



NEW MEXICO PUBLIC EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

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# **THE NEW MEXICO HIGH SCHOOL INITIATIVE Consensus Document**

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November 2004

## The New Mexico High School Initiative

November 18-20, 2004

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Convened by the Public Education Department  
Process and Technical Assistance Provided by New Mexico First

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New Mexico and the nation are undergoing unprecedented economic, social, and demographic shifts. The challenge facing education is to raise its sights to ensure that all students successfully complete high school and are well prepared for post-secondary education and the complexities of the workforce. The reality is that New Mexico ranks 46<sup>th</sup> in the high school graduation rates, ranks 45<sup>th</sup> for 25 to 34 year-olds with post-secondary education, has an achievement gap between the diverse ethnic and economic groups as depicted by ACT scores, and the state has had a declining personal income as a percentage of the U.S. average since 1980.

As a result, on November 18<sup>th</sup> through 20<sup>th</sup>, 2004, approximately 125 New Mexicans representing education administration, educators, students, community organizations, family, school board members, government, and the business community, convened in a Town Hall to discuss a statewide high school initiative. The Town Hall participants educated themselves about the issues considered and weighed a variety of options, and reached consensus about how the challenge facing education can be met to ensure all students successfully complete high school and are well prepared for post-secondary education, the complexities of the workforce and participating in a global community. The Town Hall also acknowledges that students will be educated in a partnership where the family, the community at-large, and the business/industry world share an active role and responsibility with the schools in the education of our children.

### Our Vision

The Town Hall envisions a New Mexico in which:

1. **Each student** has access to individual and structural support from the New Mexico education system to complete high school and is prepared to pursue post-secondary education and the complexities of the diverse workforce, in which all students shall

have the **opportunities** they need to be successful in their post-secondary programs, their employment, and ultimately their lives.

For students to be **successful** and reach to their full potential, they need a rigorous curriculum, specific skills, broad competencies, and habits of mind that include:

- Challenging **content**, knowledge, research, study, test taking skills, problem solving skills, critical thinking skills, communication skills, and **the ability to make informed decisions**.
- **Employability** skills with a strong work ethic and the ability to **develop and maintain respectful relationships** with others.

Students need to know how to set goals and act on those goals with confidence and determination so they can adapt to multiple career and enrichment opportunities throughout their lives. Students shall also be prepared to **participate as informed citizens** and they shall have the **personal skills, including health and well being, needed to successfully manage their lives**.

2. **Each high school** provides the environment and structure to nurture students.

- The school **environment** shall be driven by high academic performance expectations, while concurrently being safe and nurturing. It shall focus on the **“whole student,” integrated with the community, and has a global perspective**. The educators in this environment shall connect with students and other staff, shall be well prepared in their discipline, shall be engaged in high quality professional development, shall deliver differentiated instruction designed to meet the needs of the diversified student population, and shall have necessary physical and technological resources. The professional development available to educators shall support their schools’ educational plans for student success, align to the state’s content standards and benchmarks, and be appropriate for their professional growth.
- The **structure** of schools shall support the attainment of competency standards that are rigorous and consistent statewide. As students are assessed through multiple approaches, curricula shall include a rigorous component that is vertically and horizontally aligned with pre- and post-secondary proficiencies, standards, skills and expectations so that **the education pipeline is seamless**.

Curricula shall be customized to meet diverse student needs such as those presented by multiple cultures and languages, scheduling constraints, learning styles, abilities, and individual goals.

### **How Do We Get There From Here?**

In order to achieve the vision, the Town Hall recognizes that substantial and innovative changes must be made to address the challenges created by 19<sup>th</sup> century building design, 20<sup>th</sup> century curriculum, and 21<sup>st</sup> century students. Important concepts for change identified by the Town Hall are:

- **Relationships.** The participants call for **stronger relationships** and **greater structural collaborations** among family, educators and students as well as among pre-K through 8, high schools, post-secondary schools, business, government, and the community. Such structural collaborations are needed to:
  - Ensure transition into the workplace through industry alliances and innovative programs such as small learning communities;
  - Support quality teaching and learning in the classrooms;
  - Align, state, district and school processes to ensure communication among all stakeholders;
  - Establish effective professional development for educators and effective program development; and
  - Align the focus of pre-K through 8, high schools, post-secondary schools and the community to a student-centered system to allow for successful transitions.

These relationships shall include students in a process that will ensure relevancy of curriculum, and that learning takes place, and that content standards are met and measured.

- **Expectations.** The participants would like to see **higher expectations** and **shared accountability** for students, educators, community, and family, including implementing the four R's (rigor, relevance, relationships and readiness) and acquiring continued professional development for educators.

- **Curriculum.** The participants called for a relevant and rigorous **curriculum** that aligns standards vertically and horizontally, creates high expectations pre-K through 20, and provides innovative flexibility in achieving those standards with access available to all students throughout the state.
- **Organization.** The participants would also like to see **organizational change** that results in appropriate staffing, increased course offerings, and professional development, and the use of innovative models. Learning need not be confined to the classrooms and schools, but shall be integrated with the community. Agencies shall provide more assistance with less regulation. The Public Education Department shall model and provide technical assistance utilizing quality processes for continuous improvement, and shall review funding streams and models to support collaboration and innovation.

### **The Town Hall’s Recommendations for Achieving Its Vision**

The Town Hall made the following recommendations. These recommendations are not stated in any order of priority.

#### **1. Alignment of Curriculum**

A rigorous curriculum shall align the junior high school/middle school curricula with that of the high school. The high school curricula shall align with post-secondary education. The high schools shall implement both vertical alignment and horizontal alignment to coordinate what is being taught within levels. There shall be support for district curriculum development that integrates and aligns standards, courses, and themes utilizing instructional practices that incorporate cultural sensitivity, awareness of learning styles, abilities, real world experiences, applications and life skills in innovative ways.

#### **2. Rigorous and Innovative Curriculum**

The high schools shall require students to pursue a rigorous, integrated, yet personalized course of study and shall follow a statewide guideline of a world class college prep and workforce readiness curriculum that meets New Mexico content standards and benchmarks. Key components include:

- Professional development for teachers;

- Adequate facilities;
- Support structures for students;
- Accommodation of learning styles, learning abilities, and cultural sensitivity; and
- Funding to phase in the systems that adequately prepare students to be successful in meeting high academic achievement.

### **3. Outside of Classroom Learning**

High schools shall expand service learning projects, work study, internships, mentoring programs, distance learning and dual credit opportunities that develop students who are genuinely invested in their community through experiences that prepare students for college and work. High schools, combined with communities, shall maximize the synergy of classroom instruction aimed at building leadership skills through participation in student organizations and activities. High schools shall develop a viable and working system for concurrent enrollment/dual credit and other articulated programs that allow high school students who are fully funded students to take concurrent enrollment/dual credit courses for core credit.

### **4. Flexibility**

High schools shall be allowed flexibility and innovation in curriculum and provide student centered scheduling and distance learning opportunities while achieving high expectations. Reductions in regulations will reduce barriers to flexibility and innovation.

### **5. Standards**

Standards, benchmarks, and levels of performance shall continue to be adjusted and updated for relevance and currency and must be rigorous and aligned among all levels of education so that students are prepared to enter post-secondary schools and the workforce. Curricula aligned with standards and services, shall take into account students with special needs and accommodate all learning styles.

### **6. Assessments**

The Public Education Department shall analyze the data and the student assessment system – including the statewide accountability plan – to determine whether it addresses state and federal requirements; allows review of students from year-to-year, school-to-school, and transitions into college and the workforce; meets

the specific needs of schools and students through timely feedback; uses performance based indicators and assesses students through multiple approaches using authentic assessment including portfolios; and adequately tests designated essential skills.

## **7. Teacher Qualifications**

Teacher preparation programs shall evaluate and revamp their programs so that teachers exit the program highly qualified in their content area and equipped to effectively address the needs of all students. The current licensure system shall be reviewed by the Public Education Department, in collaboration with teacher preparation programs and their stakeholders, in order to align content standards and benchmarks. The Legislature, the Public Education Department and the Governor must support and fund ongoing professional development which includes:

- Skills training
- Modeling
- Mentoring
- Role playing
- Problem solving
- Quality processes

## **8. Administrator Qualifications**

Graduate programs in administration and supervision as well as other professional development programs must focus on the role of the administrator as an instructional leader. Curricula shall include training on curriculum development, best practices or high yield strategies that result in student achievement and the use of assessment and accountability data to drive instructional improvement. Training shall be provided in effective and efficient financial and other management practices and in fostering positive interpersonal relationships among staff, family and the community.

## **9. Parent and Family Expectations**

High schools shall expect, encourage, motivate, and provide welcoming opportunities for family involvement. High schools shall hold family-student conferences to assure that each family has participated in the development and

review of their student's "Next Step/Transition Plan" and Individual Career Action Plan.

#### **10. Community Expectations**

High schools and the Public Education Department shall work to increase community involvement by implementing advisory councils and Town Halls that involve families, businesses, government agencies and civic organizations on an ongoing and regular basis.

#### **11. Shared Accountability**

There shall be a structure of shared accountability, integrated action, and alignment of resources involving students, teachers, families, business, education and state government collaboration that is initiated by a statewide Town Hall. This structure addresses a broad system of continuous collaboration, which would also serve as a model for community level collaboration. The criteria used to measure whether these expectations are being met shall be clear, comprehensive and collaboratively developed. In addition, these measures shall be used to build capacity rather than force compliance. Students, family, educators and community members shall have systematic opportunities to come together and discuss the progress of high school reform.

#### **12. Mentoring, Advisement and Creating Relationships**

In addition to outside mentoring/advisement programs, every high school student shall have at least one adult mentor on campus. Mentoring of students shall be included in educator responsibilities, as this is key to creating strong relationships and student success. Educators shall be assigned to small groups of students in logical pairings (e.g., players with coaches, club members with sponsors, or teacher/student preference). The mentor shall create the opportunities for their students to stay on track toward student success. Schools shall provide the time and structure for mentoring all students by educators.

#### **13. Collaboration to Align Funding and Goals**

A system shall be developed that: leverages resources, eliminates duplication of services, and maximizes time, money, and social capital. There shall be collaboration at all levels of education (the Public Education Department, middle

schools, and post-secondary education), business and government (including the Office of Workforce Training and Development), to ensure that financial decisions align with a school's goals and expectations.

#### **14. Collaboration with Business and Community**

The Public Education Department, the districts, and high schools shall build partnerships with businesses, community groups, and community organizations to help with student needs by:

- Providing student internships and teacher externships;
- Providing workforce training statewide;
- Coordinating education programs, such as small learning communities with economic development;
- Ensuring that current day educational needs and workforce needs match; and
- Assisting with educational initiatives and legislation.

High schools shall be funded for activities to support collaboration with businesses. These activities include: 1. facilitating businesses to bring representatives into classrooms; and 2. transportation. Business community mentors shall be provided with specific objectives to enable better utilization of all resources provided.

#### **15. Collaboration with Post-secondary Education**

High school and post-secondary education shall partner to:

- Provide culturally relevant academic and workforce preparation programs;
- Develop and conduct effective transition programs including efficient transportation and flexible schedules between high schools and local post-secondary entities;
- Develop a viable and working system for concurrent enrollment/dual credit;
- Articulate educational rigor, life skills and high expectations for all students;
- Provide opportunities for exchange between higher education faculty and high school teachers; and
- Provide support for, mentoring of, and follow-up with students.

#### **16. Task Force**

The Public Education Department shall create an ongoing statewide high school task force composed of state government agencies, economic development

organizations, businesses, education employees and administrators, families, and students to build partnerships, enhance alignment and provide additional student support services. Smaller regional components shall also be created to report back regional needs to the state level.

## **17. Resources**

The Public Education Department shall:

- Seek a new funding methodology to support innovative programs, resource development, and alternative education models;
- Procure adequate funding for professional development programs and ensure that all schools are technologically linked to each other and the outside world in order to close the gap between rural and urban schools;
- Seek funding and extend the time frames of professional contracts to support professional development and more classroom time that would match or exceed national averages;
- Celebrate and recognize high quality programs in New Mexico high schools;
- Seek to increase the technology for education formula for schools; and
- Promote the benefits of and opportunities for family involvement.

## **18. Systems**

- The Public Education Department and the Commission on Higher Education shall work together to provide resources and frameworks that build capacity and support student success.
- The Public Education Department shall convene a conference with a focus on the thematic concept of small learning communities for high schools.
- High schools shall revisit and revitalize the educational plan for student success (EPSS).
- The Public Education Department shall establish a system to share best practices among all schools that includes disseminating that information to all schools.
- Districts shall be informed about the existing resources available for program improvement and enrichment.

- The Public Education Department, collaborating with the Commission on Higher Education, Department of Labor, and other state agencies shall develop and implement a pre-K through 20 data system that is accessible statewide.
- The education communities, including all ethnic groups within New Mexico, shall be provided with more information regarding their educational performance, needs, strengths, options and partnership requirements.