



**TEACH PLUS NEW MEXICO**

# Building Momentum for Student Success

# Teach Plus New Mexico: My Story and Our Work

*“I was the first in my family to break the cycle of poverty. Education was the driver that enabled me to become more than my circumstances.” - Executive Director Hope Morales*



Despite barriers I faced as a child, I was the first in my family to graduate from high school—with honors—graduate from college, and earn a master's degree in education administration. My own experience is a testament to the fact that **education is the driver that leads to economic mobility**. To improve circumstances for all our children, we must center education as a pathway to a better quality of life, better wages, and a better future.

## **What the data shows:**

Despite many interventions, economic mobility in **New Mexico is lagging compared to other states**. In 2023, New Mexico invested over \$10.1 billion of state and federal funds in income support programs—\$2.6 billion more than in 2019 (1). Despite this investment, **poverty levels remain stubbornly high** at around 18 percent (2). In 2022, New Mexico had the highest poverty rate in the nation at 17.6 percent (3), and since at least 2000, New Mexico has persistently ranked as one of the poorest states in the country. **Until more New Mexico students attain credentials and degrees and develop skills for in-demand occupations, this number is unlikely to move.**

In 2021, the poverty level of those without a high school diploma was 25.2 percent (4). By contrast, in 2022, about 9.3 percent of New Mexicans with some college and 4.3 percent of those with a bachelor's degree or higher were living below the poverty line (5). **A student is less likely to live in poverty even if they don't complete college. Access to education raises the likelihood that they will earn a livable wage.**

To understand what has worked well and what needs improving across New Mexico's education system to ensure more of our students pursue educational opportunities, I engaged in deep, strategic inquiry, digging through data and collaborating with and learning from our community, including students, parents, educators, and education policy stakeholders.

Leveraging this research, I developed goals that will help ensure students have access to the fundamentals that are required for many higher-paying careers. These focus areas and our **Teach Plus New Mexico 10-year goal are directly connected to what students need to start on a path to improved economic mobility**. With a specific focus on students who are economically disadvantaged—understanding that if we improve systems for them, all students will benefit—we aim to decrease the opportunity gap between this group and all New Mexico graduates, ensuring access to educational opportunities that will help break the cycle of poverty for many generations.

# Areas of Focus

Through my own lived experiences and research as an educator, advocate, school board member, and parent, and through collaboration with others, I identified four focus areas for advancing K-12 and postsecondary opportunities for New Mexico's students.

**1. Data-Driven Decision Making and Continuous Improvement:** Use clear, accessible data on student progress and college-career readiness to guide supports, policies, and funding. Transparent data systems help families, teachers, schools, and partners identify gaps early, target interventions, and ensure every student stays on track to graduate ready for economic opportunity.

**2. Broadened Access to High Quality Educators and the Strongest Schools:** Build a strong pipeline of well-prepared educators to teach foundational and STEM skills and expand access to advanced coursework so all students receive the instruction and guidance needed to master core skills, explore career pathways, and compete in an ever-changing economy.

**3. Expanded College and Career Pathways:** Provide every student—starting in middle school—with personalized planning tools, dual-credit options, and programs aligned to high-demand jobs. Structured pathways, mentorships, and industry partnerships connect classroom learning to real careers and postsecondary success.

**4. Greater Awareness and More Opportunity:** Ensure New Mexicans and state policymakers understanding of programs that drive economic mobility—such as dual enrollment, early warning systems, and mentorships—while sharing success stories and fostering collaboration between educators and business leaders to scale what works across New Mexico.

We can't expect our children to do better if they don't know better. Instead of being limited by their experiences, I believe students must have access to aspirations beyond any barriers in front of them and a clear understanding of what it takes to achieve their aspirations. As Executive Director of Teach Plus New Mexico, I am focused on advancing my vision for true economic mobility—through college and career success—for all our children, so that more students are able to break the cycle of poverty, just like I did in my family.

**Will you join me?**



**Hope Morales,**  
**Teach Plus New Mexico Executive Director**

# Laying the Foundation

Poverty rates are impacted by labor force participation and wages earned, both of which are directly aligned to educational attainment and postsecondary readiness/success rates.

**New Mexico's labor force participation:** It remains low, with only 57.5 percent of the population working as of August 2024, lower than the U.S. labor force participation rate of 62.7 percent (6). **For the state to achieve a labor force participation rate equivalent to the national level, New Mexico would need over 116,000 more adults in the workforce** (7). And in order to compete for and secure the jobs that are most in demand, New Mexico students must have access to opportunities that allow them to earn the degrees, credentials, and skills necessary for success.

**What we know:** High school **graduates earn more** than high school dropouts, with the difference in earnings increasing over time. On average, high school graduates earn around \$6,465 more annually than those without a diploma (8). Completing postsecondary education drives earning potential even higher. The median earnings for a New Mexican with a bachelor's degree are **59 percent higher** than someone with only a high school diploma (9).

**What's at stake if we don't act:** Stagnant college enrollment, credentials that don't pay off, and persistent economic mobility gaps by income, race, and place.



*In 2023, the poverty rate for individuals age 25 and older without a high school diploma was 25.1 percent, while the rate for those with some college education was 8.5 percent, and the rate for those with a bachelor's degree or higher was just 4 percent (10).*



# Reaching New Heights:

## Economic Mobility for Every Learner

**New Mexico's vision for student success is grounded in expanding opportunity and economic mobility for all learners.** Each goal in this plan strengthens the connection between education and lifelong prosperity—ensuring that students not only graduate but are equipped to succeed in college, career, and community life.

By improving **attendance, increasing access to dual credit and career pathways, raising graduation rates, and expanding postsecondary participation**, we are creating stronger, more equitable systems that help every student thrive. **Supporting and retaining high-quality teachers** is central to this work, as stable, well-prepared educators are essential to lasting improvement.

Together, our goals form a coordinated strategy to lift student outcomes, reduce poverty, and build a more resilient and prosperous New Mexico. To track our progress towards this vital goal and understanding our unique role in the educational space, we will focus our efforts on achieving the following outcomes:

- **Reduce the statewide chronic absenteeism rate** (students missing 10 percent or more of school days) by at least 4 percent annually, achieving a target of 18 percent, returning to pre-pandemic levels by the end of the 2027-2028 school year.

School Year	Rate	Approx # of Students
2020-2021	17.9%	53,700
2021-2022	40.7%	122,190
2023-2024	39.25%	117,600
2024-2025	30%	96,000

- **Increase economically disadvantaged student participation to 46 percent of the total dual credit and career and technical education (CTE) participation** to align with the state's demographic composition, ensuring equitable access to educational opportunities by 2030.
- **Increase the annual teacher retention rate for Level I teachers in New Mexico** by 5 percent each year, aiming for a cumulative improvement of 25 percent by 2030.

# Reaching New Heights

- Increase New Mexico's four-year graduation rate for economically disadvantaged students from 69.7 percent to 74 percent by 2028, ensuring that at least 750 additional low-income students graduate each year prepared for college or career pathways.

Cohort/Year	Overall 4-year graduation rate (NM)	Graduation rate for Economically Disadvantaged (ED) students
2022	76%	72%
2023	76.7%	69.7%
2024	78.2%	70.7%

- Collaborate with state and local leaders to improve systems that will reduce the state poverty rate by 10 percent, lowering it to approximately 15.6 percent by 2040. This progress will increase student access to opportunity and help build healthier, more resilient communities.

Historical **NM** Poverty Rates Percentiles (11):  
2022: 17.3; 2021: 17.7; 2020: 16.8; 2019: 17.5

**National** Poverty Rate Average Percentiles (12):  
2022: 11.5; 2021: 11.6; 2020: 11.4; 2019: 10.5



# Building Momentum Together

Teach Plus New Mexico is focusing our efforts in four major areas to advance K-12 and postsecondary opportunities for New Mexico's students.

## 1. Data-Driven Decision Making and Continuous Improvement

- **Ensuring continuous improvement by leveraging timely, accurate statewide longitudinal data** on student progress—including college and career readiness metrics—to inform targeted supports, policy decisions, and funding opportunities that close opportunity gaps.
- **Collecting and monitoring data on student access to dual credit courses** to ensure equitable participation, alignment with postsecondary success, and leveraging college scholarships.
- **Ensuring that data systems are transparent and accessible** to everyone focused on student aspirations—families, caregivers, workforce providers, teachers, schools, and other stakeholders across the state.

## 2. Broadened Access to High Quality Educators and the Strongest Schools

- **Strengthening educator preparation programs to increase the number of effective foundational (literacy and math) and STEM teachers**, ensuring students build strong academic foundations and career-connected skills.
- **Strengthening the pipeline for effective educators** to teach and offer advanced placement, dual credit, and CTE courses.
- **Increasing student attendance and enrollment** by providing high-quality options and programming to meet the needs of students, including charter and alternative high schools.

## 3. Expanded College and Career Pathways

- **Increasing the adoption and effective use of the Next Step Plan Level All platform** across districts to ensure that all students in grades 8–12 have access to personalized, high-quality college and career planning resources.
- **Expanding dual enrollment access and creating more structured dual enrollment experiences** with structured pathways that lead to college credentials.
- **Building CTE programs, internships, and partnerships with industry leaders** to increase student exposure to viable career options.

## 4. Greater Awareness and More Opportunity

- **Bringing greater awareness to New Mexicans and state policymakers** of opportunities and interventions like dual enrollment, early warning systems, Next Step Plans, and mentorship programs offered within various communities, so more families, educators, and students know how to maximize them.
- **Creating opportunities for cross learning and collaboration** between education and the business sector to strengthen current partnerships and develop new ones.
- **Sharing success stories and data-driven outcomes** to build broader support for scaling effective practices statewide.

# Anchoring our Work: Teach Plus Teacher Leaders

**Teacher leaders are at the heart of our work to expand economic mobility for New Mexico students.** Through specialized training and research and by leveraging their classroom expertise, these excellent educators bring firsthand knowledge of what students need to succeed. They help shape data-driven solutions, strengthen educator preparation, expand college and career pathways, and raise public awareness of opportunities that open doors for students. Yet even the most talented teachers cannot do this work alone. Achieving lasting change requires strong partnerships with families, school leaders, policymakers, and community and business partners who share a commitment to student success.

By elevating teacher voices and fostering these collaborations, we ensure that our strategies are grounded in real classroom expertise and supported by the systems needed to sustain meaningful impact for all learners.

*“Being a part of Teach Plus has **empowered me in a way that no other opportunities have.** The hands-on experiences and amazing opportunities, along with the supportive coaching, checking in, and professional learning in our cohort—all of this has **reinvigorated my love of teaching and given me a new lens of possibility for the changes our students deserve.**”*

—Teisha Holloway, VOZ Collegiate Preparatory School.



## Gaining Momentum: Teach Plus Economic Mobility Summit Series

To create pathways for students' success and a better economic future, Teach Plus New Mexico launched the **Economic Mobility Summit Series**, a set of convenings across the state designed to bring together educators, business leaders, policymakers, and community advocates to develop a shared understanding of college and career readiness, of how we support, measure and track these efforts, and to build solutions.

The series kicked off in June 2025 at CTECH of Hobbs High with a full-day event titled: “Bridging Education & Industry for Economic Growth.” The event, which drew more than 50 attendees, was anchored in a youth panel in which middle and high school students shared their experiences, needs, and aspirations with the attendees.

*“I’m not destined to be a statistic because of my economic background or my neighborhood. I’ve seen the impact advocacy can have. Inspiring others that come after us—this drives me to be the inspiration.”*  
— Juan Orona, high school student

Teach Plus New Mexico  
Economic Mobility Summit

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# Conclusion

As we work to expand postsecondary opportunities that lead to lasting economic mobility, New Mexico's education system must prioritize four key drivers of impact:

- **Data-driven decision making and continuous improvement**
- **Broadened access to high-quality educators and the strongest schools**
- **Expanded college and career pathways**
- **Greater awareness and more opportunity**

Together, these efforts will ensure that students are not only prepared for college and careers, but are also connected to high-value pathways that lead to prosperity.

By aligning our shared commitment around these priorities, we can create a future where more students—especially those historically underserved—have the opportunity to realize their full potential and turn their aspirations into achievement.

**Ready to join this effort?**

Stay connected: [www.teachplus.org/nm](http://www.teachplus.org/nm)

Facebook: [Teach Plus New Mexico](#)

Email Hope at [hmorales@teachplus.org](mailto:hmorales@teachplus.org)

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**TEACH PLUS NEW MEXICO**  
HOPE MORALES, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
HMORALES@TEACHPLUS.ORG

