



Opportunities for Teachers,
Results for Urban Students

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The Evolution of New Mexico teacher evaluation system

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The New Mexico teacher evaluation system is in the process of evolution. As a city councilor in Roswell, I understand the delicate balance between the needs of the department of education and teachers.

As a high school math teacher, I understand that [auth] accountability is necessary in education, but also that teachers need to feel that the system is equitable for all regardless of their years of teaching experience or years in their field.

This February, I had an opportunity to sing the national anthem at our state capital during the House session. Singing the anthem was an unexpected perk, but my being at the capitol was part of my work with Teach Plus.

I was meeting with state representatives and senators in order to understand how the voices of teachers like me could influence education policy. Our focus was the teacher evaluation system and we knew there would have to be compromise.

The department of education was calling for accountability and looking for an accurate way to measure teachers. High stakes assessments have some indication of what students are learning.

But teachers like me also know that students face a variety of difficult situations and come from a variety of backgrounds. Not every child has the stable home life that is the foundation of academic success.

Many of the students I teach face a range of emotional issues as they are trying to learn academic content. Assessments cannot be the only means for evaluation because there are so many contributing factors in a student's life that teachers cannot control.

So we asked, what other measures can we use to evaluate teachers?

Our final solutions were a compromise. We recommended to decrease the current rating of student assessments on the teacher evaluation from 50 percent to 35 percent.

Another area of contention with the current teacher evaluation system was the number of teacher absences, and at what point it is fair to penalize teachers on their evaluation.

Logically, as teachers' absenteeism decreased, the state saved millions of dollars on substitutes. Our research also showed that students have a more stable, secure learning environment, as well as more consistent instruction when their teacher, and not a substitute, is in the classroom.

However, teachers in our focus groups argued that if students are allowed up to 10 days of absences without penalty, why shouldn't they be given the same courtesy? I was asking this same question.



As a compromise, we requested that the number of absences without penalty be moved from three to six absences within the school year.

This final recommendation makes the system more equitable for all teachers.

Through our research, we also found that teachers were not being observed in the way that could best inform instruction in the classrooms.

In order to make the process more streamlined and fair, we asked that each teacher gets an informal observation within the first 45 days of a school year.

This would give teachers the opportunity to take the feedback and use it to improve and incorporate changes in the classroom before they have the formal observation. The state should consider incorporating this in the future.

This is an exciting time. With the new evaluation system, teachers in New Mexico are able to have double the number of days of absences in comparison to the previous system.

Teachers will also be able to showcase their classroom effectiveness through student scores and classroom observations, which are now proportionate in the new teacher evaluation system.

It's a great adjustment and I look forward to seeing how well this works for all teachers in our state.

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