

Summary of Discussions

Remodeling our System of Assessments in New Mexico
Las Cruces, NM ♦ December 11, 2018

The following provides a summary of discussions among participants in a convening on December 11, 2018, in Las Cruces, designed to encourage a remodel of New Mexico's assessment system. Approximately 20 educational leaders attended. 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 the goal of the event was not to develop consensus, 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 more individualized and responsive).
 - Is a meaningful part of teaching and learning (helpful to students and teachers, not just policymakers).
 - Meets different purposes: e.g., monitoring, showing growth, informing teaching and learning.
 - Affirms a statewide vision *and* local self-determination (e.g. some standardization, some flexibility).
 - Uses qualitative and quantitative data.
 - Does not disrupt and take up significant instruction time.
 - Assesses content and application
 - Is linguistically, culturally, and real-world relevant.
 - Is “holistic” and “whole child,” assessing a greater depth and breadth of competencies including 21st century skills and social emotional learning.
2. Teacher capacity was a common theme in the discussion. Many raised the importance of making a significant investment in teachers and leaders, strengthening pipelines to the profession, and building capacity among current educators, as an essential piece of assessment reform.

How did attendees respond to a vision that expands the use of performance assessments in the state's assessment and accountability systems?

Performance assessment was a focus of discussion, in response to a white paper prepared by Future Focused Education, and a presentation on a recent learning trip to New Hampshire, where they are expanding their performance assessment pilot (Performance Assessment of Competency Education or PACE).

1. Attendees named the following strengths of using performance assessments:
 - Assessments are embedded in classroom teaching, rather than taking significant time out of instruction, as we have had to do with the PARCC.

- Opens up different possibilities for special education and ELL students, and assessing them in more authentic ways. In the current system, some teachers do not want these students in their classes because of the impact on test scores.
 - Good way for students to see what they have learned.
 - Might this have a positive impact on improving teacher morale and reducing teacher turnover? Teachers feel “beat up” by the current system.
2. Participants named the following questions, concerns, and considerations about the idea of changing the New Mexico assessment system to include a greater use of performance assessments:
- Let’s identify what is working and what we have learned under previous assessment systems, and be careful not to “throw the baby out with the bathwater.”
 - Assessing gaps in cognition is an important element of what we use assessments for. How does performance assessment meet this need?
 - We need to look at equity issues as far as inputs to ensure resources for all districts, schools, educators, and students.
 - How might a new system ensure that the heavy work does not rest solely on teachers?
 - How might we ensure that this would not be a top-down initiative? Teacher involvement is important. Rolling out a performance assessment system will take time (someone in New Hampshire suggested six years). We need a short-term plan in the meantime.

What are the assets we can build on?

1. Collaboration that is already happening, partnerships across districts and with higher education
2. Higher education as a source of expertise and possibly serving the role of ensuring comparability across schools and districts
3. Learnings from past efforts (e.g. performance math CFAs in Gadsden)
4. Project-based learning (e.g. “High Schools That Work” high schools redesign)
5. Senior portfolio’s and presentations (e.g. Alma D’Arte Charter School)
6. Bilingualism-Biliteracy Seal (portfolio demonstration to show language skills)
7. Career and Technical Education (CTE): apprenticeships/internships/service learning, CT Student Organizations (career technical student organizations), Precision Exams, industry-recognized certifications
8. Common Core (moving away from the PARCC does *not* mean leaving the CCSS behind)

What barriers do we face?

1. Being “stuck in the deficit model,” focused on the barriers created by logistics and budget, keeps us from imagining what might be possible.
2. Change fatigue; we need new energy to do it again.

3. Teacher capacity and assessment literacy; they will need significant professional development to ensure rigor.
4. Teachers will need more time outside of teaching to do this work.
5. We could face union pushback to the increased demands on teachers.
6. This will require funding. New Hampshire, for example, has relied on foundation support in rolling out PACE.
7. New Mexico's current ESSA Plan, school accountability, and teacher evaluation system are designed around traditional standardized tests.
8. This could require changes to school calendar, length of school year, and number of days teachers have without students.

What should we do?

1. Gather more input from a variety of stakeholders, including parents, students, teacher preparation programs, school board members, and especially teachers. One suggested learning from teachers who have left the profession.
2. Assess the readiness of different school districts for a pilot.
3. Build teacher and leader capacity.
4. Work to align K-12 and higher education with industry needs and local wisdom on what matters (e.g. develop a graduate profile).
5. Identify roles and responsibilities of different players in a new system; support collaboration and avoid competition (e.g. between public and private human resources)
6. Work with colleges of education to strengthen a pipeline of teachers.
7. Decouple student test performance from the teacher evaluation system.
8. Implement a communications plan to assure the community that changes we make are strengthening learning, not watering it down.
9. Build a coalition of existing groups working on this issue.
10. Build relationships with new state leadership in the Public Education Department.
11. Clarify a long-term strategy with clear milestones in the short-term.