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November 1, 2017

MEMORANDUM

TO: Public School Superintendents, Charter School Administrators, and REC Directors

FROM: Christopher N. Ruskowski, Secretary-Designate of Education

C.N.R.

RE: NEW MEXICO'S FOCUS: ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF QUALITY FOR PUBLIC SCHOOL PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS

In 2012, New Mexico's Public Education Department, along with the Children, Youth and Families Department, and Department of Health, were proud recipients of the federal *Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant*. In the past five years, the \$37.5 million dollar grant has supported the expansion of the state's coordinated systems of early learning and development for children birth through kindergarten entry. These systems are designed to ensure many more children have equitable access to high quality early learning programs, and that they enter schools with the skills, knowledge, and dispositions they need to be successful.

Although the federal support for the Race to the Top initiative ends December 31, 2017, PED remains committed to the objectives outlined in the grant including the full implementation of *FOCUS*, New Mexico's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) in all public preschool programs statewide, including New Mexico PreK, Title 1 and special education (IDEA Part B) preschools.

FOCUS includes common requirements for these programs and the criteria by which preschool programs will be measured, along with a structured process for program improvement. *FOCUS* was designed with stakeholders from school districts across New Mexico to ensure that many more children have access to dramatically improved early learning programs so that they enter kindergarten ready for success. Through the use of a program improvement and quality rating system, public school preschool programs will increase their ability to focus on children's learning, improve their practice, and—as a result of that improvement in practice—improve each child's growth, development, and potential with kindergarten readiness in mind.

All PED preschool programs will receive support and training from PED to achieve a *FOCUS* Five Star rating. Schools will be awarded a certificate upon verification of compliance with all *FOCUS* criteria. The initial verifications will occur in October, 2017 beginning with schools that indicate readiness for monitoring.

FOCUS: Essential Elements of Quality can be accessed at <http://www.cdd.unm.edu/ecln/ped-focus/>, and address the following:

- The Full Participation of Each Child:
- Family Engagement
- Inclusive Practices for Children with Delays and Disabilities
- Culture and Language, including the Support of Dual-Language Learners
- Social-emotional Development
- Intentional Teaching, Lesson Planning, and Assessment using the *New Mexico Early Learning Guidelines*, the PED Preschool Lesson Plan, and the Early Childhood Observation Tool (ECOT).
- Required Hours for Classroom Instruction
- Adult-child Ratios and Group Size
- Health, Safety, Nutrition
- Developmental Screening
- Staff Qualifications
- Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)

Participation in New Mexico's *FOCUS* provides early childhood program personnel with the criteria, tools, resources, and support necessary to improve program quality to ensure that children are ready for success in kindergarten and beyond. While many programs have already indicated their readiness for *FOCUS* validation, all school administrators and teachers in New Mexico's public preschool programs must implement *FOCUS* Criteria in the 2017-2018 school year and remain in compliance thereafter.

For more information on the New Mexico *FOCUS*, please contact Michael Miller, Director of the Literacy, the Humanities, and Early Childhood Bureau, at 505-827-6567; Brenda Kofahl, PreK Program Manager, at 505-827-6627; Sam Ornelas, Title 1 Director, at 505-827-7592; or Deborah Dominguez-Clark, Director of Special Education at 505-827-1457.