



A Look Back

Our First Five Years of Learning





These articles were originally published on The Center for School Leadership blog. The article text has been changed to reflect the organization's new name, Future Focused Education. We're thrilled to present these blog articles as a collection of highlights and success stories from the past five years of Future Focused Education.

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Foreword

A major shift is happening across the country to design learning models that meet the needs of local communities, families and students. And the time is ripe for communities to lead and engage in important discussions around the purpose and role of K-12 public education.

Future Focused Education is at the forefront of this shift. This forward-thinking organization recognizes that the future prosperity of our society demands something different for K-12 education. Today's students need to develop as whole human beings, which means culture, local contexts and community are critical components of learning environments, as are justice, health and wellness, and college and career readiness.

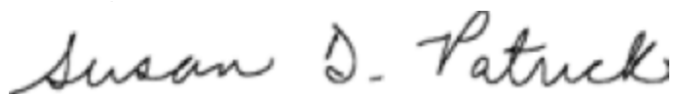
This is an exciting moment in the growth and evolution of this organization that started as one school built from the needs of the local community, to a network, and now to Future Focused Education – focused on education reform and innovation. They are thinking deeply about how new school models can prepare students for future success and are creating learning experiences that foster developmentally-rich relationships between adults and youth. These relevant, real-world learning experiences can meet the dynamic needs of students, families and communities.

The work of Future Focused Education and the Leadership High Schools thrives due to the mutually beneficial relationships they've built together with local stakeholders. The model and approach support communities to become more connected, integrated and better places to live – while providing students with authentic learning experiences that develop important skills and dispositions necessary for future success.

The work of Future Focused Education is on the cutting edge in both policy and practice across the United States – they are accelerating the shift toward high-quality, personalized learning at a world-class level. They incubate new education models focused on local wisdom for local schools, deepen learning experiences for the most underserved students and prepare them to become successful leaders in their communities and careers.

The work Future Focused is doing is critical and groundbreaking. They are cultivating innovations that are driving the future of teaching and learning, and reshaping the educational landscape. Congratulations on five years of learning. Here's to many more in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Susan D. Patrick".

Susan D. Patrick
President and CEO, iNACOL

By Tony Monfiletto, Director, Future Focused Education

Originally published in Education Week's Teacher Blog, [Living in Dialogue](#)



As the cofounder of [Architecture Construction and Engineering \(ACE\)](#) and [Health Leadership](#) high schools, I recognize we don't have a home in the current school reform landscape. Anthony Cody from [Living in Dialogue](#) is worried that we're vulnerable. Anthony thinks we're in "no man's land."

I'm definitely an outsider, but off the grid? No.

My partners and I have avoided aligning ourselves with many of the traditional players in the school reform debate. Our work is fundamental to good schooling but only tangential to the controversy over standardized tests and charter schools. We work for poor, disenfranchised students and their families who have been forgotten by the public schools. We also work for employers who have had no real input into determining what it means to be a good citizen or to have the skills and knowledge to be productive in the workplace. If serving these two interest groups puts us in "no man's land" then I don't have much hope for improving our schools for the growing number of disengaged young people in our country.

I used to be a legislative staffer and I wrote the budget for public schools. I was a teacher at my high school alma mater which has a 50 percent graduation rate and I have founded three charter schools in my home town. However, I left the state policy apparatus to get my hands dirty inside a school because I wanted to see what really happens in the classroom and how those institutions do, or do not, care for the kids who really need a great education.

That shift from the state capitol to the classroom has changed me. I used to be a skeptic who thought about metrics and accountability. How can we make schools prove that the money we spend on them is delivering results? Now, I spend little time thinking about what the state or federal government needs from me and my schools.

We created ACE and Health Leadership High School after asking our constituents what they wanted from their school and they said that they wanted us to help the thousands of young people in Albuquerque who do not graduate from school (our graduation rate is only 65 percent). These young people have dropped out from boredom, been pushed out for low level disciplinary problems or had life circumstances that undermined their success. The options for them are meager at best. They did not want what the system currently offers: a mechanized online credit recovery or GED prep program which does almost nothing to prepare them for a future. So, in a way, the students I serve are in no-man's land too.

We also asked some of the most enlightened private sector employers in my state what they desired from a school. We learned that they wanted to invest in changing the social conditions that undermine their company's success, which is exemplified by our persistent dropout problem. They knew that the changing demographics in our state and country meant that they needed to reach a segment of our community that has been expendable in the past. The truth is that, as the baby boomers leave the workforce, there will be no one there to take their place unless we start to reach the 30–40 percent of young people that we are failing. When we asked them what they really want schools to do, they said that they want employees who can think and are adaptable to a changing economy. They never, and I mean never, asked for a high score on a standardized test. Needless to say, the students never asked for it either.

In his invitation, Anthony pointed out my schools are outside the field of vision of technocrats and policy makers who have bet the farm on high stakes standardized tests and school reformers (charters mostly) who have drunk the Kool-Aid and see the tests as a way to disrupt the overall system. I will add that there are very few people from the education establishment have invited my schools into the fold. They find them threatening to their monopoly status and categorize us with all the charter management organizations (CMOs) with which they compete. However, I don't think I'm in a "no man's land" or even on a charter school island by myself. My schools are embedded in the community and they sit at the intersection of hopeful families and employers who are desperate to hire their children regardless of whether they're "accredited" by public or charter schools.

In August, 2013, Health Leadership High School will open following the example of ACE Leadership High School. Ultimately we intend to create a four-school network of charters that will serve 2,000 students. All will be designed backward from the basic question to employers, families and students, "what job do you need this school to do for you?" We have answered with a few design principles that are common to all of them:

- The schools will serve young people from ages 14–24 and be open from 9:00 am to 9:00 pm.
- Students will have legal services for immigrant students seeking Deferred Action and a school-based health center available to their families. Projects will be built around real life projects developed with industry partners.
- Positive Youth Development will be in the framework so that we treat young people as assets to be nurtured rather than problems to be solved.
- Community engagement will be a pillar of our design so that we have a reciprocal relationship with all of our partners because we know that we cannot do this work without them.
- Graduates will leave with a diploma that has currency in the marketplace because it was designed with industry as a partner. They will be engaged at every level of development, from planning projects, to training teachers, to evaluating student exhibitions.

Last year ACE Leadership High School received a D on its school report card, which is evidence of our inability to translate our success into the high stakes testing paradigm. Originally we received an F, but then it was revised because of our high special education rate and significant overage population. Our students do not perform well on standardized tests. However, they excel at working on teams, serving real-life clients and looking out for one another. Since our last report card, we have begun working with our Department of Education and a few other schools to present a new vision for accountability. Our industry partners are squarely behind this approach and we are betting that we can devise a “Performance Assessment” system that will measure what our students have learned which is aligned with the way that they actually experienced learning in our schools.

However, my good friend Michael Soguero from the Eagle Rock Professional Development Center has warned me that we will be pushed to conform to a standard of “validity” and “reliability” that is acceptable to our state authority. He worries that if we create an assessment tool that is too specialized to our community, it will not be acceptable to the gatekeepers of accountability because it is not “standardized.” This is an immense challenge because our clients demand that authenticity be the driving objective in our schools, and that means that our students must learn in real life context which cannot be standardized.

Some states have moved toward performance assessment that relies upon a common set of student projects that can be evaluated in a common way. Essentially, it is a project-based learning and assessment platform that is delivered across the system. However, this will not work for those of us in no-man’s land because our approach must be dynamic if it’s going to reach all the students who’ve been left behind by the system. Our solutions emerge from collaboration between teachers and industry professionals, and it changes as we become more sophisticated and as the industry changes. Those who have failed, or whom the system has failed, need something far more complex if we intend to reach them with learning opportunities that can help them out of a bad situation. They need the kind of learning that would coax you back into school after you have left, not the kind of learning that is prepackaged.

We are heavily invested in this experiment and the stakes are high for a business community and families who have invested so much in providing the best education for the students who need it the most. We are betting that we can create the room for our work to grow so that we put our full effort into tackling the dropout problem in our community. If we lose that bet, I won’t be the only one in “no man’s land.”

By Justin Trager, Director of School Networks, Future Focused Education



“It is time to start articulating what we do want for our students and the future of our state, instead of focusing on what we don’t want.”

It is that time of year again. I take my children to their local Albuquerque Public School and the conversation sparks up about the PARRC test; specifically why I should opt my children out of a test many people question. As a parent, teacher and education reform advocate, I understand and share that feeling of skepticism and unease. The Opt Out Movement has grown as a way for people to express frustration with the PARRC. However, I believe that we need to do more than criticize and choose not to play; we need to articulate and offer an alternative.

It is time to start articulating what we do want for our students and the future of our state, instead of focusing on what we don’t want. While the National Center for Fair and Open Testing cite some success of the Opt Out Movement in reducing the number of tests and lowering their stakes — which I applaud — we need to do more than ask for less.

My other concern about the Opt Out Movement is that it is reflective of the privilege of educated and wealthy people. According to Brookings Institution, wealthier school districts have a higher opt out rate, and a look at opt out rates in Albuquerque indicate a similar correlation between higher opt out rates with wealthier schools. Advocating for quality public education should be about social justice. We need to acknowledge and not take advantage of the benefits of class privilege; we need to make sure our work empowers all communities to demand better education.

The recently passed [Every Student Succeeds Act](#) provides the opportunity for states and local education leaders to articulate and set new standards for the outcomes they want their students to achieve. The Act opens up a whole new set of opportunities for New Mexicans to articulate what we, as a community, want for our young people and our future. We have the opportunity to challenge the premise of what politicians are telling us defines quality public education and student outcomes. We routinely hear arguments about the harm caused from too much testing, but what about questioning the current definition of what constitutes a quality education, and what prepares students for a prosperous future?

I am asking parents and teachers to take that next step. Protest has been used to express dissatisfaction, now let's work together to articulate what we want for our students. Let's create a more inspiring, meaningful alternative.

Over the past two years, Future Focused has convened school leaders from across our community to begin this work. We have embarked on developing new metrics and tools that can document and measure the efficacy of public schools, because we all know student outcomes go beyond measuring their ability to take a standardized test. Students must be able to engage in the authentic application of rigorous content and develop 21st century skills. These can be measured through performance assessments that are responsive to the community. The work has been informed by other states that have successfully developed and implemented an alternative vision for student and school outcomes.

Critics may point out that at the high school level there are already provisions for an Alternative Demonstration of Competency in New Mexico (ADC) and the ADC can include performance assessments. However, that option is currently seen as "less than" and not as significant or rigorous, since it is only available if students have not passed the PARRC or SBA after three attempts. That argument fails to acknowledge the negative impact the focus on testing has had on our students. As Yong Zhao pointed out in the Washington Post recently, "There is abundant evidence to show that actions to improve scores on standardized tests can damage the development of other important skills such as non-cognitive skills, creativity, and entrepreneurship." We need to advocate for an assessment system that asks MORE from our schools and students than demonstrating discrete skills on a high stakes test.

I want our children of New Mexico to be able to do more than take and pass a test. I want them to be critical thinkers. I want them to be able to use creative thinking and multidisciplinary content skills to analyze complex, open-ended questions and find new solutions. I want them to work with community leaders to apply those skills in real world settings to improve our community. I want our public schools to be committed and accountable to those meaningful, community and industry-driven outcomes. I think many others share that belief. I want to see fewer people talking about opting out and see more people coming together to opt in to doing something better.

Supporting Children Through Grief Is Important for Their Success

October 06, 2016

By Jade Richardson Bock, Executive Director, Children's Grief Network



“Positive Youth Development helps kids find their strength, their gift, and their story.”

Grieving kids are in every classroom, in every school. One in 20 children in the United States will experience the death of a parent before the age of 18. Others lose siblings, grandparents and close friends. Children grieve differently from adults. They cannot grieve alone, and because of this their grief is often misunderstood by those who try to help them. Unresolved childhood grief becomes a problem for our whole community as it can manifest as life-long struggles with anxiety, substance abuse, criminal activity, depression and more.

However, bereaved kids usually don't want anyone at school to know what happened in their family. Often kids explain the unexplainable to themselves by making up stories in which they are the villain. These secret, shameful beliefs have nearly every grieving kid believing, “It's all my fault.” When we inadvertently teach kids that bad things happen to bad people, bereaved youth begin to believe that they are bad people, a sentiment that can follow them for the rest of their lives.

Positive Youth Development helps us turn that story around. We catch kids being **COMPETENT**. We show them what we see — that they are able to inspire and support others, both peers and adults, with their brave, strong hearts. That even though they are each a unique snowflake, they are still snowflakes, and their journey through the heartbreak of loss and all of the subsequent blows bereaved families suffer (loss of income, loss of home, loss of pets, loss of school) **CAN** be survived.

Positive Youth Development helps kids find their strength, their gift and their story. As Fred Rogers said, “If it’s mentionable, it’s manageable.” When grieving kids get the opportunity to tell their story, without shame, they can integrate their trauma. They learn that they may not have control over what happens to them, but they do have CHOICES in how they respond. This helps them develop and grow their character — their personal sense of right and wrong — another tenant in Positive Youth Development.

Bereaved youth are at risk for all sorts of negative outcomes. At the Children’s Grief Center of New Mexico, they learn that they are not alone, and that their experience has value. We create opportunities for kids to handle hard things, and to develop strengths that will serve them as they face adverse situations for the rest of their lives. These practices are critical not only in grief work, but in schools and organizations that work with children all across the country.

When we support our children, we help them achieve the long-term success goals, as described by Kenneth Ginsburg in his book, *Building Resilience in Children and Teens*, as less fear-based decision making, “others focus” — a sense of giving back, building resilience through experience, demonstrating the ability to cope and becoming more likely to create connection in communities.

Isn’t that what we want for all of our children?

Jade Richardson Bock is the Executive Director of the Children’s Grief Center of New Mexico. To learn more, visit www.childrengrief.org.

Three Reasons Why It Is Important to Invest in the Next Generation of Entrepreneurs

November 16, 2016

By Verge Fund Staff



“We have a robust startup community here in Albuquerque that continues to grow and affirm that we do have the ability to create world-class companies with homegrown talent, research and ideas.”

At Verge Fund, we believe New Mexico can reach its full potential and become an innovation-led economy. We have a robust startup community here in Albuquerque that continues to grow and affirm that we do have the ability to create world-class companies with homegrown talent, research and ideas. But it isn't enough to just be a venture capital firm headquartered in Albuquerque: it's about helping grow and nurture the next generation of entrepreneurs. Siembra Leadership High School, one of the first entrepreneurial-focused schools in the nation – and the first in New Mexico – is doing just that. And they're doing it just a few feet away from Verge's front door! Here are three reasons why we feel that is important:

1. Entrepreneurship = innovation = better quality of life

Entrepreneurs find innovative ways to solve tough problems, problems that plague communities, individuals and businesses alike. Successful entrepreneurs and their innovations improve standards of living and create wealth and jobs while providing a monetized solution. Think about these 12 billion dollar companies that didn't exist 10 years ago: Airbnb, Uber, Snapchat, Instagram, Fitbit, Twitter, Spotify, Dropbox, Whatsapp, Tumblr, Hulu, and Pinterest. Combined, these 12 companies employ approximately 15,280 people with high paying jobs. If our up-and-coming entrepreneurs have a place and space where they can cultivate their ideas and garner investor dollars to put similar disruptive innovations to praxis, quality of life improves for everyone in the community.

2. Community Support

Entrepreneurs are more likely to be invested in other local entrepreneurs and startups that will in turn spur development and wealth within the community. If we teach our younger generations the importance of investing in and nurturing local endeavors and projects, we will create a more stable future for them, and a more stable economy for our city and state. In order to sustain the momentum and support within our local entrepreneurial community we must have the ability to staff the companies created here in New Mexico. This starts by educating our youth to fill the jobs and roles of the future created in our entrepreneurial ecosystem. An educated workforce as well as forward-thinking individuals and organizations are the backbone of our entrepreneurial ecosystem.

3. Technological Advancements

Entrepreneurs are in the business of shaking things up and challenging the status quo by offering new products and services. Some of the most important inventions only came to market because entrepreneurs took significant risks. But without them, we wouldn't be where we are today. We can go to specific examples from companies within the Verge portfolio that are disrupting markets in significant ways like IntelliCyt – a company that was recently acquired by Sartorius, a German pharmaceutical and laboratory equipment company. IntelliCyt uses flow cytometry, a technology licensed by UNM, to gain a better understanding of how to diagnose diseases and speed up the process of developing and discovering new drugs. This technology enables a more 'personalized' approach to medicine, and saves the patient time & money. Better still, IntelliCyt plans to stay in Albuquerque, which will continue to spur more high paying jobs and help advance our city as an innovation-led economy for the next generation of entrepreneurs. It is successes like these, developed here in NM, that will continue to garner support for our local entrepreneurial community. We believe that homerun technologies and companies can be created here, and we know that the teachers and students at Siembra Leadership High School believe the same.

New Federal Law Shifts Power Back to States: A Rare Opportunity to Shape the Future of Education

January 26, 2017

By Susan Patrick, President and CEO, iNACOL



With a new federal K-12 education law in the United States passed, the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), it is a historic time in public education. The power has shifted back to state and local systems to plan, design and strengthen public education for each and every student in the future.

One of the most important functions of state and local governments is K-12 education. It is the linchpin of our democracy. It provides the pathways forward so every student can achieve success in their future.

What Is Possible Under the New Federal Law?

Every state has the opportunity to rethink education and design a new plan, a new path forward in partnership with communities in deciding what the goals, values and principles should be and addressing a wider range of skills that students need. In the Every Student Succeeds Act, states are required to launch conversations with communities and stakeholders across the state to envision a broader definition of student success — one that takes into account community, family and students' needs to be prepared for an increasingly complex future. The opportunities for states are vast — they could potentially use this opportunity to align K-12, higher education and workforce needs by creating pathways that are learner-centered and focus on competencies toward qualifications that matter. States will submit their plans to the U.S. Department of Education later this year.

Power Back to States: What Are Your Goals and Visions for the Future?

Are we ready to leave the past behind and move beyond a system designed to ensure only a few students have proficiency, that students advance with large gaps in knowledge rather than asked to demonstrate mastery before advancing, thus ensuring that only some students had the requisite skills for college, higher education and certain careers while others would be stuck in low wage jobs or underskilled. This old model of one-size-fits-all education — which doesn't prepare all of our students to have the skills they need to think, communicate, learn throughout their lives and contribute positively to society — is completely out of touch with the world we live in today and the needs of society and communities.

The new federal law shifts the power back to the states — No Child Left Behind is no more. It is a historic time to discuss a new vision and build understanding of what the goals are that matter most to communities, families and students for our education systems and the governments that oversee them. Only then can we begin to identify how we can create mutual accountability for our systems that is balanced, reciprocal and builds trust in our institutions and our people. We have the chance to develop better, fairer (multiple) measures to support our educators on the front line teaching and learning, while at the same time ensuring there is transparency to hold ourselves accountable for the resources and support needed to ensure every student succeeds.

The goal of policy is to ask for a strategy that is future-focused. We can ask, “what might this look like?” It offers an opportunity for communities to lead conversations about what a student should know and be able to do at graduation and the opportunity to identify the measures that make sense for the state, districts and schools to provide a more transparent system to ensure we are doing what is best for all students and improve every step of the way in creating a new system for accountability. Are we making progress at closing the achievement gaps for all students? Are we able to accelerate and raise the bar for learning for all students? Are we able to pinpoint needs and offer resources and supports that make a difference? Do we have safe schools? How do we know when we are successful? How do we know a high school diploma is meaningful and offers the qualification to describe the competencies, skills and knowledge needed for the next level of learning and employment?

These are big — and crucial — conversations that states are having.

This is a long way from the one-size-fits-all model under the last law, the No Child Left Behind Act, which was a necessary step to change the conversation around accountability and data. But now, instead of blunt instruments and a one-size-fits-all assessment offered as an “autopsy” of learning once a year, there are many nuanced opportunities that can and should be driven by our conversations. There is a calling for new ideas and how we might implement plans with renewed purpose and goals including building a reciprocal structure, aligned to do what is best for students, driven by shared responsibility between communities, districts, schools and the state's vision. How can we design a system that recognizes the unmet needs from the past and makes the continuous changes needed with support and building trust?

Engaged communities are helping to create breakthrough models through educators and students engaging in social entrepreneurship — creating pathways tied to building competencies, skills and knowledge for future success in college and careers.

There are opportunities to rethink education toward personalized pathways that meet the graduation requirements while offering meaningful and powerful learning experiences in internships, in the community, in volunteer work, in after school programs and in helping society. Unpacking our curriculum standards and identifying the competencies needed will allow each student to have a personalized and meaningful pathway to meeting their goals for future education and employment. Are we designing our schools for future human excellence? Are experiences for learning culturally responsive, socially embedded, meaningful and relevant to the world we live in? Are we preparing young people for the future and with the ability to flourish?

Finally, there are multiple forms of assessments allowed under the Every Student Succeeds Act and they can be useful for educators and students to know where every student is in their learning, what comes next and how they are making progress against clear learning targets and building competency. This transparency can inform accountability, where supports and resources are needed, and, be directly tied to student-centered learning — transforming the system to learner-centered models. Can we design a system which can innovate, be transparent and ensure we are supporting our educators to lead the new designs and utilize the research on how students learn best? Can we begin offering personalized pathways and competency-based models with evidence of what students know and can do through different ways of showing what they know? New interdisciplinary approaches to teaching subjects in projects that span inside and outside of school are one way that students are building a broader range of skills, knowledge and competence for the future. There are many other models for next generation learning offering better personalization for students' needs.

Global Education Systems Are Transforming

There are nations around the globe advancing broader ideas around what it means for student success at graduation, redesigning curriculum and instruction, asking how to innovate for equity, opening minds to new concepts to better support educators and students in personalizing learning and move toward broader goals that matter for students, families and communities.

One last note . . . there is a 700 page report by the OECD on best practices on assessment and accountability titled *Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment*. The author explained to me, “There are models of assessment for learning across the globe that focus on system improvement, accountability for children and families and building capacity of educators to modernize learning in the 21st century. And not one is doing what the US is doing right now. Most advanced education systems moved away from norm-referenced testing decades ago, and they are never going back.”

This is about supporting public education in America. This isn't about taking the current traditional system and pitting districts versus charters. It is about reimagining all of K-12 education for our communities, our states and our future society.

Will we take this historic opportunity and drive the future of learning with the chance we have to engage communities in a discussion on what high school graduation should mean in the future and what the goals are for our education systems? Or will we wait until the “next time” the entire education system might be “unfrozen” again?

You can find Susan Patrick on Twitter at @susandpatrick

By Rachel White, M.Ed. Refugees of New Mexico, Highland High School, New Mexico



“On top of trying to navigate school in a language that they don’t understand, most refugees are dealing with some degree of PTSD from the traumatic experiences that they have endured.”

The refugee crisis is a hot button issue right now, but few truly understand the plight that refugees endure. For the one percent of refugees worldwide that are granted resettlement in a third country, they face an entirely new set of challenges. While they no longer have to fear for their lives due to persecution, adjusting to an entirely new culture is an arduous undertaking.

One of the most substantial challenges that young refugees face is the American school system. I know this because I work as an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher at the high school that enrolls the largest number of refugee students in the state of New Mexico.

In order to gain some perspective, imagine you are sitting in school as a fourth grader and the building gets bombed. You watch friends and teachers die, but you get out alive. Your country is in a civil war so the school doesn’t get rebuilt and you are unable to attend school for five years, until your family gets granted refugee status in the United States. This is the case with one of my Syrian students who enrolled at my high school this year.

Or try to imagine being born in a refugee camp somewhere in Tunisia or Tanzania — your parents aren’t exactly sure because they have been in and out of camps in different countries for the past 16 years. You have only managed to go to school for a total of three years before arriving in the U.S. and are enrolling in high school. This is the case with one of my students who arrived last February.

Better yet, imagine that where you are from, girls are not allowed to go to school. You have always dreamed of going to school, but for you, education has always been just that, a dream. Because of terrorism in your country, your family flees, applies for refugee status, and gets accepted for resettlement in the United States. You enroll in your first day of school, ever, as a 16 year old. This is the case with a number of my Middle Eastern students.

The most obvious challenge that school-aged refugees face is the language barrier. They often arrive with little to no proficiency in English. At the high school level, this is an especially daunting challenge because students are required to enroll in age-appropriate classes that count towards graduation, like algebra I, New Mexico history and biology, regardless of whether or not they are foundationally prepared. The new refugee students typically have one period of ESL class, but the rest of their day is spent in regular education classes with teachers who are not trained in working with English learners and don't know how to make the content accessible to them.

On top of trying to navigate school in a language that they don't understand, most refugees are dealing with some degree of PTSD from the traumatic experiences that they have endured.

There are many other challenges that may seem minimal to us, but can prove to be obstacles for refugee students, such as using a computer for the first time, learning to read and write a new alphabet, trying to grasp the concept of taking notes, and even organizing a notebook or backpack.

Districts across the country have implemented "newcomer" programs, or even whole schools dedicated to providing assistance to new immigrant students who are learning English.

Our systems are not prepared to meet their needs and it's time for us to put a more comprehensive and thoughtful approach to schooling on behalf of these young people and their families. Refugee students face tremendous obstacles in schools, so supports like these are imperative to the success of our new American students.

Keeping Graduates in NM Means Investing in Education

May 11, 2017

By Jessica Nojek, Internship Program Manager, New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions



“The more we work together to create a thriving ecosystem between our business community, our educational system, and families, the greater opportunities our future job seekers and businesses will have in New Mexico.”

In November of last year the [New York Times ran a story](#) by Quoc Trung Bui titled “The States That College Graduates Are Most Likely to Leave.” The story referred to recently published data by the University of Minnesota that demonstrated the net migration of college grads under 40 by state between 2000 and 2015. New Mexico was one out of ten states whose net migration rate was -2. And, our surrounding states? Arizona and Texas were +1, and Colorado was +2.

On the flip side, New Mexico is not in the bottom on this one — there are a lot of states in the US that are actually -4 for net migration rate. But I can’t help but feel saddened by this data, especially in light of our current economic challenges.

As of June last year, the New Mexico Higher Education Department reported that college costs of up to \$60 million annually are covered for students attending UNM in the New Mexico Lottery Scholarship Program. How many of those students receiving funds from the lottery scholarship program will eventually leave New Mexico as one of those +1 or +2 net migration groups to our surrounding states?

How much of our investment in education is benefiting other states versus our own communities? And, how does this brain drain affect our own economic situation when it comes to attracting new companies as well as developing those that are already here investing?

When I first moved to New Mexico I worked for a home-grown engineering design firm. The local company chose to stay and develop in New Mexico because of their passion and love for our state's unique culture and beauty. That decision presented recruitment challenges. I starkly remember, with great surprise and naiveté, when they offered an engineering position to someone living in Colorado. The candidate refused the offer because they preferred their current public school system.

This is when I began to learn something foreign to me coming out of the Washington DC area bubble. I realized that education is as much of an economic development issue as a policy issue. There are two sides to this issue. Having K-12 and higher education systems that produce strong graduation rates and students that are skilled to accommodate a local workforce's needs is one side. The other side includes cultivating a desire within our youth to support and assist their community.

With that said, it is vital to our state's economic future to continue to build a path forward that is inclusive of our younger generations and demonstrates the value in supporting our community through the unique gifts our youth have to offer. Recently I was lucky enough to participate in a mock interview exercise with a local school. The school required community service projects as a part of their curriculum and career pathway development.

As I sat there in each interview I realized that these students were already becoming personally involved in their community's needs and looking for ways they could help. They were consciously making the connection between how their future choices regarding education would aid them in giving back to the weak spots within their community and stay in New Mexico.

These students were receiving an education that supported them not only in graduating, they were also gaining awareness about their community's needs and how they can develop the skills to contribute to its future. Investment in their education was supporting our state's and their community's economic future.

The more we work together to create a thriving ecosystem between our business community, our educational system and families, the greater opportunities our future job seekers and businesses will have in New Mexico.

From Dropout to Graduate: How Moises Broke the Cycle

May 25, 2017

By Tony Monfiletto, Director, Future Focused Education



“Moises credits the school with changing his life. He’s living proof that it’s time to redesign our high schools.”

Moises earned the nickname “Fire Keeper” on a school-sponsored overnight camping trip with his classmates. He made sure the campfire stayed lit while everyone else slept. That powerful metaphor carries over into almost every aspect of Moises’s character.

Moises was among the first graduating class of Health Leadership High School (HLHS). He had the critical ingredients all students needed to succeed: his family loved and supported him, he was ambitious and passionate about his community, and he was an independent thinker. However, the pathway to his success was fraught with challenges. Instead of an asset to be nurtured, he was labeled a defiant and truant teenager and, like many of Health Leadership High School’s students, he ultimately completed that narrative by dropping out of school. He couldn’t cope with sitting in rows, reading from a textbook and doing worksheets. His mind was too active to be force-fed facts from inanimate objects.

When he received a postcard in the mail from HLHS, he was working any job he could find to help support his family. Meanwhile, his mom pushed him to go back to school and earn his diploma. The school resonated with her because it was focused on preparing students for a career and it was designed for young people who had dropped out or were off track to graduation. Because classes started later in the morning, he was able to keep his night job.

Learning by Doing and Community Engagement

He enrolled at HLHS as a “reclassified” freshman and the staff helped him find paid internships that allowed him to earn money and invest in his future. He researched, blogged, hosted radio shows and protested. At one internship, he presented to Congresswoman Lujan Grisham about the power of the internet to lift people out of poverty.

360 Support

While Moises was enrolled at HLHS, he was offered a promotion at the restaurant where he worked that would result in more responsibility and more pay, but he would have to work full time during the day. The staff at HLHS knew him well and cared deeply about his success. They helped him move to the school’s evening program which let him keep his commitment to help support his family without preventing him from earning his high school diploma at HLHS.

When I asked Moises the most important factor in his success at HLHS, he told me, “I have an equal relationship with my teachers.” They were his partners and fellow problem solvers. Like any good partner, they respected him, his circumstance and — most importantly — his value as a human being.

The “Fire Keeper” plans to become a nurse. He starts college at Central New Mexico Community College in the fall and will ultimately graduate from the University of New Mexico with a Bachelor’s Degree. But Moises was adamant that he doesn’t plan to stop there, “I plan to have many careers so that I can keep learning,” he says.

For a student like Moises, schools like HLHS are imperative. How many smart and driven students like Moises have fallen off track at traditional schools because they can’t respond to the needs of the students they serve? For students like Moises, hands-on learning, community engagement and staff who truly listen and support can make a huge difference in a student’s life. Moises credits the school with changing his life. He’s living proof that it’s time to redesign our high schools.

What Teaching Elsewhere Taught Me About My Role in Albuquerque Education

July 13, 2017

By Leslie Parker, Teacher



“I believe there are strong teachers here, I believe there is strong leadership and I believe, more than anything, in our students.”

I left Albuquerque as a recent graduate in 2006 to join the Teach for America Baltimore Corps and to establish myself as someone who was going to make a difference. I didn't know then what the next 11 years would hold, but looking back, I can undoubtedly say those years have inspired the exact work I want to continue doing here in my hometown.

For the next 11 years, I had the extraordinary opportunity to work in Baltimore and Denver schools with some of the best in the field. And when I returned to Albuquerque, after having children of my own, I realized how high the education stakes actually are and how much I wanted to be part of the solutions and work that leads to all students being able to access an incredible education here in Albuquerque.

In a community that needs the village to help raise this system, it is disappointing how many people have veered me away from working as an educator in New Mexico because “the pay is too low” and the “scores are not satisfactory.” To that, I get fired up. I am a product of the Albuquerque Public School system and I plan to send my children to the same system.

In Baltimore and Denver, I learned that strong overall student achievement comes from strong teacher retention. The strongest leaders I had were relentless to do what was best for students, asked for feedback

continuously and valued their staff by telling them and telling others about them. They recognized the brutal facts, but also never lost their undying faith that our students could achieve. This can be said about the incredible teachers I have collaborated with as well. The best teachers I worked with came to the table with solutions, proposals and the willingness to see it through. They were the most reflective, collaborative people in the building and approached everything by assuming the best first.

There is no doubt that I have a lot to learn when it comes to the current Albuquerque educational landscape, however, what I have learned is to bring what the best mentors, colleagues, families and students have taught me — I am always ready to learn. I believe there are strong teachers here, I believe there is strong leadership and I believe, more than anything, in our students. I believe that it is our community's role to be involved, to care about the hard realities and to genuinely believe our students deserve the best and do whatever it takes to make that happen.

I left as a recent graduate, a young adult, a single person ready to explore the world I didn't know. I come back a wife, a mother, a dedicated and passionate educator who has been impacted greatly by my former students and I like to believe that through my experiences, I come back with more grit, determination and humility to be a part of whatever it takes to provide the best for Albuquerque.

Finding My Voice: Traditional Education Didn't Help Me in Knowing Who I Was

August 10, 2017

By Christina Rodriguez, UNM Student, Generation Justice Fellow



“I realized that my successful academic career had not prepared me for this... I was not armed with the privilege of a confident introduction. I did not know who I was – I did not even know why I felt so strongly about being a multimedia storyteller.”

When I first interviewed for my fellowship with [Generation Justice](#), Roberta Rael, the founder of the project, looked me in the eyes and asked me, “Who are you?”

I listed off a few of my favorite jobs, achievements and passions. She asked again, “But... who are *you*?”

I realized that my successful academic career had not prepared for this. I had never applied critical thought to this question of my identity, my culture and my history. I was not armed with the privilege of a confident introduction. I did not know who I was — I did not even know why I felt so strongly about being a multimedia storyteller. This is what I expected from a career in media: finding my voice.

There are so many terrors and anxieties embedded into the academic experience, and the traditional system is often dehumanizing. I know that I, and many of the young people that I work with, have difficulties with self-love while the education system is literally testing all aspects of our character. In New Mexico, there's so much to fall in love with that it can be hard to focus on a sheet of paper or a computer screen. We are sometimes too hungry, without the space to reflect.

I love that over the past few years, I have gotten comfortable being uncomfortable. I learned how to make a microphone feel familiar, and when I have it in my hands, I feel relief. I learned the highs and lows of my voice. I have learned when to admit that I do not know something. I have learned how to ask questions. These are things that the mainstream education structures fail to teach.

I've always had a love of stories about transformation: sci-fi realities that help me to illustrate a better future in my mind. Narrative shifting is transformative work, requiring internal revolutions to create bigger, shared revolutions.

In New Mexico, it is so important that youth are given a voice. Young people are calling out injustices everyday. Young people are using the internet to revolutionize information and curate their brilliance. Young Nuevo Mexicanos are making it work on their own time: organizing, freelancing and networking.

I've decided to stay in New Mexico for college because I wanted to finally take the time to get rooted in my community, and to truly examine my role under these vibrant skies.

All the tears and all-nighters as both an Albuquerque Public Schools student and a University of New Mexico student have taught me that it is so crucial that our education systems support all the dreams of our youth. Our schools must teach resilience and be places of both freedom and security. This struggle, this emotional bond, pulls me towards making a difference for New Mexican students. Working in radio at Generation Justice has taught me that despite the nerves, deadlines and standards: our young people already have their voices, and they're just waiting for you to listen.

How Paid Internships Can Add Huge Value to a Young Person's Life

August 24, 2017

By Tony Monfiletto, Director, Future Focused Education



“Imagine how our city would be different if more young people had a chance to work with professionals like Frederica and the Human Resources team at PNM.”

One-third of students who drop out of high school will try to return, according to WestEd¹ (1). Of those who attempt to go back, only 20 percent will graduate. Out of the 28,000 high school students in Albuquerque, roughly two-thirds of them will graduate (18,666 graduates and 9,333 dropouts). Assuming young people in our community are similar to students across the country, only 3,111 of the students who leave will attempt to return (one-third), and only 622 will be successful (20 percent). In other words, only 622 of the 9,333 dropouts in our community will ultimately graduate which is just seven percent of the total.

Enter Maria Reyes who graduated from Health Leadership High School in May 2017. Like Christina Rodriguez who blogged for us earlier this month, Maria was desperate for a chance to find her way in the world. She's a young mother who reluctantly joined the Evening Reengagement program at the school which is designed specifically for students who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out. After a rocky start that included a lot of trust building with her teacher, Jeanette Paiz, she earned a paid internship with the Improve Group in the spring and PNM Resources in the summer. I sat down with Maria and Frederica Romero, her mentor at PNM, and was reminded of just how valuable a meaningful paid work experience can be in a young person's life.

¹ Sarah D. Sparks: “Many Dropouts Try—and Fail—to Return to School.” *Education Week*, June 6, 2013. http://spf.dpsk12.org/spf_alt.html

Frederica is a Senior Recruiter at PNM. This was her first time supervising an intern. She had a three step strategy:

1. Make Maria feel valuable and useful.
2. Put a structure in place to make her integral to the department.
3. Let her develop her reputation as an asset to the team.

The internship started with a round of “speed dating” where Maria met with 25 employees at PNM for 30 minutes each to learn about their role at the company and what they do every day. Then Frederica set up an online calendar where those people could request for Maria to help them with a task. People then started to book Maria to help them with assignments that including setting up conference rooms for executive meetings, scanning, organizing and filing documents, and building a database of contractors who work with the company.

Her skills have become increasingly sophisticated over time. “Executive functioning skills” like scheduling and time management have become essential as the demand for her support has increased. More importantly, she has learned that people have started to count on her for tasks that they cannot do themselves, and that following through is essential as she works to build her reputation as a trusted colleague in the office.

Frederica was the perfect mentor for Maria. She was caring and thought of her as an asset from the beginning. She also put the structures in place that allowed her to learn and grow as a young professional. According to Frederica, “Maria made it easy for us, she’s a natural multi-tasker, she’s not afraid of technology, she’s detail oriented and she asks a lot of questions.”

Maria told me, “It’s important to have a good personality and manners. Like saying hello and good morning. I’ve never seen people say good morning and hello like they do here. People smile a lot and it makes you want to talk to them and be approachable. It’s important to be responsible and accountable because I want people to have a good impression of me. I see myself as a helpful person who can help others get their jobs done.”

Maria told me about a specific task when she fielded questions from employees about their benefits. She learned about pensions, health insurance and death benefits for families of former employees. “Most people don’t understand their benefits and this has taught me how important they are. Some people don’t try to understand their benefits until they need them. I knew about benefits, but now I understand them in a real way through this experience.”

Maria is only half way done with her internship, but she is on her way. Her internship is a success, she knows what it feels like to work in a professional environment, and she’s committed to college to achieve her dreams. Imagine how our city would be different if more young people had a chance to work with professionals like Frederica and the Human Resources team at PNM. Future Focused will facilitate 40 paid internships similar to Maria’s this year. Five companies have joined us and we plan to grow the number of partners so that we can offer 250 graduating senior in the Leadership Schools Network a similar opportunity in the future. This is an essential step in our vision to empower young people to make our city healthier and more prosperous.

Thank you to our partners, funders and donors!

The support of our community is at the center of advancing the best education for the students who need it most. **Now is the time to bring our best ideas to students and communities, and this support makes it all possible.**

A special thank you goes out to our funders and donors. They share our belief that every student has a future worth investing in. **Thank you for sharing in and supporting our mission.**



Thank you to our partners in the Leadership Schools Network. Together, we are propelling evidence of innovative teaching and learning that will drive education and schools in new and important directions to create healthy, more prosperous communities.





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