



# 2024/2025 INSTITUTO DEL PUENTE IMPACT REPORT

We at Future Focused Education believe the future health and prosperity of our communities lies in the ambitions of our young people. At Instituto del Puente, the policy arm of Future Focused, we began a listening journey across New Mexico asking young people how and what they could contribute to making our state a better place to live. We were heartened to hear young people share their visions of success and give powerful insights into the role we, as advocates of their futures, can play. **Youth are asking for mentorship, learning with purpose, and care for their wellbeing**—each a component of an education system that is within our power to create.

According to young people, success is a deeply personal journey, shaped by individual growth, experiences, and aspirations. Success is not defined by a single path but by the ability to set and achieve goals in personal, academic, and professional spheres. Rooted in the values of our state, staying true to oneself—despite external pressures—is essential to maintaining authenticity. Equally important is the spirit of helping one another, a defining characteristic of New Mexican communities, where mentorship, teaching, and support uplift those facing challenges.

Through policy, Instituto is building a puente (bridge) between our current education system and the schools that our young people are asking for. Instead of decisions being made by a select few, the aim is to give young people and their community an equal opportunity to imagine a different future and build the policy bridge to take us there.

We are advocating for an education system that fosters both individual fulfillment and collective well-being. True success is linked not just to achievement but to happiness, purpose, and progress for all. Will you join us in making a difference?

Tony Monfletto  
Director of Instituto del Puente

*Thank you to our Instituto del Puente funders: New Mexico Public Education Department, New Mexico Legislature, Kellogg Foundation, Annie E. Casey Foundation, Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, and Thornburg Foundation.*



Conversations led by youth and community have taken place in every area of New Mexico—in Aztec, Peñasco, Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Lake Arthur, Santa Rosa, Hobbs, Alamogordo, and Las Cruces. Young people consistently share that they need:

- **Learning that has a purpose** and is meaningful now and in the future.
- **Care and concern for their wellbeing**, both as students and as individuals.
- **Mentorship** to help them become responsible and successful adults.

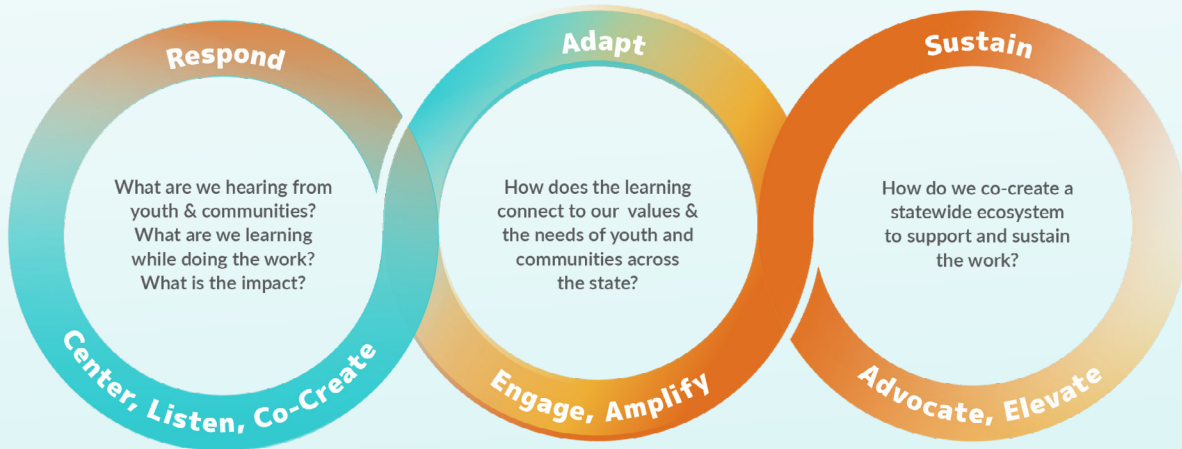
**Instituto del Puente is the bridge from community input to sustainable, solution based actions through policy work that includes the voices of those most impacted.**



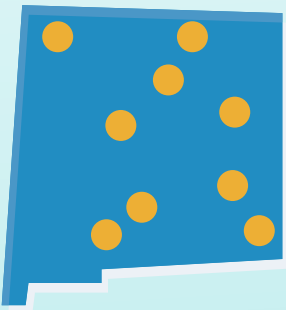
**Scan the QR Code to watch change in action at an Instituto del Puente convening!**

# How we do it

Instituto del Puente, a Future Focused Education initiative, accomplishes our mission by **responding** to dilemmas, **adapting** solutions to specific communities, and **sustaining** our efforts over time through public policy. With community help, insight and experience, we are co-creating a better New Mexico, together.



**13** Instituto del Puente convenings were held



People from all around New Mexico attended 9 Community Convenings with nearly 500 participants to support New Mexico's talented Youth. Convenings

included private employers, community stakeholders, families, local nonprofits, Instituto del Puente nonprofit partners, students, educators, and school board members. Each event featured student panels, and many also included leadership from New Mexico Public Education Department, Legislative Education Study Committee, and Legislative Finance Committee.

**2,000** data points collected from participants

In each convening, participants responded to prompts based on what youth attendees said about their hopes for the future. Responses identified key themes and were sent back out to the community for review, ensuring accuracy and alignment with their contributions and creating a rich dataset of perspectives.



**8** themes identified by community and youth

Student Centered Education	Experiential & Hands-on Learning	Equitable Access & Diversity	Policy & Structural Reforms
Mental Health & Wellbeing	Community & School Partnerships	Professional Development for Educators	Youth Voice & Empowerment

## 3 Convening Highlights

*"I think to make things better, listen to students and their needs. With that, we enjoy going to school, and also you're preparing your students for their future."*

**- Alejandra Pando**

**Lake Arthur Student and Instituto del Puente youth voice participant**

### LAKE ARTHUR CONVENING | SPRING 2024

Lake Arthur Municipal Schools is an important resource to the town of only 400 people. They've created exciting opportunities for students – from rocketry to a school garden. We listened and learned from 20 community members including students and school personnel. Lake Arthur used the convening information to create local school board policy and implement new graduation requirements, including the creation of a graduate profile, which outlines essential skills, knowledge, and character traits the Lake Arthur community has identified as important for youth to have upon graduation.



### HOBBS CONVENING | FALL 2024

In fall 2024, the Career and Technical Education Center of Hobbs buzzed with energy and excitement of 77 community members, school personnel, and students. We listened as young people described their definition of success, discussed what programs work for them, and what changes they think could improve student engagement. We learned young people in Hobbs want to be engaged in community, with hands-on learning that provides practical skills. Hobbs used the convening information to shape their Strategic Plan and to continue to improve and create pathways, engaging students in the process.

### ALBUQUERQUE CONVENINGS | FALL 2024

Some of the same people from Hobbs and Lake Arthur joined others from all across New Mexico in Albuquerque for two policy workshops. These workshops, with over 150 participants, focused on uplifting the voice of young people to respond to what they had told us. Paid internships, capstone projects in the community, and Teen Mental Health First Aid are at the intersection of their hopes and desires. From the year of convenings, co-created policy recommendations took form for the 2025 legislative session.

*"With the capstone course, you actually get out of the classroom and meet with people. You get to apply the learning that you're doing, and you get to achieve what you want to actually do."*

**- Cruz Rivas**

**Instituto del Puente youth voice participant and former Highland High School student**



## We combined the knowledge and data collected from community convenings with sustainable policy efforts, which led to the following recommendations.

### 5 policy recommendations were co-created from themes

We categorized the themes into three key requests: hands-on learning with future relevance, mentorship for adulthood, and student well-being. We then collaborated with partners to shape policy recommendations that maximize *health and prosperity for communities*.

**Local District Policies:** Redesigning the school day by implementing capstone projects, work-based learning and other community-based initiatives can create more meaningful experiences for young people.

**Sustainable Funding for Work-Based Learning:** Schools in New Mexico rely on temporary funding for paid internships, an unsustainable model. We have proposed legislation (HB 528) that will be a long term solution to help schools and employers maximize opportunities under HB 171.

**State Artificial Intelligence Policy for Public Schools:** Future Focused is developing an AI model for the statewide Capstone Initiative, advocating for: community data control, equitable AI access and representation, transparency, AI as a public good, and enhancing—not replacing—human connection.

**PED Rule Making for HB 171 Implementation:** State graduation requirements hold great redesign promise for schools. To fully appreciate this opportunity, we hope to ensure that the most innovative practices that can be pursued by districts will be allowed by the rulemaking process by the New Mexico Public Education Department.

**Teen Mental Health:** Future Focused piloted Youth and Teen Mental Health First Aid training in 5 rural schools and 2 Albuquerque schools, providing school-wide training and paid internships for student support. The program highlights the need for more mental health resources and exposes service gaps.

### 2025 legislative outcomes to celebrate:

- Secured a \$1.0 million appropriation to support Mental Health First Aid for students and staff and paid Behavioral Health internships,
- Supported \$6.2 million appropriation to deal with absenteeism that will expand the reach of the Graduation Re-engagement, Internship, Program (GRIP) initiative,
- Advocated for a memorial to study the implications of Artificial Intelligence with research support by Future Focused, and
- Supported HB 528 which was introduced to fund sustainable work-based learning across the state.

During the 2025 interim, we will expand the network of support for these initiatives by engaging young people, community members, and educators.



*“What I’m most excited about is knowing that [Future Focused Education’s proposals] are going to come from students and families.”*

**- Javier Martínez, New Mexico  
Speaker of the House and  
Instituto del Puente participant**