



Equity Report

2020-2021



Table of Contents

4 Why Equity Now? ▶

6 Confronting Racism Through Self-Reflection ▶

8 X3 Internships Keep Students Connected ▶

10 The Response to Racism is Reciprocity ▶

12 Piloting New Pathways to Graduation ▶

14 We Can't Talk About Racism Without Social Emotional Skills ▶

16 What's Next? ▶

Why Equity Now?

By Tony Monfiletto,
Executive Director,
Future Focused Education



“I will be successful because of who I am and where I come from.”

Recharacterizing young people as assets to be nurtured instead of problems to be solved is fundamental to our mission at Future Focused. In our work with students, community leaders, families, and educators across the nation, we’ve identified racism as the cause, and poverty as the result of the unjust education system. The subtext of too many schools is that young people must check their identity at the door if they are to be successful and that’s what is causing the growing alienation from our high schools.

The future of education rests in the health and prosperity of our communities and re-engaging marginalized young people is essential to that vision. “Equity” requires that schools be recharacterized as community development assets which gives them a new and different purpose. Imagine what could be accomplished if schools were re-oriented away from complying with expectations from Washington DC, Santa Fe, or the district Central Office. The new mental model also requires us to envision a future where teachers are community leaders, social workers help build school cultures with unconditional positive regard for young people, and school administrators are focused on serving the community where they exist. Our close partners in the Leadership Schools Network (LSN) bring that vision to life, providing innovative and community-engaged education to young people disenfranchised by a white-normative school system.

COVID-19 has disrupted our school systems. We’ve stopped testing and many have claimed that somehow our biggest problem is “learning loss” when we know that the holistic needs of young people can’t be captured by such a simplistic notion. While we have learned about the new flexibility of online learning, it is no substitute for systems that dismantle institutional racism, provide connection, and give purpose to young people.

Here is an overview of how we are working to change the system that will be covered in this report:

1. We have done work internally to strengthen our ability to respond to the institutional racism challenge. We have been through DEIJ training and we have changed our hiring process to improve the diversity of our staff. As a result, five of the six new hires are people of color.
2. We knew that staying connected to our interns throughout the pandemic was essential so we doubled the number of students we served through a new virtual internship option that was focused on some of the most vulnerable students in our state.
3. The Reciprocity Project has created a school template that can be applied nationally that promotes equity through community development, which is the central mission of our new school development strategy.
4. The New Mexico Graduation Equity Initiative is our partnership with the New Mexico Public Education Department that helps correct for the structural racism inherent in the education system in New Mexico. It is piloting senior capstones and graduate profiles that are rooted in the lived experience, culture, and language of our local communities.
5. We’ve made social and emotional learning a priority across all our initiatives. When we equip our educators and young people with SEL skills, they have the tools to further dismantle the racial inequities of our time.

Equity in Action

Walking the Talk

Confronting racism through self-reflection and internal restructuring

We recognized that we needed a staff with lived experience that could enrich our conversations and strategies with new perspectives.



“You will transmit what you do not transform,” is a phrase repeated by Richard Rohr, a modern mystic from the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque.

In our case, the transformation happened on a multi-week Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice (DEIJ) journey with Michelle Otero. We started from the premise that if we want to have a positive impact on our community, then we must first tend to our own needs. We were asked to wrestle with



IMPACT

6 staff meetings focused on Racial Equity and Healing, led by [Michelle Otero](#)

6 new staff and
1 new board member

our own experiences and the broader culture of white supremacy that is the water in which we swim and the air that we breathe. The experience led us to reflect on how we can build an organization that pushes back against white supremacist culture by being more inclusive, forgiving, and embracing the vulnerability of our staff.

This reflective work has created a clearer vision of the organization that we want to become. To be good to young people, we need to be good to each other.

Our DEIJ work has led us to examine our own blind spots resulting from a lack of team diversity. We recognized that we needed a staff with lived experience that could enrich our conversations and strategies with new perspectives. We set out to recruit a more diverse team by building stronger connections with our community partners. Those partners then helped us find people of color to fill our new positions as we have grown. We're proud to report that five of our six new staff are people of color.

Finally, the DEIJ focus of the organization and our more diverse staff has helped us be clearer about our equity vision and the work that we do. It has been elevated by the Governing Board and was the focus of our retreat in July 2021.

Collaborate with us



Job Opportunities at Future Focused ▶

Equity in Action

X3 Internships Keep Students Connected

Increasing job access and social capital for marginalized youth

The X3 paid internship program is the most tangible example of our commitment to equity. It gives young people direct work experience with mentors in the private sector who can change their lives. Knowing this, we have dedicated ourselves to the transformational work of building relationships between employers and previously disengaged young people.

Staying Afloat During Crisis

In March 2020, the Future Focused X3 Internship Program had hit a high-water mark: nearly 60 interns in on-site internship placements, 50 business partners, and budding internship initiatives in Santa Fe and Cuba. Additionally, 35% of our interns had been hired by their former mentors. As the pandemic turned the world sideways, the X3 team kept its balance by maintaining focus on the students and the communities who needed us most. In a time of disconnectedness, we doubled down on our efforts to keep students connected to peers, professionals, and wrap-around supports.



As the pandemic turned the world sideways, the X3 team kept its balance by maintaining focus on the students and the communities who needed us most.

When the pandemic first hit, the number of onsite X3 internship placements was reduced by 70%. Undeterred, X3 partnered with the Leadership Schools Network and other partners to design virtual, group internships guided by industry professionals.

X3 Goes Digital

Recognizing Zoom's ability to disrupt geographic and school boundaries, the COVID School Re-entry Virtual Internship brought together students from six schools and three districts. The six-week experience was facilitated by X3 staff and guided by local community health experts from Presbyterian Hospital. Students immersed themselves in the pathology of the COVID-19 virus, examined the social-emotional effects it was having on youth, and analyzed the racial disparities of the COVID impacts in communities of color.



IMPACT

IN 2020-2021. . .

194 internship placements (**88%** were virtual or hybrid)

1 in 5 interns were pregnant or parenting

Interns received **\$110,000** in stipends

98% of interns were satisfied or very satisfied with their experience

Using this research, they created a [School Re-Opening Resource Guide](#) that they presented to local superintendents, principals, and state education officials, and were paid for their efforts. Importantly, the cohort's success illustrated how relevant, engaging, professional mentorship experience, with matching levels of social-emotional support, not only helped mitigate the effects of the pandemic and systemic racism, but created spaces where young people could thrive, develop skills, and feel a sense of purpose.

The design and facilitation of the Re-entry Virtual Internship was well received. It catalysed the creation of the "X3 Virtual Internship Resource Guidebook," which the X3 team used with collaborators to design and facilitate 12 distinct virtual internships over the next nine months, with topics ranging from Economic Development and Green Construction to Behavioral Health, Event Management, and Community Health Research. Approximately 200 interns participated, among them 30 young parents. The Future Focused X3 team fundraised \$30,000 to still provide each intern with a stipend for their work.

New Credentialing

In January 2021, the X3 team launched the X3 WorkReady Certificate pilot in a concerted effort to help interns parlay their work-based learning experiences into social capital when entering the job market. This certificate created a process by which interns could credential up to 10 fundamental professional soft skills. The associated learning plan, X3 site visits, and performance reflection tools culminated in a final intern presentation, juried by professional mentors, in which the intern was "credentialed" in discrete skills based on their performance.

State-wide Reach

As word of X3's innovative work-based learning efforts spread, the team conducted work-based learning trainings for school districts and other intermediaries both locally and nationally. In April, the New Mexico Public Education Department invited Future Focused X3 to join a design team to support counties, tribes, and pueblos in a \$7 million effort to create over 5,000 paid summer internships across the state. Future Focused designed a work-readiness curriculum to accompany the internships, as well as facilitated training sessions for mentors, intern coordinators, and county and tribal officials around the state.

Host an on-site or hybrid internship ►



Sponsor an internship ►



Equity in Action

The Response to Racism is Reciprocity

Building a new community development and education movement from the ground up with The Reciprocity Project

Tools + Resources

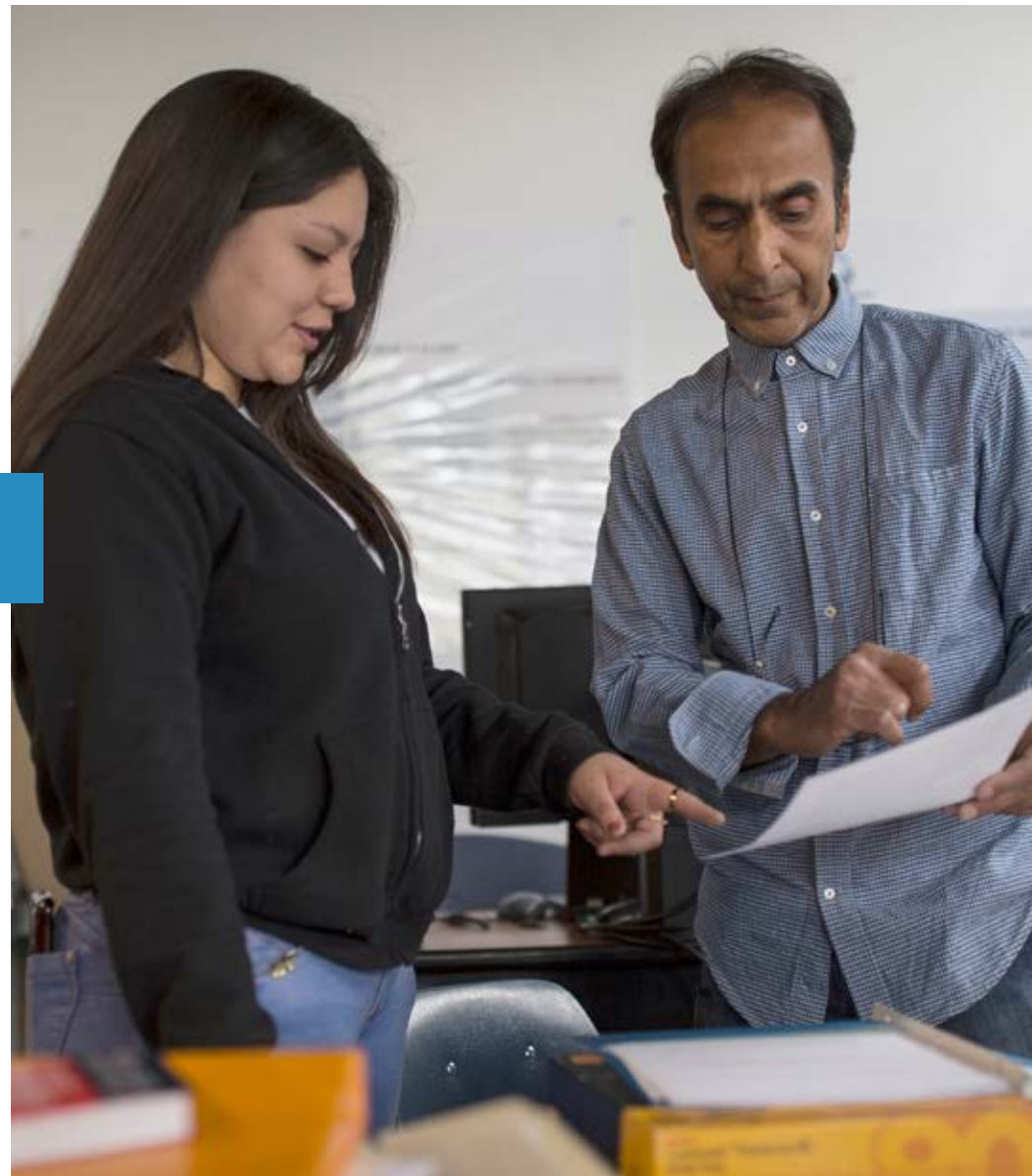
Racial Equity and Healing Goals ▶

The Reciprocity Project Distinguishers ▶

Racial equity is central to making our communities healthier and more prosperous. Racism is the key social determinant driving unjust health and educational outcomes. Addressing inequity demands that we invest in local communities.

To that end, we have launched The Reciprocity Project which is a growing coalition of nonprofits, community organizers, and education innovators that are working together to build a new kind of school from the ground up. Our partner in this initiative is the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE) located in Boston, Massachusetts. Our work is rooted in reciprocal relationships, where the voices and ownership from people and organizations will create schools that are truly in service to their communities.

Working with Reciprocity Project member Pillsbury United Communities (PUC) in Minneapolis, MN has been a revelation. They are fearless about rethinking their authorizing practice so that it does not perpetuate racism. As PUC told us about our relationship, “We were validated in our ideas, and that we weren’t crazy to be concerned about one racist system replacing another. We found an organization [Future Focused] with a similar worldview and a preciseness to their work.”



Our values dictated that we must let local communities lead.



IMPACT

IN 2020-2021...

95 participants at
8 Reciprocity Project convenings

9 [blogs on racial justice](#) and community/school reciprocity

Deep website engagement:

48 backlinks from
2 pages across
6 referring domains

924 website visits from
10 countries

The first Reciprocity Project school will be in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The Reciprocity Project got to know people working on the ground in Santa Fe and their existing efforts to make the city a healthier and more just city. As our relationships deepened, a new vision for a school began to emerge. The dialogue created a learning journey that forced us to face the fact that we were starting a school in a city where we hadn’t been invited. Our original plan was to create a school focused on the education professions. However, our values dictated that we must let local communities lead when it comes to public education.

As a result, we built a relationship with Earth Care, a local nonprofit that has 20 years of committed community work in the city. Our vision evolved, and our new school will be known as Community Leadership High School (CLHS)—co-created with Earth Care as our anchor partner. CLHS will be focused on social justice and community development, building reciprocity with the community, and building civic infrastructure.

Collaborate with us



[Join The Reciprocity Project here ▶](#)

The questions no one is asking series



How does racism generate inequities?



How do we solve for racism?



Why is our education system stuck in the industrial age?

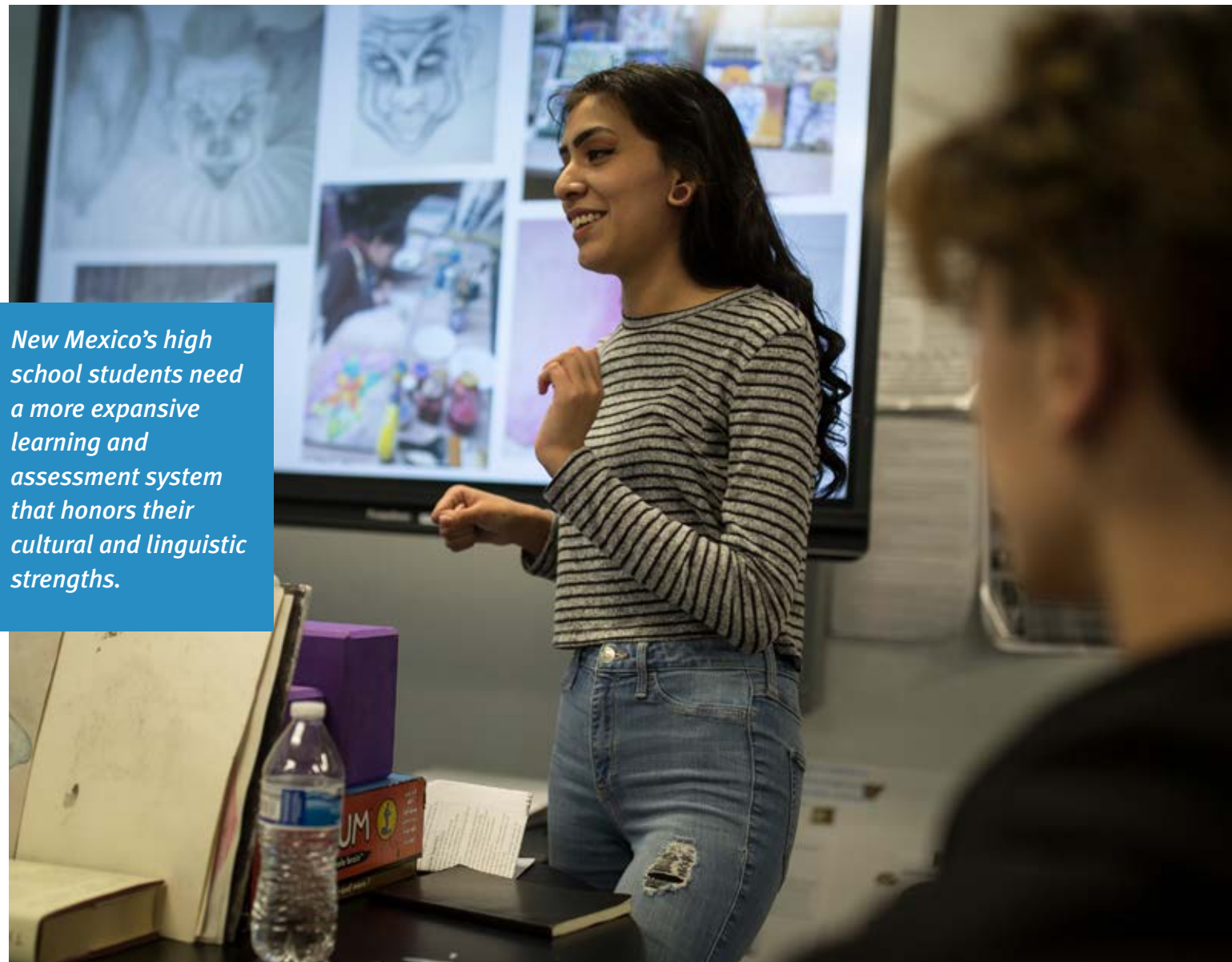
Equity in Action

Piloting New Pathways to Graduation

Replacing standardized tests that perpetuate systemic racism via the New Mexico Graduation Equity Initiative

Nearly three years ago, Judge Stapleton ruled in the landmark Yazzie/Martinez lawsuit that all New Mexican students have a right to be college and career ready and that the Public Education Department was not meeting this obligation to its students. To illustrate this inequity—specifically among students who are low-income, bilingual, and receiving special education services—the ruling pointed to low graduation rates and even lower proficiency scores in reading and math on standardized assessments.

We acknowledge that the needs of all New Mexican students have not been met but what if the measures themselves are broken? It is well-documented that [standardized assessments are inherently biased](#), especially given that their inception is founded in the [eugenics movement](#). While the SAT and other standardized assessments have admittedly undergone significant changes over the years, these metrics are fundamentally flawed and were intended to prove that white supremacy culture and values were superior to the language, culture, and knowledge that are essential to New Mexican families and communities.



New Mexico's high school students need a more expansive learning and assessment system that honors their cultural and linguistic strengths.



Impact

10 youth and **4** teacher researchers participated in our first Youth Participatory Action Research cohort

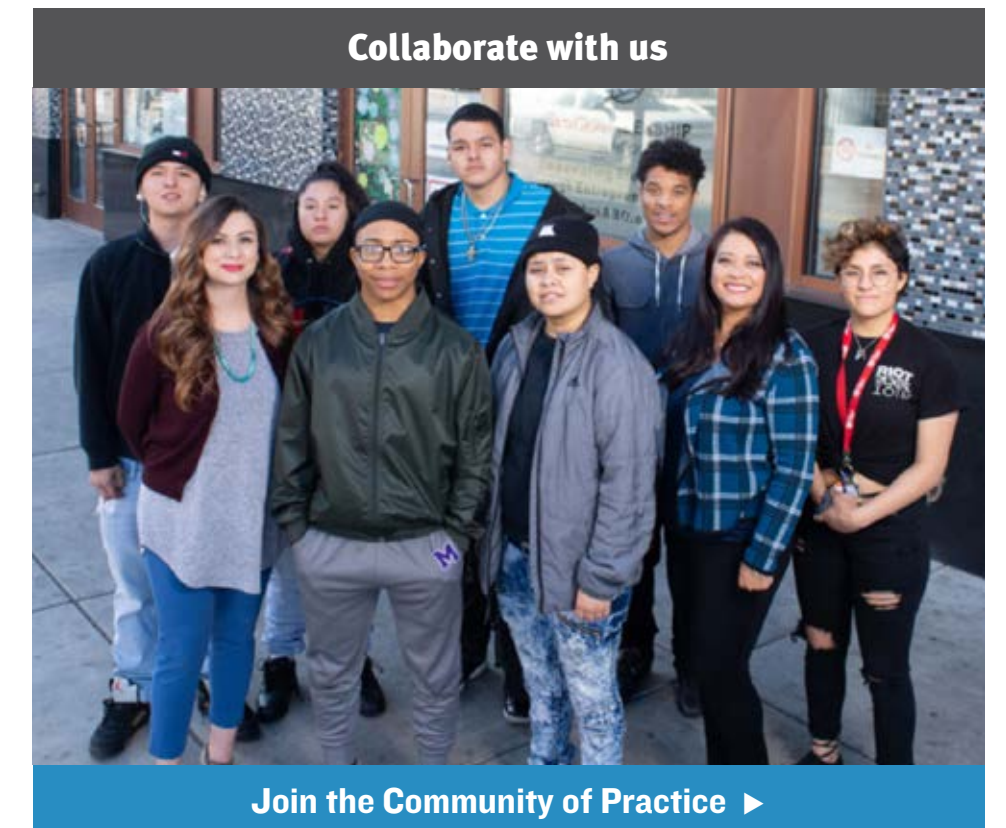
13 districts and **9** charterschools participated in the [Innovative Assessment CoP](#)

100% of CoP members agree community engagement is a necessary element of graduate profile and capstone design

Responding to a History of Structural Racism

As an answer to these concerns about standardized assessments as well as responding to community feedback about the undue amount of hours New Mexican students spent testing, the New Mexico Public Education Department developed a grant in partnership with Future Focused Education to begin work on a more holistic and community-based capstone assessment. The focus of this New Mexico Graduation Equity Initiative is “to address the education system’s history of structural and inherent racism. New Mexico’s high school students need a more expansive learning and assessment system that honors their cultural and linguistic strengths while providing feedback and other engaging opportunities—allowing students to take ownership of their learning, build strong identities, and see a rich future ahead.”

Along with others in the Future Focused-facilitated Innovative Assessment Community of Practice, the Leadership Schools Network are exemplars in the state for their community-engaged capstone assessments. A graduation capstone assessment is an opportunity for New Mexican students to demonstrate what they know and what they can do in a way that is meaningful to their community. In this effort, the NMPED has made clear that this assessment is for all students, not only the students who may not immediately meet the expectations of standardized assessments. In this way, the capstone is not an “alternative” assessment, as it is often dubbed, but is instead an equivalent to standardized assessments. This is an important step forward for New Mexican schools and valuing students’ lived experiences.



Collaborate with us

Join the Community of Practice ►

Equity in Action

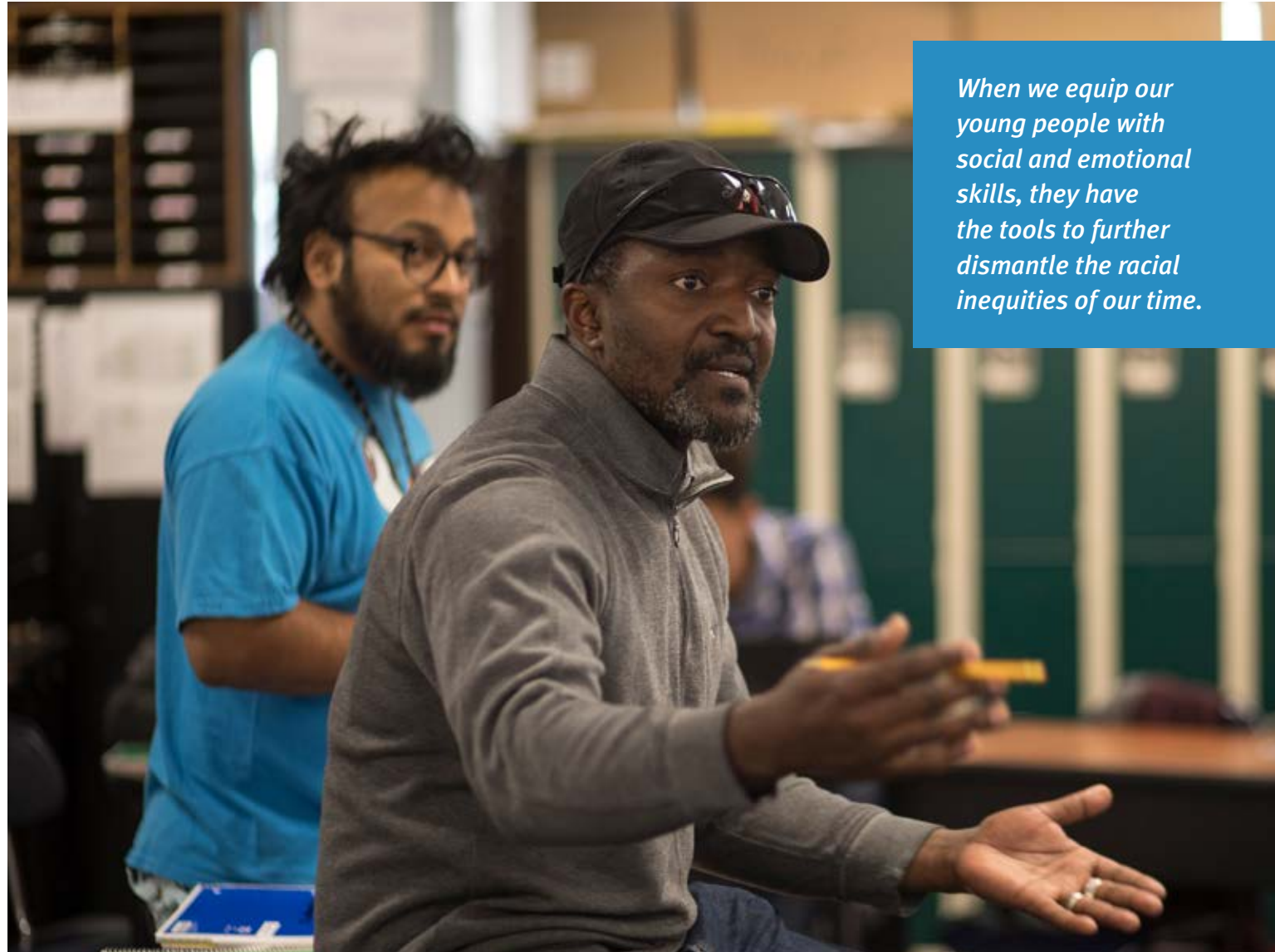
We Can't Talk About Racism Without Social Emotional Skills

Incorporating SEL into all aspects of equity work increases impact

Social and emotional learning has been tightly woven into Future Focused's equity work from the start. In order to bravely face unconscious bias, deeply rooted racial beliefs, and dismantle oppressive practices we must have hard conversations. Conversations that require self-management, relationship skills, social awareness, and self-awareness — cornerstones of social and emotional development — in order to make lasting change.

Our ability to hold these difficult conversations with grace, empathy, and deep listening determines whether we drive equity forward, or sow division and harm. Without SEL skill-building within systems, leadership, and individual educators, we won't be able to engage in the courageous, necessary conversations about equity.

Additionally, when we equip our young people with social and emotional skills, they have the tools to further dismantle the racial inequities of our time. Armed with deep SEL knowledge, we've seen our students and interns facilitate and hold space for a variety of difficult, controversial, and vulnerable topics, and become stronger communicators, empathizers, and problem solvers.



When we equip our young people with social and emotional skills, they have the tools to further dismantle the racial inequities of our time.

Impact

113 interns successfully completed cohort experiences that taught SEL

78% teacher researchers participated in our first Youth Participatory Action Research cohort

A minimum of 10% of all Leadership School Network adult staff will be trained in Youth Mental Health First Aid

Future Focused actively engaged **90** educators and members in the new SEL4NM chapter

Tools + Resources

[SEL4US national network](#) ▶

[Guiding Questions for Educators: Promoting Equity Using SEL](#) ▶

[The Aspen Institute's Pursuing Social and Emotional Development Through a Racial Equity Lens: A Call to Action](#) ▶

[Statewide SEL Framework in partnership with NM Public Education Department](#) ▶

We've worked to further SEL work across our organization and state in the following ways:

- **SEL4NM:** Future Focused was a founding member of the new state chapter of [SEL4US](#), which will promote and support high-quality social emotional learning (SEL) across New Mexico.
- **X3 Internship Practices:** Healing-centered, trauma-informed SEL practices have been incorporated into the X3 internship and cohort experience. These include mindfulness exercises, naming and sharing inner strengths, and other health and wellness activities based on identity and lived experiences. This has successfully built trust and community among the interns and their mentors allowing for deeper learning.
- **Teen Mental Health First Aid:** In 2020, Future Focused was awarded \$20,000 in grants from SEL in Action and the PNM Resources Foundation to provide paid internships for Youth Mental Health First Aid and Youth Peer Support training. The grant funds will also be used to support school staff that are taking leadership in this initiative and who become instructors of Youth and/or Teen Mental Health First Aid, as well as supporting LSN Student Support Directors to scale SEL assessment and evaluation mechanisms.
- **New Mexico SEL Framework:** Future Focused partnered with the NM Public Education Department to workshop and publish a new [state-wide social emotional framework](#) to help systematically implement SEL development into all schools and districts.

Collaborate with us



▶ If your organization is interested in professional development, SEL program development, technical skills training, or collaboration, [explore our Services page](#).

▶ [Join the SEL4NM network](#)

What's Next?



X3 Internships

X3 does what traditional school curriculum cannot: it gives young people the adult relationships in real world contexts that help them thrive. X3 is now seen as the standard by which other internship programs are judged in our state and nation.

Young people around our state are desperate for this opportunity. As the work world settles into the new normal, X3 continues its commitment to providing marginalized youth access to professional mentorship through work-based learning opportunities.

Next steps for X3:

- Embed pre-internship work-based learning curriculum into the Leadership Schools Network and other partner schools.
- Expand the Santa Fe internship pilot to serve as a springboard for growing work-based learning opportunities in northern New Mexico.
- Strengthen our comprehensive and responsive work-based learning opportunities for young parents statewide.
- Pioneer internships in new markets in high growth industries like outdoor recreation.
- Deepen our transformational relationships with young people and employers, thereby fostering more inclusive workplace environments.
- Ensure that future graduates from partner schools see the X3 NeXt alumni program as a viable post-graduation pathway toward college and career.

Our Services

Graduate Profile Development ▶

Senior Capstone Implementation Support ▶

X3 Internship Program Consulting and Training ▶

Explore our full menu of services ▶

Policy Work

Future Focused Education will become an expert that others look to in New Mexico to solve problems with community-based, student-centered learning. The combination of a new administration in Santa Fe, calls for racial justice, and COVID-19 has left a void that used to be filled by standardized testing. Accountability as a theory of change has not survived the political shifts and we have learned just how irrelevant those measurements are because of the pandemic. Our state is searching for new answers to help our schools better serve young people and their communities.

The New Mexico Graduation Equity Initiative senior capstone pilot is a radical departure from the top down centralized accountability system that asked students to check their identity at the door. The initiative has terrific potential for community, youth, and teacher development. As we move forward, we will be well positioned to partner with school districts to implement the new capstone initiative. Our challenge will be to move from a disruptive force to a co-creator of a new vision with a new set of partners at the local level. The opportunity is to push for vertical scaling—impacting our partners at all levels of the organization (teachers, administrators and the local board)—which is necessary for us to accomplish our mission and ensure our own sustainability.

Next steps for policy change:

- Engage families and caregivers to help us build a policy agenda that can meet their needs.
- Work with employers to create a new vision for education policy that actually makes our communities healthier and more prosperous.
- Offer a set of services to schools, districts, and the state that can help them meet the complex needs of their young people and the larger community.





Expansion Through Partnerships

Building on learnings from our collaboration with the Leadership Schools Network, Future Focused seeks to expand nationally to co-create innovative solutions for the young people and communities who have been most marginalized by the education system. We envision schools as agents for change and vehicles for community development. As we expand our influence beyond our home in Albuquerque, we commit to place local partners and young people in the driver's seat, and to always center equity and justice in our work.

The relationship with Earth Care in Santa Fe is a significant change for Future Focused. We have gone from being drivers to collaborators, learning alongside local partners who are already working on local equity issues. This new role will demand that we move to becoming capacity builders who can help guide our partners through the school development process rather than our prior role as institution builders.

As Future Focused partners with others to create new schools or reimagine the role of existing schools, we acknowledge the uniqueness of each community. Our approach is to grow seeds embedded in the local wisdom of each context, rather than replicating existing models that may or may not be appropriate to the culture and identity of a place.

In this new role, we practice reciprocity, offering our own experience while learning from the wisdom and assets of our partners, continually supporting each community's vision for equity.

