

Connecting local education with job opportunities

Written by Vicki Mora CEO, AGC NM Education Foundation
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In 2012, Associated General Contractors New Mexico (AGC) began working with the Greater Gallup Economic Development Corporation (GGEDC) and UNM-Gallup to connect the local education system with job opportunities. An informal agreement was signed to help align what students learn at school with what employers need at the workplace and what industries need to locate in northwest New Mexico. We struck up a new conversation to see how worlds that sometimes collide can cement new partnerships that benefit the whole community.

The three-way partnership among AGC, GGEDC, and UNM also reaches into the Gallup-McKinley school system. In order for students to graduate “career ready” and for companies to rely on our local workforce, we are building an integrated “pipeline” that connects educators and employers. We are learning there are three critical building blocks: an earlier start with students, an industry-recognized curriculum, and a more seamless path from the classroom to the job site.

How does our partnership work? And what role does each partner play?

GGEDC targeted promising industries for the Gallup market with its Target Industry Analysis. The Analysis identified education/training strengths and opportunities.

UNM-Gallup Campus worked closely with industry to focus outreach to the major employers in the region and develop a leadership role in adjusting curriculum and strengthening programs that lead to jobs.

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AGC brought a curriculum relevant to job placement and recognized across industries, employers, and markets. Identifying skill sets that matter to construction, pipeline and alternative energy as the first step. The case grew to start earlier with Gallup McKinley High Schools and incorporate curriculum competencies that employers need and want. These employment skills include: Personal Effectiveness, Academic and Workplace Competencies directly preparing for career ready Industry-Wide Technical Competencies. Competencies to be specified by industry sector representatives. Gallup McKinley High Schools quickly partnered with industry to incorporate industry certified curriculum and certify instructors. Next step took place with aligning dual credit opportunities anchored at UNM Gallup Campus.

This tees up long-term options and high-paying opportunities for students. For example, this industry driven curriculum adjustments and credentialing have included feedback from Western Refinery, Kinder Morgan, Gallup Land Partner and BNSF.

Building a Model for future success.

UNM Gallup and AGC are actively pursuing resources that will allow the partnership to focus on the connection between students and employers. The partnership will work together to develop full-time attention to connected instruction integrating industry driven curriculum that ties instruction and applied learning to the employment opportunities in the region. Emphasis will be to establish strong programs that place students to internships, apprenticeships, and employment. Our workforce development goal for the Gallup McKinley Region is to Communicate, Connect and Employ. This partnership is forcing us to rethink schools and requires the active support of those who actually hire, business leaders, government officials, educators and families.

Vicki Mora

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Vicki Mora, CEO of the AGC NM Education Foundation working closely with Dr. Christopher Dyer, Executive Director, UNM Gallup Campus to connect and rebuild relevant education-to-employment systems.

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