



December 12, 2017

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The Las Cruces Public Schools, in partnership with students, families, and the community, provides a student-centered learning environment that cultivates character, fosters academic excellence, and embraces diversity.

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Mr. Christopher N. Ruszkowski
Secretary-Designate
Public Education Department
300 Don Gaspar
Santa Fe, NM 87501-2786

Dear Secretary-Designate Ruszkowski,

Recently, strikethroughs on the End-of-Course exam (EoC) blueprints for the High School United States History End-of-Course exam have raised concerns across the state. While we understand that the intent of these strikethroughs is to communicate that a portion of a standard will not be tested, the rhetorical effect of striking through non-tested standards is to downplay the significance of these topics in history and in classroom instruction. Deputy Secretary Montaño has publicly stated that this was not the intent of the strikethrough. We write to express our objections to the strike-through as a method of indicating which portions of standards are tested and to suggest modifications to the End-of-Course exam development process that we believe will make this process more truly collaborative and effective as a complement to classroom instruction and assessment.

As a rhetorical choice, striking through particular names and events directs teachers to devote less instructional attention to them than to portions of the standards that remain intact. The presence of important historical figures and events as Rosa Parks, William Jennings Bryan, and the deploying of the atomic bomb among these crossed-out topics downplays their significance in history and claim to class-time. This method may even give the appearance of advancing a particular view of history. It is imperative that teachers understand that all standards, in their entirety, must be taught. While we appreciate the effort to communicate efficiently which portions of the standards will be tested, the rhetorical method used to convey this information will help shape how these blueprints are received by teachers, students, and the public.

As educators, we understand the need to clarify which portion of the standards will be assessed in any given year. We also understand that "*the EoCs are exams written by New Mexico Teachers for New Mexico Students*" (NMPED US History End of Course exam blueprint, p. 2). We struggle to understand the process employed by the Public Education Department to develop EoC exams, their associated blueprints, and how the process is communicated to teachers. We value the collaborative nature of this revision process. However, in the Las Cruces Public Schools, the state's second largest district, teachers are reluctant to participate in EoC development, a process that they have found confusing. While being told that the process is collaborative, they have found that in practice the last group to work on the blueprint has the final say, which is obviously not a collaborative structure. The blueprint contains language that "although we could not take every suggestion or opinion, as thoughts varied, the blueprint was the result of peer collaboration." To render this a meaningful peer collaboration, the final product should serve as the culmination of these efforts rather than overwriting work done elsewhere in the state. Revising this process to ensure that all perspectives are weighed equally will help to fulfill the blueprint's promise to reflect a wide variety of thoughts, voices, and instructional viewpoints.

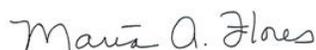
The timing of the revision process must also be refined. Asking teachers to leave their classrooms to vet test items after school has started is untenable. Our teachers' highest priority is to ensure that their students have quality instruction. Information regarding the EoCs, blueprints, and expectations for teaching the standards must be communicated in a clear and timely manner to teachers and districts across the state. The revised blueprints need to be available to teachers by mid-August to ensure that assessment complements rather than comprises student education.

In conclusion, we request that the following suggestions are implemented in the EoC development process as soon as possible.

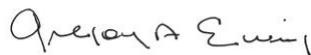
- All strikethroughs should be removed from the blueprints and different methods should be chosen used to identify tested and non-tested portions of the standards. We recommend the use of boldface type, italics, and brackets to clarify which portions of standards will be assessed.
- A flowchart and timeline for the EoC development process should be provided for teachers statewide. Criteria for participation should also be shared along with a contingency plan when not enough teachers who meet the criteria volunteer to serve on the committees.
- End-of-Course exams should be available to schools on demand to administer to students when they finish a course. Because these assessments are used as demonstrations of competence for graduation, they must be available for students to take as the complete the course, which doesn't always occur at the end of the semester or year.

We look forward to working with you to ensure that our teachers have timely and accurate blueprints for End-of-Course exams and that all stakeholders understand and have an opportunity to participate in the development process.

Sincerely,



Sra. Maria A. Flores
President, Las Cruces Board of Education



Dr. Gregory Ewing
Superintendent

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