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# Sustained, Bold Reform

Investing in  
Teacher Leadership in  
New Mexico





Chiefs for Change is a nonprofit, bipartisan network of diverse state and district education Chiefs dedicated to preparing all students for today's world and tomorrow's through deeply committed leadership. Chiefs for Change advocates for policies and practices that are making a difference today for students, and builds a pipeline of talented, diverse Future Chiefs ready to lead major school systems.



# SUSTAINED, BOLD REFORM: Investing in Teacher Leadership in New Mexico

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After many years of education reform, top-down change in public education has become a relic of the past. Nowhere is this more clear than in New Mexico, where **the New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED, or PED) is leading the way on sustained reform by investing in teacher leadership**. This approach empowers the adults closest to students to impact policy by engaging in a broader effort to improve the quality of education across the 'Land of Enchantment.'

Armed with critical federal Title II–A funds, New Mexico sought out teachers to lead this movement in 2014 by identifying the state's most effective educators and leveraging their collective expertise. Over the last three years, the state education agency has continued this work, building a variety of channels through which teacher leaders are empowered to effect positive changes in the field, ranging from programs in which teachers build curriculum or provide feedback on state initiatives, to those where they influence policy or share messages with their peers at the school level. Uniting these many initiatives is a summertime summit that brings teachers from all programs and every district together to share ideas, build momentum, and celebrate success. This work followed a clear continuum of progress, described by Chiefs for Change in our June 2017 brief [The Case for Teacher Leadership](#).

This brief takes a closer look at the scope and sequence of New Mexico's approach to teacher leadership and shares what two strong state Chiefs for Change members—Hanna Skandera (Secretary of Education from 2011 through June 2017) and Christopher Ruszkowski (Secretary of Education beginning July 2017)—see as the keys to building a successful movement of teacher leaders:

- **Teacher buy-in must be fostered not forced.** Teacher leaders are the bridge between policy and practice, and only genuine engagement will yield widespread buy-in.
- **Teacher feedback upfront strengthens policy reforms.** Seeking teacher voice and input early is critical, as this feedback ultimately leads to smoother implementation and builds positive momentum to sustain important changes.
- **Start somewhere—even if it feels small.** In collaboration with a small cadre of classroom teachers, NMPED cultivated these important programs, growing from sixteen formal teacher leaders to more than 600 in three years.

# INTRODUCTION

Researchers and policymakers alike have come to recognize that student outcomes are more impacted by teachers than any other in-school factor.<sup>1</sup> For teachers, a growing body of research affirms what classroom educators have long known innately—that there are measurably positive effects of teacher leadership on retention and satisfaction.<sup>2</sup> As such, it follows that teacher leadership should be prioritized as a means of elevating the profession and recruiting, developing, and retaining the type of high-quality educators that facilitate the significant and sustainable reforms that make more excellent and equitable education for all students a reality.

Teacher leadership, which refers to the ability of the strongest teachers to assume an advocacy, policy, content expert, or peer feedback role at the district or state level, encompasses three key objectives:

- 1 **Empowerment of high-performing teachers to create and sustain effective education policies,**
- 2 **Creation of a culture of innovation and shared responsibility toward constant improvement, and**
- 3 **Use of teacher leaders to address and solve critical issues or challenges at the school and/or district levels.**

The idea of empowering educators to effect system change from the classroom is also a key theme in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA provides new opportunities for states to utilize [Title II funds](#) to provide sustainable training and support to teacher leaders, and for districts to use this funding to establish professional growth and improvement systems that enhance teacher leadership.

Building upon the introductory brief, [The Case for Teacher Leaders: Elevating the Teaching Profession and Sustaining Equity and Excellence](#) published by Chiefs for Change in June 2017, and the profile of Louisiana’s focus on curriculum, [Hiding in Plain Sight: Leveraging Curriculum to Improve Student Learning](#) published in August 2017, this profile examines the robust teacher leadership

model developed in New Mexico. It aims to inspire and equip other states to build their own teacher leadership models by:

- Highlighting strategic questions about the vision for teacher leadership in a state;
- Emphasizing the importance of building purposeful relationships with teacher leaders, both individually and at scale;
- Explaining the development of systems to support and leverage those teachers, and;
- Identifying clear metrics that measure the effectiveness of New Mexico’s teacher leadership initiatives against its stated vision and goals.

In the introductory brief of this series, Chiefs for Change shared objectives for teacher leadership and presented a five-stage Teacher Leadership and Advocacy Continuum. This continuum, pictured below, includes steps state education agencies (SEAs) can take in implementing models of their own and guides the development of and engagement around teacher leadership models.

Approaches that span the entire continuum follow the most successful models of change management and can result in shared responsibility and improved education; when two-way forms of communication and authentic engagement are leveraged to empower teacher leaders to advocate for change and to own long-term action, changes are even more likely to endure. Implementation approaches that do not address the entire continuum over time do not tap into the critical power of teachers as partners in implementation and stewards of sustainability.

To achieve these objectives, Chiefs for Change recommends that SEAs consider taking the following steps in planning for design and implementation:

## THE TEACHER LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY CONTINUUM



<sup>1</sup>Teachers Matter: Understanding Teachers’ Impact on Student Achievement. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2012. [https://www.rand.org/pubs/corporate\\_pubs/CP693z1-2012-09.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/corporate_pubs/CP693z1-2012-09.html).

<sup>2</sup>The Irreplaceables. New York, NY: TNTP, 2012. [https://tntp.org/assets/documents/TNTP\\_Irreplaceables\\_2012.pdf](https://tntp.org/assets/documents/TNTP_Irreplaceables_2012.pdf)

→ **Know your vision and the role that teachers will play**

- Have clarity about your theory of change and a transparent approach to the content, decisions, and conversations where you will seek the voice of teachers. This will inform how, when, and where you engage teachers and what related training might entail. Teachers recognize and respond to clarity of vision and charge for their work.

→ **Build meaningful relationships with large and small groups of educators**

- Create authentic engagement. Forming deep relationships with a select group of educators creates your “kitchen cabinet” of informed and trusted advisors helping to chart a course and bring others on board.

→ **Develop systems**

- Approach teacher engagement with disciplined systems so that every interaction is high-quality, ideas are curated and acted upon, efforts can be scaled up over time, and relationships are prioritized.

→ **Identify metrics**

- Identify meaningful metrics of success to assess both short-term and long-term progress aligned to goals. Ensure your entire team is focused on these metrics and align performance management around these.

## RECOGNIZING THE NEED FOR TEACHER LEADERSHIP IN NEW MEXICO

### Developing a Vision

Prior to the establishment of the state’s first teacher leadership initiatives, the PED spent five years focusing on making foundational educational improvements.

From 2010 through 2015, New Mexico adopted and implemented the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), began issuing school grades to replace adequate yearly progress (AYP), designed and implemented a teacher evaluation system (NMTEACH), and began using the PARCC suite of assessments. While extensive stakeholder engagement and outreach occurred, educators and families were not hearing messages directly from the state, which Secretary Hanna Skandera described as “the worst game of telephone.”<sup>3</sup>

2010	Common Core State Standards adopted
2011	School grades first issued
2011	NMTEACH design process begins
2014–15	PARCC assessments initiated
2015	First meeting of Secretary’s Teacher Advisory



With such tremendous change happening in New Mexico’s schools, NMPED recognized the need to better communicate the “why” and

“what” driving these changes. Teachers across the state were wary of the shifts and received news of changes negatively, voicing concerns that they had been isolated from the policymaking processes impacting their classrooms. In keeping with the first stage of the Teacher Leadership and Advocacy Continuum, teachers hungered for more access to the process. While NMPED shared information with superintendents and advocacy groups with the expectation that messages would be disseminated to teachers and families, teachers were not sufficiently informed to have an awareness of the need for change. Prior to the institution of the robust system of teacher leadership that exists today, misinformation about the PED’s priorities and goals abounded and posed challenges for the successful implementation of the agency’s work in schools and with children.

Former Secretary Hanna Skandera shared this perspective in June 2017:

**E** If you had asked me seven years ago if it was my job to reach teachers and principals directly, I would have said “No.”...But I realized quickly that...there was a lot of confusion out there about what changes were taking place, and voices in the classroom were not getting back up to my office. So in order to open up those lines of communication, we decided to launch teacher-leader initiatives aimed at equipping, empowering, and championing our educators. These initiatives are paving avenues for our educators and leaders to engage in policy changes and have access to good information.”<sup>4</sup>

Predicated on the belief that equipping, empowering, and championing teachers would lead to similar outcomes in the classroom, New Mexico structured its system on this vision:

<sup>3</sup> Klein, Alyson. “Teachers Get an Invite to Policy Table in N.M.” Education Week, November 14, 2017. <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2017/11/15/teachers-get-an-invite-to-policy-table.html>

<sup>4</sup> Hess, Rick. “Straight-Up Conversation: Outgoing New Mexico State Chief Hanna Skandera.” Education Week, June 20, 2017. [blogs.edweek.org/edweek/rick\\_hess\\_straight\\_up/2017/06/straight-up\\_conversation\\_outgoing\\_new\\_mexico\\_state\\_chief\\_hanna\\_skandera.html](https://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/rick_hess_straight_up/2017/06/straight-up_conversation_outgoing_new_mexico_state_chief_hanna_skandera.html)

IF NMPED CAN...	THEN TEACHERS CAN...
Equip teachers with information, instructional tools, and access to policymakers,	Equip their students with critical thinking and problem-solving skills to be successful in college and careers,
Empower teachers to take action and provide opportunities to share feedback on issues impacting schools, and	Empower their students to take ownership of their learning, and
Champion the success of teachers in New Mexico as a vision for the profession	Champion their students' successes

## BUILDING AN ECOSYSTEM OF TEACHER LEADERSHIP INITIATIVES IN NEW MEXICO

### Getting Started



Governor Susana Martinez and Secretary Skandera initially utilized traditional communications methods to make changes in New Mexico: They trained superintendents, who they expected to communicate to principals and teachers. Although they did not speak directly with teachers, they believed the communication channel would work. Governor Martinez recognized that strategy wasn't working when, upon being seen at a local restaurant, a teacher approached her with his concerns that teachers were not heard and did not have their needs addressed by the PED. The Governor provided the teacher with Secretary Skandera's cell phone number and the conversation changed.

While concerns from this teacher certainly served as a catalyst for the work, NMPED had already begun to realize the value that the state's most talented teachers could add to discussions of policy and practice. With this in mind and spurred by additional conversations that elaborated on this teacher's calls for greater transparency and awareness, NMPED added a Teacher Liaison role to its staff. Established in the 2015–16 school year, the Teacher Liaison is an educator who takes a year of leave from the classroom to enter a full-time position at the SEA to serve as a point person for the 23,000 teachers throughout the state. The Teacher Liaison serves as a critical partner to NMPED staff in identifying key areas where

### TEACHER LIAISON



**PURPOSE:** To ensure someone who understands the PED and the teacher perspective takes ownership of and fosters productive communication and collaboration from both sides

**WHO:** A New Mexico teacher who takes a year leave from the classroom

**WHAT:**

Responsible for:

- Ensuring communication between the PED and teachers
- Creating communication resources
- Managing teacher leader initiatives
- Identifying key areas where teachers need help and support from PED
- Serves as the point person for teachers seeking PED support

teachers need PED help and support. Given the unique perspective the role brings to the state agency, the Teacher Liaison fosters productive communication and collaboration between the state and the classroom by dedicating his or her time to the owning, building, and cementing of the state's teacher leadership initiatives. Teachers across the state have "a friend at the department" who can help them direct their questions and get answers.

## How does the Teacher Liaison measure impact?

The Teacher Liaison tracks her impact through counting the number of inquiries submitted by teachers, the number of people on the Teacher Liaison email outreach list, and participation and attendance of teachers in the state's various programs. In New Mexico, the state started with 17 teachers and one liaison, and now have more than 100 teachers directly involved and roughly 650 who attend sessions around the state. In some ways though, the position's effectiveness is difficult to measure, as the impact is seen in inclusion, in responsiveness, and in countless small decisions having different outcomes based on teacher input.

Prior to accepting her role in the SEA, Teacher Liaison Alicia Duran says that she felt like she faced bureaucratic hurdles and nonresponsiveness when posing questions to NMPED. In contrast, she now feels that, with a role dedicated to connecting with the field, the SEA is more open to and active in answering questions from teachers throughout the state. As Teacher Liaison, Alicia's goal is to make her peers feel like they have a friend in the department and, better yet, a friend who can get answers.

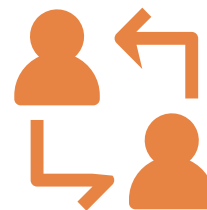


The hiring of the first two PED Teacher Liaisons, Jeff Gephart and Alicia Duran, catalyzed the design and implementation of the initial cohort of the Secretary's Teacher Advisory (STA). This group of highly—and often critically—engaged teacher leaders serves as a sounding board for the key change initiatives led by the SEA by attending important meetings and receiving firsthand information from NMPED about its priorities and initiatives. The initial goal of the STA was twofold: STA members were to learn the “why” and the “what” surrounding the systems and projects that affect teachers and schools and to share the information they learned with colleagues and district leaders.

Teachers were invited to apply for participation in the group through an invitation to an existing mailing list of 1,500 New Mexico teachers. Applications consisted of basic information—teacher assignment, years of experience—and, for the second cohort, a short interview video where applicants were asked to share information about an issue they wanted to address through the group. STA members were not only chosen to represent urban, suburban, and rural districts and because of their effectiveness as measured by the evaluation system, but also due to their leadership skills, whether their leadership experience was in their school, with the union, or in a community organization. As Alicia Duran shared in an interview:

Seventeen of us [the STA] started meeting with teachers from different grade levels and content areas... We had meetings, phone calls with the Secretary monthly, and **we as teachers learned how to channel our energy and make ourselves heard**. As we started talking more about shifts we got more information about the *why* behind re-

## SECRETARY'S TEACHER ADVISORY



**PURPOSE:** To serve as a two-way, solutions-oriented communication channel between the PED and teachers

**WHO:** 17 teachers representing diverse:

- State regions
- Content areas
- Grade levels
- Personal backgrounds and identities

**WHAT:**

Meet with the state secretary of education quarterly and participate in monthly phone calls to:

- Provide perspective and feedback on how PED decisions impact teachers
- Share PED information and resources with colleagues in local schools
- Share ideas for addressing relevant issues
- Receive professional development in PED priority areas
- Address policymakers

forms, how we can put teachers where students need the most, what equity means and how we get there. We gave feedback on how these measures impacted teachers and how we wanted to play a role in our state. We asked for a conference, we asked for more avenues for teachers to get involved.”

While this group is small, with 17 members of the first STA and 26 in the second cohort, NMPED found that engaging these teachers was a way of quickly identifying communication challenges and addressing the need for accurate and timely information. These

## How does the Secretary's Teacher Advisory measure impact?

Teacher perception of their own voices and agency is perhaps the aspect that reflects the biggest change among educators. According to current Teacher Liaison Alicia Duran, "A big testament to the shift in attitude surrounding the PED was visible in the interview videos teachers submit as part of their teacher leadership applications. Before, there was more frustration and misunderstanding, and now many of the videos reflect empowerment and excitement instead."

NMPED also measures the impact of the Secretary's Teacher Advisory through the "Belief in Learning" survey, which asks participants questions to measure their belief that all students, re-

gardless of circumstances or background, can learn. In addition, the SEA also measures impact through the NMTEACH evaluation by looking at growth in specific domains, including number four ("Planning and Professionalism") and the overall evaluation score. Finally, program completion is also used as a metric, measuring commitment and efficacy.

Demand for participation on the STA is a testament to its importance in the state: There were 240 applications for the 26 spots in the second cohort of the STA in 2017. To date, 94% of districts across NM are participating in teacher leadership initiatives in some way.

Late 2014	NMPED identifies its first Teacher Liaison
December 2015	First Secretary's Teacher Advisory begins with 17 members
May 2016	Teacher Liaison introduces Dream Team (40 members), Policy Fellowships (15 fellows), and Teacher Leader Network
June 2016	First Teacher Leader Summit attracts 300 teachers and education partners
August 2016	Second Teacher Liaison joins NMPED
April 2017	Dream Team publishes 36 curriculum resources for K–6 literacy
June 2017	Second annual Teacher Leader Summit attracts 1,000 teachers and education partners
August 2017	Second cohort of Secretary's Teacher Advisory initiated with 26 members
August 2017	Teacher Leader Ambassador program (50 participants) launches
August 2017	Third Teacher Liaison joins NMPED
November 2017	School Liaison program begins; recruitment to fill the 1:1 ratio of teachers to schools will continue throughout SY17–18. As of Nov. 2017, 83 of the state's 89 local education agencies (LEAs) are involved in teacher leadership in some way.

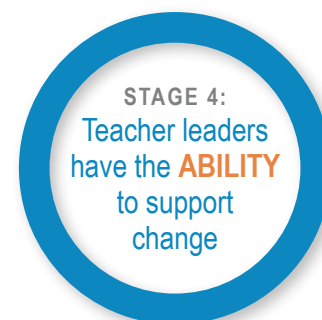
teachers also helped guide the path of additional programs to develop teacher leadership. The two-way communication helps strengthen the PED's ideas and empowers teachers to influence the design and implementation of plans.

Perhaps most significantly, the STA worked with Secretary Skandera and the Teacher Liaison to develop a definition of teacher leadership in New Mexico.<sup>5</sup> Operating under this common understanding,

Secretary Skandera and the PED soon aspired to involve teachers from each of New Mexico's 847 schools to serve as building representatives, sharing their school's needs, building skills, and developing collective ownership of education among the group with the most power to change conditions for the children of the state.

NMPED has listened to the Teacher Liaisons and the STA to develop a menu of diverse teacher leadership options that seeks to address the many motivations teachers have for becoming more involved, from engaging with policy making, deepening and improving teaching, developing curriculum, or becoming more knowledgeable on state affairs. New Mexico's approach engages teacher leaders in every school across the state, and, while the work is still in its nascent stages, it is already paying dividends.

## Getting Established



From the outset, both the STA and the Teacher Liaison used their newfound insight and positions of influence to lobby NMPED for additional avenues for teacher leadership. With this feedback, the PED developed three additional opportunities for teacher leaders, the **New Mexico Teacher Leadership Network (NMTLN)**, the **Teaching Policy Fellowship**, and the **Dream Team**.

The goal of the NMTLN is to develop a cadre of teacher leaders who can translate PED policy focus areas into classroom and district practice, dramatically improving teaching and learning for all

<sup>5</sup>New Mexico's definition of teacher leadership: "Teacher[s] who both work with students and collaboratively lead colleagues to improve their practice in alignment with school, district, or state priorities. Teacher leaders can have formal or informal roles in their schools, but all teacher leaders effectively work with other teachers and administrators to advance teaching and learning."



students. To accomplish this, the NMTLN selects fifty strong teacher leaders and provides them with opportunities to learn and improve, to collaborate and support a community of practice, and to develop leadership skills to leverage in their schools on behalf of students.

Facilitated by [Teach Plus](#), a national teacher leadership and advocacy organization that works to develop and empower teachers as leaders in states across the country, the [New Mexico Teaching Policy Fellowship](#) provides a highly selective leadership opportunity for outstanding New Mexico teachers looking to deepen their knowledge of education policy and gain a voice in decisions that affect students and the teaching profession.

Over a 12–18 month program period, expert teachers in the fellowship are taught the ins and outs of public policy, learn about their state’s particular policy context, and work together on policy projects that utilize their newly acquired skills. As a result of participation in the program, teachers are empowered to successfully lead and mobilize their peers and serve as change agents. The first cohort of fifteen New Mexico Teaching Policy Fellows, who began their program in October 2016, have contributed to legislation ensuring that teacher preparation programs receive school grades, as well as providing feedback that changed weightings on the NMTEACH teacher evaluation system. A second cohort of the Teaching Policy Fellows began in September 2017.

### How does the Teacher Leader Network measure impact?

Survey results from teacher leaders in the New Mexico Teacher Leader Network (NMTLN or TLN) indicate that members of the network say they feel more informed about the NMTEACH teacher evaluation system and that they were provided with high-quality resources to improve their teaching craft. As is the case for the Secretary’s Teacher Advisory, TLN participants also receive the “Belief in Learning” survey and are assessed through their NMTEACH evaluations, as well as through their completion of the program.


As part of their participation in the NMTLN, teachers in the group have worked together to publish several resources, including guides on PARCC, the NM Growth Model, and education laws.

### How does the Teaching Policy Fellowship measure impact?

With the completion of a real-world policy project being a cornerstone of the Teach Plus Teaching Policy Fellowship, impact is measured through the traction gained by the ideas put forth by fellows.

As a result of the advocacy work of the first cohort of New Mexico Teaching Policy Fellows, Governor Susana Martinez announced

## NM TEACHER LEADER NETWORK



**PURPOSE:** To develop a core group of teacher leaders to translate PED focus areas into practice

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**WHO:** **50 teacher ambassadors** • Selected from a pool of 743 applications • Represent 67 districts

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**WHAT:**  
NMTLN ambassadors meet four times yearly in all-day workshops and participate in monthly webinars to:

- Learn PED areas of focus
- Develop a state-wide community of support
- Create resources to teachers with helpful information
- Garner leadership skills they can leverage in their home districts

## TEACHING POLICY FELLOWSHIP



**PURPOSE:** To include teachers in policy creation to improve how state and district policies are received and implemented in schools

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**WHO:** **15 teacher leaders interested in policy**

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**WHAT:**  
Facilitated by Teach Plus, teachers in this fellowship attend monthly session where they:

- Are exposed to rigorous content modules and skills training related to policymaking
- Engage with policy leaders on pertinent policy issues
- Participate in work groups where teachers can develop and advocate for a specific policy agenda

changes to teacher evaluation policy on April 2, 2017, including changes in the weighting of educator observations and adjustments to teacher attendance policies. Moreover, of the 13 specific recommendations made by the Teaching Policy Fellows to the department regarding the ESSA state plan, NMPED incorporated 11 into the final draft submitted to the U.S. Department of Education.

Teachers can also apply to the Dream Team, an instructional leadership initiative. Started in spring 2017 as a partnership between LearnZillion and NMPED, the Dream Team supports development for educators seeking to build and share literacy curricula with their peers across the state. In particular, the program was envisioned as focusing on building K–6 literacy curricula throughout the 2016–17 school year; this focus area was chosen based on an analysis of assessment outcomes. For the inaugural cohort, 40 teachers were selected from around the state to be trained monthly to deepen their understanding of student thinking and curriculum and develop lessons in close reading, as well as professional learning plans.

### How does the Dream Team measure impact?

The Dream Team's impact and success hinges on building an active community of learning where teachers feel confident to teach lessons on close reading in their classrooms. Through a combination of ongoing virtual collaboration and three in-person TeachFest convenings, the Dream Team gathers to engage in hands-on learning to foster their leadership and facilitation skills, as well as develop close reading lessons for students. 100% of the teachers on the New Mexico Dream Team reported feeling confident in their ability to write text-dependent questions as a direct result of their teacher leader experience. Perhaps even more important, 97% stated that through this development, they feel prepared to share the expertise they gained with fellow teachers to scale the impact.

The group created a series of thirty-six Close Reading Guides for use by K–5 teachers, aligned to standards and with pacing guides.

## THE DREAM TEAM

**PURPOSE:** To provide teachers with high-quality support in building curriculum and resources and amplify their knowledge and expertise



**WHO:** 40 teacher leaders interested in honing their teaching craft

- Grades K–6
- Content: Literacy

**WHAT:**

Facilitated by LearnZillion these teacher leaders meet to:

- Build lessons that engage students in reading and understanding complex grade-level texts
- Collaborate with one another and coaches to analyze student work and inform instructional decisions
- Prepare to lead professional learning in their home schools and to support fellow teachers using their fellowship training

## Getting Embedded



Throughout the past 24 months, NMPED has engaged in deep consultation with classroom teachers to build an ecosystem of diverse teacher leadership and advocacy initiatives designed to equip, empower, and champion New Mexico's educators and improve outcomes for students. The model used in New Mexico provides a long-term framework for two-way communication between teachers and the department as well as high-quality professional development for teacher leaders. Teachers leaders are now part of leading change efforts in their schools and districts to continue supporting and sustaining changes locally. This work is a key element of the strategy to sustain the improvements that have been made to date for students and accelerate the trajectory of progress.

## SCALING THE NEW MEXICO TEACHER LEADERSHIP MODEL

Following three years of the intensive outreach, planning, and implementation that led to the development of the Teacher Liaison, Secretary's Teacher Advisory, NM Teacher Leader Network, Teaching Policy Fellowship, and Dream Team, this work culminated in July 2016 with New Mexico's first statewide teacher summit.

Aimed at reaching even more teachers, NMPED, the Teacher Liaison and the STA worked to bring to life a two-day convening that attracted more than 300 teachers from around the state. Organized around four general and 39 break-out sessions, the inaugural teacher summit allowed a wider group of teacher leaders to have their voices heard, fostered understanding of PED evaluation systems, provided access to aligned and meaningful professional development and resources, created new teacher leader networks from around the state, and celebrated teachers as professionals.

### Getting Results

The New Mexico Teacher Summit has also demonstrated tremendous growth in its short history, expanding from just 300 teachers in July 2016, to 650 teachers in June 2017. In 2017, all available spots for the event were requested within 72 hours, illustrating the quality and reputation of the event and the desire of teachers to become more involved with the SEA and the communication, resources, professional development, and leadership opportunities it offers.

The success of the original NMTLN prompted NMPED to expand access to the information and professional development it provides for the field. To date, the **Teacher Ambassador** program has partnered with 50 teachers who educate their peers on PED initiatives in order to build their awareness for change (see Stage 1). Thus far, this representative group has had the opportunity to learn about teacher report cards, school grades, and other programs and create resources for their peers. In addition, these teachers engage with the Teacher Liaison in monthly conference calls and deliver quarterly projects to build teacher understanding (see Stage 2). Ambassadors receive a \$1,000 stipend for their work. Teacher interest in the Ambassador program is an early indicator of the program's influence: More than 700 teachers applied for the 50 spots in the first iteration of this group.

In the summer of 2017, the PED announced that the goal of the network is to expand to include one **School Liaison** from each of New Mexico's 847 schools. The more than 500 teacher leaders, from both traditional public and public charter schools,

are responsible for sharing information and resources from the PED and for representing, communicating with, and sharing feedback from their colleagues (see Stage 3). The NMTLN School Liaison program was launched in the 2017–18 school year and brings together its participants for twice yearly regional sessions. In each session, teacher leaders in the network meet with peer liaisons in their region for a four-hour session. Liaisons also participate in monthly webinars focused on more discrete knowledge and skillsets, like learning to read teacher reports and how to use that information to guide instruction (see Stage 4). Finally, the School Liaisons also spend the significant portions of their in-person meetings building relationships in the network.

With several programs available for teacher leadership, the New Mexico team is intentional about opportunities to collaborate to maximize and sustain impact (see Stage 5). Teachers across all programs interact, and often help coordinate activities, at the summer teacher summit. Additionally, members are not excluded from participating in more than one of the leadership activities or programs; three members of the current STA are also TLN Ambassadors.

Once teachers get started in teacher leadership roles, the NMPED provides opportunities for them to grow their skills in the same roles and across groups. Teachers in the STA and who serve as Ambassadors and School Liaisons may serve consecutive terms; in addition, the second Teacher Liaison to have served in this role, Alicia Duran, has elected to take an additional year of leave and has begun her second year in the position. Unlike the three NMPED-housed programs, however, the Teach Plus Teaching Policy Fellows and LearnZillion Dream Team are not permitted to reprise their roles. These teachers are encouraged to take on other teacher leadership roles.

Selection of teachers to serve in teacher leadership roles is highly competitive and the process ensures that only the most exemplary educators become teacher leaders. At first, there was a reluctance to use data in selection, for fear of excluding interested teachers. However, it was critical that the model include the most effective educators and as a result, NMTEACH outcomes are one of several criteria that are used in selection. This allows programs to focus on leveraging effective educators while providing significant access to a wide array of teacher leadership opportunities. The programs provide educators with some of the most effective professional development available, helping to strengthen curricular knowledge and assessment strategy.

## DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE TEACHER LEADERSHIP SYSTEMS: FUNDING

One of the biggest barriers states have encountered in building effective, sustainable teacher leadership models is finding funding. States can use federal Title II–A funding to provide training and support to teacher leaders, and districts can also use this funding to implement professional growth and improvement systems that enhance teacher leadership. Chiefs for Change has explored promising uses of this funding in our [September 2016 brief](#) on this topic.

Monies sourced innovatively from federal Title II–A dollars have been invaluable to New Mexico in supporting teacher leadership initiatives. The support of Governor Susana Martinez has also been critical in the establishing of a teacher liaison — the budget and appointment for this role come from the governor’s office.

Ensuring the right people are involved is another core component of creating a teacher leadership model. Those involved include:

- 1 **The PED and the governor**, who ensure that there is political will, reserved funding, and specific roles designated to establish teacher leadership initiatives
- 2 **The Teacher Liaison**, who owns and manages teacher leadership initiatives at the PED
- 3 **Teachers**, who serve on a selection committees to identify teacher leaders and participate in the initiatives
- 4 **Principals and superintendents**, who nominate teachers for teacher leadership opportunities and allow teacher leaders the opportunity to share what they have learned with their home schools and districts
- 5 **External partners (e.g., consultants from Learn-Zillion and Teach Plus)**, who bring best practices from national networks to accelerate the progress in New Mexico
- 6 **Philanthropies**, whose support is critical in enabling the SEA to move quickly and nimbly

## MEASURING IMPACT AND RESULTS

Although the teacher leadership model is relatively new and continues to grow, it has already begun to make a significant impact on the culture in schools. With an eye on continuous improvement, NMPED gathers feedback to inform the development and responsiveness of each of its teacher leadership programs. The Secretary, the Teacher Liaison, and teacher leaders look to several standard measures to determine effectiveness, including teacher leadership retention in their roles, numbers of applications for the various opportunities, and survey results that measure understanding of various initiatives, like NMTEACH.

In 2017, New Mexico captured a baseline of teacher perception through its Teaching and Learning Conditions Survey. Moving forward, this survey will be the primary way the state measures teacher perception of its teacher leadership efforts; data from the second administration of the survey will be available in summer 2018. NMPED will also use the NMTEACH evaluations to gauge the impact of teacher leadership involvement on teacher performance.

## THE FUTURE OF TEACHER LEADERSHIP IN NEW MEXICO

In the summer of 2017, Secretary Hanna Skandera stepped down from her role as state chief. Immediately following her departure, her deputy and member of the Chiefs for Change [Future Chiefs](#) program, Christopher Ruskowski, was [named Acting Secretary](#) and, ultimately, Secretary-Designate of the PED. Through this seamless transition, teacher leadership continues to broaden and deepen in New Mexico. In May 2017, Ruskowski, then Deputy Secretary for Policy and Program, spoke of teacher leadership to Education Post:

I do believe that we’re in an era of catalytic teacher leadership. Technology has broken down some of the barriers to scaling best practices and facilitating teacher collaboration and collective learning. So there’s an opportunity to have classroom teachers weigh in on all elements of policy, program and practice, as well as an opportunity to create a new set of career ladders that can look different in different contexts. In New Mexico, we’re working with our Secretary’s Teacher Advisory, our newly-formed New Mexico Teacher Leader Network, and a variety of partners to amplify teacher voice, create statewide communities of practice around teacher craft and create two-way communications channels with our schools.”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Vaughn, Michael. “Coffee Break: Christopher Ruskowski on the Coffee Shop ‘Post-Up,’ the Immigrant Experience and Dinkytown Pierogies.” Education Post, May 3, 2017. [EducationPost.org/coffee-break-christopher-ruskowski-on-the-coffee-shop-post-up-the-immigrant-experience-and-dinkytown-pierogies/](http://educationpost.org/coffee-break-christopher-ruskowski-on-the-coffee-shop-post-up-the-immigrant-experience-and-dinkytown-pierogies/).

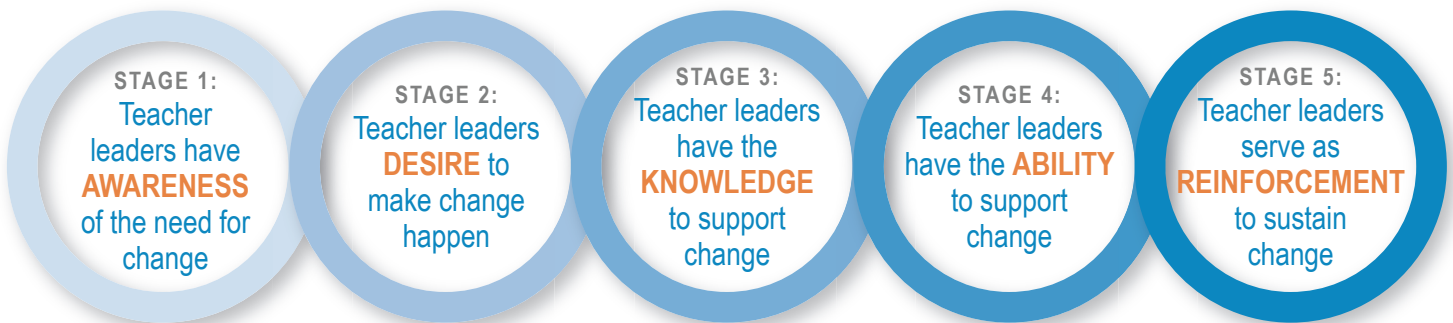
Secretary Skandera and Secretary Ruskowski have sought input from the Teacher Liaison, the Secretary’s Teacher Advisory, and other teacher stakeholder groups on what programs the SEA should maintain and what it should expand. The next phase of these leadership and empowerment efforts will be rolled out in the 2017–18 school year and include the facilitation of the following groups:

- The second cohort of the Secretary’s Teacher Advisory,
- The second cohort of the NM Teacher Leadership Network,
- Version two of the Dream Team (now focused on social studies), and
- The second cohort of the New Mexico Teaching Policy Fellows.

In addition, the third annual teacher summit is planned for the summer of 2018 and again will expand its reach to impact more educators throughout the state.

Rightfully so, NMPED and its teacher leaders are proud of the model they have built. When looking to the future, their chief priorities include scaling efforts to equip, empower, and champion *all* teachers. Given the importance of these initiatives, it is imperative that the SEA identify the right teacher liaison to shepherd this work and ensure that the strides the state has made toward forging a productive, supportive, solutions-oriented relationship between the PED and teachers can withstand potential changes in administration.

As they relate to the Teacher Leadership and Advocacy Continuum, New Mexico’s teacher leadership efforts have allowed the state’s teachers to move through the stages both quickly and broadly. Teachers have migrated through the full continuum of teacher leadership and have been sufficiently developed and empowered to support change as trusted partners and respected equals in the process of policymaking. As New Mexico continues to deepen its commitment to teacher leadership and begins to reap the rewards of the opportunities it has created for teachers, the system will reify itself by moving continuously through the five stages of teacher leadership development, bringing along more teachers over time.



## ADVICE FOR OTHER STATES

Reflecting upon their lessons learned, the New Mexico PED has advice for other states looking to pursue their own teacher leadership models:

- 1 Teachers must lead from within**
  - SEAs must amplify teacher voice, particularly at the state level—it is of the utmost importance that the strongest teacher(s) are elevated into a liaison role to serve as a bridge between educators and the state agency, representing peers, asking tough questions, and building coalitions.
- 2 Teachers must have opportunities to voice their feedback**
  - It behooves SEAs to put initial plans in front of teachers and carefully consider how to proceed based on feedback received. Doing so enables state teams to roll out initiatives quickly, build momentum, and better understand and rectify

unintended challenges. Teachers in New Mexico understand that NMPED takes their jobs and concerns seriously and understand the state’s urgency to solicit teacher voice to get things right.

- 3 Start somewhere—even if it feels small**
  - “You cannot get overwhelmed at what lies ahead. Just start somewhere,” said Alicia Duran, current New Mexico Teacher Liaison. New Mexico started out with 17 Secretary’s Teacher Advisory members and one Teacher Liaison. Now, with roughly 650 of the state’s 22,000 teachers involved in some way, the program is growing at a rapid pace. By outlining a clear vision from the Secretary, a strong selection process for becoming a Teacher Leader, and clear metrics to ensure progress was being met at each step of the way, NMPED has provided a roadmap for other states hoping to learn from its model.

## RESOURCES

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The resources below are provided here to help other states considering teacher leadership.

- [Chiefs for Change Brief: The Case for Teacher Leadership](#)
- [New Mexico Teacher Leader Network School Liaison Overview](#)
- [New Mexico Teacher Leader FAQ](#)
- [Teach Reach New Mexico](#)
- [New Mexico Teacher Leader Network Program Overview](#)
- [Teacher Blog Posts](#)

## ABOUT THE FUTURE CHIEFS PROGRAM

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Chiefs of state and large-district education systems play a pivotal role in guiding outcomes for students, and finding and choosing excellent Chiefs is rightly an enormous focus for states, cities, and their elected leaders. Yet few pathways exist to help identify and prepare excellent candidates, and while more than half of U.S. students are students of color, education Chiefs are far from reflecting that diversity.

To change that, we are helping to build a diverse pipeline of Future Chiefs by identifying bold and innovative state and district education leaders. These leader candidates are strategic systems-builders clearly focused on excellence and equity. Chiefs for Change provides them with collective learning opportunities that include coaching and mentorship from outstanding current Chiefs, leaving them far more prepared to step into vital leadership roles.

Learn more about the Future Chiefs program or nominate a Future Chief [here](#).