

Education Transformation & Early Childhood Development

No matter whose criteria you are using, New Mexico schools are regularly ranked among the nation's poorest. So perhaps it is no surprise that the Foundation strongly believes that innovation is needed in the state's education sector. McCune recognizes that the wide body of research confirms that interventions in the first four to five years of a child's life offer the best opportunity to influence later educational successes. The Foundation supports programs and organizations that advocate for policy reforms, and that provide direct services and build statewide investments in early childhood education and development.

Many of the McCune Foundation's funding partners and other organizations approach the area of education from a "cradle to career" perspective that honors the notion that people's lives are continuums, as opposed to collections of disconnected phases that we all simply "pass" through. This "big picture" approach reinforces that education transformation will always be limited in K-12, unless we work harder to make sure children are prepared to learn when they get to kindergarten.

And then there's the disconnection between the education system and the world of employment. This is not only a disservice to our students, but a detriment to our local economy. The McCune Foundation supports the "cradle to career" approach and hopes to engage that continuum through a number of its priorities, including Education Transformation & Early Childhood Development. In addition, the Foundation supports higher education initiatives that more directly connect university and college programs to economic development or workforce development efforts.

As a uniquely diverse state from a cultural perspective, New Mexico also requires a broader perspective about what child development and education means. Tribal communities often hold different perspectives with regard to how children should be educated and prepared for the world. The Foundation respects and supports a broad array of approaches and honors those that seek to reinforce long-held cultural beliefs and approaches.

For the purpose of its funding focus, the Foundation has identified five key leverage points that support its grants in these areas:

Key Leverage Points

Early Childhood Development. Among the toughest challenges facing the "cradle to career" continuum in New Mexico is that the majority of 4- to 5-year-old children who enter the education system are not yet prepared to learn. This means that a huge percentage of children are beginning their formal education from a position of trying to

catch up with their peers. This places a huge burden on school districts across the state that are already strained with financial and political struggles. It is widely agreed that the only real remedy for these problems is for the State of New Mexico to find a way to increase its investment in early childhood development. Studies show a 7 to 1 return to the economy for every dollar spent on early childhood development, making this a clear economic development issue as well.

Estimates of how much additional funding would be required range between \$250 million and \$400 million per year. Additional concerns exist regarding the availability of effective early childhood programming in the state. In support of this priority, the Foundation will favor proposals that drive the development of innovative early childhood and home visiting programming, as well as incubation of programs that appear promising. Collaborative approaches to this work, especially efforts that leverage existing work or connect work across geographies are especially compelling. The Foundation also prioritizes efforts to educate the public and lawmakers about the benefits of funding early childhood development and groups that advocate on behalf of funding for these programs.

School leadership development is key to the success of any school. In the most successful schools, that leadership extends beyond the administration and includes teachers in the classroom. As more innovative school models emerge, a growing pool of talented and motivated teachers will be key to the successes of even the most well-conceived approaches to education. The Foundation prioritizes programs and organizations that provide opportunities for professional development and creative career advancement for teachers and administrators.

Locally designed approaches are among the core values of education in New Mexico. While the Foundation appreciates the contributions and implementation of national models in our state, it also recognizes that education must be responsive to the communities it serves. Start-up schools, programs and educational approaches that are developed in New Mexico to address New Mexico-specific challenges and set high expectations for our students are prioritized for funding. The Foundation is moving away from providing ongoing support of established schools and funding for independent schools and focuses support on work that prioritizes vulnerable students.

Multilingual educational opportunities can be a unique benefit of living in a “majority minority” state with large populations for whom English is a second language. New Mexico’s multilingual capabilities, including the broad range of Native languages from our tribal communities, provide our state with unique educational opportunities. Data shows that students in multilingual classrooms have certain learning advantages over classrooms where only one language is used. And with burgeoning economies in Mexico

and other Spanish-speaking countries in Central and South America, New Mexico has an opportunity to position itself as a conduit for business between enterprises based in the United States and Latin America.

Reform infrastructure development is critical for the future of education in New Mexico, especially with a broad spectrum of approaches being proposed to transform educational outcomes in our state. The reform landscape can be confusing to both community members and lawmakers. In addition, competing and cooperating organizations can further muddy the conversation through the information and rhetoric they inject into the discussion. The Foundation prioritizes programs and organizations that demystify education reform for community members, make it easier for community to get involved and facilitates broader interest in education around the state.

Afterschool and in-school supplemental programs will be considered for funding only if the work is aligned with the foundation's broader education transformation goals. Priority will be given to programs that connect to broader, community based initiatives or that reflect deeper levels of coordination among groups serving the same populations. The Foundation will also prioritize efforts that are coordinated or collaborative in nature.