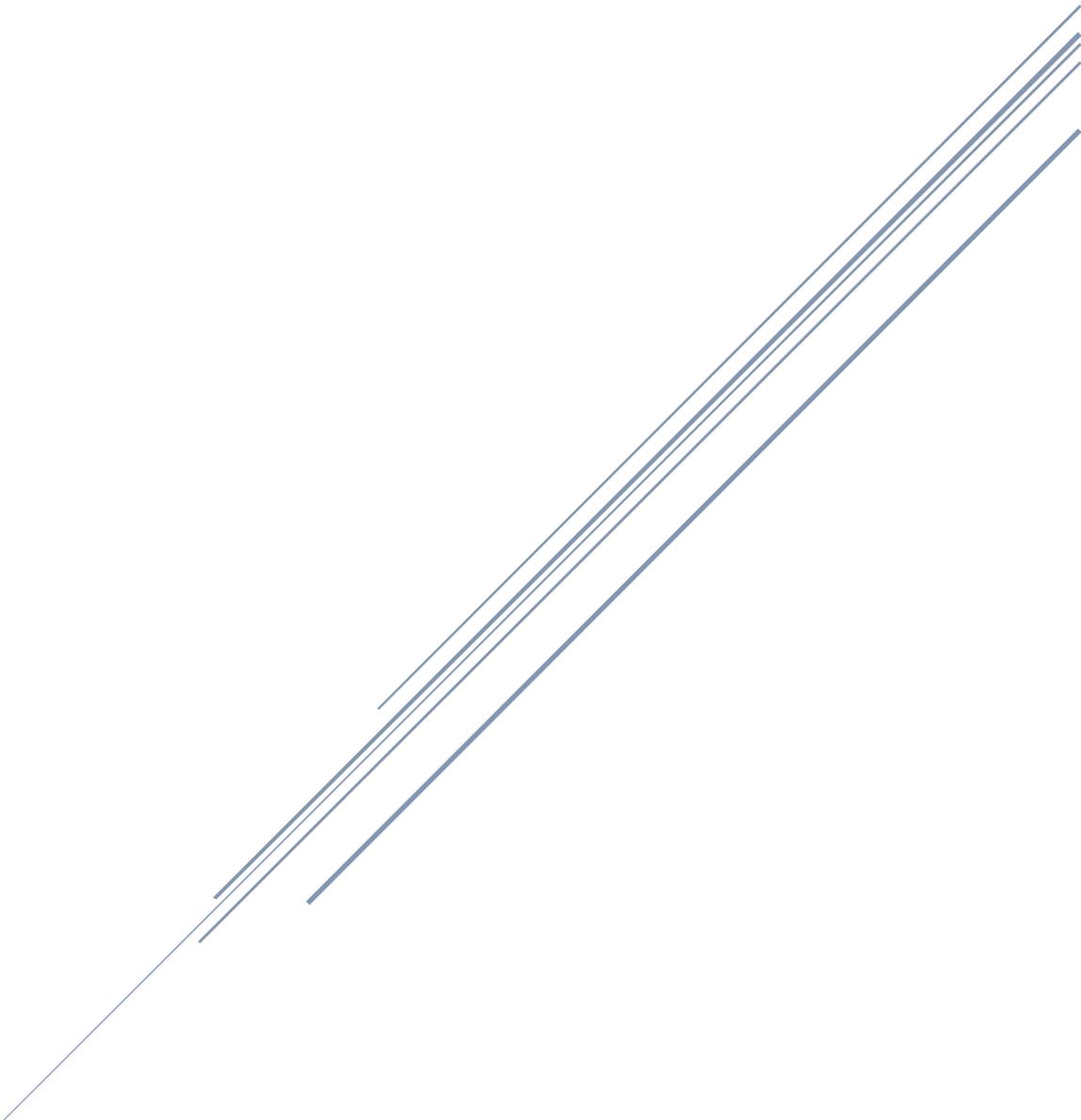


# STORIES OF LEARNING

American Graduate Dialogues in  
Sandoval, Torrance and Valencia Counties



## **Acknowledgements**

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## Overview

During the winter and spring of 2015, Learning Alliance New Mexico and Littlelobe partnered with New Mexico Public Broadcast System – American Graduate, NM PBS – American Graduate, and the United Way of Central New Mexico on a project to engage students and communities around the themes of graduation, attendance and school support. The three themes align with the work of the High School Graduation Collaborative Action Network of Mission: Graduate.

Learning Alliance New Mexico and Littlelobe worked with students in four high schools located in Sandoval, Torrance and Valencia counties. Students spent a full-day exploring ideas about graduation, attendance and school support through storytelling, interviewing and filmmaking. Littlelobe edited student generated media into 10 – 15 minute films. Learning Alliance, Littlelobe and student leaders showcased each film in the corresponding rural community, relayed written student responses to interview questions and engaged participants in dialogues around what they heard and read about from the student work. Media can be viewed at [www.learningalliancencm.org/stories-of-learning-intiative](http://www.learningalliancencm.org/stories-of-learning-intiative) and the written responses are included in Appendix A of this report.

After the Sandoval, Torrance and Valencia community dialogues, NM PBS invited students, dialogue participants and a panel of local education leaders to be part of a Public Square Town Hall television program filming. NM PBS filmed the show during April 2015 and aired the program May 2015. The program can be viewed at <http://portal.knme.org/video/2365498973/>.

Research from this partnership, including films, written responses and the PBS show, can inform future work of the High School Graduation Collaborative Action Network of Mission: Graduate and other collective impact work in New Mexico.

## Stories of Learning Process

Before partnering with NM PBS, Learning Alliance and Littlelobe engaged a number of communities in New Mexico using a similar process. Littlelobe uses art and filmmaking to highlight youth and community voice. Learning Alliance offers community dialogue facilitation to encourage participants to use an asset-based approach to recommend how education could better serve students and education leaders. The organizations work together to generate solutions rooted in local wisdom and diverse perspectives. The themes below resulted from using this process.



## Sandoval County Findings

More than 20 students and community members, including the Bernalillo High School principal, convened to discuss graduation, attendance and school supports in Sandoval County. Input from the dialogue participants include:

### Themes from Sandoval students

- Afterschool activities - specifically art, music and filmmaking - engage students and encourage them to attend school and graduate
- More focus on financial literacy would better support students as they prepare for college and life after graduation
- Students are highly motivated to attend school for social reasons, e.g. visiting with their friends and dating partners, etc.
- Many students experience bullying, which creates a desire for more respectful relationships among peers

### Themes from Sandoval community members

- Families desire high achievement, completion and personal development for students
- Need for deep community involvement to support students holistically – socially, emotionally, mentally and vocationally
- Better communication and understanding between schools, communities and families would lead to greater success

## Torrance County Findings

More than 25 students and community members, including the Moriarty and Estancia superintendents, convened to discuss graduation, attendance and school supports in Torrance County. Input from the dialogue participants include:

### Themes from Torrance students

- Students value and appreciate FUN in the classroom
- Upon reflection, many students wish they would have done better in school sooner (studied more, learned from mistakes, paid more attention, etc.)
- Social well-being is of great importance, which makes bullying an even bigger challenge
- Many core classes do not address individual creative and professional interests
- Pressures on students (time management, good grades, college and career prep, etc.) can be overwhelming

### Themes from Torrance community members

- Successful students grow pride, success and economic development in the community
- Local desires to create a shared vision for community, instill the value of learning in students and create systems more responsive to students' individuality, choices and interests
- Community support of student and teacher well-being is vital

## Valencia County Findings

More than 50 students and community members, including the School of Dreams Academy and Los Lunas principals, convened to discuss graduation, attendance and school supports in Valencia County. Input from the dialogue participants include:

### Themes from Valencia students

- Students desire active classrooms where they learn about their career interests
- Some of the most significant moments in school/things students love about school involve sports, extra-curricular activities, connections with teachers, socializing and learning
- Gear UP and AVID make strong impressions on students
- Struggles include stress and being overwhelmed, lack of social engagement and not understanding subjects and assignments

### Themes from Valencia community members

- A strong, safe school community involves supported students, families and teachers who are engaged, respectful and successful
- Open communication is key to developing the strong, safe community described above
- Smaller classes with more technology and individualized learning could help students succeed

## Evaluation

Of the 49 participants from Sandoval, Torrance and Valencia who turned in evaluations, 49 (100%) indicated attending the dialogues was a good use of their time. Participants commented on what they learned about how to better support students and graduation. See Appendix D for specific comments.

## Next Steps

Learning Alliance encourages Sandoval, Torrance and Valencia community members to further discussions and local initiatives to address the themes identified during the dialogues. Learning Alliance will continue to host dialogues, attend meetings and support existing efforts supportive of themes. As Learning Alliance works with more communities, common themes and concerns begin to frame state-wide issues. In communities across the state, issues like personalized learning relevant to a student's desired career and the importance of strong relationships between students, families and teachers have emerged time and again as vital to student success.

Common statewide issues can inform statewide efforts to improve education. Policy, programs and personal focus can respond directly to community concerns. At a local level, community members have a responsibility to their students and schools. At a state level, New Mexicans have a responsibility for all New Mexican students and all New Mexican schools. Information presented in this report may be helpful to inform local and state-wide strategies.

## Appendix A – Sampling of Students’ Questionnaire Responses

During the Stories of Learning one-day intensive, filmmaking sessions at **Bernalillo High School**, students answered questionnaires as a means to begin thinking about different stories for the day. Some answers from the questionnaires are listed below.

### My favorite kind of classroom environment is...

- Science because I really dig science
- Colorful and open because I feel more lively, happy and comfortable in that environment
- Art because I love to draw and paint new creations
- A hands on environment because we get to learn how to work and associate with other people
- Art because I love painting and drawing, but also having fun
- Quiet because I can draw and listen to my teacher
- Interactive but silent when it needs to be because it's easier to see other perspectives and concentrate when needed
- Math
- A small classroom because with small groups, you get to know people better and concentrate more

### If I could start school over again I would...

- Make the right decisions
- Do my best to graduate on time
- Turn all my work in
- Not transfer high schools
- Grow my hair earlier
- Work hard
- Not be afraid to be me

### These are the most significant moments I experienced as a student

- Smoking my first joint
- Getting my art scholarship
- Creating hilarious memories
- Both my grandmas passing
- Meeting my partner
- First day away from home
- First day of middle school
- Making new friends**
- Getting Honor Roll
- 8th grade promotion
- Getting accepted to College Horizons and SPAZ
- Starting to not care
- Realizing how important school is to me
- First day of high school
- Being me
- Being bullied
- Not fitting in

If I could learn one thing in school, I would learn...

- Forensics because it is interesting
- The arts because that is what I love doing
- A big vocabulary because I would use it in my music
- Art because I could become a better drawer
- Math because it is important

Something that happened or I learned in school that really engaged/concerned/mattered to me was...

- When the science teacher broke down and got fired
- That bullying is not punished enough
- My grades and my parents - they both push me to do my best
- Getting into college for a better future
- Weight lifting matters to me because I was losing weight
- Science

These are the things I love most about school:

- |                  |                                   |                   |
|------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|
| • <b>Friends</b> | - <i>Coming to the Club House</i> | - <i>Art</i>      |
| • Thespians      | - <i>Staying after school</i>     | - Making memories |
| • Going to class | - Girlfriend/boyfriend            | - Sports          |
| • Reading        | - Learning new things             |                   |

These are the things I struggle with most about school:

- |                                |                              |                   |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| • <b>Saving money</b>          | - Being in afterschool clubs | - Math            |
| • Hearing people use gay slurs | - Procrastination            | - Credits         |
| • Classes                      | - Staying out of trouble     | - Drugs           |
| • Peer pressure                | - Grades                     | - <i>Bullying</i> |
| • People saying rude things    | - Struggling                 | - Science         |

During the Stories of Learning one-day intensive, filmmaking sessions at **Estancia High School**, students answered questionnaires as a means to begin thinking about different stories for the day. Some answers from the questionnaires are listed below.

My favorite kind of classroom environment is...

- Fun one because having fun and learning is the best
- Quiet because I work best on my own
- Outside because I am an outdoor person and I love it
- A little loud because I get anxiety when it is too quiet
- Noisy because it makes everyone more happy and the environment more happy
- Fun because it helps me get in the mood to work
- Close knit because it makes me feel more relaxed
- A free, fun classroom because I don't like strict guidelines
- English class because I get so much out of it and love it
- Abundance of students because everyone has a say and different ideas
- A happy, joyous, free kind because work is done in a happier more understanding way
- P.E. because it's fun
- Not many students because then the teacher listens to me
- Accepting because it's nice to feel accepted and freely express your opinion

If I could start school over again I would...

- |                                |                              |                     |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|
| •Not (too close to finishing)  | -Do more social activities   | -Pay more attention |
| • <b>Do better; study hard</b> | -Go in having more knowledge | -Read more books    |
| •Change a lot of things        | -Learn from my mistakes      | -Do the same        |
| •Enjoy easy kindergarten class | -Be nicer                    |                     |

These are the most significant moments I experienced as a student

- |  |                         |                          |
|--|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| • <b>Meeting my best friends</b>                         | - Learning              | - Bullying               |
| •Beginning high school                                   | - Being abused          | - Looking at colleges    |
| • <i>Good teachers who care</i>                          | - Gifted classes        | - Senior year, free year |
| •Winning a drawing contest                               | - Getting into NJHS     | - Happiness              |
| •The feeling of being held back                          | - Relationships         | - Joining FFA            |
| •Bringing my animals to school                           | - Getting a valentine   | - Making honor roll      |
| •Working with Mr. Harbert                                | - Taught by Mr. Jenkins | - Skipping a grade       |
| •Finishing elementary                                    | - Joining a sports team | - Fighting               |
| •Sophomore year  | - Seattle semester      |                          |
| •Learning to not care what people think                  |                         |                          |
| •Seeing kids get bullied; helping them; fighting a bully |                         |                          |

If I could learn one thing in school, I would learn...

- Math because I'm not very good at it
- About art because I love art
- How to speak another language because it could be a skill that will help in life
- How to have a better work ethic because I am bad at turning in things
- Creative writing because it is something I would love to see more of
- About law because I want to be in the law profession
- Technology and art because I love drawing and learning more
- Anatomy because I love science about the human body
- How to play the trumpet because that's one on my bucket list
- Math because I want to be an engineer
- Drama because I really wanted a drama class
- Finances because I actually need to know that

Something that happened or I learned in school that really engaged/concerned/mattered to me was...

- The PARRC testing
- My grade and graduating
- Common Core
- Why I exist
- Having my buddy kill himself
- All the opportunities you can get
- Going to the state cross country meet
- If you don't at least try, you won't go anywhere
- Being bullied and seeing people bullied

These are the things I love most about school:

- |                  |                                  |                       |
|------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| • <b>Friends</b> | - <b>Lunch</b>                   | - <b>Learning</b>     |
| • <b>Sports</b>  | - <b>Getting out of my house</b> | - <b>Art</b>          |
| • Writing        | - <i>Girlfriend/boyfriend</i>    | - FFA                 |
| • Judging teams  | - Laughing                       | -Clubs                |
| • Teachers       | - <i>Talking</i>                 | -Escaping my problems |

These are the things I struggle with most about school:

- |                          |                              |                            |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| • <i>Math</i>            | - <b>Homework/studying</b>   | - <i>Money for college</i> |
| • Testing                | - <b>Good grades</b>         | - Bad influences           |
| • Time management        | - <i>Judgmental students</i> | - Drugs                    |
| • Volunteering           | - Racist jokes               | - Unfair teachers          |
| • Reading                | - Writing                    | - Being different          |
| • Waiting for graduation | - Choosing a career path     | - Teachers who dislike me  |

During the Stories of Learning one day intensive, filmmaking sessions at **Los Lunas High School** and the **School of Dreams Academy**, students answered questionnaires as a means to begin thinking about different stories for the day. Some answers from the questionnaires are listed below.

My favorite kind of classroom is...

- Comfortable and open because it makes you feel at home and you can be open-minded
- Close together because I felt comfortable
- A classroom with pictures because I feel like my teacher is fun and outgoing
- A decorated room because it makes me know what the teach kind of likes
- *An AP class because all or most [of] the students in that class want to learn as much as I do*
- A fun and hands on learning environment because I feel that students/people in general learn better when it's fun hands on experience
- Relaxed/collaborative because it gets everyone involved
- Open space with a lot of people because I like to interact with people and not feel so closed up
- A free and energetic one because it makes me interested in the learning and I actually learn
- Relaxed and informative because it provides the most learning to me
- Explorative and fun because when I'm having fun I actually learn things
- With a lot of students because you can hear everyone's opinions
- *Gear Up/AVID classroom because you give your opinion, talk and solve problems in a group*
- A talkative, working class because it'll be good if everyone works and has fun at the same time
- Interacting with students because I like to speak my mind and meet new people
- A sociable one because that's how students grow
- A small classroom because I don't feel like nobody cares, that the teachers want to be there
- Somewhat relaxed but serious because it helps to not be stressful and I get work done
- Quiet because I can focus
- Controlled chaos because I love socializing and being around others
- To be interactive because I feel it gives an amazing learning experience
- Fun, calm and exciting because it makes me feel at ease
- Active environment because I like projects and hands-on activities
- Happy and fun because it makes school fun and it makes learning fun
- Interactive because if the students and teachers can't discuss things together it's hard to learn
- Art because it's a way to express your feelings
- Relaxed because no pressure
- Active environment because you always get to learn something new

If I could start school over again, I would...

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do it the same way I did before</li> <li>• Take it more seriously</li> <li>• <b><i>Try harder and focus more on math and science</i></b></li> <li>• I don't think I would like to start school again</li> <li>• Never get suspended or expelled</li> <li>• Talk to way more girls</li> <li>• Really try to learn</li> <li>• Take advanced classes</li> <li>• Do my best at everything</li> <li>• Be a better student</li> <li>• Learn more about writing</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Take more time to appreciate it</li> <li>- Start doing all my work</li> <li>- Definitely not</li> <li>- Try to talk to everyone</li> <li>- Learn from my mistakes</li> <li>- Make different friends</li> <li>- Start over in middle school</li> <li>- <b><i>Pay more attention</i></b></li> <li>- Take opportunities I have passed up</li> <li>- Take advantage of naptime</li> <li>- Have more people around me</li> </ul> |
|--|--|

These are the most significant moments I experienced as a student:

- **Having a teacher there to help me**
- *Having sports to help me escape*
- *Making the school sports teams*
- **Being involved in extra-curricular activities**
- Meeting my favorite teacher
- Watching "Predator"
- Learned to write in cursive
- Realizing school doesn't prepare you for reality
- *Being exposed to great literature*
- Having to put up with bad teachers
- Education does matter
- Always take notes
- Don't be absent
- Passing the Government end of course exam
- Being homeschooled
- Doing a lot of writing and entering contests
- Becoming an influential person in my class
- Meeting amazing people
- Finding four Fs on my report card
- It's hard for me to learn English and writing
- In school, just have fun
- My grades dropping from having hard times
- Having to maintain my grades for sports
- Moving to a lot of different schools
- **Meeting new people and friends**
- *Being bullied*
- The first time I got in a fight
- First love and heart break
- Learning so many new things in Chemistry
- Losing friends
- Learning to be myself
- You're not getting younger
- Get on your teacher's good-side
- Getting sent to the principal
- Getting accepted to UNM
- Going to an actual school
- Being put down by a teacher
- Accomplishing good things
- Getting suspended
- Being the leader of choir
- I'm learning things I know but deeper
- Ridiculed for being gay

If I could learn about one thing in school, I would learn...

- Real life situations because we need it and it would be fun
- To be open to others because the more people you know the better you'll be
- Filmmaking because I like to make memories
- More calculus and physics because it [is] what I want to do when I have a career
- About animals and the outdoors because I love animals and the outdoors is where I feel free
- Music theory because I'm interested in how harmony is created
- Sound engineering and music production because that's what I want to do later on
- A trade because algebra is not real life; it's not life after school
- Chemistry because I love Chemistry and always want to learn more
- How to be a good significant because that is the most important to me
- More math (calculus) because I want to become an engineer
- How to fix cars because in case of an emergency and to become a mechanic
- How to work with others because it's an important part of learning and accepting
- Anatomy because it's an investment in my human capital because I want to go pre-med
- Writing and drama because I want to do these for my career
- How to balance a check book because I need to know that
- How to help people because I like to help people
- To play guitar because that is my favorite instrument
- How to be a good mother (for the future) because my mom is the first person I look up to and I'd like someone to look up to me as a good role model
- Math because [it's] my favorite subject
- Art because it is my passion
- How to rely on myself

Something that happened or I learned in school that really engaged/concerned/mattered to me was...

- The dash - Filming because a video can tell a lot
- To have someone along the way to help me - Being introduced to physics
- **Joining Gear UP** - **Being in AVID**
- Learning how to write really well - *Chemistry*
- The human brain and how we think - US History and Dance
- English and science - People judge you no matter what
- The rape crisis prevention program - Being on a competitive dance team
- Getting into good habits for my future - *The Holocaust*
- My art teacher taught me Anime
- Everyone's different and not everyone is going to like you

These are the things I love most about school:

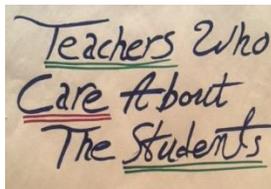
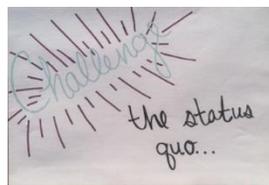
- **Friends** - **Sports** - **Boyfriends/girlfriends**
- **Learning something new every day** - **Math and science** - **Gear UP**
- **Favorite teachers** - Falling asleep - *Clowning around*
- Building my future - **Lunch** - AVID
- **Dance** - Reading - Rehearsals
- **AP Art** - Broadcasting/film class - Having fun
- Being motivated by teachers and peers - My school is small - English
- The advantages we have - Digital art

These are the things I struggle with most in school:

- Stress - *Overwhelm myself* - **Having a lot of work**
- Not wanting to be there - Caring what others think - My handwriting
- Keeping up my reputation - Paying attention in class - **Preparing for college**
- Not being outgoing - *Not having friends* - **Bullying**
- Getting here on time - Our generation just sucks - Chemistry
- Motivating [myself] to do mindless and useless [stuff] - Respecting authority
- *Understanding math* - Prepare for testing - **Waking up**
- Not understanding what's taught - Walking to class - Grades
- My pre-quitting because of my fear of failing - Economics
- Some of my teachers - The language - The worldliness
- *Math* - *Work I don't understand* - *Tests and quizzes*
- Not being good enough to do anything - Reading - Time management
- Getting caught up in girl drama

## Appendix B – Sampling of Students’ Advocacy Messages

My school is like a group of my best friends	Surround yourself with people who make you smile	Always stay positive	School isn't just in the classroom
State Champs 2015 Football	Get a good education and graduate	It's the people and community that add color	A teacher that goes the extra mile
You're worth it!	Less Uniform More U	Hey We are young adults Not adults	Don't throw me into adulthood Prepare me for it
Escaping to sports activities	Hands on projects	A cosmetology program-Programs that would benefit my future career	Need a mentor to help thru obstacles
Welcome to a happy, healthy, fun, exciting school	I go to school for a better life	Involving real life situations	Having positive energy is :)
One step closer to freedom!	Enhance education	A great community	Accept(s) me for who I am
	Failing sucks...I need a tutor!	Where's my Life Skills 101 class?	



## Appendix C – Sampling of Dialogue Participants’ Prompt Responses

### **What are your hopes for education in Sandoval County?**

- Graduation is 100%
- Go to college; Have a successful job; Become a special education art therapist; Have 9 kids and a wife
- All tribal leaders to support all educational needs; Get families to understand their children; Coordinate with Town of Bernalillo and all tribal libraries to have access to libraries – possibly longer hours
- There is always a support system for students...ALWAYS!
- Students can have a better life with the county and they can help them out with everything they need in school
- Students are challenged to grow into themselves
- The education system in Sandoval will become more interested in the lives of students and continue to help students struggling with their own road blocks graduate
- To be honest, I’ve lost hope in the education system; I guess maybe my hope would be that the system could regain my confidence and trust
- People want to be here more because schools are great

### **What actions would benefit us all (in Sandoval County)?**

- Make sure every student can read at outstanding proficiency and comprehension; Make sure every student has a future dream realized through education; Start with dreams then follow your bliss
- Social network; Brighter experience of communication
- Community involvement; Smaller class sizes; Educate our leaders to understand and hear our children’s voices and needs
- Love and support
- Believing in everyone and showing support and care
- We should help out what the students are doing; What the county should do is help out our kids and other students that need help
- Work through school and get a higher education
- If teachers really took it upon themselves to know their students; To learn what interests them and what is causing them to struggle; If they do that, I believe there would be a better chance of students, teachers and parents being happier
- Take bullying and peer pressure seriously – it ruined my educational experience for years and the impact has extended into my adult life; More realistic consequences; Use “natural” consequences; Use them early; Don’t wait until bad habits are entrenched; Cultivate empathy and the ability to connect
- Students learn to grow food and cook it; Healthcare at school, including mental

## **What does the ideal education look like and feel like to best support students and increase graduation (in Sandoval County)?**

- Elementary, middle school, high school, college, break, career
- More tutors on hand; Computer Club House is essential to my children; Introduce different clubs to motivate students; Interventions needed for children who are emotionally stressed out to prevent them from dropping out of school
- Knowing that you can always do better; Twelve years and you are finished for the moment
- An environment where everyone is comfortable, where they feel that and they have the initiative to graduate
- You have to push your kids to go to school and finish it then get a better job; They can go back to school and have a better life; They should have more stuff to do for the school and make sure they do their work and help each other
- A fruit tree – the student is the tree and the branches are all the interests and projects that the student is growing; Some branches cross each other and intersect in surprising ways – connection are made that weren't there before; New branches burst forth from older but still vital branches and the tree continues to grow into its own shape; Toward fruit picking graduation time, the tree's myriad branches are heavy with juicy fruit; The fruit is picked and eaten by the younger students and the growing season cycle begin all over again with eager anticipation for an even better crop next year!
- A big, supportive family with students supporting students and teachers really caring about the success of their students; A place where you feel safe and comfortable; It would also be a more open place with more natural lights and colors
- Free of bullying; Personalized to best meet each individual's needs
- Year-round including summer; Music, theater, dance, art, coding, gaming, movies in school, TV shows produced by students

## **What possibilities exist that we haven't imagined (in Sandoval County)?**

- A complete overhaul of the way we educate; More hands on for those who learn in that manner; Increased higher educational prospects for students who are less hands on
- Right state of mind
- Transportation to and from libraries; Not all tribal members have access to the internet; Guest speakers for positive reinforcement of students
- Anything is possible as long as you put your mind to it
- Each student is a whole fruit tree; We haven't tapped the potential of what a student is capable of
- Graduating high school as a senior is not the only path into college; Students who, for individual reasons, may benefit from getting a GED and going straight to college should be allowed and encouraged to do so; More options should exist to not require "full day" classroom studies; Perhaps for mental health reasons or because some students need less classroom instruction; give them room and time to explore and discover
- Art infused into every class including math and science; Gourmet food in the cafeteria

## **What are your hopes for education in Torrance County?**

- Money; Education to better ourselves; Clubs – we get so bored with the standard classes
- That every student has the opportunity to graduate
- That students exceed, excel, achieve their goals and make their dreams come true
- For graduation to go up for many students in the county
- A big corps will find potential in this valley which will create economic growth and opportunity for our people and communities; Students have opportunities for internships and career choices
- Education will enable our students to escape poverty as adults and bring businesses and help to Torrance County
- Students taking pride in school and county
- Love to see our school flourish and grow for our community; School pride to be through the roof; For school to be a place where kids want to go and where they want to be
- Students look beyond just going to school and getting it over with and start building a passion for learning and making their lives better
- To be recognized as a premier educational system that provides opportunities for students to enjoy school experiences and lead productive and individually successful lives
- Industry and employment will move in so that students will be allowed to stay where they are and still make a living if that is their choice
- The education system can grow and become less one-sided
- To make school the place that students want to be because learning is the best experience they have; They are respected and valued while engaged in their education
- There will be an increase in students; Increase in funds to bring back the arts, home economics and family consumer services

## **What actions would benefit us all (in Torrance County)?**

- We need to come together as a community; We need a voice; We need a change
- Fundraising; More books; More teachers; More foreign language classes; More sports programs
- If we had more funding and more teachers
- Teacher and student support from all stakeholders; Shared vision of what our hopes for education look like; Teaching styles that match learning styles of students from this generation
- Unity; Communication; Parent and community involvement; More programs; More extracurricular activities; More motivation for our kids to want to be here
- More extracurricular programs; More student involvement in Board decisions
- True community engagement and involvement leading to a common purpose
- Responsible adults with a strong civic responsibility, integrity and willingness to do what it takes to change their worlds
- A more diverse selection and also more personalized methods that make people think in a way they would want to; Not just testing, testing and more testing!
- Considering and incorporating student input and needs in planning
- Stop doing what hasn't worked by a different name and work on using successful methods already in place; Change the culture of survival to become one of excellence

## What does the ideal education look like and feel like to best support students and increase graduation (in Torrance County)?

- One in which students are respected, meaningfully engaged in their own learning, and become convinced that their high school experience will transfer to their adult lives; One in which the adults at their schools clearly care and support their school efforts
- Less testing; Going back to the teachers being able to teach; Knowing what the students are going to major in college
- Better building; New stuff; More faster computers
- A fun environment for the student because many of them get bored of school because there is nothing to do
- Attendance; Students who are prepared to learn; Happy, self-confident students and adults; Teachers and students working together; Appropriate staff to meet all students' needs and interests; Family supports such as housing and crisis management working with schools; Teachers teaching what they love and sharing their passions
- Student ownership – students have a voice in their classroom and school; Student engagement – instruction that engages them on their level and pushes them to reach higher levels of learning than they thought possible; Every student knowing/feeling/understanding they have teachers that care and are willing and capable of helping them reach their full potential
- Understanding a student's strengths and weaknesses; Helping students understand our global world through well-rounded education and sensitivity to countries, cultures and people
- More flexible schedule; More 1-on-1 time for children; More realistic environment; Career-oriented high schools; Lots of hands-on learning; Field trips and career fairs; Guest speakers; Drs, lawyers, business leaders, chemists to teach; Flipped classroom setting; Give kids more ownership and allow them more choices
- Students wanting to come to school; Teachers who motivate kids to be the best they can be; Students fighting each other for involvement
- Student input is sought and implemented as much as realistically possible; Students must be shown and given various opportunities to better understand what their options are
- The education that prepares students for their futures; They should not only be learning the core subjects, but things like balancing a checkbook, saving money and making wise investment decisions; As a volunteer I heard students grouse about learning things that they would never use; I constantly gave them real life examples of when they would draw upon the particular concept that they were learning; An emphasis on the fact they are learning how to learn
- Less of an obligation and something that makes people want to go and work, not just grumble and complain; Don't focus on one aspect or one group; Intelligences are not just yes or no
- Career exploration early on to guide planning and courses for future goals and pathways; Students getting/using the skills that they need to choose a future that they want due to opportunities; Courses that are valued and applicable to life skills and needs, that engage students and make them want to be in school and working towards their future
- Class size of 1 teacher to 14-20 students; Students working toward a career goal instead of the "factory model"

## What possibilities exist that we haven't imagined (in Torrance County)?

- Kids don't care if they don't get an education or even try; but we can make it happen
- Moving away from a "seat-time" model and toward more "Just-In-Time" learning opportunities; Today's students are so globally connected their learning styles demand faster pacing
- More basketball courts; More sports programs; More electives (band, choir, law), Rugby!
- Time, money, etc.
- Use of technology
- Technology in the hands of students; Inquiry-based instruction – students learn curriculum through problem-solving and real world, engaging activities and projects
- Student exchange to other countries
- Design the career path with plan A/B/C; Give kids more alternatives
- Getting students more involved in something they have a passion for; Getting students interested in things outside of school – it's not just the lockers and classrooms that make school
- 100% graduation with 100% of graduates working toward his/her individual life aspiration(s)
- Vocational programs should be emphasized as not all students aspire to a higher education but all students will have to make a living
- Immersion in different environments and scenarios
- Look at Finland's system – seems to be excelling, not stifling, creativity to meet the test

## What are your hopes for education in Valencia County?

- Every student graduates every year
- We at least get an A as a grade for the school system and we get more kids to participate
- All students feel good about school
- Better roads
- Kids can go to school in a safe place, be encouraged and be taught by teachers that are professional; It's great that teachers befriend our kids – unfortunately too often they try to act too much like the kids and don't hold high standards in being respectable
- 100% graduation in Valencia County; A little stricter on students; Zero tolerance for bullying
- Prepare high schoolers for college; Better pay for teachers
- Higher graduation rate with a plan for college and trade [school]
- Education will straighten up; Not so much testing; More class time; I hope that God will be accepted in schools again; If all students could really enjoy their education
- Education could further improve for not only schools in general, but for students and staff as well; You could have the best school and school system but what is it without students and staff?; The more that students and staff understand and get reached out and reach out for help for themselves, the better the system will become; Start small and go big; There is always room for improvement
- It continues to grow and evolve
- We get on the path to getting more students to value education; There are so many ways to incentivize learning and to make kids enjoy school
- Reduced high school dropout and increased college graduates; Improved economy; Reduced suicide; Happy and healthy families

## **What actions would benefit us all (in Valencia County)?**

- Community communication
- The actions of everyone sitting along with each other and actually wanting to learn; If everyone had a dream and they actually set their minds to it we would have a better community and student faculty
- More communications at all levels; Public information system focused on student learning and education
- As far as bullying – it will never end – so we need to teach our kids to stand up for themselves and to stand up for others when they see it happening
- Positive attitudes; Zero tolerance
- Get the government to back off and let the parents have control of the children as they use to be able; Be able to have communication between parents and children
- Anti-bullying; Better learning environment; Focused; Good Grades; Graduate
- Letting God back in; Standing up for ourselves (for things like bullying); Doing all we can to give students their best education for their needs/interests
- Smaller more dedicated classes focusing on where students see themselves in the future
- Actions toward having more involved teachers and productive curriculum; Making sure our students will become productive graduates will help everyone
- More direction and support for students; Less emphasis on standardized tests; Improved access to technology
- No bullying; Becoming friends again

## **What does the ideal education look like and feel like to best support students and increase graduation (in Valencia County)?**

- Education where both student and teacher are equally excited and prepared to teach and learn
- Having the teachers and students all engaged in the subject; Being active and just full of life; It would also feel comfortable and feel like you can't be judged
- School culture should reflect that everyone is important to each other; Students need to believe that they can succeed; Teachers know that they made a real difference to each student
- Family support; Do good in school
- Quiet and focused so that we can learn; Teachers should connect to students in a personal way
- Getting everyone involved; Kids not only make good grades but are reclassified; These kids do not get heard even if people say they do; Getting them involved will help them get encouraged
- Complete circle; Zero tolerance
- Students learn in a fun way
- If students have physical activity, individualized learning plan, staff/teacher/parent/guardian involvement, varied electives, emotional support and anti-bullying then they become focused and engaged and graduate
- Education that prepares students for the future; Things that speak out to them and their interests instead of putting every student through the exact same courses; Letting us have more freedom and teaching us what we want to know will go a longer way than forcing us to learn things

- Communication to ALL students; Students reaching out to teachers and vice versa; A beautiful and professional campus; A wider variety of classes for students to join – especially for career choices; A positive and optimistic environment; Professional teachers and staff and respectful public figures
- Not being ignored by friends, teachers, etc.; Being noticed by teachers, peers, etc.; People helping each other out with studying; Not so much testing and quizzes; Learning what we need and need in life, like how to write checks, etc.; Learning how to be more advanced and how to get our grades up and keep them up; After school tutoring
- It's a place where students and teachers work together to guide their learning; Allowing both work toward graduation and brighter future
- A place where students and teachers connect; When you like your teachers you focus more
- A genuine relationship and interaction between teacher and student; Fill students with motivation, enthusiasm, and a sense of accomplishment
- A safe environment that supports students' goals; The focus would be on learning not just earning credits; Success would be measured through authentic assessment methods rather than standardized tests; Each student would be challenged to reach his/her full potential and provided the support necessary to succeed; Services should include transportation, counseling, coaching and life skills
- Communication – the most important; A child is a product of the parent; What you see is usually what you get; Make it fun; Learning is fun!; Listen, talk less

### **What possibilities exist that we haven't imagined (in Valencia County)?**

- Finding out what every single student wants to do with their life and work with each one to make a plan how to get there
- The possibility that everyone we go and have went to school with since middle school would graduate; No drop outs and that is a possibility, we just all need to set our minds to it
- Getting the loud and outgoing kids partnered with the quiet ones and engaging them in subjects
- Use of technology for student to move faster in their educational career
- Having more types of teaching; Learning skills; Smaller class sizes; Allowing students to have days off for doctor appointments
- Giving
- There should be outside school instead of being inside
- Completely individualized learning
- Being more open to change; Student education to better fit them and their interests, needs and future career
- Breaking down public schools into small portions
- Smaller focused classes where students lead their education utilizing technology and media
- No federal qualification for teachers so more federal involvement in schools might help; Put more thought into who we're putting in a classroom and how that person is prepared to engage students
- John Lennon – Imagine all the people living life in peace/ Imagine no possessions/ I wonder if you can/ Brotherhood and man; Communication; Don't forget about trust; That's something that isn't spoken – you earn it

## Appendix D – Sampling of Participants’ Evaluative Comments to “What did you learn about how we can better support our students and graduation?”

### Sandoval

- Support by giving them a place to let their voices be heard and where they feel their voices/opinions are valued
- Showing love and support
- Support, encouragement
- Follow the heart
- To show ideas to help the school
- Everyone’s comments and positive feedback
- We really need to let students take classes that have relevance to their interests
- Each individual has unique factors that need to be addressed to ensure support...well, I guess, we already knew that, but it was emphasized
- We should listen more
- Get more smaller classrooms
- Be at school all day
- Mental illness; Education; Bliss; LGBTQ; Family; Communication
- How to learn more things about the school classwork and talking
- Stop bullying; Help students relax into themselves; “Follow your bliss” by Joseph Campbell; Do what’s in your heart; Support and love students and learning; Let students make decisions, make mistakes, talk about it, learn from it and move on; Don’t judge
- Push ourselves so that we can reach our goal

### Torrance

- Just realizing school can become so much more than what it is
- It sounds like they want less testing, enthusiastic teachers and more extracurricular activities
- Students want connections, too
- What we need to make things happen and what it takes!
- Open dialogue between students and others
- Listen to student input and seek their opinions; Offer more courses
- Student feedback! We need a forum for our students to have a voice
- Less testing and more teachers being able to teach
- It was amazing to hear one voice across the board; We all want more and better for our schools and community!
- That many people want to have newer technology than what we have these days
- That the students need a voice
- That to really get in touch with students we have to make a connection with them, even if it is just sitting down and talking to them

## Valencia

- Listen, compassion, feel, accountability
- By strengthening communication and teaching students things that will help them in the future for their careers
- Work as a community (parents/admin./teachers/students) to enhance student engagement
- Sound like communication between teachers and students
- That students want more communication
- That all the students want engaging teachers
- I learned about other people's input on education now and how we can improve it
- One on one for teachers and students; Also with parents and teachers; Students and parents
- I learned how kids want more hands on [learning] and communication with teachers as people
- I learned that communication is very important between students and teachers and I learned how to make my voice heard
- Got good insight into the students' point of view on what is important to them
- That communication and a focused environment is important
- I learned that communication is a big deal and it helps benefit students
- Better communication between everyone
- Better communication is so important on all levels
- More communication between teachers and students
- The students' participation was very enlightening to be open to their needs and that they do want to better themselves
- That we have to try and prevent bullying and make school fun
- I learned that there definitely needs to be more interaction in the classroom
- Improve relevance of education and communicate better with students