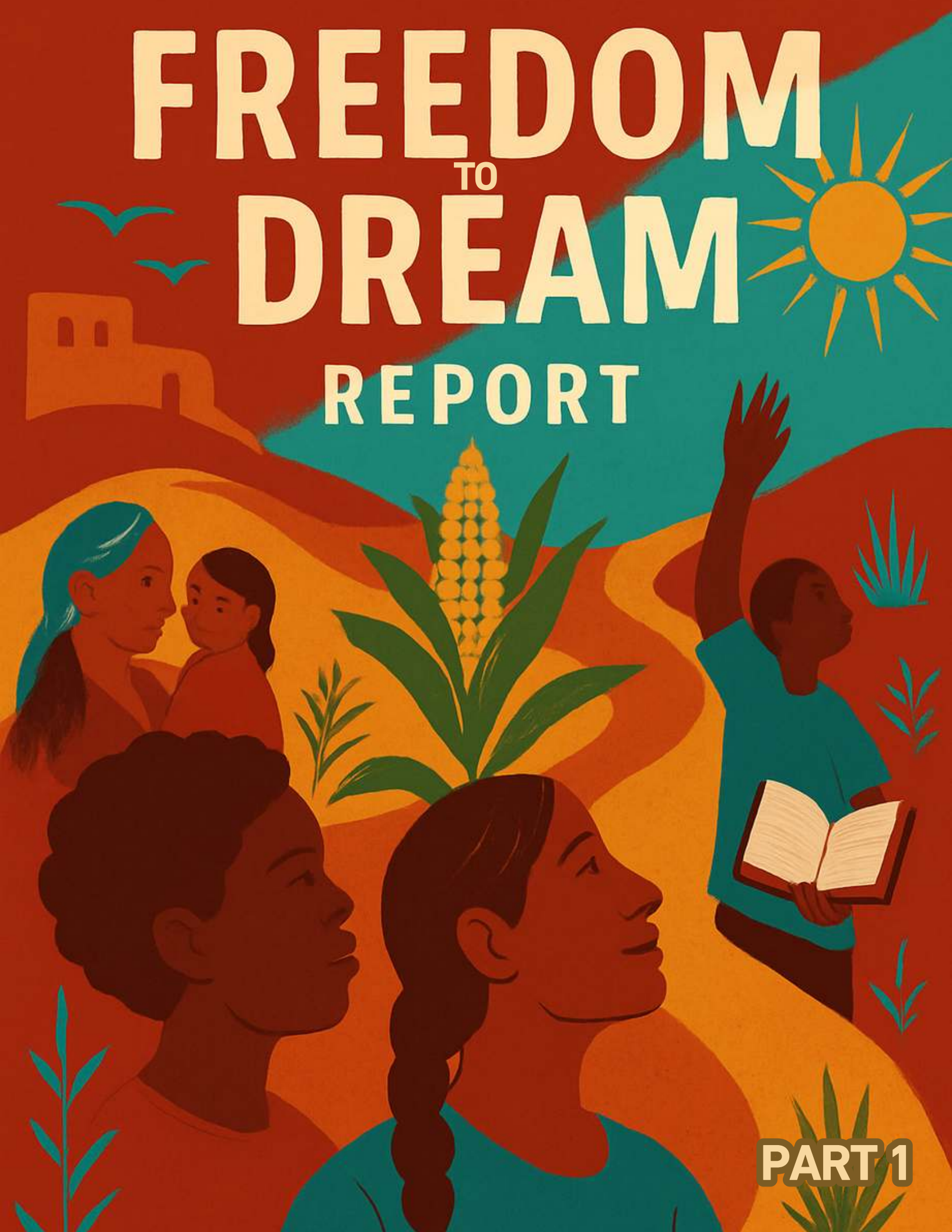


FREEDOM TO DREAM REPORT



PART 1

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INTRODUCTION

Transform Education New Mexico (TENM) is a coalition of passionate, dedicated advocates working to bridge the gap between New Mexico's youth, communities, and policymakers. We believe that every student—including students with disabilities, low-income

students, and those from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds—deserves an education that honors who they are and provides the resources they need to thrive. Our goal is to amplify youth and community voices to ensure that our education system reflects the needs and aspirations of all students.



TRANSFORM
EDUCATION
NM

Founded in response to the Yazzie/Martinez ruling of 2018, which declared that New Mexico must provide equitable resources for students to succeed, TENM has been at the forefront of advocating for structural change. While the ruling called for reform, many schools still suffer from systemic underfunding and inequities. The work we do is grounded in the principle that it's time to act. No more waiting. Every day that passes is another day our children don't have the education they deserve.

We are leading the charge for a more equitable, student-centered public education system. In this report, we share the foundation of a youth-informed policy agenda that will guide our advocacy efforts in the years ahead.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report is the result of a collaborative, community-driven process. We extend our deepest gratitude to the young people, families, educators, and advocates who generously contributed their time, energy, and insight. From the outset, participants understood that their input would be used to inform policy decisions—grounding this work in the lived experiences and priorities of those who care deeply about the future of New Mexico's students.

- **Youth Leaders:** We extend our heartfelt thanks to the youth leaders whose visions, ideas, and voices have shaped this policy agenda. Their passion, resilience, and commitment to change are the foundation of this report. They are the change-makers who inspire us all.
- **Coalition Partners:** We are grateful for the support and contributions of our community partners, including organizations that are committed to advancing educational equity across New Mexico. Your work on the ground continues to pave the way for transformative change.
- **Advocates and Educators:** We thank the educators and advocacy groups who have worked tirelessly to amplify the needs of students in New Mexico. Your expertise and commitment help steer our efforts forward.
- **Policymakers:** Special thanks to the policymakers and lawmakers who have joined the fight for educational justice. While the work is far from complete, your leadership and support are vital in moving the needle toward systemic change.

This report also serves as a call to action to all New Mexicans—students, families, educators, and advocates. Together, we can build a future where every student is given the opportunity to thrive.



WE ARE UNITED BY OUR DESIRE FOR SOMETHING GREATER

Ask any New Mexican if our education system needs transformation, and you'll hear a resounding "Yes." Across kitchens, classrooms, community centers and tribal libraries, the message is clear: our children deserve more than what the system was built to provide. We dream of schools that nurture every student's brilliance and prepare them for a future rich with possibility. While the vision is shared, it took a courtroom to make the state listen—and still, the promise of that vision remains unfulfilled. The 2018 Yazzie/Martinez v. State of New Mexico ruling echoed what our communities have always known: real justice in education means transformation—not tweaks. It means meeting the needs of those long ignored, and building something bold, beautiful, and worthy of our youth.

Efforts to undermine public education—whether by weakening federal support or rolling back commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion—stand in direct opposition to the spirit of this ruling. These actions threaten to erase hard-won progress and further dehumanize the very students the Court sought to protect. In the face of these challenges, we must remain steadfast in our commitment to advancing equity, honoring cultural and linguistic identity, and ensuring every child receives the education they not only deserve but are constitutionally guaranteed.

Freedom Dreaming 2037 is an initiative rooted in the belief that young people are necessary partners in designing the blueprint for the public education they want and deserve. It is both a response to systemic injustice and a bold declaration of what's possible when youth are trusted as architects of the future. In the face of ongoing challenges, we must remain united and unwavering in our pursuit of equity, the celebration of cultural and linguistic identity, and the promise of an inclusive and culturally sustaining education for every child—not as a privilege, but as a constitutional right.

Between 2023 and 2024, Transform Education New Mexico co-designed three regional Freedom Dreaming gatherings in collaboration with partners from across New Mexico. These events allowed us to engage in creative, community-driven advocacy, where young people shared their dreams and helped us understand what is missing, what is possible, and what we should push for. From a high school theater in Las Cruces in October 2023 to the halls of the Santa Fe Roundhouse in February 2024 and the auditorium at Northern New Mexico College in August 2024, each gathering brought together a diverse range of voices eager to collectively dream about the future for our youth.

STUDENTS DESERVE THE FREEDOM TO DREAM

An 18-year-old Indigenous student from Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo gave voice to the profound tension faced by many Native youth—the yearning to explore the wider world while feeling an unshakable responsibility to stay and fight for the survival and prosperity of her community. "Students like me have literally been stripped of the freedom to dream. And it's not ok," she declared, her words echoing the silent struggles of countless others. The challenges faced by the students at the center of the landmark Yazzie and Martinez lawsuits reflect the injustice of systemic failures rooted in a long history of neglect and inequality.



YOUTH VOICE IS THE MISSING PIECE IN POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Youth voice is not just an accessory to the policy process—it is the missing piece that can strengthen, refine, and future-proof policymaking in ways that benefit the state as a whole.

Students across the state have voiced a powerful vision: they deeply value educators and school personnel, calling for enhanced training, equitable salaries, and culturally relevant learning experiences. They reject policies that define “high-quality” education via excessive testing, rigid schedules, and one-size-fits-all approaches. Instead, they demand infrastructure that connects real life to their school experiences, alongside curricula that ignite inquiry, curiosity, and a sense of agency. They emphasize the importance of nurturing relationships with caring adults in schools and the availability of healthy, locally sourced food. Ultimately, students affirm that their physical, emotional, and mental well-being form the foundation for meaningful learning and lasting educational success.

A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN TO TRANSFORM EDUCATION IN NEW MEXICO

While history shows decades of underinvestment leading up to the landmark Yazzie/Martinez v. State of New Mexico court ruling, we don’t often acknowledge the accumulation of an education debt accrued over time. For this reason, it’s imperative to move beyond year-to-year “reforms” and move forward with the development of systemic solutions that will transform schools and support our young Freedom Dreamers’ vision for their futures.

OUR PROCESS & VISION FOR 2037

Freedom Dreaming 2037 was inspired by Robin D.G. Kelley’s *Freedom Dreams* (2002) and led by TENM. The scope of Freedom Dreaming 2037 is to facilitate a statewide process of engagement, centering young people in envisioning schools as places of healing, empowerment, and opportunity. Participants in this work have ranged in age from a small handful of late elementary students, to middle and high school students, to youth preparing to enter college—and even 20-somethings already working in their communities who were enrolled in public schools prior to the Yazzie/Martinez ruling. As lawmakers and advocates shared their own educational experiences alongside youth visions for the future, diverse perspectives across life stages and lived experiences helped ground the vision in a multi-generational understanding of what education has been and must evolve into.

To achieve this expansive vision—where by 2037, education in New Mexico will be culturally affirming, equitable, inclusive, and deeply transformative for all students across different family contexts, identities, backgrounds, and neighborhoods—TENM collaborated with anchor youth organizations such as The Learning Action Buffet (The LAB), NM Learning Alliance, and Moving Arts Española. These creative platforms bridged art, advocacy, and policy and were at the center of Freedom Dreaming 2037. Young people’s artistic expression offered a powerful lens for understanding the needs within our schools, illuminating challenges and opportunities in ways that traditional approaches often leave out.

Southern New Mexico



Central New Mexico



Northern New Mexico



OUR FREEDOM DREAMS

YOUTH-LED FREEDOM DREAMS FOR EQUITABLE AND TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

With support from the Resource Equity Funders Collaborative, Transform Education New Mexico co-designed three regional gatherings in collaboration with partners from across New Mexico between 2023 and 2024.

United by a powerful shared intention—to move beyond simply naming limitations and instead embrace boundless possibilities—each *Freedom Dreaming 2037* event became a space for imagining, in the words of Dr. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, “the world we seek to build.” These gatherings were rooted in hope, inviting youth and communities to dream boldly and unapologetically about the future of education.

The guiding principles of *Freedom Dreaming 2037* include:

- **Equity and Inclusion:** Centering the voices and lived experiences of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), along with youth of diverse gender identities, abilities, and socioeconomic backgrounds.
- **Empathy and Connection:** Fostering community by creating space for young people to connect, share their truths, and harness their collective power.
- **Creative Imagination:** Dismantling the confines of oppressive education systems and centering learning as a space for freedom dreaming—where youth lead with vision, expressing their dreams through art, storytelling, and creative exploration.



DOLLARS FOR THE DREAM

As part of the Freedom Dreaming 2037 experience, the “Dollars for the Dream” activity invited participants to envision what fully resourced, just, and joyful schools could look like in New Mexico. Grounded in hope and imagination, the activity was also designed to generate meaningful data by anchoring discussions in locally relevant priorities identified by regional partners across the state.

Participants explored key topics tailored to the needs and aspirations of their communities:

- Southern New Mexico: Biliteracy, Ethnic Studies, Hands-on Learning, Mental Health in Schools
- Central New Mexico: Bilingual Education, Healthy School Food, School Violence, Mental Health
- Northern New Mexico: Culturally Connected Learning, Hands-on Learning, Physical Safety, School Violence, and Belonging

To deepen understanding of school funding decisions, participants used a visual chart outlining the various entities that influence education policy. A companion table clarified common budget categories, including personnel, student services, and structured learning spaces—empowering communities to link their dreams to real-world budget advocacy.

A TARGET FOR CHANGE

Our youth experts set a bold target: transformative change by the year 2037. We recognize that meaningful progress takes time—but in a world where timelines drive action, we know it is essential to name a deadline. Setting a date grounds our dreams in urgency and accountability, making clear that change is not only possible, but necessary within a generation.

THE GOAL OF SCHOOLING

Young leaders emphasized that the true purpose of education should be to support student well-being—not to boost test scores or mold students into better workers. Grounded in this belief, each event embraced a holistic vision of school transformation, one that centers the whole child and the communities they belong to.

THE FREEDOM DREAMING CONTINUUM: FROM EARLY CHILDHOOD TO CAREER IN 2037

Young people have made one thing clear: their educational journey is not a collection of disconnected stages, but a continuous path that should be supported from early childhood through adulthood. They envision a future where every transition—from pre-K to kindergarten, from middle school to high school, and especially from high school into adulthood—is thoughtfully designed and fully supported.

Yet today, many policies and systems remain siloed, limiting the imagination of adults and the potential of students. The often-invoked phrase “college and career readiness” rings hollow when the system itself fails to empower young people to confidently step into their futures. Instead of preparing students for life, many feel underprepared and isolated at critical turning points.

Interconnected systems design offers a bold alternative. By aligning early childhood education, K–12, higher education, and workforce development, we can create a seamless continuum that prioritizes student well-being, academic growth, and long-term success. This requires visionary, unified state leadership willing to dismantle outdated silos and build inclusive pathways forward.

The 2018 Yazzie/Martinez decision affirmed what communities had long known: New Mexico’s education system is failing to meet the needs of its students—especially low-income Indigenous, Bilingual-Multicultural, Hispanic, Black, and students with disabilities. Despite existing laws, deep inequities persist. The ruling laid the groundwork for transformation. Now, with urgency and resolve, we must fulfill that promise—by investing in culturally and linguistically responsive education, uplifting student voices, engaging families, and meeting the needs of students with disabilities to ensure equity throughout the educational journey.



COLLABORATION IS KEY

Partnerships with local youth organizations were essential in grounding youth freedom dreams within local contexts. The graphic to the right are some of the highlights of our engagement and an overview of our timeline.

WE AREN'T DONE YET...

We acknowledge that meaningful youth participation still faces real barriers—including scheduling conflicts, limited transportation, and difficulties reaching rural and Indigenous communities. As we move forward, we are committed to expanding this work to more intentionally include rural, tribal, and incarcerated youth, ensuring deeper and more inclusive engagement across the state.

While these initial gatherings had limitations, the voices and visions shared at the three events offer a powerful starting point. They serve as early case studies in what we envision as a broader, ongoing process to uplift student perspectives and shape a truly representative, statewide agenda for education transformation.

NORTHERN (ESPANOLA)

80 Participants (High School) | 76% Youth.

1 Lawmaker participated out of 4 invited.

Regional Partner



CENTRAL NM (ABQ)

75 Participants (Middle & High School) | 71% Youth.

1 Retired Lawmaker participated out of 15 invited.

Regional Partner



SOUTHERN (LAS CRUCES)

40 Participants (High School) | 20% Youth.

4 Lawmakers participated out of 8 invited.

Regional Partner



INFRASTRUCTURE BETWEEN YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR COMMUNITIES

The current education system in New Mexico has consistently failed to provide equitable learning experiences, especially for students from marginalized backgrounds. Decades of deficit-based reforms have positioned education as a tool to "fix" perceived deficits in communities, rather than leveraging the strengths of those communities to enrich education. This approach has resulted in the disconnection of many students, particularly those who have been pushed furthest from opportunity, leaving a significant percentage of young people unengaged by traditional schooling. In response, the Yazzie Martinez Joint Non-Compliance Motion filed in September 2024 by both the Martinez and Yazzie Plaintiffs, underscored the necessity of a multicultural and multilingual framework that values students' unique strengths and backgrounds. This approach, echoed in statewide Freedom Dreaming gatherings, advocates for a system where students succeed because of their identities, not in spite of them. These gatherings allowed youth, educators, and community members to express their visions for an education system that prioritizes purposeful learning, well-being, and mentorship. They demand educational experiences that nurture students' sense of purpose and agency.

EMBEDDING COMMUNITY ASPIRATIONS INTO EDUCATION POLICIES

Culturally responsive, community-aligned learning and meaningful adult-student relationships that help students connect learning to their lives emerged as priorities in the Freedom Dreaming events. Further amplifying this vision, the message was loud and clear that we need to position youth as essential voices in education transformation. Their insights clarify that schools must be places where students feel understood, valued, and equipped to shape their own futures. Through continued youth leadership and partnerships with policymakers, New Mexico can build an education system that honors each community's dreams and prepares all students for success.

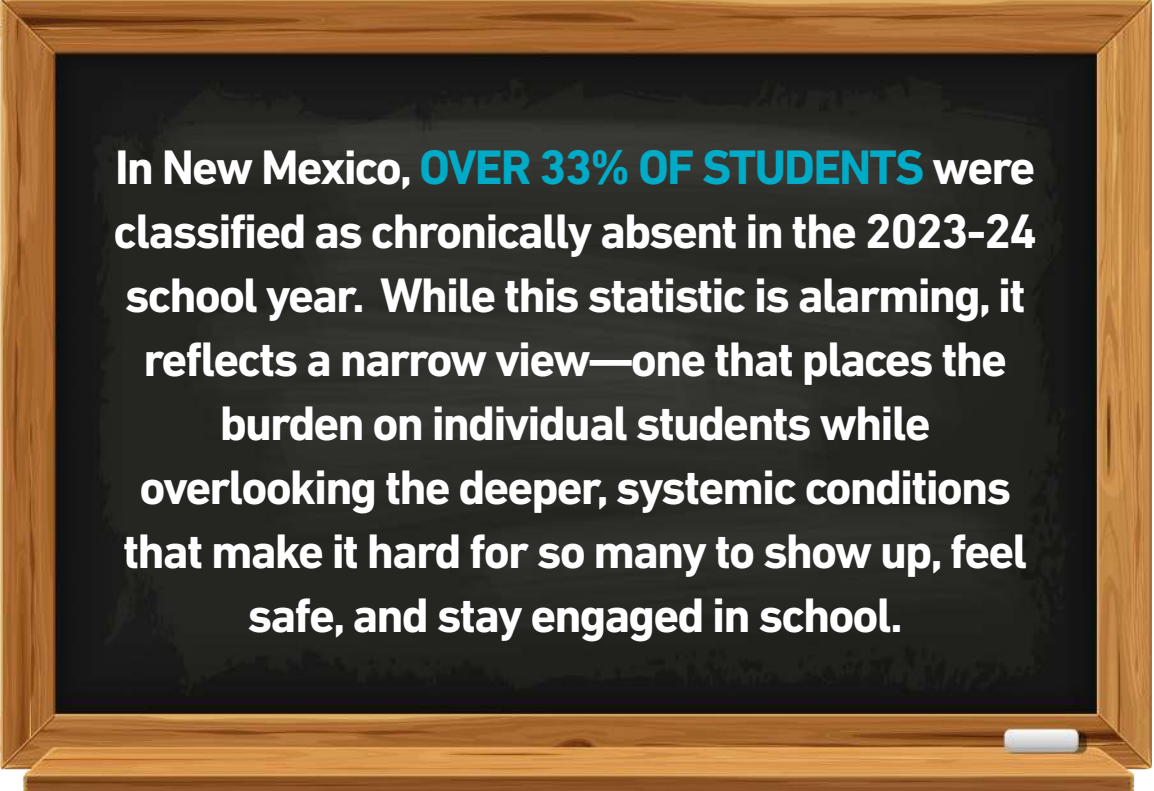
THE DATA GAP

WHY TRADITIONAL METRICS FALL SHORT IN CAPTURING WHAT STUDENTS NEED

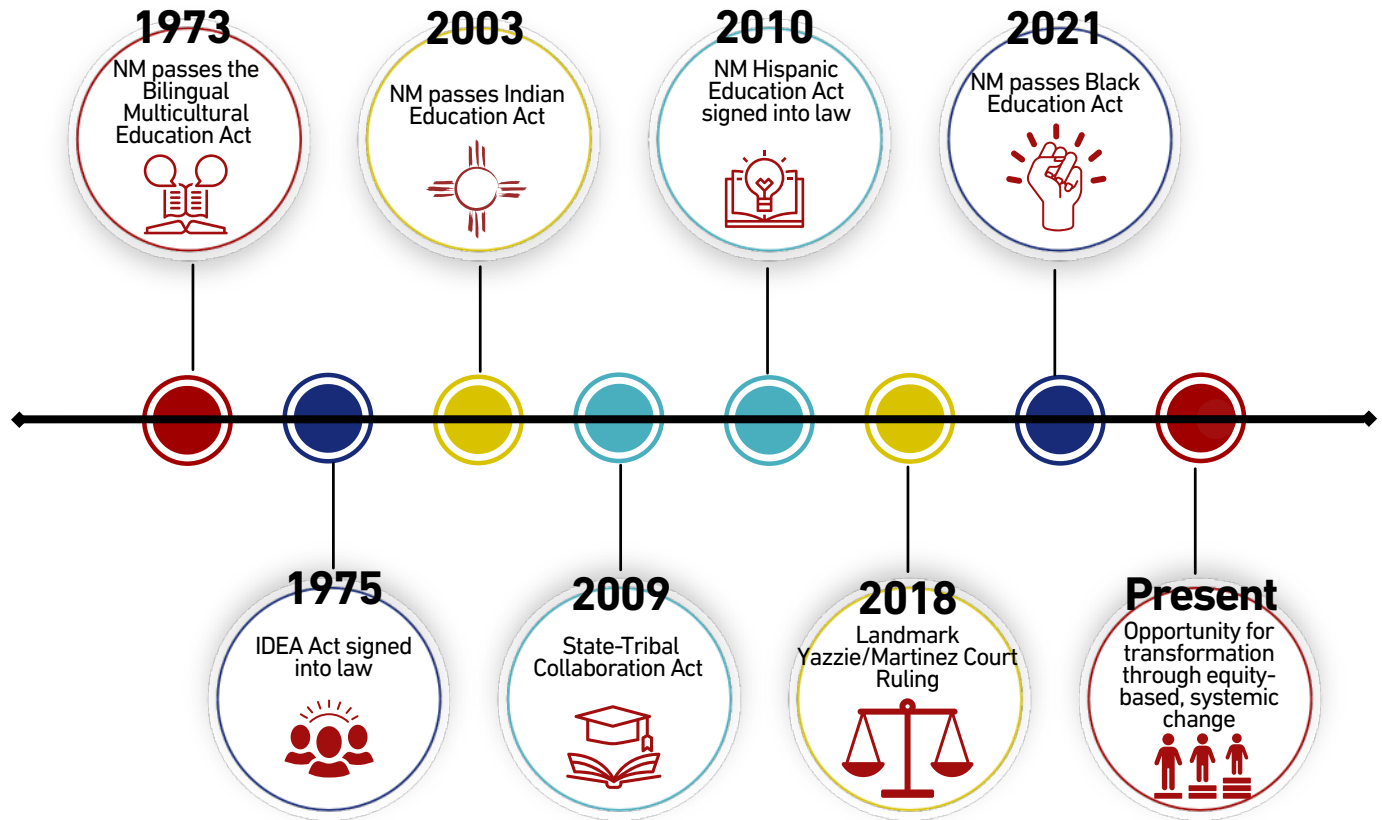
In K-12 education, traditional data collection focuses on four main indicators: enrollment, absenteeism, scores on standardized tests, and graduation rates. While these metrics offer some insights into student demographics and achievement, they fail to tell the whole story. Enrollment data, for example, informs funding and staffing decisions, but it doesn't capture students' individual needs or lived experiences. Similarly, proficiency scores in subjects like reading and math often reflect structural challenges that hinder students' success—factors that are largely unaddressed by conventional data.

Absenteeism data, used as a gauge of engagement, stops short of probing the reasons behind absenteeism. Traditional metrics offer limited insights into students' real needs and ignore the assets they bring to their education. Our youth are eager for an education that connects with their lives, including their cultural backgrounds and aspirations. This is especially relevant in New Mexico, where approximately 22% of students are English language learners, not accounting for other multilingual students who enrich their classrooms. Yet these strengths are rarely acknowledged or supported in a meaningful way. Many students also express a desire for safety—physical, mental, and emotional—which is often missing in their school environments. They want an education that values their whole selves and prepares them for life beyond school.

The reality is that our education system's existing indicators don't capture these needs. We lack metrics that evaluate whether students feel valued, heard, or supported. We don't ask if they are given a culturally relevant curriculum or if they feel secure in their identity at school. Instead of amplifying student voices, we rely on outdated metrics that obscure their experiences and devalue their insights. The current data landscape, grounded in deficit-based frameworks, overlooks the core question of how educational structures are failing to engage and support all students equitably.



In New Mexico, **OVER 33% OF STUDENTS were classified as chronically absent in the 2023-24 school year. While this statistic is alarming, it reflects a narrow view—one that places the burden on individual students while overlooking the deeper, systemic conditions that make it hard for so many to show up, feel safe, and stay engaged in school.**



TRANSFORMING NEW MEXICO'S EDUCATION SYSTEM FROM THE GROUND UP

In New Mexico, we have laws that outline the required specifications that define what a safe, equitable and culturally sustaining education system must look like. These include the Bilingual Multicultural Education Act (BMEA), the Indian Education Act (IEA), the Hispanic Education Act (HEA), the Black Education Act (BEA), and the State-Tribal Collaboration Act of 2009 requiring a government-to-government relations and tribal consultation. The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as well as state special education law, require the State to provide students with disabilities a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) in their least restrictive environment (LRE), and Section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits discrimination against students because of their disabilities.

New Mexico's children deserve more than what our education system was originally built to provide. While recent investments and landmark commitments to equity—through policies like the BMEA, IEA, HEA, BEA, and federal protections for students with disabilities—represent important progress, they remain layered on top of an unstable foundation. The current system was not intentionally designed to support the cultural identities, languages, and lived realities of the students it now serves. Like airplanes or bridges, schools must be constructed to community-informed specifications—where identity, belonging, and safety are built into the blueprint, not added on after failure. Young people have told us clearly what they need: caring, inclusive schools that affirm who they are and meet them where they are. The disconnect between aspiration and implementation speaks to a deeper design flaw. A truly equitable education system is not something we hope into being—it is something we construct with purpose, precision, and accountability. If we are serious about protecting and nurturing our most precious cargo—our children's lives and dreams—then it's time to confront how our current definitions and assumptions, including labels like 'at-risk,' must be fundamentally reframed.



REFRAMING 'AT-RISK': RECOGNIZING SYSTEMIC FAILURES

Deficit thinking remains one of the most persistent obstacles to this shift. As Dr. Richard Valencia argues in *Dismantling Contemporary Deficit Thinking*, labeling students as “at-risk” obscures the role that schools and systems play in creating those risks. When we reframe students as being placed at risk by the system, we acknowledge the truth: it is not students who are deficient, but rather the structures around them that fail to support their success. This shift in language is more than symbolic—it helps redirect accountability from students and families to the systems and policies that shape their lives.

Research and evaluation practices, too, must evolve. Mainstream methods often claim objectivity while ignoring the biases baked into their design. From the questions we ask to the data we prioritize, traditional approaches can reinforce the very inequities they should be exposing. For instance, standardized testing—frequently upheld as an “objective” measure of learning—often reflects disparities in opportunity rather than actual ability. Without examining whether all students have access to the resources they need to succeed and the opportunity to learn what they are assessed on, we risk mistaking inequality for individual failure.

True educational equity requires a different lens. One that centers root causes, honors community knowledge, and values what students bring to the table—not just how they perform on a test. It also requires changing what we measure and how we assess learning. We must track not only academic progress but also the presence—or absence—of the resources, relationships, and supports that allow students to thrive.

By embracing an asset-based approach and creating space for student and community voices, we can reimagine success in broader, more human terms: personal growth, cultural belonging, critical thinking, and connection to community. These are the indicators that matter. And when our systems reflect those values, we’ll finally begin to meet the promise of education for all of New Mexico’s students.



EMERGENT THEMES & DATA ANALYSIS

Six key themes emerged from community discussions about education in New Mexico. These themes represent a shared vision for improving the education system and addressing inequities, particularly for students from marginalized communities. Each theme reflects the needs and aspirations of youth, families, and educators who are committed to creating a more inclusive and supportive educational environment.

1. **Funding and Resources:** Calls for increased funding for teacher pay, classroom resources, infrastructure, and mental health services. Youth want input on budget development and resource allocation to ensure that funding is distributed equitably to support the needs of all students.
2. **Educator Preparation and Support:** Focuses on better pay and benefits for teachers, improved teacher training in areas like mental health, culturally responsive teaching, and inclusive education. Ongoing support for educators is vital to ensure they have the tools they need to succeed.
3. **Language and Culture as Assets:** Emphasizes the importance of biliteracy, culturally relevant curricula, and the support for Native languages. Students and families want educators who understand, value, and integrate diverse cultures into their teaching, creating nurturing environment for all learners.
4. **Student Support and Well-Being:** Highlights the need for more mental health services, individualized attention, positive student-adult relationships, and access to healthy food in schools. Students call for environments that prioritize their emotional well-being and provide the support they need to thrive academically and socially.
5. **Community and Family Engagement:** Advocates for stronger school-community partnerships, increased family involvement in school activities, and accessible community events. Families and communities seek more meaningful ways to collaborate with schools to enhance student success and well-being.
6. **Systemic Change and Accountability:** Calls for youth to have an active role in shaping education decisions and policies, changes to student learning assessments, and a focus on student interests and needs. Students want more accountability from the education system, ensuring that it is responsive to their voices and committed to equity.



FUNDING AND RESOURCES

YOUTH-IDENTIFIED NEEDS

Students voiced a strong call for increased funding to support teacher pay, classroom resources, infrastructure improvements, and mental health services. They emphasized the importance of safe, clean, and comfortable facilities and stressed the need for well-maintained schools with updated classrooms, kitchens, and recreational areas. Youth also highlighted a desire for a broad range of courses—especially hands-on and work-based learning—tying these improvements directly to better engagement, learning, and social interactions.

YOUTH PRIORITIES

Establish regular student input in the following areas:

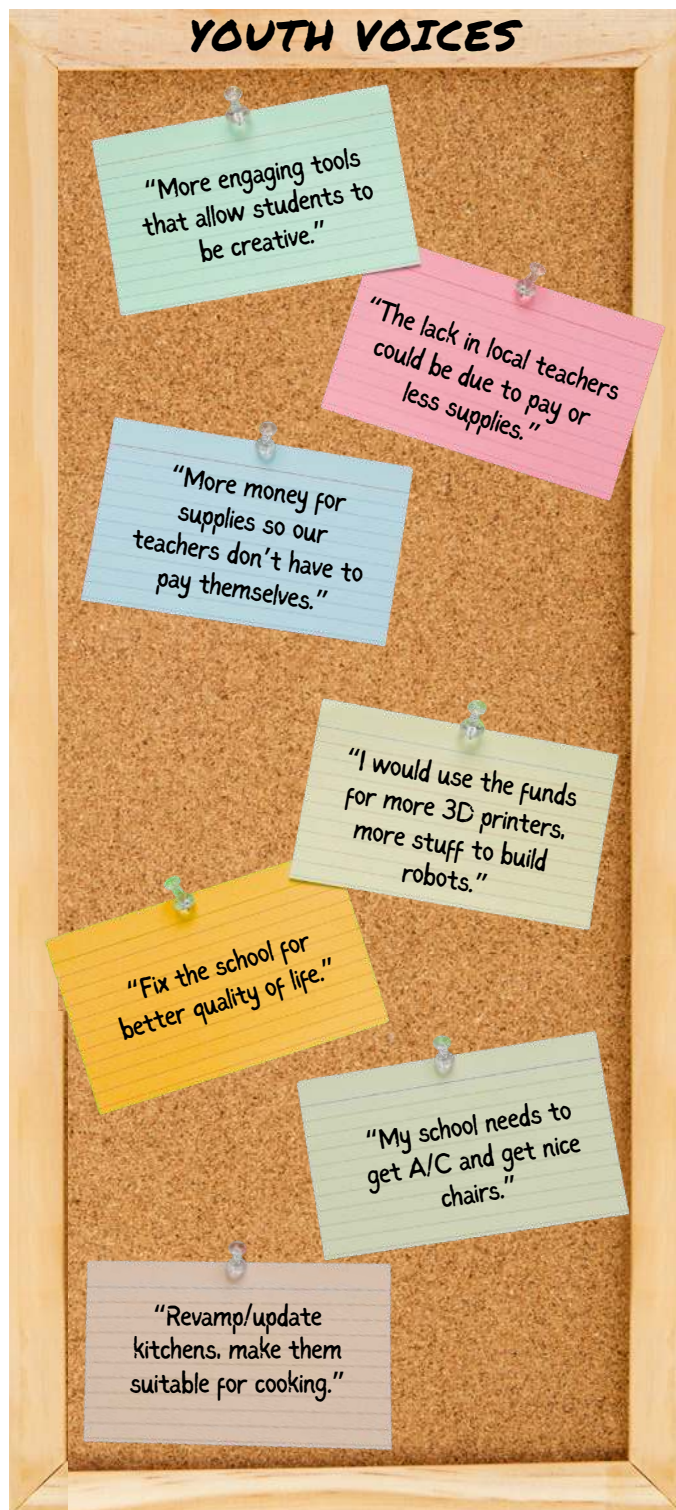
-  Budget development
-  Assessing availability & functionality of classroom supplies, equipment, & technology.
-  Evaluating whether facilities meet students' learning needs.

Incorporate annual student feedback in designing courses that reflect their interests. Shift toward hands-on, real-world learning experiences to enhance engagement and practical skill-building.



ALIGNMENT WITH YAZZIE/MARTINEZ FINDINGS

The Yazzie/Martinez decision highlighted inadequate funding as a major barrier to providing an adequate education, especially for students placed at risk by the system. The call from youth for more and better resources echoes the court's findings on the need for more equitable funding to address educational disparities.

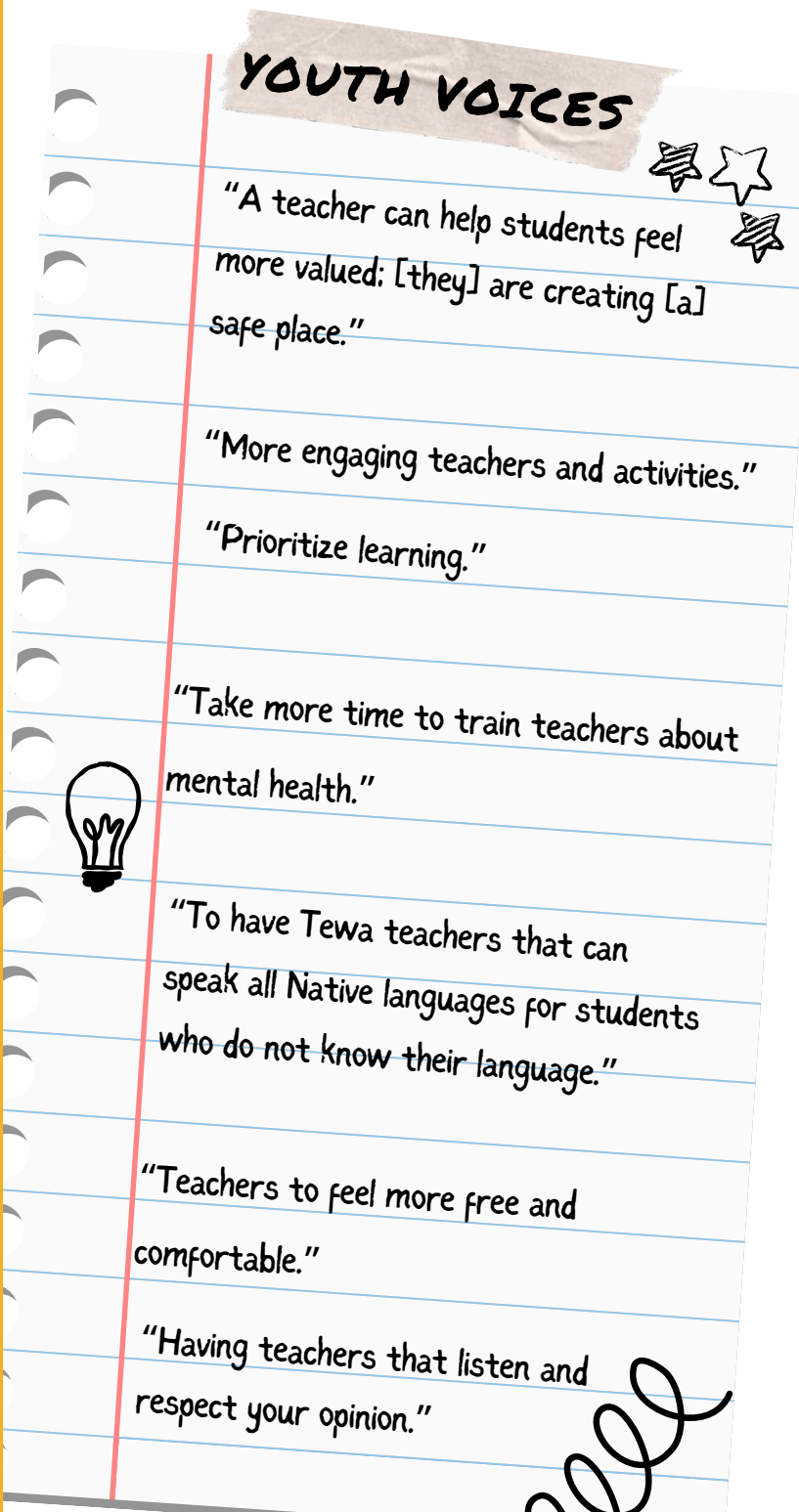


EDUCATOR PREPARATION AND SUPPORT

YOUTH-IDENTIFIED NEEDS

Youth participants call for better teacher pay and benefits to attract and retain quality educators, especially in terms of serving bilingual, Native, and special education students. They stressed the need for high quality teacher preparation programs because they want well-rounded educators trained in areas such as mental health, biliteracy, and culturally responsive teaching. They also noted that teachers should customize their approaches based on the unique interests and needs of their students. They pointed to the importance of ongoing support and training for teachers and the need to have teachers who see themselves as learners.

YOUTH PRIORITIES



Give teachers more time to learn about how to focus on students' identities when planning lessons and how to build classroom environments that feel caring and supportive.

Empower students to take ownership of their learning and engage in thoughtful, critical reflection on the material they are studying.

Create special programs and groups for bilingual teachers to learn together and support each other. Offer meaningful training that helps teachers grow in teaching both languages, with the help of expert biliteracy coaches.

Provide training for school leaders and staff to understand and respect diverse cultures, promote fairness, and address racism. Offer leadership development to help school leaders make fair decisions and set a positive example, while ensuring that diverse voices are included in important school decisions.

ALIGNMENT WITH YAZZIE/MARTINEZ FINDINGS

The ruling emphasized the necessity of qualified, well-prepared educators. Investing in educator training and retention aligns with the decision's focus on the need for high-quality teaching staff capable of effectively serving New Mexico's diverse student population.

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE AS ASSETS

YOUTH-IDENTIFIED NEEDS

Youth spoke loud and clear about the importance of biliteracy—ensuring students become fluent in both their home languages and English—as well as the need for culturally relevant curricula, materials, and expanded support for language teachers and programs to preserve Native languages and Spanish spoken across the state. There is a strong desire for culturally competent educators and a curriculum that reflects the diverse histories and cultures of New Mexico. They noted that a more relevant and localized curriculum with things such as school gardens, outdoor learning, ethnic studies, and bilingual education could foster a stronger sense of identity among students.

YOUTH PRIORITIES

-  Hire more Native language teachers and expand Native language programs.
-  Support teachers and administrators in enacting culturally responsive/sustaining teaching to include a more holistic approach about the people (cultures, languages, etc.) and lands in New Mexico.
-  Ensure teaching includes more complete local and state history.



ALIGNMENT WITH YAZZIE/MARTINEZ FINDINGS

The court recognized that culturally and linguistically responsive education is essential. It directed the state to do more to support Native American students and English Language Learners.

"Learning more about different cultures (Native American land and culture)."

"Allow students to express their culture."

"Local learning, students learning about their environment, history of the generations of local people, producing positive outlooks on NM."

"[Have] culturally relevant gardens/farm."

"Cultures, histories of NM to form understanding."

"Building student identity."



STUDENT SUPPORT AND WELL-BEING

YOUTH-IDENTIFIED NEEDS

The youth told us they need more mental and behavioral health services, individualized attention, and programs that cater to students who may need more support. Students named a correlation between school violence and the need for increased trauma informed support services. Mutually respectful and positive relationships between students and adults in the schools surfaced as a high priority. Another example of the breadth of well-being that youth seek from their schools pertains to fresh and healthy food, preferably locally grown.

YOUTH PRIORITIES

-  Greater access to mental health resources, social workers, and behavioral health services is requested, as well as spaces like reset rooms to support student well-being.
-  Prioritize individualized learning, flexible schedules and diverse course offerings.
-  Healthier and fresh locally grown food.
-  Mutually respectful relationships that honor student's identities and foster a sense of belonging.



ALIGNMENT WITH YAZZIE/MARTINEZ FINDINGS

The decision noted that New Mexico must provide sufficient resources for ELL students and students with disabilities. The youth identified priorities confirm the need for adequate student centered support structures.

"Teachers [have] real conversations with us."

"Create a welcoming, warm/inviting [environment]."

"Introduce/integrate students to get to know each other."

"More student friendly environments that allow students to be themselves rather than being stuck at desks with uncomfortable chairs."

"Invest in adding more lessons and programs that benefit student well-being."

"I dream for an easy going environment where school is more than a place of discipline and being unwanted."

"[Have] cultural sharing opportunities."

"Give students reasons to go to school."

"We need to trust adults to feel safe in school."



COMMUNITY AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

YOUTH-IDENTIFIED NEEDS

The youth identified a need for stronger school-community partnerships and increased family engagement, which are critical to fostering supportive learning environments. We heard from them that schools should focus more on welcoming and engaging families. They also noted how important it is for schools to develop stronger ties with local businesses and community organizations given the different ways they can support student success.

YOUTH PRIORITIES

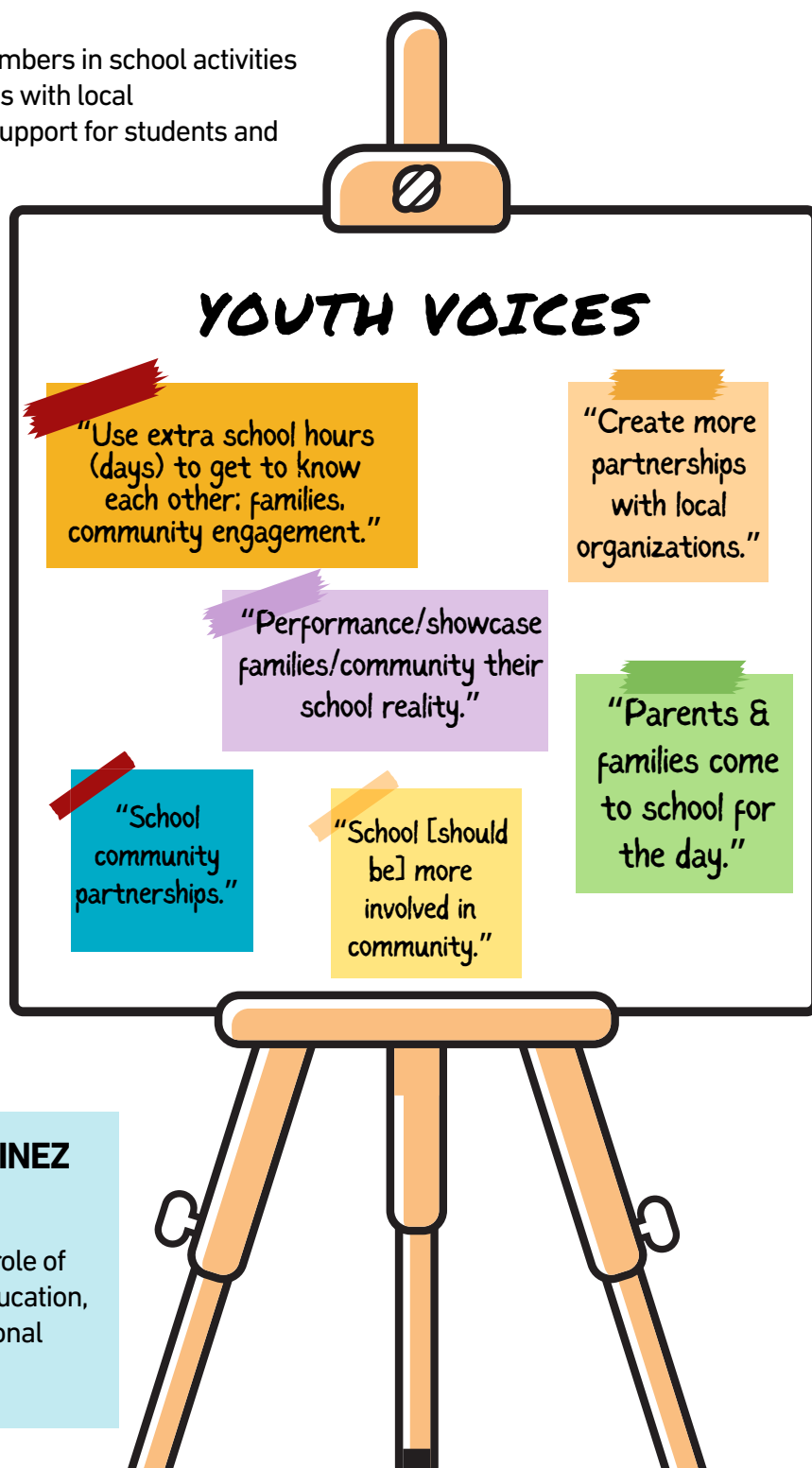
Engage families and community members in school activities and decisions, and build partnerships with local organizations to provide additional support for students and their families.

Host community events that are designed to be accessible and welcoming for working families. These events should be scheduled at convenient times and provide opportunities for all family members, regardless of age or work commitments, to participate.

Recognize the diverse needs of these families by offering childcare, transportation support, and multilingual resources, ensuring that everyone feels included and able to engage.

Create welcome centers and hire family liaisons.

Provide work-based learning opportunities and other community-anchored experiences.



ALIGNMENT WITH YAZZIE/MARTINEZ FINDINGS

Yazzie/Martinez stressed the important role of family and community involvement in education, especially in terms of enhancing educational equity and student success.

SYSTEMIC CHANGE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

YOUTH-IDENTIFIED NEEDS

The youth responses clearly illustrate that they want to take an active role in shaping their educational environment, decisions, and policies that affect them. They are acutely aware of what is needed in the schools and they want to be more involved at every level of the system from the classroom to the state level. Assessment of student learning is one example posed by the youth where major improvements are possible. This relates to their call for a change in priorities and a greater focus on what students are genuinely interested in. Youth participants also highlight the need for open communication and authentic community gatherings to ensure that all voices are heard and respected in the educational process.

YOUTH PRIORITIES

-  Participatory budgeting where youth have a voice.
-  Youth involvement in school boards.
-  Co-created student-centered goals.



YOUTH VOICES

- ☒ "To create a program where a school's individual education funds can be influenced by student opinions (participation budget)."
- ☒ "Change priorities."
- ☒ "Students as a resource to schools."
- ☒ "I wish we could have activities that helped us enter what we learned into our lives."
- ☒ "WHY do we spend so much on testing?"
- ☒ "Requirement that districts demonstrate student participatory budget surveys done in order to get funding."
- ☒ "I should not be in class for 7 hours a day."



ALIGNMENT WITH YAZZIE/MARTINEZ FINDINGS

The Yazzie/Martinez ruling points to the need for systemic changes, including improved accountability, transparency, and participatory decision-making. The ruling called for a complete overhaul of the education system to address the needs of historically underserved students.

FROM VISION TO ROADMAP: THE FREEDOM TO DREAM

At the heart of the movement for education justice in New Mexico—and across the country—is a fundamental question: Who gets to dream?

Young people are urgently calling on adults to truly listen—not just to their ideas, but to their pain, frustration, and hope. This report reflects their readiness to help shape the plans that will transform schools by 2037. They may not know every detail of policymaking, but they know what it feels like to be trapped in a system built without them. Too often, while we speak of giving them wings, we simultaneously clip them—leaving them to navigate their future in the shadows of a broken system.

PREPARING FOR ACTION

This report reflects more than data—it reflects the collective voice and vision of New Mexico's youth, families, educators, and communities. The insights shared in Part 1 illuminate what students are experiencing now and what they need to thrive. But naming the need is only the beginning. Turning these priorities into meaningful, measurable change requires action.

Part 2 of this report will serve as the bridge between what we've heard and what must happen next. It will present concrete recommendations that translate student-identified priorities into policy solutions grounded in equity, sustainability, and cultural relevance. These recommendations will be shaped by continued collaboration with youth, families, educators, tribal leaders, and community partners—ensuring they are not only responsive, but rooted in the realities of those most impacted.

This process positions Transform Education New Mexico and our partners to co-lead the development of solutions alongside legislators, education officials, and advocates statewide. By grounding our policy agenda in lived experience and aligned legal mandates—such as those outlined in the Yazzie/Martinez decision—we are building a shared path forward. One that is bold, actionable, and co-governed by the very people who have been left out of decision-making for far too long.

As we move toward Part 2, we invite policymakers, allies, and systems leaders to walk with us—not just to hear the calls for justice, but to help deliver on them.





TRANSFORM EDUCATION

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