



June 14, 2017

Dear Esteemed Members of the Legislative Education Study Committee:

Please accept this letter as well as the attached letter which we sent on April 1, 2017 to Secretary Skandera and Deputy Secretary Ruszkowski detailing our recommendations for New Mexico's ESSA plan. It is our hope that while we were not invited to join you tomorrow, you will receive these documents as evidence of the involvement of educators in the process of the development of the state plan.

In October 2016, as our fellowship was launching, we asked fellows to select three policy issues upon which they would direct their focus during their fellowship. The majority of fellows were interested in ESSA, and five fellows from various regions of the state (Gallup, Rio Rancho, Santa Fe, Hobbs, Las Cruces) formed a working group to study ESSA, attend stakeholder meetings, interview colleagues, and make recommendations to the Public Education Department.

Training on ESSA, and Its History

At the initial meeting of all of the fellows, they met with Dr. Steve Robinson, currently a teacher in Washington, D.C., who worked for six years in the Obama Administration as Education Policy Advisor. During his time, he worked closely with then-Secretary Duncan and members of Congress to develop ESSA. Dr. Robinson taught the fellows about the history and intention of the original ESEA, the changes that have been made to it over the years, and the provisions included in ESSA. Over the course of their fellowship, the fellows also had training modules on Title II of ESSA, focusing on a variety of provisions pertaining to teacher leadership.

Stakeholder Meetings

All but one of our 15 fellows attended the stakeholder meeting in their region, and all of the regional meetings were attended by at least one fellow. Following the stakeholder meetings, we had a whole group meeting and discussion regarding the takeaways from each regional meeting and how they might inform a broader set of recommendations. Those takeaways helped ensure that the recommendations that the fellows would eventually make were inclusive of the aspirations shared in various communities for the future of public education.

Meetings with PED Officials

During the development of the recommendations, our fellows met with officials from the PED to share some of their early thinking and findings, and to have a dialogue about areas that the PED was looking for additional feedback on. Fellows met with Christopher Ruszkowski, Matt Pahl and Ashley Eden virtually and over the phone.



Presentation to Secretary Skandera

On February 10, 2017, fellows presented their nearly complete recommendations to Secretary Skandera and Deputy Secretary Ruszkowski in a meeting that lasted over two hours. Several other members of the PED were also present, including Ashley Eden, Amanda Aragon and Alicia Duran. During the meeting, PED officials asked questions of the fellows about their recommendations, how they were derived, and how they planned to finalize their recommendations. The meeting served to ensure that the voice of teachers from across the state were being heard by the primary decision maker and that the fellows could continue to establish themselves as a credible partner on challenging education policy issues.

Submission of Final Recommendations

On April 1, 2017, we submitted the teachers' recommendations to the PED in a letter (which is also attached, for your reference). We were delighted to hear that the PED regarded the letter as "one of the top three well-researched, student-focused and well-written" letters they had received. When the plan was released, we were more delighted to discover that the vast majority of the teachers' recommendations had made it into the state plan.

Of course, the voice of teachers must be considered when crafting thoughtful education policy, but unfortunately, that is not always the case. We would like to take this opportunity to publicly acknowledge the PED for their willingness to continually engage with our fellows on these issues, and to adopt their recommendations.

Sincerely,

Christopher Eide

National Director, State Policy, Advocacy and Partnerships, Teach Plus

On behalf of:

Shana Speicher - Eagle Ridge Middle School

Mary Beltran - Gonzalez Community School

Catherine Brijalba - Southern Heights Elementary

Lauren Ceronie - Catherine A. Miller Elementary

Denise Corrales - Booker T. Washington Elementary

Lauren Morrison - South Valley Academy

Rachel Henderson - Van Buren Middle School

Bryan Dickinson - South Valley Academy

Alanna Purdy - Six Directions Indigenous School

Natasha Mackey - University High School

Hope Morales - Military Heights Elementary School

Amanda Bader - Rio Rancho High School

Joel Hutchinson - Centennial High School

John Gutierrez - Blanco Elementary



April 1, 2017

Dear Secretary Skandera and Deputy Secretary Ruszkowski:

Thank you for your efforts to incorporate critical stakeholder feedback in New Mexico's ESSA plan. The release of the plan is an important first step in laying the groundwork for policy changes that will enable our state's education system to better serve all students, especially low-income students, ELL students, Native-American students, rural students, and students with special needs.

We appreciate the substantial progress that has been made and consider this plan a significant step forward. We are grateful to the staff members of NMPED for continually creating opportunities to engage teachers' perspectives in the creation of this plan. We are particularly pleased by the continuation of the annual statewide assessment (PARCC). We strongly support the continued commitment to high standards and greater transparency around disparities facing schools and districts across the state.

We have reviewed the draft ESSA plan and respectfully submit recommendations to you in the areas of assessment, English Language proficiency, Direct Student Services, educator preparation and growth, teacher evaluation, school accountability, and interventions for struggling schools. Our recommendations are based on the poll of 125 peers in our local districts, additional small focus groups of teachers, and our own range of school and classroom experiences.

Our recommendations are as follows:

1. Engage educators in an assessment audit designed to eliminate redundant or ineffective assessments. (Section 3)

In order to decrease the amount of time spent on testing, we encourage the elimination of redundant or ineffective assessments. In high school, many students take the PARCC, followed by EOCs and AP tests. An example of redundancy is where a student should be exempt from an EOC if they are taking the AP test for that course.

Additionally, we would like to see the PARCC testing window pushed closer to the end of the year in combination with continued efforts to return the results back to teachers in a timely manner so they can use these results to help their students. The PARCC assessment can and should be used as the Math and ELA EOCs.

We also recommend eliminating EOCs in middle school electives. Middle school electives serve as opportunities for exploration for students. We recognize the need to hold teachers accountable, and ensure equality of access within these courses. We suggest a portfolio or another alternative measure to demonstrate the rigor of the curriculum.



2. Appoint a committee of practitioners to design innovative and holistic methods of assessment that will both accommodate different student needs and align rigorously to standards. (Section 3)

Engaging educators to work with PED to design appropriate assessments for very young students, students with special needs and English Language Learners will better ensure accessibility to rigorous standards for all students, and will increase buy-in among teachers.

3. Adopt the growth percentage model for measuring students' growth in English Language proficiency. (Section 4.1.A.iv)

To fully illustrate the extent to which students demonstrate English language proficiency, progress should be measured on a growth percentage model. When the student's score falls short, the growth value is negative, and when it exceeds expectations, it is positive. A student's residual value indicates whether the student is exceeding their expected growth, or failing to meet it and by how much.

To create a more transparent growth model, residual values should be based off the proficiency targets. For example, a value of 1 indicates that the student met their target exactly. A value of 1.2 indicates that the student exceeded their target by 20%. A value of 0 indicates that the student has made no growth, but did not move backward either. A value of -0.2 indicates that the student fell short of their target by 20%. A value of -1.2 indicates that the student moved backward by 20%. The growth percentage model provides incentive for teachers to encourage students to exceed their yearly growth targets.

4. Elect the 3% DSS set aside, and engage educators in developing the application for funding. (Section 4.3)

We support the state in setting aside 3% of Title I funding for Direct Student Services (DSS) in addition to the 7% set aside for school improvement. The DSS set-aside gives New Mexico the opportunity to fund schools and districts across the state in a more equitable manner. Because the vast majority of districts in New Mexico would qualify for DSS funding, we do not see this decision as politically divisive, but rather as an avenue to education equity statewide.

This funding should be used in a way that encourages districts to find innovative approaches to reach struggling learners and schools. We encourage the state to provide local education agencies with a wide range of high-quality and research-based DSS options. These options should include, but not be limited to, after-school and/or Saturday academic programs and online distance learning for small or rural districts. Before implementing DSS funding, the state must have meaningful, ongoing consultation with teachers, students, community members, and administrators regarding the terms of the application for districts to access funds. This collaboration should continue throughout the DSS implementation period, and should be used to inform future funding decisions.

5. Use a portion of the 3% of Title II-A funds designated to support innovative practice in teacher preparation to support a residency model and select colleges of education. (Section 5.1 B)

As a part of the 3% of Title II, Part A to support innovative practices in teacher prep programs to ensure teachers are "DAY 1" ready for the classroom, NMPED should implement a residency model during teacher preparation. This residency model can be included in the Clinical Practice component of the EPP review framework of educator preparation programs across the state. Programs that implement a residency model



as part of the fourth year of undergraduate programs, or the third year of graduate programs could qualify to receive bonus points within the EPP framework.

6. Use Title II-A funds to develop standards for high-quality mentorship and fund mentorship for early career and struggling teachers. (Section 5.1 C)

Using NMTEACH as a framework, NMPED should use Title II funds to support teacher mentorship by expanding the current TPE model to all schools to support minimally effective, ineffective, and new teachers through quality mentorship experiences. In addition, NMPED should create standards for mentorship selection and use a portion of Title II funds to compensate effective mentors. Mentors will support ineffective, minimally effective, and new teachers in their districts, preferably in matching fields of expertise (i.e., content and grade level). Mentors should be required for all teachers with less than three years of total experience, and given adequate resources, for all teachers who scored ineffective or minimally effective on their most recent evaluations.

7. Make iterations to the teacher evaluation system such that 35% be allocated to student academic growth, 35% to principal observation, 20% to planning, preparation and professionalism, 5% to attendance, and 5% to surveys. In addition, increase the number of allowable personal days to six. (Section 5.2 A)

We recommend the continuation of NMTEACH, with a few iterations designed to maintain an evaluation system that incorporates high accountability, provides a better balance between student achievement and observation of practice, and ensures better teacher support and understanding.

To achieve that balance, we recommend decreasing the percentage of a teacher's evaluation currently assigned to student achievement and growth from 50% to 35% and increasing the teacher observation component to 35%. This leaves 20% for planning, preparation, and professionalism (domains 1 and 4), and 10% for surveys and attendance. Furthermore, we recommend that every teacher has the same evaluation standards no matter how many years of student achievement they have. Acknowledging that teacher attendance is critical to student success, but that the current attendance measure is significantly and adversely affecting teacher morale, we recommend increasing the allowable number of teacher absences from three to six. To ensure a more complete understanding of a teacher's effectiveness, we recommend that the PED require two walkthroughs with feedback prior to each formal observation. A certified observer such as a principal should be required to conduct the walkthroughs and feedback aligned to the framework.

8. The state ESSA plan should require that student achievement data be broken out by subgroups, and we recommend an "n size" no greater than 30, no less than 10. (Section 4)

Ensuring that each subgroup of students is receiving equitable resources designed to improve their academic outcomes is critical to the future of our state's most vulnerable students. Balancing the diversity of socioeconomic subgroups in New Mexico and the need to protect students' identity in reporting, we recommend an "n size" between 10 and 30. In addition, we recommend continuing to shine a light on English Language Proficiency by making it a requirement that districts report progress in that area.

9. The state ESSA plan should require that districts report levels of ELL proficiency. (Section 4)

This is a requirement of ESSA, and we believe that it is strong practice to continue to create urgency around this critical issue.



10. School success indicators should focus on student academic growth, and should include at least one of the following: Individual student academic growth based on standards; Individual student academic growth compared to other similar students; Successful completion of coursework aligned to college readiness. (Section 4.1.a.v.)

Holding schools accountable for increasing students' academic achievement creates an important level of urgency which will benefit students. As New Mexico adopts indicators of school success, we believe that student academic achievement should be the primary focus. Individual growth, growth compared to peers, and success on assessments aligned to college readiness are the true markers of the performance of a school community. In addition, we request that the state consider including as a success indicator the retention of teachers rated in the highest two ratings levels. Strong teachers are essential to the success of students, and a school's ability to retain its best teachers is a true signal of the health of the school.

11. In D or F schools, prioritize targeted, ongoing, school-based professional development as the primary intervention. (Section 4.3)

The perspectives among teachers we interviewed and surveyed resonated with our own experience that when schools are failing to meet the needs of students, the teachers in the school are inevitably misaligned, uninspired, or poorly prepared to raise the level of academic achievement of their students with the required magnitude. The most effective way to begin to reverse the causes of failure is to define a clear path forward and motivate and prepare teachers to reach that goal. Targeted, ongoing, school-based professional development that aligns rigorously to the goal is the most effective route toward that end for teachers.

The growth in academic achievement of students in New Mexico over the past several years is an indication that promising policies are in place. With feedback on how to iterate existing policies from teachers, the PED has an opportunity to stay on track and increase buy-in among those closest to the students every day. Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important work for our students and our profession. We look forward to continuing to work with you as this moves forward.

Sincerely,

Teach Plus New Mexico Teaching Policy Fellows
Shana Speicher - Eagle Ridge Middle School
Mary Beltran - Gonzalez Community School
Catherine Brijalba - Southern Heights Elementary
Lauren Ceronie - Catherine A. Miller Elementary
Denise Corrales - Booker T. Washington Elementary
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