

Making the transition into postsecondary education

Bridges Project for Education believes in the benefits of postsecondary education, whether in pursuit of vocational training, a two-year associate or a four-year bachelor's degree. The effort you, or the prospective or current college student in your life, put into attending, persisting through and completing a certification or degree has exponential rewards. These include: knowledge of a particular subject or across a range of subjects; career foundations and skills; expanded job opportunities; increased income; better health and well-being; and community engagement via voting and volunteering. Individuals, families and communities can benefit as more citizens engage in postsecondary education.

The transition into college,

LEARNING CURVE



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however, can be challenging for the student and their family, guardian and support network. As positive a change as it can be, those who are first-generation to college are especially affected, since they do not have the benefit of their family's previous experience with higher education to smooth the path. In addition, students from small, rural communities such as ours may find the transi-

tion uncomfortable, especially if they leave home to live on or near campus.

Challenges

What are some of the challenges that new college students face? It depends on whether they're a recent high school graduate or nontraditional student (GED/HSE grads, parents, military and those older than 24). Many recent high school graduates are becoming adults even as they tackle a college-level course load and new responsibilities. This may be the first time they live on their own, with a roommate or roommates, and in a new community that may differ greatly from the one in which they were raised. Some students may work while in college. Nontraditional students may experience some or all of these changes, while also balancing family and work duties.

Support services

All schools offer support services for new and current college students. The U.S. Department of Education sponsors TRIO programs, including Student Support Services, intended to assist low-income, first-generation and students with disabilities into and through college. If you're eligible, check your college to find out if they participate in TRIO.

Colleges offer other supports based on student need. Most provide training on how to navigate their college system, academic advisement, mental health and wellness centers, tutoring services and centers for underrepresented student groups who may need additional supports. This can include African-American, Asian-American, people with learning or physical disabilities, Hispanic, LGBTQ, Native

American and women student centers. These centers provide cultural programming, mentorships, scholarships and workshops, while promoting campus diversity, student retention and academic and personal success.

Engagement equals success

A recent study by Challenge Success, a nonprofit affiliated with the Stanford University Graduate School of Education, identified student engagement as one of the most important factors in student success. Students who participate in their classes, internships or research, student organizations and other extracurricular activities – who are active participants in their education – report the greatest student learning, job satisfaction, well-being and future income. Student success may have less to do with attending a more selective or even a

particular college and actually rest in the student's hands and initiative. Read Bridges's blog to learn more: bridgesproject.org/student-engagement-matters.

Bridges encourages students, families and support networks to keep the lines of communication open throughout this process. Talk with those who have shared similar experiences. Our college counselors are available to speak with all involved about the many changes they might be going through. We offer advice, help guide people to relevant support services and assist our clients with the financial aid process while they're in school. Call (575) 758-5074 or email Bridges at info@bridgesproject.org to schedule an appointment.

Mackenzie Frederick is the college counselor and development coordinator for Bridges Project for Education.

Governor dumps controversial PARCC testing in N.M.

By Jesse Moya

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With the stroke of a pen, Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham has declared the end of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers in New Mexico schools and many educators across the state let out a sigh of relief.

Lujan Grisham signed an executive order Jan. 3, calling for a transition away from the PARCC standardized test and urges the state Public Education Department to begin work on another way of measuring students.

For nearly four years, the PARCC test – has stirred up controversy over its rigorous grading and effect on teacher evaluations. Students from grades 3-11 take the test to determine their proficiency in reading and math and are graded to standards that some say are impossible.

"It was a rigorous assessment that provided a snapshot on student proficiency," said Peñasco Superintendent Marvin MacAuley. "I would prefer a more meaningful assessment that would capture student data at multiple times during the school year so we can measure growth and make necessary adjustments in instruction to best serve our students."

Taos County educators and administrators are optimistic for the future of testing without the PARCC and are hopeful about the replacement that the state will be working on for their future students.

"I believe we need to design and implement accountability and assessment systems that measure what matters and drive student success in K-12 and beyond," said Taos Municipal Schools Superintendent Lillian Torrez. "We must use student assessments as a tool for growth while creating accountability for equity to support English learners and students with disabilities in order to close the achievement gap."

Schools in Taos have improved their proficiency scores in the past, with some schools above 50 percent proficient in some subjects. Taos Charter School held the highest scores within the district in 2018, scoring over 55 percent proficient in English and Language Arts.

Other schools in the area have seen success in their PARCC scores such as Questa High School, where students nearly doubled math



Morgan Timms/The Taos News

Educational assistant Rita Frésquez assists first-graders in a reading exercise Monday (Sept. 10) at Enos Garcia Elementary School in Taos.

proficiency scores.

PARCC was criticized over the years in New Mexico for its tough grading and test content. The test prompted several walk-outs and student protests when it was launched under former Gov. Susana Martinez.

Lujan Grisham made an early campaign promise to seek other alternatives to the test, which is now only used by New Jersey and the District of Columbia. The New Jersey Supreme Court recently ruled that the test could not be mandated for graduating high school students. The test faced numerous "opt out" pushback in New Mexico for its high stakes approach and challenging content.

"New Mexico's use of high-stakes testing like PARCC is failing our education system," Lujan Grisham said. "It limits the education of our students and fails to effectively measure the impact our educators are having."

According to Lujan Grisham, several teachers were dissuaded from continuing in the educational field due to the PARCC test and that ending it was a step forward in respecting the teachers and students across the state as well as the first move to developing a new system.

"[PARCC] wasn't fair to the students or to the teachers," said town councilor and former teacher Pascualito Maestas.

Maestas said the test was "almost impossible to pass." For the replacement test that the state will be working on this year, Maestas said his recommendation would be to use SAT and ACT tests to measure students' proficiency, as college-bound students are already focused so much on those tests.

The next step for the PED

will be to bring parents, teachers and even students together to begin the steps of finding a new test. Elements of the PARCC may still be used to test students for the 2019-20 school year. In addition to the order ending PARCC, Lujan Grisham also signed an order to stop the use of the test scores on teacher evaluations.

Lujan Grisham also announced that Lieutenant Governor Howie Morales, an educator, would be filling the position of Cabinet secretary at the Public Education Department for the time being. He is temporarily replacing outgoing secretary Christopher N. Ruzkowski.

The decision to end PARCC is the new Governor's first executive order to be signed into action.

Taos teen group offers communication to teachers

By Jesse Moya

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During a regular teacher workshop at Taos Municipal Schools, area teens brought the topic of communication and mental health to the table for a new type of discussion.

A group of six teens worked for a month on a presentation and workshop for teachers on the importance of communication and mental health awareness in schools.

"Our young people have such creative minds," said St. James Episcopal Church youth minister Jill Cline. "I think it very important to strengthen their spirit and feed their souls by helping them to find their voices on all topics and be heard."

Cline has been working with students from Common Grounds, a teen advocacy and support group in Taos, as well as others to complete the workshop. Taos Area Teens, as the group is known, is made

up of Taos HOPE, Common Grounds, Teens Take the Lead and the Taos Youth Homeless Advisory Board.

During the workshop, teens met with counselors from Taos schools to discuss the importance of improving conversations in schools in talking about bullying, depression and school safety. "This is a Teen-lead experiential program designed to improve trust building, listening skills, and better communication," according to a PowerPoint presentation developed by the teens.

"I hope that we can talk to the new governor about changing things a little bit," said facilitator River Joy Johnson. "I want there to be less bullying and hopefully there will be adults who teens can talk to without that fear of them going to hospital or psychiatric ward."

Johnson, a founder of the group, said her ultimate goal with the workshop is to create a safe cul-

ture in schools where teens can feel comfortable discussing their feelings and fears. While there are plans to expand the workshop into other classrooms and schools, Johnson said nothing has been finalized just yet.

The teens supplemented the discussion with storytelling activities as well as videos and poems. Though the majority of employees had taken part in other professional development that day, the group plans to bring their efforts into the schools to spread the discussion of good communication.

"The kids have already been invited into a classroom to host this workshop by students for students," Cline said. "We hope to be invited again to TMS for further and more expansive workshops with more staff."

The students in the group will continue their efforts and have hopes to take their discussion to students younger than high school age.

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