



Shaping the Future of AI in New Mexico Education: A Second Policy Brief

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Introduction

In 2018, Future Focused Education partnered with the State of New Mexico to reimagine assessment in response to the Yazzie-Martinez lawsuit. Through interviews with disengaged youth, the idea emerged of community-based capstone projects as a new pathway for student engagement. In 2024, the Legislature passed HB 171 "Modernizing Graduation Requirements" putting capstones and graduate profiles into statute.

As Future Focused Education began developing an AI-powered database platform to support schools in managing capstone programs, key questions emerged about ensuring the technology would align with the diverse languages, cultures, and values of New Mexico's communities. These questions sparked a broader conversation about the role of AI in New Mexico education and the importance of proactive policy to guide its implementation.

Initial Agreements

An initial policy convening on AI in New Mexico education revealed broad agreement on several key points. Participants expressed enthusiasm for AI's potential to enhance educational outcomes and for New Mexico's opportunity to lead in shaping AI policies and practices. Equitable AI access and representation across New Mexico's diverse communities emerged as a central priority. The group emphasized the importance of a policy framework that ensures local control of approved AI tools to protect cultural knowledge and data sovereignty, especially for tribal communities.

Detailed Findings

Building on these areas of consensus, a second convening expanded on the first conversation to introduce more specific recommendations for the state AI policy. Participants expanded on calls for data sovereignty, recommending specific frameworks to give tribal nations and other communities control over their data. They proposed adopting the CARE principles (Collective benefit, Authority to control, Responsibility, Ethics) as a framework for data governance in AI; in addition, participants called for ongoing tribal oversight through a commission or task force with real decision-making power. The ability for communities, particularly indigenous ones, to fully withdraw their data from AI systems if desired was considered essential.

Addressing potential biases in AI algorithms and ensuring transparency in data collection and use also emerged as key priorities. Participants emphasized that AI and



data should be treated as a public good, not controlled by private entities. They also stressed the importance of making AI tools universally accessible while cautioning against AI replacing human connection. Culturally sensitive AI and human training was considered essential when providing student support.

New Mexico's Distinct Perspective

The policy conversations in New Mexico have surfaced several considerations that set the state's approach to educational AI apart. Central among these is the proposal for a state-hosted AI system. This idea of a locally-controlled infrastructure that would keep data within state borders and allow for the development of AI tools tailored to New Mexico's cultural and educational contexts is a defining feature of the state's discussions.

The idea of a state-hosted system reflects a commitment to centering New Mexico's unique diversity in the development of AI tools and policies. It's not just about customizing the technology itself, but about creating an entire ecosystem that reflects New Mexico's languages, values, and ways of knowing.

Other states have used the metaphor of an electric bike to explain their goals for educational AI; electric bikes amplify human intention without overwhelming it, similar to how AI systems can aid users without replacing their agency. Participants generally agree with these principles, but they also emphasize that the AI needs to be compatible with the cultural context of learning. We can't just consider the bike; we must consider the landscape it travels through as well.

Critical Questions

We have identified five questions that should be addressed to move our thinking forward:

1. While the vision of a state-hosted AI system that reflects New Mexico's cultural landscape has emerged as a central theme in policy conversations, how would it be administered? How can we create governance structures that ensure ongoing community input and oversight, especially from tribal nations? Further, would these entities have the authority to act upon reports of suboptimal performance by the AI?
2. Beyond governance, who should have ultimate ownership of the model and the computing resources underlying it?
3. Similarly, what processes should be adopted to ensure democratic input and oversight while creating the local AI tool? How do we ensure that community and teacher voices are adequately and fully represented in this process?



4. What is the level of devolution the AI system should operate at? If we want to have that capacity, do we have the necessary AI expertise currently available in-state to juggle multiple models at multiple levels?
5. Finally, since AI is a rapidly-changing technology, how do we create a policy framework that's detailed enough to provide an incentive structure to catalyze community-minded AI practices while remaining flexible enough to account for advances without statutory changes?

A New Opportunity

As New Mexico continues to grapple with these critical questions, it has the opportunity to innovate a groundbreaking approach to educational AI policy. By centering the unique cultural landscape of the state and the voices of its diverse communities, New Mexico is poised to develop AI policies and practices that don't just mitigate harm, but actively promote equity, cultural sustainability, and community empowerment. However, realizing this potential will require ongoing conversation and collaboration. The ideas and priorities surfaced in these initial policy discussions provide a strong foundation, but there is still much work to be done to translate these insights into concrete policies and governance structures. As such, Future Focused Education and its partners are committed to continuing this crucial dialogue. The upcoming convening on July 29th represents the next step in this journey - an opportunity to dive deeper into the critical questions that have emerged, to engage more voices from across the state, and to chart a path forward that truly reflects the hopes and values of New Mexico's communities.