

# TAILORING PREPARATION PROGRAMS TO BETTER FIT STUDENT, TEACHER, AND COMMUNITY NEEDS: Recommendations for New Mexico Teacher Preparations



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## +++++ INTRODUCTION +++++

In 2017, New Mexico presented “New Mexico Rising,” its plan for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The long-term goals in New Mexico are to improve academic achievement, graduation rates, and English language proficiency amongst students. Ultimately, the goal is to have 66 percent of high school graduates obtain a postsecondary degree or certificate by 2030.<sup>1</sup>

The 20 members of the Teach Plus New Mexico are teachers from across 12 districts in New Mexico. We teach in a wide variety of traditional district and public charter schools and are invested in how state education policy affects our classrooms and our students. We chose to participate in Teach Plus to learn more about education policy, and to become active participants in the education decision-making process. As Fellows, we recognize that classroom teachers have a critical impact on the ESSA indicators, and on preparing students for success in post-secondary careers and college courses. In Section 5 of “New Mexico Rising,” NMPED identifies methods for supporting excellent educators through initiatives to attract, develop, and retain teachers in New Mexico classrooms in order to impact lifelong outcomes of students.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the call for the recruitment and retention of high-quality teachers, New Mexico struggles to meet this goal and continues to see high teacher turnover in certain regions and subject areas across the state. Available data indicates that much of our teacher turnover is attributed to lack of training and support. Nationwide, nearly 17 percent of new teachers leave the profession in the first five years of teaching.<sup>3</sup> However, in 2015 New Mexico was ranked second highest in the nation for teacher turnover amongst new teachers.<sup>4</sup> Darling-Hammond notes that “a number of beginners leave the teaching profession early because they don’t feel effective.”<sup>5</sup> The National Council on Teacher Quality Standards ranks New Mexico’s Educator Preparation Programs (EPP)s among the lowest in the nation as based on their Teacher Prep Review Criterion, revealing that teacher preparation programs could be a root cause of novice teacher turnover.<sup>6</sup>

In response to this challenge, NMPED has proposed the use of EPP report cards. We recognize this as an important first step in introducing accountability for preparation programs across the state. As part of our research, we wanted to better understand issues of turnover and determine best practices of successful EPPs. We also wanted to know if the residency models of teacher preparation that are built on alignment, based in high-need schools, and inclusive of cycles of learning, produce more resilient, successful teachers.

To better understand the issues of turnover amongst novice teachers, we analyzed statewide effectiveness levels of novice teachers (Level I teachers). We utilized rule-hearing documents to better understand the proposed EPP report cards. We also reviewed those EPPs in other states that specifically implement a residency model. This report presents our research findings and makes recommendations intended to improve the preparation of teachers in New Mexico.

## FINDINGS

1. Across the state, Level I teachers who are the newest teachers and are serving the neediest students are some of the lowest performing.
2. Research-based recommendations should inform and improve the foundation of New Mexico teacher preparation programs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Implement clinical preparation programs as a continuous practice.
2. Ensure there is timely and comprehensive data sharing between NMPED, EPPs, and LEA's to inform teacher and school placement process.
3. Specify the duration and timing of clinical experiences for preservice teachers for different EPP models.
4. Provide more in-the-field experience at high-need schools.

# +++++ FINDINGS +++++

## **FINDING 1: ACROSS THE STATE, LEVEL I TEACHERS WHO ARE THE NEWEST TEACHERS AND ARE SERVING THE NEEDIEST STUDENTS ARE SOME OF THE LOWEST PERFORMING.**

During the 2016-2017 school year, just over 40 percent of Level I teachers were rated Minimally Effective or Ineffective, demonstrating a lack of training and practice necessary to effectively serve New Mexico's students.<sup>7</sup> Most preparation programs focus on content rather than essential clinical skills such as management, data analysis, classroom design, and differentiation for student subgroups.<sup>8</sup> In New Mexico, there are nine teacher competencies based on a framework of student diversity. Some of these include content knowledge, use of various teaching methods and resources, communication, data analysis and assessment, educational environment, and reflectiveness.<sup>9</sup> When New Mexico educator preparation programs do not reflect the nine teacher competencies, first year teachers are not ready to impact diverse learners on day one of classroom instruction.

Approximately five percent of teachers in New Mexico who serve high poverty, highly-diverse communities are novice teachers, amounting to 1,200 public schools professionals.<sup>6</sup> Districts with poorer, more diverse populations are more likely to have minimally-effective or ineffective teachers. The New Mexico Educator Equity Plan reports that districts with higher economically-disadvantaged populations typically have lower average summative scores for their instructors.<sup>10</sup> The figures for students of color are more alarming given that districts with higher minority enrollment rates correspond with lower average teacher effectiveness. New Mexico students of color and those living in poverty face diminished prospects for success because they are disproportionately taught by low performing, novice teachers.

**FINDING 2: RESEARCH-BASED RECOMMENDATIONS SHOULD INFORM AND IMPROVE THE FOUNDATION OF NEW MEXICO TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS.**

In 2010, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) Blue Ribbon Panel released its report, *Transforming Teacher Education Through Clinical Practice: A National Strategy to Prepare Effective Teachers*. The report called for clinical practice to be at the center of all preparation programs.<sup>11</sup> We agree with its fundamental recommendation that clinical practice be embedded within each progressive step of a preparation program and that preservice teachers see the ongoing connection between their learning and their teaching within the PK-12 classroom.

In a 2008 research study, it was suggested that all preservice teachers should learn a set of high-leverage practices including teaching guided reading, leading classroom discussions, and evaluating and analyzing data. These practices are research-based, span across subjects, occur frequently within PK-12 classrooms, and preserve the integrity and complexity of teaching.<sup>12</sup> They are learned teaching behaviors and should be taught early within EPPs. Implementing these practices would constitute a shift for New Mexico's EPPs. Current preservice teachers

typically spend time studying theory and curriculum during preparation. They only have opportunities for implementation at the end of their program. In line with the Charlotte Danielson Framework that underpins the NMTEACH teacher evaluation framework, trainee teachers require embedded time within methods courses that emphasize the application of newly learned skills in classrooms. Ongoing clinical practices allow novice teachers the chance to utilize their learning and reflect upon their practice immediately. This cycle of learning contributes to a more reflective style of teaching, one more conducive to producing career-long learners.

At the same time, our research also shows that preparation programs based on residency models, built on alignment, and inclusive of cycles of learning are capable of producing more resilient teachers than traditional EPPs. In cities such as New York and Washington, residency-educated teachers are also demonstrating a capacity to work effectively in high-need schools and to begin to build sustainable careers in the field of education.

+++++ **RECOMMENDATIONS** +++++

The following recommendations to improve training for pre-service teachers aim to develop educators capable of closing opportunity gaps for New Mexico's students.

**RECOMMENDATION 1: IMPLEMENT CLINICAL PREPARATION PROGRAMS AS A CONTINUOUS PRACTICE.**

As a top priority, EPPs should implement clinical preparation programs (or residencies) as a continuous practice underpinning all coursework. We recommend that teacher education entail a continuous cycle of learning, with clinical practice forming the foundation for effective reflection. Classroom experience should be introduced early in EPPs and remain a fundamental element in pre-service teacher education. We consider the AACTE conceptual model for designing preparation programs affords a good starting point for this endeavor.<sup>13</sup>

**RECOMMENDATION 2: ENSURE THERE IS TIMELY AND COMPREHENSIVE DATA SHARING BETWEEN NMPED, EPPS, AND LEA'S TO INFORM TEACHER AND SCHOOL PLACEMENT PROCESS.**

We recommend that higher education programs establish more systematized and transparent processes for matching pre-service teachers and effective mentors in partner schools. We propose that mentor teachers who possess a proven track record of positive student achievement and professionalism become master teacher leaders. We believe that combining factors such as years of experience, level of certification, and overall NMTEACH effectiveness rating can result in more successful student teacher placements. Cooperating mentor teachers should be full-time Level 2 or Level 3 teachers, and have earned effective or higher on their NMTEACH evaluations in order to qualify for matching with pre-service teachers. We also recommend that higher education program personnel continuously evaluate relationships with school sites and cooperating teachers to ensure authentic, effective, evidence-based practices form the basis of clinical experiences for student teachers. We recommend that all EPPs have secure access to NMPEDs annual teacher NMTEACH ratings to facilitate timely identification and recruitment of cooperating teacher mentors for EPPs.

**RECOMMENDATION 3: SPECIFY THE DURATION AND TIMING OF CLINICAL EXPERIENCES FOR PRESERVICE TEACHERS FOR DIFFERENT EPP MODELS.**

To better prepare pre-service teachers for immediate impactful classroom instruction, EPPs needs to be fully grounded in clinical practice that blends academic and professional content. Clinical experiences should happen early on and then consistently throughout the educational teacher training program. 6.65.3 NMAC requires that clinical experiences are provided on a continuous basis and that the majority of clinical experiences align with the area, subject, or category of certification or license sought.<sup>14</sup> However, these requirements do not take into account whether the program is traditional or not or its duration. We recommend that EPPs explicitly state the number, length, frequency, and distribution of all clinical practices.

**RECOMMENDATION 4: PROVIDE MORE IN-THE-FIELD EXPERIENCE AT HIGH-NEED SCHOOLS.**

Too many novice teachers in K-12 classrooms across the nation aren't adequately prepared to assume full responsibility of classrooms. Unfortunately, a disproportionate number of these teachers currently begin their teaching careers in front of high-need students with no clinical training tailored to specific demographics and learning abilities. In anticipation of this likelihood, we recommend that at least some clinical experiences take place in high-need school settings. Developing an appreciation of, and confidence with, learner diversity is a professional prerequisite for creating successful EPP completers. Basing clinical opportunities in high-need contexts will better align EPP design with key scorecard metrics, and provide pre-service teachers the opportunity to learn within the context they will most likely be employed.

## +++++ CONCLUSION +++++

It is evident that New Mexico recognizes the importance of an effective teacher in every classroom. NMPED has set high goals for future students in the state through its ESSA plan. In addition, the department has created EPP report cards to hold universities accountable to the training of future educators. We recommend that EPPs build on these necessary foundations and implement a residency program. We believe that by carefully selecting placement schools and cooperating teachers, and by providing meaningful cycles of learning for preservice teachers, New Mexico's students will have greater access to effective teachers.

+++++ **ENDNOTES** +++++

<sup>1</sup> The New Mexico Public Education Department. (2017). *New Mexico rising: New Mexico's state plan for the Every Student Succeeds Act*. Santa Fe, NM: Author.

<sup>2</sup> See endnote number 1

<sup>3</sup> Fensterwald, J. (2015). *Half of new teachers quit profession in 5 years?* Retrieved from <https://edsource.org/2015/half-of-new-teachers-quit-profession-in-5-years-not-true-new-study-says/83054>

<sup>4</sup> Burgess, K. (2016). *NM 2nd highest in teacher turnover*. Retrieved from <https://www.abqjournal.com/879333/nm-2ndhighest-in-teacher-turnover.html>

<sup>5</sup> Scherer, M. (2012). Supporting beginning teachers. *Educational Leadership*, 69(8), 18-23.

<sup>6</sup> National Council on Teacher Quality. (2016). *Teacher prep*. Retrieved from <https://www.nctq.org/teacherPrep/2016/home.do>

<sup>7</sup> The New Mexico Public Education Department. (2015). *New Mexico educator equity plan*. Santa Fe, NM: Author.

<sup>8</sup> Windschitl, M., Thompson, J., Braaten, M., and Stroupe, D. (2011). Proposing a core Set of instructional practices and tools for teachers of science. *Science Education*, 96(5), 878-903, DOI 10.1002/sce.21027

<sup>9</sup> Teach NM. (2018). *NM Teacher Competencies*. Retrieved from <http://teachnm.org/experienced-teachers/nm-teacher-competencies.html>

<sup>10</sup> See endnote number 7

<sup>11</sup> American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. (2018). *A pivot toward clinical practice, its lexicon, and the renewal of educator preparation: A report of the AACTE clinical practice commission*. Washington, DC: Author.

<sup>12</sup> Grossman, P., Hammerness, K., and McDonald, M. (2009) Redefining teaching, re—imagining teacher education. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 15(2), 273-289, DOI: 10.1080/13540600902875340

<sup>13</sup> See endnote number 10

<sup>14</sup> New Mexico Public Education Department. (2018). *Public Notice*. Retrieved from <https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/bureaus/public-education-commission/pec-public-notices/>