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Innovation Zone Evaluation Report

July 2024

Year 2
2023 - 2024

Prepared by:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction:

In 2022, the New Mexico Public Education Department (PED) selected ten local education agencies (LEAs or schools and districts) to establish Innovation Zones (IZ). Innovation Zones reimagine the traditional education model, enhancing the high school experience and academic outcomes to serve local community needs better. Central to school and community transformation is a shared vision for education, culminating in a written document outlining the community's expectations, known as the local Graduate Profile. The Innovation Zone initiative emphasizes and supports the integration of graduate profiles, community capstones, Career Technical Education (CTE), work-based learning (WBL), and personalized supports. At Innovation Zone schools, local communities nurture students to become the problem-solvers and innovators we need in our communities. The ultimate goal is to enhance student and community well-being and ensure students graduate well-prepared for the workforce, higher education, and life.

This report evaluates the second year of the Innovation Zone initiative implemented during the 2023-2024 school year. Forty-seven local education agencies (LEAs) were awarded grants this second year and provided intensive professional development, guidance, and technical assistance based on research and promising practices.

The Innovation Zone initiative's Six Essential Practices (1) align with and support PED's statewide Community Schools initiative to improve educational outcomes in New Mexico by adopting the Six Key Practices of Community Schools framework (2), showcasing PED's commitment to integrated and consistent approaches across its programs.

LEAs incorporate the Six Essential Practices at each Innovation Zone location:

1. Collaborative Leadership, Shared Power, and Voice
2. Powerful Student and Family Engagement
3. Expanded, Enriched, and Relevant Learning Opportunities
4. Meaningful Community-Connected Classroom Instruction
5. Integrated Systems of Support
6. Culture of Belonging, Safety, and Care

Source:
1. https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Innovation-Zones-Self-Assessment-Rubric.pdf
2. https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/bureaus/cs-and-elt/community-schools/key-practices/

Purpose of the Evaluation

This evaluation aims to document and assess the implementation of the Innovation Zone initiative in its second year, identifying barriers and supportive factors in the school transformation process. It examines how innovative changes in practice are leading to substantial improvements in the student learning experience, with the overarching goal of demonstrating progress in each of the six essential practices over time. Establishing a baseline for first-year Innovation Zone awardees and tracking progress for returning awardees, the evaluation focuses on developing, implementing, and integrating the six essential practices. Additionally, it assesses the impact of school transformation efforts on students, LEAs, and communities. The results are intended to inform the work of education organizations and state and local education agencies beyond the current grantees, enhancing their efforts with students and families.

Methodology

The Center for Community Analysis (CCA) at New Mexico State University conducted interviews, distributed surveys, and collected data from representatives from the Innovation Zone LEAs, Future Focused Education (Future Focused), Social Emotional Learning Alliance for New Mexico (SEL4NM), the Los Alamos National Laboratory Foundation (LANL), and New Mexico Public Education Department. The CCA also analyzed artifacts, including notes from meetings and convenings, participation rates, data, and evaluation reports from Future Focused and its partners. The CCA attended meetings and convenings and collected data through participant observations and conversations. Lastly, the CCA developed a reporting tool to collect IZ awardee data about their implementation of the graduate profile, community capstones, social-emotional learning, career-technical education, and work-based learning.

Key Findings

The Innovation Zone Initiative saw a significant expansion, growing from 10 LEAs in the pilot year to 47 in its second year. The increase and improvement in graduate profiles, community capstones, and internships and the tremendous growth in participants' understanding and knowledge of implementing the six essential practices that lead to whole school transformation are key takeaways from the initiative.

The initiative's growth led to a dramatic increase in internships and community capstones, with 2,449 students participating in 2,477 internships during the 2023-2024 school year, marking a 307% increase from the previous year. Among these internships, 70% were paid. By the end of the reporting period, 86% of LEAs had implemented internships, 45% had implemented community capstones, and 70% had finished or were updating a graduate profile.

Pre and post-surveys showed significant growth in knowledge about Innovation Zone practices. Key areas of growth include but are not limited to:

- Supporting student engagement
- Leveraging community, student, and family assets and weaving local, state, and federal resources to support student engagement
- Connecting college and career pathways to graduate profiles and driving instruction with profiles
- Incorporating student voice into the school experience
- Ensuring equitable access to capstones

Survey results also showed that Innovation Zone participants, compared to non-participants, reported significantly more positive student engagement and success practices, especially for work-based learning.
These practices included:

- Developing shared power and voice with diverse community partners
- Creating vertically aligned internship pathways
- Establishing sustainable work-based learning programs using existing resources
- Forming partnerships with employers for WBL and identifying WBL supports
- Aligning CTE with core academics

Surveys also revealed positive differences between first-year and second-year cohorts, indicating that second-year awardees exhibited a higher knowledge of Innovation Zone practices. These results and the pre-and post-survey data suggest that increased exposure to learning and practices leads to a greater understanding of positive practices over time. Most awardees demonstrated the development or implementation of essential practices associated with the initiative, such as graduate profiles, WBL, capstones, and CTE alignment, alongside an enhanced understanding of transforming schools and supporting students effectively.

In interviews, LEAs overwhelmingly expressed gratitude for the funding and the support and explained how the Innovation Zone grant positively impacted their students, teachers, staff, and communities compared to when they did not have the grant. Common themes found in interviews:

- **Expansion of WBL Opportunities:** Many educators mentioned increased WBL programs, including increased paid internships, business partnerships, and practical, hands-on learning experiences that can lead to certifications.
- **Enhanced Career Exploration, Pathway Development, and Equitable Opportunity:** In addition to creating specific pathways, there is now an emphasis on exposing students to a broader range of career options. Programs and experiences are helping students break out of limited perspectives shaped by their immediate surroundings, encouraging them to consider college and careers they might not have otherwise.
- **Increased Student Engagement, Motivation, and Academic Performance:** Internship programs improve attendance, graduation rates, and overall student performance while building confidence and self-efficacy. Several LEAs emphasized how internships incentivized students who struggled in the past or were disengaged to work harder to maintain their grades and keep their internship opportunities.
- **Innovative Teaching and Learning Resources:** Funding has provided access to state-of-the-art equipment and resources, enhancing the teaching and learning experience. Funding also contributed to pedagogical innovations (like restorative justice training) and updated equipment, ensuring students are trained on tools used in the current workforce environment.
- **Collaborative Program Development and Long-term Vision:** Funding has brought educators together to develop programs and plan for continuous improvement in CTE, WBL, capstones, and social-emotional learning.

- **Holistic Educational Approach:** LEAs recognized that personalized learning, alternative pathways, and social-emotional support are needed to diversify educational options offered, including focusing on students' social-emotional needs and providing pathways beyond traditional academic routes.
- **Positive Impacts on School Ecosystem:** Many LEAs reported overall improvement in the school environment, emphasizing how these programs benefit not just students but also teachers and the broader school community. Some see potential for teacher recruitment/retention as well as post-COVID recovery.
- **Financial Incentives and Real-World Connections:** LEAs emphasized how paid internships and other opportunities motivate students by connecting their education to tangible, real-world benefits.

However, the initiative revealed a few challenges. LEAs felt there needed to be more clarity about the expectations of the grant, funding, and support that started earlier. LEAs also experienced difficulties specific to their school/community. For example, some rural schools experienced difficulty connecting with local businesses, transportation, staff support, and meeting the needs of students with disabilities and English language learners.

Learnings and Recommendations

This year's initiative implementation revealed successes and challenges, providing valuable insights for future improvements. Data collected from LEAs and stakeholders highlighted key factors for continued success. These experiences can guide strategic refinements in upcoming years, ensuring the initiative's effective evolution.

Implementation Successes and Challenges:
Despite initial hurdles, the program demonstrated significant potential.

- Timely funding allowed many LEAs to begin their initiatives with a solid financial foundation.
- Technical assistance providers did not receive contracts until December and could not start work with LEAs until January, causing initial uncertainties.
- Many LEA concerns were clarified once support started.
- LEAs reported that internships not only increased student engagement but also broadened students' perspectives on career options and post-secondary opportunities.
- LEAs reported improved collaboration among teachers and the provision of essential professional development opportunities.

Innovative Practices and Positive Responses:

- LEAs used inspiration from others' work to solve problems, find unique community-related partnerships, and increase family engagement and feedback.
- LEAs responded positively to technical support and site visit opportunities and desired more, indicating their commitment to learning and growth.
- The funding allowed many LEAs to provide paid internships and capstone experiences previously unavailable to students.

Recommendations for Future Implementation:

- Earlier contracts with support teams before LEAs start implementation in the fall could lead to even greater success.
- Discuss realistic site staffing structures with LEAs to support the rollout of initiatives and prevent unrealistic workloads for principals.
- Implement mentorship programs for first-year participants, as suggested by several second-year awardees.
- Offer differentiated technical support based on LEA profiles and specialized needs.
- To reduce the travel burden, offer site visits and technical assistance in more regions.
- Clarify fund usage guidelines and grant expectations as early as possible.

Concerns and Future Considerations:

- Student transportation is challenging for rural districts.
- LEAs expressed concerns about the sustainability of their programs, especially paid internships, without continued funding.
- Ensuring funding stability is crucial for the ongoing success of these initiatives.

Ultimately, LEAs experienced much success in the initiative's second year, demonstrating the importance of addressing challenges and leveraging collaborative efforts for continuous improvement.

Conclusion

The Innovation Zone Initiative has enabled LEAs to reimagine educational practices and experiment with new ideas. It has fostered new connections among schools, communities, and businesses, inspiring hope and improving school engagement among students, teachers, and the community. In its second year, the initiative's expanded scope has amplified its impact, creating a solid foundation for future growth and innovation in the New Mexico education system. Perhaps the greatest impact of this initiative has been offering participants new ideas on how to engage and motivate students and improve collaboration and cooperation internally within schools and externally with other LEAs, with PED, and with community partners, encouraging an alignment of priorities centered on enhancing the student experience. As the program continues to evolve, it shows promise in transforming educational experiences and outcomes for New Mexico's students.

Innovation Zones by the Numbers 2023-2024

2,449

IZ students participated in internships (paid or unpaid)

67%

of paid internships used Innovation Zone dollars

324%

increase in students participating in internships in IZ schools since SY 2022-2023

94%

of survey respondents agreed, “WBL should be a part of every student's high school experience.”

958

IZ students participated in Community Capstones

100%

of survey respondents agreed, “All students should have an opportunity to use Capstones as a demonstration of competency for graduation.”

INTRODUCTION

The Innovation Zones Initiative brings together cutting-edge program initiatives and funding that often need to be more cohesive and connected. It supports the integration of graduate profiles, capstones, Career Technical Education, work-based learning, and personalized supports.

In 2022, the New Mexico Public Education Department awarded approximately $4.4 million in Innovation Zone grants to ten local education agencies (LEAs) to redesign the high school experience and support community needs. (3) For the 2023-2024 school year, 47 LEAs collectively received $11.4 million to expand this initiative. (4) The Innovation Zone Initiative aims to build on existing school innovations, addressing inequities highlighted by the Yazzie-Martinez lawsuit. The funding supports creating work-based learning opportunities statewide that connect high school students with local employers for paid internships, integrates Career and Technical Education with core academics and college and career pathways, and improves personalized student supports, including social-emotional learning.

Future Focused Education and partners provide professional development for counselors, teachers, administrators, and career support professionals through communities of practice, school site visits, the EdUprising conference, sharing resources, and 1:1 technical assistance meetings. The initiative focuses on engaging students, deepening their community ties, and preparing them for college and careers, strongly emphasizing student leadership and voice. It also complements the Community School Model through local partnerships with families and community (including Tribal partners, nonprofit community-based organizations, and local businesses). The evaluation aims to assess the initiative's effectiveness and impact in its second year and recommend future improvements.

The Innovation Zone initiative aligns with and supports PED's statewide Community Schools initiative to improve educational outcomes in New Mexico by adopting the Six Key Practices of Community Schools framework (5), showcasing PED's commitment to integrated and consistent approaches across its programs.

Source:

3. Innovation Zone Initiative Year 1 Evaluation, 2022-2023.
4. https://ladailypost.com/ped-innovation-zones-in-new-mexico-high-schools/
5. https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/bureaus/cs-and-elt/community-schools/key-practices/

ABOUT INNOVATION ZONES

Over the past several years, the NM Public Education Department worked with Future Focused Education, Los Alamos National Labs Foundation (LANL Foundation), the NM Legislature, and other partners to design and launch the New Mexico Innovation Zone Initiative. The Innovation Zone Initiative is rooted in innovative practices happening around New Mexico and informed by research, especially the recommendations and findings in the LANL Foundation and the PED's January 2022 NM Comprehensive College and Career Pathways Assessment Report. (6) The overarching goal of the Innovation Zone Initiative is to redesign high schools that prepare students to feel secure in who they are and ready for whatever path they choose to increase the well-being of students and their communities. The Initiative intends to implement a system-wide transformation, integrating a multifaceted set of actions within each Local Education Agency. LEAs received professional development, guidance, and technical assistance leveraging promising practices. PED invested in technical assistance from Future Focused and partners who provided resources and guidance for graduate profiles, capstone development, work-based learning, and social-emotional learning.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE INCLUDED:

- Individualized check-ins and consultation meetings with Future Focused staff and partners
- Organized school site visits/demonstrations/consultations/presentations by exemplary and experienced schools and districts
- Work-based learning, CTE alignment, capstone, and graduate profile Community of Practice (CoP) meetings and workshops
- Social-emotional self-assessment and consultations
- Workshops and events
- EdUprising Conference on March 1-2, 2024

Source:
6. https://lanlfoundation.org/research/new-mexico-comprehensive-college-and-career-pathways-assessment-report/

LEA Application and Selection Process

The New Mexico Public Education Department released an Intent to Apply form on April 18, 2023, inviting charter schools and districts (i.e., Local Education Agencies-LEAs) interested in implementing the Innovation Zone Initiative. (7) The New Mexico Public Education Department provided LEAs with extensive application support. (8) This included a self-assessment rubric, application graphic organizers, a webinar recording, virtual office hours, and a budget workshop. (9) LEAs presented their applications to a review panel and were evaluated based on the LEA's potential to perform the transformation work and the number of students served, and they prioritized regional and cultural diversity.

APPLICATIONS WERE EVALUATED ACCORDING TO SELECTION CRITERIA, WHICH INCLUDED:

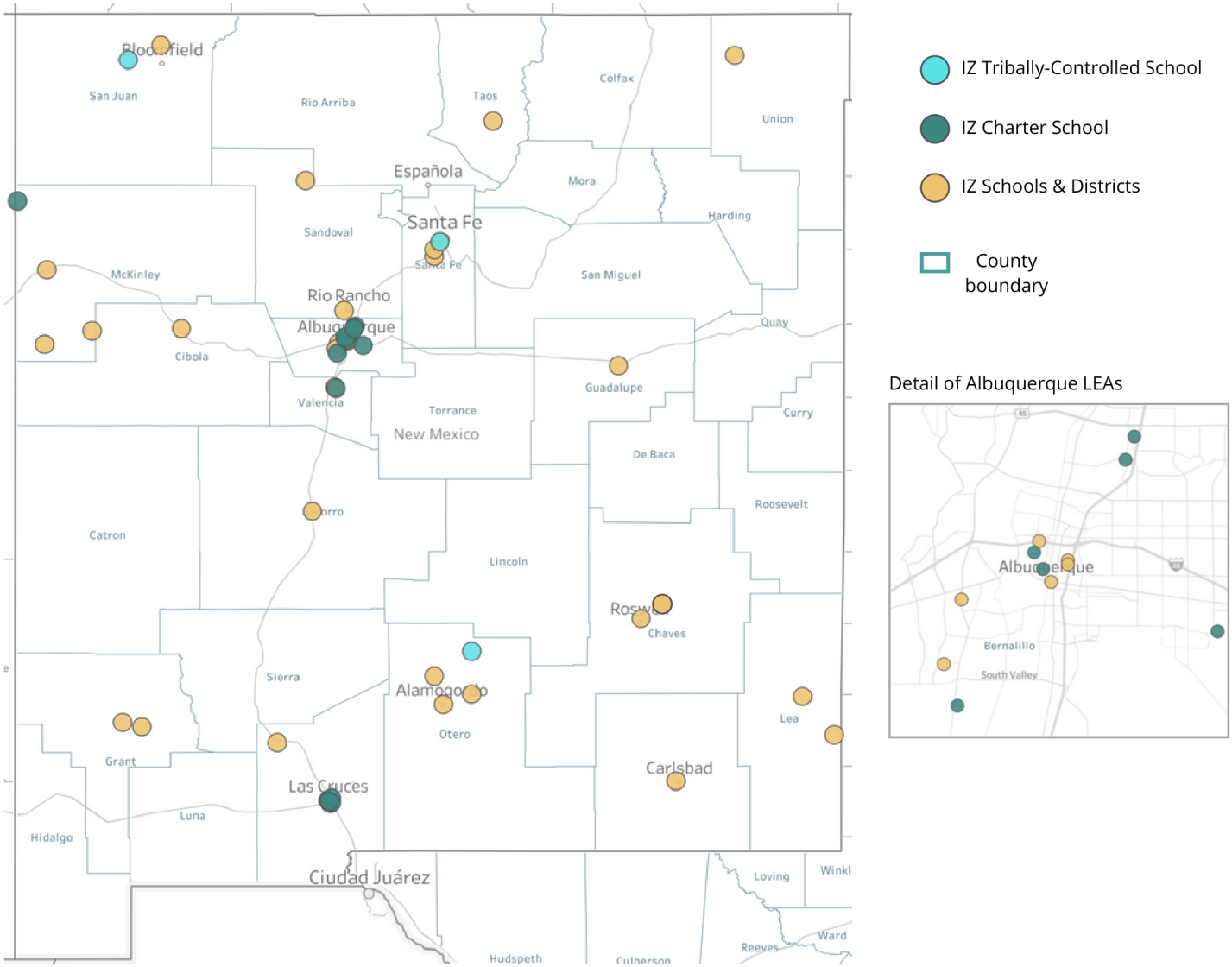
- Collaborative leadership, shared power, and voice
- Powerful student and family/community engagement
- Expanded and culturally enriched learning opportunities
- Meaningful community-connected classroom instruction
- Work-based and experiential learning
- Capstone course inclusion
- Integrated systems of support
- Post-secondary alignment
- Robust personalized supports
- Evaluation and continuous improvement plans
- Budgets that align student-focused innovative goals

Source:
7. https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Innovation-Zone-Awardees-2023-24-Application-Core-Elements.pdf
8. https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Innovation-Zones-Self-Assessment-Rubric.pdf
9. https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Innovation-Zone-Application-Presentation-Template.pdf

Participating LEAs (Schools and Districts)

The districts and schools participating in the Innovation Zone Initiative served more than 50,000 high school students. The districts and schools varied in size; the LEA with the smallest number of students (49) was Dził Ditł'ooí School of Empowerment, Action, and Perseverance (DEAP), a public charter high school located in the rural northwest corner of the Navajo Nation, while the largest sub-awardee was Albuquerque Public School District, which serves over 20,000 high school students. The LEAs were located in various geographic regions, stretching from the state's northern regions to the southern border (Figure 1). Rural and urban schools served students from multiple cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. NMPED awarded forty-seven LEAs, three Tribally-Controlled public schools, nineteen public charter schools, and twenty-five public schools and districts with Innovation Zone awards for approximately $200K each for the 2023-2024 school year. Twelve LEAs are located in Albuquerque, five in Las Cruces, and three in Santa Fe. Nine LEAs have a student population where 45% to 100% are Native American.

Figure 1: Map of Innovation Zone (IZ) LEAs



See Appendix A, Table A1 for a detailed list of LEA enrollment demographics

Participating LEAs (Schools and Districts)

Tribally-Controlled Schools (3)

• Mescalero High School • Navajo Prep School • Santa Fe Indian School

School Districts and High Schools (44)

*The Academy for Technology & the Classics
Alamogordo Public Schools
Albuquerque Public Schools CTE Department
Albuquerque Sign Language Academy
*ACE Leadership HS
*Alma D'Arte HS
Aztec Municipal Schools
Carlsbad
Cloudcroft
Cobre High School
*Cottonwood Classical Prep
Cuba
*DEAP School
Des Moines
Early College High School and Career Enrichment Center
*Explore Academy Las Cruces
Gallup Central High School
Goddard High School
Grants High School
Hatch
*Health Leadership HS
Hobbs (CTECH)
Las Cruces Public Schools
*Las Montañas Charter
Los Lunas
Lovington High School
*Mark Armijo Academy
*Monte Del Sol Charter
*Native American Community Academy
*New America School of Las Cruces
Ramah High School
*Robert F Kennedy Charter
Rio Rancho Public Schools
Roswell High School
Santa Rosa High School
*School of Dreams Academy
*Siembra Leadership HS
Silver Consolidated School District
Socorro High School
*South Valley Academy
*Technology Leadership HS
Tularosa
*Vista Grande Charter
Zuni Public School District

LEAs in **yellow** are year 2 (Cohort 1) Innovation Zone awardees, and schools in black are first-year (Cohort 2) awardees.

*Represents the 19 LEA Charter Schools

METHODOLOGY

New Mexico State University's Center for Community Analysis (CCA) conducted interviews with Innovation Zone LEAs, distributed pre and post-surveys, and collected data from Future Focused Education, the Los Alamos National Labs (LANL) Foundation, and the New Mexico Public Education Department (PED). The CCA also analyzed artifacts, including notes from meetings and convenings, data from websites, news articles, blogs, and public reports. The CCA attended meetings and convenings and collected data through participant observations and conversations. Lastly, awardees submitted quantitative and qualitative end-of-year data to the CCA about the number of students participating in internships, capstones, the implementation of graduate profiles, career-technical education (CTE), social-emotional learning, and more. The CCA collaborated with an evaluation advisory committee. The committee was comprised of staff from Future Focused Education, the Public Education Department's College and Career Readiness Bureau (CCRB), the LANL Foundation, Ocotillo Strategies, the Social Emotional Learning Alliance for New Mexico (SEL4NM), and Parents Reaching Out to develop the evaluation plan with data indicators from the initiatives outlined in PED's RFA.

The evaluation primarily focuses on assessing the initiative's short-term and mid-term goals. These goals target changes in attitudes, knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors related to the Innovation Zone's essential practices and components. By measuring these changes during the initiative's early stages, we can determine the program's effectiveness and potential long-term impact on individuals and communities.

Data Analysis Methods

This evaluation employed a mixed-methods approach to assess the implementation and outcomes of the Innovation Zone Initiative. The evaluation included qualitative and quantitative components to capture the depth of experiences and measurable changes over time.

Qualitative Components

The CCA conducted semi-structured interviews with 30 Innovation Zone LEAs to understand participants' experiences and perceptions of the Innovation Zone Initiative. Interviewees were comprised of teachers, principals, administrators, and coordinators. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and was guided by a predetermined set of questions, allowing for flexibility to explore emerging themes. Interview questions were aligned with the self-assessment rubric LEAs used to apply for the grant, and NMPED used to evaluate the strength of the applications. The rubric reflects NMPED's 6 Key Practices for Community Schools and guides the evaluation plan. (10) The evaluation teams also framed surveys around the components of Innovation Zones. (11)

Data from interviews and open-ended text responses from surveys conducted by the CCA and partners were analyzed using qualitative coding methods. Interview transcripts and open-ended text responses were analyzed using thematic analysis. Key phrases and segments were identified and coded. This initial coding was deductive, based on the interview guide, which aligned with the six essential practices for Innovation Zones and components of Innovation Zones, and inductive, capturing emerging insights. Quotes from LEAs in this report represent common themes from the evaluation and were extracted from interviews, open-ended surveys, and meetings or convenings.

Source:

10. https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/bureaus/cs-and-elt/community-schools/key-practices/
11. https://futurefocusededucation.org/innovation-zones/#nexts/

Quantitative Components

Data for various programs, including internships, capstone projects, Career and Technical Education (CTE) activities, and other related initiatives, were analyzed using descriptive statistics derived from school and district submissions.

The evaluation team implemented a pre-survey and post-survey design to measure changes in knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors related to the Innovation Zone. Fifty-six staff members across 45 LEAs took the pre-survey. Results were analyzed for themes related to the six essential practices within the Innovation Zone strategies, and the responses were compared among two cohorts. The final sample of respondents who took both surveys included 42 participants from 38 Innovation Zone LEAs. The survey was administered at two time points: the Innovation Zone Kick-off event in January 2024 (pre-survey) and in May 2024 (post-survey) at the end of the Innovation Zone grant. A control group of 14 schools that did not receive an Innovation Zone grant took the survey in May 2024.

The pre-survey and post-survey data were analyzed using the Wilcoxon signed-rank test to compare the paired observations for the Innovation Zone LEAs. The Wilcoxon test was chosen as a nonparametric test for its suitability for ordinal data and its ability to detect differences in the central tendency of the paired observations. The evaluation team analyzed changes between the pre-survey and post-survey to determine the initiative's effects on Innovation Zone participants. The control group's results were analyzed to assess trends in knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors and to serve as a comparison for the Innovation Zone participants. Differences between the Innovation Zone post-survey results and the control groups' survey results were examined to evaluate the initiative's effectiveness by comparing the two groups.

Limitations

One unforeseen limitation was that the evaluation team, Future Focused Education, and their technical assistance partners commenced their contracts in January. This timing resulted in a delay of approximately half a school year before Innovation Zone LEAs began receiving technical assistance, professional development, and evaluation support. Consequently, there may have been a slight underestimation of the program's impact on participants. Additionally, the survey response rate for Non-Innovation Zone (Non-IZ) participants was low, with 14 responses. Nevertheless, the evaluation revealed significant differences in knowledge, beliefs, and understanding related to Innovation Zone practices between Innovation Zones schools and those not involved in the initiative.

Another limitation was the unavailability of current data from the New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) concerning graduation rates, Career and Technical Education (CTE), Advanced Placement participation, and enrollment rates. This unavailability was due to ongoing statewide changes in PED's data systems, including the transition from STARS to NOVA. Consequently, most quantitative data for the report were sourced from end-of-year reporting tools or surveys distributed throughout the year. Some LEAs faced challenges in consistently reporting data, rendering some data unusable, likely due to staffing limitations or inconsistencies in their data collection methods.

Research Questions

The overarching research questions were:

1. What was implemented in the Innovation Zone initiative in 2023-24? (Using a Results-Based Accountability framework, address the questions: How much did we do? How well did we do it?)

2. In 2023-24, what was the short-term impact of Innovation Zone funding, professional development, guidance, and technical assistance on districts, schools, and partners? (Using a Results-Based Accountability framework, address the question: Is anyone better off? What changed regarding actions/practices, attitudes, circumstances, knowledge, and/or skills?)

3. In 2023-24, what was the impact on students who participated in Innovation Zone activities (WBL, capstones, CTE, etc., individually and when these are integrated through college and career pathways) in SY2023 and SY2024? (Using a Results-Based Accountability framework, address the question: Is anyone better off? What changed regarding actions/practices, attitudes, circumstances, knowledge, and/or skills?)

This evaluation aims to document and assess how well the Innovation Zone (IZ) initiative was implemented in its second year, understand barriers and supportive factors to the school transformation process, and measure the impact Innovation Zone funding and professional development supports had on students, schools, community, and policy. The evaluation articulates how innovative practices lead to substantial improvements in the student learning experience. This evaluation report is outlined based on the six essential practices Innovation Zone schools are tasked with incorporating into their schools. **Sub-research questions are bolded in yellow and capitalized in each section.**

6 ESSENTIAL PRACTICES INNOVATION ZONES

1. Collaborative Leadership, Shared Power and Voice
2. Powerful Student and Family Engagement
3. Expanded, Enriched, and Relevant Learning Opportunities
4. Meaningful Community-Connected Classroom Instruction
5. Integrated Systems of Support
6. Culture of Belonging, Safety, and Care

FINDINGS BY 6 ESSENTIAL PRACTICE AREAS

1. **Collaborative Leadership, Shared Power and Voice**
2. **Powerful Student and Family Engagement**
3. **Expanded, Enriched, and Relevant Learning Opportunities**
4. **Meaningful Community-Connected Classroom Instruction**
5. **Integrated Systems of Support**
6. **Culture of Belonging, Safety, and Care**

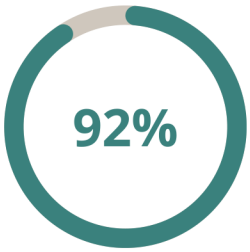
1 COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP, SHARED POWER AND VOICE

Collaborative leadership, shared power, and voice mean actively involving stakeholders in the decision-making process for the school's vision and goals. This approach encourages participatory practices for distributing responsibilities and harnessing the collective expertise of everyone involved. Stakeholders collaborate to build a culture of professional learning, mutual trust, and shared responsibility, intentionally including historically marginalized communities. It also helps create sustainable and supportive environments for students, staff, and educators by effectively combining resources to enhance support for students. (12)

HOW IS SHARED POWER AND VOICE FROM A DIVERSE SET OF COMMUNITY PARTNERS IN THE DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF INNOVATION BEING DEMONSTRATED?

LEAs implemented collaborative leadership, shared power, and voice in developing graduate profiles. Graduate profiles outline the knowledge and skills the local community identifies as important outcomes for graduates. This includes social-emotional skills that honor students' cultural and linguistic identities. LEAs received support in developing graduate profiles through technical assistance provided by Future Focused. LEAs also participated in Communities of Practice (CoPs), the EdUprising Conference, and Educator Networks and received individualized support. Survey results indicated that nearly all respondents (92%) believe graduate profiles are an important response to the Yazzie-Martinez case (Figure 2).

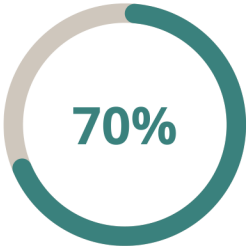
Figure 2: Importance of graduate profiles



of respondents said graduate profiles are an important response to the Yazzie-Martinez case.

By the end of year two, 70% of the Innovation Zone LEAs reported they were either finished or revising/updating an existing graduate profile (Figure 3). It should be noted that graduate profiles are living documents that are regularly updated, as several grantees who finished expressed. Schools collaborated with various stakeholders—including students, teachers, administrators, parents, community members, local businesses, and industry partners—to create graduate profiles. Engagement methods included surveys, focus groups, interviews, town halls, and community meetings, often facilitated by organizations like Battelle for Kids and Future Focused Education. The multi-step, iterative process involved several stages like data gathering, analysis, drafting, feedback collection, and refinement, typically taking several months to a year.

Figure 3: Graduate profile status among LEAs, SY 23-24



of LEAs were finished or revising/updating an existing graduate profile by the end of the reporting period.

Source:
12. https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/bureaus/cs-and-elt/community-schools/key-practices/key-practice-2/

Emphasizing community values, cultural relevance, and regional workforce needs, schools engaged students in designing and providing input on the profiles, including graphic design. In one school, students reflect on and present their progress toward their graduation profile twice a year, fostering ownership of their learning and encouraging them to pursue their passions, positively impacting their academic progress. Overall, the LEAs described a collaborative, inclusive, and iterative approach to developing graduate profiles, strongly aligned with community input and local needs.

"I really love the idea [of a graduate profile], to be very honest with you. I thought it was a great way for us to focus on what our students will need down the road and I thought that would be a great document for us to create to kind of get some buy-in from our teachers, students, community members."

"So the other part of that is asking the community and students what they would like because, as the adults, we have ideas sometimes, but then our ideas don't necessarily mesh with what they're interested in."

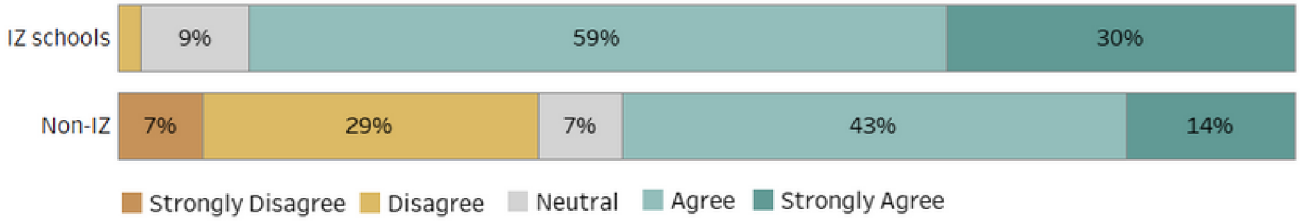
LEAs use other methods to ensure that students, parents, and the community are a part of decision-making at the school. For example, many LEAs offer students choices through project-based learning and career pathways, making learning more hands-on and relevant to real-world applications. Some LEAs individualize internship and capstone projects that build off student interests. Schools reported partnering with local businesses, nonprofits, and other organizations for internships, project-based learning, and curriculum development. These partnerships ensure that educational innovations align with community and workforce needs. Several LEAs mentioned efforts to include community voices, particularly in areas with significant Native American populations. Schools partnered with Tribal leaders and incorporated traditional practices into school programs.

"We're working with various Pueblos to bring people in and show people how to do this. But it's a collaboration, and it's a family, it's a generational thing. What we see right now is that we have students who are learning Navajo and Zuni, and we have grandparents who speak Navajo and Zuni. But the parents don't speak it, and they don't know the language. So we have people come in, and they work with this generational group of people."

Many schools have established diverse advisory boards or councils that include representatives from various stakeholder groups. These typically include students, parents, teachers, administrators, local businesses, community organizations, and sometimes local government officials. One school mentioned a Collaborative Leadership Council with 23 members from different backgrounds. Schools hold regular meetings, forums, and workshops to gather input from community partners—from monthly Site-Based Leadership Team meetings to quarterly community meetings and annual town halls. Most schools use surveys, focus groups, and other feedback mechanisms to gather input from various stakeholders. LEAs emphasize student voice by including students in decision-making through student councils, focus groups, and advisory positions.

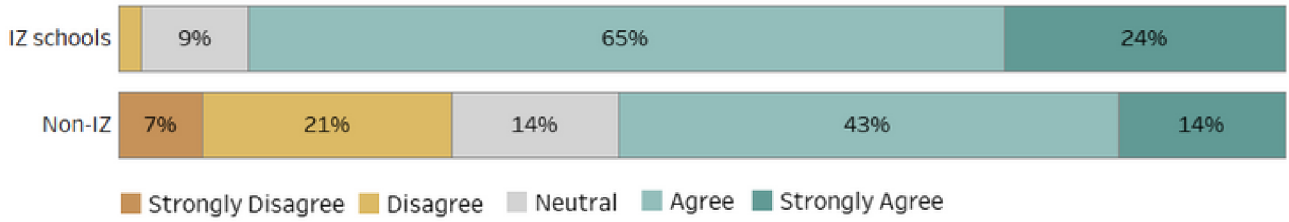
The end-of-year survey asked respondents to evaluate their level of knowledge regarding developing shared voice at their school. A comparison between Innovation Zone (IZ) schools and schools that did not receive the grant (Non-IZ) showed IZ schools had more positive responses, with 89% either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement, compared to 57% for Non-IZ schools (Figure 4). Furthermore, the percentage of strong agreement was more than double in IZ schools (30% vs 14%). Non-IZ schools also had a much higher disagreement rate (36% combined disagree/strongly disagree) than IZ schools (2% disagree). Results show that IZ respondents felt more confident in their knowledge than Non-IZ schools.

Figure 4: I know a lot about how to: "Develop shared voice from a diverse set of community partners."



Responses to a statement regarding how to develop shared power from a diverse set of community partners revealed similar results to shared voice. Only 2% of IZ schools disagree, compared to 28% of Non-IZ schools who disagree/strongly disagree (Figure 5). In addition, 89% of IZ schools showed positive (agree/strongly agree) perceptions compared to 57% of Non-IZ, suggesting Innovation Zone participants have a much stronger perceived ability or knowledge about developing shared power from diverse community partners than Non-IZ schools.

Figure 5: I know a lot about how to: "Develop shared power from a diverse set of community partners."



"We conducted several surveys over the last two years, established parent and student focus groups, and interviewed various stakeholders to understand their needs, interests, and suggestions for the programs. These initial actions drove our decision to apply for an IZ Grant. This work will help design programs that are responsive to our community's needs and expectations."

LEAs showed a strong commitment to inclusive decision-making and recognized the value of diverse perspectives in shaping educational innovations. However, the depth and breadth of community involvement vary across schools and districts, with some appearing to have more comprehensive and systematic approaches than others.

"I think early on [in the process] people recognized that you had to [engage community]. If your community was not a part of the school, you were gonna struggle. And so we've really made a point of including our community."

"In the 2023-2024 school year, [our school] began a partnership with Johns Hopkins University to support students in developing their voice through Student Agency. As part of this initiative, students traveled to Johns Hopkins University to be highlighted in the project. These students then collaborated with their peers to ensure that all students have a voice in shaping the future direction of our Innovation Initiative and other school aspects. We believe that for students to succeed, they must have agency, a sense of belonging, and connectedness. By empowering our students with a strong voice, we ensure they have a seat at the table in decision-making processes."

"We have been working closely with area employers, the Economic Development Council, the local hospital, NMSU-Grants Campus, and with our Native American Pueblos to help determine student needs, employer needs, and ways to attract a variety of student populations to our existing CTE programs, as well as to identify future CTE programming needs."

HOW ARE LEAS EFFECTIVELY WEAVING LOCAL, STATE, AND FEDERAL (AND, WHERE APPROPRIATE, TRIBAL) RESOURCES TO REIMAGINE THE HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE AND SUPPORT CRITICAL CHANGES TO HOW STUDENTS ARE ENGAGED?

LEAs braided funding to support their goals. Schools are combining multiple funding sources, including Perkins grants, Next Gen funding, Title I, ESSER funds, operational budgets, Public Education Department mini-grants, community school grants, grants focused on mental health, and more. Braiding funding proved helpful to LEAs because it allows schools to support comprehensive initiatives that a single funding source may not cover. However, numerous LEAs were worried about the sustainability of their programs without Innovation Zone funding, and being able to obtain funding from other sources reassured them.

"Within the conversations with partners at CCRB, county, and city-wide, we share our needs transparently, which has brought us closer to new resources. In order to help our local economy and small business we help support what's going on by communicating to students seamlessly. Before IZ, we did not have clear communication of opportunities, and this has helped us establish a ground for collaboration with our local governments and community."

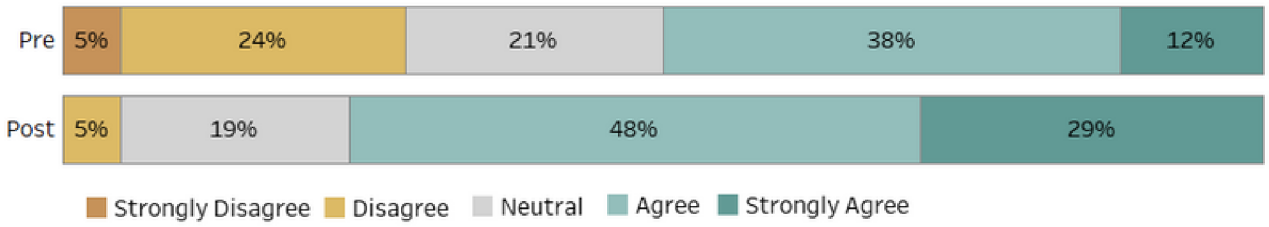
LEAs are also leveraging nonfinancial resources to support students. This includes community partnerships. Many schools partner with local businesses, nonprofits, and community organizations to provide internships, mentorships, and real-world learning experiences. These partnerships often contribute resources, expertise, and work-based learning opportunities. Schools serving Native American students partner with Tribal councils and organizations to incorporate culturally relevant programming and support. This includes language classes, cultural events, and collaboration with Tribal leaders on curriculum development.

"We are creating learning opportunities outside the classroom that connect students with their community and culture. This involves Native field trips and cultural events. We organize visits to cultural sites, museums, and Tribal gatherings to immerse students in their heritage."

"We partner with our community organizations, local businesses, and nonprofits to offer our students vocational education, including internships, mentorship programs, and community projects, to empower them to succeed."

Results from the pre and post-surveys with Innovation Zone participants showed a substantial positive shift in participants' confidence or knowledge about effectively combining resources from different stakeholders to support student engagement initiatives. The post-survey indicated respondents shifted from negative views to more positive ones (Figure 6). The overall positive sentiment (agree/strongly agree) increased from 50% to 77%, and strong agreement more than doubled from 12% to 29%. Negative sentiments (disagree/strongly disagree) decreased from 29% to 5%.

Figure 6: I know a lot about how to: "Effectively weave local, state, and federal resources to support critical changes to student engagement."



"Weaving is the appropriate word here. As we weave school resources as well as local, state, federal, and Tribal resources with Innovation Zone resources, we have been able to rethink priorities as they relate to cultural relevance. The reimagining of the Early College Academy experience, especially with the emphasis on college and career readiness, allows for community-driven learning connected to prior-lived experiences, language, and Native and Hispanic cultures, especially those generational experiences that involve grandparents, parents, and students. Our strategic approach addresses funding, partnerships, and curriculum development."

2 POWERFUL STUDENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

At the core of every school are students and their families. Ideally, engagement activities are designed to build trust and collaboration, empowering families to support their children's learning. Families and students should play an active role in the school community, participating in decision-making and shaping the school's environment, priorities, and partnerships. Schools should draw on families' lived experiences and insights to enhance student success. With these goals in mind, schools transform into hubs offering opportunities for both adults and young people, fostering a deeper understanding of children, and better aligning home and school efforts. As a result, positive relationships, school climate, and student outcomes—such as attendance, discipline, and academic achievement—improve. Additionally, schools gain crucial advocates as families and community members align with strategic goals and view themselves as essential partners in the school's success. (13)

HOW ARE COMMUNITY-SPECIFIC STUDENT AND FAMILY ASSETS BEING LEVERAGED?

Many LEAs used the Innovation Zone Initiative to leverage student and family engagement to ensure the success of their schools, districts, and programs. LEAs made concerted efforts to involve parents in the school or district's plans, activities, and concerns. One LEA implementing social-emotional learning hosted a program that teaches parents how to deal with the emotional needs of their children. Another LEA involved parents in the judging process for the senior exhibition. An LEA invited parents to see the school's augmented reality work-based learning tools during a "family night." Another strategy was community nights for families and students to learn more about the school's CTE pathways from teachers. Numerous LEAs include students and parents in the decision-making process for various initiatives and programs in their schools. Some LEAs had specific positions at their school before the initiative, focusing on family engagement.

Acknowledging the diversity within their communities, multiple LEAs offered events and resources in Spanish, ensuring that all families could actively participate in their children's education regardless of language barriers. Goddard High School recognized that their successes were bolstered by the support and resources provided through the SY 2023-2034 Innovation Zone Grant. One notable achievement was the implementation of the SOAR K12 database-driven Tutoring Center. The center provided students with personalized tutoring to help them succeed in their coursework. Coupled with implementing a text messaging system to alert students and parents about missed assignments, the school has seen dramatic changes in attendance and grades.

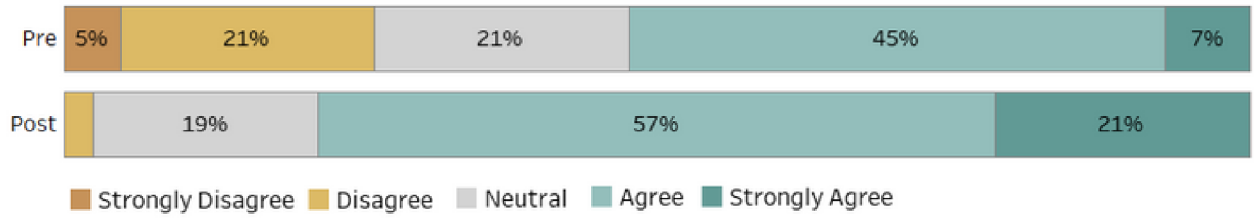
"We are grateful for the unwavering support of our community and engaged parents, who play a vital role in our students' success. Their involvement strengthens our school-home partnership and ensures that students receive the support and encouragement they need to excel academically and personally. As a result of these initiatives and collaborative efforts, we have seen a decrease in failure rates and discipline issues, indicating that our students are more engaged and successful in their academic pursuits."

Source:
13. https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/bureaus/cs-and-elt/community-schools/key-practices/key-practice-1/

Several Innovation Zone schools leverage student and community assets by following a Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Framework. Health Leadership High School, a project-based charter school in Albuquerque, has a student body of 30 percent English Language Learners (ELL) and focuses on implementing a Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Framework recognizing and valuing community-specific assets like language and bilingualism. The school embraces and encourages students' language skills, particularly in Spanish, American Sign Language (ASL), and various Native American languages. (14) They offer the State Seal of Biliteracy/Bilingualism in these languages, recognizing the value of students' linguistic backgrounds in healthcare professions since medical interpreters and healthcare workers who speak multiple languages are in high demand. The school employs staff members who reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity of the student body, creating a more relatable and supportive environment. The school also incorporates traditional healing methods from various cultures into its curriculum alongside Western medicine. Integrating traditional home remedies alongside biology and first aid training validates students' cultural backgrounds, making them feel their identity and heritage are valuable in academic and medical settings. This approach is crucial for New Mexico, which requires healthcare professionals who not only fill a shortage but also deeply understand and connect with the communities they serve. Health Leadership High School's mission addresses this need, making it innovative and essential for the state's future healthcare landscape.

Results from the pre and post-surveys with Innovation Zone participants showed a substantial positive shift in participants' confidence or knowledge about leveraging community-specific student and family assets and building upon local innovations to improve the learning experience (Figure 7). There was an overall positive shift: Positive responses (combined agree/strongly agree) increased from 52% to 78%. Negative responses (disagree/strongly disagree) decreased from 26% to 2%.

Figure 7: I know a lot about how to: "Leverage community-specific student and family assets and build upon local innovations to improve the learning experience."



Source:
14. https://futurefocusededucation.org/health-leadership-case-study/

IN WHAT WAYS ARE LEAS BUILDING UPON LOCAL INNOVATIONS TO ENSURE ALL STUDENTS ARE SERVED BY SUBSTANTIAL IMPROVEMENTS TO THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE OF LEARNING?

Many schools and districts are building on local innovations through community-driven learning opportunities like work-based learning and projects. At the same time, others emphasize elevating students' rich linguistic and cultural practices in the classroom.

"[Our school] is unique in our commitment to local culture, especially for our Native students from Taos Pueblo. The school has an MOU with Taos Pueblo to honor their cultural events schedule ensuring students are not penalized for their absences to perform their cultural duties. [Our school] also provides Taos Pueblo Tiwa language classes as a foreign language credit and students can earn a bilingual seal on diploma if they choose."

"Currently, we collaborate with local cultural organizations and community centers on cultural heritage projects, allowing students to engage with and contribute to their communities, thereby fostering a connection to their cultural roots and local history. Partnerships with local businesses, particularly those owned by community members, enable students to gain practical business skills and promote their cultural heritage through internships and projects."

In interviews and surveys, LEAs spoke about fostering strong community engagement by creating inclusive learning environments that benefit all students. Schools organized events like exhibitions or science fairs where students showcase their talents, and parents participate as judges and attendees. Community schools leveraged their site-based leadership teams by holding regular meetings involving community members, parents, and students in decision-making processes, with many ideas coming directly from students. Several schools have developed family academies and feedback nights to bring families into the building to provide feedback and build stronger connections. Many schools also have a dedicated position focused on improving communication with families, gathering feedback, and involving families in decision-making processes.

"We have a site-based leadership team, and we try to meet at least twice a month, and that's where we're inviting our community members as well as parents, students, especially a lot of our ideas have come from the students, and they're the ones reaching out and telling us what they want."

"We've piloted family academies. They want to keep building on that-increasing family engagement. We did a family feedback night and brought families into the building and ask them questions about what their perceptions of family engagement were and I just think getting them in the building and talking to us and also making phone calls was just a really good step in building on our connections with families, and I feel like they have. They're a stakeholder in the school."

"My position as family advocate has allowed me to build upon our existing structures for communicating with families and focus on family feedback and family involvement and giving families voices in our decision making."

3 EXPANDED, ENRICHED, AND RELEVANT LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Expanded, culturally enriched learning time and opportunities empower students, leverage their strengths and interests, foster a sense of safety, and enhance academic success. These opportunities support students' educational growth and social, emotional, and physical development, allowing them to explore passions and deepen their understanding of academic content. They can accelerate learning and help bridge opportunity gaps between students from low-income families and their peers from higher-income backgrounds during out-of-school hours. Such opportunities are most effective when they incorporate deeper learning practices that engage students with meaningful, culturally enriching content connected to their lives outside of school. (15) Career Technical Education (CTE) programs and work-based learning (WBL) can provide these experiences by placing students in the community and preparing students for the workforce, enhancing their educational experience, and contributing to their long-term success. CTE and WBL also contribute to economic development by aligning education with local workforce needs and helping address skills gaps in the job market. (16)

Work-based learning, like internships, can increase equity by helping students build networks that have the potential to improve their social capital and expose them to new careers. (17) Additionally, when low-income students can access paid internships, they do not have to choose between school or low-paying jobs that do not lead to long-term financial stability. The benefits also extend to employers and the broader community. Employers can help shape the next generation of workers, and communities feel better connected to the youth and see them as contributing members of society. LEAs participating in Innovation Zones leveraged CTE and WBL to provide students with hands-on, practical skills that are directly applicable to various industries.

IN WHAT WAYS ARE SCHOOLS BUILDING CHALLENGING COLLEGE AND CAREER PATHWAYS BY INTEGRATING HIGH-QUALITY TECHNICAL EDUCATION, WORK-BASED LEARNING, AND CORE ACADEMICS AND DUAL CREDIT- BOTH INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF THE SCHOOL BUILDING?

Numerous first-year LEAs provided internships, paid and unpaid, to their students. Second-year LEAs either began or expanded on their existing internships, offering them to more students. These LEAs acknowledged that receiving the Innovation Zone funding earlier in the school year than last year made a difference in their ability to implement innovative practices and build on the previous year's success. This cohort mentioned significant progress in various areas, with a strong focus on expanding and improving work-based learning opportunities, enhancing curriculum, and utilizing the funding provided. This cohort also noted improved organizational structures and communication, which likely contributed to the overall success of these programs.

Source:
15. https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/bureaus/cs-and-elt/community-schools/key-practices/key-practice-3/
16. https://www.ecs.org/wp-content/uploads/PB_0324_Lessons-on-Expanding-Quality-CTE-and-Work-Based-Learning-.pdf
17. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/20201120_BrookingsMetro_Work-based-learning_Final_Report.pdf

Quotes from year 2 Innovation Zone LEAs:

"[Now] we have sound processes to pay students. We actually were able to spend a lot of our funding due to having access to it promptly."

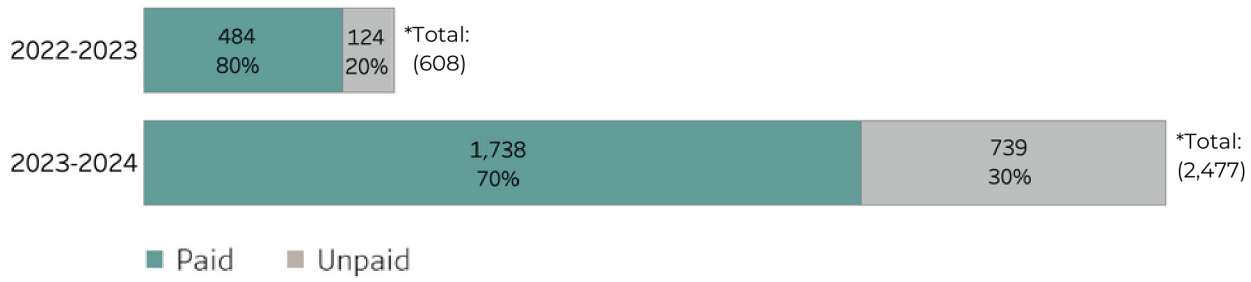
"Our biggest progress this year was the development of a sequential, scaffolded WBL program that every student participates in every week that aligned with our other initiatives."

"We successfully continued to implement and expand our WBL paid internship program from a 1-semester small pilot of 20 students to 60 students."

"We have been able to continue building strong relationships with additional industry partners, which in turn has added new work-based learning opportunities for our students. Next year, we look forward to being even better!"

In total, LEAs provided 2,449 students with 2,477 internships during the 2023-2024 school year (Figure 8). Among internships, 70% (n=1,738) of the internships were paid, and 30% were unpaid internships (n=739). With the addition of 37 LEAs this year, the number of internships rose dramatically. There was a 324% increase in students participating in internships between the last school year and this school year.

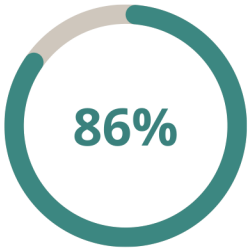
Figure 8: Total number and percent of paid and unpaid internships in Innovation Zones in year one and year two of the Innovation Zone Initiative*



*Totals exclude internships not labeled as Paid or Unpaid. 2,449 distinct students participated in internships. For a detailed list of internships by LEA please see the Appendix.

Among LEAs who reported the number of internships in their schools this year (n=44), 86% (n=38) offered at least one internship (Figure 9). Nearly all paid internships (67%) were funded (partially or fully) with Innovation Zone dollars. Other common funding sources included LEA operational budgets, employer-paid sources, Near-Peer, Next-Gen, and other grants.

Figure 9: Percentage of Innovation Zone LEAs with internships



of LEAs implemented internships in 2023-2024

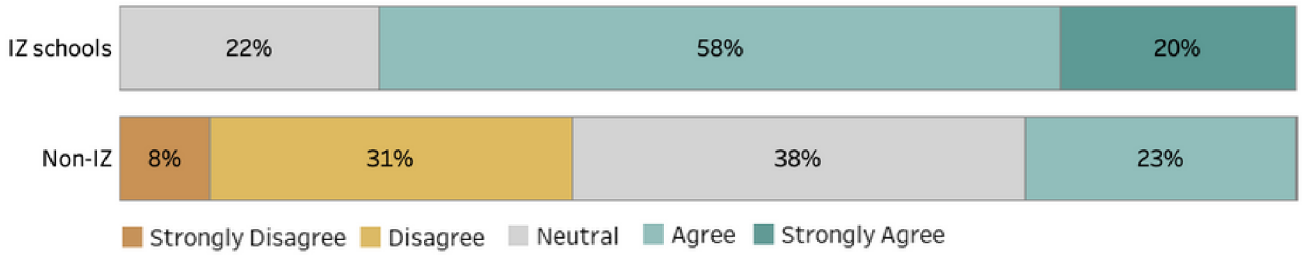
Some LEAs had challenges implementing internships. Numerous LEAs reported transportation being a barrier to students accessing internships. While some LEAs could provide transportation, others looked for creative ways for their students to participate in internships. LEAs in Las Cruces and Albuquerque chose internship sites for students within walking distance of their schools. Several LEAs mentioned how internships helped students who would otherwise not be engaged in school and could not participate in school activities because they had to work long (and likely unpredictable) hours in jobs like retail or fast food to provide for their families. By offering paid internships associated with the school, LEAs addressed this barrier and helped students provide for themselves and their families while making them feel more connected to the school.

LEAs in rural areas reported barriers to developing internships in their school because of the small number of local businesses. For these areas, the school itself was the leading employer in the city, so the variety of internship options was limited. LEAs were creative in finding ways to give their students expanded, enriched, and relevant learning opportunities. For example, an LEA purchased a tiny home kit and has brought in local contractors and volunteers to assist the students in building a tiny home.

Survey results reveal significant differences between Innovation Zone (IZ) and Non-IZ schools across various educational initiatives and strategies related to WBL. Among IZ schools, fifty-eight percent agreed, and 20% strongly agreed that they understand how to develop vertically aligned internship pathways compared to 23% of Non-IZ schools who agreed (Figure 10).

Figure 10: As of right now, I know a lot about:

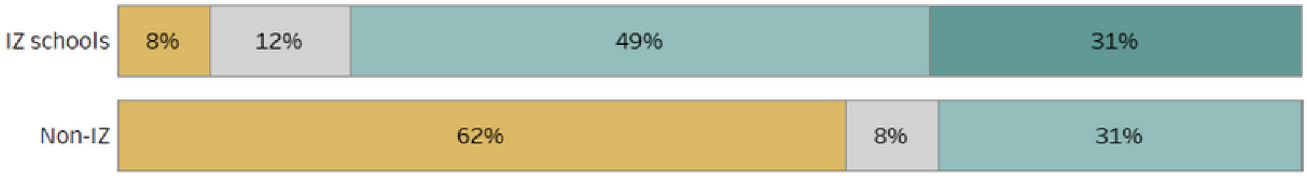
"Developing vertically aligned internship pathways."



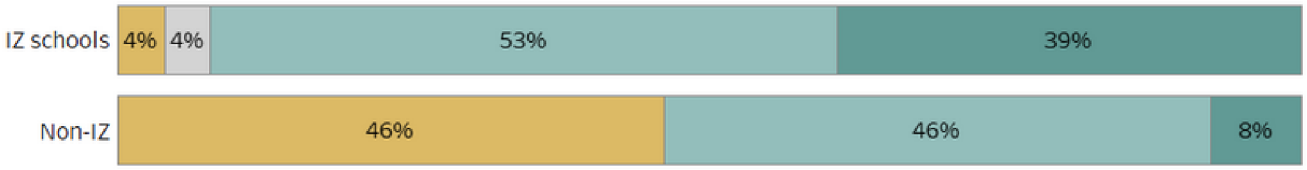
IZ schools were far more positive in their understanding of designing sustainable WBL programs, with 80% agreeing or strongly agreeing (Figure 11). In contrast, 62% of Non-IZ schools disagreed with the statement. IZ schools showed overwhelming favorable agreement with a statement regarding their knowledge on how to develop employer partnerships for WBL; 92% agree/strongly agree, while Non-IZ schools are split (54% agree/strongly agree, and nearly half, 46% disagree). IZ schools almost unanimously said they understood how to identify student support for WBL, with 84% agreeing/strongly agreeing, while Non-IZ schools showed a stark divide, 62% disagreeing and 38% agreeing.

Figure 11: As of right now, I know a lot about:

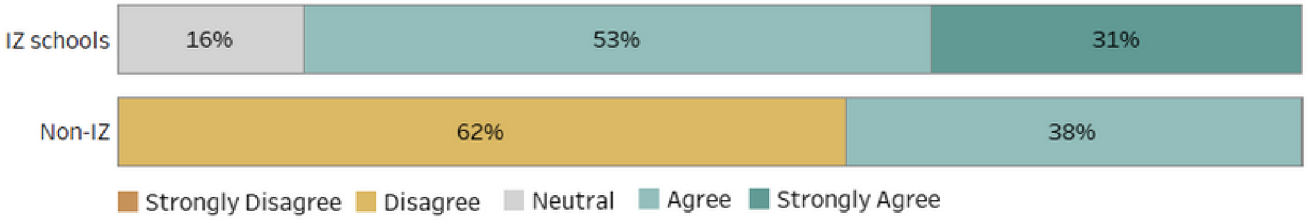
"Designing a sustainable WBL program with existing school and community assets."



"Developing partnerships with employers for WBL."



"Identifying the necessary student supports for WBL."



Overall, IZ schools consistently demonstrate stronger agreement in knowledge about innovative educational practices, particularly those involving real-world applications, work-based learning, and partnerships with employers. Non-IZ schools show more uncertainty about these initiatives, suggesting that the Innovation Zone program may effectively promote and implement these progressive educational strategies or are prepared to do so.

CTE programs are a vital component in fostering enriched learning opportunities. These programs, designed to integrate technical, career-specific skills with traditional academic knowledge, have proven to be instrumental in enhancing student outcomes. (18) During the 2022-2023 school year, there were 22,444 CTE concentrators across 119 LEAs in New Mexico. (19) Based on 2022-2023 9th-12th grade enrollment numbers from the National Center for Educational Statistics database (101,654 students), roughly 22% of high school students in New Mexico were CTE concentrators. This is six percentage points higher than SY 2019-2020, when approximately 16% of students were CTE concentrators. (20) The PED found that CTE programs are linked to increased graduation rates. (21) In 2023, the graduation rate for senior CTE concentrators was 95.77%, compared to the 76.7% graduation rate for all high school seniors. This trend was reflected in all student subgroups, specifically low-income, Native American, English language learners (ELL), and students with disabilities (SWD). Seventy LEAs had a 99-100% graduation rate for CTE concentrators. Among ten schools with the highest graduation rates of the 70 LEAs, 6 LEAs participated in the Innovation Zone Initiative. The PED credits this high graduation rate to CTE students being more engaged because they are working towards a future career.

Source:

18. https://cteresearchnetwork.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/CTE-SysRevAbstract-508.pdf
19. LESC, Hearing Brief: A Review of CTE Programs, Pathways, and Funding, 07-24-24
20. https://lanlfoundation.org/app/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/NM-CCCP-Report-FINAL_0.pdf
21. https://ladailypost.com/ped-new-mexico-sees-consistent-graduation-rates/

Readiness to implement CTE and WBL is likely tied to the technical support LEAs received during the grant period. Future Focused Education and LANL provided LEAs with professional development assistance on aligning graduate profiles, capstone design, and building pathways for high-quality technical education, WBL, internships, and core academics.

The LANL Foundation supported an "Alignment Cohort" with four professional development workshops, an ACE Leadership High School site visit, and various resources. The Alignment Cohort was a subset of 14 Innovation Zone grantees seeking to better align CTE, core academics, work-based learning, capstone, and dual credit. A survey of participants at the end of the year indicated that the majority found the Alignment Cohort workshops were valuable to their school or district. Respondents mentioned how participation in the Alignment Cohort influenced their planning, instructional, and other strategies to integrate high-quality CTE with core academics, WBL, and dual credit. Respondents reported that participation led to increased focus and improvement and helped them "level up" their work. It also offered participants new ideas and increased awareness of aligning WBL, core academics, and CTE. Participants valued learning about strategies from other schools and educators, which led to more intentional planning.

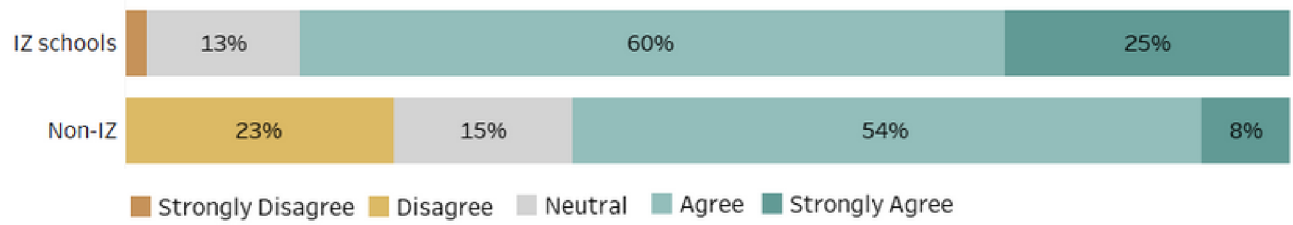
"I am more aware of the importance of aligning WBL and core academics and having a common vision amongst all stakeholders."

"It has helped me to see what more schools are doing and for me to get more creative."

"It has helped us to slow down the implementation of WBL opportunities on campus for deeper and more intentional planning."

Survey results overwhelmingly suggested that exposure to Innovation Zone support and professional development considerably impacted the Innovation Zone awardees, and that impact has increased over time. A comparison of pre-survey results from the first-year Innovation Zone LEAs and second-year LEAs revealed that second-year Innovation LEAs had a statistically significant higher level of agreement on how to align CTE with relevant core academics emphasizing real-world application, project-based learning, performance assessment, and personalized student supports. In addition, comparing IZ LEAs to a sample of Non-IZ LEAs across the state shows a statistically higher level of agreement for Innovation Zone participants, with 85% agreeing or strongly agreeing, compared to only 62% for Non-IZ schools (Figure 12). Non-IZ schools also have a higher rate of disagreement (23%) compared to 2% for IZ schools.

Figure 12: I know a lot about how to: "Align CTE with relevant core academics emphasizing real-world application, project-based learning, performance assessment, and personalized student supports."



LEAs were asked if they had a structural strategy for building challenging college and career pathways (e.g., well-defined programs of study, academies, theme-based schools, or schools-within-schools). The sophistication and comprehensiveness of these strategies varied widely across the surveyed schools. Many schools have established clear, structured programs of study that align with industry needs and academic standards. These often included courses from introductory to advanced levels, culminating in capstone projects or work-based learning experiences. Several schools have implemented career academies or specific pathways focused on health sciences, engineering, business, and technology industries. Most schools also offer dual credit courses in partnership with local colleges and universities. Based on SY 2022-2023 data, 36,590 dual credit courses were taken by 18,074 students, approximately 18% of the New Mexico high school population (Figure 13). Eighteen percent is three percentage points higher than SY 2019-2020, when approximately 15% of students were enrolled in dual credit. (22) CTE has a broader reach, and many schools align CTE with labor market needs and offer industry certifications. These programs often involve hands-on learning experiences and internships, which LEAs value. Nearly all survey respondents (94%) agreed/strongly agreed that WBL should be a part of every student's experience (Figure 14). While many schools have well-developed strategies, some are still in the early stages of developing or implementing their college and career pathway programs and face challenges like teacher retention.

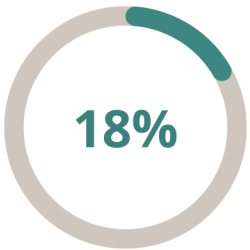
"Teachers within each CTE pathway engage in common planning sessions, enabling them to share best practices, align instructional strategies, and develop integrated projects. This collaborative planning fosters a cohesive learning experience for students and ensures that all educators are working towards the same educational goals."

"Our biggest restraint on building and sustaining pathways is finding and keeping instructors."

Finding and retaining instructors for CTE and Dual Credit classes was a reoccurring theme, particularly for schools in rural locations. However, an Innovation Zone LEA that is rural and Tribal recognized the impact Innovation Zone funding had on supporting their CTE programs by providing the funding for updated equipment, which not only ensures students are using the latest technology but could potentially serve as a draw for teacher recruitment.

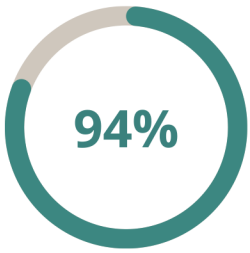
"Another thing that I know is going to have a big impact on later on, is when we try to recruit teachers. If you have a really wonderful facility with all the latest equipment and neat technology, and all the materials and supplies, it's an incredible draw for applicants, and you get a chance to pick from candidates. I've never had this opportunity in all the years I've taught to have all the things I need to do everything I want to do. That's just never happened. It's always something out there on the horizon that you wish you could. We never got to weld aluminum and stainless steel and things like that. Now everybody gets to do that. And it's not just a project. It's skill-building. It almost makes you feel very special. So we're very fortunate."

Figure 13: Estimated percentage of students enrolled in dual credit



of students were enrolled in dual credit in SY 2022-2023

Figure 14: Percentage of IZ LEA survey respondents who strongly agreed/agreed



"WBL should be a part of every students' high school experience."

Source:

22. https://lanlfoundation.org/app/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/NM-CCCP-Report-FINAL_0.pdf

ARE PATHWAYS ACCESSIBLE TO ALL STUDENTS, CONNECTED TO GRADUATE PROFILES, AND ASSESSED BY MEANINGFUL, LOCALLY-DEVELOPED COMMUNITY CAPSTONE EXPERIENCES?

In 2018, the First Judicial District Court ruled that the State of New Mexico violated students' constitutional rights by failing to provide a sufficient public education. (23) The Yazzie-Martinez case highlighted inadequacies in New Mexico's education system, which revealed that the state was failing to provide adequate resources and opportunities for economically disadvantaged students, Native American students, students with disabilities, and English learners. Innovation Zones seeks to remedy this condition by ensuring all students are college- and career-ready, particularly historically underserved students. Innovation Zone LEAs described how equity plays a role in implementing work-based learning and CTE.

"The Innovation Zone has advanced equity in our school as well as the community by allowing us the opportunity to truly change students' lives that might not have had the opportunity otherwise. For example, a middle-of-the-road academic, Hispanic male, not involved in any extracurricular activities, with non-English speaking parents, attended CTECH in the Construction pathway, was one of the very first students to have work-based learning opportunities through the Innovation Zone Grant, working at Habitat For Humanity and the NM Ramps Project earning $15.00/hr, and learning a trade outside of the classroom. His shyness and overall confidence completely changed from the opportunity he had through the Innovation Zone Grant, and he also competed in SkillsUSA in the State and National competitions. He graduated from Hobbs High School with a diploma, dual credit, many hours of WBL, and a full-time position with French Brother's Homes as a project manager, making $27/hr. and now is a Superintendent making $30/hr. with French Brothers. He is just one story of many who have built equity and change in their lives through the Innovation Zone." ~ Kristy Hughes, CTECH Community Relations

"Our efforts have been dedicated to advancing equity within our school and community by leveraging innovative pedagogical practices, inclusive CTE-based curriculum design, and targeted interventions. We have sought to address disparities in educational access, opportunity, and achievement by reevaluating our current CTE pathways offerings and aligning them to the feedback gathered from student interest surveys and community partnership opportunities for WBL. Through the implementation of differentiated instructional practices and PD, we have helped personalize learning pathways coupled with culturally responsive teaching practices and worked to ensure all students have equitable access to appropriate academic guidance and support to pursue a high-quality educational course path tailored to their individual needs and interests."

"[The Innovation Zone funding] paid the student an internship, and it also paid for [the student's] coursework and his [real estate] tests. So when he walked, he's got a full career that was paid for through school."

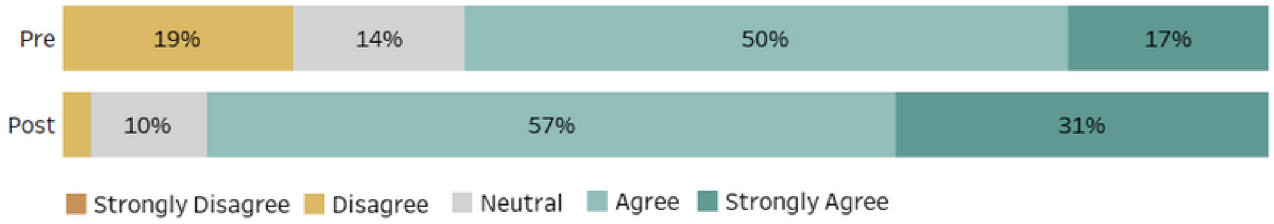
"I know the high school, in particular, has really taken into consideration students who maybe don't have a vehicle, students who struggle financially and really has--they have looked at giving them jobs on campus so they don't miss out on things like that."

Source:
23. https://nmeducation.org/the-yazzie-martinez-impact/

Graduate profiles outline the essential knowledge, skills, and qualities students should acquire before graduation. The graduate profile acts as a guide for educators in shaping curriculum, teaching methods, and assessment approaches. When thoughtfully developed, graduate profiles encourage learning and evaluation that are both culturally and linguistically responsive. (24) Graduate profiles can help schools create CTE and career pathways that students want and the community needs. They can also help schools design community-connected and equitable learning experiences like capstones and WBL.

Pre-survey and post-survey results indicated a significant improvement in participant's knowledge of connecting college and career pathways to graduate profiles (Figure 15). In the pre-survey, 67% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they knew how to connect college and career pathways to graduate profiles, compared to 89% in the post-survey, demonstrating the impact of Innovation Zone professional development and support.

Figure 15: I know a lot about how to: "Connect college and career pathways to graduate profiles."



LEAs explained how schools are making deliberate efforts to align their pathways with their graduate profiles, though the specific approaches and levels of development vary. Las Cruces Public Schools developed KPIs for their graduate profile to connect to student learning and student outcomes in CTE. Many schools create pathways to develop hard and soft skills outlined in graduate profiles.

"Course pathways are designed to align with these profiles, offering a diverse range of academic and extracurricular opportunities that cater to individual interests, strengths, and career aspirations. By integrating course pathways with graduate profiles, [our school] ensures that students receive a well-rounded education that not only prepares them for college or career but also fosters personal growth, critical thinking, and social responsibility."

"Pathways are connected to our graduate profile by utilizing the core skills of reading, writing, math, scientific methods, computers, and technologies while creating an atmosphere of curiosity and willingness to learn. While knowing and respecting myself, knowing and respecting others, I am resourceful, I have unique strengths and interests, and I am agile and ready to create my future."

"Every pathway is connected to our graduate profile because the elements within it would relate to any college or career technical education pathways."

Source:
24. https://futurefocusededucation.org/2024/05/29/graduate-profile-services/

Interviews and surveys indicated most schools were in the process of developing methods for assessing pathways with meaningful, locally-developed community capstone experiences.

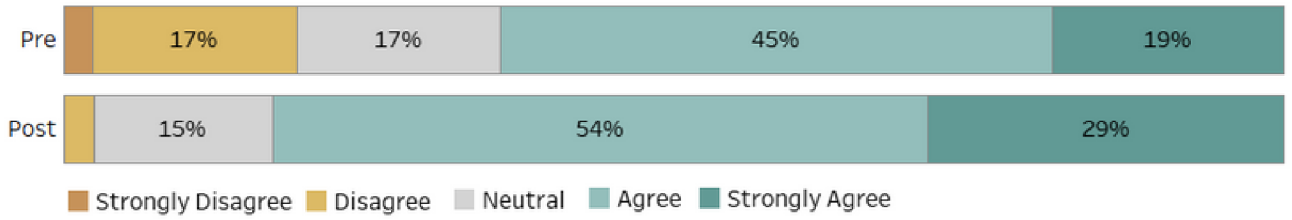
"One thing I wanted to add about the capstones is how the portfolio has become a really nice vessel for capstones. And it's something that's integrated across all grades. What we've worked on this year is that we have formed two different committees. One of those committees is a capstone assessment committee. That is facilitated by one of our amazing teacher coaches and then has the representation of a capstone assessment advisor from each grade level. We've created capstone assessment rubrics used by all of our advisory teachers guiding the capstone portfolio process and have made vertically aligned assessments for each grade level that allow students to go deeper into the the capstone portfolio process every year."

"All capstone projects contain a service learning element and support student learning on how to be optimistic and hopeful for their future."

"Capstones are the greatest demonstration of learning I have seen in my 31 years as a high school educator. Work-based learning, with some upcoming refinements, also is a strong measure of student success and learning. Dual credit is another. CTSO involvement also is a strong measurement."

In just five months, Innovation Zone participants' confidence grew in their knowledge of how to develop a capstone project and their ability to provide equitable access to meaningful capstones, suggesting that technical support or consultations have positively impacted educators' perceived ability to provide these experiences. In the pre-survey, 64% of respondents agreed/strongly agreed that they knew how to develop a capstone project compared to 80% at the end of the grant period. In addition, in the pre-survey, 64% agreed/strongly agreed they knew how to ensure all students have equitable access to meaningful and relevant capstone experiences compared to 83% in the post-survey (Figure 16). The reduction in disagreement from pre to post is particularly notable, indicating a shift in perspective for those initially skeptical.

Figure 16: I know a lot about how to: "Ensure all students have equitable access to meaningful and relevant capstone experiences."



4 MEANINGFUL COMMUNITY-CONNECTED CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION

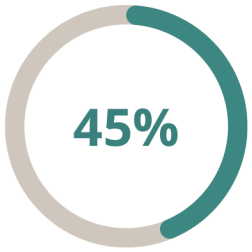
Meaningful, community-connected classroom instruction integrates high-level content and skills with real-world learning opportunities. This approach aligns the curriculum with the local community and students' identities, cultures, and experiences, fostering meaningful inquiry-based learning and problem-solving. Educators and community school staff provide students access to a rich, challenging, culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy by emphasizing the connection between learning and community. Schools and communities develop a mutually reinforcing and supportive partnership. In these partnerships, students are seen as assets and leaders in their communities. (25)

DO ALL STUDENTS HAVE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO MEANINGFUL AND RELEVANT CAPSTONE IN COMMUNITY EXPERIENCES?

In the 2024 legislative session, House Bill 171 (HB171) updated New Mexico's high school graduation requirements by no longer requiring students to complete demonstrations of competency in core academic subjects (i.e., mathematics, reading, and language arts, writing, social studies, and science) to receive a high school diploma. (26) The new graduation requirements include capstones and various performance assessments as new graduation pathway options.

HB171 defines community capstones as a multifaceted academic and intellectual experience that takes a wide variety of forms and that culminates in a final product, performance, or presentation explaining how the final product, performance, or presentation explicates the chosen course to an evaluation panel convened by the public school to evaluate the quality of the course and the final product, performance or presentation. (27)

Figure 17: Percentage of community capstones in 2023-2024



Innovation Zone LEAs implemented community capstones

Community capstones also demonstrate that students have met the expectations in the Profile of a Graduate. In the 2023-2024 school year, 45% of schools (n=21) reported implementing community capstone projects in their school (Figure 17). In addition, 945 students participated in a total of 958 community capstones. These teacher-driven assessment methods mark a significant departure from previous years. They especially support students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP), as they can simultaneously work on community capstone projects, complete the IEP requirements, and meet graduation requirements. Previously, portfolios were the only Alternate Demonstration of Competency reserved for students unable to achieve minimum scores on the PARCC or End of Course exams. (28)

Source:
25. https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/bureaus/cs-and-elt/community-schools/key-practices/key-practice-4/
26. https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us
27. https://www.nmlegis.gov/Sessions/24%20Regular/bills/house/HB0171.pdf
28. https://futurefocusededucation.org/2024/01/25/individualized-education-and-capstones/

Survey respondents overwhelmingly supported the use of capstones to demonstrate competency towards graduation and recognized that capstones are an important response to the Yazzie Martinez court case (Figures 18 and 19). Innovation Zone LEAs reported that 250 students used community capstones as a demonstration of competency for graduation this year. According to Future Focused Education, supporting capstones is vital for enhancing the effectiveness and equity of education in our state. (29) It empowers educators to assess what students know and can do rather than relying on external standardized tests to identify areas students have yet to master.

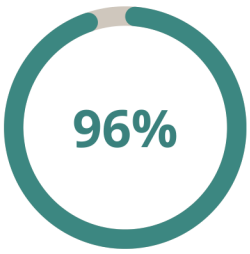
LEAs were at different points in developing capstones. Many first-year and second-year awardees continued to focus on developing graduate profiles, CTE, and work-based learning. In addition, numerous LEAs implemented CTE capstones rather than community capstones. LEAs use capstones for students to show the skills they have obtained at the end of an internship or pathway. Numerous LEAs are rethinking how to implement capstones because of the recent passage of HB171, which changes the graduation requirements in New Mexico and allows CTE courses and WBL to count towards core requirements. (30)

One LEA currently implementing capstones is working to replace its credit recovery program with capstones. Another LEA used their service learning class as a pilot for capstones. Students worked at animal shelters, ran events, and more for their capstone projects. Another LEA used service learning as a capstone, where students worked with a community partner. One example was students working with gun buyback programs and using the gun parts to make gardening tools through the school's welding program. Another LEA's students were involved in Community capstone projects focused on unhoused individuals and affordable housing, suicide prevention, and safe sober spaces for youth in the county. An LEA has students building a tiny home as a capstone project. The students helped with construction and electricity for the tiny house with the help of community contractors and volunteers. Numerous LEAs are having their students create portfolios to demonstrate what they have learned throughout their time in school and their competency to graduate.

Figure 18: Percentage of IZ survey respondents who strongly agreed/agreed

"All students should have an opportunity to use capstones as a demonstration of competency for graduation."

Figure 19: Percentage of IZ survey respondents who strongly agreed/agreed



"Capstones are an important response to the Yazzie Martinez court case."

In this school year, among schools that completed community capstones, at least 250 students used community capstones to demonstrate competency toward graduation.

Source:
29 https://futurefocusededucation.org/2023/09/21/new-graduation-requirements-will-empower-students-and-teachers/

30. https://www.governor.state.nm.us/2024/02/09/governor-signs-bill-modernizing-graduation-requirements-requirements-not-updated-since-2009/

IN WHAT WAYS ARE LEAS PROVIDING COMMUNITY-DRIVEN LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES CONNECTED TO PRIOR LIVED EXPERIENCES, LANGUAGE, AND CULTURE?

LEAs are providing community-driven learning opportunities through work-based learning, CTE pathways, and capstone projects. Numerous LEAs developed or used existing partnerships with local businesses and organizations to support these efforts. LEAs utilized shared power and voice to hear from local stakeholders about what learning experiences should be included in the school to best represent the diversity of the students. In addition, schools brought in local cultural figures and held events connected to student's language and culture.

An LEA is currently developing a curriculum that includes cultural elements. Other LEAs include Ethnic and Native Studies in their curriculum. LEAs are supporting English language learners by connecting them with internships and capstone projects that reflect their language and culture. LEAs support their students in obtaining their Seal of Biliteracy. Two schools had students complete capstones for the Seal of Biliteracy. Students participating in community capstones also chose topics related to their experiences, language, and culture. For example, a student's project focused on keeping the Tiwa language alive, and another focused on mental health. In everyday class projects, teachers are encouraging students to take the lead on projects and connect them with their cultural background and interests. Multiple LEAs partner with nearby Tribes and support students in working with them through internships or completing a community capstone.

"We facilitate real-life experiences outside the classroom, ensuring their educational journey honors their diverse backgrounds while equipping them with practical, real-world skills."

"We added an Indigenous media productions pathway and so tied to that, [a] half-time position of a Navajo teacher so that ultimately the goal is that students can embed language in some of their videos and pieces of that."

"When implementing programs like Native Studies and Ethnic Studies, we ensure that they are designed with cultural sensitivity and representation. We work closely with our dual credit partners and Native American and Hispanic community leaders to create authentic and respectful content. The grant has allowed us to hire instructors from these communities and we are able to offer traditional practices, like moccasin making, drum making, and curanderismo herbal classes."

An Innovation Zone school located in the remote ranching community of Des Moines engaged students in learning experiences that are community-driven and culturally relevant. (31) Through internships, students used architecture software to design and build a tiny house under the guidance of professional architects and contractors. The program integrated real-world skills such as business literacy, decision-making, and exposure to various careers beyond agriculture. The tiny house project leverages local resources and addresses the unique challenges of a rural community with limited exposure to diverse career paths. The program enhanced technical skills and fostered problem-solving, critical thinking, and self-directed learning, providing valuable career insights and experience. The LEA has considered this project could potentially address housing issues in this rural community or serve as an Airbnb that students manage.

Source:
31. https://futurefocusededucation.org/2024/04/18/des-moines-schools/

IN WHAT WAYS ARE INSTRUCTION AND INNOVATION DRIVEN BY LOCALLY DEVELOPED GRADUATE PROFILES?

LEAs are using the graduate profile as a guiding document for curriculum and any projects that students participate in. LEAs ensure that graduating students reflect the traits defined in their graduate profile. For example, several LEAS assessed student capstones using a rubric based on the graduate profile indicators. Some LEAs are working on aligning assessment systems more closely with graduate profiles or industry standards. Most schools consider their students' cultural backgrounds when developing their graduate profile and mention involving community partners in identifying critical skills and attributes for graduates. When designing CTE pathways, several LEAs align pathways with graduate profiles and incorporate the hard and soft skills outlined in graduate profiles. Numerous schools honor Native American culture in the traits and design of their graduate profile and use it to drive curriculum and instruction. Although schools are making deliberate efforts to align their pathways with their graduate profiles, specific approaches and levels of development vary.

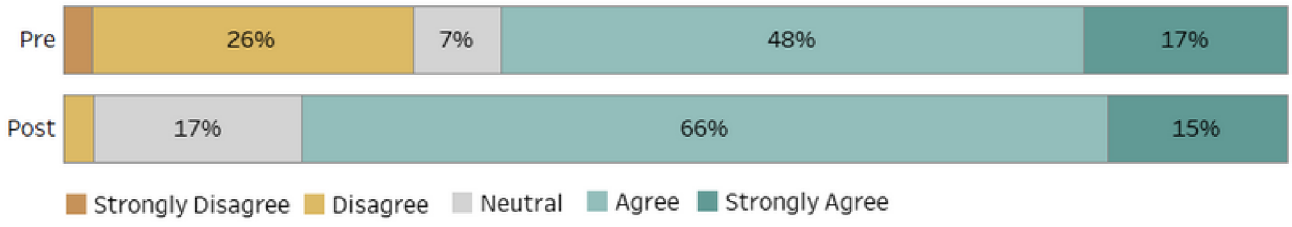
"[Our] School's problem of practice is: "What will [our students] do to affirm, value and strengthen students' Ashiwi identity and culture?" along with our graduate profile continues to drive curriculum and programming planning and development. The intentional inclusion of these two components in lesson planning and implementation of programs strengthens connections to lived experience, language, and culture."

"All capstone projects contain a service learning element and support student learning, how to be optimistic and hopeful for their future."

"Through pathway experiences, students learn the value of community service, advocacy, and ethical decision-making, aligning with our Graduate Profile's emphasis on leadership and citizenship."

Pre- and post-survey results indicated a significant increase in the percentage of respondents who agree (from 48% to 66%) that they know how to drive instruction and innovation with locally developed graduate profiles (Figure 20). The percentage of respondents who strongly disagree decreased from 26% to 2%, indicating fewer participants feel entirely uninformed. However, the increase in respondents who were neutral indicated that some LEAs could use more support in this area.

Figure 20: I know a lot about how to: "Drive instruction and innovation with locally-developed graduate profiles."



5 INTEGRATED SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT

Integrated systems of support promote healthy learning, development, and well-being using an assets-based approach to benefit students, families, and the community. Integrated systems of support offer services to address academic and non-academic barriers, increasing access to essential services and preventative care. By addressing social determinants of health, integrated systems of support improve student attendance, behavior, social well-being, and academic achievement. (32)

IN WHAT WAYS ARE LEAS INTEGRATING ROBUST ACADEMIC, SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, HEALTH AND WELLBEING SUPPORTS INTO THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE WITH CLEAR EVIDENCE OF STUDENT VOICE AND PERSONALIZATION IN DESIGN?

The Social Emotional Learning Alliance for New Mexico (SEL4NM) is a strategic partner of NMPED and the Innovation Zone Initiative. SEL4NM's mission is to improve the lives of all young people and adults by empowering advocates to support social and emotional learning in New Mexico. (29) SEL4NM guided Innovation Zone LEAs by participating in and presenting to the Communities of Practice (CoPs), site visits with LEAs, implementing their SEL Readiness Self-Assessment, and providing debriefs and reflections with LEAs about their results.

LEAs provided academic systems of support to encourage student success. Numerous LEAs had academic supports for students, like tutoring. For example, one LEA gave teachers weekly sessions to provide tutoring support to students in need. LEAs have study halls, peer mentoring, and academic advising. One LEA used Innovation Zone funding to purchase the program NM JAG (Jobs for Americas Graduates), and another LEA purchased Bright Path, a college and career interest and aptitude platform. One LEA, concerned about the students who were missed using traditional support methods, held a student conference with food, a DJ, and resources. Goddard High School has tracked missing assignments through its program. With Innovation Zone funding, the school expanded the program and created a tutoring center where adult tutors are paid to assist those students in need.

"But within that there is also what we have, which is called an intensive tutoring program. So, every classroom teacher has at least one of those four flex sessions every week dedicated to providing tutoring support specifically to the students who are struggling in their class."

LEAs prioritize college and career readiness for students by offering work-based learning, internship opportunities, career exploration resources, and career fairs, as well as by having a staff position in the school specifically to help students in these areas. Having a staff member specific to college and career readiness or an advising period has proved beneficial to students. Students have the agency to make decisions, like which pathway is best for them, while also receiving guidance and support.

Source:
32 https://sel4nm.org

“So, that's one thing that we're revamping, our advisory program next year, and that's going to be a component of that. So, the 11th and 12th grades, a day a week, will be college and career exploration. For all 11th/12th graders and 9th/10th graders, a day of the week next year during advisory will be like soft skills and social-emotional learning. That's one thing that I've seen at numerous schools. Sometimes, we assume kids have some of these skills as they go through different levels. Even like organizing a backpack or a notebook or taking notes, like we assume kids have these skills, and then they really don't, and we just keep on moving along without really reteaching or even laying the foundation for those skills for the kids that don't have them.”

Numerous schools provide transportation services to work-based learning opportunities to ensure accessibility. For example, at Gallup Central High School, students from schools up to an hour and a half away get bussed in to participate in CTE programs. Some LEAs even purchased transportation with the Innovation Zone grant.

“Some of our schools are about an hour and a half away, hour away, half an hour away. But we provide transportation for our students in the morning to come, and do their CTE program with us and then they go back in the afternoon for their core at their home school.”

Numerous LEAs are implementing social-emotional learning. SEL4NM found that 51% of LEAs were in the early phases of SEL integration implementation, 29% were implementing and planning improvements, and 20% were fully implementing SEL. (33) Survey responses and findings from SEL4NM found that most LEAs are in the early stages of implementing SEL and may be experiencing challenges.

“SEL has been confused with teachers thinking they need a specific curriculum rather than needing to have relationships with students.”

Some LEAs use counselors and social workers to provide SEL support to students. In addition, LEAs use dedicated SEL coordinators or teams and specific SEL curricula. An LEA plans to use advisory periods to teach students soft skills and expand on social-emotional learning. Another LEA has a health and behavioral health team that meets with students when they come to the school to understand their background and starting point better. LEAs use restorative justice practices to assist students in conflict resolution and community building. In addition, LEAs are ensuring that their SEL supports connect to cultural values for Native American and Hispanic students.

Student voice and personalization varied widely among LEAs. Some LEAs surveyed students, staff, and parents/guardians to gather feedback on perceptions of school climate, safety, belonging, and overall satisfaction. They also implemented mechanisms for students to provide feedback, report concerns, and voice their opinions. LEAs also offered professional development to teachers and staff on SEL, trauma-informed practices, and overall student well-being.

"We have a student data wall with every student's name on it. School staff write things about the student next to their name, such as: he likes basketball, he works at Walmart, etc. Only the good stuff. Our goal is to see which students we know things about and which we don't. We will then actively work on getting to know those that we don't know. We need to increase our SEL capacity."

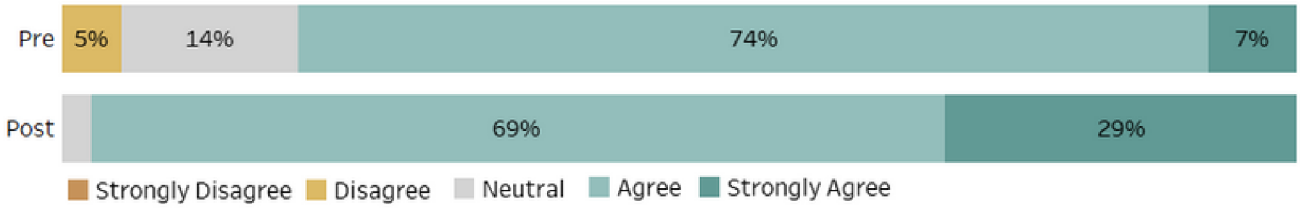
Source:
33. Innovation Zone Initiatives and the Integration of Social-Emotional Learning Skills, SEL4NM

"[Our] students have a SEL counselor full time to help them with their needs. This has been an instrumental help to addressing the struggles our students face going through everyday teen life. One student who is in our work-based learning internship class actually seeked out support from our SEL counselor when he wanted to make poor decisions and self identified that if he did so it could impact his paid internship. It was a huge win!"

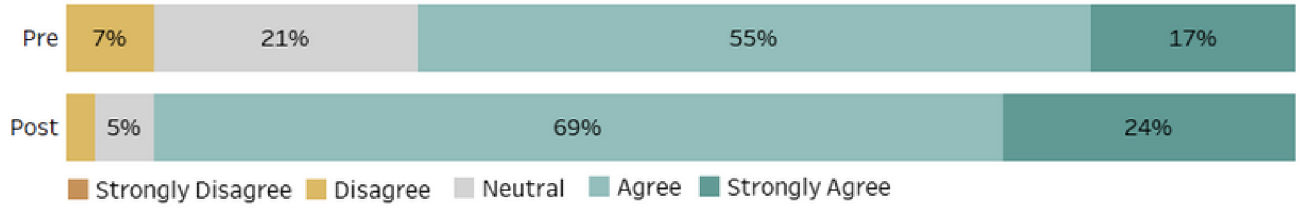
Post-survey results indicated that respondents had an improved sense of how to include student voice and personalization in designing the student experience and integrating robust academic and well-being support (Figure 21). Respondents showed increased agreement regarding including student voice and personalization; 81% (agree/strongly agree) in the pre-survey compared to 98% agreement in the post-survey. Similarly, their knowledge of integrating robust academic, social, emotional, health, and well-being support into the student experience was 72% (agree/strongly agree) compared to 93% agreement in the post-survey. The strong agreement with both statements after the program suggests its effectiveness in improving understanding and support for these educational strategies.

Figure 21: I know a lot about how to:

"Include student voice and personalization in designing the student experience."



"Integrate robust academic, social, emotional, health, and wellbeing support into the student experience."



6 CULTURE OF BELONGING, SAFETY, AND CARE

A culture of belonging, safety, and care in schools creates a welcoming, trusting environment where diversity is valued and everyone is encouraged to share. This environment fosters healthy relationships, helps students feel safe, reduces stress, and supports their learning and development by allowing them to take risks, explore new experiences, and develop their identities. (34)

IN WHAT WAYS ARE SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES CULTIVATING A CULTURE OF BELONGING, SAFETY, AND CARE FOR ALL STUDENTS?

LEAs are making tremendous efforts to cultivate a culture of belonging, safety, and care for students. Survey results indicated that 98% of respondents believe teachers and staff at their LEAs cultivate a culture of belonging, safety, and care for all students. As discussed previously, LEAs are implementing Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) programs to foster empathy, self-awareness, and emotional regulation. Some LEAs are implementing anti-bullying programs, mental health support services, and trauma-informed practices. Multiple LEAs have a "wellness room" where students can decompress, learn coping skills, and talk to an adult if needed. LEAs used smaller school sizes to their advantage, creating and fostering personal relationships with students.

"We employ a zero-tolerance policy towards bullying and harassment, supported by a robust system for reporting and addressing any incidents swiftly and effectively."

"We provide extensive support services, including counseling and access to mental health professionals, to assist students with personal or academic challenges."

LEAs promote an inclusive and diverse environment by celebrating diversity, implementing culturally responsive teaching, and ensuring equal access to school resources and programs. Numerous LEAs mentioned their efforts to involve diverse populations in CTE pathways. For example, they purchase smaller clothing sizes for female students who are welding. LEAs discussed including and meeting the needs of students with disabilities in CTE pathways as well. One LEA includes Native American traditions and beliefs in learning. Another LEA paired English Language Learners with bilingual internship sites to support their language development. LEAs also provide events and resources for parents in English and Spanish to ensure inclusivity.

"A couple of our interns are English language learners also, which is cool. So both of those, we were able to find sites that were bilingual. So, one student is from the Philippines and is learning English. And Cruces Creatives has a Filipina coordinator and so they could communicate culturally and linguistically. And now that student presented their final presentation all in English, and it was amazing."

Source
3.4 https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/bureaus/cs-and-elt/community-schools/key-practices/key-practice-5/

LEAs support staff by offering professional development opportunities on cultural competency, inclusive teaching, and trauma-informed practices. LEAs foster a culture of belonging, safety, and care by ensuring family and community engagement. LEAs hosted community meetings and school events to get input from parents and the community and offer volunteering opportunities to parents and the community.

DO ADULTS (TEACHERS, PARENTS, COMMUNITY) DEMONSTRATE TRUST IN STUDENTS, AND ARE THEY HOPEFUL ABOUT FUTURE POSSIBILITIES FOR ALL YOUNG PEOPLE?

LEAs are highly optimistic about the future possibilities of their students and believe there are even more possibilities because of Innovation Zone funding. Survey results indicated that 92% of respondents believe teachers and staff at their LEAs are hopeful about the future possibilities for all young people. Social-emotional learning (SEL) has assisted teachers and staff in their interactions with students. LEAs noted the importance of having a positive and supportive environment for students and building strong relationships between staff and students. SEL has assisted teachers and staff in understanding their students and provides best practices for interacting with students based on their needs. An LEA noticed benefits from the end-of-school-year recognitions and celebrations of students and decided it is important to celebrate students all year.

"Strong relationships between students and teachers. Involved counseling team. Restorative Justice practices. Every student is known and respected—cultivate a sense of belonging for students."

"Our school is built around relationships and community. Our SEL programming is organic, not a package of curriculum that has no buy in. My students and staff feel heard, validated, and supported."

"We take the overall well-being of our students very seriously. All teachers receive training regarding the importance of safe school environments and how to handle and respond to students who are dealing with a variety of emotional and social situations. We are working to continuously offering training and support to all staff in regards to SEL."

"We just want to celebrate our students. I think what we've noticed this year is because of what seems to be a lot of apathy or disengagement in school, the small pieces of celebrations that we did come out with at the end of this year, they seem to really perk up with, and so we want to take full advantage of that next year and just celebrate everything that we can."

"We support students to envision their future selves in high wage, high skill careers to make active, meaningful and lasting connections between classroom content and potential career paths."

An LEA discussed the connection the community and local businesses have to the students after connecting through internships. The LEA thought that the local businesses taking interns would be hesitant, but the businesses became actively involved in the students' lives and the school. For example, the local businesses attend school events and games and plan to attend graduation. In addition, the schools themselves have to have trust in their students who participate in internships. Students are expected to be professional at their internship sites and maintain their grades, attendance, and behavior at their school. LEAs trust students to maintain both of these responsibilities.

"We actively involve parents and the community in our efforts, fostering strong partnerships that enhance the support network available to students."

"The Innovation Zones funding has done more to improve positive student culture than any investment we've ever taken. Students are learning more about themselves and building quickly toward stronger self-efficacy. We have a lot of work to do to formalize it in ways the students don't see, but students are much happier and can see the investment we're putting into them."

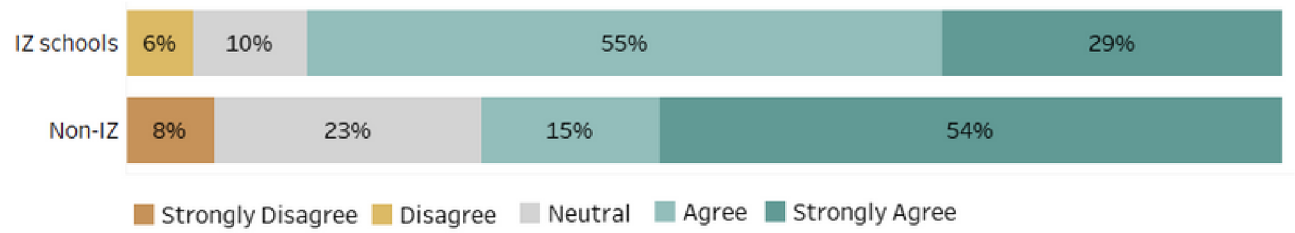
"Our Innovation Zone, Roadrunner Rally events, allowed us to leverage student agency, and they highlighted how amazing our students can and will perform when left to their own devices! We limit them by planning everything-they can and will far exceed our expectations!"

LEAs also noted the importance of including students in decision-making to create a culture of belonging, safety, and care. Many LEAs reported that this was an essential component of their work. One LEA offers a "tip line" where students can share their input without having to talk directly to staff.

"Students are encouraged to actively engage in the innovation process by sharing their ideas and feedback through student council, student government, or advisory council positions. This ensures that their voices are valued and considered in driving positive change."

The survey distributed to IZ schools and Non-IZ schools compared how teachers and staff at IZ schools and Non-IZ schools agreed with the statement that they "demonstrate trust in students" (Figure 22). While both groups generally demonstrate trust in students, IZ schools show 84% agree (55% agree/29% strongly agree), and 69% of Non-IZ schools agree (15% agree/54% strongly agree) IZ schools show more consistent agreement across their staff. Non-IZ schools have stronger positive opinions among some staff and more neutral and negative responses. This suggests that the Innovation Zone initiative may lead to a more uniform culture of trust in students, albeit with slightly less intense positive sentiment.

Figure 22: How much do you agree: "Currently, the teachers and staff at my LEA demonstrate trust in students."



MEASURES, IMPACT, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **LEA Measures of Success**
2. **Impact on Students**
3. **Impact on Staff**
4. **Impact on Community**
5. **Impact on Policy**
6. **Feedback and Recommendations**

1. HOW IS STUDENT SUCCESS MEASURED?

The evaluation team asked how the LEAs currently measure success and how success should be measured. Schools and districts are employing diverse methods to measure student success. LEAs use traditional metrics to measure student success, like attendance, graduation rates, standardized tests, pathway retention, AP participation, and scholarships awarded. However, numerous LEAs are shifting towards more comprehensive and holistic approaches rather than traditional metrics. LEAs are expanding their definition of success to include indicators of college and career readiness, social-emotional development, participation in extracurricular activities, and the development of skills outlined on the graduate profile. Schools and districts are also finding non-academic indicators such as community involvement, overall well-being, and preparedness for their future to be necessary measures of student success. This multifaceted approach to measuring success aims to capture a more complete picture of student achievement and preparation for life beyond school, recognizing that academic performance alone may not fully represent a student's potential or progress. LEA's measurement of student success includes balancing quantitative data with qualitative assessments to provide a more nuanced understanding of student success. However, many schools and districts still rely primarily on traditional methods of measuring student success.

When asked what they believed were good student success measures, some LEAs found traditional measures adequate. However, numerous LEAs thought measuring student success required a multifaceted approach beyond conventional academic metrics. While graduation rates, test scores, and academic growth remain important, LEAs increasingly value a more holistic view of student achievement. This includes assessing critical skills like problem-solving, communication, and collaboration; tracking personal growth in social-emotional well-being and character development; and evaluating real-world readiness through capstone and work-based learning experiences. Many schools emphasize the importance of engagement, both in the classroom and through extracurricular activities and students' community contributions. Importantly, educators stress the need for individualized measures of success that account for each student's unique starting point, goals, and circumstances, focusing on growth over time rather than fixed benchmarks. This shift reflects a broader understanding that preparing students for future success requires developing well-rounded individuals with academic knowledge and essential life skills.

"This varies, for some students just showing up at school is success. Student engagement in the classroom, participation in activities, passing classes, working at school, working in the community. Ability to grow from where they started."

"I think a good measure of success would be for students to experience growth, development compared to where they were when they first started."

"Capstones and Portfolios show what students are capable of versus standard grading."

"Good measures of student success encompass both academic achievement and holistic indicators of well-being and engagement."

2. IMPACT ON STUDENTS

Increased Engagement and Academic Improvement:

- Improved engagement in school (e.g., interest, grades, attendance, graduation rates)
- Expanded learning opportunities

Career and Workforce Readiness:

- Increased career exploration and awareness
- Developing real-world and workforce readiness through WBL

Personal Development:

- Increased confidence and empowerment
- Skills gained through social-emotional learning

Post-Secondary Equity:

- Students get help obtaining scholarships and college admissions
- Increase equity in college and career exposure and experiences

Financial and Practical Benefits:

- Through paid internships, students can provide for themselves, stay connected to school, and avoid low-skill, low-paying jobs.

"We had another young lady who is in special education and we were able to connect her with our preschool and she interned with the preschool all year. And at the age of 18, she's gainfully employed with the preschool and an employment that she'll be able to continue on for as long as she wants to."

"I cannot imagine trying to get these kids to do these internships unpaid. It would be a real struggle."

"Coming out of COVID, we have struggled to get students to school, to stay in school. Our graduation rate was low, and kids were thinking, "why should I finish school? I can just go and be making $18 an hour at McDonald's, and I can just go for my GED." And so with Innovation Zones, it's teaching kids there's a pathway here. Putting them into capstone projects/internships, they get a little paycheck for it, and so it's almost incentivized. Come to school, follow this pathway, and this is what we can offer you, and that wasn't there before. They're on track to graduate. They're at school almost every single day. It's the social-emotional part, I think that is the biggest piece."

"What the funding has enabled us to do is really create events that target the kid that's not in everything, right? Because you get kids in CTE who are in CTSOs who are in FFA or HOSA, and their student government kids, and their athletes. It's the kid who's not in something that we have been able to build all of these events for."

"The funding has really helped us a lot in terms of supplies and materials for the stuff and things involved with these pathways because that's what gets kids excited when they see things to play with or like, "what is this? I only see this in a doctor's office, I only see this when I go to the tire shop, I get to touch it." Like it gets them excited to want to be a part of it, and that's been a huge help for us."

"A lot of kids never get out of their neighborhood. They only see the jobs their relatives are working in or jobs like fast food, so that is where they are working, and they assume that is the only thing out there and the only way to make money. That is a big part of what we are doing, career exposure. And that is where Innovation Zone hits the nail on the head. It's providing opportunities for kids to see what's really out there. They can dream and figure out, "hey, I do want to go to college? I just never thought about it because I was never exposed to these things.""

"Teachers have seen that the students who are participating in internships, if their grade point average dips they cut back on internship hours until they raise their grades and meet the criteria. They are seeing kids who participate in these programs, who may have been more difficult in the past, are actually making a connection out in the real world, and they don't want to lose this opportunity, so they strive to work harder than they may have done in class before. So that has been big."

3. IMPACT ON STAFF

- Teacher empowerment and pride
- New positions and personnel (e.g., LEAs used funding to hire work-based learning coordinators, Innovation Zone coordinators, and family engagement coordinators)
- Improved facilities, technology, and equipment
- Increased collaborative decision-making and collective thinking
- Support for CTE teachers
- Shift in instructional approaches (e.g., funding allowed teachers to implement capstones)
- Professional development opportunities for counselors, new teachers, and nontraditional teachers

“So now we've had the luxury of being able to do things that we've never been able to do ever. And so things like the Innovation Zone Grant, Perkins, NextGen, those types of things have allowed us to continue to expand our programs and our programs of study and really do a lot of really cool things. We don't want these things to go away, they're important.”

“People will do a lot of things, but often they do them better when they actually get paid. So having money to provide stipends have been amazing.”

“I think all of those pieces have come together through this grant, and it helps. What the Innovation Zone has done is it helped us not live in silos. It's helping take that conversation, and it's not just an academic conversation and then a work-based conversation, it's a whole conversation. And so that really has helped merge those pieces together and bring all the right people to the table.”

“I just wanted to expand a little bit more on what the family advocate position has been able to bring. Just having the position for someone to organize all of that is really great.”

“So with this money, we're really able to really enhance all of our programs because a lot of our stuff was 20 years old+, and so this was a huge benefit to us to be able to get some new stuff in here and actually some material to work with.”

“The biggest thing it brought us all together to think about these things [CTE, Internships, capstones, etc.] What if we had never gotten this money? We wouldn't be in this room now, and still thinking about what it looks like “in the future.” I think, more than anything, that's what the funding has done for us; it has brought us more together as a group, as a CTE program. And so, it's just going to keep growing. We'll keep coming up with better and better ideas.”

“I've been able to utilize the funds for teacher professional development that I would not have been able to do so.”

4. IMPACT ON COMMUNITY

- Increased engagement and partnership with community members, local businesses, and organizations
- Improved perception of students and the school
- Economic benefits
- Workforce development

“So it's been cool to see the local community actually get invested in the school because I've always heard that is a nice idea, but it actually happened this year, which is fun to see.”

“It's cool because the downtown people are always so excited when I was canvassing to see who wants interns. I expected a little more push back like, oh god, high schoolers, but they're so excited, and it's created this whole tapestry of support because now that internship sites are invested in our school and I didn't really anticipate that.”

“That's what Innovation Zone’s done for us. It's done so much, $678,000 into the local economy last year in student salaries.” ~ George Kerr, Work Based Learning Coordinator, Albuquerque Public Schools

“These opportunities are crucial and it's like seed money that's coming right back into our community where the kids are then turning around and either using it at home or using it in a local businesses and so for us, it's a boost all the way around. It's a full circle. Helps the kid, helps the community, helps small business grow.”

“It flipped the script on how our community looks at our kids. Because we were able to actually pick up the bill for the work-based out in the community, it kind of was a no stress kind of relationship that they were able to have and work with our kids to the point where once the money ran out, we offered those companies the chance to keep the kid but they would have to employ him and they would have to pay for him and a lot of those companies did that. We've established this trust factor between the kind of kids we're putting out and now they want our kids. So to me, that's been the biggest impact because it's changed the narrative on how the community looks at our students.”

“We want to build a skilled workforce here. I mean, our community is small and yes, we'd love to see our kids be able to grow and kind of break that cycle. You know, here being a small community, it is a very poor community and we see our students where they're just stuck at home and they're maybe stuck on welfare and just learning that maybe through generations. We're trying to change that here and I think that's what the Innovation Grant is all about.”

5. IMPACT ON POLICY

Following the success of CTE, the Innovation Zone initiative, and WBL initiatives, House Bill 2 increased funding for pilot programs, including CTE, career technical student organizations, Innovation Zones, work-based learning initiatives and equipment, and summer internships by 12.5%, from $40m to $45M.

In February 2024, House Bill 171 was signed into law. The bill revises high school graduation requirements and aligns them with the workforce and higher education. (35) The new graduation requirements also require all New Mexico schools to create a graduate profile. (36) The bill allows CTE courses and WBL to count toward core requirements. The new graduation requirements greatly fit students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Students with an IEP can work on capstone projects and meet the requirements set out by their IEP, all while being a part of the decision-making process of their time in high school and their future. (37)

As part of the Innovation Zones Initiative, Future Focused Education, the LANL Foundation, and Ocotillo Strategies engaged the partners and stakeholders for policy recommendations to sustain and scale the initiative. (38) Partners and stakeholders included the Innovation Zone cohort (teachers, staff, and students), NMPED CCRB, NMPED High School Transformation Coalition, NMPED Leadership and Policy Team, Transform Education of New Mexico, All Pueblo Council of Governors, the Tribal Education Alliance, and Future Focused Education - Instituto Del Puente.

Recommendations include:

- Provide recurring, sustainable funding with equitable, transparent criteria for funding distribution, monitoring, and renewal.
- Reenvision teacher and school leader preparation to build capacity for innovation and educational change.
- Redefine school days to include teacher collaboration and professional development.
- Create a separate division, bureau, or entity within PED for School Transformation, Innovation Zones, and Graduate Profiles.
- Strengthen partnerships between schools, higher education, and the workforce to create clear career pathways.
- Ensure equity in funding for tribes and Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools, including non-competitive, non-reverting, inclusive funding.
- Optimize instructional time to foster innovation in courses and schedules.
- Approve long-term multi-year projects to ensure continuity and completion, desilo funding to allow flexibility in addressing priorities, and ensure funding is available by July 1 each year.
- Consider capstone projects and meeting IEP requirements as elements of demonstrating competency.

Source

35.https://www.governor.state.nm.us/2024/02/09/governor-signs-bill-modernizing-graduation-requirements-requirements-not-updated-since-2009/

36. https://futurefocusededucation.org/2024/05/29/graduate-profile-services/

37. https://futurefocusededucation.org/2024/01/25/individualized-education-and-capstones/

38. Policy Recommendations to Sustain and Scale the NMPED Innovation Zones Initiative presentation. Warren, Hand, and Monfiletto, 2024.

6. FEEDBACK & RECOMMENDATIONS

Innovation Zone LEAs provided feedback on their experiences and recommendations to improve the implementation and effectiveness of the Innovation Zone grant. LEAs provided recommendations about supports such as CoPs and other meetings.

LEAs valued the professional development and networking opportunities the CoPs, site visits, EdUprising, and meetings provided. They appreciated sharing best practices and the sense of community and belonging the meetings fostered. For many, the meetings validated policies and procedures through the shared experiences of LEAs. The LEAs also valued the facilitators' guidance in developing and implementing new educational practices and the support in creating and refining graduate profiles, capstones, and other educational frameworks. Constructive feedback included offering better scheduling so more staff could participate. Some LEAs recommended tailoring the meetings to specific groups and needs. For instance, a larger district LEA felt the support was more applicable to smaller districts or schools. A response from one LEA highlighted the need for CoPs and PED to address the needs of students with special needs. A second-year awardee found the CoP meetings beneficial for new grantees but not for those further along. Some expressed interest in mentoring first-year awardees, recommending a stipend to cover costs such as travel and time. Regardless, some second-year LEAs still found the CoPs helpful, particularly those still expanding their programming.

LEA feedback on CoPs and individualized coaching:

"It's been career changing. Having real discussions, real data, real change to address the Yazzie/Martinez lawsuit had been everything."

"All the support we received with creating the Profile of a Graduate was essential to the success in reaching all the stakeholders and facilitating the process. The facilitators were so knowledgeable and able to guide the discussions by skillfully asking questions to make sure all voices were heard and the values of each group were heard."

"The CoP has been extremely helpful. The best part is networking with other IZ schools and sharing resources they have utilized, especially IZ schools that were in their second year. It was almost like a mentorship for the new schools."

"It has been helpful at times. Sometimes, our team feels as if we are giving a lot of information rather than receiving and have suggested the IZ schools on the upper level of work mentor a new school in their last years of funding or have individual coaching with an FFE coach."

"The CoP has helped provide insight into what other schools and districts are implementing across the state. However, due to the community we serve, those ideas and practices would need extreme modifications [for students with special needs]. In addition, the rigidness around licensure and course codes in programs of study do not meet the needs of the students we serve."

"The CoP meetings have supported our social-emotional needs of being and belonging which we are most grateful!"

Innovation Zone LEAs also provided feedback on funding, the implementation of the grant, staffing, communication, and administrative or logistical issues.

- Though LEAs received funding on time, the contract for technical support providers was not in place until late 2023, so support from Future Focused and partners could not begin until January 2024. Consequently, many LEAs felt overwhelmed, as they were uncertain of expectations until the beginning of the year. Many LEAs initiated their work upon receiving funds in August but had to adjust after gaining more insights from the provided support. In addition, some grantees struggled to navigate complex grant regulations and flow-through funding.
- Due to the delayed start, LEAs were also unaware of the data reporting requirements until the latter half of the grant period. This delay proved challenging, with many LEAs submitting their data late and a few failing to submit.
- LEAs provided several recommendations regarding funding. LEAs requested a comprehensive list of allowable expenses in advance, as they felt constrained in their ability to innovate with the funding. For example, LEAs wanted to use the funding for incentives, music performers, travel for learning opportunities, or furniture to make rooms more appealing to students.
- LEAs stressed the positive impact the funding had on students, particularly in providing paid internships. However, they also noted concerns on whether it was financially sustainable.

LEA feedback on administrative and logistical aspects of the grant:

“As first-year grantees of the Innovation Zone Initiative, our journey was marked by several significant challenges. Foremost among these was navigating the project's complexities without initial guidance, as creating a budget was daunting.”

“One of the significant challenges we faced was navigating the complexities of grant regulations and funding. Our team had limited experience with flow-through grants, so we struggled with understanding the exact guidelines for accessing and utilizing the funds. Because of this inexperience, we missed some opportunities to purchase goods and services that could have supported our programs and initiatives. Additionally, we found it challenging to identify and connect with the right people at the district level who could guide us through the administrative and regulatory processes. Another challenge was balancing the need for innovation with the constraints of traditional educational structures. Our goal was to create an environment that fostered creativity and new approaches, but we had to do so within the context of existing regulations, which at times felt limiting.”

"Our greatest challenge in implementing the Innovation Zone initiative was not learning about all the requirements until the middle of the process. We had no idea of the additional requirements related to the Innovation Zone funds until halfway through the year. Luckily, we were already implementing many of the requirements on our own.”

“One notable success was the overwhelmingly positive feedback from students who participated in internships through the initiative. These internships were not just learning experiences but passion-driven opportunities that ignited students' enthusiasm for their chosen fields. Particularly significant was the excitement students expressed about receiving payment for their work, giving them a sense of empowerment and the ability to contribute to their families' financial well-being.”

"I think the biggest worry across the board is sustainability. We are being asked to implement AMAZING programs and make significant changes, but there is no game plan on how this will be sustainable after the Innovation Grant funds go away.”

The evaluation team offers the following recommendations for supporting the Innovation Zone initiative moving forward:

1. Provide Clear and Comprehensive Guidance:

- Address grantee frustrations by clarifying fund usage guidelines and grant expectations as early as possible.
- Develop clear, accessible resources that LEAs can refer to throughout the grant period.
- Encourage multi-member teams for grant implementation.
- Encourage strong communication between grant applicants and implementers.

2. Enhance Technical Assistance:

- Address scheduling conflicts and staff limitations.
- Provide regular check-ins to identify and resolve staff limitations or other challenges.
- Provide detailed information for LEAs at all stages of implementation, from initial planning to advanced execution.

3. Tailored Support:

- Implement a formalized mentor system, pairing experienced LEAs with newer grantees.
- Offer differentiated support based on:

a. Implementation stages: Provide stage-specific guidance and resources

b. LEA size, type, and location: Customize support to address the unique challenges of different LEA profiles

c. Specialized populations served: Offer targeted assistance for LEAs working with specific student groups.

4. Accessibility:

- Offer site visits in various parts of the state to reduce the travel burden on LEAs.
- Accommodate southern and rural LEAs by offering virtual options or regional meetups.
- Consider rotating locations for in-person events to ensure equitable access.

5. Data Reporting and Measurement:

- Support the evaluation team in communicating requirements at the start of the grant period, including specific metrics and deadlines.
- Make reporting mandatory for LEAs, especially for the end-of-year evaluation.
- To enhance the evaluation process, consider establishing a formal data-sharing mechanism with the evaluation team. This would facilitate tracking the long-term effects of the Innovation Zone initiatives.

Implementing these recommendations will create a more robust, responsive support system for LEAs, ultimately maximizing the impact of Innovation Zone initiatives on student success.

CONCLUSION

In its second year of implementation, the Innovation Zone Initiative has demonstrated substantial progress and impact across participating Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and New Mexico. This evaluation highlights the initiative's success in transforming educational practices through the graduate profile, work-based learning, capstones, and personalized supports. By reimagining high school education, the initiative has made significant strides in preparing students to feel successful, secure in their identities, and ready for their chosen paths. In addition, Cohort 1 LEAs could expand on their work from the previous year, and Cohort 2 gained the knowledge to develop and implement systems that will make lasting changes in their school.

One of the most remarkable achievements of the initiative has been its impact on changing knowledge, beliefs, and behavior. LEAs are looking at schools differently and have the resources to implement change. Teachers have the ability and capacity to implement innovative practices in the classroom. Students are also experiencing a shift in their beliefs and behavior because of the opportunities and support they are receiving. LEAs note a rise in student attendance, engagement, and behavior, demonstrating its effectiveness in enhancing the overall student experience. Educators have also benefited from the initiative, allowing them to be innovative in their teaching and develop strong and supportive relationships with students. Community involvement has been a cornerstone of the initiative, with students contributing to local projects and the economy, strengthening community ties, and fostering a sense of belonging.

Feedback from LEAs indicated helpfulness from the support provided by Future Focused Education, LANL Foundation, Ocotillo Strategies, SEL4NM, PED, and their partners. However, LEAs needed this support at the beginning of the grant period. Ultimately, the funding allows schools and districts to do things they could have only imagined, and they need it to continue their work. LEAs are concerned about sustainability and want to ensure that future students get the same opportunities.

The Innovation Zone Initiative has laid a strong foundation for educational transformation in New Mexico. The initiative has inspired hope and passion for learning among students and educators by fostering a culture of innovation and collaboration. The New Mexico Public Education Department has chosen 51 schools and districts to participate in the 2024-2025 school year initiative. (39) As the program continues to expand and refine its practices, it holds great promise for further enhancing educational experiences and outcomes for students across the state. The journey of reimagining education is ongoing, and the Innovation Zone Initiative stands as a beacon of progress and potential, guiding the way toward a brighter future for New Mexico's students.

Source:
39. https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/bureaus/college-career-readiness/innovation-zones/

APPENDIX A: CHARTS

Table A1: Participating LEA Enrollment Demographic Profiles, SY 2022-2023

Iz Lea	Locale	Total student count	% Females	% Males	% Asian	% Black or African American	% Hispanic	% Native American	% White non-Hispanic	% Ell	% Low-Income	% Swd*	% Economically Disadvantage	Graduation Rate %
ABQ Sign Language Academy	City: Large	125	49	51	≤ 5	≤ 5	59	8	26	10	35	58	28	***
Academy for Technology & Classi..	Town: Fringe	392	54	46	≤ 5	≤ 5	67	≤ 5	26	9	16	7	16	≥ 95
ACE Leadership HS	City: Large	236	29	71	≤ 5	≤ 5	89	≤ 5	7	19	54	31	54	44
Alamogordo	Town: Remote	1,579	49	51	≤ 5	7	44	≤ 5	43	≤ 5	34	17	34	80
Albuquerque Public Schools (CTE)	City: Large	20,929	49	51	≤ 5	≤ 5	69	6	18	18	34	21	34	72
Alma D'Arte	City: Mid-size	121	60	40	≤ 5	≤ 5	70	≤ 5	26	≤ 5	12	21	12	68
Aztec	Town: Fringe	764	49	51	≤ 5	≤ 5	40	16	42	≤ 5	≤ 5	18	≤ 5	67
Carlsbad High	Rural: Fringe	1,551	47	53	≤ 5	≤ 5	61	≤ 5	35	10	20	13	20	74
Cloudcroft High	Rural: Remote	113	55	45	≤ 5	≤ 5	20	≤ 5	75	≤ 5	20	8	20	83
Cobre High	Town: Remote	276	50	50	≤ 5	≤ 5	90	≤ 5	9	6	43	13	43	91
Cottonwood Classical Prep	City: Large	759	55	45	5	≤ 5	52	≤ 5	38	≤ 5	5	5	5	94
Cuba High	Rural: Remote	300	49	51	≤ 5	≤ 5	19	77	≤ 5	48	57	19	57	85
DEAP	Rural: Remote	49	18	63	≤ 5	≤ 5	≤ 5	≤ 95	≤ 5	20	35	6	35	59
Des Moines	Rural: Remote	51	49	51	≤ 5	≤ 5	24	≤ 5	75	≤ 5	16	≤ 5	16	***
ECHS /CEC (ABQ)	City: Large	217	56	44	≤ 5	≤ 5	60	≤ 5	30	9	13	7	13	93
Explore Academy (Las Cruces)	City: Midsize	189	44	56	≤ 5	≤ 5	60	≤ 5	33	11	40	15	40	84
Gallup High School	Rural: Fringe	961	50	50	≤ 5	≤ 5	18	74	6	39	53	16	53	79
Goddard High	Town: Remote	1,155	48	52	≤ 5	≤ 5	38	≤ 5	38	9	29	16	29	72
Grants High	Town: Remote	843	50	50	≤ 5	≤ 5	41	45	11	15	43	15	43	66
Hatch Valley High	Rural: Remote	380	47	53	≤ 5	≤ 5	97	≤ 5	≤ 5	46	52	11	52	92
Health Leadership	City: Large	216	58	42	≤ 5	≤ 5	81	≤ 5	14	29	49	20	49	36
Hobbs	Town: Remote	2,216	51	49	≤ 5	≤ 5	72	≤ 5	25	≤ 5	46	16	42	87
Las Cruces Public Schools	City: Midsize	7,503	49	51	≤ 5	≤ 5	77	≤ 5	18	14	37	15	36	77
Las Montañas Charter	City: Mid-size	162	56	44	≤ 5	≤ 5	91	≤ 5	6	15	72	25	72	20
Los Lunas	Suburb:Small	1,486	47	53	≤ 5	≤ 5	69	9	21	9	33	14	33	74
Lovington	Town: Remote	737	47	53	≤ 5	≤ 5	80	≤ 5	18	19	≤ 5	14	≤ 5	92

Table A1: Participating LEA Enrollment Demographic Profiles, SY 2022-2023; *Continued*

Iz Lea	Locale	Total student count	% Females	% Males	% Asian	% Black or African American	% Hispanic	% Native American	% White non-Hispanic	% Ell	% Low-Income	% Swd*	% Economically Disadvantage	Graduation Rate %
Mark Armijo Academy	City: Large	200	45	56	≤ 5	≤ 5	≤ 95	≤ 5	≤ 5	46	56	28	51	52
Mescalero High	BIE	609	*	*	*	*	*	100	*	100	100	23	100	***
Monte Del Sol Charter	City: Small	369	51	49	≤ 5	≤ 5	81	≤ 5	17	26	27	15	27	88
Native American Community Academy	City: Large	455	49	51	≤ 5	≤ 5	13	86	≤ 5	19	42	24	42	61
Navajo Prep	BIE	271	*	*	*	*	*	98	2	100	100	*	100	***
New America School (Las Cruces)	City: Mid-Size	170	45	55	≤ 5	≤ 5	92	≤ 5	≤ 5	27	62	19	62	25
Ramah High	Rural: Remote	287	52	48	≤ 5	≤ 5	16	62	19	28	51	14	54	74
Rio Rancho Public Schools	Suburb: Large	5,409	49	51	≤ 5	≤ 5	58	6	31	≤ 5	21	16	20	88**
Robert F. Kennedy Charter	City: Large	370	52	48	≤ 5	≤ 5	92	≤ 5	≤ 5	26	39	30	39	36
Roswell High	Town: Remote	1,438	52	48	≤ 5	≤ 5	82	≤ 5	15	13	41	13	41	69
Santa Fe Indian School	BIE	695	*	*	*	*	*	100	*	100	100	13	100	***
Santa Rosa	Town: Remote	197	51	49	≤ 5	≤ 5	95	≤ 5	≤ 5	6	51	13	51	92
School of Dreams Academy	Suburb: Small	606	51	49	≤ 5	≤ 5	72	≤ 5	25	12	52	16	21	68
Siembra Leadership	City: Large	283	47	53	≤ 5	≤ 5	75	≤ 5	15	52	18	28	52	60
Silver City Consolidated Schools	Town: Remote	638	49	51	≤ 5	≤ 5	72	≤ 5	25	≤ 5	46	16	46	78
Socorro	Town: Remote	450	55	45	≤ 5	≤ 5	76	≤ 5	17	≤ 5	51	20	51	74
South Valley Academy	Suburb: Large	606	49	51	≤ 5	≤ 5	72	≤ 5	25	48	35	15	35	87
Technology Leadership	City: Large	310	59	41	≤ 5	≤ 5	81	5	11	11	45	19	45	58
Tularosa	Town: Remote	272	53	47	≤ 5	≤ 5	43	30	24	≤ 5	46	21	46	72
Vista Grande	Town: Remote	77	46	53	≤ 5	≤ 5	54	27	18	≤ 5	52	29	52	65
Zuni Public Schools	Town: Remote	371	50	50	≤ 5	≤ 5	≤ 5	98	≤ 5	38	78	12	78	73

* Indicates data not available.
** Indicates data is estimated based on reporting schools.
*** Indicates data was not reported for the 2023-2024 school year.

Notes: Enrollment data was unavailable for the 2023-2024 school year at the time of this report due to changes in data systems at the New Mexico Public Education Department. Data reflect high school enrollment. SWD is defined as students with disabilities and ELLs English language learners. Early College High School/Career Enrichment Center (ECHS/CEC) only includes enrollment data for the Albuquerque ECHS, CEC was not available. Sources: New Mexico Public Education Department Enrollment Report SY 2022-2023, 40-Day Count; National Center for Educational Statistics; and the Bureau of Indian Education 2020-2021 Report Cards.

Table A2: Internships in Innovation Zone Schools, SY 2023-2024

LEA	Number of Paid Internships	Percent of Paid Internships	Number of Unpaid Internships	Percent of Unpaid Internships	Total Number of Internships
Academy of Tech and Classics	33	1.3%	36	1.5%	69
ACE Leadership	103	4.2%	0	0.0%	103
Alamogordo High School	24	1.0%	0	0.0%	24
Albuquerque Sign Lang Acad	13	0.5%	9	0.4%	22
Alma D'Arte High School	10	0.4%	2	0.1%	12
APS (Albuquerque CTE Department)	378	15.3%	9	0.4%	387
Aztec	88	3.6%	1	0.0%	89
Carlsbad	70	2.8%	0	0.0%	70
Cloudcroft	15	0.6%	4	0.2%	19
Cobre High School	34	1.4%	0	0.0%	34
Cottonwood Classical	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0
Cuba High School	266	10.7%	127	5.1%	393
DEAP	4	0.2%	0	0.0%	4
Des Moines	13	0.5%	0	0.0%	13
Early College Academy & Career Enrichment Center (CEC)	33	1.3%	1	0.0%	34
Explore Academy LC	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0
Gallup High School (Opportunity Career Center)	12	0.5%	0	0.0%	12
Goddard High School	24	1.0%	14	0.6%	38
Grants High School	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0
Hatch High School	17	0.7%	11	0.4%	28
Health Leadership	141	5.7%	0	0.0%	141
Hobbs Municipal Schools/CTECH	80	3.2%	0	0.0%	80
Las Cruces Public Schools	0	0.0%	133	5.4%	133
Las Montañas High School	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0
Los Lunas Schools	8	0.3%	0	0.0%	8
Lovington High School	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0
Mark Armijo Academy	51	2.1%	41	1.7%	92
Mescalero High School	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0
Monte del Sol	3	0.1%	0	0.0%	3
Native American Comm Acad (NACA)	0	0.0%	36	1.5%	36
Navajo Prep	*	*	*	*	*
New America School	11	0.4%	0	0.0%	11
Ramah High School	11	0.4%	2	0.1%	13
Rio Rancho Public Schools	17	0.7%	0	0.0%	17
Robert F Kennedy	15	0.6%	0	0.0%	15
Roswell High School	0	0.0%	7	0.3%	7
Santa Fe Indian School	*	*	*	*	*
Santa Rosa High School	65	2.6%	7	0.3%	72
School of Dreams Acad	2	0.1%	0	0.0%	2
Siembra	27	1.1%	0	0.0%	27
Silver Consolidated Schools	*	*	*	*	*
Soccorro High School	16	0.6%	0	0.0%	16
South Valley Academy	20	0.8%	290	11.7%	310
Technology Leadership	22	0.9%	3	0.1%	25
Tularosa High School	17	0.7%	5	0.2%	22
Vista Grande	37	1.5%	1	0.0%	38
Zuni Public School	58	2.3%	0	0.0%	58
Total	1,738	70.2%	739	29.8%	2,477

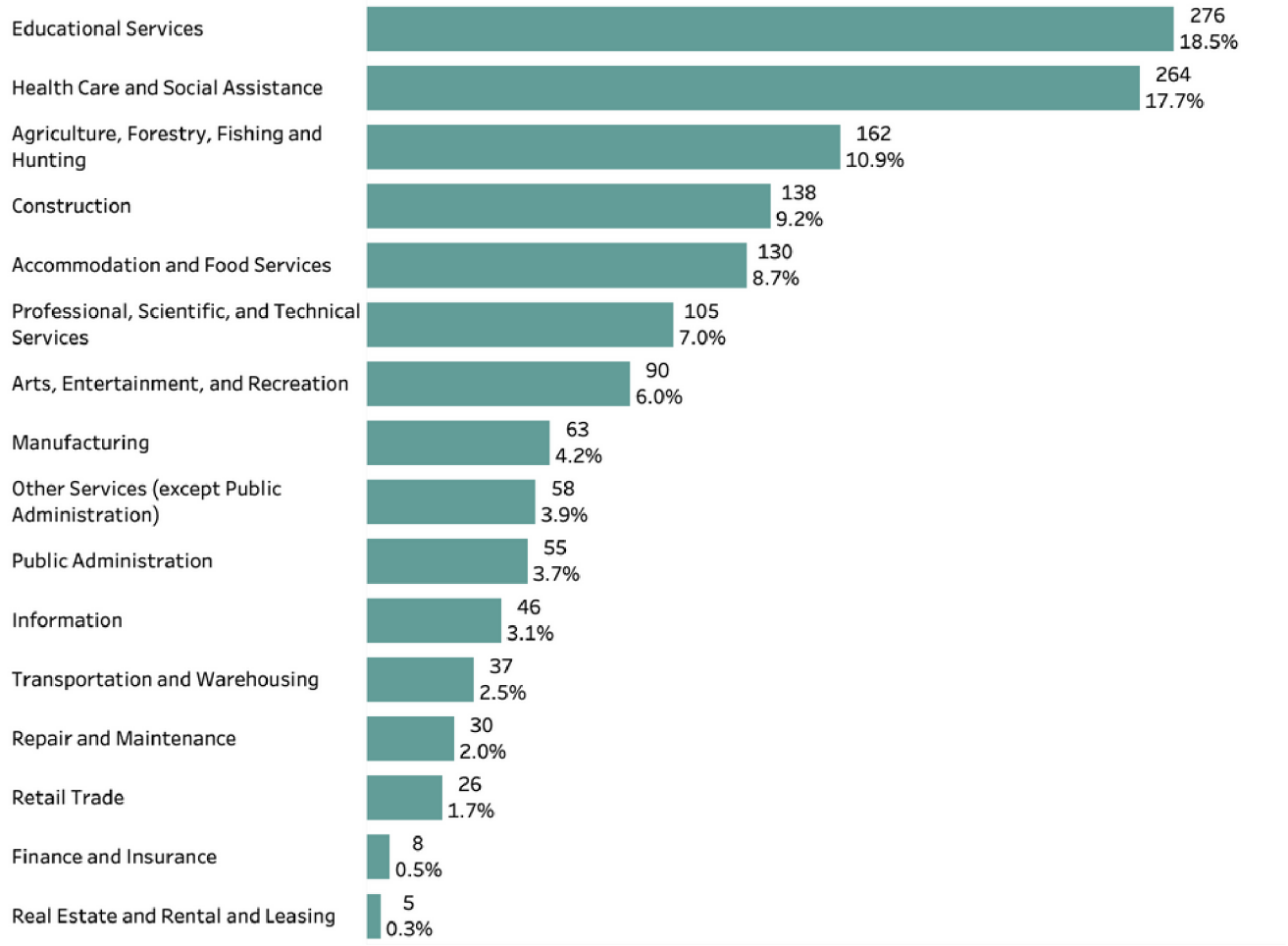
* Indicates data not available

Table A2: Internships in Innovation Zone Schools, SY 2023-2024; *Continued*

LEA	Number of Students (Unduplicated) Paid	Percent of Students (Unduplicated) Paid	Number of Students (Unduplicated) Unpaid	Percent of Students (Unduplicated) Unpaid	Total Number of Students (Unduplicated)
Academy of Tech and Classics	33	1.3%	34	1.4%	67
ACE Leadership	91	3.7%	0	0.0%	91
Alamogordo High School	24	1.0%	0	0.0%	24
Albuquerque Sign Lang Acad	12	0.5%	9	0.4%	21
Alma D'Arte High School	10	0.4%	2	0.1%	12
APS (Albuquerque CTE Department)	378	15.4%	9	0.4%	387
Aztec	87	3.6%	1	0.0%	88
Carlsbad	70	2.9%	0	0.0%	70
Cloudcroft	15	0.6%	4	0.2%	19
Cobre High School	34	1.4%	0	0.0%	34
Cottonwood Classical	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0
Cuba High School	264	10.8%	127	5.2%	391
DEAP	4	0.2%	0	0.0%	4
Des Moines	13	0.5%	0	0.0%	13
Early College Academy & Career Enrichment Center (CEC)	33	1.3%	1	0.0%	34
Explore Academy LC	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0
Gallup High School (Opportunity Career Center)	12	0.5%	0	0.0%	12
Goddard High School	24	1.0%	14	0.6%	38
Grants High School	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0
Hatch High School	17	0.7%	11	0.4%	28
Health Leadership	141	5.8%	0	0.0%	141
Hobbs Municipal Schools/CTECH	80	3.3%	0	0.0%	80
Las Cruces Public Schools	0	0.0%	133	5.4%	133
Las Montañas High School	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0
Los Lunas Schools	8	0.3%	0	0.0%	8
Lovington High School	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0
Mark Armijo Academy	51	2.1%	41	1.7%	92
Mescalero High School	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0
Monte del Sol	1	0.0%	0	0.0%	1
Native American Comm Acad (NACA)	0	0.0%	36	1.5%	36
Navajo Prep	*	*	*	*	*
New America School	11	0.4%	0	0.0%	11
Ramah High School	11	0.4%	2	0.1%	13
Rio Rancho Public Schools	17	0.7%	0	0.0%	17
Robert F Kennedy	15	0.6%	0	0.0%	15
Roswell High School	0	0.0%	7	0.3%	7
Santa Fe Indian School	*	*	*	*	*
Santa Rosa High School	65	2.7%	7	0.3%	72
School of Dreams Acad	2	0.1%	0	0.0%	2
Siembra	27	1.1%	0	0.0%	27
Silver Consolidated Schools	*	*	*	*	*
Soccorro High School	16	0.7%	0	0.0%	16
South Valley Academy	20	0.8%	290	11.8%	310
Technology Leadership	22	0.9%	3	0.1%	25
Tularosa High School	17	0.7%	5	0.2%	22
Vista Grande	30	1.2%	1	0.0%	31
Zuni Public School	57	2.3%	0	0.0%	57
Total	1712	69.9%	737	30.1%	2449

* Indicates data not available

Figure A1: Internships by Field, SY 2023-2024



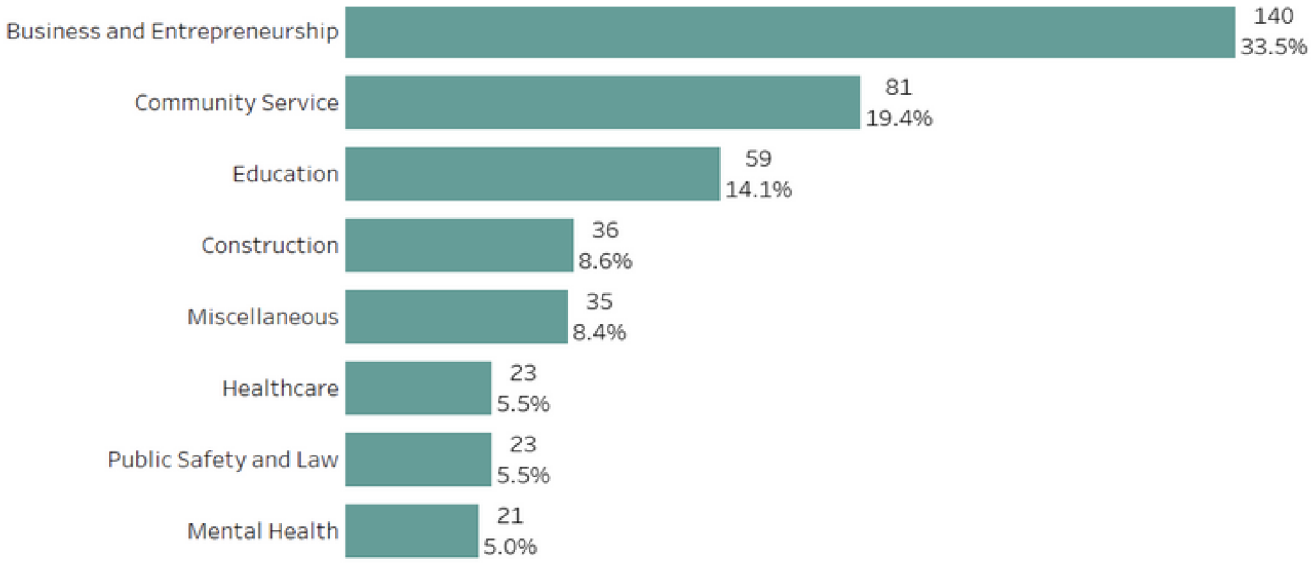
Note: Number and percent include only internships where the internship field was reported.

Table A3: Capstones in Innovation Zone Schools, SY 2023-2024

LEA	Number of Capstones (All Types)	Number of Community Capstones	Number of students in a Capstone
Academy of Tech and Classics	106	0	106
ACE Leadership	66	0	66
Alamogordo High School	14	13	14
Albuquerque Sign Lang Acad	0	0	0
Alma d'arte High School	34	34	0
APS (Albuquerque CTE Department)	0	0	0
Aztec Municipal Schools	17	2	17
Carlsbad	74	67	74
Cloudcroft	0	0	0
Cobre High School	0	0	0
Cottonwood Classical	69	69	69
Cuba High School	122	0	122
DEAP	0	0	0
Des Moines	12	9	12
Early College Academy & Career Enrichment Center (CEC)	0	0	0
Explore Academy LC	0	0	0
Gallup High School (Opportunity Career Center)	0	0	0
Goddard High School	2	0	2
Grants High School	0	0	0
Hatch High School	11	11	11
Health Leadership	109	109	109
Hobbs Municipal Schools/CTECH	0	0	0
Las Cruces Public Schools	16	0	15
Las Montañas High School	0	0	0
Los Lunas High School	60	60	60
Lovington High School	0	0	0
Mark Armijo Academy	0	0	0
Mescalero High School	0	0	0
Monte Del Sol	120	120	120
Native American Comm Acad (NACA)	206	206	206
Navajo Prep	*	*	*
New America School	3	3	3
Ramah High School	0	0	0
Rio Rancho Public Schools	786	0	525
Robert F Kennedy	0	35	0
Roswell High School	0	0	0
Santa Fe Indian School	*	*	*
Santa Rosa High School	10	10	10
School of Dreams Acad	2	2	2
Siembra	87	0	87
Silver Consolidated Schools	*	*	*
Soccorro High School	27	27	14
South Valley Academy	71	70	71
Technology Leadership	23	23	23
Tularosa High School	7	7	7
Vista Grande	14	14	14
Zuni High School	67	67	67
Total	2135	958	1826

* Indicates data not available

Figure A2: Capstones by Field, SY 2023-2024



Note: Number and percent include only capstones where the focus of the student's capstone was reported.

APPENDIX B: DEFINITIONS

Graduate Profile:
A document tailored for each community that outlines the essential academic skills and subjects critical for graduates' success after high school, with required units aligned accordingly. This document is used by school districts or charter schools to detail the cognitive, personal, and interpersonal skills students should possess upon graduation.

Capstones:
Capstone Project: A multifaceted academic and intellectual experience that take a wide variety of forms and that culminates in a final product, performance, or presentation explaining how the final product, performance, or presentation explicates the chosen course to an evaluation panel convened by the public school to evaluate the quality of course and the final product, performance or presentation (HB171 2024)

A community capstone is a months-long project (or course) rooted in authentic contexts and building on local assets and culture. Students engage in active, self-directed, and community-based research and learning experiences to produce a body of work that teachers periodically assess for evidence of competence. Capstones result in public exhibitions of learning to school, family, and community. Capstones demonstrate that students have met the expectations put forth in the Profile of a Graduate.

Capstone in Community I (2024, Course 2240) for grades 9-12: This course enables students to design a project rooted in authentic contexts and build on local assets and culture. Students engage in active, self-directed, and community-based learning experiences to produce a body of work, resulting in public exhibitions of learning to school, family, and community. Students will develop community-defined skills, critical thinking, resilience, problem-solving, time management, integrity, community-mindedness, communication, and collaboration.

Capstone in Community II (2024, Course 2241) for grades 10-12: This course enables students to extend a project rooted in authentic contexts and build on local assets and culture. Students engage in community-based research and active and self-directed learning experiences to produce a community-based solution that results in public exhibitions of learning to school, family, and community. Students will learn ethical research practices and develop community-defined skills, as well as critical thinking, resilience, problem-solving, time management, integrity, community-mindedness, communication, and collaboration.

Paid Internship:
Paid work experiences with employers (including schools or districts) outside the classroom, which can also be conducted in hybrid or virtual formats or as group internships. Group internships involve paid experiences where a class or group of students works with a facilitator or employer partner(s) on defined deliverables

Other Work-Based Learning: Work-Based Learning (WBL) is a continuum of experiences from grades 9-12, involving career awareness and exploration, career preparation, career training, and aid in the transition to college or to a career from high school.

APPENDIX B: DEFINITIONS

Industry Recognized Certificate or Credential: The term "industry-recognized" refers to a credential that:
A. Is sought or accepted by employers within the relevant industry or sector as a recognized, preferred, or required credential for recruitment, screening, hiring, retention, or advancement purposes;
B. Where appropriate, is endorsed by a nationally recognized trade association or organization representing a significant part of the industry or sector.

CTE – Career and Technical Education: Career and Technical Education (CTE) encompasses high school courses and postsecondary programs focused on the skills and knowledge required for specific jobs or fields of work.

Career and Technical Student Organizations: Career Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs) align with the sixteen career clusters. They are 1) BPA - Business Professionals of America, 2) DECA, 3) FCCLA - Family, Career and Community Leaders of America, 4) HOSA - Future Health Professionals, 5) SkillsUSA, and 6) TSA - Technology Student Association 7) FFA - Future Farmers of America and 8) Educators Rising.

Career and Technical (CTE) Participant: A CTE participant is a student in grades 9-12 who, within the reporting school year (SY 20XX-20XX), took one or more CTE courses in an approved program of study

CTE Concentrator: In Perkins V, a 'CTE concentrator' at the secondary school level is defined as a student who has completed at least two courses in a single career and technical education program or program of study, such as Health Science or Business Management and Administration.

CTE Completer: A grade 9-12 student completing an introductory CTE course, a second concentrator course, and a CTE capstone course

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