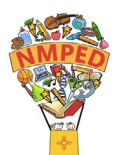


# Together We Rise

What Innovative Education Looks Like

Collected learnings from New Mexico and beyond  
from the Future Focused Education blog





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# Foreword

By Tony Monfiletto, Executive Director, Future Focused Education

Welcome to the EdUprising Conference!

For those of you who are here in person, we are excited to showcase some of the most important local and national education leaders to help lift up with possibilities in New Mexico. This publication is a compilation of blogs that we have published in the past two years and it reflects diverse ideas that can help inform a pathway forward.

First, we look to our *vecinos* and we are simultaneously inspired and grounded by their lived experience and vision for a better state. We are proud to publish student activist and local hero Kenia Alonzo, as well as Edward Tabet-Cubero, a tireless equity advocate. We also have the expertise of Dr. Gwen Perea Warniment whose policy vision is transforming our schools to reflect the wisdom that is inherent in our own communities.

We also acknowledge that to move forward we must reconcile the past injustices perpetrated against the Native American community. We are proud to publish Duta Flying Earth who presents a deep analysis of our current circumstances. We aim to lift up the local wisdom of mentors like Tatiana Falcón Rodriguez, and Cynthia Ramirez, a champion for the “unconditional positive regard” for young people. This publication is a full-throated endorsement of their theory that the pathway to learning is through care and concern for the well-being of young people. This is the starting place for a strategy to make our communities healthier and more prosperous.

Our publication gives equal time to some of our national partners as well. Susan Patrick, Paul Leather, Scott Marion, and Sarah Lench have made important contributions to our thinking. We choose to work with them because they are listeners who start with understanding the New Mexico context before suggesting how they can contribute. We admire their expertise and their generosity, but most of all we respect the way they enter our state as learners.

Finally, we are excited to have Tim Ware write about his year as an aspiring school leader in Memphis, Tennessee. He spent a year collaborating with Future Focused Education to launch a network of schools in his hometown. We have been undermined for too long by people who think our state is a problem that can’t be fixed. Instead, our partnership with our friends in Memphis is a testament to our vision for young people and the wisdom of local communities.

We hope you enjoy this year’s conference, and leave equipped with practical knowledge to apply in your schools, classrooms, and communities. Here’s to learning and listening.

Together we rise,  
**Tony Monfiletto**



# How NM’s Education Department Is Transforming Assessment: Start with Teachers

By Gwen Warniment  
Deputy Secretary for  
Teaching, Learning and  
Assessment, New Mexico  
Public Education Department  
December 19, 2019

*“Assessment should not just be a system for sorting and labeling. It should be a measurement of real student learning; it belongs with teachers.”*

I come from generations of New Mexicans. I am a former teacher and instructional coach. I am a parent and the daughter, sister, and niece of educators. Definitively, I know that the pathway to better futures for our students, their families, and our communities is through investing in educators. Teachers are the single most important investment we can make in improving our schools.

The future of our communities depends upon a teaching force that can imagine new ways to help us close the equity gap. The decisions we make to build, support, and celebrate this teaching force are critical as we move to transform education for our state.

## MAKING THE CHANGE

One of the more important, purposeful decisions we made as I began my service at the New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) was to move assessment from the accountability division into the realm of teaching and learning.

Moving departments might seem like a small change. But it has huge implications. Assessment should not just be a system for sorting and labeling. It doesn’t belong in the accountability division. It should be a measurement of real student learning; it belongs with teachers. This move effectively shifted the work of assessment into the core of the daily work of educators across our schools and districts.

## HOW WE DID IT

Any effort at lasting change should not be based on NMPED’s decisions alone, but should be rooted in local communities. We needed to seek knowledge from local community members and educators, and build from the ground up. Our first step was to systematically engage the community to collect local wisdom from across the state after the decision was made. NMPED sponsored 13 community engagement sessions statewide.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE LANL FOUNDATION

We created the Student Success Task Force, a convening of 45 members representing multiple viewpoints and roles in education from throughout the state. We charged the Task Force to make recommendations to build out a balanced assessment system that can comply with federal regulations while supporting local practices to better facilitate student learning and success.

## WHAT WE FOUND

The Student Success Task Force made several high-level recommendations that require a new emphasis on teaching and learning, including:

- Ensure assessment practices are culturally responsive
- Involve New Mexico educators in the process
- Pursue other innovative practices that measure student learning (e.g. performance-based assessments)

These recommendations are the foundation of our work to build out a more meaningful graduation options, which will become a new vision that reflects the needs of local communities. I am particularly excited about how the work of the Task Force aligns with our vision of a new teacher evaluation system that moves away from labeling and blaming teachers to one that invests in their growth and professional development.

## WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

We are taking a significant step forward in this work. In Phase II of the Task Force we will partner with Future Focused Education to launch a Community of Practice (COP). This will bring teachers and school leaders together to learn from one another to expand the demonstrations of competency for graduation. The COP will be charged with helping create a graduation option that allows a measure of student learning based on innovative teaching practices that are project-based, more reflective of local practices, and currently rooted in New Mexico schools.

The COP will be launched at the EdUprising Conference on January 10th, 2020 in Albuquerque. We are working to identify first adopters from districts and charters across the state already demonstrating innovative teaching practices that can cultivate and grow this work. Members of the COP will:

- Identify current school and district assets
- Identify opportunities for growth
- Explore on-site facilitated learning events
- Participate in school intervisitations, observations, and virtual collaborative convenings

Based on this work, the COP will be charged with creating the Quality Criteria for Performance-Based Graduation Options.

I believe that in order to get a place of culturally and linguistically sustainable teaching practices, our work needs to be rooted in building on the assets students bring with them. If this new system is to be accessible to all kids, we need to grow our multiple student pathways to demonstrate their readiness. Innovative assessment practices linked to demonstrations of competency for graduation can be the entry point to create a more equitable system. And most importantly, our teachers should lead the way.



**Gwendolyn Warniment** serves as the Deputy Secretary for Teaching and Learning for the New Mexico Public Education Department. In this role, she oversees three divisions: Educator Quality, Curriculum and Instruction, and Assessment. With over two decades of experience supporting public education, Gwen has taught across the elementary to post-secondary landscape, chiefly focused on bilingual, STEM education.

# 8 Ideas That Are Transforming America's Education System

By Susan Patrick  
President and CEO of the  
Aurora Institute, Co-founder  
of CompetencyWorks  
August 2, 2019

Five years ago, Future Focused Education asked me to join a gathering with local educators to help set the national context for the coming changes in education. Since then, I've been to New Mexico many times to learn about the work that is happening there. I'm inspired by the passion of local educators transforming their schools to make their communities healthier and more prosperous. All the ingredients needed for long-lasting change are already present, and I'm excited to contribute to the ground-up strategy unfolding in the state.

This series will explore eight core trends changing the face of public education in the United States. I've seen these trends in action globally, across the nation, and in New Mexico. My hope is that with these shifts we can drive the future of education toward innovation and equity so that all learners emerge ready to succeed, thrive, and lead.

## TREND #1

### ASK IF OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM IS "FIT FOR PURPOSE"?

With fast-moving changes and increasing complexity across our society, the time is ripe for communities to re-engage in the central question: "What is the purpose of education?" Education is a major contributor to societal well-being, community participation, and economic prosperity and growth. Is our current system "fit for purpose"? Are we getting the results we need for our future well-being, prosperity, and growth?

The first step is to engage communities to define the purposes of education and outline the "profile of a graduate." In other words, communities must determine the knowledge and skills students should have to be successful in adult life. That profile becomes a north star that guides systemic changes that re-orient teaching and learning to ensure each graduating student has those skills. It redefines what student success looks like.

## TREND #2

### REJECT ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL SOLUTIONS

We can't keep tweaking the traditional K-12 education system in its current formulaic one-size-fits-all approach. There is an over-reliance on efficiency by ranking and sorting students—with damaging cultures of failure, blame, and shame along the way.



Instead, we need a system where failure is part of the learning curve, trust flourishes, and constant growth and successful outcomes are natural consequences of a well-designed and equitable learning environment. Re-envisioning education offers an opportunity for continuous improvement and honesty. We must design holistic, learner-centered models that produce competence and mastery of knowledge and skills, and create environments that foster well-being and respect for our youth. Designing a system that treats all learners with dignity will move us away from the current predictable inequitable outcomes and toward a prosperous, open, and just society.

### TREND #3

## FOCUS ON MASTERY, NOT SEAT TIME

Education should be competency-based. The traditional models relying on seat time to earn credit are flawed. Time-based models produce variability in results and inequity in outcomes. They produce gaps in learning, where students on a bell schedule may learn some, all, or none of the material before being moved to the next unit.

Instead, mastery-based systems focus on the learning—which holds all students to the same high expectation of demonstrating mastery before advancing. Such systems are a foundation for multiple pathways of learning: inside and outside of schools, in internships, with variability in how, where, and when they learn.

There's a shift happening toward competency-based assessment where students show learning through portfolios of work and interdisciplinary projects. Recognition of learning and evidence of prior learning will be a new focus for policy and best practices. There will be significant focus on learner-centered environments, and rethinking structures for recording and communicating student progress over time in order to reflect a well-rounded education for the whole child.

### TREND #4

## MODERNIZE THE EDUCATOR WORKFORCE

Modernized educator professional learning and leadership development programs are needed to offer personalized pathways for adults in our education systems and they must be built on mastery.

In *Developing a Modern Teacher Workforce*, Katherine Casey describes: "Development is a process, not a destination. Learning spans the course of a lifetime, and professional development spans the course of an educator's career as they try, test, and extend new practices... For students and educators alike, teaching and learning are grounded in meaningful demonstrations of learning rather than seat time."

Just as each person has a resume, each person in a future-focused education system will also carry an artful portfolio of work illustrating knowledge, skills, and strengths. Micro-credentialing processes will build the muscle to shift professional learning, development, and lifelong learning toward this end.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE AURORA INSTITUTE

This trend is already showing great results. For example, the Kettle Moraine School District in Wisconsin has created micro-credentials for educators to provide pathways to specific skills and habits that closely align to the district's mission and goals. Digital Promise believes that micro-credentials that are both personalized and competency-based can readily prepare educators to work in these environments. Micro-credentials allow for flexibility in professional learning and also create the opportunities to experience a similar learning environment as their students.

### TREND #5

## DRIVE CHANGE FROM THE GROUND UP; TALENTED EDUCATORS ARE LEADING NEW DESIGNS

Around the globe, many of the strongest future-focused designs for learning are educator-led. Teachers have the proximity, influence, and skills to lead the changes. For example, in the Minnesota Teacher-Powered Schools, more than 22 schools partner with Education Evolving and Hamline University to provide coaching, peer sharing, and professional development as teachers work with students and communities to transform schools. As part of the movement, these teachers design and run schools and school units. They lead everything, from designing curriculum to collaborating on school-wide decisions.

As teachers design powerful learning experiences and empower student agency, their new visions of what modern teaching and learning look like are taking hold. Learning is active, powerful, and deep. Learning is connected to communities and highly relevant for students' lives, communities' futures, and well-being.



IFYOUASKME.ORG

## TREND #6 EMPOWER COMMUNITIES FOR COLLECTIVE CHANGE

Communities are an essential pillar of the transformation of education. Around the country, they are visioning future-focused goals and values for their schools by redefining student success, monitoring progress, and expanding opportunities for learning inside and outside of school walls.

Transforming culture means every member of the ecosystem serves learners individually and collectively. Developing feedback cycles and reciprocity to support school leaders, educators, families, and students is key—we must invite community to always be learning and engaged in continuous improvement.

In New Mexico, NACA Inspired Schools Network (NISN) and Future Focused Education are great examples of this. NISN is building a movement of students, families, and educators to create excellent schools relevant to the communities they serve. They support leaders in indigenous communities to develop rigorous academic curriculum, while also promoting indigenous culture, identity, and community investment [\[hear from NACA on page 24\]](#). At Future Focused, the Leadership School Network model is a community-led design where each school is responsive to the assets, needs, and desires of their community.

## TREND #7 PRIORITIZE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

In order to advance achievement with a focus on historically underserved students, schools are creating new designs based on caring, inclusive, and culturally-relevant learning.

An asset-based frame, moral purpose, and growth mindset are creating strategic framing and cultural conditions for education systems change. I've seen this happening in EPIC North, a school in New York City that is changing the educational trajectories of Black and Latino young men by placing equal emphasis on academic and personal growth, driven by six values: empowerment, personalization, inclusion, collective work and responsibility, continuous growth and learning, and cultural relevance. Noble High School in Maine is providing differentiated supports for students based on their specific needs. Building from a goal of long-term personalization, they are incorporating a democratic process and allowing students to have agency in their work, thus fostering a trusting environment.

There is also growing recognition of the importance and urgency to support a diverse educator workforce reflecting diversity and demographics of our students and communities served.



**TREND #8**

**COLLABORATE TO CREATE AN ALIGNED, LIFELONG  
SYSTEM OF LEARNING**

A transformed education system relies on more effective collaboration across all levels of the education system: early childhood, K-12, higher education and career pathways. Knowledge, skills and habits of success are important and should be recognized by educational institutions, employers, communities, and society.

In Michigan, several state initiatives are driving education to workforce pathways. For example, Michigan’s Top 10 in 10 Years Goals and Strategies provides a roadmap to “propel Michigan to be a top 10 state” in providing educational opportunities to support all students. The Marshall Plan for Talent Development seeks to develop an education-to-workforce readiness system that supports the Top 10 roadmap to promote a certificate-based education and digital badges.

*“My hope is that with these shifts we can drive the future of education toward innovation and equity so that all learners emerge ready to succeed, thrive, and lead.”*

According to the Michigan Office of Performance and Transformation, “Instead of relying solely on the four-year college model that does not always translate directly to high-paying careers, the Marshall Plan aims to favor more gradual, step-by-step learning that will encourage students to learn throughout their lives. This will allow future workers to build their careers more gradually, rather than being forced to decide their future paths when they are 18-20 years old.”

Governors are beginning to hold work groups across communities, employment sectors, and all levels of education to set a vision for aligned and meaningful credentials throughout a person’s lifetime. Approaches will vary by local needs and assets, and regional approaches will help foster targeting resources and expanding opportunities for students across institutions.

**BIG PICTURE, LONG-TERM**

I am grateful to have been invited into New Mexico to share information on the opportunities we are studying globally to reimagine the future of education. Yet, I seek to offer the information in identifying opportunities in federal and state policy with humility, knowing that the designs of the future must be conceived and borne by local communities and educators who are actively re-examining the goals and broader purposes of education. Is the education system “fit for purpose”? Will the plans for the future and learning experiences created in new pathways authentically connect with our youth, our communities’ values, be relevant and embody collective hopes for the future?



PHOTO COURTESY OF KATE RUSSELL, ART SMART NEW MEXICO, MEOW WOLF

These are questions for pondering as each community and state examines their journey in revitalizing hopes for the future and the critical role that education systems might play in this long-term expedition, with its ups and downs, surprises, and waypoints. As one educator in Albuquerque expressed, “We must have an ‘asset’ frame. We must have unconditional positive regard for all of our youth.”



Susan Patrick is President and CEO of the Aurora Institute (formerly iNACOL) and Co-founder of CompetencyWorks. Patrick is a Pahara-Aspen Education Fellow, and was awarded an Eisenhower Fellowship in 2016 to study global education systems transformation toward creating a more peaceful, prosperous, and just world.



# Why We Need Social Emotional Learning Standards Now

By Cynthia Ramirez  
Director of Student  
Support, Technology  
Leadership High School  
March 21, 2019

*“If you never heal from what hurt you,  
you’ll bleed on people who didn’t cut you.”*  
-Unknown

This quote speaks to the work we do as educators to support, teach, and care for our students through trauma-informed practices and social emotional learning.

As an educator, school social worker, and now an administrator, I’ve had the opportunity to witness the amazing ability for young people to overcome the most adverse obstacles. Recently I spent an afternoon listening to seniors at Technology Leadership High School present their community improvement proposals. Their presentations included helping the homeless, creating youth centers, and establishing emergency platforms for people to access mental health services. Their proposals are a culmination of and testament to their own healing and social emotional learning.

Opening Technology Leadership High School four years ago allowed us to create a school whose foundation is to develop and support a young person’s resiliency. We intentionally developed a model that aligns strong academic rigor and social emotional learning.

Our model includes pairing youth with a supportive adult, integrating student-driven goals, and creating intentional opportunities to achieve those goals. We developed an advisory framework that prioritizes identity development, mental health services, and social emotional skills. Here is what I’ve learned over our past four years at Tech:

## WE MUST FIRST WORK ON OURSELVES

If we are to provide an educational space for young people to be challenged, grow, and become their best selves, we must do this same work for ourselves, as adults and role models. The Aspen Institute’s National Commission on Social, Emotional, & Academic Development released a report calling for specific changes to incorporate social emotional skills into our classrooms and our personal lives.

Their recommendations call us to prioritize the whole child, embed social emotional learning into academics, and build our own expertise on child emotional development.

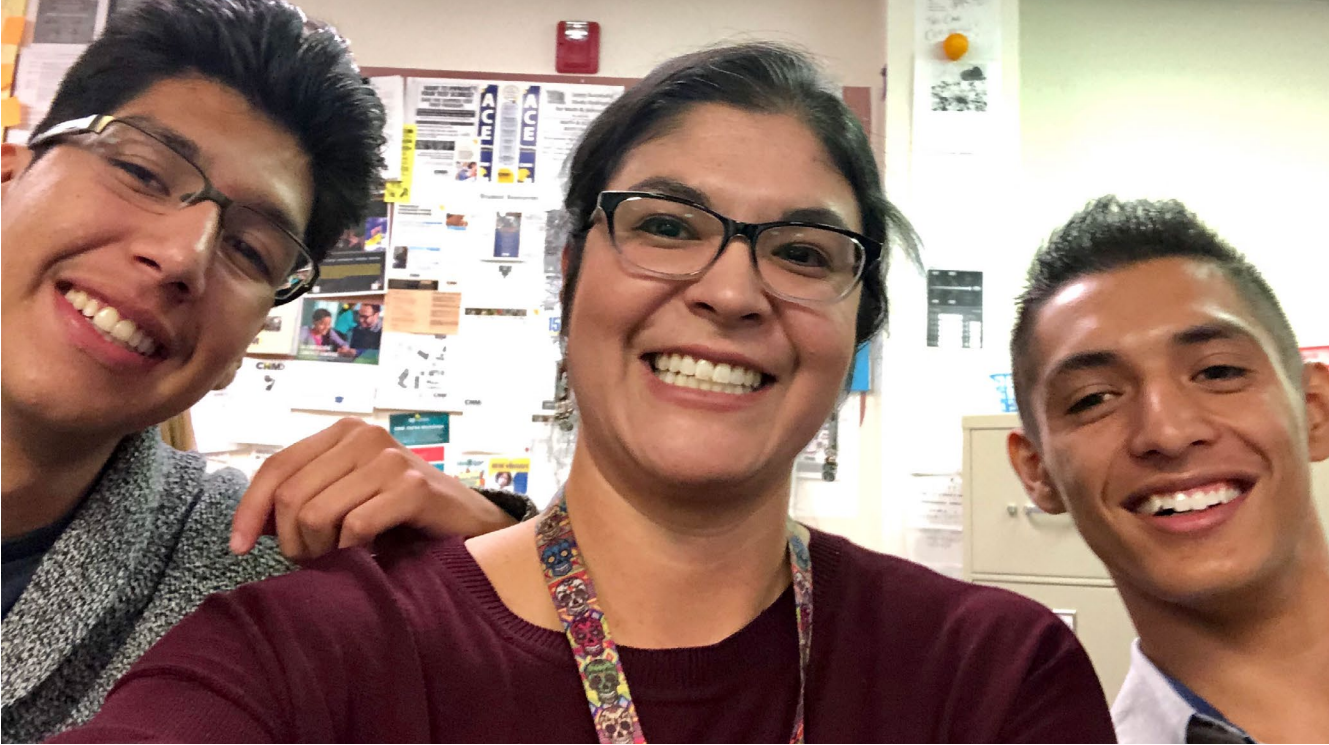


PHOTO COURTESY OF CYNTHIA RAMIREZ

## HOW WE DO IT AT TECH

Tech’s Student Support Model integrates these recommendations in various ways. We realize that in order to educate a young person we must have a full understanding of the entire young person.

### Support services

We have four school social workers (including myself as Director), and three social work interns to provide services to each of our 220 students. Each student receives an intake that helps determine resources and support needed (individual or group mental health services, outside community resources, etc.), identifies the student’s strengths and assets, and examines what type of learner they are.

### Skill-up the staff

All of our staff at Tech receive over 30 days of professional development throughout the school year to include how to integrate social emotional learning and the advisory framework goals into project-based learning.

### Ask more

We have students complete check-ins every school day and utilize resources from the Search Institute to collect data and guide interventions.

### Scaffold

In order to ensure continual and measurable growth, our social emotional standards are scaffolded to meet the development of the student. Starting with ninth grade skills of emotional awareness and managing reactions and behavior, to twelfth grade skills of preventing and resolving interpersonal conflicts, this tiered framework helps us meet students where they are and track progress.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MIKE KANE, EQUAL VOICE NEWS

## THE NEW NORMAL

We need to imagine educational settings where every student has access to support by licensed school social workers and/or other licensed mental health professionals. The situation is dire. A new report from the ACLU found that:

- 1.7 million students attend schools with police but no counselors.
- 6 million students are in schools with police but no school psychologists.
- 10 million students are in schools with police but no social workers.

At Tech, deeper engagement through project-based learning includes access to mental health services. This ensures that student development is integrated into classroom projects. True progressive educational reform for our children and for our communities will require educators to do the following:

1. Work with and for educators to create social emotional learning standards in New Mexico.
2. Work towards establishing standards to institutionalize a commitment to improving students' lives, not just academic performance.
3. Work to create space within schools for educators from charters and the district to cross-collaborate on best practices.
4. Work to acknowledge that school social workers are educators, an integral part of schools, and contributors to youth development.

## ADVOCATE FOR EQUITY

I am privileged and humbled to be a part of a cohort of educators from across the nation as a Deeper Learning Equity Fellow. The fellowship allowed me the opportunity to unapologetically advocate that all students have equitable access to deeper learning. Social emotional skills are pivotal to a student's academic success, overall development, and long-term success.

We know that the social emotional development allows youth to incorporate academic information to build towards increased consciousness and self-actualization. We need more educators striving for equitable access for all students to achieve their goals. It will take all of us.

*"You can't do the Bloom stuff until you take care of the Maslow stuff."*

*-Alan E. Beck*



Cynthia Ramirez is the Director of Student Support at Technology Leadership High School. Cynthia dedicated 11 years of her career as a school social worker for the Albuquerque Public Schools. She is a Deeper Learning Equity Fellow, a board member of GLSEN Albuquerque, and Co-Founder/Co-Facilitator of the Greater ABQ Safe Zone Consortium.



# Teacher Evaluation

## Pt. 1: A Good Idea Gone Bad?

By Scott Marion  
National Center for the  
Improvement of Educational  
Assessment  
January 3, 2019

Let's be honest about state-mandated teacher evaluations. They have not fulfilled the policy promises of increased teacher quality and student learning. There is inequitable distribution of high-quality teachers across states and districts.

I've spent significant time over the past 10 years helping design and implement state-controlled educator systems—and I must admit these policies did not work as many had hoped. Does that mean we should give up on teacher evaluation? No, but we need to make sure we attend to the many lessons learned in rethinking educator support and evaluation.

### A VERY BRIEF HISTORY

The Race to the Top competition and the waiver authority exercised under the No Child Left Behind Act by the Obama-Duncan administration shifted the control of educator evaluation systems from districts to states. The push towards a more centralized approach for evaluating teachers grew out of policy intentions that believed credible and consistent evaluations would better reveal inequities in teacher quality. Another factor contributing to increased state control was the advent of sophisticated statistical models for evaluating “student growth” (Brill, 2011). These models generally rely on large-scale data, so it made sense to apply the results in similar ways across the state. However, the new approach didn't lend the credibility and consistency we imagined.

### NEW DATA, BIG HOPES

State-led teacher evaluation systems designed to meet the Race to the Top and waiver rules generally included two major components: teacher practices and student “growth.” Student growth was required to be weighted “significantly” in the evaluation, interpreted by most states as somewhere between 20 and 50 percent of the overall rating. Thanks to Race to the Top, an increase in available data allowed researchers to better estimate long-term effects of having higher-quality teachers. A well-publicized study in 2011 of 2.5 million children by Raj Chetty and colleagues found a strong correlation of student success to high-performing teachers. Students with these teachers were “more likely to attend college, attend higher ranked colleges, earn higher salaries, live in higher socioeconomic status neighborhoods, and save more for retirement.” When faced with the challenge of how to incorporate measures of student learning into teacher evaluations, other related improvements developed. We learned how to design and implement student learning objectives in ways that could support improvements in instruction. We also designed better accountability for teachers in classes without state test data.

On the teacher practice side of the equation, many rating tools and processes that had been around for a while such as those developed by Charlotte Danielson, Robert Marzano, and Kim Marshall, received much more attention as principals were expected to improve the accuracy, effectiveness, and consistency of their ratings of teacher practices.

### WHAT WENT WRONG?

In spite of some of these gains, the evidence seems pretty clear that state-led teacher evaluation systems failed to achieve the policy aims. In fact, one of the key problems was that the policy aims were often unstated or unclear. Were policy makers interested in formalizing the system so it would be easier to get rid of very low-performing teachers? Or were they interested in a system that could support improvements in teacher quality across the board? Most state plans tended to indicate the latter even though the results might offer some weak support for the former.

In other words, after years of intensive design work and implementation support, the distribution of teacher ratings only appears to differ slightly from those found in the Widget Effect (Weisberg, et al., 2009), which documented that teacher evaluation methods failed to identify truly exceptional teachers, didn't result in specific feedback to improve teacher quality, and didn't result in consequences for poor performing teachers. It concluded that in the teacher evaluation system, “excellence goes unrecognized and poor performance goes unaddressed.” To be fair, recent analyses (Kraft and Gilmour, 2017) show more variability than documented previously, except for the lowest category where states report remarkably few teachers (generally less than 1%).

Beyond the lack of clarity, state-led teacher evaluations suffered from many technical problems. Much has been written about the challenges associated with employing value-added or student growth percentile models for evaluating individual teachers. There is no question this is a serious issue, but it pales in comparison to the insurmountable hurdles of evaluating student growth in non-tested subjects and grades.

Approximately 70 to 80 percent of educators teach in non-tested subjects or grades, and it is nearly impossible to attribute changes in student achievement in comparable ways across a state for these subjects (Marion, et al., 2012).

### PRINCIPAL-PROOFING

Of all the shortcomings, perhaps the most egregious was that states—following federal guidelines—appeared intent on creating mechanistic, “principal-proof” evaluation systems. This was about as effective as “teacher-proof” curriculum. It cannot be done. While the intention to limit personal bias is noble, principals are critical in evaluating their teachers. They provide at least half of the evaluation through teacher practice ratings. Despite issues like school culture, labor pools, and union battles that could give prejudicial leanings, there is growing evidence that principals are able to better differentiate teacher practices compared to what is reported (Kraft and Gilmour, 2017). However, principals must work with their teachers each day and are often



# Teacher Evaluation

## Pt. 2: The Solutions

By Scott Marion  
National Center for the  
Improvement of Educational  
Assessment  
February 7, 2019

I lamented the unrealized promise of state-required educator evaluation in part one of this series. Instead of giving up, I offer some thoughts for how educator evaluation can be used to improve teaching and learning.

I unabashedly support the notion that all people need high-quality feedback in order to improve their performance, whether we're talking about teaching, golf, art, or writing. The days of teachers working in the silos of their classrooms or principals engaging in perfunctory fly-by evaluations will not suffice with increased demands for student learning.

### STRIVING FOR COHERENCE

The main problem with state-led educator evaluation systems, especially those created to meet Race-to-the-Top requirements, was considerable incoherence. School and educator accountability (evaluation) systems were treated as entirely separate enterprises. Evidence of student learning and teacher practices were treated as if they were not embodied in the same person, and principals were somehow expected to implement new systems without any training or experience. Therefore, in order to create more coherent evaluation and support systems, I offer the following recommendations.

### 1. CONNECT SCHOOL AND EDUCATOR ACCOUNTABILITY

All states are required to implement school accountability systems under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Schools that are unarguably low performing (e.g., low student growth and low student achievement) likely need more state oversight to build the leader and educator capacity to enact meaningful educator support and evaluation systems. On the other hand, schools that are performing well should have the autonomy to implement their own performance management systems.

### 2. PRINCIPALS ARE THE LYNCHPIN

The push for comparable, state-defined educator evaluation systems has contributed to treating educator effectiveness as a measurement problem with a focus on standardization and comparability. Most experts agree that educator evaluation is not measurement. Shifting evaluation to local educational leaders could shift the orientation to personnel evaluation, allowing users to focus on feedback for improving performance rather than trying to precisely measure a hypothetical trait.

On the other hand, we are not blind to reasons why proponents first pushed for state control of educator evaluations. School and district leaders have demonstrated little capacity to enact

unwilling to risk giving poor ratings unless they are absolutely sure of their rating or if they have other information about the teacher.

So, here we are. The state systems are not working for both teachers and students. But there is some hope. In my next article, I offer some suggestions for moving forward, chiefly at the local district level, about why and how we should continue to support and evaluate teachers in order to improve the quality of student learning.

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systems that support improvements in educator practice and the willingness to make the hard personnel calls when necessary. Therefore, states should help provide oversight to ensure that local districts develop the capacity to enact high-quality support and evaluation systems to avoid exacerbating existing inequalities.

States, following federal requirements, appeared to create “principal-proof” evaluation systems, which were as ineffective as “teacher-proof” curriculum. Principals, like any managers, need to have the capacity to manage their portfolio of professionals. Further, principals, as the instructional leaders, are ultimately responsible for ensuring the quality of instruction and learning in their buildings. Leaders must have the knowledge and skills necessary to evaluate and provide useful feedback to educators to support meaningful improvement. Leaders also need the authority to implement such systems, while allowing for protections common to most collective bargaining agreements. Finally, if building leaders are ultimately accountable for improvements in student learning, they would be wise to hire and support the highest quality teaching staff possible, which could ameliorate some concerns about the need to protect teachers from capricious “evaluations” by school principals.

**3. STUDENT LEARNING MUST COUNT**

Both educator practices and evidence of student learning should be considered in a coherent evaluation system. For example, most of the major tools for measuring teacher practice (e.g., Danielson’s Framework) require evidence of teachers’ planning and executing instructional activities or units. So wouldn’t it also make sense to include some indication of what students learned from these units? The evidence of student learning generally comes from assessments only peripherally related to activities that occurred in the context of classroom observations.

We should create systems that incentivize teachers and others to create better local measures, use assessment information to foster student learning, and document student progress over time. In fact, almost all of the major tools for evaluating practice include rubrics for teachers’ assessment literacy and the use of assessment results to improve learning. For example, the Danielson Framework (Danielson, 2014) includes criteria for “designing student assessments” as part of Domain I (Planning and Preparation). This is just one example, but it is clear that Danielson and others draw attention to appropriate design and use of assessments for instruction and learning.

**4. CONTEXTUALIZE AND EMBED**

The next step is to include student performance results in the evaluation of teachers in ways that are coherent with evaluations of teacher practice. One way to accomplish this is by contextualizing the support and evaluation process within rich curriculum units, such as those designed through an Understanding by Design (UBD) framework (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Such units include multiple measures of student performance that are not seen as extra accountability assessments. Additionally, such instructional units are often designed collaboratively by teams of educators, which can enhance the internal accountability associated with this more contextualized approach.



The instructional units provide opportunities for generating and collecting data related to many aspects of teaching practice. Among other artifacts, the UBD planning templates, the student work generated from the assessments, and the teachers’ actions as a result of analyzing the student work will serve as meaningful evidence of teaching quality. A major advantage of such an approach is that evaluators can examine teaching practices, assessments, and evidence of student learning all from a similar context. This gives a more holistic understanding of teaching effectiveness and provides feedback in a highly-relevant context to support improved practice.

**WHAT NOW?**

My support for educator evaluation systems is contingent upon recognizing the central role that school leaders play in supporting teaching quality and evaluating their personnel. Such systems must coherently privilege the critical connections among instruction, assessment, and evidence of student learning if they are to lead to improvement in teaching quality and student learning.

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**Scott Marion** is a national leader in designing innovative and comprehensive assessment systems to support both instructional and accountability uses. He is the Executive Director of The National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment and coordinates and serves on five district state Technical Advisory Committees for assessment, accountability, and educator evaluation.

# Why Internships Are Critical for Youth of Color

By Tatiana Falcón Rodríguez  
Community Health  
Program Manager,  
Food Farmacy Manager  
May 6, 2019

*“It is our duty to see that our mentees succeed.  
Our future depends on it.”*

Growing up in Puerto Rico, my biggest mentors were strong, committed, and progressive women of color who did things I felt too scared to do: speak up, stand up, take space. Moving to the continental U.S. was a challenge. I found myself suddenly surrounded by people unlike me. I did not have mentors who understood my background, or what it felt like to be a complete stranger in the room. There were no role models to help me look for opportunities to grow. Because I never had great experiences with mentors, I promised myself that I would become one. I promised I would give meaningful experiences to my mentees without judgment or limitations.

## MEET BRISA

When I first met our X3 intern, Brisa, a student from Health Leadership High School, I was struck that she had all the qualities I remember lacking when I was that age: she was confident, she was vocal, and she did not hesitate to ask for clarification. My first big challenge was trying to keep up with her energy! She was clear about how she liked to learn and asked questions without hesitation. In the office, she always made sure to say good morning to all staff and to build relationships with everyone. It’s been so inspiring to see her confidence grow as she accomplished her tasks and projects.

Brisa worked with us at Presbyterian’s Center for Community Health Food Farmacy. The Food Farmacy program is an innovative approach to increasing access to healthy food and chronic disease self-management. Healthcare providers “prescribe” healthy food to patients who have food security issues or may also need healthier foods to meet their health goals. At the Farmacy, Brisa was tasked with conducting patient phone calls, registering patients into the program, training new interns and volunteers, managing product inventory, and suggesting new workflows.

The Farmacy work day is fast-paced and, at times, chaotic. There were moments where patients got upset or impatient over wait time. But Brisa surprised us every day with the ways she handled these difficult situations with compassion and composure. She validated patients’ concerns and updated them regularly on their wait time. We had several patients who specifically requested her to shop with them and who noticed when she wasn’t there.



## OUR ROLE

Mentorship creates rich work-related experiences that give students a space to grow. For young people of color, this is especially essential. They need mentors who believe they are capable or anything they set their minds to, regardless of their background. Studies have shown that white professionals experience a “fast track” when it comes to executive positions as opposed to their non-white counterparts. Non-white professionals have slower career advancements and don’t have as much access to professional development opportunities. In my work with Brisa, I’ve made a point of providing tasks that require more critical thinking and leadership skills so that in the future she is not limited to lower-paying and stagnant positions.

Young people need mentors who understand the challenges people of color face in work environments—from blatant racism to daily microaggressions, and preconceived notions of competency.

As mentors, we need to provide kind, open spaces for young people to have new opportunities, gain confidence, and grow. It is our job to provide that and it’s our duty to see that our mentees succeed. Our future depends on it.



Tatiana Falcón Rodríguez is a supervisor for Community Programs at Presbyterian Community Health. She has also co-designed, planned, and implemented New Mexico’s first Food Farmacy program as part of Presbyterian Health Services.



# An Educator’s Response to the Secretary’s Comments on Manifest Destiny

By Anpao Duta Flying Earth  
Executive Director, Native  
American Community  
Academy  
December 28, 2017

On December 9th, 2017 the New Mexico Public Education Secretary-designate Christopher Ruszkowski said, “This is a country built over the last 250 years on things like freedom, choice, competition, options, going west, Manifest Destiny—these are the fundamental principles of this country.”

My grandmother first told me about Manifest Destiny in the context of genocide and brutal colonization of our ancestors. European colonizers used the idea of Manifest Destiny based in a righteous divine purpose to validate the killing, raping, and theft of Indigenous land and ideas. She would often emphasize that though Manifest Destiny began hundreds of years ago, it is still alive in peoples’ ideas today. It is the cause for a corrupt notion of property rights that disregards the inherent rights and responsibilities that Indigenous people have to the land. Manifest Destiny has led to the paternalistic treatment of tribes by the federal government articulated in policy and de facto treatment of Indigenous people that sends a message of “we know what’s best for you” and in fact “it’s our divine right to control you and your land base.”

*“We must make education particularly relevant to students regarding their cultural historical needs. This will intellectually and socially fortify their communities.”*

Because of my knowledge and personal experience with the idea of Manifest Destiny, I was shocked to hear it referenced in a speech by the New Mexico Secretary of Education as a positive baseline theory in our education systems. Everyone in the education field, especially the New Mexico Secretary of Education, has the responsibility to learn about the local context and culture of the people, if for nothing else than to better understand the thousands of children and families who are affected by their leadership. What message is proliferated by the validation of Manifest Destiny as quintessentially American?

I understand that the intentions of these comments are based in the support of high-quality charter schools. However, there is no context that validates the use of this term in relation to progress without disregarding the brutal reality of what happened in this country’s history under the auspice of Manifest Destiny. We need to demand accountability of individuals who carelessly use terms that buttress domination and supremacy of one group over another. Accountability is necessary when considering that the individual who made these remarks is responsible for the leadership of an entire state’s education system.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MIKE KANE, EQUAL VOICE NEWS

We must make education particularly (or specifically) relevant to students regarding their cultural historical needs. This will empower them to articulate and achieve their individual passions, thereby intellectually and socially fortifying their communities. A very good friend of mine once said, “What’s good for Maori is good for the world.” This meant that supporting the self-determination of communities to actualize their own goals related to their cultural philosophy and epistemology is better than trying to force them to be something they are not. A Canadian relative reflected, “If a savior mentality to education in Indigenous communities was effective, then boarding schools would have been constructive and successful in tribal nation building.” But in fact, they caused drastic harm.

We believe that moving forward for Indigenous communities requires unlocking local genius by centering education on culture and orienting learning and growth to fit this focus. We should not assume that what works in one community will work in the next—or that an outside perspective is more valid. Dropping in outside one-size-fits-all education models will not benefit our communities.

At the Native American Community Academy (NACA), we believe that a successful educational equity movement will be rooted in a localized context and the community and families that it serves. One of our community’s core values is culture. We honor and value our own cultures and those of others. We recognize we are influenced by many cultures, including Indigenous, youth, and contemporary western cultures and are mindful in how this impacts the development of identity. We hope that we can all draw upon our strengths and culture to ensure a healthy, respectful, and relevant educational experience for all students. This model could be helpful to the New Mexico Public Education Secretary and help him to avoid making insensitive comments such as that made about Manifest Destiny in the context of our education systems.



Anpao Duta Flying Earth is the Executive Director at the Native American Community Academy (NACA), a graduate of Cornell University and UNM, and a Woodrow Wilson Fellow. Duta grew up on Standing Rock Reservation in South and North Dakota. He is Lakota, Dakota, Ojibwe, and Akimel O’odham.

# The Yazzie/Martinez School Sufficiency Decision Is About So Much More than Money

By Edward Tabet-Cubero  
NM Coalition for the  
Majority  
August 2, 2018

The recent decision in the *Yazzie/Martinez v. State of New Mexico* education lawsuit offers the unprecedented opportunity for New Mexicans to reset the trajectory of our state for generations to come. It is essential that families, educators, advocates, and policymakers develop a shared understanding of exactly what was decided and why. As a community, we must not let the court’s landmark decision become politicized and reduced down to an overly-simplistic debate about dollars and cents.

After years of the same reports ranking New Mexico’s education system at the bottom, with dismal results for all students, and unfathomable gaps in achievement for Native American students, English language learners, economically disadvantaged students, and students with learning disabilities, dozens of families said, “*Ya basta!*” (“Enough already!”)

*“The State has starved our public education system, not just of financial resources, but of the programs and supports our educators and children need in order to realize their full potential.”*

These families and their respective attorney teams from the New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund took the stand. It doesn’t have to be this way. They acknowledged that our New Mexican children possess just as much potential as their peers across the country. Our teachers are just as capable as any teachers anywhere. Our families value education and want the absolute best future possible for our children. However, the State has starved our public education system, not just of financial resources, but of the programs and supports our educators and children need in order to realize their full potential.

The primary argument in the plaintiffs’ complaint was that the State has failed to meet its constitutional obligation to provide these specific at-risk students “a uniform system of free public schools sufficient for the education and open to all children of school age in the state.” When the case was announced, it was quickly dubbed a “sufficiency” or “adequacy” case, drawing comparisons to dozens of other school funding cases across the country. However, like most things in New Mexico, this case is actually quite unique. And it *should* be unique. Our student demographics are simply different. Seventy-six percent of children in New Mexico are culturally and/or linguistically diverse and over 70 percent of our children are identified as economically disadvantaged.

With those distinct demographics come very distinct learning needs. Far beyond the basic funding arguments they made, what the plaintiffs in this case did was put New Mexico’s entire K-12 educational system on trial, arguing that the State has failed to provide our most at-risk students with all of the programs and supports they need in order to succeed. And the state district court judge agreed in her judgement, declaring:

**“1. The Defendants have violated the Education Clause, the Equal Protection Clause, and the Due Process Clause of the New Mexico Constitution.**

**2. More Specifically, Defendants have violated the rights of at-risk students by failing to provide them with a uniform statewide system of free public schools sufficient for their education.**

1. The Defendants have failed to provide at-risk students with programs and services necessary to make them college or career ready;
2. The funding provided has not been sufficient for all districts to provide the programs and services required by the Constitution; and
3. The Public Education Department has failed to meet its supervisory and audit functions to assure that the money that is provided has been spent so as to most efficiently achieve the needs of providing at-risk students with the programs and services needed for them to obtain an adequate education. ”

As a life-long educator and father of four daughters in New Mexico public schools, here is what simultaneously frustrates me and also gives me hope— *we know what works*, we just don’t do it!

Decades of research and practical experience make it abundantly clear that there are multiple programs, supports, and ways of educating children from diverse and impoverished backgrounds that actually help to close the opportunity gap. Examples from right here in New Mexico include the call for a bilingual teaching force in our New Mexico Constitution, the nation’s first funded Bilingual/Multicultural Education Act, and the nation’s first Indian and Hispanic Education Acts. The problem is that the NM Public Education Department has failed to effectively support, monitor, and hold local districts accountable for the implementation of these approaches that we know work and are required by statute.

From nationally-recognized communities, in-school initiatives, and world-class dual language education programs to comprehensive pre K-12 tribal education collaborations, New Mexico is full of bright spots of education programming that works. The challenge is taking these programs to scale across the entire state, so that they are offered in a constitutionally-required uniform manner that provides opportunities for all our state’s children. It is incumbent on all of us to remind our elected officials that we are not going





to nickel and dime our way out of 50th. We need to seize the opportunity for a wholesale transformation of our state’s education system in a way that fosters innovative, research-based practices that build on the unique assets that make us New Mexican.

The emphasis in this case on “programs and services necessary” ahead of “funding” is no accident. We must not allow this landmark decision to be reduced to a simple math problem. Just as our children are not a test score, they are also not a dollar figure.

## CASE UPDATE

October 2019

In July of 2018, the court declared New Mexico’s public education system constitutionally insufficient, agreeing with the plaintiff families and school districts that the State has violated the constitutional rights of at-risk students, including Native Americans, Hispanics, English language learners, low-income students, and those with special needs.

The State (legislative and executive branches) was given a deadline of April 15, 2019 to come into compliance with the New Mexico Constitution by providing all students a “sufficient” education.

That deadline essentially gave the defendants one legislative session to remedy the findings of the lawsuit. That has not happened.

The legislature appropriated some \$450 million in new funds, which fails to get the state back to 2008 funding levels. Educator pay raises were also mandated, but the funding the legislature appropriated was insufficient, meaning school districts spent all of their new funding on pay raises, leaving nothing left to provide any additional services to students.

Funding for specific programs, such as K-5 plus, which adds 25 days to the school year, were fraught with challenges, including a short timeline for roll-out and onerous requirements that prevented many districts from accessing the funds provided. The legislature also increased the funding index for at-risk students, raising it to about 16 percent, but trial testimony clearly indicated that the index should be at least 25 percent. There was a modest increase to pre-K, but thousands of four-year-olds still lack access to high-quality programs.

Finally, this highly politicized process failed to actually focus on the specific student groups represented by the lawsuit; little to no funding was provided for programming specific to their needs. For example, out of a three billion dollar budget, the Indian Education Act fund received a modest increase of three million, bilingual education received seven million, and while three-fourths of New Mexico students are low income, the Community Schools Act only received two million to provide statewide services.

The positive momentum of the new leadership at the Public Education Department is hopeful. But in order for them to provide the oversight and support necessary for districts to meet the needs of the students represented in the lawsuit, the legislature must appropriate sufficient funds in the right places.



Edward Tabet-Cubero is a founding member of the NM Coalition for the Majority, which advocates for equity and quality in the education of linguistically and culturally diverse students in NM. He lives in Santa Fe with his wife who is also an educator, and four daughters who attend NM public schools.

# How “Assessment” Became a Dirty Word

By Paul K. Leather  
Director of the 4 State  
Performance Assessment  
Project  
June 10, 2019

Why has state testing become such an anathema in today’s schools? The rise of mandated state assessments was born out of the desire to make schools more accountable. But many states are suspending high-stakes tests like PARCC. New Mexico and New Jersey were among the first, but won’t be the last.

In 1983, the report *A Nation At Risk* found the U.S. was falling behind in a race more precious than most—the skills and talents of the American worker were failing to compete with the very best internationally.

## THE CHILDREN LEFT BEHIND

Out of the national hub-bub that followed, the Standards Movement was enshrined into law in 2002, when President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). An effort to raise standards for all, and to close educational gaps for the least fortunate, NCLB sought to hold every student, every teacher, and every school to the same set of high standards measured by their specific state test.

What resulted was that students in reasonably well-off communities where parents were able to invest time and money to support their students’ education did reasonably well on the test. Meanwhile, in lower income cities and towns, with more single-parent families with fewer resources, children performed poorly. School improvement became the mantra, consultants were hired, curricula was adopted, interim tests put in place.

A teacher in these poorer performing schools came to no longer recognize their classroom. It was made clear that she would be placed on a teaching regimen that was not her own. Pacing guides in classrooms became mandatory, regardless of evidence of student learning.

## THE FALLOUT

The results were predictable. Curricula narrowed, perniciously, to those subjects that were covered on the test, mainly the three Rs—reading, writing, and ’rithmetic. Science and technology, arts and music, civics and history, along with many other subjects, were offered less frequently or dropped completely.

Teachers struggled to push their students to do better on “the test”—the anxiety-inducing, once-a-year trial—where students filled out bubble sheets for hours, sitting in rows, often in the gymnasium until the bell rang. Since curricula and instructional methods in most states were local decisions, state tests were designed to be agnostic of curricula and instruction. This meant

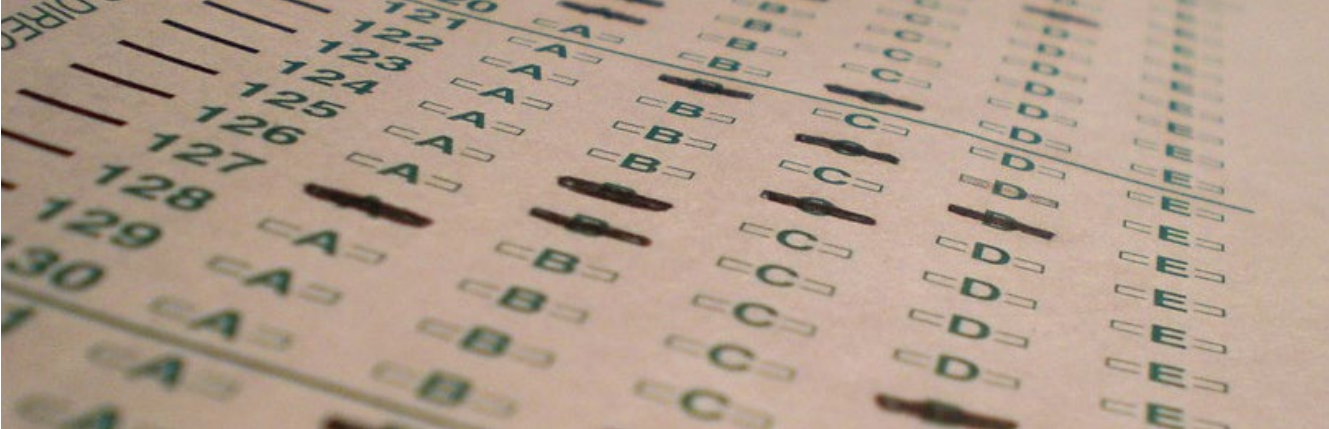


PHOTO COURTESY OF TIM LEWIS

that for a teacher to prepare a student to do well, they needed to “teach to the test.” And so in many of our nation’s classrooms these new teaching regimens came to be known as “drill and kill”. And yet, because of the inherent inequity of opportunity in schools, relative performance rarely changed, and test results continued to follow essentially the socio-economic status of the community. Not surprisingly, this circumstance was exacerbated by lists of “best places to live” by the likes of *U.S. News & World Report*, Niche, and SchoolDigger, looking to provide data for those seeking new homes. Property values slowly rose or fell with the test results, doubling down on the direct correlation of test results to socioeconomic conditions.

Over time, except in a few places, even the most ardent school improvement initiatives failed to lift test scores significantly. Consequently, the U.S. continues to fall behind leading countries in academic K-12 performance by nearly every measure, more than 15 years after the passage of NCLB.

## A WAY OUT

What if there was another way, as Governor Lujan Grisham has ordered? Another way to both measure student growth and performance, as well as to support deeper, richer teaching practices?

At the National Center for Innovation In Education, we’re convening Future Focused and the New Mexico Public Education Department along with seven other states to chart a new course for the future of assessment. And we’re not alone. A number of educational leaders across the country believe there is another way, and the most recent reauthorization of the federal K-12 education legislation, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), has created options for states to systematically try other approaches.



Paul Leather is the Director of the State Level Performance Assessment Learning Community, a project of the National Center for Innovation In Education. Leather has served as Deputy Commissioner of Education in New Hampshire, and led the development of the New Hampshire Performance Assessment of Competency Education.



# The Real Root of “Assessment” Will Surprise You

By Sarah Collins Lench  
Director of the Assessment  
for Learning Project  
July 10, 2019

*“It’s time for assessment practices to be intentionally designed to foster student agency rather than hinder it. This is not a test, folks. This is our future.”*

When you hear someone say “assessment,” what is the first word or image that comes to mind? When I ask this question around the country, the answers are always the same:

- “Test.”
- “Data.”
- “Right and wrong.”
- “Scantron bubble sheets.”
- “Nervous children in front of computers.”

The mere mention of assessment conjures up very vivid pictures of rooms filled with judgment and anxiety. Learning is noticeably absent.

Now what if I told you that the Latin root of the word assess, *assidere*, means “to sit beside”?

That paints an entirely different picture, doesn’t it? To sit beside a student is to offer support. It suggests an ongoing relationship, not an impersonal event. Meaningful feedback, not absolute judgement. Assessment, at its very root meaning, is deeply integrated with teaching and learning.

My colleagues and I at the Assessment for Learning Project (ALP) are working to make that different picture a reality for every student in every classroom. Launched in 2015, ALP is a national grantmaking and field-building initiative inviting educators and leaders to rethink the role of assessment for learning and K-12 systems improvement. We provide technical assistance and grants ranging from \$15,000 to \$750,000 to schools, districts, networks, and states who are developing and refining innovative approaches to rethink assessment.

## WHAT WE SHOULD BE ASKING

Future Focused Education’s work with the Leadership Schools Network and the broader policy change they are leading in New Mexico were a natural fit to join the Assessment for Learning Project. We’ve supported an incredible multimedia gallery called “If You Ask Me...” that brings student voices into the conversations about what the future of education should be. We’ve also supported learning excursions to exemplary models like New Hampshire.



PHOTO COURTESY OF JACK HYNES

District administrators experienced firsthand a statewide assessment and accountability system that prioritizes authentic evidence of student-centered learning. Resources have helped Future Focused staff to learn about digital badges for real-world work experiences alongside national innovators like Del Lago Academy for Applied Sciences. ALP grant dollars have brought national experts to support statewide convenings of educators and system leaders who are creating a shared vision for assessment in New Mexico.

## HOW TO RETHINK ASSESSMENT

This work is about students as agents of change—for themselves, their communities, and beyond. The concept of “student agency,” is usually framed in terms of personal goals and individual success. But Future Focused is taking a different approach. They are treating students as assets for community development. This has totally transformed how the Assessment for Learning Project thinks, talks, and acts upon issues of student agency.

Youth-led movements for social change are nothing new [see Kenia Alonzo's articles, pgs. 36-40], and our news and social media feeds today are filled with young people taking action on issues like climate change and gun reform. They’ve been agents of change, now it’s time for education systems—and the assessment practices that support their learning—to be intentionally designed to foster their agency rather than hinder it.

Is it too far of a leap to move the assessment conversation from bubble tests to solving the global climate crisis? Not if we commit to sitting beside students, listening to their voices as they tell us about their goals, experiences, what they know, and what they want to know.

But don’t take my word for it, listen to the words of Jacob Gutierrez from Capital High School in Santa Fe:

*“I think that schools need to help provide the youth with our life goals, because we are the future of the country... We learn for tests now instead of learning for knowledge.”*

Through virtual and in-person peer-to-peer conversations, the ALP Learning Community is lifting up insights that inform our initiative-wide learning agenda.

These are the questions that we believe the entire field of education needs to wrestle with in order to fundamentally rethink assessment:


- How can assessment support a broader definition of student success?
- What assessment practices most effectively empower students to own and have agency over their learning?
- How can educators build their expertise in gathering, interpreting, and using evidence of student learning to enhance instruction?
- How does assessment for learning inform broader contexts of accountability, policy, and system design?
- How can we pursue equity through assessment for learning?

Future Focused has benefited from learning how their innovative peers are addressing these questions, and we have collectively benefited from the ways that FFE has pushed our thinking as well.

This is not a test, folks. This is our future. Many thanks to Future Focused for helping to shape that future. It's a pleasure to sit beside and learn with you.



**Sarah Collins Lench** is the Director of the Assessment for Learning Project and the Chief Curiosity Officer at the Center for Innovation in Education.



If you ask me...

**“I think that schools need to help provide the youth with our life goals, because we are the future of the country ... We learn for tests now instead of learning for knowledge.”**

- Jacob Gutierrez

12th grade  
18 years old

Capital High School  
Santa Fe

Scan this image with the Photobloom AR app to see Jacob’s interview come to life. See more interviews in the “If You Ask Me...” galleries online at [ifyouaskme.org](https://ifyouaskme.org).



# Why I Led a Walkout Against Gun Violence. A High School Senior's Take

By Kenia Alonzo  
Generation Justice, Media  
Justice Intern  
March 29, 2018

*“I cried because I had to plan a walkout to say I didn’t want to die at school. I cried because I, a student, had to take action because my government would not.”*

My name is Kenia Alonzo, I’m a senior at Cibola High School and my number one fear is a school shooting.

I have a plan if a gunman walks into my class. If it’s third period, I’ll crawl out the window and up the dirt hill behind my portable, hoping he doesn’t see me. If it’s fifth period, I’ll hide behind the metal cart with iPads inside, hoping that thin metal is enough to stop bullets. If it’s in the hallway, I’ll run to a nearby classroom and try not to cry. I shouldn’t have to have a plan. I’m sick of having to have a plan, but New Mexico’s gun-death rate is 40 percent higher than the national average. Women and children are at a higher risk of becoming homicide victims in New Mexico than in almost all other states.

I am an activist and organizer. I’ve been an activist since I was twelve years old. I am a Generation Justice media justice Intern. Generation Justice is New Mexico’s premiere, award-winning youth media project and they train youth to harness the power of media. I have been with Generation Justice for three and a half years, where I have been taught the essentials of message making and organizing. I was able to utilize all the knowledge and resources that Generation Justice has given me when I planned my high school walkout and when I participated in the organizing meetings for the Albuquerque March for Our Lives.

Four weeks after the Stoneman Douglas High School shooting on March 14th, 2018, students across the country were going to walk out of their classrooms to send a message to our government: Enough is enough. I assembled a small team of students from different grades to plan the walkout at my school. The team consisted of sophomores Kyler, Valentin, Jazmin, Tori, Angelica, and Aidan; Cat, a junior, and Mariah, a senior. We felt a deep obligation to show respect for the students that never came home from school and for the youth of our community who became victims of gun violence.

We had less than a week to plan, so we worked tirelessly and hoped for the best while planning for the worst. We made flyers, talked to the administration, and made social media accounts



PHOTO COURTESY OF MATHIAS WASIK

to spread the word. I adjusted the Generation Justice Code of Conduct to make it apply to our school walkout. Because this was Cibola High School’s first walkout, we wanted to make sure we did it respectfully and efficiently. We had no room for error.

Finally, the day of the walkout came. I was nervous. Once we got outside, I saw other students walking out of their classes. I saw the news vans and news helicopter. I wanted to cry. We all gathered on the soccer field, then we started walking around the field, chanting “Not one more!” or “Enough is enough!” One minute before we were supposed to go back to class, all 300+ students gathered in the center of the field and we held 17 seconds of silence for the 17 people killed in Parkland. Again, I wanted to cry. Everyone headed back to class and I gathered with the other organizers and we hugged. We quickly spoke to the media then headed back to class. Then...I cried. I cried because I had to plan a walkout to say I didn’t want to die at school. I cried because I, a student, had to take action because my government would not.

Although my initial motive for the walkout was based on my biggest fear, I couldn’t express my emotions. After it was over, I realized that besides feeling fear, I was tired, sad, and angry. The March For Our Lives in Albuquerque took place March 24th, 2018. It was organized by amazing local youth that I had the honor of getting to know and help. I marched with 20 other Generation Justice members and their families. During the rally, all the organizers gathered on the stage together and when I looked at the crowd, I was overwhelmed by the community support. I saw children carrying signs and also chanting “Not one more!” We were planning for 2,000 people. The Albuquerque march was estimated to have had 9,000 to 10,000 people. Again, I cried.

There were 800 other events on that day across the world, with millions of people marching. Everyone heard us. Congress heard us. Our country heard us, and marched with us. Students aren’t alone anymore. The March for Our Lives and our school walkouts were just the beginning.



# A Year After I Planned a Student Protest...Are Things Better Now?

By Kenia Alonzo  
Generation Justice  
November 6, 2019

*“We don’t have our happy ending yet. This movement is still ongoing and it needs your support.”*

My name is Kenia Alonzo. I am now 19 years old. In March of 2018, I organized a successful walkout at my high school and participated in planning Albuquerque’s March For Our Lives. I was 17 years old, a senior, and scared to go to school.

I wasn’t the only student who was scared that I might not go home one day. After having open discussions with other students, we all realized that our anxieties were sprouting from the same fear: a school shooting. We weren’t alone in this either. Students all over the country were experiencing the same nervousness when walking into class every day or hearing the fire alarm go off and wondering if it’s a drill or a part of someone’s plan to hurt us.

Honestly, it sucked having to worry about my friends and homework, then having to worry about dying at school. It made it difficult to focus and to feel safe anywhere but home. We saw horrible things on the news every day. It was like we couldn’t have a proper mourning period for one tragedy before the next happened, each one seemingly more horrific and extreme than the last.

Unfortunately, more than a year later, it feels the same, if not worse.

The lack of humanity that we saw scarred us. Everyone seems a little jumpier than before. Sometimes everyone goes quiet when a door slams a little too loud...because it sounds like something deadlier. I still come up with escape routes when I am in new surroundings. Not because I want to, but because I feel the need to survive. The world feels like it’s getting bigger and scarier each day. The fear that comes with a different shooting every month is draining and it’s important to take care of yourself mentally and emotionally.

There are many different ways to do self-care and it’s important to know what works for you. For me, I had the opportunity and privilege to unplug and take a breather for the summer doing conservation work at the Grand Canyon National Park. It didn’t fix everything in the world, but I felt better. That was my priority because it was an important step towards healing for me. I know everyone can’t just take a break, even when they need it most. It is so, so, so important to show your support for movements and to offer help in the ways that you can, but you also need to know your limits.



PHOTO COURTESY OF KENIA ALONZO

I wish this was more positive. I really wish that I could just say, “Yay! The world is better and there’s no need to fight or fear!” But we don’t have our happy ending yet. This movement is still ongoing and it still needs your support.

We need a change in this country. We need leaders who listen to us and work for us. We need more love and compassion and humanity. I know it’s difficult in this climate, but that just means we need to keep going. Please help fight for the change that we deserve.



**Kenia Alonzo** is a 19 year-old graduate of Cibola High School in Albuquerque, New Mexico, now studying Natural Resources at Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute. She is a member of Generation Justice, an award-winning youth media project. She is Navajo and Two Who Came to the Water, born for the Tangle People. Her maternal grandparents are the Black Streak People and her paternal grandparents are the Zuni People.



# What Does it Take to Increase Ed Equity in America? A Basketball Mindset

By Tim Ware  
Co-founder and CEO of The  
Higher Learning Project  
December 4, 2019

When I was in middle school, I joined the basketball team. My father, a three-sport college athlete turned minister, told me that basketball was a microcosm of life. “Everything that you need to learn about life, you can learn while playing basketball.”

As a youngster who just wanted to play the game, I missed his point (I also didn’t know what a microcosm was). However, over the course of the next 10 years while playing organized team sports I began to understand what he meant.

In the real world, I was once told by a State Superintendent of Education that if he saw college athletics on a person’s resume they almost always made it to the interview. He believed sports had cultivated in them a set of leadership skills that served them well in high-stakes and high-pressure settings.

Just as in life, excellence in sports requires:

- A discipline and dedication to the craft
- A willingness to accept critical feedback and adjust accordingly in order to grow your skill sets
- An understanding of what skills/assets you bring to the team and how it fits into the broader picture
- The ability to communicate in real time to a variety of people
- The ability to adapt your plan to the reality of what you are facing
- The ability to tune out distractions, disappointments, frustration and even anger while focusing on achieving a goal

## WHY I’M A TEAM PLAYER

Perhaps the biggest lesson that I took from playing sports through college is this: *a team will always beat an individual*. To put it another way: *to go far, go together*.

My current work is to design, launch, and lead a healthcare focused alternative school in Memphis, Tennessee. The school will serve students who, through choice or circumstance, have dropped out of school and are disconnected from both society and opportunity. Enter Future Focused Education.



PHOTO COURTESY OF TIM WARE

Over the course of the past year I have had the opportunity to work with Future Focused Education to understand the core elements of the Leadership Schools Network so that we can adapt it to the context of the city where I live.

## WHY MEMPHIS?

Memphis has the highest percentage of opportunity youth in the country. “Opportunity youth” are between the ages of 16 and 24, and often have very complicated lives. Many of them have experienced homelessness, drug abuse, or teen pregnancy. Some have dropped out of traditional school systems or been tangled up in the courts or foster care.

Memphis also has some of the most pronounced health disparities in the nation. In contrast, the health sector in Memphis, and Tennessee more broadly, anticipates having 56,000 new jobs that will need to be filled over the next five to seven years.

We have an incredibly powerful but inert asset in every corner of our city: disconnected and opportunity youth. If we can harness the creativity, productivity, and vision of these young people, while building legitimate onramps to meaningful opportunity, we can make Memphis an even more vibrant city full of opportunity and support.

## WHY FUTURE FOCUSED?

During my time in Albuquerque many of the ideas that I have developed over nearly two decades doing community-facing work—wraparound services, public education, and nonprofit leadership—were challenged and stretched. Through thoughtful conversation and intentional observation I began to understand how the convergence of student supports, student-focused learning, and community partnerships could be radically reorganized within a school setting to serve the young people that districts struggle to reach.

The philosophical under-pinning of the Leadership Schools Network is explicitly aligned to a very important personal belief: students have inherent value, and their families represent the fabric of the broader community. I believe that each school should echo and affirm the values of the community as well as the assets that exist within each community. I saw firsthand that Future Focused Education and the Leadership Schools consistently model this type of affirmation. In fact, they model this in one of the most difficult contexts: serving young people who have not experienced academic or behavioral success in the existing school options.

Success in our endeavor to create a health industry themed alternative school in Memphis will create the following:

- Young people who become lifelong advocates for healthier lifestyles
- Young people who work directly with industry professionals to create innovative and community-informed approaches to reducing significant health disparities impacting African-American communities in Memphis
- Young people who are equipped with the hard and soft skills as well as the network and social capital to access meaningful opportunities in careers or college
- A city who comes to see young people, even those who have complicated lives, as assets to be nourished rather than problems to be dealt with

This is our vision. The students and families that I will be serving deserve a leader, a team, a school, and a system that is willing to go far. To do this we must go together. We have the ability to adapt our plan to the reality of what Memphis is facing. We have the discipline and dedication to our craft. And we understand how our skills and assets fit into the broader picture of increasing education equity in America.

I have found my team in Albuquerque. Individually, we are going fast. Together we will go far.



**Tim Ware** has held multiple senior executive roles and has nearly two decades of experience in community-based public service. Tim's current body of work focuses on creating alternative onramps into the workforce for young people who have not found success through traditional K-12 and four-year college programs.

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