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Beyond Standardized Tests: Measuring the “Educational Sweet Spot”

A collaborative effort in Albuquerque pursues an innovative way to assess schools

ALBUQUERQUE, New Mexico – Can a standardized test summarize a student’s preparedness for life after school? The response is often a resounding “No.” A collaborative, two-year effort is underway in Albuquerque, NM to develop new methods of evaluation that lay the groundwork for innovation and improvement in our education system. On September 18th the New Metrics Initiative, led by the New Mexico Center for School Leadership, the Eagle Rock Professional Development Center and the McCune Charitable Foundation, will convene a cross-section of leaders from innovative New Mexico charter schools. The Initiative seeks to identify new metrics of evaluation that support and incentivize schools that provide students with the educational experiences and skills they need to become successful adults.

The New Metrics Initiative emerged from a challenge faced by many schools working in troubled districts: funding. While funders might readily recognize schools that inspire dramatic transformations in districts that struggle with high attrition rates, low test scores and other challenges, that progress is often not captured by standardized tests.

“A simple analysis of the number of students who are ‘competent’ at Math or Reading does not tell the story of a school.” Says Tony Monfiletto, Director of the Center for School Leadership, **“The ability to solve problems, work on a team, and communicate ideas are fundamental to a young person's future, but those can't be measured within our current evaluation system. The New Metrics Initiative seeks to identify metrics that reflect and incentivize the development of these real-world skills.”**

The Eagle Rock Professional Development Center is helping the school leaders to **“raise their gaze and look at the contours and landscape of the innovative work they are doing”** says Michael Soguero, Director of Professional Development at Eagle Rock, a non-profit that works with educators from around the country. Over a series of strategy sessions led by [Eagle Rock Professional Development Center](#) that began in February, 2014, school leaders have shaped their vision for an “Educational Sweet Spot,” a place where students successfully deploy what they have learned through real life projects that engage both inter-personal and academic skill sets to creatively solve real-world problems. **“Eagle Rock is especially skilled at facilitating this kind of work,”** comments Soguero, **“we work with innovative schools and educators around the country so their day-to-day work can inform and benefit more schools locally and nationally.”**

Henry Rael of the [McCune Charitable Foundation](#) comments, **“Our goal with this Initiative is to support the development of approaches that measure school success in terms that align with our values as a foundation. We also want to learn about possible impediments to the kind of innovation that re-engages, retains, and ensures our students are well equipped to meet the challenges in their futures.”**

On September 18th the schools will finalize their strategy for the next year of research and analysis for the Initiative. September will be a turning point for the project, as the New Metrics Initiative transitions into an implementation phase.

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[The Marshall L. and Perrine D. McCune Charitable Foundation](#), established in 1989, is dedicated to enriching the health, education, environment, and cultural and spiritual life of New Mexicans. The Foundation memorializes its benefactors through proactive grantmaking that seeks to foster positive social change. The Foundation grants approximately \$5 million a year to New Mexico non-profits, with the average grant amounting to about \$15,000.

[The Center for School Leadership](#) is committed to ensuring students succeed in our communities and transition into fulfilling lives. The Center works to design high schools with input from the people who have the most at stake in the success of our educational system: students and families, community members, and employers. The Center is in charge of ensuring innovation and sustained growth in Leadership High Schools through conducting work in three spheres: Leadership High School Network development; new Network high school creation; and analysis and design of education policy.

[Eagle Rock Professional Development Center](#) works with educators from around the country who wish to study how to re-engage, retain and graduate students. Eagle Rock provides consulting services at school sites and hosts educators who study and learn from Eagle Rock practices. The non-profit Center is an initiative of American Honda Motor Co., Inc.