

# Summary of Discussions

Remodeling our System of Assessments in New Mexico  
Santa Fe, NM ♦ October 18, 2018

*The following provides a summary of discussions among participants in a convening on October 18, 2018, in Santa Fe, designed to encourage a remodel of New Mexico's assessment system. Approximately 40 educators, advocates, and state officials attended from around the state. To produce this summary, Future Focused Education staff read through discussion notes and a survey completed by attendees and pulled out common themes.*

## **What do we want New Mexico's assessment landscape to look like in five years?**

1. While not all agreed, there was support among many in the room for a system of assessments that:
  - Places students at the center (i.e., takes into account their experience and needs).
  - Is a meaningful part of teaching and learning (helpful to students and teachers, not just policymakers).
  - Includes different assessments for different purposes, used appropriately based on their type and the stakeholder needs they are designed to address.
  - Engages teachers (and possibly students) in the creation of assessments.
  - Affirms a statewide vision *and* local self-determination.
  - Measures progress *and* supports improvement.
  - Can be clearly understood by parents and community.
  - Is linguistically, culturally, and real-world relevant (some mentioned hands-on approaches to instruction and assessment: e.g., project-based learning, performance assessment, portfolios).
  - Is “holistic” and “whole child,” assessing a greater depth and breadth of competencies including 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and social emotional learning.
  - Includes multiple ways for students to demonstrate what they know.
2. There was disagreement on what a new vision would mean for the PARCC. Some in the room voiced support for the exam; others were critical.
3. In addition to the PARCC, New Mexico students also take standardized End of Course exams mandated by the state and a variety of interim and classroom-based assessments determined at the district, school, and classroom levels. Additional work is needed to clarify where change is needed and which assessments might be the focus of innovation.
4. Some in the room expressed that it is a misuse of test scores to use them as a primary measure in the state's school accountability system. One wondered: Could we use sampling methods to satisfy the information needs of policymakers rather than having all students take an annual standardized test in every subject?

## **What are the assets we can build on?**

1. Changeful time in our state (new governor and secretary of education, *Yazzie/Martinez vs the State of New Mexico* decision)
2. Flexibility under Every Student Succeeds Act (that NM has not yet leveraged)
3. Teachers' passion, expertise, and assessment literacy
4. Diversity of New Mexico's population
5. Innovations in our state: Local graduate profiles, Bilingual Seal, NM STEM Ready! Standards
6. Alignment of instruction with Common Core State Standards

## **What barriers do we face?**

1. Tradition, discomfort with change, "NCLB Stockholm Syndrome"
2. Political tribalism and competition over limited funds
3. Current accountability system, which holds schools and educators accountable for PARCC and EOC scores
4. Educator fatigue because of changes to requirements with every change in leadership
5. Assessment literacy gaps among educators
6. Big-money assessment companies
7. Disagreement on what needs to change (no common vision)
8. Physical classrooms not versatile enough
9. English-centric assessment system

## **What should we do?**

1. Develop systems and structures for cultivating and listening to student and community voice in an ongoing way.
2. Clarify a common vision for a system of different assessments for different purposes.
3. Empower, provide professional development, and build assessment literacy for teachers and leaders; incorporate into teacher preparation programs.
4. Develop district and/or statewide graduate profiles to address the possible misalignment between what is measured by the PARCC and what communities value most.
5. Decouple PARCC from the teacher evaluation system.
6. Explore the possibility of:
  - An innovation zone policy at the state level.
  - Changing or removing the End-of-Course exam requirements at the state level.
  - Applying under ESSA Section 1204 (Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority).
  - Reforms to New Mexico's school accountability system: What would reciprocal accountability look like? How might we shift from the punitive nature of the current accountability system to one that emphasizes professional learning and continuous improvement?