

ENGAGE New Mexico: A Triage Response to Engaging and Supporting Students in Remote Learning During COVID-Related School Closures

Executive Summary

On March 27, 2020, Governor Lujan Grisham, New Mexico, ordered all k12 school buildings to remain closed for the remainder of the school year due to the COVID-19 virus. While policy changes were quickly put into place to mitigate the consequences of this radical transition of all students to home learning, it was clear that additional resources would be necessary to bolster the efforts of educators to keep students engaged and to fill the equity and infrastructure gaps that existed throughout the state.

Schools found innovative ways to bring education to students, outfitting school buses with wifi hotspots and using the existing transportation infrastructure to deliver and pick up packets; however, many districts lacked both the expertise and the resources to provide the outreach and the additional social emotional and academic support required to keep students engaged. Meanwhile, many students and their families struggled with what to do next.

In partnership with Graduation Alliance, the New Mexico Public Education Department acted with urgency to address student attendance issues by applying principles for at-risk student engagement and deploying resources quickly and at scale on behalf of school systems around the state.

The foundational principles of the program included:

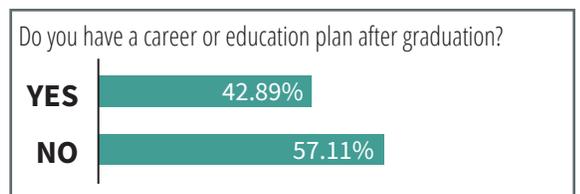
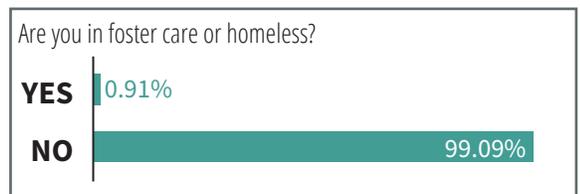
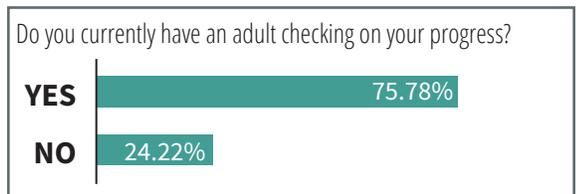
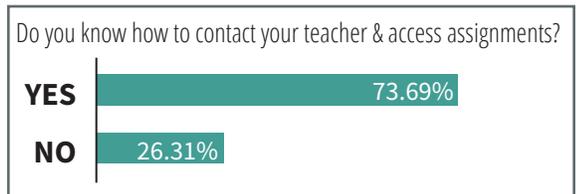
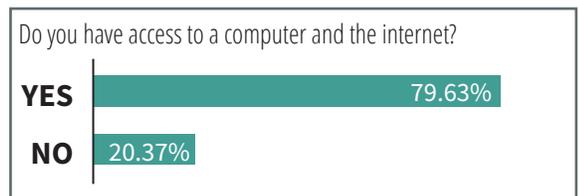
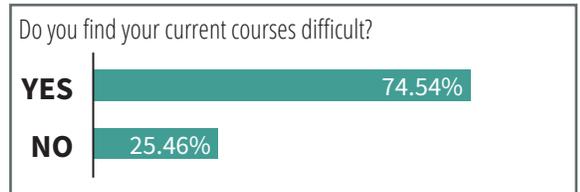
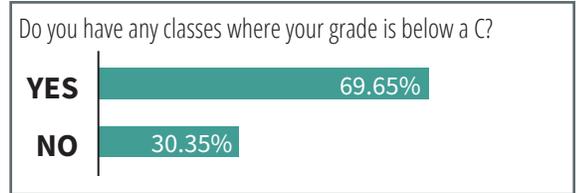
1. Persistent, consistent, and systematic outreach to disengaged and struggling students and families.
2. A triage approach to understanding each individual student's barriers to engagement.
3. On-going support using a differentiated treatment strategy based on students' identified barriers.

This program focused on students in grades 6-12. Schools referred students who had completely disengaged or who were irregularly participating and in jeopardy of failing one or more of their courses.

The outreach team used a multi-modal outreach strategy, including phone, email, and text message, to reach out to students and their families. Where data allowed for it and in consultation with the NM PED, a culturally sensitive approach to outreach to special populations, including Hispanic families with language barriers and Native American families, was implemented.

Students who opted-in to coaching were asked a series of questions to help the outreach counselor assign the students to the appropriate intervention support level. This triage approach allowed the team to quickly ascertain the level of support a student was likely to need.

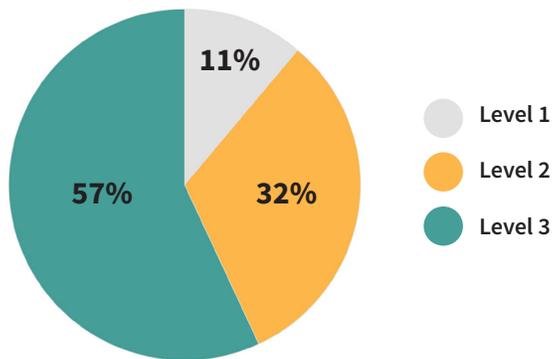
Self-Identified Barriers to Engagement Across All Grades



The goal of the support team was to commit students to re-engaging with the district’s continuous learning programming and provide the social emotional and academic support necessary to keep them engaged and on-track through the end of the school year. In addition to coaching, and when appropriate, the support team referred students and families to state and local resources related to public health initiatives, mental health support, and workforce support for families.

ENGAGE New Mexico was launched on April 23. By the close of day on April 24, forty-three percent of districts and charter schools in the state opted into participation and approximately 7,500 students were referred for outreach. In the subsequent weeks, the outreach team made more than 40,000 attempts to contact referred students, establishing contact with approximately 3,000 students and families. Fifty-three percent of the students the outreach team was able to connect with requested on-going support, and the support team conducted more than 11,000 interventions before school ended for the year.

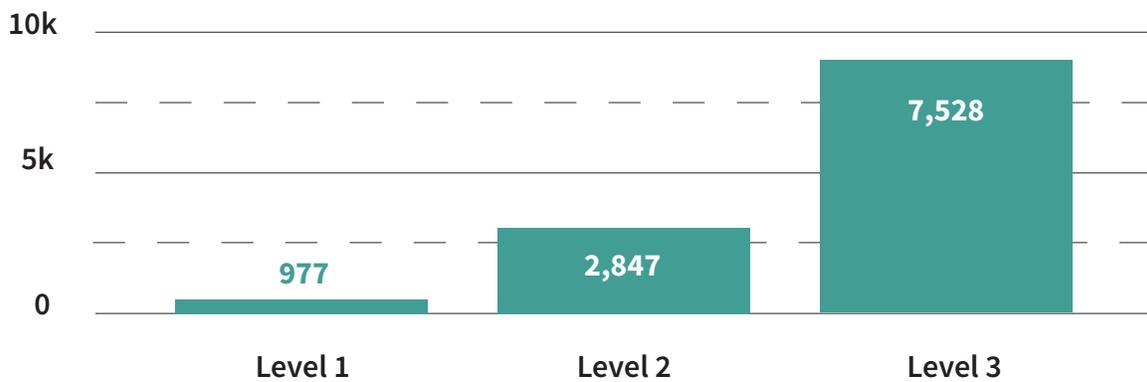
Percentage of Students by Support Level Across All Grades



STUDENT OUTREACH
More Than **40,000** Attempts to Contact Students

STUDENT SUPPORT
More Than **11,000** Interventions

Interventions Made by Support Level



Avg. Interventions/Student	Avg. Interventions/Student Level 1	Avg. Interventions/Student Level 2	Avg. Interventions/Student Level 3
7	5.3	5.6	8.2
% Students w/ 2-Way Contact	% Level 1 w/ 2-Way Contact	% Level 2 w/ 2-Way Contact	% Level 3 w/ 2-Way Contact
70%	35%	67%	78%

Key findings from the project:

- The top barrier to student engagement was a lack of structure and accountability. Learning from home represented a new set of challenges that could not be solved simply by providing students with devices or a user name and a password. The shift to remote learning happened in the midst of significant social and financial upheaval for families and communities across the state and around the world. These changes often exacerbated underlying challenges, such as availability of at-home supervision and the need for supporting learning challenges and emotional behavioral issues.
- 57% of interventions required to re-engage students and keep them engaged were focused on the details of how to learn remotely and providing accountability for daily engagement and consistent progress - problems normally solved through the observation of and access to teachers in a face-to-face environment.
- 37% of interventions were aimed at solving specific issues such as getting additional help, connecting with teachers, accessing courses, or resolving technical issues; of those, only 8% were focused on getting students access to devices or internet connectivity.
- While small numbers, critically important were the referrals to community resources, including mental and physical health, to support students and families.
- Families proactively requested support upon learning of the about the ENGAGE New Mexico project.
- Students and families engaged with coaches at the same rate regardless of whether they had a connected device.
- Too much technology enablement created its own set of challenges. Students reported being confused by multiple logins and not knowing where to go when for what.
- A new class of at-risk students emerged: students who showed no risk indicators prior to COVID school closures but still disengaged from or struggled to succeed in remote learning. This new class of at-risk students became at risk because they lost their accountability and support structures in the transition to remote learning.
- Structural upheaval resulted in students who did not engage. Disengagement from school for extended time and in the midst of a global pandemic, financial crisis, and social upheaval is a significant risk factor for dropping out that cannot be ignored.

The ENGAGE New Mexico project demonstrated that students and families, whether at-risk prior to the COVID-related school closures or not, required significant outreach and on-going academic and social emotional support in order to stay engaged and progressing in remote learning activities.

It is our desire that the implications of the data gathered during this project will inform future planning to provide schools and families with the support they need to move forward under such uncertain and challenging circumstances.



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