WHAT WE WANT TO SEE IN SCHOOLS

LOCAL WISDOM FROM NEW MEXICO EMPLOYERS AND EDUCATORS

September 2016

MISSION: GRADUATE

Report prepared by Mission: Graduate in partnership with the **NEW MEXICO CENTER FOR SCHOOL LEADERSHIP** BRINGING CHANGE THROUGH NETWORKING & REDESIGN

Contents

Introduction

On April 26, 2016, the New Mexico Center for School Leadership (NMCSL) brought together a variety of local employers and other stakeholders for a School Innovation Tour. NMCSL is an Albuquerque nonprofit organization that has re-imagined how schools engage with their communities, with industry partners, and with their students in order to better support student learning.

A primary objective of the School Innovation Tour was to raise awareness in the business community and among other stakeholders about innovative models of teaching and learning. To that end, tour participants were given the opportunity to hear from students and staff, visit classrooms, and tour the facilities of eight local schools: ACE Leadership High School (ACE), Health Leadership High School (HLHS), nex+Gen Academy (NexGen), Media Arts Collaborative Charter School (MACCS), South Valley Academy (SVA), Amy Biehl High School (ABHS), Native American Community Academy (NACA), and the Albuquerque Sign Language Academy (ASLA).[1]

Figure A. NMCSL Three-Pillar Model[2]

LEARNING BY DOING Students use problem solving and innovation to address real-world problems.	**360-DEGREE SUPPORT** High expectations require high levels of student support.	**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT** Mutually beneficial partnerships deepen student learning experiences and support student growth.

These eight schools are managed independently from one another, but all are aligned with a three-pillar model endorsed by NMCSL (see Figure A). With the support of the McCune Foundation, this cohort of schools has been collaborating to identify the inputs, outputs, and outcomes relevant to their schools, an effort called the New Metrics Initiative.

At each school, the Tour ended with a facilitated discussion, giving participants the opportunity to debrief what they had observed. In the months following, a three-person research team conducted interviews with 18 Tour participants. Transcriptions of the debriefs and the interviews were then analyzed, and findings were compiled in this report.

This report is organized around the following questions:

1. What stood out to Tour participants in the schools they visited?

2. What did Tour participants identify as methods of assessing performance used in their own workplaces? How might these be applied in a school setting?

3. How might these learnings inform next steps for improving education in New Mexico?

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[1] Seven of the schools showcased in the tour are charter schools; nex+Gen Academy, which is a "school of choice" in Albuquerque Public Schools, was the only exception.

[2] New Mexico Center for School Leadership. (n.d.). *Local wisdom for local schools: A vision for the future.* Retrieved August 24, 2016, from http://leadership-pdc.org/library.

What stood out to School Innovation Tour participants in the schools they visited?

Many of the Tour participants were impressed with what they heard and saw in the eight showcased schools. In their debrief discussions, and in the interviews we conducted afterwards, individuals spoke highly of the schools' innovative approaches to instruction, positive climates, and connections with their communities. Across the board, what we heard from participants suggests that these schools provide strong examples of the three-pillar model in action, and that their efforts are bearing fruit, at least for a subset of students.

In this section, we first dig into each of the three pillars and share key learnings. We then discuss how student learning is being assessed at the schools included on the Tour.

Pillar I: Learning by Doing

All eight schools showcased in the Tour employ a "learning by doing" approach to instruction. This includes a variety of methods outlined in Figure B. Tour participants at the different sites heard teachers and students speak about each school's instructional model, and also had the opportunity to briefly observe teaching and learning practices as they walked through the schools.

Figure B. "Learning By Doing" Instructional Methods [3]

What's done	Description	Example	Where it's happening
Project-based learning curriculum	Students learn by undertaking assigned real-world projects, usually working in teams. Projects are framed with a problem to solve or question to answer.	In an interview, a tour participant described a project in which NACA students created a database of cosmetic products, the toxins in each, and their health implications.	ABHS, ACE, ASLA, HLHS, MACCS, NACA, Nex-Gen, SVA
Service learning opportuni-ties	Students engage individually or as a group in meaningful community service, either as a one-time event or over a period of time.	At ABHS, tour participants learned that all students must complete a senior project based on a year-long service learning experience in the community.	ABHS, HLHS, MACCS, NACA, SVA

[3] Table was developed based on the interviewees' observations and input from NMCSL staff, and is not intended to be comprehensive.

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What's done	Description	Example	Where it's happening
Internships	Students are placed with local employers for work-based learning experiences, returning consistently to the same assignment for a period of at least a month.	All SVA juniors are placed in internships that are career focused.	ABHS, ACE, HLHS, MACCS, NACA, SVA
Community partnerships	Partnerships with local industry and community groups enhance schools' ability to align student learning with community and workforce needs.	HLHS creates projects with community partners to respond to pressing needs in the community, particularly in Albuquerque's South Valley.	ABHS, ACE, ASLA, HLHS, MACCS, NexGen, SVA

Finding: Tour participants described teaching and learning in the schools as relevant, personalized, and hands-on.

Applied and project-based approaches to teaching were prevalent in the Tour schools, according to interviewees, who repeatedly used words like "real-world," "practical," "hands-on," and "innovative" to describe what they saw.

One interviewee recalled that a teacher at NACA had students learning the core material right alongside native tradition with a project comparing commercial beauty products to homeopathic remedies. A second interviewee was impressed that MACCS students film documentaries in their community. A third reflected on a student's presentation on a service learning project at SVA:

It was neat to see a presentation that wasn't just, I went to the library studied some things and threw them up on these slides, but it was, I've been engaged with this group for the last six months, and here's a reflection on what that meant to me, what that meant to the community, what that meant to the people I served.

The showcased schools rely far less on direct instruction from a teacher than would be true in a traditional school setting. Interviewees said "learning by doing" methods recognized that students bring a diversity of strengths, cultural backgrounds, and learning styles. Visitors observed and heard from students who were using technology to conduct research, participating in service learning projects, reflecting on their experiences, and producing collaborative products and presentations.

Finding: Visitors observed that the schools' "learning by doing" approach is teaching students important workplace skills.

Visitors observed that the projects students were undertaking in their classes simulate the kinds of projects that they might one day encounter in the workplace. Project-based learning often involves working in a team, conducting research, exploring possible solutions to problems, and producing an end-product, whether a report, presentation, video, database, or website. Repeatedly, tour participants from a variety of industries said they saw students demonstrate skills that will serve them well in their future careers. One visitor to ABHS, for example, said the following:

> *You can tell that the students are really strong, not only in what they know but how they show what they know. The students were very much able to engage in real conversations with outside people, collaborate with one another. They have all the different tools and skillsets to be successful once they graduate.*

Tour participants observed a variety of workplace knowledge, skills, and attributes in the students. The following is a list of those commonly named by interviewees:

- Teamwork and collaboration
- Communication
- Public speaking
- Ability to interact with adults
- Compassion and empathy

- Self-confidence
- Adaptability
- Willingness to learn from others
- Work ethic
- Time management
- Customer service skill

- Goal setting
- Initiative
- Cultural and community awareness
- Perseverance

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Finding: While interviewees were universally impressed by the students they met on the Tour, several wanted to know about the schools' less successful students.

Several tour participants we spoke with recognized that the schools most likely showcased some of their most successful students. In their interviews, they wondered whether the schools' less successful students also benefit from the project-based and personalized approaches to teaching and learning. The answer to that question was not clear, as evidenced by this quote from a local educational leader who visited NACA:

> *It's easy to tell when it's a panel of their top-performers, and that was inspirational and you want to celebrate that, but I would like to know what happens or how does that process evolve and change for the kids that are struggling.*

Pillar II: 360-Degree Support

Research has consistently shown that student success can be influenced by a school's climate, including a sense of safety and trust, strong relationships, and holistic social supports offered within the structure of the school environment.[4] Visitors described a variety of practices used by the schools to nurture a positive school climate, as outlined in Figure C.

Figure C. School Practices that Reinforce 360-Degree Support for Students[5]

What's done	Description	Example	Where it's happening
Morning Meetings	The entire school gathers as a culture-building event. The students, teachers, and other staff celebrate success and discuss challenges that are important to the health of the school.	During SVA's morning meeting, there were "different people on the microphone talking about things that were happening that day or that week, students were excited and were interacting," according to an interviewee.	ACE, SVA

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[4] See, for example: Thapa, A., Cohen, J., & Higgins-D'Alessandro, A. (2013). A review of school climate research. *Review of Educational Research*, 83(3), 357-385.

[5] Table was developed based on the observations of interviewees and input from NMCSL staff, and is not intended to be comprehensive.

What's done	Description	Example	Where it's happening
Mixed Classrooms	Students of varying ages and abilities/disabilities learn and interact with one another.	ASLA visitors observed hearing and non-hearing students, and students of different ages working together in the same classroom.	ACE, ASLA, HLHS, MACCS
Safe Spaces	Schools designate spaces where students can meditate or seek personalized advice.	At NACA, "they had a place set up where kids could worship if they needed," said one interviewee.	ABHS, ACE, HLHS, NACA, SVA
Use of Physical Space	Schools intentionally design, arrange, and decorate the physical environment to support a positive school climate.	At NexGen, furniture was set up to create working and collaborative spaces throughout the school; SVA students design and paint murals on campus with local artists.	ACE, ASLA, MACCS, NexGen, SVA
Proactive social worker role	Social workers and counselors focus on establishing a positive school culture and building ongoing relationships with students rather than on academic advising and crisis intervention	At ABHS, social workers greet students in the morning and identify issues the students arrive with so they can offer support.	ABHS, ACE, HLHS
Advisors / Advisory	Teachers and staff are assigned a cohort of students that they meet with as a group and also provide one-on-one support.	Students at ACE told visitors that they were each matched with an advisor who provided them with encouragement.	ACE, HLHS, ABHS, SVA, NACA

Finding: Visitors were impressed by the feeling of trust, pride, and empowerment among students in the schools.

One tour participant at NexGen described an atmosphere of trust: "I think it goes to the trust I see in this entire school. Backpacks are kind of laying around and no one is tampering with

them. That's amazing." Another visitor described how the values of the school were internalized by the students:

> *Not just the student ambassadors but all the students that you talked to, there was something about the way they interacted with you that made clear that the ethos of the school was something that they believed in and had really adopted.*

Several visitors predicted that students would graduate from the Tour schools believing in who they want to be and what they want to do. According to one visitor to ACE, "You show students how to take accountability for themselves and how to be successful adults. These students can come out of school and believe they can be that person." Another visitor to ASLA noted, "You see that everybody here believed that they could do it."

Finding: Students at the showcased schools are offered a college-like experience, according to visitors, which they described as different from traditional school settings.

Visitors at several schools observed that students were given opportunities to work without direct supervision, including using their laptops or cell phones to complete projects. For example, one tour participant described visiting a NexGen classroom:

> *I can remember a group of students who were engaged in talk, and some of them had computers out in front of them and some of them had telephones out in front of them, and when we walked by they were using both devices for their work. And so that definitely stands out because for young people— shoot, for me—there are times that that's a real distraction, but here they were really using their personal technology as a tool.*

The trust given to students allowed for a more college-like atmosphere, as one visitor to HLHS noted: "Students had the autonomy to bring their food with them or were coming in at different times for different classes. It felt more, honestly, like a college."

Some participants felt the climate in these schools differed from more traditional settings. One interviewee remembered the comments of another Tour participant at SVA:

> *She was like "I see the students smiling, I see them interacting with teachers, I see them interacting with principals," and she said, "it hurts me because I don't see that in my community, and I want to know how you got to this point because I want this for my students," and she was on the verge of tears talking about it because, if you read about that on a piece of paper, you'd say, "Boy, that's really neat," but when you're in that place and experiencing that in real time, it's such a stark contrast to what other school environments feel like for your body and your heart and that had seemingly a profound effect on her.*

Finding: Participants widely recognized the support that students received from one another, from teachers, staff, and administration.

The support students received from adults in the Tour schools was apparent in the perspectives shared by Tour participants. As one said:

> *It was incredible to see the staff and students interact. You have a relationship that you build with students that I don't see at traditional schools. If I had the resources or someone who took the time to take care of my education when I was younger I would have had a more concrete goal with college and finding a career.*

The relationships between students and teachers resembled what one would expect from a workplace environment, as demonstrated in this comment from an interviewee:

> *A lot of the students seemed to know some quirks or traits of each teacher, and the teachers seem to let their guard down a little bit with the students and they get to know them on a personal level, and it's nice that there's a real rapport. And it's the kind of rapport that you would have in the professional world with someone new to a company and after a period of time getting to know other people in the company.*

Many of the students at the showcased schools had not been successful in traditional school settings where they said they had less personal support from adults. One visitor to ACE was struck by the story provided by one of students who led the Tour:

> *What I clearly remember is one student talking about how he'd been basically kicked out of multiple schools and found himself at ACE and found an advisor that just clicked for him and saw his skill level, and now he's got this whole other attitude about learning and a whole other social group that encourages learning.*

Finally, visitors also noted how students cared for one another. An SVA visitor witnessed an English-speaking student help a bilingual student communicate her research, and at ASLA, an interviewee said students rubbed each other's backs in calming support.

Finding: The student support observed by visitors was attributable in part to a relatively high number of counselors and social workers, and their proactive role.

Tour participants speculated that the schools they visited had more counselors and social workers than would be typical in other schools. As one visitor to HLHS said:

> *I am really impressed with the number of social workers on staff for a student population that is as small as it is here. That's a lot of support."*

In a follow-up inquiry, we found that visitors' observations were accurate. Across the eight Tour schools, approximately 2,800 students receive support from 16 counselors and social workers, an overall ratio of 175:1.[6] In contrast, the student-to-counselor ratio statewide is approximately 421:1.[7]

According to Tony Monfiletto, executive director of NMSCL, the visitors' observations about student supports are also a reflection of the "redefined role" of counselors and social workers in the showcased schools. In many traditional high schools, counselors spend much of their time on academic advising—making sure that students have the credits they need to graduate—and then are called into situations when there is a crisis, usually resulting in referrals to external services. Meanwhile funding flows restrict New Mexico school social workers to supporting only special education students, with few exceptions.

In contrast, Monfiletto says, at the Tour schools, teachers and assigned advisors do much of the academic planning with students, freeing up the counselors and social workers to play a more proactive role in establishing school culture and identifying and addressing individual student needs.

Pillar III: Community Engagement

In NMCSL's three-pillar model, the community engagement pillar "is designed so that community partners share their expertise and resources to support teachers and the school curriculum, while student involvement in the community allows students to participate in authentic learning experiences."[8] Visitors recognized and appreciated the variety of ways the Tour schools engage the community and reach out to employers, summarized in Figure D.

Figure D. School Practices for Engaging the Community[9]

What's done	*Description*	*Example*	*Where it's happening*
Real-world projects	Schools involve community and industry partners in identifying real problems that need to be solved, and turn these into projects for students.	At MACCS, students use a film studio to work on projects requested by local organizations and community members.	ABHS, ACE, HLHS, MACCS, NexGen, SVA, NACA

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[6] Tony Monfiletto, personal communication, September 20, 2016

[7] American Counseling Association (2014). *United States Student-to-Counselor Ratios for Elementary and Secondary Schools* [data table]. Retrieved September 23, 2016, from https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/public-policy-faqs-and-documents/2013-counselor-to-student-ratio-chart.pdf?sfvrsn=2. This ratio is based on data from the U.S. Department of Education and may not include specialized counselors (e.g. college and career counselors) nor social workers, who in the state of New Mexico serve primarily special education students.

[8] New Mexico Center for School Leadership. (n.d.). *Local wisdom for local schools: A vision for the future*, p. 11.

[9] Table was developed based on the interviewees' observations and input from NMCSL staff, and is not intended to be comprehensive.

What's done	Description	Example	Where it's happening
Industry focus	Schools are created in partnership with a particular industry, and that focus informs curriculum across subject areas.	HLHS was developed in partnership with First Choice Healthcare, Presbyterian Healthcare Services, and the University of New Mexico Hospital.	ACE, HLHS, MACCS
Graduate Profile	Input from local employers informs the development of a document that outlines the knowledge, skills, and attributes students should develop before they graduate.	Before ACE opened, professionals from the Association for General Contractors were consulted in developing a Graduate Profile that continues to inform the school's curriculum and instruction.	ACE, HLHS
Exhibition volunteers	Community members serve on panels to judge student projects as a form of performance-based assessment.	At ABHS, students present senior capstone projects to a group of school staff and outside professionals who score the presentations on a set of criteria.	ABHS, ACE, ASL, HLHS, MACCS, NACA, Nex-Gen

Finding: Several interviewees articulated how the school's engagement with the community and industry partners has a mutually beneficial outcome.

Universally, interviewees expressed a belief that schools and communities should work together, and they were impressed with how this was being done in many of the showcased schools. The benefits that visitors identified for students and local employers are outlined in Figure E, along with relevant quotes from interviews.

Figure E. Benefits to All Parties

Who Benefits	How They Benefit	Quotes from Interviews
Students	Learn to be involved; gain practical skills and maturity	*These students are so active and involved—and I was not at that age. So that's been kind of surprising for me that there could be students who are so passionate and active in their community, and to me that speaks to a level of maturity that I did not have at that age.*
	Gain social capital in their industries of interest	*They get to know people in the film community that are real-world working actors and technicians, so they have a connection to that community while they're in school, not just waiting until after school for that to start.*
	Are more engaged in school because their learning is placed in a real-world context	*When someone who has been perceived as a consumer or a victim or vulnerable finds out that they can have an impact in their community and they're able to set goals and they're able to dream, they're able to meet a community need that is close and personal for them. They become excited, they dream, they solve problems, and instead of dropping out, they graduate and they go to college and they engage in their community.*
Employers	Gain from solutions and products developed by students	*They have some services there [at MACCS] that I think would lend themselves really well to helping small businesses in Albuquerque and in New Mexico with some of their publishing needs and things like that.*
	Provide input so schools are preparing students to meet the workforce needs of the future	*The fact that they are going into the community and asking industry leaders, "What are the problems that you are having in your industry, and how can we, through our students, help you solve those problems," is really turning the model.*

Student Assessment

All eight schools included in the Innovation Tour are required under current state law to have their students complete the New Mexico PARCC exams.[10] Beyond the PARCC, however, visitors' impressions were that these schools relied far less on tests than most schools do.

We asked interviewees what they had learned about how the schools assess students' learning. Most participants said the brief tours did not give them an opportunity to witness a student assessment taking place, but they did hear from students and staff who described innovative forms of assessment being used in the schools. The following are four examples of non-traditional performance-based assessment practices described by tour participants:

- **Ongoing project-based assessment:** At stages throughout a project, the teacher is assessing student progress and providing constructive feedback.

- **Exhibitions:** Student projects culminate in a presentation or demonstration judged by a panel of school faculty, staff, and/or community members.

- **Demonstrations:** A student teaches others how to complete a task (e.g. a blood pressure test) to demonstrate that they have mastered a skill.

- **Portfolios:** A student completes a variety of pieces of work over time and compiles them as evidence of learning.

Finding: Interviewees expressed strong support for alternatives to traditional testing.

For the most part, tour participants were not experts in student assessment, and several said so when sharing their opinions. Even so, they provided at least three different rationale for supporting the performance-based assessments common in the Tour schools. First, they said most problems one encounters in the workplace and in everyday life do not have one objective or right answer. In that way, these assessments are closer to the types of assessments students will encounter in the world outside of school, as demonstrated in this comment from a visitor to MACCS:

The members of the community come in to assess student work from a professional and very much a real-world perspective. I think one of the problems with schools and testing is that a lot of that is done from specifically and strictly an educator's perspective, and that works a little bit in a bubble. . . Once you get out of school, if that's the only model you've had, you aren't set up to interact in the real world because the real world doesn't sit down and give you a test every couple of months on how you're doing and what you're supposed to know.

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[10] PARCC stands for "Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers" and is the system of standardized tests required in New Mexico. The PARCC replaced the Standards Based Assessment (SBA) beginning in 2014-15.

Secondly, several interviewees said that traditional forms of testing do not assess students on important workplace skills and character traits. For example, one said:

> *At the end of the day, when I think about competencies in employees, would I rather have someone who can demonstrate it on a test or someone who can actually perform the task in the field? . . . Schools that are able to assess those core employability skills and demonstrate that those students are achieving and meeting those, I think would be very helpful to the business community.*

Finally, students come with a variety of strengths, disabilities, and passions. Several interviewees expressed that a one-size-fits-all test does not make sense in many cases because of these differences. Project-based learning and performance-based assessment allow for a personalization that can highlight a student's strengths and ultimately build confidence in a way that a traditional test cannot.

Finding: More than one third of those we interviewed believe some testing is necessary.

We asked the interviewees the following question: "If more schools were to adopt these non-traditional approaches to assessment, what concerns would you have, if any?" Their responses essentially fell into one of three categories, summarized in Figure F.

Number of Interviewees	Opinion on Testing	Quotes from Interviews
7	Both traditional and non-traditional assessments serve a purpose.	*We must acknowledge that kids are bigger than a test score while at the same time not go way on the other end of the spectrum of all the opt-out craze that No Child Left Behind has caused. Helping kids to understand that the formal assessment has its place and can be important and then in addition there's these other pieces that make up a human being and a productive human being, and how you give and take to make your life and the lives of others better.*
5	Traditional testing does not work, but non-traditional assessments will need to establish their reliability.	*I think that in order to do that you have to be really thoughtful about how you preserve evidence of students' mastery—or not— of some learning outcome. I think that it would be messier and more difficult to score in a standardized way, and I think that's where people get nervous. They think about standardization and reliability.*

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Non-traditional assessments should be adopted widely but with appropriate support for teachers and students.

The model is great, but I think teachers need a different set of skills or a different level of authority to be able to actually do that kind of teaching. It might be more professional development on the teacher's side, but more specifically how to teach in a project-based learning setting, rather than what I think a lot of teachers are getting, which is basic curriculum models, templates that they're supposed to enforce in a classroom setting to teach towards a test result.

What did Tour participants identify as methods of assessing performance used in their own workplaces? How might these be applied in a school setting?

NMCSL believes that the methods used to evaluate employees in the workplace might have some valuable lessons for schools. In the debrief sessions at the end of each school tour, and in our follow-up interviews, participants were asked about how their performance is assessed in their own places of work. We then asked them whether they could imagine how these methods could be applied in schools to evaluate student learning.

Finding: The most common evaluation practice that tour participants said is used in their own workplaces is a cyclical performance review supplemented by ongoing feedback.

For the most part, tour participants were not experts in student assessment, and several said In most workplaces described by participants, employees are involved in setting goals and developing an individualized plan for achieving them. Employees then meet with their supervisors at least annually to review their progress and the process they underwent over the past year, regardless of whether they achieved their goals. One tour participant described how this happens in his workplace:

The way we do it here, since we are a small staff, is that every employee has developed an individual work plan for the year. For me as a manager with them, it's making sure they have a clear sense of what their roles are, what their responsibilities are, and what benchmarks they are supposed to be hitting. But what I always tell them is that at the end of the day, it is more important not that they meet the benchmarks but that they understand the process of getting there.

Participants mentioned several other elements of their workplace evaluations that they found useful. These included the following:

- **360-degree and peer evaluations:** The evaluation includes feedback on an employee's performance not just from his or her direct supervisor but from others in the organization and, if relevant from clients or customers.

- **Self-evaluation:** The employee has the opportunity to reflect on his or her own performance rather than only receiving external feedback.

- **Continuous improvement methods:** An employee working on a project tries multiple iterations, studying and learning from the results each time, and then making appropriate adjustments to how he or she is doing things.

- **Project completion:** In some workplaces, employees know they are doing a job well if they follow through on a contract, they bring an assigned project to completion, or their completed product sells.

Finding: Tour participants who articulated how the evaluation methods used in their workplace could be applied to students were excited by the idea and believed students would benefit.

Most interviewees had a difficult time imagining how their workplace performance assessments could be applied to students because they are not familiar enough with how schools function. Those who could describe these methods being adapted for students, however, believed students would benefit.

They said, for example, that students would feel more ownership of their education if they were involved in setting their own performance goals—both quantitative and qualitative. Students would also find individualized, qualitative feedback more affirming and helpful than a grade or score. One interviewee said his own children had attended a school where no grades were given. Instead, teachers provided written, narrative evaluations of the students twice a semester. As a parent, he "found those much more interesting and useful and informative than when the kids got into eighth grade and they started to get the number grades."

Another tour participant emphasized the importance of ongoing feedback in between the formal evaluations—both for employees and for students:

A third described how a self-evaluation practice in her workplace might be adapted for students:

> *I've worked with a couple of places where every couple of weeks you basically have to send a list of accomplishments and progress on various projects to your superior and those are sometimes shared or discussed at staff meetings. So maybe having students do that, too, journaling what they've been doing the last week and what they're going to do this week to come and then checking in on those goals and what they have to do to accomplish those.*

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Finding: Even while seeing their value, a few interviewees identified two primary barriers to using individualized performance evaluation methods in schools: (1) the time involved and (2) the need for quantitative data to understand how our students are doing as a whole.

Interviewees identified two key limitations to using individualized performance review processes in schools. First, these methods require more time than handing back test scores and grades on assignments, as expressed by one interviewee:

> *I mean it's a big investment of time, because when do you do that? You're already teaching and then you have your meetings and then you monitor these tests and then you have to make sure you're preparing for the tests.*

> *I don't know enough about what a day looks like in a traditional school environment from an administrative or teaching standpoint to say, but I do know how much time it takes in our organization.*

Second, educational leaders, advocates, and policymakers rely on quantitative data from standardized assessments to understand how students are doing in the aggregate. If individualized performance reviews replaced the standardized assessments, it would be much more difficult to understand how students are doing across a school, a district, or a state. One educational leader put it this way:

> *What makes me nervous is if we're going to do the more performance-based assessments and teachers are going to have the autonomy to create curriculum or use curriculum resources to address the needs of their kids, we on a large scale need to know how those kids are doing. As everybody goes to individualized performance assessments, then [school and district] leaders have no way of knowing. If you have seven thousand kids at a grade level, how do you know what quality of education you're providing if you have no common measure, and then how do you on a large scale address where the deficits might be? How do you put financial resources, human resources, all of that?*

How might these learnings inform next steps for improving education in New Mexico?

In organizing the Tour, NMCSL intended to do more than provide an interesting field trip for adults. NMCSL's vision is "to create and sustain a healthy, vibrant and responsive network of schools that *is a catalyst for education policy reform locally and nationally.*"[11] With this vision in mind, is it possible the Tour helped establish a foundation on which NMCSL and engaged stakeholders could build future work? The local employers, educators, and community members we interviewed expressed a clear willingness to support educational improvement in the Albuquerque area, and to support the showcased schools in particular. Our analysis also suggests that some would advocate for policies that would support the scale-up of innovative approaches to education beyond this subset of mostly charter schools—if organized and asked to do so.

Recommendations for New Mexico Center for School Leadership

Interviewees were asked how they think NMCSL might further engage the business community and other stakeholders in local schools and policy advocacy work. Their suggestions are as follows:

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[11] See: http://leadership-pdc.org/about/center-overview/, emphasis added.

• **Continue engaging the business and nonprofit sectors in activities that will build their knowledge about schools like those included on the Tour.** When possible, interviewees said to make sure events are convenient for busy individuals and targeted to people most likely to see the value of school-community partnerships. One recommended, for example, that NMCSL hold a breakfast or lunch gathering with presentations from students and staff, without the three-hour time commitment. A second recommended designing event specifically targeting human resource staff, who often face challenges finding new talent. A third suggested an event focused on nonprofit organizations, showcasing the service learning projects students are doing in the community.

• **Invite greater business community involvement in the judging of the exhibitions.** The idea of serving as a judge captured several interviewees. One in particular described this as a "compelling" way to be involved and suggested marketing this opportunity more broadly.

• **Engage** a variety of stakeholders in policy advocacy. Participants had several ideas in this arena:

> **(1)** Have a single cohort of policy-influencing individuals who stay connected with the schools and learn more in depth about what each school is doing to engage students.

> **(2)** Have legislators tour the Tour schools.

> **(3)** Form teacher and parent groups to advocate for education policy changes.

> **(4)** Engage unusual partners, people who policymakers would not expect to be supporting charter schools.

• **Facilitate the sharing of innovative school practices** across the schools, districts, and the charter-district divide, and explore which can be scaled.

Recommendations for Businesses and Community Members

In interviews, several members of the business community said that employers should care about supporting education locally because it will foster a strong city and state with a competent workforce. Moreover, they saw value in supporting schools like those showcased on the Tour because of their emphasis on teaching skills important in the workplace—or "soft skills." The following emerged as ways employers and community members can be involved:

• Collaborate with educators on developing student projects based on real-world issues.

• Offer service learning and internship opportunities to individual students and whole classrooms.

• Volunteer as judges for student exhibitions.

• Serve on school boards and governing councils.

• Organize business community and Chamber of Commerce support for policy advocacy efforts.

An Opportunity for Policy Advocacy

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides a significant opportunity for business and community members to help re-think primary and secondary education in the United States. The ESSA, signed into federal law at the end of 2015, replaces the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), and brings with it the following: a loosening of federal mandates, greater state and local control over school policy and practice, and a requirement that decision-makers solicit stakeholder input in developing plans for implementing ESSA.

Given this context, a number of perspectives shared by interviewees can inform next steps as ESSA is rolled out in New Mexico. In Figure G, we align elements of ESSA with the findings from our interviews.

Figure G. Opportunities for Policy Change in New Mexico

What does ESSA Say?	What did Tour Participants Say?
TOPIC: STUDENT ASSESSMENT	
States must assess student proficiency in math, reading or language arts, and science, but have more flexibility than under NCLB in the assessment system they use. *Under ESSA, the Department of Education will also be selecting seven states for an "innovative assessment pilot." (Application deadline was September 22, 2016.)*	*While perspectives varied, most agreed the current system of standardized assessment is problematic, although more than one third said testing may be necessary in moderation. They were impressed with the schools' alternative forms of assessment (e.g. demonstrations, portfolios) and thought these better prepared students for career and life.*
TOPIC: SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY	
States have considerable flexibility in designing a school accountability system. The system must include indicators of academic achievement, graduation, and student growth. In addition—and new since NCLB, the system must include at least one nonacademic measure of school quality or student success.	*Universally, interviewees expressed the importance of nurturing attributes in students beyond a mastery of reading, writing, and math. They perceived the Tour schools' emphasis on all the needs of the students—not just their academic achievement—to be critical for student success. Several noted that the climate and students supports they witnessed in the schools they toured were different from the environments of traditional public schools. These perspectives align with the ESSA requirement that school accountability systems include at least one nonacademic measure.*

TOPIC: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

At least once every three years, states must use their state accountability system to identify schools in need of "comprehensive support and improvement," and then implement improvement plans. States have flexibility in what strategies they use, as long as they are evidence-based and informed by a school-level needs assessment.

While interviewees did not discuss school improvement directly, they expressed strong support for NMCSL's three-pillar model for school design:

1. *Learning by Doing*
2. *360-Degree Support*
3. *Community Engagement*

Conclusion

In this report, we summarized the perspectives of the local community members, employers, and educational professionals who participated in a School Innovation Tour in April 2016. Our analysis of their end-of-tour discussions and interviews with 18 participants two and three months later suggest that (a) across sectors, many have a stake in our local educational system and are willing to commit their time and energy to support improvement; (b) the Tour exposed visitors to innovative strategies not common in traditional schools and visitors were impressed with what they saw; and (c) there are significant questions among engaged stakeholders about the impact our current standardized testing system is having on schools and students.

Moreover, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) opens up several opportunities for reform in how New Mexico assesses and supports students and schools. The New Mexico Center for School Leadership would do well to document the effectiveness of the three-pillar model—potentially seeking third-party evaluation—strengthening a case for alternative student assessment and a broader understanding of school accountability.

Join the Movement
Participate in education transformation!

Visit us!
Visit a school, judge an exhibition, collaborate on a community-based project. Email us to schedule a visit: tony@leadership-pdc.org.

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