

FREEDOM TO DREAM

AUTHORED BY TRANSFORM EDUCATION NM,
GROUNDED IN THE VOICES OF YOUTH ADVOCATES



OVERVIEW:

ELEVATING YOUTH ADVOCATES TO TRANSFORM EDUCATION

Every overworked educator and every empty chair where a student should be is **evidence of a system leaking brilliance and creativity**. Yet, in these same classrooms, we witness the resilience of teachers innovating against all odds and the untapped potential of students stripped of their freedom to dream by our current system—despite their constitutional right to a sufficient education. Our **"Freedom to Dream" Report presents powerful data and recommendations that highlight the youth-driven vision for the future**, underscoring the urgent need for action to achieve critical goals by **2037**.

In 2023 and 2024, Transform Education New Mexico collaborated with its coalition partners to host three regional gatherings for youth. 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 shape the future for our youth.

THE CHALLENGE:

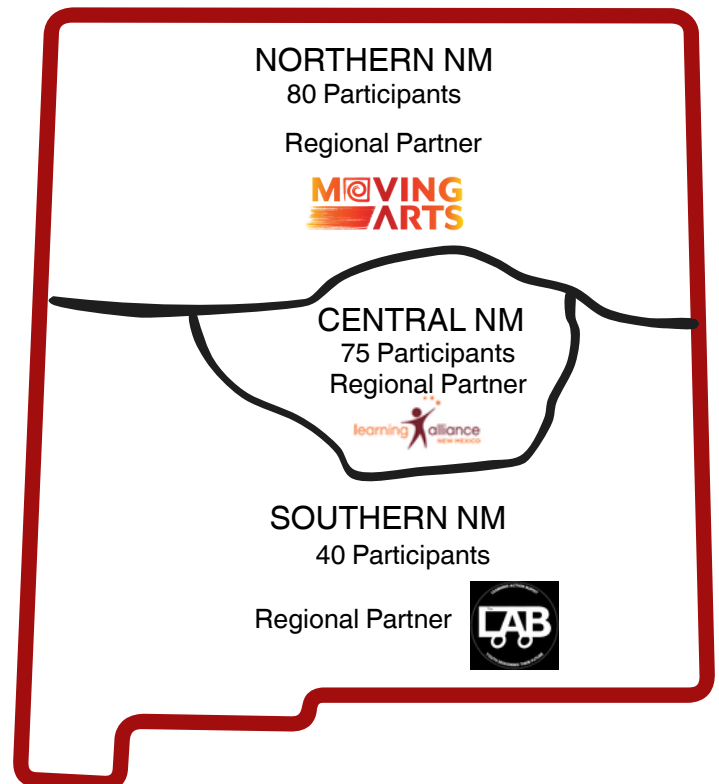
OVERLOOKED REALITIES YIELD UNSOLVED PROBLEMS

One in three students in New Mexico is missing over 10% of school days, thus signaling a profound misalignment between what schools provide and what students need. The voices of students—those most directly impacted by these shortcomings—make this clear. **Many are effectively "walking away" from the system**, not always physically but in terms of trust, enthusiasm, and belief that schools are designed with their success and welfare in mind.

This **misalignment stems from a lack of clear, student-centered direction in education policy and practice**. Schools often operate within outdated and disjointed frameworks that prioritize standardized metrics over holistic learning, wellness, and preparation for real-world challenges. The result is **a system that overlooks the cultural, linguistic, and personal realities of students, particularly those from historically underserved communities**.

"Education in New Mexico could be boundless. all it takes is that first step."

- Cruz Rivas, Youth Leader



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ONE SHARED VISION:

TRANSFORMING EDUCATION TO BEST SERVE NM STUDENTS

In our Freedom Dreaming gatherings, young people voiced strong support for transformative systemic shifts over short-term policy efforts that fail to center their needs and concerns. Our Freedom Dreamers want lasting changes—that **cultivate liberatory/educational spaces while also including appropriate, multilingual and culturally relevant instruction as the foundation of learning**—to show them that policymakers care and understand their needs. This vision is especially **critical for students with disabilities and those who have been pushed out of schools and are now caught in the juvenile justice system.**

Students across the state have voiced a powerful vision:

- 1 Invest in equitable educator support and development:** Provide targeted professional development, culturally relevant training, and equitable compensation for educators and school personnel, especially in schools serving underrepresented communities.
- 2 Redefine high-quality education beyond standardized testing:** Shift away from excessive testing and rigid schedules, prioritizing personalized learning experiences that meet the diverse needs of all students, particularly those in marginalized communities.
- 3 Foster a supportive, relationship-driven school environment:** Create an environment where all students, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds, can build meaningful relationships with caring adults who support their academic, emotional, and mental well-being.
- 4 Ensure access to mental health services and nutritious foods:** Provide nutritious, locally sourced meals and comprehensive mental health services, prioritizing schools in underserved areas to ensure that all students have the physical and mental health support they need to thrive.
- 5 Empower students with agency and culturally relevant learning:** Develop curricula and school infrastructures that reflect the diverse cultural backgrounds of students, connecting learning to real-life experiences and giving students from underrepresented communities a voice in shaping their educational experiences.

THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW

CENTER YOUTH AS EXPERTS

Engage in direct dialogue with youth and families.

LISTEN , UNDERSTAND AND ACT

Advocate for full and sustained funding, and be a champion for equity by understanding education sovereignty of our Pueblos, and tribes.

ADVOCATE FOR AND ENGAGE IN SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY

Shared accountability calls on lawmakers to prioritize equitable solutions, implement policies based on input from all stakeholders, and ensure an inclusive education system that serves the community's needs.

FUTURE-READY CONTINUUM FROM EARLY CHILDHOOD TO CAREER

Students have spoken loud and clear that their **educational journey to adulthood is a continuum, not a series of disconnected stages, and they envision a future where each phase— from early childhood to career— is seamlessly integrated to provide consistent support, opportunities, and pathways for success.**

Interconnected systems design integrates early childhood education, K-12, higher education, and workforce development to ensure academic success, well-being, and career readiness. It **requires unified, forward-thinking state leadership.**

Six years ago, the Yazzie/Martinez ruling underscored a critical truth: New Mexico's education system is failing to meet the needs of its students. Despite existing statutes supporting Indigenous, Bilingual-Multicultural, Hispanic, Black, and special education, systemic inequities persist. The ruling laid the groundwork for transformative change, but action is overdue. **By advancing culturally responsive education, parental involvement, and equitable access, we must now fulfill the promise of an inclusive system that serves every student.**



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