



Education Policy Experts Release New Independent Analysis of New Mexico's Efforts to Date to Improve Low-Performing Schools

NM praised for vision, taking a leadership approach to school improvement efforts

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States have a responsibility and opportunity to create systems to meaningfully address underperforming schools in order to provide all students a strong, equitable education. States have chosen their own approaches to identify and use federal funds to support and turn around their lowest-performing schools, and today, HCM Strategists, in partnership with the Collaborative for Student Success (CSS), released the results of an independent peer review analysis of current school improvement efforts in 17 states. The report highlights best practices being used in these states and identifies areas for improvement. "[Check State Plans: From Promise to Practice](#)," is a continuation of the "Check State Plans" reviews released last year and looks at how states are approaching the allocation of federal funding targeted for school improvement efforts and activities. Moreover, this analysis looks at how well states are providing resources and supports to their districts to target schools that are most in need.

Seventeen states, including New Mexico, were chosen to be reviewed in this initial round because they had the most publicly-available information at the start of the peer review process. When considering the full set of eight indicators, evaluators determined that four states embraced a strong state role to drive reform, five states are partnering with districts and eight states are relying heavily on district leaders to improve the results with some oversight and support from the state.

New Mexico received a "Strong" rating in 4 out of 8 categories: vision, funding, capacity building and autonomy, and continuous improvement and monitoring, and an "Adequate" rating in all other categories. The panel of experts believe that New Mexico is using a "State Leadership Approach," and does a good job of ensuring that districts are submitting applications that have a strong focus on evidence-based interventions and are aligned with the district's proposed theory of action for intervention and implementation. These strengths will make it more likely that districts and schools will make sustained, long-term improvement. Read more on the next page.

"Figuring out how to close achievement gaps between our country's highest and continuously lowest performing schools is one of the greatest equity issues of our time," said Jim Cowen, Executive Director of the Collaborative for Student Success. "The federal government provided one billion dollars and significant freedom to state leaders to drive bold, innovative change for their most challenged schools. It's important that states are stepping up to the challenge and being thoughtful and inventive in how they realize results."

"Promise to Practice is intended to inform policy makers of what is happening across states and serve as an advocacy tool to help state education leaders leverage both their newfound flexibility and their federal funds to drive meaningful school improvement," explained HCM's Elizabeth Ross, lead author of the report.



The Collaborative and HCM recruited independent peer reviewers that included former state chiefs, members of the civil rights and disability communities, and education experts from around the country as well as individuals with dedicated expertise in school improvement at the state, district, and local levels.

Peer reviewers analyzed several state specific documents including a state's application for districts to receive federal school improvement funding, application scoring rubric, state school improvement guidance and supporting materials and an independent survey, conducted by Education First, that was commissioned to support this work. Evidence was reviewed and critiqued across 8 different categories: vision, funding, rigorous review process, continuous improvement and monitoring, capacity building and autonomy, engagement, and sustainability. Each was rated as: exemplary, strong, adequate, needs improvement, or weak.

“As with our peer review of state's ESSA plans, this new independent analysis done by experts aims to highlight best practices across those states that are implementing strong school improvement systems, as well as show states where they can improve in order to provide the best education possible for our students,” concluded Cowen.

To read more about the qualifications of the peer reviewers see [here](#) and the process see [here](#).

To read the full report and national press release visit the “Check State Plans: From Promise to Practice” website at <http://promisetopractice.org>.

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About the Collaborative for Student Success:

The Collaborative for Student Success is a non-profit advocacy organization that works to defend high standards, high-quality assessments, and strong systems of accountability, to ensure that all kids are prepared for college or career. Through capacity-building efforts with in-state organizations and collaboration with national partners, we promote fact-based public discourse and fight to advance policies that promote best practices and ensure equitable outcomes for all students.

New Mexico's Analysis:

Excerpts below are taken verbatim from the HCM peer review analysis.

To read the entire HCM review for New Mexico's school improvement plan [click here](#).

To read the HCM national report click [here](#).

Strengths:

New Mexico's rubric has strong alignment with the stated requirements for comprehensive support and improvement schools. New Mexico also ensures that districts are submitting applications that have a strong focus on evidence-based interventions and are aligned with the district's proposed theory of action for intervention and implementation. In addition, the state holds high expectations for the applicants and maintained their commitment to the competitive application process and



rigorous review process by working with the applicants during the process to strengthen their plans, and in the end not approving applications that don't meet the standard.

Due to the alignment with its prior accountability system, New Mexico has a better articulated and formulated plan for the more rigorous options than many other states. Based on the New Mexico context, the options seem reasonable and with fidelity of implementation would likely lead to improvements. It is also encouraging that the application for More Rigorous Interventions is well aligned to the state's outlined theory of school improvement. Fortunately, the clarity and alignment of New Mexico's materials make strong local plan design and faithful implementation significantly more likely.

The New Mexico materials are clearly written, easy to understand, and articulate a well-designed comprehensive plan. The frequently asked questions document will be extremely helpful to schools and districts. The availability of the NM DASH, a web-based action-planning tool identified to all schools is a positive of the plan, and if user-friendly, should act as a central access point for all work.

Where the Plan Can Improve:

New Mexico outlines a clear theory of action in their ESSA plan, but it appears that the vision and mission are buried within the school improvement materials. Pulling out the vision and theory of action would help stakeholders ground their work. It's also important for New Mexico to ensure that the school and district leaders engage the parents and community members in the development of, not just the implementation, of the improvement plans.

While New Mexico outlines some great options for districts to use in their turnaround plans, some of the information lacks a clear description of the various options including the pros and cons and requirements of each option. For a district with low-performing schools, even beginning to select one or more of these options may be daunting. This may be occurring via personal consultation, but could be strengthened by additional materials or information on the process. Additional guidance on how to identify evidence-based strategies that are aligned to a school and districts needs could be strengthened. In addition, the evidence base for the state-provided improvement options could be more clearly articulated.

Finally, it does not appear that the state has a process to monitor outside entities who partner in the improvement efforts, including the state-defined interventions and partners. While the state is using strong monitoring practices generally, it would be helpful for the field to understand which education partners have been successful across districts. This is important for districts who are choosing to use outside entities to ensure that the partners engaged are of high quality.