



## 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.*



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 son has now made it a tradition for future generations in our family; he too has graduated from high school with honors and is now a student at New Mexico State University.

My own experience is 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. Despite this investment, poverty levels remain stubbornly high at around 18 percent. In 2022, New Mexico had the highest poverty rate in the nation at 17.6 percent, 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 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. By contrast, the poverty level of those without a high school diploma was 25.2 percent in 2021. Even if a student doesn't complete college, they are still less likely to live in poverty, while access to high-quality educational options 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, I spent a year 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 and stories from our communities, I have 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 10-year goal are directly connected to what students need in order 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 generations to come.



### 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 have identified four focus areas for advancing K-12 and postsecondary opportunities for New Mexico's students.

1. **Measure What Matters:** Align New Mexico's data systems to the goals outlined in the New Mexico Public Education Department's (NMPED) strategic plan and other states goals, ensuring that these systems provide accurate and timely information to inform stakeholders and decision makers.
2. **Give More Students Access to High-Quality Schools:** Grow enrollment at high-performing schools and replicate effective, innovative best practices that help to improve teaching and learning at more schools across the state.
3. **Invest in Those Most Proximate to Students:** Align policies, supports, and funding to ensure that teachers and local decision makers are well informed, prepared, and continuously supported to improve student outcomes.
4. **Increase Access to Liveable Wage Careers:** Give more first-generation college students the opportunity to pursue careers that require college by broadening access to career exploration and more scholarships, including New Mexico's Opportunity Scholarship.

In the following pages, I give an overview of the current barriers and opportunities to student economic mobility in New Mexico, as well as do a deeper dive into our focus areas: data and accountability, access to high-quality schools, support for educators and leaders, and knowledge and skill development for students in order to have access to quality options after graduation.

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 those 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 for families like mine.

**Will you join me?**

*Hope Morales*

Hope Morales,  
Teach Plus New Mexico Executive Director