



# ESSA PHASE II STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK REPORT

for the Learning Alliance of New Mexico

March 2017



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*Center for Education Policy Research*

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**MARCH 2017**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On December 10, 2015, President Obama signed into law the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which replaces the now 15-year old No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). ESSA represents the latest iteration of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which was the first attempt by the federal government to expand educational opportunity to all American children through a series of programs providing targeted support for children and schools in low-income communities. Although the goals of NCLB, ESSA's predecessor, were widely shared at the time of passage by both Democrats and Republicans alike, the law had become unworkable in recent years as states and local educational agencies (LEAs) struggled to come to terms with the law's requirement that 100 percent of all students be proficient by 2014. ESSA is important at this time in our nation's history because it represents a significant swing away from the strong federal control exerted by the U.S. Department of Education under its NCLB waiver policy, and toward increased support for state and local control over many aspects of public education, including the development and deployment of state standards, statewide systems of accountability, and statewide assessment systems.

In the fall of 2016, The Learning Alliance of New Mexico (LANM) engaged The University of New Mexico Center for Education Policy Research (CEPR) to conduct the ESSA policy review. As a result of the policy review, LANM, the New Mexico School Superintendents' Association (NMSSA) and the New Mexico Coalition for Charter Schools (NMCCS) created a Stakeholder Feedback Toolkit to garner broad, structured input in the areas of flexibility and opportunity presented by ESSA. The focus areas in which the input was collected were: challenging academic content standards; high-quality student academic assessments, and a state-wide accountability system for teachers and schools.

CEPR conducted a thorough review and analysis of stakeholder feedback data provided by school districts, agencies, and organizations from across New Mexico. The findings are presented in this report, which reflects the feedback from over 4,000 stakeholders from across New Mexico.

### CHALLENGING ACADEMIC CONTENT STANDARDS

The stakeholders prioritized knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for college, career, and life success that are categorized below into three broad areas and that can be foundational to identify and drive standards.

- Awareness
- Life skills
- Literacy and STEM

The stakeholders participating in the focus groups reported that they perceived a gap between what the schools provide as opposed to what the students need, in the following areas:

- College, career, and life skills
- Social/emotional awareness
- Supports

### HIGH-QUALITY STUDENT ACADEMIC ASSESSMENTS

The focus group participants advocated for three strategies that teachers can use to best gauge students' learning.

- Limited testing
- Hands-on work
- Individualized assessment

The participants suggested the following alternative ways the students can demonstrate mastery of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are important for success:

- Projects
- Self-assessment
- Collaboration
- Application to real life
- Verbal communication

## **TEACHER ACCOUNTABILITY**

The participants prioritized information important in identifying teachers' strengths and areas of improvement as:

- Student assessment outcomes as a factor
- Classroom observations
- Parent and student surveys
- Teacher self-evaluation

Participants recommended the following supports for teachers:

- Professional development, instructional support, and guidance
- Respect and understanding; leadership and ownership in the classroom
- Better compensation

## **SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY**

Participants emphasized important aspects of schools to be measured or counted in the school accountability system that currently are not measured or counted.

- Student-focused school culture
- Teacher and staff work ethic and attitudes
- Family and community relations

Participants recommended the following supports for struggling schools:

- Assessment reforms
- Investment in teacher quality
- Adequate school funding and other resources; community supports

## INTRODUCTION

The Learning Alliance of New Mexico (LANM) commissioned the University of New Mexico Center for Education Policy Research (CEPR) to conduct a research project that comprised of two distinct phases and foci. The Phase I involved the policy review of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), completed in August 2016.<sup>1</sup> This law increases policy-making power of states. Thus, stakeholders in New Mexico have an opportunity to voice their concerns, opinions, and recommendations to the legislators and the New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED), and to impact policy. The Phase II of the CEPR-LANM project aimed to collect and analyze stakeholder feedback on New Mexico's education system and to provide input to the state legislators and policymakers for the implementation of ESSA. CEPR took the lead in preparing the present report that is based on the analysis of stakeholder feedback summary reports. The stakeholder feedback summary reports reflected the data collected in over 350 focus groups incorporating more than 4,000 participants.

## OUTLINE OF THE REPORT

The report will discuss the methods and processes used to collect stakeholder input. The subsequent sections of the report will follow the order of topics covered by the focus group protocol - challenging academic content standards; high-quality student academic assessments, and a state-wide accountability system for teachers and schools. The last section of the report presents concluding remarks about the context and purpose of the project, and key observations included in the report.

## METHODS AND PROCESSES

LANM partnered with local groups to get stakeholder feedback for the implementation of ESSA by coordinating focus group efforts across New Mexico via community groups, charter schools, and districts. The New Mexico School Superintendents' Association (NMSSA), the New Mexico Coalition for Charter Schools (NMCCS), and LANM shared outreach efforts. LANM worked with NMSSA and NMCCS to develop a Stakeholder Feedback Toolkit.<sup>2</sup> The Toolkit was designed to support broad stakeholder engagement, as encouraged by ESSA, to inform state, district and school educational plans. NMSSA distributed the Toolkit and information about ESSA to its 89 members and 7 districts responded with stakeholder input syntheses (3,683 participants). NMCCS distributed the Toolkit and information about ESSA to its 97 members and 15 charter schools responded with input (79 participants). LANM distributed the Toolkit and information about ESSA to 79 community organizations (10 business groups, 30 nonprofits, 11 education support entities, 12 funders, 5 higher education groups, 2 media groups, 6 state groups and 3 unions) and 17 community organizations responded with input (313 participants).

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<sup>1</sup>The University of New Mexico Center for Education Policy Research, "Every Student Succeeds Act Policy Review", August 2016.

<sup>2</sup>Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) New Mexico Stakeholder Input Toolkit available at <http://learningalliancencm.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/NM-ESSA-Stakeholder-Input-Toolkit.pdf>

<b>Partner</b>	<b>Outreach</b>	<b>Participant Yield</b>
NM School Superintendents' Association	89 Members Districts (7 responded) <sup>3</sup>	3,683
NM Coalition for Charter Schools	97 Member Charter Schools (15 responded)	79
Learning Alliance of New Mexico	10 Business Groups 30 Nonprofits 11 Education Supports 12 Funders 5 Higher Ed Groups 2 Media Groups 6 State Agencies 3 Labor Unions	313
	<b>Total Participants</b>	<b>4,075</b>

## CREATION OF THE CODING CATEGORIES

Researchers coded input using 23 categories. Initial coding categories aligned with the LANM values framework: “achievement and equity,” “worldview,” “holistic,” “asset-based innovation,” “respectful,” and “urgency.” The categories adapted to align with more frequently used language, i.e. “asset-based innovation” became “problem-solving” and “urgency” became “responsiveness/urgency.” Researchers expanded categories beyond the values framework to accurately reflect common ideas heard throughout focus groups. (See Appendix A)

## PROCEDURES FOR CONDUCTING THE FOCUS GROUPS

The ESSA Toolkit provided procedures for conducting the focus groups including a step-by-step guide (pp. 4 – 5) and Protocol (pp. 6 – 8). The Protocol was offered as a guide and not a requirement. A training video posted on YouTube provided further procedural recommendations.<sup>4</sup> Additional Toolkit resources to assist with procedure included aligned questions for specific groups: Students, Educators, Families and Community Members and Combined (pp. 10 – 23); a facilitator guide (p. 24); note taker templates (pp. 25 – 36); an optional participation agreement form (p. 38); a template for synthesis (p. 40); and strategies for leaders to host focus groups (pp. 41 – 42).

## PROCESS USED TO DEVELOP THE SUMMARIES

The Toolkit recommended that superintendents appoint a lead on the stakeholder input process and summary. Charter school leaders could do the same – appoint a lead within the school to guide the process. For community organizations, often the individual who coordinated and facilitated the focus groups wrote the summary. When LANM conducted focus groups for community organizations, LANM summarized raw notes distilling verbatim responses into stakeholder input response forms.

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<sup>3</sup>Albuquerque Public Schools (APS): Focus groups were conducted in most of 145 APS traditional schools, and included staff and parents. APS also conducted four community forums with average six focus groups in each. An APS administrator made an estimate that APS focus groups included over 2,000 participants. In other words, participants from APS made about half of all the stakeholder focus-group participants, feedback from whom is presented in this report. The APS summary report is included as Appendix B, as an example of the summary reports CEPR and LANM received from stakeholder groups.

<sup>4</sup><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=201wbHg7LdE&feature=youtu>

## THE ANALYSIS OF FOCUS GROUP DATA

LANM collected the summaries from the stakeholder group leads. The CEPR and LANM research team coded and analyzed the text, identifying key concepts and themes. Finally, CEPR compiled this report from the analysis of qualitative data generated by the focus groups. The summary from APS was treated as a special case because APS alone accounted for about half of all the focus groups of participants. The APS summary is included as Appendix B to showcase the Stakeholder Input Return Form format.

This report presents the stakeholder feedback, highlighting the key themes in the sections that follow. Focus group questions are listed at the head of the sections reporting participants' responses. Please note that the phrases "stakeholders," "focus group participants," "participants," "members," and "respondents" are used interchangeably throughout the report. They refer to the stakeholders who participated in the focus groups for this project.

## ANALYSIS OF THE SUMMARY REPORTS

The focus groups followed a protocol that included questions for the stakeholders in four key areas of public education: challenging academic content standards; high-quality student academic assessments, and a state-wide accountability system for teachers and schools. Stakeholder groups conducted multiple focus groups and submitted a summary of the qualitative data collected from the cluster of focus groups. The following sections provide the most common themes and shared concepts that emerged from the analysis of summary reports from stakeholder groups.

### CHALLENGING ACADEMIC CONTENT STANDARDS

**Think for a moment about the knowledge, skills, and attitudes important in life and the workforce. When our kindergartner's today graduate from high school in 2028/29, which of these will be most important to their career and life success?**

The focus group participants contended that the students would need the following skills:

1. Awareness
  - a. Social/emotional awareness
  - b. Agency (Self-awareness)
  - c. Worldview (Cultural awareness)
2. Life skills
  - a. Critical thinking
  - b. Collaboration
  - c. Communication
  - d. Problem solving
  - e. Accountability
3. Literacy and STEM

### AWARENESS

The participants indicated that students need to be aware of themselves and others; they must learn to control emotions and self-regulate, and also show empathy and understanding for others. Students have drastic social and emotional needs and the schools must determine a way to integrate more meaningful services into the school day so students have a foundation for learning. Students also need to learn to respect different cultures, languages, and show global awareness.

### *Social/emotional awareness*

The stakeholders asserted that social/emotional skills are the most important ones students should learn in school to prepare for their career and life success. Students need to be able to self-regulate, motivate themselves, demonstrate perseverance, and have empathy. They need to be able to recognize and manage their emotions and learn how to handle stress, so that they can focus on academics. It is difficult to teach to a child who is unable to focus because he or she is upset about a problem at home or elsewhere. Participants maintain that schools should offer support to students that have problems at home.

### *Agency (Self-awareness)*

One of the most frequently stated desirable attributes was students exerting personal control or power over their own education. Coded as “agency,” this refers to the focus group participants’ belief that students need to be responsible for their own education. Students should take ownership and work hard in school. Students need to self-reflect and be active learners in the classroom. A student may have the best teacher but unless he or she wants to learn, the teacher will not be able to reach that child. The child needs to be motivated and resilient.

### *Worldview (Cultural awareness)*

Worldview refers to respect for language, culture, history, and global perspective. Students should learn to be respectful towards other cultures. Students also need to learn about their own culture. It is important for them to have a sense of connectedness to the world. They need to appreciate diversity and others languages. It will be beneficial for the students to be knowledgeable of the history of the world and of their own state.

## **LIFE SKILLS**

The participants were clear that academic performance is contingent upon fostering in students positive social, collaboration, and communication skills that borrow from unique experiences in their homes and communities. Participants believed that focusing solely on academics was irresponsible for the schools. Life skills include personal and work skills that students need to succeed in life that includes college and career. The participants reported that students must cultivate life skills such as adaptability, budgeting, civic duty, and balancing aspects of life. Participants also stated that students need career and workforce knowledge. The focus group participants frequently discussed the following skills as most important.

### *Critical thinking*

An important skill students should learn in school is to demonstrate critical thinking. Participants contended that students must learn to be open-minded, analyze information, and look at situations from various perspectives. Participants also stated that students should develop related skills such as research, problem-solving, strategizing, and focusing.

### *Collaboration*

Participants believed that students need to learn to collaborate with others. When they prepare to enter the workforce, they would need to know how to work with others, in teams. Participants mentioned that, in order to be successful in the workplace, students must learn how to work with different personality types and get along with authority figures.

### *Communication*

Focus group participants maintained that students must learn to be effective communicators. They need to know how to express their ideas and to listen to others in verbal and written communication. Students also need to develop non-verbal communication skills.

### *Problem solving*

It was reported that students should acquire problem-solving skills. They need to be creative and find different ways to resolve issues. They must be able to explore resources and find information they need. This tool is important for college success and in the workforce.

### *Accountability*

Focus group respondents stated that students need to learn that they should be accountable for their actions. They must learn to be responsible, trustworthy, punctual, and know time management. Learning these skills will help them navigate the world.

## LITERACY AND STEM

Focus group members expressed that literacy is a necessity for any young adult to succeed in life. Students must learn how to read and write proficiently when entering the world of college and career. They also need to have basic math skills. Stakeholders deemed technology aptitude and Science-Technology-Engineering-Math (STEM) knowledge and skills to be important for the students to prepare for a career. It is crucial for the students to know how to use technology. Math and science education is important for students to succeed in this century.

### **Which of these knowledge, skills and attitudes important in life and the work force are schools currently developing in students?**

Stakeholders reported multiple skills and attitudes that are important in life and the work force schools are currently developing in students:

1. Literacy and STEM
2. Social/emotional awareness
3. Critical thinking and problem solving
4. Accountability

## LITERACY AND STEM

Participants reported that schools are currently providing reading and writing instruction in the classrooms. It is important for any successful person in society to be able to write well and comprehend reading material. These skills are critical for most jobs and career paths.

Schools are teaching science, math, and technology use. The schools are asking students to do their work online, which is teaching them how to use computers. Not all students have computer access at home so it is important for the schools to provide such access. Students are also learning basic math and science skills.

## SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL AWARENESS

Stakeholders reported that students are learning to advocate for themselves and also have empathy for others. The schools are teaching the importance of self-esteem. Teachers are setting the example in the classrooms. A good attitude by the teacher shows the students how they should operate.

## CRITICAL THINKING AND PROBLEM SOLVING

Students are learning to be curious and comprehend what they are learning. Schools are teaching students to solve problems.

## ACCOUNTABILITY

Students are learning how to be accountable by learning time management, work ethic, and respect. However, it was also reported that some of these are lost along the way. Less frequently, the participants also mentioned that schools are teaching self-discipline, life skills, and team work to students.

### **Please explain any disconnects you see between what our graduates need and what they are currently learning in today's school system.**

1. College, career, and life skills
  - a. Curriculum and testing
  - b. STEM
  - c. Communication
2. Social/emotional awareness
3. Supports

## COLLEGE, CAREER, AND LIFE SKILLS

Participants asserted that students should learn skills directed to life as a whole. Not all students will be going to college; hence, there needs to be a focus on teaching them skills they will need when they graduate high school and enter the job market. Participants said students need to learn skills such as budgeting money and applying to jobs. According to some respondents, while students are constantly being tested, testing has limited connection to the “real world.”

### *Curriculum and testing*

Stakeholders emphasized that students are tested too much; they are unable to truly focus on conceptual learning because they are worried about all the testing. There was also a concern about frequent changes in testing. Moreover, another concern was there is a disconnect between those who create the curriculum and those who teach it in the classroom. This disconnect forces the teachers to teach to the test rather than for the child to learn the curriculum.

### *STEM*

Stakeholders emphasized that students need to learn to work with technology, and to use the computer properly. Students are not learning enough science to be successful in college, according to the participants.

### *Communication*

It is important for students to learn how to communicate effectively and express their ideas both in writing and orally. Schools should focus on teaching students communication skills.

## SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL AWARENESS

The participants contended that they would like for the schools to teach students how to deal with their emotions. Schools need to focus on helping students have positive attitude and perseverance. The participants maintained that students need to learn how to be empathetic towards others and also how to approach their own trauma.

## SUPPORTS

Stakeholders maintained that students, parents, and teachers need better support systems; also, resources being offered are limited. The participants see the teacher/students ratio as a huge issue. Teachers have to deal with large classes made of students with a wide range of abilities. Teachers are unable to offer enough support to each individual student because they are spread too thin. There are families that are unable to be

involved in their students' learning because they work many jobs or have issues at home. Stakeholders said that one reason for the disconnect is a lack of adequate funding and other resources.

### **Thinking about all your answers, what were the most important things you learned while you were in school that have supported your career and life success?**

A small number of participants who responded to this question reported that they learned self-discipline, self-motivation, self-advocacy, persistence, and adaptability in school. Participants said they learned how to be independent while in school. They also acquired skills such as working in teams and responding to different personality types.

## HIGH-QUALITY STUDENT ACADEMIC ASSESSMENTS

### **Part of a school's job is to make sure students successfully acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that they will need later in life. In your experience, how can teachers tell whether students have learned what they need to?**

#### **Of all these different ways that teachers have assessed students' learning, which do you think have been most helpful?**

Participants overwhelmingly agreed that bubble tests and annual tests are the least helpful for parents to understand how their student is performing in school and for teachers to design methods to support struggling students. Participants overwhelmingly believed that pre- and post-testing was a method of assessment the schools should use when monitoring what students learned. The participants also agreed that interim assessments were valuable for teachers and parents to engage in different strategies to help struggling students improve.

The stakeholders suggested the following ways to assess students:

1. Limited testing
2. Hands-on work
3. Individualized assessments

### LIMITED TESTING

Testing is one way the teachers can gauge whether students have learned the material they have been offered. However, testing should not be the only way to evaluate if a child has learned the material. Moreover, teachers are not fully informed what a student will be tested on. Participants asserted that teachers should be encouraged to create tests to evaluate their students' learning. Tests should tell the teachers what the students are missing. Participants emphasized that the PARCC is the least valuable of the tests.

### HANDS-ON WORK

Hands-on work such as quizzes, homework, presentations, projects, writing, and assignments that allow practice are considered useful by many participants. Not all students test well; each student is unique. Hence, general tests should not be the only assessments. Students need to receive feedback from their assignments allowing them to learn from their mistakes.

#### **Participants observed that:**

More funding is required to implement different forms of assessments. Smaller classroom sizes will allow teachers to evaluate their students properly. Teachers need to be given autonomy so they can create their own assessments. Students need to be tested based on their capabilities. If a child is in special education, their tests should be for that particular capability.

## INDIVIDUALIZED ASSESSMENTS

Each child is unique and should be tested as such. Some of the ways to assess a student individually is through portfolios. Students need to see their progress from the beginning to the end of the year. This will allow the student to self-reflect and be involved in their own education. Stakeholders stated another way to ensure we are evaluating each student effectively is by teacher observations of each student. It is important for teachers to track a student's learning. The teacher-student relationship is an effective way to tell whether a child has learned. Teachers are the ones that can estimate whether or not a student understands new concepts.

Some participants believed peer mentoring and students teaching each other are effective ways for learning. This portrays a level of critical thinking and also that they are learning how to effectively communicate their ideas. Students may also lead class discussions.

Additionally, the participants suggested performance-based assessments for performing and fine arts, parent feedback, and culturally relevant tests as other forms of assessments.

### **What ideas do you have for alternative ways students can demonstrate mastery of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are important for success?**

Participants mentioned many alternative ways students can demonstrate mastery of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are important for success.

1. Projects
2. Self-assessment
3. Collaboration
4. Application to real life
5. Verbal communication

## PROJECTS

Students can show their knowledge through project-based presentations, portfolios, group work, observations, oral exams, and answering questions by their teachers. Students could do science projects, math projects that apply to real life, and give technology presentations to demonstrate their knowledge.

## SELF-ASSESSMENT

Participants thought that students need to be aware of their work and progress. Students should be more accountable for their learning, assess their own progress, and must learn to self-reflect on what they learned, e.g. through a portfolio.

## COLLABORATION

The participants elaborated that an alternative way to demonstrate mastery is through collaboration; students working together helping one another understand the material better. Parents and teachers also need to work together to ensure the child is learning and strategize if they are not learning the material.

## APPLICATION TO REAL LIFE

The participants emphasized the importance of students learning basic life skills. Students need to show schools that they will be able to thrive independently after high school. One way of evaluating them would be to show them real life scenarios and ask what they would do. Project-based learning is a way to teach them real life skills, which can be assessed through their presentations.

## VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Another alternative is for the students to be assessed orally, perhaps through discussions in small groups. It is important for students to be able to express themselves effectively not just in writing. There needs to be assessments that test this skill. Testing is mostly done on a computer or paper. However, students need to be assessed on their communication skills with oral assessments.

## STATEWIDE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS: TEACHER ACCOUNTABILITY

**As is true with most professionals, teachers are evaluated. Teacher evaluations include how well they are working with students in their classrooms and identifying areas where teachers are strong and where they might need some additional support. What kind of information is important in figuring out teachers' strengths and areas for improvement?**

NMPED implements teacher accountability by conducting teacher evaluations based on a formula that relies on different data points.

Overwhelmingly, participants agreed that teachers should be evaluated in our schools and held accountable considering they have important responsibilities. The respondents believed that basing teacher evaluations on student test scores was inappropriate. They felt strongly that accountability of teachers should be a collaborative process where teachers, supervisors and peers all play a role in evaluating and supporting teachers, especially those who struggle. When asked what information is useful in determining the teachers' strengths and areas of improvement, the stakeholders referred to and weighed in on following key points.

1. Annual student assessment outcomes as a factor
2. Classroom observations
  - a. Individualized and differentiated instruction
  - b. Student engagement
3. Parent and student surveys
4. Teacher self-evaluation
5. Other suggestions from the participants

## ANNUAL STUDENT ASSESSMENT OUTCOMES AS A FACTOR

While stakeholders thought students' performance on standardized tests and other state and district assessments should be just one of the many criteria for evaluating teachers, others said that assessment outcomes should be a major factor in teacher evaluation. Some said student growth should be an accountability measure, not the raw test scores.

Many focus group participants, however, asserted that assessments should not be included in teacher evaluations at all and said teachers should be evaluated on their performance in the classroom, classroom culture, and instruction. Focus group participants stated that teachers will not get good evaluations when they teach disadvantaged students.

Participants suggested that evaluations are for improvement. They should be used to strategize solutions to increase the level of expertise by shadowing mentor teachers, and observing colleagues that successfully implement curriculum.

## CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

Stakeholders viewed accountability more broadly, as a collaborative process that includes peers and is guided by master teachers and administrators. Teachers should collaborate with peers. Stakeholders did not see much benefit in judging teachers or measuring their value in terms of student performance and growth on standardized testing. Stakeholders believed observations by peers, master teachers and coaches, and administrators to be valuable for accountability purposes as well as teacher improvement. The feedback should be followed by necessary supports. They recommended informal walk-throughs and formal evaluations, and observation rubrics. Participants strongly emphasized that teachers should be observed for improvement, not evaluation.

### *Individualized and differentiated instruction*

Stakeholders emphasized that teacher evaluation should take into account if the teacher meets the needs of individual students or subpopulations. Stakeholders often said that the student should be treated as a whole child, respected, and receive needed supports in education.

### *Student engagement*

Some participants said that teachers should be held accountable for positively engaging students. Students should feel good about themselves and their strengths. Teachers should be able to showcase their students' work and show their growth. Low teacher/student ratio, less testing, reporting and paperwork, and more time with the students are important considerations.

## PARENT AND STUDENT SURVEYS

Stakeholders strongly believed that feedback communicated by the parents and students is critical in evaluating whether a teacher had an impact on student learning. Participants said that the teacher's relationship with the students and their families is a measure of teacher effectiveness. Surveys should show that the students feel good about themselves and reflect self-efficacy. Some viewed anonymous feedback to be more useful than feedback with names listed.

## TEACHER SELF-EVALUATION

Some stakeholders proposed that self-evaluation should be a component in teacher evaluation. Video recording classrooms and then sharing those videos with master teachers for finding areas of improvement is beneficial for the teachers and students.

## OTHER SUGGESTIONS FROM THE PARTICIPANTS

Here are additional suggestions for teacher evaluation.

- Students are prepared for the next grade
- Students are learning effectively, and happy and engaged.
- Multiple and varying sources of data on the student are collected and used to get a complete and valid picture of student growth and achievement.
- Students are tracked past high school which will provide information on real life application of what the teachers taught.
- Student attendance is an important component.
- Feedback from past students is helpful.
- Evaluations should not be punitive or hurtful.

## What is the best way the district or others can support struggling teachers?

Participants suggested three focus areas to support teachers:

1. Professional development, instructional support, and guidance
2. Respect and understanding; leadership and ownership in the classroom
3. Better compensation

### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT, AND GUIDANCE

Stakeholders emphasized providing effective professional development (PD) in instructional areas as well as in classroom management. PD should be relevant for the teachers and focused on their subject areas. PD should be individualized as needed. Moreover, the respondents suggested ongoing supports that included peer mentorship, high-quality instructional coaches, and administrator involvement and backing.

Stakeholders said schools should make resources available to teachers by hiring master teachers, coaches, or retired highly effective teachers. There should be follow up and ongoing feedback to make adjustments and assess progress, making teachers more effective. Peer-mentorship was also viewed as an effective strategy. Respondents also emphasized the following: Help teachers become successful in managing the classroom and providing high-quality instruction. Explain to the teachers realities of the communities they are serving. Address challenges with comprehensive and localized educator preparation.

The participants emphasized that the schools must create a collaborative environment that is nurturing. Teacher supports may include common preparation time, team work, and professional learning communities. Weight the scores for teachers who serve students with economic and educational challenges.

New teachers and struggling teachers should receive a road map and guidance in curriculum, lesson planning, and pedagogy.

### RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING; LEADERSHIP AND OWNERSHIP IN THE CLASSROOM

Stakeholders held that teachers should be respected and understood for the work they do. Teachers should have less paperwork to fill out and more time with their students. Participants said teachers should be considered leaders of their classrooms, and in-charge of assessments and curricula. Value teachers and listen to them. Teachers should be able to voice concerns without repercussions.

Parents should be part of the conversation to address student attendance and academic issues. Teachers should receive support to connect with students and families.

### BETTER COMPENSATION

Focus group participants felt that teaching should be incentivized with better salaries and other measures. Many advocated that teachers should receive better pay which will attract more talent and create competition. Better compensation also implies more respect and value for the teachers' work which is due to them. Some argued that there should be better resource allocation for schools and education in general.

**A full and well-rounded picture of how well a teacher is doing should be created. This can mean teacher observations, evaluations, student and parent feedback, etc.**

## STATEWIDE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS: SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY

**Remembering what you answered about knowledge, skills and attitudes kindergartners will need in the year 2028/2029, please discuss the following.**

**Yes/No Poll – Do you feel like your school addresses what you feel is most important for your student’s success?**

**Those who answered yes: How does your school address the needed areas?**

Respondents strongly expressed that the current accountability system misses the mark on key indicators of school performance. Schools that are performing well are those that foster environments that respect individual students, their experiences, and their families. They are also schools with high expectations of students and make a focused effort to connect the standards taught in classrooms to the world outside of the school.

These are some of things that schools are addressing:

1. Instructional programs, interventions, and positive school climate
2. Meeting the needs of students and families
3. Teachers meeting student needs
4. Parent/community involvement

### INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS, INTERVENTIONS, AND POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE

The participants elaborated on the policies and practices that showed their schools were on the right path. They reported that the schools have a common vision and mission which provides a basis for collaborative work across schools, and that many schools celebrate multiculturalism in their buildings and the communities. Many schools reportedly have strong dual-language bilingual programs.

According to the participants, some schools build strong internal relationships and support system. “My school has a collaborative focus in making decisions,” one participant said. Teachers, counselors, custodians – all respect and collaborate with each other. Parental involvement accepted and encouraged.

Some respondents said their schools have strong intervention programs; others said they have well-rounded education, reading interventions, field trips that challenge and stimulate students. Many schools have an intervention called AVID<sup>5</sup> (Advancement via Individual Determination). Some schools have assemblies for rewards to motivate students.

Some participants described focused strategies in their schools such as small groups by ability and personal learning plans. Schools provide opportunities for students to explore interests, be creative, and become life-long learners. There is support for technology and non-core classes. Some schools provide problem-based learning.

The participants reported school advisory committees emphasizing life skills and career readiness. According to participants, some schools have career focus, tailored to students’ specific needs. Some schools have 9th-grade academy to learn non-cognitive skills. Some schools have implemented *Early Warning Indicators*, a strategy to identify students that are at-risk for falling behind their grade level or off-track for high school graduation.

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<sup>5</sup>AVID is a college readiness program targeting the least served students in the academic middle who have the capacity to succeed but need extra support and direction. AVID’s Mission: To close the achievement gap by preparing all students for college readiness and success in a global society.

## SCHOOLS MEETING THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

Schools help students and families when they ask for help. Schools serve up counseling and support programs for students who need them. Schools sometimes provide wrap-around services to meet the needs of students and families so the students would be ready to learn.

## TEACHERS MEETING STUDENT NEEDS

Some participants said they have excellent teachers who put in 100 percent although there are limited resources. Teachers go out of the way to help students. The participants also said that teachers in their schools are teaching what can be applied in the real world.

## PARENT/COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Parent support and involvement is critical in schools. They should feel safe to speak up. The community engagement is vital to create safe and effective environments.

Participants claimed that schools try to serve, but plates are too full and systems are strained. Deficits are based on funding limitations.

### **Those who answered no: How could your school improve in order to address the areas?**

1. Student-focused supports
2. Teacher improvement strategies

## STUDENT-FOCUSED SUPPORTS

The participants pointed out that all students should get attention. Schools should provide career counseling. College and career should be emphasized, not just college. Schools may consider providing additional supports for the students whose parents are not interested.

Extra-curricular activities such as life-skills classes should be offered to the students for well-rounded development: financial literacy, typing, home economics, wood shop, computer classes, etc. Schools should deliver whole-child approach, social skills and self-discipline, multiple opportunities, and a collective perspective on how to serve students.

## TEACHER IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

Some teachers may not be invested or competent to teach at the standard held by the evaluation system. Teachers are stressed by the mandates. They need support. More parent-teacher communication needed about how the students are doing.

### **What do you wish was measured/could be counted at your school that currently is not measured/counted? (Note: Many of the following are included in the accountability and evaluation systems but still are reported here because that is what the participants said)**

1. Student-focused school culture
2. Teacher and staff work ethic and attitudes
3. Family and community relations

## STUDENT-FOCUSED SCHOOL CULTURE

Stakeholders recommended that statistically sound methods of student, as well as school, evaluations need to be developed. They also reflected that qualitative measures of learning should be used. Participants argued that when assessing students, their love of learning and effort, willingness to take risks, life skills, and work ethic should be part of assessment measures. Participants contended that accountability measures

should include career and college success, giving back to the community, and ability to apply skills learned. Participants emphasized that evaluations should gauge if the students feel safe and if they feel happy in school.

Schools should be accountable for the level of differentiation. Other school evaluation measures that were suggested included student, staff, and parent satisfaction; caring community; staff creativity; and collaboration.

## TEACHER AND STAFF WORK ETHIC AND ATTITUDES

Participants said that accountability should include teachers' and staff members' dedication, and long hours worked. Great effort goes in to improving student attendance. School counselors, teachers, and staff must work together exhibiting creativity and collaboration. The implementation of common vision and mission should show that the whole instructional team works well. Also, ask teachers if they feel supported, and if they receive consistent leadership, resources, and professional development.

## FAMILY AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Participants maintained that accountability reports should include school-family-community communication and engagement, services and supports offered, and before-after school programs conducted for the students and school community. Accountability should include services to the community, safe environment, inclusiveness, and friendliness of the staff. The schools should get marks for bilingual programs, equity, and cultural sensitivity. It is important to measure how the school is contributing to the community, and how it is addressing the needs of specific populations. The community should be able to provide feedback about the principal, administration, and teachers.

The participants maintained that most schools do things well. Deficits are caused by a lack of funding. The sentiment was "The things we do not do well are the things we cannot afford to do well."

### **What is the best way that the state and a district can support struggling schools?**

Some participants complained that part of the reason schools struggle is programs and their implementation change too quickly and the "turnover" rate in school programming leaves teachers unable to implement any strategy with fidelity.

Stakeholders pointed out the following key areas where supports are needed for struggling schools.

1. Assessment reforms
2. Investment in teacher quality
3. Adequate school funding, community supports, and other resources

## ASSESSMENT REFORMS

Stakeholders said that school and teacher accountability should redirect focus away from testing and toward student learning, with attention to student growth. There should be less testing and more time for teaching. Also, participants strongly believed that assessments should look and feel drastically different. An overwhelming majority of participants demanded assessments be personalized to meet the unique learning styles of students. Portfolios, project based learning, presentations and role reversal were discussed. It is clear that assessment is valuable for teachers, parents, and students. However, participants want policy makers to develop assessments that are reflective of real life and personalized.

## INVEST IN TEACHER QUALITY

Participants said pay teachers a fair wage. Give teachers incentives to stay and work above and beyond expectation. Treat teachers like professionals. Provide high-quality and need-based professional development. Share best practices. Create collaborative environments; provide more planning and prep

time. Schools and teachers should examine why students are struggling and find ways to mitigate the students' struggles, improving their performance. Provide meaningful PD that can be applied immediately. The teacher should communicate to the parents what is expected at the grade level of their student.

## ADEQUATE SCHOOL FUNDING, COMMUNITY SUPPORTS, AND OTHER RESOURCES

Participants stated that struggling schools needed additional supports from the State and the district. Supports include: increased mentorship and collaboration opportunities for staff, more poverty awareness training, and additional staff to intervene when a student struggles with issues outside the classroom. The state and school districts should enhance school funding and other much needed supports and resources. Provide adequate resources and materials for classrooms. Reduce class size. Offer turn-around models for failing schools. Provide more resources for school with low-income minority communities. Focus on providing more opportunities for students to grow.

Stakeholders said that there should be more local control and community should brainstorm how to create an ideal school. Parents should clearly be informed about their students' performance and must understand the report card. Many supported culturally relevant curriculum. Participants thought the districts and PED should share best practices with schools.

Stakeholders said school allocations should be based on the needs of the school community; the SES component should be taken into account in the budget. Money should be allocated to social services. Perhaps incentivize the best principals and teachers to work in struggling schools.

**The best way that the state and a district can support struggling schools is by funding schools properly!!! Get us the resources that we need, pay fully for our textbooks – not just for 1/3 of the cost.**

**Struggling schools should be structured after high-performing schools. Look at what is working and implement it in schools that are struggling.**

**Increase innovation and flexibility at schools, in assessments, curriculum and instruction.**

## CONCLUSION

The Obama administration signed into law the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in December 2015. The ESSA provides New Mexico the opportunity to re-engage with students, educators, district leaders, families, and the community for input on improving our education system. The NMPED has invited community and stakeholder feedback to improve New Mexico's education system, and better support schools, teachers, and students. LANM collaborated with partners NMSSA and NMCCS, and facilitated focus groups representing stakeholder groups across New Mexico. Focus group feedback can substantially inform the implementation of ESSA to improve education in New Mexico. CEPR took the lead in producing the current report that is based on the analysis of focus group summary reports.

This report represents the voices of more than 4,000 focus group participants from well over 350 focus groups. The focus groups incorporated a wide variety of stakeholders including teachers, parents, students, school staff and administrators, community members, representatives from the business community, non-profits, funders, state agencies, labor representatives, and more.

The Stakeholders seemed to share many common concerns such as the validity of teacher and school accountability systems, and state and district student assessments. They lamented that the schools lack adequate resources to support students and teachers. Stakeholders suggested that teacher evaluations should include classroom observations and other qualitative data. They emphasized that students, along with literacy and STEM, should receive a greater variety of extra-curricular activities with an emphasis on life

skills. They asserted that we need to put more energy into preparing students for college and/or career. The stakeholders clearly signaled that we must provide more focused professional development and mentoring for teachers with a follow up, and incentivize and show respect for the teaching profession.

This report has systematically presented the stakeholders' concerns, expectations, and recommendations in key areas of the education system – challenging academic content standards; high-quality student academic assessments, and a state-wide accountability system for teachers and schools. The stakeholders have also offered their innovative ideas to improve results for the students, communities, education system, and the New Mexico economy.



*Center for Education Policy Research*

# Appendix

## APPENDIX A

<b>Coding Categories</b>	<b>Description</b>
Accountability	Responsible for outcomes
Achievement	Specific to academic success
Agency	Personal control
Application to real life	Translation from theory to practice
Collaboration	Teamwork; group effort
Communication	Relay information between and among groups
Critical-thinking	Analysis and synthesis
Equity	Sense of fairness
Extracurricular activities	Classes and programs offered beyond standard curriculum
Higher expectations	Belief in potential to be more successful
Holistic	Focus on the whole child/teacher/system
Literacy	Familiarity and savviness with a subject
Personalization	Customization to benefit the individual
Problem-Solving	Creativity; innovation
Relevancy	Meaningful; connects world to humans and vice versa
Respectful	Appreciation as humans; not parts of a system
Responsiveness/Urgency	Meets students/teachers/system where they are with immediacy
Rigor	High quality and thoroughness
Social/emotional learning	Beyond cognitive understanding
Socioeconomics	Contextualizing how income influences outcomes
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, Math
Support	Systems to encourage success
Worldview	Respect for language, culture, history and global perspective

## APPENDIX B

### New Mexico Every Student Succeeds Act, ESSA Stakeholder Engagement Focus Group Input Return Form

#### Overview

Thank you for hosting focus groups and collecting stakeholder input. Please use this form to provide information about your district, charter or organization and to synthesize the stakeholder input you received.

#### Information

We ask for the following information to categorize your input. Like focus group participants, your individual district, charter or organization will not be identified by name in the statewide synthesis. Rather, we will relay input from broad categories such as “districts,” “charters,” and “community organizations.”

**Name of district, charter or organization: Albuquerque Public Schools**

Number of total participants who provided input:

#### Synthesis

The synthesis should capture the common themes and responses given after each question. It could be as short as a few sentences or longer if necessary. Please send raw notes from focus groups in addition to the school document.

#### Challenging Academic Content Standards

Overwhelmingly, APS participants believed the content standards and skills taught in our schools should be reflective of the real life skills students require when they leave our doors and enter the workforce or college. These standards should focus on creating critical thinkers who have the ability to be resilient when they leave the schools and enter life.

The participants were clear that academic performance is contingent upon fostering students who have positive social, collaboration and communication skills that borrow from each child’s unique experiences and home and in their communities. Participants believed that focusing solely on academics was irresponsible for the schools. Children have drastic social and emotional needs and the schools must determine a way to integrate more meaningful services into the school day so they students the foundation for learning.

The participants believed that schools must evolve to understand that not every child is going to go to college so more vocational education was essential.

Contact information for questions  
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## New Mexico Every Student Succeeds Act, ESSA Stakeholder Engagement Focus Group Input Return Form

Technology is a concrete component of learning that will help prepare our children for a world current teachers and administrators cannot imagine.

### High-Quality Student Academic Assessment

Participants agreed, as a whole, that assessment and progress monitoring are a necessity in our schools and did not believe that no testing should occur. Participants agreed, as a whole, that bubble tests and annual tests are the least helpful for parents to understand how their student is performing in school and for teachers to design methods to support struggling students. Participants overwhelmingly believed that pre- and post-testing was a method of assessment the schools should use when monitoring what students learned. The participants also agreed that interim assessments were valuable for teachers and parents to engage in different strategies to help struggling students improve.

However, participants were incredibly strong in their belief that assessments should look and feel drastically different than they currently do. Participants in every single response group, regardless of the makeup of the group, demanded that assessment be personalized to meet the unique learning styles of students. Portfolios, project based learning, presentations and role reversal were discussed by every single response group. It is clear that assessment is valuable for teachers, parents and students. It is tailoring those assessments to be reflective of real life and personalized that participants want policy makers to develop.

### Statewide Accountability System

#### Teacher Accountability

Overwhelmingly, participants agreed that teachers should be evaluated in our schools and that their performance should be taken seriously when considering their responsibilities as teachers. The majority of response groups believed that basing teacher evaluations on student test scores was inappropriate. Response groups felt strongly that accountability of teachers should be a collaborative process where teachers, supervisors and peers all play a role in not only observing teachers to rank their performance, and to support teachers who struggle. A significant portion of participants believed peer observations needed to occur in schools, not just observations from supervisors. Participants also believed more individual reflection was necessary as part of the conversation teachers have with supervisors. Participants believe respectful environments must be created so the school is viewed as a positive place to work and interact.

The majority of response groups felt strongly that students and/or parents should have a voice in their teacher's evaluations. These groups included parents, teachers and students.

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## New Mexico Every Student Succeeds Act, ESSA Stakeholder Engagement Focus Group Input Return Form

Support for struggling teachers mainly focused on personalization for struggling teachers through meaningful mentorship, peer review and individual support plans from supervisors. There is a clear desire for teachers to be able to talk to each other more and help each other when they struggle. Struggling teachers need appropriate resources to support them, additional EAs, more professional development and true communication with their principals to work on skills they lack.

### *School Accountability*

Participants shared a common theme, throughout most of the response groups, that they believed the current accountability for schools missed the mark on key indicators for school performance. Schools who are performing well are those who foster environments that respect individual students, their experiences and their families. They are also schools who have high expectations of students and make a focused effort to connect the standards taught in classrooms to the world outside of the school.

Participants agreed that attendance, community involvement, school climate, facilities, communication with families and the school's ability to care for the social and emotional needs of students should all be considered in school accountability measures. Participants agreed that academics were important and that they had to be measured, but that academics were not the entire picture.

The majority of school staff participants who believed that schools struggle because programs and their implementation change too quickly and the "turnover" rate in school programming left teachers unable to implement any strategy with fidelity.

Participants agreed, as a whole, that struggling schools needed additional supports from the State and the district. Increased mentorship and collaboration opportunities for staff, more poverty awareness training, and additional staff to intervene when a student struggles with issues outside the classroom. Other ideas for supporting struggling schools centered on the idea that all school improvement must be personalized to the individual needs of a school and its community and that it must respect the cultural differences at each school. There was a strong desire from community participants to allow them to take more ownership of their school and that if this ownership was granted the schools would perform at a higher level.

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