

New Mexico State Seal of Bilingualism-Biliteracy Focus Groups

Reviewing results

Guiding questions for reviewing the findings.

As you read the results think about these questions:

1. *What are the most important examples and features of successful implementation of the state seal?*
2. *What are the lessons of those successes? How can we share examples to support success in all districts?*
3. *What are the most important challenges or misconceptions expressed by participants? Are there any surprising challenges you hadn't heard about?*
4. *Where are the opportunities for support? What resources can be created? What recommendations provided in #13 are feasible?*
5. *Who should know about these results? How do you want to disseminate the information? What format would be most effective for the audience(s)?*

1. What were the original reasons for adopting the Seal?

Directors and teachers noted that their districts originally decided to adopt the seal so they could give students in their bilingual programs' recognition of their native language and cultural heritage. The seal also worked as an encouragement to continue studying non-English into and through high school. The seal would be a way to recognize Spanish-speaking students and their bilingual skills and to say that "you are valuable."

Teachers who teach students with IEP said that the seal was originally offered to students with IEP to create equity in access to opportunities and to develop of students' first language because that impacts the development of English, their second language. Tribal educators started the seal as a way to validate students who wanted to become fluent in their native language.

Students had many different reasons for why they decided to pursue the seal. Several students believe the seal will help them get to college or obtain a job. Several students are also pursuing the seal to emphasize their family's heritage and culture.

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2. What are the current priorities for the Seal program?

Strengthening students' identity and heritage and increasing the number of seal students were mentioned most often by district leaders as a current priority. Another current priority mentioned within one group, with consensus among all participants in that group, was keeping the level of rigor high and not watering it down so that students who attain the seal are truly bilingual and biliterate. Other priorities mentioned were to get more teachers to think about the seal as a *"shift in mindset and the way that we are embracing everybody in an effort towards equity,"* offer the seal in more languages, include teachers outside of the program to be part of the seal portfolio panels so that more teachers will start valuing the seal, fully understand the seal process and requirements, get permission for seal students to wear special seal stoles at graduation, restructure the seal to make it more rigorous and more challenging, reevaluate the seal and its purpose, add the seal to lower school levels so that students can stay in a dual language track through all school years.

Teachers current priorities varied partially by the length of time their school had been administering the seal. Priorities for those in districts where the seal was new centered around issues such as promoting the seal opportunity and increasing the number of students who earn the seal. Teachers in schools that had been administering the seal for some time focused more on improving the implementation, such as setting up a better system to keep track of students' seal-related achievements over the years. Other priorities teachers mentioned include learning how to administer the seal in more languages, determining if it is possible to create a special pathway for students with IEPs, and creating incentives that would encourage more students to earn the seal. For example, a participant mentioned that her school was trying to connect with businesses that take the seal into consideration in their hiring decisions and use that as an example of the seal benefit to encourage students to pursue the seal.

Teachers did not mention strengthening students' identity as a current priority, but when asked if it is, many noted that this is a priority but is not an aspect of the seal that gets mentioned when they promote the seal to students and families. They think it is inherent in the portfolio pathway that requires students to write an essay reflecting on their personal meaning of the seal.

Teachers who support students with IEPs said that their districts are looking into how to increase the number of students with disabilities in the bilingual seal pathway and how to include language goals in IEPs. They are trying to determine what required seal courses students with IEP take and what type of accommodations they need. Current priority for the tribal educator who participated in the focus groups is to increase the number of students who are fluent in their tribal language and strengthen students' identity with their tribal culture.

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3. How and when are students informed about the Seal?

Many of the district leaders and teachers noted that they promote the seal during high school staff visits to 8th-grade students, and also at the beginning of the high school for incoming freshman. After that, students are informed about the seal multiple times over the high school years by bilingual and multicultural education program teachers, world language teachers, counselors, and EL teachers. One participant said that Native American youth advisors inform and guide students in 9-12 grades in their high school. Directors in two groups mentioned that students learn about the seal from each other. In some schools at least, the seal has become so much part of the school culture that all staff keep an eye out for potential students. Language teachers promote the seal in their classes. At least in one school district, counselors promote the seal when they meet one-on-one with students and students learn about the seal in the Bilingual Parent Advisory Committee where seniors, who are currently pursuing the seal, give a presentation to parents and students about the seal. In one FG, participants also mentioned that they the seal in promoted on the district's website.

The tribal educator said that students are informed about the seal frequently. Every Native American student is enrolled into the tribal language culture program course and they are told that if they finish the program and meet the requirements, they can get the seal when they graduate.

Students learned about the seal in different ways. One reported knowing about the seal since their sophomore year but didn't start pursuing it until a higher grade. A few students knew about the seal before high school because a sibling had earned the seal or because they went to a bilingual elementary school and always knew about the path toward the seal. One learned about the seal in freshman year and has been pursuing it since then – he received a flow chart about different seal pathways during high school registration. For most of the students, the Spanish teachers and bilingual coordinators make sure they stay on schedule and know what to do through meetings, Remind and Google classroom or through email reminders to "bilingual seal 2020 class." One student noted that they were not clear about requirements and the process in general because their school does not have seal meetings and regular communications.

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4. How and when are parents informed about the Seal?

District leaders and teachers noted a variety of ways parents are informed about the seal at either the end of 8th grade or the beginning of 9th grade: during parents night, open house, orientation meetings, parent-teacher conferences, or parent advisory council meetings or sending home a brochure about the seal. One district has a messaging system that goes to all parents that announces the seal. Other staff mentioned the district website, word of mouth, or notification when the school thinks that a senior is ready to take the seal assessment. One district leader said that they don't inform parents about the seal except when they are invited to attend the celebration where their child receives the seal. The tribal educator noted that parents are informed by their students, through their website, or during monthly parent advisory council meetings.

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5. How and when do students sign up?

All directors said that the seal is available to anyone (that is, there are no prerequisites and students do not need to be nominated). One participant said that currently anyone can enroll, but they are planning to establish prerequisites to ensure that a student is able to take the necessary courses in high school and graduate with the seal (for example, you can't sign up in year 3 if you have only taken one non-English course, because "we don't want to set them up for failure"). This district is thinking about requiring students to have Spanish 1 and 2 before signing up for seal. A teacher said that anyone can sign up for the seal, but she recruits seniors who have passed or almost passed the Determining Language Proficiency Assessment that students must take per the MOU the district has with the Navajo Nation.

For almost all participants, there doesn't seem to be a formal way to sign up students who are interested in pursuing the seal at their district/school. When participants in different groups were asked this question, they referred to "signing up" as the final step during which students apply to graduate with the seal and counselors check that the students fulfill the requirements. However, in one school, students who are interested in pursuing the seal, sign up for it earlier in high school.

Schools rely on bilingual or foreign language teachers or coordinators to keep a spreadsheet to record students' language courses they have taken. One participant was concerned that more students would be eligible for the state seal, but this is not always noticed due to the informal record keeping and because some teachers don't know about all the different state seal pathways. This is especially worrisome for students who transfer from one district to another in high schools. When talking about getting new students on track for earning the seal, one coordinator noted, "I don't really have a process for anybody. It's just... it's advertised and if they want it, they can sign up for it."

The tribal educator said that those who have met the seal requirements sign up for the seal just before high school graduation.

As noted by school and district staff, the official “signing up” happens when they fill out the application for the seal in their senior year.

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6. Are students with individualized education plans pursuing the Seal?

All of the district- and school-level participants said that students with IEP can sign up for the seal, but the answer was often qualified by statements, such as "to my knowledge yes, it's available to any student" or "I don't see why not. I mean, you realize that population is somewhat limited, but you have to provide that access to it." One district-level educator said that while the seal is available for all, they don't really make it available for all because many special education students are not able to take the units of credit that are required for the seal (because of different course codes). A few participants were aware that accommodations for students with IEP existed. One teacher said that the accommodations are handled at the district level. In some schools, students with IEP were pursuing the seal, but it appeared that in many districts, educators were not aware of any students with IEP who were currently pursuing the seal or had earned the seal. One teacher said that they were in the process of trying to establish a pathway for students with IEP.

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7. How are students recognized as they work toward the Seal?

Most participants said that they don't recognize high schools students in any way while they are pursuing the seal, but one participant said that students in these programs are recognized at celebrations at the middle school level, at ninth grade academy, and at high school. They recognize seal recipients with a reception for families. This district offers a *district* seal at the elementary- and middle school-level, recognize seal recipients during a "promotion" ceremony after 5th and 8th grades where “bilingual” is one of the awards. For all other schools represented in the groups, students are not recognized until their high school graduation ceremony.

Student reported feeling supported and recognized by multiple teachers who coordinate with each other, but also feel that other clubs, sports, and AP courses are a higher priority by their school. A few students noted unless you have friends who are also pursuing the seal or Spanish-speaking teachers, you don't really learn about the seal – it doesn't seem valued throughout the school. One student had a special teacher who encouraged them to earn the seal. No student indicated that their school had any kind of celebration or recognition for students who were pursuing the seal prior to graduation.

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8. Which pathways are used for demonstrating proficiency?

Each of the four pathways was offered by at least four districts or schools represented by our participants. One school district does not offer the two pathways that include a portfolio option because it requires a panel of judges and this district offers the seal in so many languages that they would not be able to find enough judges and train them well enough to keep the rigor at the same level as with the other pathways. One district mentioned that they don't offer the pathways with an assessment because they can't guarantee that the students will pass the assessment. Some districts are offering (or planning to offer) pathway 4 (assessment and portfolio) because they don't have enough teachers to teach four courses in a seal language other than Spanish. Some are adding a portfolio option because dual credit status doesn't allow students to take four credits of a foreign language and district had noticed a drop in the number of seal recipients.

Teacher participants in one group noted the inconsistency of requirements across districts and compared the requirements in each of their districts including which assessments are required and the minimum score required on the assessments. They highlighted that different requirement levels feels unfair to them. One participant said that teachers worry that their district is going to graduate fewer seal recipients because they have tougher

requirements than other districts and wished that state had uniform requirements so that all districts would have an equal level of rigor. They worried that some students missed out on being able to obtain the seal because their district's requirements were tougher.

Most districts mentioned only Spanish as the language that students could earn the seal in, but at least participant mentioned a student had received a seal in Tagalog and another student was working towards received seal in American Sign Language. This district is able to provide seals in these languages because it is located near a university whose faculty serve as members of portfolio panels. One school had been able to offer the tribal pathway in the past but had not been able to keep a Navajo-speaking teacher.

Special Ed teachers are creating unique pathways for students, modifying the requirements to make accommodations consistent with a student's IEP. Participants talked about how they often receive resistance from teachers who hesitate to deviate from the seal requirements (for example, a student must receive C or higher from a class). To guide a student with an IEP through a unique pathway requires someone to advocate for the students, keep careful records about the accommodations, and provide extensive documentation to the state for why the student qualifies for the seal.

The tribal educator noted that students can take courses and an assessment developed by teachers and language board to be rigorous or give a portfolio presentation in the tribal language to the tribal language board.

There was confusion among most of the students about the seal requirements, what options they had, what was compulsory, and among students whose schools offered both state and district seals, there was confusion about state vs. district seal requirements. Some students mentioned the Global Seal, but didn't know much about it. Students who knew that they needed to do a portfolio didn't necessarily know what producing a portfolio would entail – they would do this the following year.

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9. Are the requirements appropriate; does the Seal indicate proficiency?

Some district leaders feel that the seal proficiency requirements are appropriate because they set their own requirements that were above the state requirements. For example, they require students to take AP classes and pass AP exams to obtain the seal or the Navajo nation sets high standards for obtaining a seal in the Navajo language. Most participants felt that the requirements for English were too low. One district leader said, *"if we're talking bilingualism, there needs to be a higher level of English proficiency than just meeting high school requirements."* One district was planning to increase the minimum required GPA. No other district had plans to make the requirements in their districts more rigorous.

Most teachers seem to think that the seal requirements are too low. Those that teach in a district that has adopted more demanding standards, they feel that their district's standards are fine (for example, they require AP courses and AP exams for the seal award). Several teachers think many of their seal students were not proficient in both Spanish and English. They questioned if the seal was actually bilingual because the district requires only a Spanish essay and not an English essay too.

Teacher of students with IEPs noted that the proficiency requirements for the seal are typically too high for students with disabilities and accommodations are needed.

The tribal educator thought the requirements were good. Portfolio students must demonstrate their proficiency in Zuni and students need to perform well in assessments to pass.

With one exception, students felt that the level of proficiency required to obtain the seal was too low. Some students thought that native Spanish speakers should be held to higher standard but most thought that the standard should be the same for everyone.

Notes:**10. What additional resources would be helpful?**

Both district leaders and teachers brought up a need for districts to collaborate and learn from each other. They noted a few ways they could collaborate: sharing external evaluators on portfolio panels; sharing information about the implementation of the seal in their schools and about lessons learned; coming up with and adhering to consistent seal requirements in order to create equitable access to the seal regardless of which school district a student attends. There was a strong consensus among participants within and across groups that they wanted to know what was going on in other districts implementing the seal.

District leaders also mentioned the following needed resources: help obtaining non-Spanish test materials (they are hard to find); financial resources to hire more Spanish teachers and foreign language teachers, money to cover the cost of seal-related assessments, more tutors, tuition reimbursement to "grow" bilingual/bicultural teachers in small schools. They wanted more training about the seal so that all districts would implement the seal correctly. For example, one district leader noted there is misunderstanding that you need a formal "bilingual program" to offer the Seal, but you don't if you do the pathway 4 (assessment and portfolio).

Teachers mentioned the need for following resources: a user-friendly flowchart about the seal process that describes what students and teachers need to do and when; a state-wide online tracking system that follows students who are pursuing the seal (what classes they have taken, etc.), even if they move to a different school district; guidance for establishing a fifth pathway for special ed students.

Several teachers wanted help with the portfolio evaluations and said a standard rubric with examples would be helpful. One teacher highlighted that the portfolio evaluation is one of the hardest things they do. Others in the group agreed that a common rubric would ensure that equal rigor is applied to all the students across the state (some districts worry that other districts award more seals because they have low standards on their portfolio). A participant in another group mentioned that having a list of external panelists who could judge students' presentations would be helpful. Two of the three teacher groups mentioned wanting a "seal hotline" to contact someone at PED to ask questions.

The participants in the special education teachers group mentioned they need Navajo-speaking teachers to offer the tribal seal pathway to students (school keeps losing their Navajo-speaking teachers). Need comprehensive guidance documents (like they have in California) that help teachers educate students with IEP, and more professional development to teachers related to teaching students with IEP whose first language is not English.

Several students mentioned that it would be helpful to have more fluent Spanish-speaking teachers who could mentor them. Insufficient amount of communication about the seal process and requirements was also mentioned. The students thought connecting with seal-seeking students in other high schools would be helpful.

Notes:**11. What are the successes?**

Increasing the number of students who earn the seal was mentioned as a success by teachers and district directors. Both groups also mentioned powerful portfolio presentations as a success. Across groups and participant types, the portfolio presentations are mentioned frequently as emotional, powerful, inspirational, and a great way to demonstrate to other students and parents the value of the seal. One participant cried when describing these presentations.

Both teachers and district leaders felt that the seal had created growth and improvement in their schools and districts in the following ways: teachers talked about how their foreign language classes are full because so many students are pursuing the seal, the seal validates students' and teachers' work, both teachers and parents now

advocate for the seal, the seal has given status to biliterate and bicultural students affirming the value of their language and identity. Teachers also mentioned that several seal recipients had received the NM David scholarship.

District leaders who have started the seal recently were proud of getting seal program started and being able to offer it to the students, while those who have been implementing the seal longer listed as successes the following: ability to keep the rigor high, restructuring of the seal opportunity and establishment of clear processes, offering a variety of different languages, and getting more attention and support for the seal.

A teacher of students with an IEP noted that many students finally know about the seal and ask about it. Navigating the seal requirements and succeeding in completing the requirements has given students agency and taught them to advocate for themselves.

The tribal educator noted that through the recognition that students receive in the graduation ceremony students are feeling more part of their tribe because they know the language and understand the culture because of the seal studies.

Students talked about how working towards the seal has helped them improve their Spanish and communicate with individuals who only speak Spanish at school. At work, they are able to help Spanish speaking customers, and at home they are able to communicate with grandparents and family members who speak only Spanish. Also, some students are able to help their parents and other family members who don't speak English by translating from English to Spanish. Students have also learned to get to know other students in their school that they wouldn't know if they were not pursuing the seal. In the schools where the seal requirement includes community service, students say that it helped them get to know their community better and feel proud to give back to their community. Students feel that the seal will help them to stand out when they apply for college or scholarships. Students also believe that the seal will help them get a job and they will earn more because of they are bilingual skills. A student said that some of the seal course credits will count in college where she plans to minor in Spanish. Students also discussed more intrinsic values of biliteracy and bilingualism. One student said that when you speak the same language, "you feel a stronger connection" to the other person. Another student said that being bilingual "opens up your perspective" and makes you more open minded. One student credited the bilingual seal as having served as a reminder that you should not forget your language, helping the student to reconnect to their own culture, and to think that it's ok to speak Spanish. *"I feel like it empowers you and reminds you where you came from."* Another student said, *"The bilingual seal really distinguishes you from other people and it helps you be determined. I feel like it helps you set a goal and helps you pursue that goal and finish the goal, so I feel like that's gonna help us in college."*

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12. What are the challenges?

For district leaders the biggest challenges for implementing the seal was lack of qualified teachers. They also mentioned difficulty in maintaining a high level of rigor in all languages and different pathways (for example, the portfolio), lack of equity because proficiency levels are lower in some districts than in others, inability to offer the seal in tribal languages (other than Navajo) because of lack of response from tribes, the high cost of the assessments, lack of community support, and male students' lack of interest in the seal.

Teachers reported administrative aspects of the seal have proven to be challenging - how to keep accurate records over the years of students' classes and assessment scores, especially when a student changes school districts. Another challenge is understanding all the seal requirements correctly, for example, what does it mean exactly that a student must have a C or higher *"Can it be a C-, or 70? It has taken a couple of years of work out these types of kinks."* One participant would like to add a new language to their seal but didn't know what the steps are to do that. One participant said: *"How do we really know if they are proficient in English if they are taking ELD classes and they have a C or higher."* One teacher noted that students try to avoid seal pathways with the portfolio because it's so much work and some are fearful that they won't pass the English part (if district requires both languages). One participant said that they are still working out how to handle a situation where a

student's AP score doesn't arrive until after graduation. There was some confusion about class codes: (which course code specifically can be used for the Spanish or other world language?) Does biology or mathematics course taught in Spanish count towards the seal? How should students who come from another country be classified and what are the requirements for them if they are already fluent? Should their previous education qualify for the seal? You can't place kids who are fluent in French in a French I class.

Other challenges noted by teachers were: having enough teachers to offer four courses in a language, ability to put together a portfolio panel that understands the requirements, making sure that all the requirements aligns in all the three high schools in the district, having enough time to implement the portfolio, and how to convince student about the benefits of the seal. One participant mentioned that in their school it's difficult to get students interested in pursuing the seal because they say it doesn't benefit them – they say they are already bilingual, and this only adds work. Trying to find a way to incentivize students is a challenge.

Related to students with IEPs - teachers were not aware of what the law says about the rights of students with IEP and what it means to provide accommodations. Student are often pulled out of dual language classes because many teachers are not certified to teach bilinguals and students with IEP. Schools also have a difficult time keeping teachers who are certified in special education and language education because they are in high demand. *"Our biggest hurdle is that we don't have certified staff that could provide everything that these students need in one model."*

The tribal educator noted a challenge with disagreements among the tribe about who should have the final say in defining the tribal seal.

Several students mentioned "time management" as their main challenge. They seem to feel a lot of stress about all the schoolwork, community work, club activities, employment, and seal requirements, that they need to complete in order to graduate. Those who needed a portfolio to pass the seal requirements found the portfolio requirements challenging, especially the number of essays they needed to write and compiling examples of previous work (especially if they had not been saving their school work along the way).

Notes:

13. Are there any recommendations for improving the Seal program?

Across groups and participant types, a few recommendations for PED emerged.

Guidance:

- **Provide state-wide seal training** for administrators and teachers to break down the process of implementing the seal.
- **Provide an updated guidebook** because the current seal handbook is viewed as not providing enough guidance. Teachers would like PED to provide more guidance about how to help students with IEP to obtain the seal (in each seal pathway).
- **Have more consistent requirements and procedures** and make the seal more equitable for students across the state. Finding the right level of rigor. One participant said: *"Avoid the watered-down versions and keep the high, rigorous ones."*
- **Provide a PED SSBB contact** person who will answer questions about the seal.
- **Provide opportunity for cross-district sharing** so staff can exchange ideas, network, and learn from each other.

Promotion support

- **Identify student ambassadors** to help recruit new seal participants (and have them share their portfolio presentation with the legislature).
- **Invite business leaders/owners to come to schools** and talk about the usefulness and value to being bilingual (could be district initiative)

- **Get colleges to recognize the seal** in college application process.
- **Work with community partners to promote the seal** throughout the state, such as the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce for Spanish speakers.
- **Reach out to tribes** and educate them more about the tribal seal pathway so that more tribes would establish the seal requirements and be ready to support a student who would like to obtain a seal in one of the native languages.
- **Release information about the seal on the news** or put out a press release the way they do for state mandated tests, and run a state wide seal campaign encouraging people to “contact your school districts and your school for more information” so that all students and parents know about the seal.

Portfolio support

- **Post and maintain a centralized list of portfolio judges**, particularly for judges for rare languages.
- **Create an exemplar portfolio rubric** for portfolio evaluations, so that everyone across the state is using the same requirements. As one teacher put it: “I appreciate the openness in the guidelines, but at the same time, I kind of wonder sometimes like, are we too hard on them or maybe not hard enough?”

Funds

- **Provide more resources to hire more language teachers** because language classes are full, and some students are turned away.
- **Provide stipends** for teachers who spend a lot of extra time helping students with the portfolio presentations.

Notes:

Background information about the focus groups

Introduction

The New Mexico State Seal of Bilingualism-Biliteracy (SSBB) is the capstone of culturally and linguistically responsive education that the New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) envisions for NM Students. The SSBB state regulation was published in September 2015; it set the adoption criteria for school districts and state charter schools to award the SSBB for their high school graduates. To earn the SSBB, students must meet the graduation requirements and demonstrate proficiency in a language other than English, through one of the following options: (1) language certification by an individual Tribe, (2) units of credit and an assessment, (3) units of credit and an alternative process portfolio; or (4) an assessment and an alternative process portfolio. Since the State of New Mexico adopted the SSBB in 2015, 25 school districts and four state charter schools have adopted the SSBB. Within this time frame, around 3,280 students have received a diploma of excellence with the SSBB. In 2019/20, 1,100 students graduated with the SSBB.

NMPED, with support from the REL Southwest, designed a focus group study that was conducted in 2019-2020 to gain a better understanding of the local implementation challenges and successes for adopters of the SSBB. NMPED recruited participants from districts who have adopted different Seal pathways and from districts of different sizes and geographic locations throughout the state. A total of 34 stakeholders from 12 districts participated in the focus group discussions including: 14 bilingual and world language teachers, 12 district directors, 1 tribal educator, and 7 students. Participants in similar roles met together in one of ten groups.

- Bilingual and world language teachers: 3 groups
- Teachers with special education students: 1 group
- District directors: 4 groups

- Students: 1 group
- Tribal educators: 1 group

Former New Mexico bilingual educators moderated the focus groups. Participants discussed:

1. What were the original reasons for adopting the Seal?
2. What are the current priorities for the Seal program?
3. How and when are students informed about the Seal?
4. How and when are parents informed about the Seal?
5. How and when do students sign up?
6. Are students with individualized education plans pursuing the Seal?
7. How are students recognized as they work toward the Seal?
8. Which pathways are used for demonstrating proficiency?
9. Are the requirements appropriate; does the Seal indicate proficiency?
10. What additional resources would be helpful?
11. What are the successes?
12. What are the challenges?
13. Are there any recommendations for improving the Seal program?

Focus group results are summarized by topic area. The focus group discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed, and then the transcriptions were reviewed and summarized by REL Southwest and NMPED staff. The results are not representative of the experiences and viewpoints of all stakeholders in districts that have adopted the SSBB. However, participants were purposively recruited from districts of different types and locations across the state, and that differ with respect to the type and number of pathways offered. The results provide a variety of perspectives to inform NMPED's efforts to support districts' successful implementation of the SSBB.

Methodology details

Date and location

Most of the focus groups were conducted during two days of the La Cosecha conference held on November 14-15, 2019, at the Convention Center in Albuquerque. Two rooms were set aside for the focus group sessions. All focus groups lasted approximately an hour and were conducted in English. NMPED recruited former New Mexico educators to serve as moderators. These educators were trained in focus group moderating and note taking techniques on November 13, 2019 by REL Southwest researchers. The student focus group took place at the National Hispanic Cultural Center where students participated in a Student Leadership Institute. A virtual focus group for district bilingual studies directors and coordinators took place on February 20, 2020 and was moderated by a REL Southwest researcher.

Recruitment

To obtain comprehensive and diverse feedback, NMPED recruited participants with a variety of roles and from a variety of districts in terms of the number of pathways available. NMPED recruited bilingual and world language teachers in public school districts, bilingual and world language teachers of students with disabilities who are pursuing the seal, bilingual program district coordinators in public school districts, bilingual program coordinators in charter schools, bilingual program coordinators in districts that have not adopted the state seal, tribal education directors, and high school students who were pursuing the state seal. NMPED recruited focus group participants to all but the student session. The organizer of the Student Leadership Institute that convened high school students during the La Cosecha conference to a Student Leadership Conference invited seven high school students to participate in a focus group. NMPED sent an email invitation and an email reminder to the educators they recruited.

Participants were originally recruited for 11 sessions. Two scheduled groups had no attendees so did not occur (one of the 2 groups of bilingual program district coordinators in public school districts with 1-2 pathways, and a group of bilingual program coordinators in districts that have not adopted the seal). Because the educators who participated in the La Cosecha focus groups were mostly from larger, urban districts in close proximity to Albuquerque or north of it, a virtual focus group was added. NMPED sent an email to district leaders in all the state seal districts south of Albuquerque and invited each district to send one participant to the virtual focus group.

We conducted 10 focus groups.

- Bilingual and world language teachers in public school districts with 3 seal pathways
- Bilingual and world language teachers in public school districts with 1-2 seal pathways (2 groups)
- Bilingual & world language teachers of students with disabilities who are pursuing seal
- Bilingual program district coordinators in public school districts with 3 seal pathways
- Bilingual program district coordinators in public school districts with 1-2 seal pathways
- Bilingual program coordinators in charter schools
- Tribal education directors
- High school students who are pursuing the seal
- Virtual focus group for district bilingual coordinators in the southern part of New Mexico

Participants

A total of 34 people participated in the focus groups: 14 teachers, 12 district-level bilingual program coordinators, one tribal educator, and seven students. The focus group participants represent 12 of the 28 public school districts that had adopted the state seal: Albuquerque, Robert F. Kennedy Charter, Clovis, Deming, Espanola, Farmington, Lovington, Portales, Rio Rancho, Roswell, Santa Fe, and Zuni. Five participants were from the Santa Fe school district, three from Albuquerque, and the remaining districts were represented by one or two participants. Two of the school districts have less than one thousand students, five have between 2,800 and 8,000, and five have over 10,000 students. Three of the districts are classified as “city,” two “suburb,” and seven as “towns.” One of the districts is a tribal-controlled public school and one is a district charter school.

The most common pathway among the focus group districts is pathway 4 (assessment and portfolio) which was offered in six participating school districts. Five of the school districts offered pathway 2 (assessment and credits). Two districts offered pathway 3 (portfolio and credits) and three offered pathway 1 (the Tribal Language pathway). In all districts that participated in the focus groups, students have awarded the seal in Spanish. In five of the school districts, students have also been awarded the seal in other languages: in two school districts, students have been awarded the state seal in two languages and in two school districts in three languages. In one school districts, students have been awarded the state seal in four languages. Overall, students in participating districts have been awarded the state seal in eight different languages: French, German, Italian, Korean, Navajo, Spanish, Tewa, and Zuni.

Seven high school students who are working towards obtaining the state seal and who participated in the Student Leadership Institute during the LaCosecha conference participated in the student focus group. One of the students was pursuing the state seal in American Sign Language and the rest in Spanish. Three of the students were from Albuquerque, two from Clovis, one from Rio Rancho and one from Santa Fe school district.

Focus Group Questions

With the support of REL Southwest researchers, NMPED and partners drafted the focus group questions in the fall of 2019. The final version included 14 questions with additional probes. The questions and probes were adapted for each participant group. The questions are available upon request.

Coding and analysis

Focus group discussions were audio recorded and the recordings were transcribed by REV.com transcription services. REL Southwest researchers removed focus group participants' names and affiliations from the comments. Text was pasted to an Excel spreadsheet for coding and analysis. REL Southwest provided support and worked with NMPED staff to code and analyze the data. Each comment by a participant or moderator was coded by topic area or coded as not usable. Coded responses were then reviewed by two reviewers and summarized for each group and across groups noting where there were commonalities.