undermine their efforts. Administrators and teachers expressed that when reviewing the data, they feel they are being negatively labeled.

Community members stated that high rates of turnover in upper administration seem to create instability in the system (e.g. in five schools the principals left mid-semester). According to some participants, the high turnover rate combined with budget restraints results in positions being vacated for long periods of time, and engenders a lack of confidence in the data that is received by schools. Participants noted that when new leadership does not learn the systems and processes from the beginning, school staff cannot progress in best utilizing the systems or processes meant to support educators and improve student learning. This lack of continuity negatively impacts school morale, concluded some participants.

Many groups called for a more well-rounded and transparent approach to school accountability. One group shared that ESSA is an opportunity to ensure that the right measurements are being taken. Specific suggestions include:

- With regard to data, review data points to confirm relevance to student learning. Refine our understanding and use of data. Focus more on qualitative rather than quantitative data.
- Apply best business communication practices and practice open, two-way communication with all education stakeholders that fosters collaboration. This would lead to better strategic communication and delivery of information between schools, educators, and PED.

- Leverage ESSA as an opportunity to work together, developing a clear, strategic plan for the state that includes both high standards and the humanity of the teaching profession and would guide current and future administrators, ultimately bringing stability to the system.
- School report card should include ELL indicators.
- Rethink desired outcomes and how best to meet them (e.g. rather than additional school days, consider revising the proportion of time teachers spend in front of students to 60 percent and the amount of time being reflective practitioners to 40 percent).
- Clarify who educators can go to for guidance, system navigation, and assistance.
- Revisit qualifications for graduation, ensuring students are receiving the education they need to succeed in school and career.

TEACHER SUPPORT AND EVALUATIONS

Many groups spoke to the issue of teacher morale. Teachers shared that they feel unsupported, and report that the profession itself is not valued. One group questioned whether teachers and schools are being measured appropriately. In addition to providing autonomy for teachers to meet student needs, many groups underscored the necessity for additional and relevant professional development.

Many groups wanted to see more emphasis on teaching as a profession, and all groups suggested the need to increase teacher pay. Other specific suggestions include:

- Provide teacher training and professional development for students and current teachers that results in higher quality teachers. Training and professional development should be frequent, consistent and relevant to classroom instruction.
- Provide teachers and schools with assistance and guidance in improving their “failed” categories on their tests/assessments.
- Extend the number of teaching days to 200 with a longer school day (e.g. 7:30 – 4:30 pm), in which teachers receive compensation for this additional time.
- Assign a single community leader who speaks for the entire community on education issues and solutions (i.e. superintendent or mayor), and can align resources in the community to improve public education.
- Regarding professional development and training, teachers need:
 - Training that offers assistance in best practices in teaching and education that are grounded in practice
 - More dialogue among teachers and those who train them
 - Leadership development, in order to provide more sustainability around leadership
 - Information technology training
 - Guidance in how to better understand and meet the needs of low income students and students who live in rural areas
 - A variety of training options scheduled throughout the year, including teacher generated, peer-to-peer, online, and workshops, to allow for professional development to be built into the program

STUDENT ASSESSMENTS

An over-focus on testing was noted among all groups in all sessions. Participants shared that along with the challenges schools, teachers, and students experience in the administration of student assessments, they were

also concerned that measuring only English and mathematics elevates these subjects to the exclusion of science and social studies, which are also important in providing a student with a well-rounded education. Ultimately, teachers are concerned that they are preparing students to take tests well rather than learn well.

Suggestions on the subject of assessments included the following:

- Student assessments should also include non-academic indicators.
- Identify external entities that can work on evidence-based interventions and outcomes that promote student learning and success.
- Consider whether PARCC is the most appropriate assessment tool for all students, and provide students more access to ACT preparation.

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS

- **Funding:** Stabilize the education budget, recognizing that it is an investment, not a cost. Ways to do this could include tapping into the land grant fund, utilizing Title II funding for teacher professional development and better resource allocation.
- **Low Performing Schools:** More consistent and ongoing support is needed – with structures that support reflective practice.

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 Santa Fe 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 report. The final report highlights those ideas that received the most support throughout the full community meeting engagement process. All reports are available on the New Mexico First website at www.nmfirst.org