



## New Mexico Rising

Engaging our Communities for Excellence in Education

### BACKGROUND REPORT

- This report informs a series of community engagement activities associated with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).
- Community members are urged to read this report before attending a local forum or taking the online ESSA survey.
- Community meetings
  - Gallup: October 12
  - Farmington: October 14
  - Santa Fe: October 17
  - Albuquerque: October 18
  - Roswell: October 27
  - Las Cruces: November 15

### OUTREACH CONVENER

New Mexico Public Education Department

### FACILITATOR AND RESEARCHER

New Mexico First



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Providing all New Mexico children with a quality education is the key to our state's future. New Mexicans want children to receive the education that allows them to fulfill their potential, pursue their dreams, achieve their goals, support themselves and their families, and contribute to their communities. However, challenges exist.

About every 20 years, the nation begins a new chapter in reforming our education system. The most recent chapter is the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the new law governing K-12 education. Replacing "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB), ESSA enables students, teachers, administrators, policymakers and community leaders to contribute ideas on refining the state education systems to better support students and educators.

The New Mexico Public Education Department (PED) will convene a series of six regional meetings in fall 2016 to solicit input about the development of the state's ESSA plan to support student learning. The department contracted with the nonpartisan, nonprofit New Mexico First to prepare this backgrounder and facilitate the meetings. (See appendix for additional engagement opportunities.)

## NEW MEXICO STUDENTS

Improving our education system continues to be critical for New Mexico as the state continues to rank near the bottom in the U.S. for student performance, scoring among the lowest math and reading scores in the nation. By 2020, most New Mexico students will not have the education, credentials or degrees required to fill 63 percent of the state's jobs. However, parents, educators and policymakers have reason to be encouraged as New Mexico made gains in student test scores for math and reading and since 2003 more students are graduating high school.

## ESSA HISTORY AND REQUIREMENTS

The new law requires that by summer 2017 all states submit to the U.S. Department of Education their plan for implementation of ESSA. Most ESSA provisions will take effect for the 2017-2018 school year.

ESSA maintains the previous requirements that states, districts and schools maintain a uniform measurement of student performance allowing for comparisons among schools, student groups and individual students over time, reporting of results and support for teachers and schools. However, states and districts have greater discretion to design elements to transform and improve the state education system than existed under NCLB, including substantial resources for teacher and educator professional development.

Specific areas for reform under ESSA include:

- School accountability and report cards
- Student assessment and graduation requirements
- Identification and support for English language learners
- Support for low-performing schools (including funding flexibility for Title I)
- Support and evaluation of teachers and school leaders (including funding flexibility under Title II)
- State education report cards

Additional focus areas for ESSA include required outreach and input from stakeholders including:

- Parental participation
- Authentic engagement with tribal governments and communities
- Thoughtful inclusion and support of rural school districts
- Educator input

For all stakeholders, communication is critical to overcoming the challenges students and schools face. Stakeholders urge that information about ESSA and how it will be implemented in New Mexico be transparent, accessible, applicable and consistently provided. By working together, all stakeholders can meet the needs of our students.

# FOREWORD

## 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 to engage with students, educators, district leaders, families and the community for input on how to continuously refine education systems.

The New Mexico Public Education Department (PED) partnered with New Mexico First to convene a series of six regional meetings throughout the state in fall 2016 to solicit input about New Mexico's ESSA plan to support schools and student learning. New Mexico First will also issue an online survey for people unable to attend a community meeting. This report is meant to help inform and elicit in-depth ideas among community meeting participants and survey respondents.

## Who Should Attend a Community Meeting?

Essentially, anyone interested in the future success of New Mexico students can take part in these meetings! The state especially hopes to hear from:

- Teachers, school and district administrators
- Parents and families
- Community, tribal and civic leaders
- Business and economic development leaders
- State and local elected officials
- School board members

## What Happens at the Meetings?

These meetings provide participants a chance to learn about ESSA and share with PED their priorities, expectations and concerns helping PED set informed goals and expectations for our public education system. There will be a brief opening session to set the context for the meetings, but the bulk of the meetings will be comprised of small group discussions among participants who want to contribute to the success of New Mexico students.

## What Happens After the Meetings?

Following the regional meeting series, PED will use the input received to inform the development of its 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 series is convened by the NM Public Education Department (PED). The PED 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 and Researcher

New Mexico First engages people in important issues facing their state or community. Established in 1986, the public policy organization offers unique town halls and forums that bring together people from all walks of life to develop their best 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](http://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.

## Where Do We Get Our Information?

This New Mexico First report was prepared by Pamela Blackwell and Heather Balas. Throughout this document, we provide as many data sources as possible. We draw from published reports, newspaper and journal articles, first-hand interviews, legislative hearings and online resources. We know that policymakers, researchers and students use our reports, so we provide the details they need to learn more – and answer further questions. Footnotes provide short-references to complete citations in the bibliography.

A special thanks goes to those interviewed for this report: Amanda Aragon, PED; Ellen Burnstein, Albuquerque Teachers Federation; Vicki Chavez, NM Regional Education Cooperatives Association; Alicia Duran, PED Teacher Liaison; Chris Eide, Teach Plus; Ian Esquibel, The Learning Alliance; Latifah Phillips, PED; Liz Ross, HCM Strategies; Gloria Ruiz, PED; Christopher Ruskowski, PED; Renata Witte, NM Parent Teacher Association.

## Chapter 1:

# NEW MEXICO STUDENTS

## Student Achievement and Readiness

As a whole, New Mexico students face many challenges. A fifth of the state's population lives in poverty, ranking the state the second worst in the nation.<sup>1</sup> In addition, over two-thirds of the New Mexico's students' qualify for free or reduced price lunch.<sup>2</sup> Research shows that 42 percent of young people born to families in the lowest fifth of income distribution will remain there. For these young people, educational attainment beyond the high school diploma may offer the only means of moving up the economic ladder.<sup>3</sup>

Since higher levels of educational attainment typically correspond to higher incomes, there is a direct correlation with increased economic activity of individuals and businesses. This is why the educational attainment of a population is a common starting point in evaluating the workforce's capacity to contribute to economic growth.<sup>4</sup> By 2020, most New Mexico students will not have the education, credentials or degrees required to fill 63 percent of New Mexico's jobs.<sup>5</sup>

## How are New Mexico Students Doing?

The New Mexico K-12 education system serves over 330,000 students through 89 school districts and 96 charter schools.<sup>6</sup> The state ranks near the bottom in the U.S. for student performance, scoring among the lowest in math and reading in the nation.<sup>7</sup> However, parents, educators and policymakers have reason to be encouraged because New Mexico has made gains in student test scores and increased high school graduation rates since 2003.<sup>8</sup> Since 2012, when school grading first began in New Mexico, the number of schools receiving an A or B grade has increased so that there are now more schools with an A or B grade than those with a D or F grade.<sup>9</sup> This increase equates to 30,000 more students having access to A or B schools.<sup>10</sup>

The current student assessment testing system, Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), has been in use for two years. In 2016, New Mexico PARCC test scores in reading increased by 1.3 percent. Of New Mexico's 89 school districts (64 percent), 57 showed gains on the tests. About 5,000 more New Mexico students are now on grade level than in 2015.<sup>11</sup> In addition, 3,239 more Hispanic students and 4,061 more economically disadvantaged students are proficient in reading compared to 2015.<sup>12</sup> Native American students showed the highest rate of growth in reading.

New Mexico students also saw an increase in their math PARCC scores. In 2016, students' scores in math increased by 2.5 percent. With 77 school districts (86 percent) showing gains in math, 7,300 more students now perform on

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<sup>1</sup> (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015)

<sup>2</sup> (NM Public Education Department, 2015)

<sup>3</sup> (Southern Regional Education Board, 2015)

<sup>4</sup> (Leach, 2016)

<sup>5</sup> (Southern Regional Education Board, 2015)

<sup>6</sup> (NM Public Education Department, 2015)

<sup>7</sup> (Uytterbrouck, 2016)

<sup>8</sup> (Uytterbrouck, 2016)

<sup>9</sup> (NM Public Education Department, 2016)

<sup>10</sup> (NM Public Education Department, 2016)

<sup>11</sup> (NM Public Education Department, 2016)

<sup>12</sup> (NM Public Education Department, 2016)

grade level than in 2015.<sup>13</sup> Elementary students showed the most improvement in math and Hispanic students showed positive gains in all grade levels.

Overall, economically disadvantaged students exceeded statewide growth rates in both reading and math. Schools that participate in the state’s Principals Pursuing Excellence (PPE) program also saw a marked increase above the state average, in the number of students proficient in reading and math (4.24% increase in math, 4.87% increase in reading). The PPE program is a two-year program targeted to 84 low-performing New Mexico schools that supports principals to improve student achievement in their schools.<sup>14</sup> The success of PPE schools provides an example of an innovative transformative model that could be expanded and applied to other schools.<sup>15</sup>

**WHAT IS PARCC?**

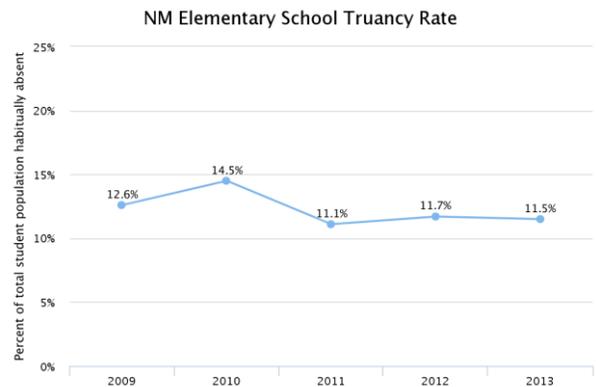
In elementary, middle, and high school, New Mexico students take the PARCC test. The PARCC test is a nationally recognized standardized test developed by a consortium of teachers, administrators and other experts from eight states including New Mexico, and the District of Columbia. The BIE and the U.S. Department of Defense administer the tests and also participate at varying levels in the development of the PARCC tests. The PARCC tests are designed to measure how well students understand and are able to apply the skills and standards under the Common Core State Standards which cover reading, English and math. The tests are also designed to provide educators with a deeper understanding of how students learn. ESSA requires that 95 percent of students are assessed annually using the state’s designated student assessment. All students in New Mexico, with some exceptions for students with disabilities or who may be English learners, must by law take the PARCC test, and all high school students must pass the PARCC test or alternative test to graduate.

**Additional New Mexico Student Indicators**

Below are additional indicators that measure student academic achievement for New Mexico K-12 students statewide.

**<sup>16</sup>INDICATOR: ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TRUANCY**

Studies have shown that students who are chronically absent, meaning they miss 10 days or more of the school year due to excused or unexcused absences, are at risk academically, particularly in the early grades. These absences result in loss of instructional time, which translates into weaker reading skills. Attendance habits begin at home. Schools also play a role; student attendance is better in schools where parents feel welcomed and engaged.<sup>17</sup>



<sup>13</sup> (NM Public Education Department, 2016)

<sup>14</sup> (Priority Schools Bureau, NMPED)

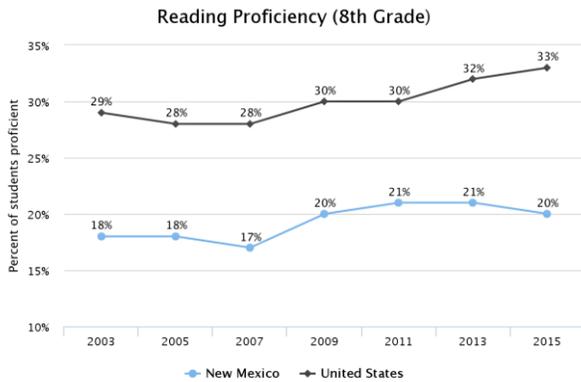
<sup>15</sup> (Christopher Ruszkowski, 2016)

<sup>16</sup> (NM Public Education Department, 2016)

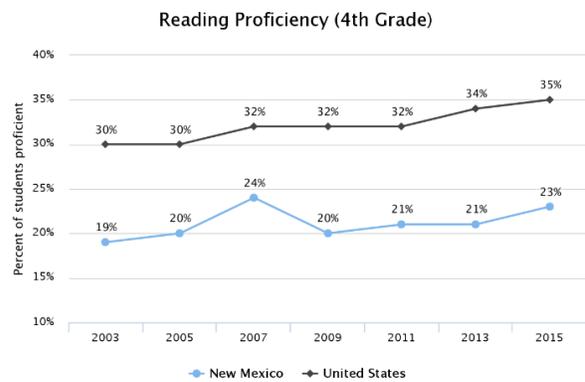
<sup>17</sup> (Attendance Works, 2014)

**INDICATOR: READING PROFICIENCY**

Children who read well are more likely to perform well in other subjects, such as math and science. Strong reading skills also predict the likelihood of graduating from high school and attending college, as well as securing employment and earning better wages.<sup>18</sup> The percent of fourth grade and eighth grade students in New Mexico who are proficient readers has remained about the same over the last decade with an increase of 1.25 percent for fourth grade and an increase of 2.89 percent for eighth grade between 2015 and 2016.<sup>19</sup> This equates to 478 more fourth grade students and 917 more eighth grade students reading at grade level.<sup>20</sup>



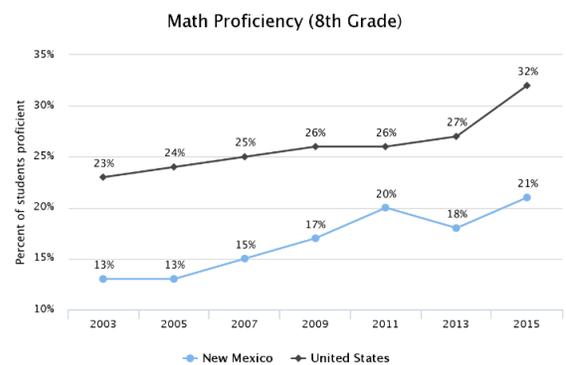
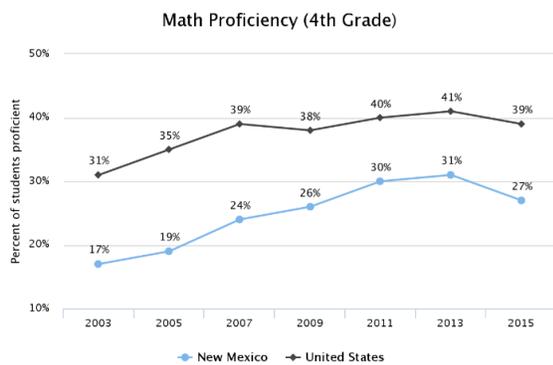
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**INDICATOR: MATH PROFICIENCY**

Competence in mathematics is the strongest predictor of long-term academic success.<sup>23</sup> It is also essential in an increasingly technology-based world and workplace. Students with strong math skills are more likely to attend and complete college. Math proficiency is also related to higher levels of employability and influences higher levels of



<sup>18</sup> (Child Trends, 2014)

<sup>19</sup> (NM Public Education Department, 2016)

<sup>20</sup> (NM Public Education Department, 2016)

<sup>21</sup> (NM Public Education Department, 2016)

<sup>22</sup> (NM Public Education Department, 2016)

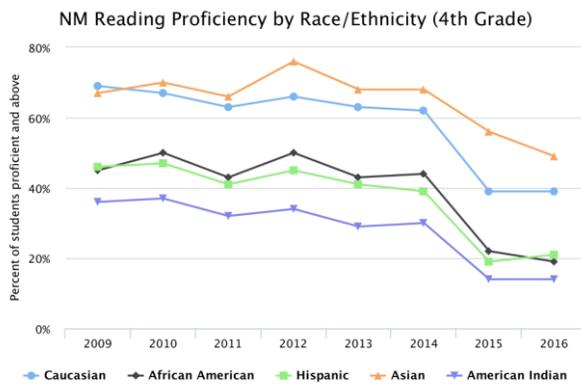
<sup>23</sup> (Gulbrandsen, 2011)

earnings.<sup>24</sup> New Mexico made excellent progress in student math scores in the last decade, although 8th grade proficiency took a small dip in 2014.<sup>25</sup> (Chart sources: <sup>26</sup> <sup>27</sup>)

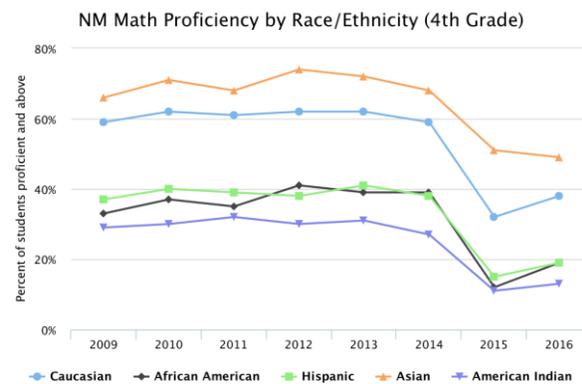
**INDICATOR: ACADEMIC PROFICIENCY BY RACE/ETHNICITY**

Achievement gaps matter, particularly when the educational disparities affect such large segments of the population. New Mexico schools consistently see double-digit gaps in academic proficiency. The following chart provides one example, fourth grade math where the gap is about 37 percentage points. As of 2013, similar gaps exist in fourth grade reading (31 percentage point gap between highest and lowest achieving groups), eighth grade reading (30 percentage point gap), and eighth grade math (29 percentage point gap).<sup>28</sup>

Indicators disaggregated by race and ethnicity help to measure how well schools are ensuring that all students are learning. The indicators identify which groups of students are not achieving at the same rate as their peers so the school and districts can then take action to address this inequity. That states work to ensure that all students are learning is a key requirement of ESSA. According to PED, the department expected a drop in student test scores in 2015 due to teachers and students having to become accustomed to how the tests are given, a heightened concern about the then new assessment in general and because PARCC assessment content is considered more challenging than previous student assessments.



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**INDICATOR: HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATE**

High school graduation usually leads to higher earnings for individuals, and greater productivity and economic growth for their communities. The median earnings of individuals with a high school diploma, even with no additional education, are roughly 40 percent higher than earnings of those who do not finish school.<sup>31</sup> As the following two charts show, New Mexico’s overall high school graduation rate has climbed over the last decade, reaching 69 percent in 2014. We still fall short of the national average of 81 percent. New Mexico’s graduation rates were the lowest among neighboring states, where 75 to 88 percent of students graduate.<sup>32</sup> Further, until

<sup>24</sup> (Child Trends, 2014)

<sup>25</sup> (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015)

<sup>26</sup> (NM Public Education Department, 2016)

<sup>27</sup> (NM Public Education Department, 2016)

<sup>28</sup> (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015)

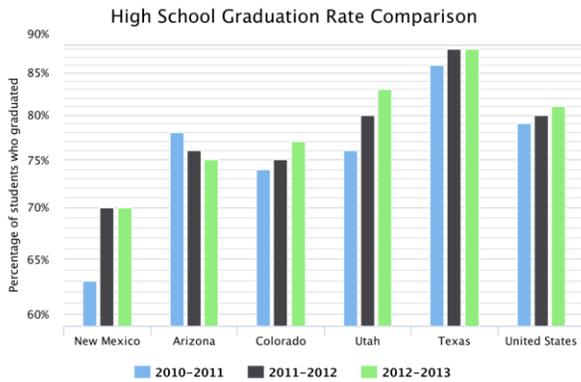
<sup>29</sup> (NM Public Education Department, 2016)

<sup>30</sup> (NM Public Education Department, 2016)

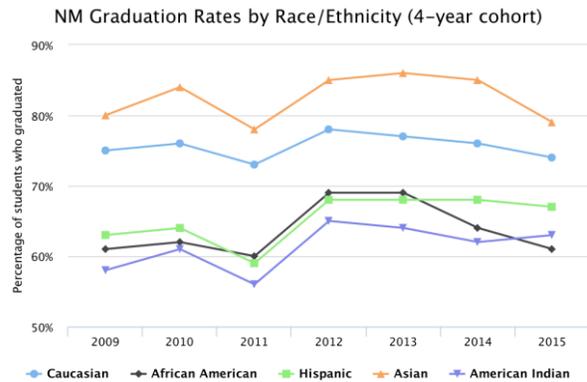
<sup>31</sup> (Promising Practices Network, 2015)

<sup>32</sup> (Governing: States and Localities, n.d.)

2016 the gap between ethnic groups was not closing.<sup>33</sup> To graduate, New Mexico students must demonstrate competence in core subject areas by passing PARCC or alternative tests and must also complete the required number of credit hours.



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### What Do Students Want?

Students want to learn the relevant skills that get them a job, preparing them for tomorrow’s careers, according to Ian Esquibel, executive director of the Learning Alliance.<sup>36</sup> The Learning Alliance is a New Mexico nonprofit that supports the educational needs of students and families. Much of this report focuses on education reform from the perspective of what adults would like in our education system. However, it seems important to consider the perspectives and concerns of students as well. The Learning Alliance reports that its student leaders want student-centric implementation of ESSA in which their voice is valued and where adult issues do not impede student success.<sup>37</sup> One of the ideas unique to students is the suggestion by some students that early in their education starting in middle school or earlier, that each student is assigned a guide to continually orient them to the education and career path system that is foreign to so many young people.

<sup>33</sup> (NM Public Education Department, n.d.)

<sup>34</sup> (Governing: States and Localities, n.d.)

<sup>35</sup> (NM Public Education Department, n.d.)

<sup>36</sup> (Esquibel, Executive Director, The Learning Alliance, 2016)

<sup>37</sup> (Esquibel, Executive Director, The Learning Alliance, 2016)

## Chapter 2:

# ESSA HISTORY AND REQUIREMENTS

## History of Federal Education Acts

The 1965 passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) signaled the federal government’s commitment to and involvement in quality and equality in the schooling offered students in the U.S.<sup>38</sup> In 2002, passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act reauthorized ESEA, this time requiring that schools measure student achievement in uniform ways allowing for comparisons among districts, schools, student groups and individual students over time. The new law also required that states intervene to address achievement gaps between disadvantaged students and their peers.

For the first time in U.S history, NCLB clearly quantified how many of our nation’s students were academically “proficient” – including which schools were delivering that level of preparedness for all types of students.<sup>39</sup> Where many people believe NCLB fell short was in its unrealistic goal that every child must perform at grade level in reading and math by 2014, and that all schools could be fixed using the same tool box. Multiple reports indicate that these factors frustrated teachers and administrators alike.<sup>40</sup>

The new ESSA law, enacted in 2015, retains the NCLB requirements that states, districts and schools maintain uniform measurement of student performance allowing for comparisons among schools, student groups and individual students over time, reporting of results, and measurement of teacher and school effectiveness. However, states and districts have greater discretion to design some elements of their state plans. The new law also allows for substantial resources for teacher and educator professional development as well as teacher recruitment and retention.

The stated purpose of ESSA is to ensure that all children in all communities graduate from high school ready for college and career.

## NCLB WAIVERS – A RUNNING START?

Under NCLB, New Mexico and 42 other states chose to operate under “waivers” that allowed flexibility regarding some requirements. This flexibility came in exchange for rigorous state-developed plans to improve educational outcomes for all students, close achievement gaps, increase equity and improve quality of instruction.<sup>41</sup> Under this system, New Mexico developed its current student assessment, school report cards and educator evaluation systems.

Officials at PED report that New Mexico’s 2012 decision to comply with NCLB under the more rigorous waiver program means that the state is closer today to complying with the new ESSA requirements than many states. Proposed regulations under ESSA mirror much of what New Mexico is already doing. For educators in particular, this may mean they have already experienced the large scale changes that other states have yet to go through. In addition, PED reports that it has already assembled staff-expertise to refine assessment systems and analyze data.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> (Turner C. , 2015)

<sup>39</sup> (Turner C. , 2015)

<sup>40</sup> (Turner C. , 2015)

<sup>41</sup> (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.)

<sup>42</sup> (Ruszkowski, 2016)



- High schools in which the graduation rate is consistently less than 67 percent
- The lowest performing five percent of schools in the state
- Schools in which there is a consistent performance gap between subgroups within the same school (e.g. Student Group A representing a race/ethnicity consistently underperforms compared to Student Group B representing a different race/ethnicity.)

### IMPACTS FOR NEW MEXICO

New Mexico currently has a school and district grading system with published school report cards. That system tracks all the five required indicators except English language proficiency. The PED proposes public and educator input on the English proficiency requirement.

Regarding low-performing schools, ESSA provides for greater flexibility on any “turn-around strategies.” These decisions and the responsibility for interventions will first be driven by the schools and districts.<sup>47</sup> Under ESSA, the PED’s role is to provide guidance during the turn-around planning process, ensure that the school improvement plans include evidence-based interventions and provide final approval of the plans.<sup>48</sup> Unlike under NCLB, ESSA does not prescribe interventions a school must use to turn it around giving communities some room to innovate.

### Student Performance, Growth Assessments and Coursework

Like NCLB, ESSA requires that students take standardized tests to measure progress. However, the new law allows greater flexibility in the selection of the assessment tool. States may use some combination of PARCC, computer-adaptive assessments, SAT, ACT or other nationally recognized assessments.<sup>49</sup> A limited number of states may also apply to develop their own assessment system, but the efforts must be self-funded and meet the same requirements as traditional assessments.

Another change under ESSA reduces the emphasis on standardized “proficiency” measures; instead states will be allowed to also gauge progress by measuring student academic growth. This change is in answer to educators’ criticism that while a student attaining grade-level proficiency is important, a better measure is whether a student is growing in their knowledge and making progress over time. (For example, under a proficiency standard, a school would measure whether a third grader knows specific math concepts; under a growth standard, the same school would gauge how much that third grader’s understanding of math measurably improved over the year.)

Increased course options for students present another set of ESSA reforms. Previously, educators expressed concerns that NCLB’s primary focus on math and reading prevented students from receiving the well-rounded education they need for career readiness. Parents and educators also pointed out the value of other courses (like music or technology) to keeping students engaged in school.<sup>50</sup> Answering these concerns, ESSA allows schools to be evaluated on whether students are provided with a well-rounded education through access to advanced coursework and workplace readiness opportunities and by also expanding the definition of “core academic subjects” to include the humanities, arts and social sciences.<sup>51</sup> The new law also provides additional funds to support science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) programs.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> (Tamara Hiler, 2015)

<sup>48</sup> (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2016)

<sup>49</sup> (Education Commission of the States, 2016) Note: computer-adaptive assessments are tailored tests that adjust the difficulty of questions based on the student’s response. Generally, if a student answers a question correctly, the next question will be harder; if a student answers incorrectly, the next question will be easier.

<sup>50</sup> (Blair, 2015)

<sup>51</sup> (Scott D. Jones, 2016)

<sup>52</sup> (U.S. Department of Education, 2016)

## IMPACTS FOR NEW MEXICO

Beginning in 2015, New Mexico students in grades 3-11 began taking the nationally normed PARCC exams.<sup>53</sup> This set of computer-based assessments are intended to measure whether students are on track for college or careers. New Mexico is one of 11 states using PARCC, and our students are among roughly five million nationally taking the exams. Given the considerable effort by the state, districts and schools to get the effort off the ground, PED recommends that New Mexico remain with PARCC as our ESSA-approved assessment. Presuming that PARCC will continue to be the state's assessment, this approach will likely require some additional investments; several rural and tribal schools reported challenges with the computer-based model, reporting challenges with hardware and internet speed.

Beginning in 2016, most New Mexico students are required to pass the PARCC test to graduate from high school.<sup>54</sup> Students who do not pass PARCC may still earn a high school diploma by meeting an "alternative demonstrations of competency" (ADC).<sup>55</sup> ESSA allows states the flexibility to develop ADCs for students who do not pass their high school assessment exam. In New Mexico, PED invites input on the development of ADCs. (See appendix for additional engagement opportunities.)

## English Learners

The new law contains several changes affecting students whose first language is not English, including changing the preferred terminology to "English learners" (ELs). State accountability systems and report cards are required to measure student progress and proficiency for ELs. States must also give English proficiency and math assessments to English learners in their first year in U.S. schools. The law provides options for how states include EL students in their overall accountability data, enabling them to be phased in over time and as their English improves.<sup>56</sup>

## IMPACTS FOR NEW MEXICO

Our state's population includes many cultures and people with different linguistic backgrounds. Albuquerque Public Schools estimates that about one-fifth of its students are English learners. Many of these students hold tremendous academic potential, given the proven developmental benefits of bilingualism. However, they often require additional support in the classroom to achieve that potential.

New Mexico's "Educator Equity Plan," approved by the U.S. Department of Education in 2015, provides some direction in this regard. It calls for targeted training and cultural competency for New Mexico teachers. Further, Article XII of the state constitution calls on the legislature to provide for the training of teachers "so that they may become proficient in both the English and Spanish languages, to qualify them to teach Spanish-speaking pupils and students in the public schools and educational institutions of the state..."

Parents are key to addressing this goal, yet many are English learners themselves. It is critical that their voices are valued as highly as that of other parents.<sup>57</sup> (To that end, interpretation services are offered at ESSA community meetings if requested, and the online parent survey will be posted at [www.nmfirst.org](http://www.nmfirst.org) in Spanish and English.)

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<sup>53</sup> PARCC (like ACT or SAT) generally goes by acronym; it stands for Partnership of Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers. Sample exams are posted at <https://parcc.pearson.com/practice-tests/>.

<sup>54</sup> (NM Public Education Department, 2014)

<sup>55</sup> (Albuquerque Public Schools, n.d.)

<sup>56</sup> (Education Commission of the States, 2016), (Education Trust, 2016)

<sup>57</sup> (Witte, 2016)

The PED invites suggestions for including English learner indicators in state and school report cards, preparing teachers to support EL students, and meeting the needs of students and their families in communities. (See appendix for additional engagement opportunities.)

## Support and Evaluation of Teachers and School Leaders

Under previously granted NCLB waivers, states developed mandatory teacher and school leader evaluation systems. This requirement is removed under ESSA, but instead states are “permitted” to implement evaluation systems. The federal government is prohibited from prescribing evaluation measures, and states with evaluation systems are required to make the public aware of the criteria they use.<sup>58</sup>

The new law also requires that state and local report cards include the professional qualifications of teachers (i.e., the number who are “inexperienced,” teaching with emergency credentials, or teaching out of subject). This measure points to the need for high quality, content-based and sustained professional development, and ESSA provides for that. States may use federal education funding for a wide array of teacher support programs including mentoring, targeted training, teacher academies, and STEM master teaching, etc.<sup>59</sup>

### IMPACTS FOR NEW MEXICO

New Mexico has a teacher evaluation system that was launched in the 2013-2014 school year. The system aims to identify effective and ineffective educators. Teachers are evaluated using multiple measures to help assess how well they prepare students. These measures include student growth, principal observations, student surveys and teacher attendance.<sup>60</sup> The evaluation is also intended to identify where a teacher may need assistance. The PED proposes to continue the teacher evaluation system under ESSA.

Preliminary interviews conducted for this report indicate that some teachers would propose changes. While teachers overall want to be evaluated – and agree that ineffective educators should be provided additional training or removed from the classroom – teacher advocates express concerns about the current system. They report frustration that when questions about the data in a teacher’s evaluation arise, teachers are unsure of where to go for more information. More information and direction regarding addressing these and other variables might help to improve some teachers’ confidence in the evaluation process.

Regardless what process is deployed for teacher evaluation, appropriate professional development is key in New Mexico. Teacher advocates warn that some previous efforts were seen as punitive rather than supportive, or not structured to meet teachers’ needs. They hold that infrequent, one-size-fits-all teacher workshops do little more than “check the box.” Advocates suggest that professional development should be site specific, job embedded so that it is a daily part of a teacher’s workday, and ongoing so that the teacher may have support necessary from school year to school year.<sup>61</sup>

Programs such as TeachNM which provides online information and resources for teachers and administrators and is supported by PED, and Teach Plus which offers a competitive education policy fellowship program for New Mexico teachers, may provide models worthy of consideration.

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<sup>58</sup> (Education Commission of the States, 2016)

<sup>59</sup> (Education Commission of the States, 2016)

<sup>60</sup> (NM Public Education Department, 2014)

<sup>61</sup> (Burnstein, 2016)

## State Report Cards

New Mexico does not currently publish a statewide report card, but under ESSA it will. State report cards must now also be designed based on input from parents. In addition to providing data on students based on race, gender and economic status as required under NCLB, states must now also report information on the performance of all students and all subgroups including homeless, military dependent and foster-care students.<sup>62</sup> The state report card will also provide data on all the variables presented in the previous sections. Some additional requirements include:

- Schools identified for improvement and targeted support plans
- Preschool programs
- Access to advanced coursework, such as advanced placement or dual credit
- Chronic absenteeism
- Per pupil expenditures

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<sup>62</sup> (Scott D. Jones, 2016)

**Chapter 3:****CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

In addition to the issues and topics specified in the last chapter, common sense dictates consideration of a few more items. Stakeholders agree that, working together, New Mexico can bring equitable, quality education to all students. They also agree that ESSA provides a unique opportunity to advance that goal.

**Parents as a Valued Voice**

Parents unquestionably play a critical role in the well-being and education of their children. Advocates interviewed for this report said the many parents do not understand the role of student assessments. For example, some parents do not realize that choosing for their young child to opt-out of PARCC testing can contribute to her or him being less prepared to pass the test in high school (which is a graduation requirement), or that opting-out can have a negative impact how their child's teacher is evaluated or their school's grade.

For these reasons and others, parent advocates suggest that ESSA implementation include as direct, transparent and evenly delivered communication with parents as possible, providing opportunities for meaningful feedback from all parents.

Parents who interested in learning more and contributing to the development of education plans for their community can access the online Family and School Community Toolkit created by PED.

**Tribal Education Systems**

New Mexico's tribal communities face unique opportunities and challenges. Many tribes, in addition to the day-to-day management of their school systems, are simultaneously deliberating on how to best provide their students with an education system. They want that system to leads to student success while also reflecting culture, language and values.

In addition to these philosophical issues, tribal schools face practical challenges. Many are governed by two education systems that are not necessarily aligned: PED and the federal Bureau of Indian Education (BIE). The BIE governs tribal schools in 23 states including New Mexico.<sup>63</sup> One example of an alignment issue is that students in tribal schools located in New Mexico take the PARCC tests, but it is unclear how they are performing compared to their in-state peers because their scores are compared with only BIE school students. Also, while many tribal students begin their education in BIE tribal run schools, most eventually attend non-tribal schools overseen by PED making assessment of students throughout their education an additional alignment challenge to overcome.

While 99 percent of New Mexico students took the PARCC assessment online in 2016, resources for appropriate infrastructure such as reliable online broadband connectivity in tribal schools is also a concern. For example, some students in tribal communities were reportedly unable to effectively take the PARCC tests because they did not have reliable technology to take the online tests. Currently there is a statewide broadband initiative underway to better connect rural and tribal as well as urban communities.

Tribal advocates interviewed for this report hope that ESSA will bring resources to align and support tribal education standards that are specifically customized for tribal communities. They recommend that those making education policy decisions consistently engage and seek input from tribal communities.

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<sup>63</sup> (Phillips, 2016)

## Rural Access and Local Community Support

Many rural New Mexico school districts feel that they do not have the training and resources to implement ESSA, having been previously frustrated at attempting to comply with NCLB waiver requirements. Advocates for rural districts suggest that New Mexico support an ESSA implementation rural delivery model that is local and trusted and that can consistently provide day-to-day instructional training and technical assistance.<sup>64</sup> Advocates also suggest that the delivery model include teacher recruitment and retention pipeline support specifically for rural areas.

## Questions for Consideration

Given the information presented in this background report there are excellent options for education policy discussions. Questions to consider for these discussions may include:

### GENERAL

- What is working well/not working well in your school and school district?
- What are the characteristics or qualities you envision for your school and school district?
- What are the strengths of New Mexico's education system?
- What are the opportunities for improvement to New Mexico's education system?
- What non-technical aspects of the education system can be improved? (e.g. one-page versus multiple page reports, additional explanation for items in student assessments, etc.)

### STUDENTS

- Are there other ways we can ensure all students are successful?
- How should we ensure more students are graduating?
- What are additional ways to demonstrate Alternative Demonstrations of Competency (ADCs)?
- What is the best way to integrate the new required indicator of English language proficiency?
- How can we ensure the success of English learners?

### TEACHER SUPPORT

- How do we best support teachers so that they and their students are successful?
- How can educators, schools and districts use evaluations and report cards as tools to improve student and school performance?

### COMMUNITIES

- How can we ensure that rural districts have the training and resources they need?
- What would it take to better align education systems and provide resources for tribal communities?

### COMMUNICATION

- What is the best way for students, parents, teachers and administrators to receive information about their students, schools, policy changes and guidance, and who should deliver that information?
- What are the best ways and optimal frequency for students, parents, teachers and administrators to provide feedback for improving the education system?

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<sup>64</sup> (Chavez, 2016)

# CONCLUSION

Implementation of ESSA provides an opportunity for education stakeholders to continue to work together to provide all New Mexico children with a quality education that will shape their future and our states economic future, allowing students to reach their full potential. Overwhelmingly, interviewees consulted for this report called for quality coordination and communication among stakeholders. This includes information that is transparent, informative, accessible, appropriate, applicable and consistently provided.

While our challenges are real, New Mexico has an abundance of students, parents, teachers, administrators and community leaders that care, that have the desire and ideas to innovate and refine our education system, and who aim to provide lasting benefits for our children for decades to come.

Appendix:

# PED STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH

## ESSA – Stakeholder Outreach Opportunities through PED



*ESSA provides New Mexico the opportunity to re-engage with students, educators, district leaders, families, and the community for input on how to continuously refine New Mexico's education system to better support our teachers and students. Source: PED (2016)*

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## New Mexico Rising

Engaging our Communities for Excellence in Education

### FINAL SUMMARY REPORT

This report presents results from the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) regional community meetings held fall 2016.

#### 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, 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 20 regional meetings throughout the state in Gallup, Farmington, Santa Fe, Albuquerque, Rowell and Las Cruces as well as Tribal Government to Government sessions, 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 sessions occurred at each of the regional meetings, with one of the three sessions tailored for teachers. Approximately 650 people attended the meetings held in fall 2016. Participants represented a diverse array of stakeholders and viewpoints including teachers, school and district administrators, parents and families, community, tribal and civic leaders, and economic development leaders.

Communities members offered input on everything from teacher support to improving broadband infrastructure for online, career readiness courses. The majority of comments addressed various elements of the state's overall school accountability system, including teacher evaluations, student testing, and school report cards. Comments also addressed unique needs of English learners, the types of courses offered or required in school, support for low-performing schools, and a handful of other topics.

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 this statewide summary report, are published at [nmfirst.org](http://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](http://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](http://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.

## **Final Report Authors**

This New Mexico First report was prepared by Elizabeth Perrachione and edited by Pamela Blackwell and Heather Balas.

# INTRODUCTION

A diverse array of stakeholders took part in the 20 regional meetings held in Gallup, Farmington, Santa Fe, Albuquerque, Roswell, Las Cruces and the tribal Government to Government meetings held in fall 2016. Participants included teachers, school and district administrators, parents and families, community, tribal and civic leaders, and business and economic development advocates. The rich cultural diversity of the state was reflected in both the mix of participants as well as the range of ideas shared. Over 600 people attended the in-person meetings. In addition, over 400 people provided their feedback through an online survey that was available in both English and Spanish.

This report overviews the collective feedback received at the meetings highlighting the areas of commonality among the regions. Responses from the online survey align with the feedback garnered through the in-person meetings. (For additional information specific to the regional and government to government meetings, please refer to the individual community reports located at [nmfirst.org](http://nmfirst.org).)

Participants in all meetings 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 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?” Those responses were submitted into a “word cloud” application that makes the most frequent submissions larger. Above is the word cloud from the six regional meetings.

# COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Communities members offered input on everything from teacher support to improving broadband infrastructure for online, career readiness courses. The majority of comments addressed various elements of the state’s overall school accountability system, including teacher evaluations, student testing, and school report cards. Comments also addressed unique needs of English learners, the types of courses offered or required in school, support for low-performing schools, and a handful of other topics.

## Teacher Support and Evaluation

Under ESSA, rather than being required to develop teacher evaluation systems as under NCLB waivers, states are now “permitted” to implement evaluation systems. States with evaluation systems are required to make the public aware of the criteria they use.

New Mexico’s teacher evaluation system was launched in the 2013-2014 school year. The system aims to identify effective and ineffective educators. Teachers are evaluated using multiple measures to help assess how well they prepare students. These measures include student growth, principal observations, student surveys and teacher attendance. The evaluation is also intended to identify where a teacher may need assistance. The PED proposes to continue the teacher evaluation system under ESSA.

Under ESSA, states may use federal education funding for a wide array of teacher support programs including mentoring, targeted training, teacher academies, and STEM master teaching, etc.

### TEACHER EVALUATION - COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Community meeting participants shared both positive comments and considerable concerns regarding teacher evaluations. Those who appreciated the evaluation system lauded their administration for the transparency of the process, timely dissemination of data and clarity about how to utilize evaluation scores to improve performance in the classroom. Concerns expressed about evaluations were focused more on the evaluation process itself.

Some noted that considerable confusion still exists around evaluations, with others questioning the efficacy of the evaluations as a tool for supporting student learning. Most groups objected to student test scores counting for 50 percent of the evaluation rubric. A wide array of factors impact students’ ability and drive to succeed in school, many argued, much of which fall outside of the teacher’s control, especially for special education teachers some offered. Participants also commented that test scores that do not accurately reflect the level of engagement teachers have with students during instruction time.

Teachers reported that receiving teacher evaluation ratings of “ineffective” without effective recourse, transparency in the evaluation rubric and guidance on how to improve has left many dedicated teachers feeling demoralized.

Further, administrator accountability to ensure impartial and constructive evaluations was questioned by some groups. Others noted that concerns with evaluations are exacerbated by teachers feeling that they have no

voice in developing education policy. To many participants it seems that policy is set “by the numbers” and thus does not consider other factors that contribute to an educator’s success in the classroom.

Suggestions to improve teacher evaluations include:

- Lower the percentage that student test scores count toward teacher evaluations.
- Restructure the administrator observation process so that better promotes transparency, consistency and constructive guidance for classroom instruction.
- Ensure evaluation data transparency and accuracy, and when it is not, correct the data in a timely manner.
- Provide teachers with their evaluations at the beginning of summer break so they have time to review the feedback and improve.
- Adjust the evaluation rubric to better account for students’ cultural and language circumstances (e.g. Native American, English learners, special education, and at-risk students) so that these students’ teachers are more fairly evaluated.

### **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Peer-to-peer collaboration among teachers was overwhelmingly viewed by participants as the most effective and rewarding type of professional development. They noted that the most effective peer-to-peer collaboration requires the support of administrators, a dedicated period of time built into the school-day for teachers to meet consistently during the week and throughout the school year. Teachers reported that peer-to-peer collaboration has resulted in effectively troubleshooting how to best customize instruction for classrooms and individual students, and how to coordinate lessons across disciplines, all of which have improved student learning. Teachers who have effective peer-to-peer collaboration feel that it has allowed them to become student-focused educators who honor their pupil’s voices. All communities noted that peer-to-peer mentorship can also be an effective way to both “reward” experienced educators while strengthening those new to the profession.

Others appreciated the opportunities they received, including those focused on STEM, leadership development and career pathways.

While all participants value educator professional development, many cited budgetary shortfalls as negatively impacting the amount of investment schools can make in professional development.

Autonomy to choose their own resources for classroom instruction was appreciated by many teachers. Some expressed concern that materials were not well distributed throughout districts, leaving teachers unaware of resources available to them. Still others cited a lack of time and training to determine which resources would be most useful to them in the classroom.

Many groups suggested that professional development begins in college when students are training to be teachers. They suggested that more needs to be done to more appropriately and rigorously train and prepare student teachers.

Suggestions to improve professional development include:

- Provided dedicated time in the school-day during the week and throughout the school year for teacher peer-to-peer collaboration

- Provide training on how to best use available resources in the classroom
- Include “regular”, special education and gifted teachers in peer-to-peer collaboration
- Increase student teacher training to one-school-year
- Increase funding for professional development
- Provide teachers training in the following areas:
  - Use of data from student assessments to inform instruction
  - Identify and work with students who have experienced or are experiencing trauma and other home-life challenges
  - Increase information technology literacy
  - Increase cultural competency (including hiring more Native American teachers)
  - Classroom management
  - Additional training for teachers who are not “in-field” teachers (i.e., They are teaching subjects outside of their subject-area training or expertise.)

### TEACHER MORALE

Every community commended teachers for their strong commitment, resilience and hard work, as well as their ability to forge strong bonds with their students. For many, this appreciation also extended to administrators – who participants described as invested and impassioned – as well as school staff, including bus drivers and cafeteria workers. However, all groups expressed concerns regarding low teacher morale citing the following contributing factors:

- Heavy workloads that render preparation challenging
- Large class sizes that do not allow for individual instruction
- Fewer and dwindling stable resources
- Salaries that are not competitive
- Challenges in recruiting and retaining teachers

Suggestions for improving teacher morale include:

- Engage teachers in high-level decision making processes (e.g. development of standard-based guides and textbook selection)
- Allow teachers greater autonomy in selecting resources and create their own individualized instruction on the common core standards, including discretion for designating time parameters for instruction
- Increase the use of block scheduling for larger periods of time for classroom instruction and planning (i.e. 90-minute class periods)
- Expand use of “Work Keys” assessments which are helpful in effectively determining a student’s readiness for courses and career training and for use in other areas
- Hire additional mental health counselors for schools and provided focused support and training for teachers to identify and manage student behavioral issues
- Provide additional funding and resources to schools in rural areas so they can offer a comparable education to schools in urban areas (e.g. funds could be used for teacher recruitment and supports)
- Expand the use of district learning plans to guide teachers

- Increase efforts to cultivate more teachers as educational leaders
- Provide teachers and administrators with access to third-parties who can assist them in supporting struggling students
- Require fewer large-scale changes in the education system, as well as a longer adjustment period when changes do occur
- Establish a mechanism for removing unnecessary, ineffective, inefficient or duplicative required responsibilities and tasks for teachers and administrators

## Student Assessments

Like NCLB, ESSA requires that students take standardized tests to measure progress. However, the new law allows greater flexibility in the selection of the assessment tool. States may use some combination of PARCC, computer-adaptive assessments, SAT, ACT or other nationally recognized assessments. A limited number of states may also apply to develop their own assessment system, but the efforts must be self-funded and meet the same requirements as traditional assessments.

Another change under ESSA reduces the emphasis on standardized “proficiency” measures; instead states will be allowed to also gauge progress by measuring student academic growth.

Additional focus areas for ESSA include required outreach and input from stakeholders including thoughtful inclusion and support of rural school districts.

Beginning in 2015, New Mexico students in grades 3-11 began taking the nationally normed PARCC exams. This set of computer-based assessments are intended to measure whether students are on track for college or careers. New Mexico is one of 11 states using PARCC, and our students are among roughly five million nationally taking the exams. Given the considerable effort by the state, districts and schools to get the effort off the ground, PED recommends that New Mexico remain with PARCC as our ESSA-approved assessment.

In addition, beginning in 2016, most New Mexico students are required to pass the PARCC test to graduate from high school. Students who do not pass PARCC may still earn a high school diploma by meeting an “alternative demonstration of competency” (ADC).<sup>1</sup> ESSA allows states the flexibility to develop ADCs for students who do not pass their high school assessment exam.

### STUDENT ASSESSMENT-COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Some educators and business leaders noted PARCC student assessments as a positive, as they enable them to see New Mexico student performance in relation to their peers across the country. Participants also noted that teachers who receive support from well-trained administrators on how to assess the data also find the PARCC test results to be useful for informing classroom instruction.

Many rural communities have found the PARCC assessments challenging to administer due to lack of reliable broadband access. A limited number of computers also impacts overall student instruction. Further, some groups questioned the accuracy of PARCC assessments in measuring student performance, especially for ELL students. Finally, many communities shared that areas of study not tested that provide for a well-rounded

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<sup>1</sup> (Albuquerque Public Schools, n.d.)

education (e.g. science, social studies, and socioemotional skills) are less emphasized due to the time it takes to prepare students for the assessments.

In all communities, it was the amount of time devoted to testing and re-testing, as opposed to the individual assessments themselves, that created the most concerns. Many shared that teachers have less instructional time and that they sense a lack of balance in classroom planning and structure. Participants explained that many teachers are unclear on what to prioritize, resulting in components of teachers' responsibilities becoming neglected. Some commented that assessment demands have also tempered inspired and innovative teaching.

Participants commented that leadership turnover and instability combined with insufficient training for administrators in assessment systems, inhibits the progress of school staff and engenders a lack of confidence in student assessment data. In addition, a lack of participation among administrators regarding the implementation of policy and accountability measures in this area, noted some, negatively impacts school morale.

Suggestions to improve student assessments include:

- Reduce the overall amount of student testing and number of assessments
- Allow SAT/ACT testing to replace current end of year assessments
- Ensure that all schools have the technological infrastructure in place to support the online assessments and preparation for those assessments
- Add fields that better identify students with special needs or other circumstances that may impede their ability to perform well on the tests (e.g. ELL and special education students)
- Align in a more accurate way what is being tested with what is being taught
- Uphold that all subjects as being equally important for student success and a well-rounded education, regardless of whether students are tested on those subjects

## School Report Cards

Under ESSA, schools must track and report on at least the following five indicators:

1. Proficiency on statewide tests in English language arts and math
2. Growth in proficiency or another academic indicator that can be broken out by subgroup
3. English language proficiency (a new requirement)
4. High school graduation rates
5. A fifth "other" indicator of school quality such as student engagement, educator engagement or school climate/safety

Like NCLB, ESSA also requires that states identify their lowest performing schools using a school grading system. States must also provide targeted support for the following low-performing schools with the following characteristics.

New Mexico currently has a school and district grading system with published school report cards. That system tracks all the five required indicators except English language proficiency.

- High schools in which the graduation rate is consistently less than 67 percent

- The lowest performing five percent of schools in the state
- Schools in which there is a consistent performance gap between subgroups within the same school (e.g. Student Group A representing a race/ethnicity consistently underperforms compared to Student Group B representing a different race/ethnicity.)

### **SCHOOL REPORT CARD – COMMUNITY FEEDBACK**

Community meeting participants, especially parents, grandparents and those engaged in community-wide economic development efforts, found the school grades useful. However, many others noted that continued confusion exists regarding the usefulness of the school report card system and the evaluation scores upon which they are based. Administrators, teachers, and community members feel that the school report card system unfairly negatively labels their schools, teachers, students and their community. Further, they argue that without providing guidance and recourse to improve the schools, a failing school grade undermines the value of the community and more importantly undercuts students' confidence and belief in themselves.

Suggestions to improve institutional report cards:

- Train administrators and school leaders on the school grades system and its components
- Provide consistent, local on-site guidance to school administrators on how to improve school grades
- Provide parents with information on the school grade system and how they can assist in improving school grades

## **English Learners**

The new law contains several changes affecting students whose first language is not English, including changing the preferred terminology to “English learners”. State accountability systems and report cards are required to measure student progress and proficiency for English learners. States must also give English proficiency and math assessments to English learners in their first year in U.S. schools. The law provides options for how states include English learner students in their overall accountability data, enabling them to be phased in over time and as their English improves.

### **ENGLISH LEARNER – COMMUNITY FEEDBACK**

Community meeting participants were happy to see bilingualism being approached by some school districts as both an economic and cultural advantage. However, programs for English learners are reportedly not adequately funded leading to a lack of support for teachers and students. Additionally, some groups noted, English learners traditionally underperform in assessments – as they must often take tests in English rather than their own native languages.

Suggestions for English learner programs include:

- Support licensure of teachers whose native language is not English as well as those who teach English language learners (e.g. Increase the number of teachers with Teacher of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) endorsement)
- Require all teachers to be bilingual within a certain number of years after they were hired to help in communicating with ELL students and also to raise awareness of the benefits of mastering more than one language.

- Encourage schools to become bilingual, teaching students who know English other languages while supporting those who are learning English.
- Partner with community organizations who can provide volunteers, mentors and tutors – all of which offer support to ELLs

## Coursework

Increased course options for students present another set of ESSA reforms. Previously, educators expressed concerns that NCLB’s primary focus on math and reading prevented students from receiving the well-rounded education they need for career readiness. Parents and educators also pointed out the value of other courses (like music or technology) to keeping students engaged in school. Answering these concerns, ESSA allows schools to be evaluated on whether students are provided with a well-rounded education through access to advanced coursework and workplace readiness opportunities and by also expanding the definition of “core academic subjects” to include the humanities, arts and social sciences. The new law also provides additional funds to support science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) programs.

### **COURSEWORK – COMMUNITY FEEDBACK**

Many participants asserted that a more holistic approach should be employed when identifying students’ academic needs and tailoring curriculum and area tracts for students. Overwhelmingly, participants are concerned that the current education system is not meeting the academic needs of the whole child.

General issues regarding coursework include:

- Use of a “one-size fits all” model of instruction
- Lack of differentiated resources for different learning styles
- Insufficient time for students to master concepts
- Insufficient resources for gifted and special education students
- An overemphasis on math and reading for student assessments resulting in less instruction time for other subjects as well as social and emotional learning

### **CULTURALLY RELEVANT CURRICULUM**

Tribal leaders commended the Navajo Nation for taking important steps regarding coursework by developing academic standards and working collaboratively with public schools and PED. They were also pleased with the Navajo, Zuni and Tewa language programs and classes that emphasize and teach indigenous culture – and would like to see these programs expanded in other schools and districts. However, many tribal participants were concerned with the lack of control over the education of their students due to a lack of interjurisdictional alignment and coordination as well as a lack of control over students located in large cities. Additionally, participants felt that many educators and school leaders are not adequately equipped to support the cultural needs of Native American students and indigenous viewpoints.

Suggestions for a more culturally relevant curriculum include:

- Respectful acknowledgment of the Native American tribes and the importance of competency-based training and cultural awareness

- Better coordination by public schools to incorporate the tribal calendar in scheduling
- Engagement of tribal leadership in continuing to advocate for their students attending schools in large cities
- Expand the teaching of Native culture as a way to increase students' self-esteem and pride in their heritage (Tribes have found this to be particularly effective in combating drug and alcohol addiction.)

### **FINE ARTS, STEM AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

Many communities expressed support for fine arts and science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) courses available to their students, with some suggesting that these opportunities are as valuable as other career tracts by offering alternatives for students who are less interested in core academic courses. Many suggested that it is these courses that not only engage students in school but also keep them in school.

While physical education classes were not specifically discussed, some communities wanted to see an increase in recess time that can aid in student wellness and help them to better focus during classroom time.

### **CAREER READINESS AND VOCATIONAL COURSEWORK AND TRACTS**

Overwhelmingly, all communities saw value in increasing access to career readiness and vocational coursework. Business and economic development participants in all communities reported that they have shown a commitment career readiness and vocational education and would like to do more.

Suggestions to improve career readiness and coursework opportunities include:

- Engage more teen centers in providing trade and vocational support
- Increase funding and support for dual credit programs via online learning academies, and between multiple entities including school systems
- Increase the number of guidance counselors and provide enhanced training so that they may better guide all students to reach their unique academic and career goals
- Better prepare students for the track they choose (i.e. college, technical and vocational or career).
- Boost academic achievement in the earlier grade levels to ensure student success in high school and beyond
- Recruit and retain more trade and vocational teachers, including engaging community professionals as classroom instructors

## **Low Performing Schools**

Regarding low-performing schools, ESSA provides for greater flexibility on school "turn-around strategies." These decisions and the responsibility for interventions will first be driven by the schools and districts. Under ESSA, the PED's role is to provide guidance during the turn-around planning process, ensure that the school improvement plans include evidence-based interventions and provide final approval of the plans.

### **EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

All communities cited expansion of early childhood education as working well. More schools are prepared to support younger children shared some participants. Participants with early childhood education in their schools reported that those children are better prepared for elementary school. Participants suggested that access to preschool should be expanded in all communities.

## **WRAP-AROUND FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES**

All participants agreed that there are myriad of reasons why students may struggle in school, namely economic and other home-life challenges that inherently supersede students' motivation and ability to succeed in school. Participants shared that while systemic support for children dealing with inequity in the form of poverty and access issues, social justice barriers, and disabilities, has improved in some areas, considerable barriers still exist. "Whole-level engagement" as a strategy to create improvement throughout the entire community has increased, noted others, with many effective student and family programs available especially in urban areas.

Overwhelmingly, however, participants cited the need for access to a greater array of support services to assist students and their families. While requested by all communities, participants from rural communities observed that the need for wrap-around services is more acute since rural communities typically have very few non-profits and lack a cohesive network of social services. Participants suggested that filling these gaps in services would better ensure student success.

Suggestions for improving wrap-around student and family support services include providing:

- Nutritional food (at home and in school)
- Assistance, at times, with expenses
- Home visits
- Parental support and training
- Community wellness and health programs
- Teen centers
- Support services at schools so that schools are gathering places and community centers (i.e. using a community school model)
- Transportation (in rural locations)
- Support for at-risk, students in foster-care, gifted and special education students
- Students in foster care and system-involved youth with required assurances and strategies to support their educational needs including:
  - That students can remain in their school of origin and are provided transportation to and from the school, or be immediately enrolled in a new school though they may not have all records normally required for enrollment
  - That PED designate an employee to serve as a state point of contact for child welfare agencies to oversee the successful transition and support of these students

## **TRUANCY**

The need to better address the many reasons why students either do not attend and/or do not perform well in school when they do was noted in all meetings. As with wrap-around services, poverty was cited by every group as an issue that impacts student attendance and engagement. Participants shared that many students need to get a job to help support their families rather than attend school, while others are so effected by challenges in their home lives that focusing on school is difficult and feels irrelevant. Additional impacts on student attendance cited by groups include:

- Students home-life difficulties

- Lack of communication between parents, the school and law enforcement
- Inconsistent or ineffective truancy rules
- An inability to break the truancy cycle (Participants noted that parents of truant students were many times truant students themselves.)
- Lack of effective consequences at school and at home
- Unreasonable school start times
- Police presence in schools

Overwhelmingly participants suggested in-school suspension programs and other resources that would address behavioral issues without removing students from school. Participants also suggested establishing more wrap-around truancy prevention teams led by truancy “coaches” to address the underlying reasons for truancy.

### **COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND COLLABORATION**

School-community partnerships, cited many groups, provide volunteers, mentors and tutors to assist administrators and teachers in the classroom. Additionally, noted some participants, businesses and economic development professionals can offer feedback to schools on the skills, knowledge and training industries and businesses need for future employees. This real-world input enables administrators and teachers to focus career-readiness classes so that students graduate with relevant skills that are crucial for their ongoing success. In many areas, especially within rural communities, libraries are becoming a hub for school and community.

One group shared that success happens in environments where partnerships provide a nurturing environment for students. Specific suggestions on where such partnerships and community collaboration could be deepened and better established include between:

- Tribal communities
- Tribal communities and public schools
- Business sectors, communities, schools, nonprofits, and teachers with the specific purpose of helping the whole community have a voice and way to contribute to education in the community
- Schools (for the sharing of best practices)

One group also suggested bringing leaders from all sectors together on a regular basis for multiple meetings to focus on a shared set of goals to help the long-term development of children. This would, they explained, create a backbone structure for education while providing resources that reflect the goals of their communities.

### **Additional Feedback**

Additional focus areas for ESSA include required outreach by state education departments and input from stakeholders including:

- Parental participation
- Authentic engagement with tribal governments and communities

### **PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

Many parents noted their appreciation for open lines of communication and alignment of information and efforts between the teachers, school board and principal. Parents in all groups also expressed appreciation for school districts providing parents with direct email access to teachers, and for schools sending automated

messages by phone and text. One group commended its district for listening to parents' concerns demonstrating that parental feedback was seriously considered and positively impacted school operations. Many participants also appreciated transparency of school budgets.

Many groups expressed appreciation for parents who are highly engaged in the school, with participants (particularly in urban areas) citing multiple avenues for parents to be involved by providing hands-on, experiential learning opportunities and non-academic skills and subjects. A few groups noted that parental engagement is improving, with most identifying a need for increased engagement. Participants cited that the two primary reasons parents are not engaged in the schools are because they themselves did not have positive experiences when they were in school, and many parents feel they are not respected, that their voice is not valued by administrators and teachers.

Participants suggested that education leaders develop effective strategies to engage all parents including:

- Establish clear and consistent ways to communicate with parents
- Educate parents about all aspects of their children's education, including common core, goals, and required paperwork – this will promote parents to partner with teachers
- Conduct a study on how to better engage parents
- Better engage parents who are monolingual (i.e. speak a language other than English), have less formal education, and who did not have positive educational experiences as students
- Provide transportation for parents to attend meetings, events, and programs
- Provide programs, parenting and other courses, and support services at the school (i.e. the community school model)
- Seriously consider parent input and concerns, and respond to parents in a timely manner
- Foster a welcoming environment in the schools for parents and families

### **INTER-JURISDICTIONAL COLLABORATION**

All participants agreed that more needs to be done to better align and coordinate the various government and other entities that govern education in our state. Participants suggested that interjurisdictional collaboration and meaningful communication among the governing bodies would help develop more effective education policies. Tribal leaders called for a more comprehensive tribal consultation process when developing education policy that impacts tribal communities.

# 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 and our state's economic future, allowing students to reach their full potential.

The Public Education Department and New Mexico First appreciate the time, effort and commitment to education of those who participated in the Gallup, Farmington, Santa Fe, Albuquerque, Roswell and Las Cruces and tribal government to government 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 each regional meeting were compiled in individual community reports detailing the most common themes and all suggestions from each community. This final report highlights those ideas that received the most support throughout the full community meeting engagement process. All reports are available at [www.nmfirst.org](http://www.nmfirst.org).