



# STATE REPORT NEW MEXICO

## OVERALL APPROACH

**Equity:** How well does the state’s approach to school improvement include focused attention on supporting underserved students and closing the achievement gap? Does the state require LEAs to maintain an equity focus in their school improvement plans, activities and resource allocations?

Addressing the systemic inequities of the New Mexico educational system and closing achievement gaps is a core focus of the state’s ESSA plan. While the achievement gap goals may be different for various subgroups, the intention of such differences is to target the largest gaps in the system and address historical inequities. How equity will be achieved could be enhanced and more clearly articulated throughout the materials, applications, resources, NM DASH (Data, Accountability, Sustainability, and High Achievement), and application rubrics. For instance, the overarching focus of the state’s documents appears to be on intentional design and faithful implementation of interventions that will raise achievement, but not necessarily on closing the achievement gaps within the schools.

**Strengths:** How is the state thoughtfully leveraging ESSA’s flexibility to put in place the necessary policies and procedures that create an enabling environment for effective and sustained school improvement, and that consider state/local lessons learned from past efforts? What parts of the state’s turnaround strategy or guidance to LEAs were strongest or exemplary?

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.

## TURNAROUND COMPONENT OVERVIEW

|   |                 |
|---|-----------------|
| Coherent and Aligned Vision for Improving Outcomes . . . . .  | <b>Strong</b>   |
| Strategic Use of Funding and Alignment of Resources . . . . . | <b>Strong</b>   |
| Rigorous Review Process . . . . .                             | <b>Adequate</b> |
| Continuous Improvement, Monitoring and Evaluation . . . . .   | <b>Strong</b>   |
| Evidence-Based Interventions . . . . .                        | <b>Adequate</b> |
| Capacity Building and Autonomy . . . . .                      | <b>Strong</b>   |
| Engagement . . . . .  | <b>Adequate</b> |
| Sustainability . . . . .                                      | <b>Adequate</b> |

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.

**Improvements:** How can the state improve its turnaround efforts? What parts of the state’s strategy or guidance to LEAs were unclear? What risks and challenges might the state face with its current approach?

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.

## TURNAROUND COMPONENTS

**Coherent and Aligned Vision for Improving Outcomes:** How well does the state articulate a coherent vision or theory of action that drives their school improvement efforts? Is this vision aligned with the state’s accountability system and goals for closing the achievement gap?

N/A      Weak      Needs Improvement      Adequate      **Strong**      Exemplary

New Mexico outlines a strong vision and framework for improving outcomes in the state. The state’s vision pushes the envelope for what is possible under the policy framework in the state by requiring district leaders to turn in a plan that adheres to the states college and career ready vision and ensuring all students are succeeding. Specifically, the New Mexico vision and framework focuses on leadership, differentiated support and accountability, talent management, and instructional infrastructure. In addition, the application for More Rigorous Interventions is similarly detailed at unpacking state expectations for district approaches to Human Capital, School Leadership, and school-level adjustments. This vision and its components are carryovers from the state’s ESSA plan, which reflects a degree of consistency. New Mexico also clearly describes the options for more rigorous options thanks to the high degree of alignment with the state’s previous accountability system. This helps provide clarity around what will occur if a school does not improve within the specified timeline and demonstrates good alignment with the states accountability system.

While a strong plan and vision, this area could be improved by ensuring that the vision and theory of action more clearly articulated at the forefront of all communication and materials. It is currently buried within the resources and supports for districts, and in the ESSA plan. This clear articulation would assist with stakeholder engagement and buy-in.

**Strategic Use of Funding and Alignment of Resources:** Is the state allocating funding in a way that is strategic and maximizes resources? Are LEAs expected to prioritize improvement efforts that address the underlying performance issues?

N/A      Weak      Needs Improvement      Adequate      **Strong**      Exemplary

New Mexico distributes school improvement funding via a competitive process, and the state plans to support districts with the application, plan development, and implementation phases. This early involvement and support is strong, as is the ability to selectively elect additional supports and receive additional competitive funds to pay for those supports.

New Mexico should be commended for distributing funding through a well-defined competitive process. Doing this can challenge the status quo and encourage systemic improvements. New Mexico articulates a six-step needs assessment process that is designed to diagnose issues and identify underlying root causes, which are then used to develop the plan for improvement. This helps schools ensure that they're developing the right interventions to address the underlying causes of underperformance and can help ensure that funding is being allocated towards well-developed plans.

Furthermore, the applications include clear statements of the consequences for non-compliance, which mostly relate to the withholding of funds. The application also notes expenses that are not likely to be approved, and the need to plan carefully for sustainability places. These processes attempt to ensure that the interventions are efficient and direct for state leaders.

In its school improvement application, New Mexico asks districts to assign per school funding for improvement efforts specific to school-level performance issues, and insists that schools must think about their specific needs and that the proposed interventions "are relevant and appropriate to the needs of the school." The High School Transformation improvement pathway also seems like an example of targeting funds to specific interventions, though it's only offered to 10 high schools per application cycle.

It is unclear what supports are provided to schools and districts who do not receive funds, yet are still identified for improvement.

**Rigorous Review Process:** Is the state applying rigorous criteria and review processes to ensure resources will be used to support effective school improvement efforts? Is the state prioritizing funding to LEAs who demonstrate the greatest need for school improvement funding (including LEAs with a high percentage of CSI and TSI schools) and the strongest commitment to school improvement?

N/A      Weak      Needs Improvement      **Adequate**      Strong      Exemplary

New Mexico's rubric is clear and consistent regarding its priorities for district and school intervention design and implementation. In addition, the rubric appropriately weights the elements to score the application and it was clear that New Mexico is committed to funding schools that are identified for More Rigorous Interventions and that submitted applications that were serious about making significant changes and improvements. This was evident when the state rejected some of the applications for their lack of strength and commitment to turnaround. The inclusion of blended learning opportunities to support districts respond to the application is commendable.

The theory of action is listed at the end of the evidence-based section, and the application would be strengthened by elevating the theory of action to directly after the needs assessment and root cause analysis. The addition of the assurances is strong. It was also unclear whether districts with a higher percentage of comprehensive and targeted schools would be more likely to receive additional support.

**Continuous Improvement, Monitoring and Evaluation:** Does the state have a robust, data-driven process to monitor LEAs’ implementation of the school improvement plans within their district? Did the state establish clear milestones to ensure improvement over time, and within four years?

N/A      Weak      Needs Improvement      Adequate      **Strong**      Exemplary

New Mexico’s system for continuous improvement and monitoring is called NM DASH. This integrated data system provides monthly, quarterly and annual data reports to identified schools. This integrated data system is particularly valuable since it signals state attention to a range of in-process indicators (e.g. staff and student attendance, course completion, and interim assessment data) and achievement outcomes. The state will annually monitor the progress of growth targets on number of leading and lagging indicators, has set clear milestones, and uses the New Mexico school grading system (A-F) to monitor improvements from multiple data points.

In addition to the data reporting, New Mexico holds dedicated check-ins with districts that have identified schools. Additional monitoring may also be required if progress is not made, or if deficiencies are found and not addressed. NM DASH does contain elements where achievement goals for student subgroups are set, however, the work would be strengthened by more publicly articulating the state’s overall aspirations for equity and closing the achievement gap. It will be useful for the field to know how New Mexico is using the NM DASH data and the NM TEACH data to help school leaders and educators understand how their school is performing and where improvements can be made within the district and school levels.

Knowing that the monitoring process is well-defined and frequent, more information would be useful regarding how the progress monitoring cycle aligns with the annual milestones for overall improvements, including achievement gap closures of subgroups and adult implementation metrics.

**Evidence-Based Interventions:** To what extent is the state mandating LEAs use evidence-based strategies in their improvement efforts? Does the state provide guidance and supports to LEAs to help them identify and implement the most effective strategies based upon their needs?

N/A      Weak      Needs Improvement      **Adequate**      Strong      Exemplary

New Mexico is appropriately requiring districts to use evidence-based strategies in their improvement systems. The state has provided a list to nationally-sourced repositories of information, as well as a process to select other strategies/interventions outside of those on the included lists. This information is helpful for district and school leaders, though it will be important to understand how district leaders are using this information and the data from their needs assessment to ensure they’re implementing the right strategies that best meet their needs.

The work would be strengthened by providing additional strategies and interventions that align directly to the turnaround framework. The selection of the evidence-based practices is heavily weighted in the application review, and emphasizes the applicants choose strategies aligned to their needs and appropriate for their population.

**Capacity Building and Autonomy:** How well does the state articulate, delineate or set parameters around which interventions and responsibilities belong to the state, LEA and/or school? Does the state provide support or guidance to help LEAs identify and reduce barriers to school improvement? Does the state have a framework or process to support and monitor outside entities who partner with the state, LEAs or schools in school improvement efforts?

N/A    Weak    Needs Improvement    Adequate    **Strong**    Exemplary

New Mexico adequately delineates the roles and parameters of the state and district involvement in the improvement of the schools by citing a number of learning opportunities for schools and districts on their roles and responsibilities. New Mexico primarily uses the NM DASH application to drive their school improvement efforts, which includes a series of clear, prescribed steps and explains when the state will be involved, and when it will not. For instance, it is noted that state officials are heavily involved in the oversight of the implementation of the district- and school-generated interventions including oversight of “critical actions” and “reimbursement requests.” The system has robust capabilities that allow the state and districts to stay on the same about what is happening in their schools. That said, New Mexico could do more to publicly define the role the district and the role of the school in the improvement efforts outside of NM DASH.

It does not appear that the state has a process to support or monitor outside entities who partner in the improvement efforts. If districts or schools are relying on outside entities to partner with them in the turnaround work, it is important that parameters are put in place to ensure that districts and schools are partnering with high quality organizations.

**Engagement:** Does the state require LEAs to engage with stakeholders such as parents and community members in the development and implementation of their school improvement plans? Does the state provide sufficient guidance and resources to LEAs to effectively do so, helping them foster local buy-in and promote sustainability?

N/A    Weak    Needs Improvement    **Adequate**    Strong    Exemplary

New Mexico does require districts to detail their stakeholder engagement efforts and encourages transparency through the implementation of their plan. For instance, the application seeks detail on the methods, times, and places for regularly updating stakeholders on progress and sharing progress monitoring data. It appears that New Mexico is asking districts to describe how they’ll engage stakeholders during the intervention process, but the state’s school improvement application is thin on guidance to engage parents and community members in the needs assessment, the development, and execution of the mutually developed plan, instead including this requirement as one of many things a district commits to by submitting the application. That said, the state has provided guidance to districts on stakeholder engagement outside of the school improvement application, and districts are required to provide proof that they have engaged community member and tribes in school improvement.

New Mexico did recently develop a taskforce and appointed a parent liaison at the state level to support parents and community engagement at the state, district and school levels. However, it is unclear how much involvement this newly appointed position will have with the identified schools.

**Sustainability:** Does the state have a plan in place to review the school improvement efforts statewide and evaluate the impact and effectiveness? Does the state have a process in place to support LEAs and schools by enhancing their capacity to maintain their improvement efforts upon exiting identification and intervention?

N/A    Weak    Needs Improvement    **Adequate**    Strong    Exemplary

New Mexico has a well-articulated and intensive plan for staff and regional office staff to monitor and support schools and districts throughout implementation via onsite and desktop monitoring. The initial

options that schools and districts choose are designed to increase the likelihood of sustainability and to address systemic and structural issues. A number of assurances must also be signed by the board president and the superintendent, which helps set the expectations for a long-term commitment to improve by the key governing bodies. In addition, New Mexico reiterates the importance of sustainability and encourages their districts and schools to consider and address sustainability throughout their application, plans and implementation of this work.

New Mexico's plan is based on a decade of strong leadership and implementation of the continuous improvement cycle. The state has reported that it is currently in the process of codifying the state's accountability system, school grading, and NM DASH in state rule and statute. Pending the success of these efforts, this will go a long way in helping these policies withstand shifts in leadership.

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