

Renewing our Schools,
Securing our Future



A Report on:

Workforce Development: Ensuring Students Have the Tools to Succeed

September 28, 2004 – Albuquerque, New Mexico

PARTICIPANTS

Task Force Members:

- John Buchanan, former Congressman, State of Alabama
- Louis Caldera, President, University of New Mexico
- Delia Pompa, Principal, DMP Associates and former Director, Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs
- Chauncey Veatch, National Teacher of the Year, Coachella Valley High School, Thermal, CA

Special Guest:

- Honorable Bill Richardson, Governor, State of New Mexico

Panelists:

- Veronica Garcia, Secretary of Education, State of New Mexico
- Letitia Chambers, Executive Director, New Mexico Higher Education Commission
- Michael Glennon, President, Technical Vocational Institute – Workforce Training Center
- Joseph Martin, President, Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute
- Tony Monfiletto, Founder and CEO, Amy Biehl Charter School
- Lorenzo Gonzales, Master Teacher, Math and Science Academy

Student Perspectives:

- Katie Griffin

INTRODUCTION

Workforce Development: Ensuring Students Have the Tools to Succeed, was the third of six public education forums lead by the *Renewing our Schools, Securing our Future* National Task Force on Public Education. This forum was held on September 28, 2004, at the Technical Vocational Institute-Workforce Training Center in New Mexico and was attended by approximately 80 people. Participating Task Force members heard from distinguished panelists to learn more about the commitment of New Mexico to improving secondary and postsecondary education, the financial and technical assistance needed to support these efforts, and the ability of learning institutions to tailor their offerings to accommodate changing workforce requirements. This event provided a forum for local and state leaders, education advocates, parents and students, and community members to discuss New Mexico's efforts to prepare its workforce for the challenges of the 21st century.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Most jobs that pay a living wage today require applicants to possess a high school diploma, at the very minimum. Even those positions that do not formally demand postsecondary training often necessitate college-ready skills. Given these facts, the economic viability of individuals, communities and our nation depends upon the existence of a workforce equipped with complex communications and critical-thinking abilities. Postsecondary education and training are critical to the development of these requisite skills.

To develop such a prepared workforce, we need to strive for a seamless P-20 system that begins with the pre-K to 12 education system graduating more students who are ready to enter postsecondary education and training programs. Multiple pathways through high school, leading to postsecondary education and training should be instituted, and all fully prepared students should have access to postsecondary opportunities. Those students who do not reach grade twelve, or do so without an adequate education, should also have access to continuing learning opportunities. If the United States is to keep pace with other developed countries, we must make every effort to ensure that students graduate from high school fully prepared and have access to postsecondary education and training opportunities that equip them with the capabilities to thrive in today's workplace.

WELCOME

The Honorable **Bill Richardson**, Governor of New Mexico, welcomed the *Renewing our Schools, Securing our Future* Task Force to his state and emphasized the significance of aligning the state's educational system with its economic and industrial needs. He called for a number of efforts at the federal level to support this objective. Gov. Richardson suggested that federal legislation should link higher education to workforce preparation, not just in terms of rewards and results, but also in terms of funding. He voiced his support for the No Child Left Behind legislation but reiterated the importance of

providing adequate financial resources to support state initiatives aimed at workforce development. Gov. Richardson pointed out that while the federal government currently provides only nine percent of the state's education funding, every dollar is critical. New Mexico directs half of the state's overall budget to education.

Gov. Richardson also focused on the critical role of workforce training in order to meet the increasing demands of the kinds of new jobs that have been created in the state. Providing an example of the link between workforce training and good jobs, he cited the film industry, which has been a boon to New Mexico's economy in recent years. Film industry growth is outpacing the number of existing film crews able to support these endeavors. In order to address this dilemma, the state has recently made a large investment in creating workforce training programs at community colleges to prepare New Mexicans to enter the film business and to upgrade the skills of those who already work in this industry.

Gov. Richardson also discussed the importance of centralizing the coordination of the higher education system to ensure that community colleges and four-year institutions work in concert to most effectively promote the completion of postsecondary degrees and the entrance of prepared students into the workforce. He concluded by thanking panelists and the audience for their work on the issue of education, which is critical to the success of both New Mexico and the nation.

PRESENTATION HIGHLIGHTS

Participants in this forum discussed workforce preparation and analyzed New Mexico's successes and challenges. Panelists described state- and school-level initiatives to ensure quality, with a particular focus on secondary schools. They also introduced a local community college, a tribal school, and an area charter school.

Veronica Garcia, Secretary of Education for the state of New Mexico, discussed New Mexico's efforts to address education issues in a collaborative, rather than silo-based, fashion with officials responsible for the health and economic well-being of state residents. She also noted four ways in which the state is attempting to close the achievement gap:

- Recruiting, retaining and training highly qualified teachers
- Setting higher expectations and providing the support to ensure that students are prepared for the challenges of higher education and the workplace
- Creating a P-20 education system, and
- Creating and filling Secretary and Assistant Secretary level positions for education within the state government, including Secretary for Indian Education and Assistant Secretary for Rural Education.

Garcia also commented on the importance of local-level public-private partnerships and including employers and the public in developing educational standards. She concluded by calling for a renewed focus on the three "Rs" that federal, state and local level

governments must possess: *rigor* in terms of expecting strong results from students, *relevancy* in terms of ensuring that the education system prepares students for careers, and *relationships* in terms of working together to help students achieve.

Letitia Chambers, Executive Director of the New Mexico Higher Education Commission, spoke on the challenges of preparing a workforce to meet the demands of today's economy. By 2010, Chambers said, 67 percent of jobs will require some form of higher education. New Mexico has room for improvement in terms of preparing students to meet this standard. Today, 60 percent of New Mexican high-school students graduate. Approximately 36 percent of those who graduate from high school go on to college. In sum, only 11 percent of all New Mexicans who enter the 9th grade graduate from college. These statistics mean that New Mexico is not providing adequate replacements for many of the high-wage, high-skilled workers who are between the ages of 50 and 64 and are soon to leave the workforce. Partly a result of these trends, the state's average wage stands at 73 percent of the national average, down from 83 percent in 1980. Chambers pinpointed inadequate high-school preparation as one problem, citing that 70 percent of New Mexico's college students require some remedial course work. She pointed out that New Mexico has some programs that are proving successful at motivating underrepresented populations to pursue their learning in a more focused way, but the state needs to reach out more to middle- and high-school students. Chambers called for the state to sponsor more tutoring programs and to reach out to inform students of their financial aid options. She also suggested that New Mexico enhance its financial aid system and create a new need-based financial aid program.

Michael Glennon, President of the Technical Vocational Institute – Workforce Training Center, addressed the role of community colleges in preparing a well-trained workforce and outlined several of the Technical Vocational Institute's (TVI) initiatives. TVI is a full-service community college offering a wide array of occupational programs. TVI prepares students to transfer to four-year institutions and offers programs designed to keep pace with the state's employment needs. TVI achieves this by reaching out to the business community, asking industry representatives what skills and knowledge they need in their employees, and soliciting their curriculum-related suggestions. Much of the college's success stems from its unique way of combining programs, offering customized training, and incorporating mentoring into the curriculum. TVI boasts a 96 percent placement rate in a student's field of study, 95 percent employer satisfaction rate, and a 96 percent student satisfaction rate. Glennon concluded by stating that increased funding for Pell grants would be a tremendous help to his institution, as well as other community colleges and technical/vocational training centers.

Joseph Martin, President of the Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI) discussed the role tribal colleges play in New Mexico's efforts to develop a highly-skilled workforce. Four of the nation's 33 tribal colleges are located in New Mexico. Tribal schools play an important role by working to promote culture and language while educating students and assisting them in formulating their future educational and career plans. He also noted that tribal schools are primarily funded by the federal government and, consequently, are particularly vulnerable to changes in financial support at the

national level. SIPI leaders realize that education and economic opportunity are inseparable and have redesigned the learning experience by grounding education within the context of the larger community. For example, the school reaches out to business leaders to identify the skill sets they are looking for in employees and engages in dialogue on how best to prepare and train students to enter the workplace. Martin described several areas of study available at SIPI, including greenhouse technology and hydroponics, geo-spatial technology, and bio-mass energy.

Tony Monfiletto, Founder and CEO of Amy Biehl Charter School, addressed the adequacy of current high-school graduation requirements in preparing students for postsecondary education. Today, meeting the requirements for high-school graduation at most schools entails completion of a specified number of course credits that Monfiletto said is problematic because credits do not always translate into knowledge. He suggested that graduation requirements should mandate the demonstration of skill and learning, rather than only the accumulation of credits. At Amy Biehl Charter School, for example, students must pass two college-level courses in order to qualify for graduation. This enables students to prove that they are ready to leave high school and succeed in college. Monfiletto said this approach also encourages a shift in responsibility away from the lone teacher and toward the entire learning team, thus facilitating inter-departmental relationships among faculty. This provides students with moral and emotional support while preparing them for college. Monfiletto acknowledged that this reconceptualization of the meaning of high-school graduation needs more exposure, more partners and more schools willing to implement it. He closed by stating that without a link to meaningful graduation requirements, the phrase “all children can learn” is merely rhetoric.

Lorenzo Gonzales, Master Teacher at the Math and Science Academy, discussed the importance of teacher training and professional development, particularly as it relates to educating children in math and science. He described the Math and Science Academy, which is sponsored by the Los Alamos National Laboratory, and spoke of his work in providing professional development geared toward helping teachers boost their students’ knowledge of these subject areas. Gonzales cited a National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) study showing that between 1992 and 2000, 60 percent of New Mexico’s students equated the learning of math and science with rote memorization. Gonzales attributes this misconception to difficulties teachers have in conveying math and science concepts to students in an effective way. He, along with other master teachers, works to improve teacher quality among 72 K-9 educators in five of New Mexico’s school districts. He concluded by advocating that the state’s education department, institutions of higher education and K-12 educators come together to develop effective ways for teachers to reach their students in order to prepare them for a lifetime of learning.

TASK FORCE AND PANELIST DIALOGUE

Panelists and Task Force members then entered into a dialogue on next steps, teacher/student interaction, parental involvement, federal funding and educational opportunity. Below is a synopsis of the discussion that ensued.

Next Steps:

Panelists offered the following as recommended next steps to strengthen the state's workforce training and education curriculum:

- The use of a systemic approach, as opposed to a programmatic approach, to student preparation for the workforce should be favored. A systems approach enables reform and creates a mechanism whereby real and radical changes are possible.
- The use of evidence-based decision-making and planning should be instituted in a systematic manner.
- School founders and leaders should offer greater support for instituting change, particularly in the area of redefining high-school graduation requirements.
- Cognitive coaching and other methods should be used in professional development to make teachers more reflective and thoughtful in the classroom.

Teacher/ Student Interaction:

Panelists were asked to share their perspectives on the interaction between teachers and students and to offer ways in which teachers can most effectively reach their students. The following suggestions were offered:

- Continue to nurture teacher/student relationships. Review the evidence, and redefine strategies in light of what produces successful results and what fails to do so.
- Redefine teacher preparation as a continuously developing process. Provide on-going professional development. Allow teachers time to receive training.
- Redefine what is considered a working year for teachers, and build in more time for professional development. Provide adequate funding for teacher training.

Parental Involvement:

Panelists were also asked to provide their thoughts on parental involvement. The following points were made.

- College-prep level coursework should be the standard school curriculum, and parental consent should be required for the student to deviate from that norm. Many parents and students today are not aware of which high school courses are required for college admissions.
- The concept of parental involvement should be redefined in light of the fact that in many families, both parents work outside the home. Parental involvement is not limited to membership in formal school organizations. Make parents aware that their participation in other ways is equally appreciated.

Federal Funding:

Panelists were asked to provide suggestions for areas in which the federal government can most improve its support. The discussion centered on Pell Grants and Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Act funding.

- Currently in New Mexico, merit-based aid is increasing while need-based aid for higher education is declining. The purchasing power of the Pell Grant has decreased since the 1980s, and it needs to be restored.
- Perkins funding, especially for community colleges, is just as important as is funding for regular K-12 education, and there needs to be more federal funding for both. It is unwise to focus funding on K-12 at the expense of higher education, or vice versa.

Educational Opportunity

One panelist emphasized that standards are important, but that tying institutions too tightly to meeting certain criteria can have a chilling effect on schools' willingness to take risks on some students. For example, one aspect of opportunity within the educational system is that a student could drop out of high school, earn a G.E.D., enroll in a community college, transfer to a four-year program and perhaps eventually go on to complete a doctorate. While at any point along this spectrum, such a student might look like a huge risk for a school to admit, but it is important to give students an opportunity to prove themselves.

STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

Katie Griffin, a student majoring in Physical Education at the University of New Mexico, discussed the importance of physical education as a component of the school curriculum. She also addressed the ways in which physical education teachers are incorporating new learning styles and integrating physical education with other subject areas, noting that funding of these initiatives is critical.

Secretary Garcia responded to Griffin's concerns, mentioning the connection between physical education and overall public health issues, such as obesity. Garcia said the state is looking at ways to ensure that physical education is institutionalized in the system.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

To gain additional insight into New Mexico's workforce education and training issues, Task Force members and panelists turned to the audience to hear about their experiences, concerns and ideas. The highlights of this discussion follow.

Career Academy:

High school career academies play a role in workforce development and preparation for postsecondary education and training. TVI, for example, accepts high school courses for credit if they meet curriculum requirements. Dual credit is permitted. TVI is also looking for connections to magnet and charter schools. Career academies and career strands are encouraged as long as the career pathways have a multitude of levels and high rigor.

Initiatives:

It was recommended that Task Force members look at, and consider expanding, the three initiatives mentioned below.

- Skills assessment: identification of the needs of employers with respect to math, reading and teambuilding skills, to name a few.
- Career information delivery system: a computerized system designed to provide the public with information on the state’s job needs, a list of employers and available jobs, and identification of “jobs of the future.”
- Job forecasting: development of a 10 year forecast that outlines the state’s needs, educational requirements and wage rates.

Entrepreneurship:

New Mexico is one of the nation’s leaders, per capita, in creating new companies. It’s also a leader in failure of businesses on an annual basis. The state needs to a better job of linking emerging markets with needs. Because the voices of small businesses aren’t represented at the table, outreach to businesses and communities is important when matching skills with employer needs.

