



New Mexico Rising

Engaging our Communities for Excellence in Education

GALLUP MEETING REPORT

- Community meetings on the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) occurred throughout New Mexico in fall 2016.
- This report summarizes the Gallup meetings, held October 12, 2016.
- A separate, statewide report includes all community feedback.

CONVENER

New Mexico Public Education Department

FACILITATOR

New Mexico First



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New Mexico students have made gains in test scores for math and reading in recent years, and more 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 Gallup with one session tailored for teachers. Approximately 50 people attended the Gallup meetings held on October 12, 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 Gallup, the most common themes that emerged from the meetings on what is working well were:

- Committed educators, staff and school board
- Diversity in teachers and language reflecting the community
- School report cards and school choice
- Communication among education stakeholders

Areas of major concern were:

- Teacher support issues
- Coursework concerns
- Parental engagement and support for at-risk students

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 a major 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.

Gallup

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

A diverse array of stakeholders took part in the three meetings held in Gallup, 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 50 people attended the Gallup meetings held on October 12, 2016.

New Mexico First facilitated the two of the three ESSA meetings in Gallup. (The third, focused on teachers, was led by PED.) Participants at the New Mexico First-led meetings 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 responses were submitted into a “word cloud” application that makes the most frequent submissions larger. Above is the word cloud from the combined Gallup 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 items in the sections below.

What Works Well

Community members identified several areas that are working well in the Gallup region. For example, they shared positive comments regarding successful programs (i.e., Teach for America and STEM projects), aspects of the state's accountability system they favor, and various types of community assets.

- **Committed people:** Participants commented that dedicated administrators, principals, teachers, and support staff all help advance school success. School board members were also recognized as effective. High standards, noted participants, are also seen in the expectations many teachers and parents hold for students, as well as the expectations parents hold for district leadership.
- **Diversity:** One discussion groups highlighted their appreciation of teacher diversity, while another pointed out that the Zuni Pueblo was growing their teachers from the community. Many participants were happy to see bilingualism being approached by the district as both an economic and cultural advantage and referenced Zuni's K-12 language program as an example of effectively teaching Navajo language and culture in the schools. This focus on diversity honors the fact that the Gallup areas schools have among the highest percentages of Native American students in the nation.
- **School report cards:** Some participants found the school report cards, with their A-F grades, useful for measuring whether their schools were doing a good job. Participants proudly shared that within a two-year period, there are no longer failing schools in the Gallup-McKinley County School District and the number of high-performing schools has increased.
- **School choice:** Some people expressed appreciation for local charter schools and their high graduation rates. Others offered that charter schools help focus on the unique needs of each student.
- **Communication:** There were many positive comments regarding communication and transparency. Parents specifically found automated messages by phone and text useful, and some appreciated the transparency of the school budget.

What Needs Improvement and Suggestions

Community members also identified areas that are not working well in the Gallup region. Issues fell into three main themes:

- Teacher support issues
- Coursework concerns
- Parental engagement and support for at-risk students

TEACHER SUPPORT AND EVALUATIONS

Participants expressed concerns about recruitment and retention of teachers. Training was perceived to be needed in information technology, teachers whose native language is not English, teaching English language learners, cultural competency, and that there be high-level of recognition for teachers. Participants commented that teachers would also benefit from fewer large-scale changes in education systems and a longer adjustment period when there are changes.

Some expressed that teacher evaluations should focus less on student testing. People shared examples of problems with data collection for teacher evaluations, causing teachers to question their accuracy or value. Participants noted it would benefit teachers more to receive evaluation results sooner.

Attendees offered several suggestions to address these matters.

- Ensure that the teacher evaluation process is fair and accurate.
- Reduce the percentage of student performance applied to teacher evaluations.
- Teacher evaluations should better account for the issue of student mobility from school to school or district to district.
- Improve communication regarding the statewide education policy related to teachers and administrators.
- Review teacher certification while ensuring that training immerses teachers in their subject matter.
- Establish programs for communities to grow their teachers from teacher's aides.
- Expand teacher and parent recognition, with awards in each district that honor top teachers and parents.

COURSEWORK

Several participants addressed concerns regarding the courses and curriculum available to students. For example, people urged more cultural resources including culturally relevant textbooks, Native American history, hands-on cultural experiences, and more administrative support and funding for Navajo language programs.

Additional comments focused on the need for more job and career-based learning, with dual credit career readiness courses. Participants also noted that funding cuts have left rural students with fewer electives (including but not limited to vocational training).

Suggestions to address coursework and classroom challenges included:

- Increase learning experiences outside of the school and in the community.
- Provide college prep courses before students' senior year.
- Retain and add electives.
- Provide more course options that are broader and have an applied aspect (e.g. providing both Algebra II and applied math).
- Recruit teachers for vocational classes (e.g. plumbers and electricians)
- Revisit graduation requirements to enable students to take vocational programs.
- Better identify and support gifted children.
- Provide targeted communication for English learners.

- Improve technology deployment in schools.
- Review graduation requirements with families and students before students enter their senior year.

PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS

A great deal of support was expressed for the need for effective strategies to engage all parents in the schools, and to consult more with Native American tribal members and leaders. Participants recognized the need to better address the reasons some students are not attending school or do not perform well when they are in school. Economics arose as an important factor identified by many participants, with affordable housing and the need for students to contribute financially to their families by getting a job rather than attending school being cited as two main factors.

The need for access to additional family support services and greater coordination among existing services was also identified. Specifics included the need to better flank at-risk students (those suspended, expelled or who drop-out) while also better engaging gifted students. Some participants identified the need for greater alignment between the district and juvenile justice system.

Specific suggestions included:

- Establish a parental/community liaison at the schools.
- Develop and increase access to mental health resources, wellness programs, advocates and programs for at-risk kids, and in-school suspension programs. House programs at the schools.
- Provide community service learning activities.
- Better identify and challenge "gifted" children.
- Incorporate cultural training and the "Six Pillars of Character" (trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship).
- Provide a district-wide truancy report.
- Use the local Zuni radio station to transmit information from the district to the community.
- Create a Parent Academy that can meet families where they live and work.
- Support a Navajo Weaving class for new parents where parents learn about weaving while also discussing nutrition, parenting information, school matters and other related topics.
- Provide transportation for families to participate in school events, meetings and programs.
- Create a Wellness Council made up of parents, students, teachers and school-based health clinics.
- Provide additional mental health counselors and CYFD support.

Conclusion

Implementation of ESSA provides an opportunity for education stakeholders throughout New Mexico to continue to work together to provide all students with a quality education that will shape their future, 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 Gallup 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.