

+++

+ Teach Plus

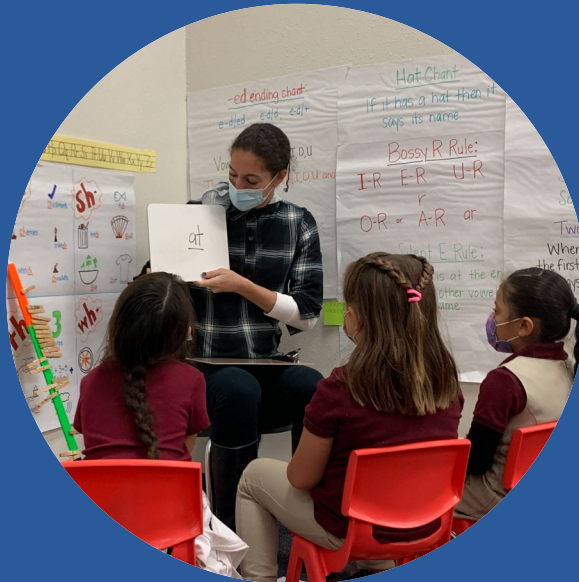
+
+

SPOTLIGHTS

INNOVATION

IN EDUCATION

Across New Mexico



**TEACH
+PLUS**





INTRODUCTION

Since launching in New Mexico in 2016, Teach Plus has worked with over 700 educators in our Policy Fellowship and through our Network. To improve teaching and learning in our state, Teach Plus teacher leaders undertake research, write and publish op-eds, and engage in advocacy with decision makers to change educational policies in the state to benefit students, teachers, and communities.

Teach Plus teacher leaders have provided recommendations to policymakers on [improving teacher and student engagement during COVID](#), [creating opportunities for students and teachers of color in the state](#), and [recruiting and retaining an early childhood workforce in New Mexico](#). Through their work, research, and conversations with teachers across the state, Teach Plus and Teach Plus teacher leaders have shared many best practices that schools and districts in the state have implemented to improve educational outcomes for their students. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the need for such learning, as teachers, schools, and districts worked to overcome the challenges exacerbated by COVID. The pandemic has also brought to the forefront the need to innovate and create a more equitable education system for all students.

THE INNOVATION IMPERATIVE



In fall 2021, Teach Plus released a national report, "[The Phoenix Project: Building an Equitable Educational System Beyond the Pandemic](#)." The report puts forth a case for an innovation imperative, rooted in teachers' desire to use everything they were learning during COVID to innovate and build a more equitable education system where students, teachers, families, and communities thrive.

[New Mexico, ranked 50th nationally in education](#), is in dire need of innovative approaches throughout our system. We know that by listening to teachers and

honoring their leadership and work in schools, we can bring effective practices forward, empower student growth and achievement, and deepen educational opportunities for all our students. Here, we highlight the innovative practices of three New Mexico schools and two classrooms that are helping to develop effective teachers, retain educators in the classroom, and improve student learning.

SELECTING THE INNOVATOR SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS

For this spotlight, Teach Plus leveraged our network of educators and educational leaders in the state to learn more about innovative ideas and practices happening in schools across New Mexico. The schools and teachers we highlight are moving away from traditional educational models and are approaching teaching and learning differently. Our selections were based on the following criteria:

- + Implementing effective innovative strategies to improve student growth and achievement, supported by data
- + Addressing social and emotional learning needs of students and staff through these innovations
- + Delivering targeted professional development to staff on how to best use these innovative strategies in their work and teaching

The innovator schools and teachers we selected share a focus on research-driven strategies to prepare their students for college, careers, and post-secondary success. They have achieved positive change by integrating social emotional learning practices for students and staff, and by having robust plans for meaningful and continuous professional development to ensure students are learning from highly effective teachers.

"The world has changed significantly in the past few decades, but the ways that we think about schools have not." —Meaghan Hindman, Altura Prep

To measure the impact of these innovative models, we posed a set of questions to explore how each school's and teacher's approach to teaching and learning has influenced their school's culture and academic performance. Questions included:

1. Why is innovation in education critical to student engagement and success?
2. How are you meeting the diversity of needs among students and staff?
3. What professional development do you have in place for your teachers and staff as related to your innovative model?
4. What does social emotional learning look like for your students as well as your staff?

Innovator Schools:

- + **Albuquerque Collegiate, Albuquerque**
- + **Altura Preparatory School, Albuquerque**
- + **Mission Achievement and Success (MAS), Albuquerque**

Innovator Teachers:

- + **Shari Hicks, Teach Plus Change Agent, El Capitan Elementary, Roswell**
- + **Robbi Berry, Teach Plus Network Member, Monte Vista Elementary, Las Cruces**

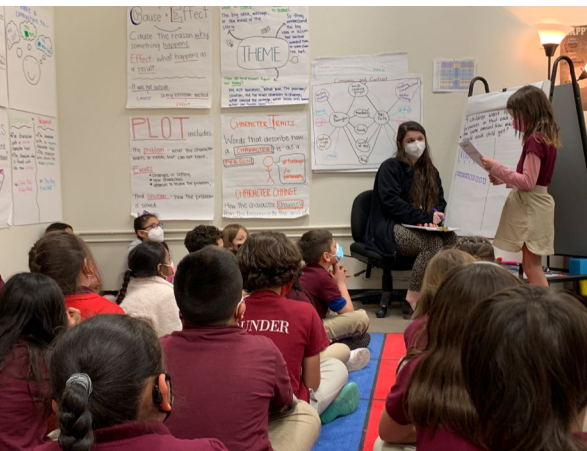
INNOVATOR SCHOOLS

Albuquerque Collegiate

In brief: Albuquerque Collegiate is a Title I, K-4 public charter school serving 160 students in the South Valley of Albuquerque. More than 40% of students come from low socio-economic households. Students at the school receive extended learning time daily, lengthening their school year by 30 days beyond the 180 day required by the state of New Mexico.

The Innovation: Albuquerque Collegiate utilizes a co-teaching model in grades K-2, with each student being taught by two certified teachers for intensive intervention and differentiation in instruction. In grades 3-4, students are taught by high-quality, subject-level, content specialist teachers. Teachers at Albuquerque Collegiate receive frequent and intensive professional development and one-on-one coaching to ensure best classroom and instructional practices are used effectively.

How students benefit: At Albuquerque Collegiate, students receive instruction through two distinct instructional models. With access to two certified teachers at all times, K-2 students are able to receive direct data-driven instruction as well as intervention in every subject area. This also narrows the student to teacher ratio by half. In grades 3-5, students rotate daily between content specific teachers, giving them access to high-quality and focused instruction. The school uses measurable success criteria to drive instruction and meet the needs of their diverse student population. Albuquerque Collegiate has achieved twice the state's score in reading, with 79% of all students scoring proficient this school year in iStations Reading Assessment in the 2021-2022 school year.



Jade Rivera, Executive Director and Founder of Albuquerque Collegiate explains why a different approach to teaching and learning is necessary: *“We have too much at stake for our scholars and their success for nice ideas. Our model is based on principals that are proven to demonstrate success for our scholars. Particularly for students of low-income households and of color.”*

The Albuquerque Collegiate model incorporates a system of research-driven, specific approaches to teaching and learning. As Rivera explains, *“Intervention is deeper than what would be seen in a single teacher classroom, which is especially critical in the primary grades. It’s data-driven and both teachers can differentiate [instruction].”*

Professional development for teachers: Albuquerque Collegiate is committed to teacher professional development and providing consistent opportunities for coaching sessions. The school is focused on preparing teachers to start each year with specific lesson plans and instructional delivery methods, such as economy of language-giving directions, standard routines, and procedures as well as strategies based on texts like Teach Like a Champion 3.0 and Get Better Faster. Instructional planning time is designed in a team setting and is data-driven, allowing teachers to collaborate and support each other as they integrate the necessary interventions and differentiation within instruction. Delivery of high-quality instruction and access to intensive academic support at all grades at Albuquerque Collegiate helps to ensure students are prepared for college graduation and beyond. Instructional coach Kelsey McCaffery explains, “[This teacher coaching] model prevents teacher burnout. Having a co-teacher and having staff that is going to push you but also push to a point of support. ‘Let me push you because I know you can and let me support you to get there.’”

Altura Preparatory School

In brief: Altura Prep is a Title I, K-4 school serving 188 students in the central Albuquerque area. Eighty percent of Altura Prep’s student body are from low socio-economic households. A quarter of the student population are English Language Learners (ELL).

The Innovation: Altura Prep assigns content specialist teachers for all grades K-4, giving each student access to subject-focused instruction, differentiation, and intervention. Teachers are given more time to thoroughly teach their subject area, providing students with a learning environment where each subject is taught with fidelity and dedication to student mastery.

How students benefit: At Altura Prep, students rotate daily to English Language Arts, mathematics, STEAM, and enrichment classes, with each student being taught by a teacher specializing in that content area. In departmentalizing this way, Altura Prep promotes student engagement and focus by having mobility throughout the day as well as promoting more positive adult interactions. Teachers are not just generalists but content experts able to provide rich learning experiences and interventions that meet each student’s needs in each subject area. Having more than one teacher throughout the day promotes discourse and connection between students and teachers.

During the 2018-19 academic year, when Altura first opened its doors, just 32% of students reached grade-level proficiency in reading and 38% of students in math. In the 2021-22 academic year, 74% of students in the same cohort were proficient in reading and 63% of students in math. Altura’s performance has placed them in the top 25% of all New Mexico schools this school year. According to Directors Meaghan Hindman and Lissa Hines, this success is directly linked to *“the structure of the school and teacher specialization allowing our teachers to truly focus on strong differentiated and accelerated instruction, which students have desperately needed after the spring of 2020 and the required remote/hybrid learning of Fall 2020.”*



Professional development for teachers: Altura recognizes each of their staff strengths and supports them through placement in specific content areas. Since teachers share students, they can assist one another with strategies to support students and classrooms. *“Beginning of year professional development includes whole-staff components and differentiated components where content area teachers work with administrators and one another to plan and align content through the grade levels for the upcoming year. Since teachers are able to focus on one content area, it is expected teachers have strong lesson plans addressing student needs in their subject area. Teachers are also given time to collaborate and learn about each student’s performance and behavior in other subjects.”*

—Altura Prep teacher

“My thoughts are all ‘pros’- no cons- I feel like I finally get to teach deeper, in a way that I couldn’t before when I was trying to teach everything, broadly. I feel like I get to know my students so much better as readers. I can get them more of what they need. Then, working with (the math teacher), I get to hear about them as mathematicians, which broadens my understanding of the students as learners, too. I love it. I feel like I can finally get to the good stuff with my kids.” —Altura Prep teacher.



Mission Achievement and Success (MAS) Charter



In brief: MAS Charter is a Title I school that serves 1,838 preK-12th grade students in two locations in Albuquerque. The school serves the metropolitan areas surrounding both site locations. MAS’s student population is 86% Hispanic and 87% of students are from low socio-economic households.

The Innovation: MAS Charter engages its students in a rigorous college preparatory program focused on getting them ready for success in college and in life. Students receive explicit, data-driven instruction in both foundational skills and personal success skills, goal-setting, planning, and decision-making.

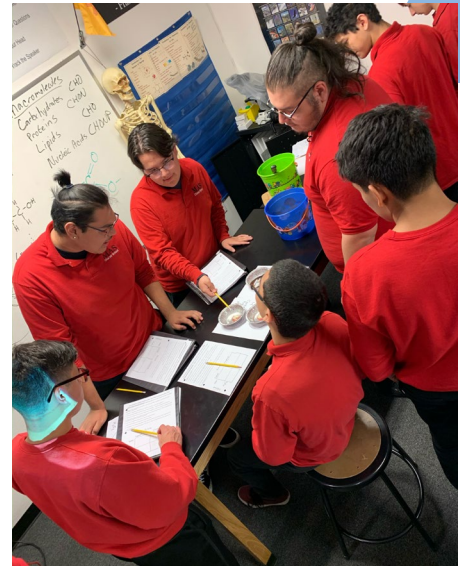
How students benefit: In the 2019-20 academic year, 70% of MAS students tested proficient in reading and language arts and 42% of students tested proficient in math, compared to New Mexico’s statewide proficiency level of 34% in reading and 21% in math.

According to founder and principal JoAnne Mitchell, MAS takes a *“no excuses, whatever-it-takes approach to teaching and learning in the classroom.”*

With immediate access to data, instructional coaches, teachers, and students can target areas that need remediation, differentiation, or acceleration, resulting in an individualized approach to learning for students. MAS demonstrates that its approach to promote graduation and pursuit of college coursework for all of their students is working. The school reports graduation rates of 90%, with many of its students being first-generation high school graduates and college students.

Innovation at the school means continuous focus on data, providing more direct and targeted foundational instruction to students who are one or more grades levels behind, and helping students pursue college credit as they finish high school coursework. Mitchell explains: *“We do what we know works in schools. We have professional development, providing a longer school day, focus on data, differentiation for students behind, intense phonics instruction, all the things that research proves works in schools. [We have] a relentless focus on data.”*

Professional development for teachers: Teachers participate in ongoing professional development to determine gaps in content delivery, question assignments, and probe student skill deficits. Within MAS Charter’s professional learning communities (PLCs), coaches guide teachers through instructional gaps in differentiation, intervention or remediation, and delivery of content. Teachers are highly encouraged to observe other teachers and even review videotapes of their own teaching with their coaches. Similarly in monitoring student performance, teachers do a deep dive into their own data and analyze what can be improved. Mitchell adds, *“It’s about meeting teachers where they are, gaps are addressed, so they can be the best for the [students].”*



INNOVATOR TEACHERS



Shari Hicks, El Capitan Elementary

In brief: El Capitan Elementary is a Title 1, K-5 school serving 438 students in the Roswell Independent School District (RISD). Sixty-nine percent of students are Hispanic and almost all of its student population comes from low-income households. RISD has provided students with 10 additional instructional days beyond the state required minimum.

Shari Hicks is an Intensive Teaching to Academic Potential (ITAP) teacher at El Capitan Elementary. She is also a 2022 Change Agent in the social-emotional learning (SEL) Change Agent Network Fellowship, a Teach Plus initiative where teacher leaders, in collaboration with their peers and principals, identify the social and emotional learning needs of their schools and students and chart a path forward to solve the SEL problems-of-practice through continuous improvement.

The Innovation: Led by Shari, teachers at El Capitan Elementary are participating in a schoolwide effort to teach students mindfulness practices to help identify, self-reflect, and react to their emotions responsibly and respectfully. Shari is also helping teachers support students on a social-emotional level. She has coached teachers at her school on how to use active listening, create safe spaces for students to share their feelings, and recognize

a student's need for open communication with their teachers. These strategies not only help students reflect and calmly discuss their feelings, but they give teachers opportunities to reexamine their own reactions to student behavior. In meeting with her teaching colleagues, Shari is careful to remind them that, *“We are no longer just responsible for academics, but providing learning opportunities for students to wholly succeed in life beyond high school graduation.”*

How students benefit: Students are learning how to identify and reflect on their feelings, and act on these with thought and strategy. Previously, it was easy for teachers at the school to question student behavior and jump to conclusions on how to deal with it. Now, teachers are witnessing how the new approach is humanizing teaching and learning, with students opening up in ways teachers had not anticipated.

Since beginning her Change Agent initiative, Shari has built more buy-in with her colleagues around implementing color zone student check-ins, which help students recognize their feelings by selecting a color in a discreet manner showing their teacher how they are feeling based on the color they selected. In the beginning of the project, 11 out of 48 staff members were implementing zone check-ins, with only 5 of those 11 using them on a daily basis. In just a few months and evidence of improved classroom behavior, the number jumped to 50% of all staff at the school. The teachers who are participating have noted that they're able to build stronger relationships with students, leading to more productive learning environments.

Breaking down the barriers and building community:

In remote learning, students and teachers have put up barriers. Shari has identified strategies such as “stop, think, and talk about colors,” which she uses with students who come to her in emotional crisis. Shari shares this and other strategies with the general education teachers at her school. This approach, led by a teacher leader, is helping staff to build community across the school.



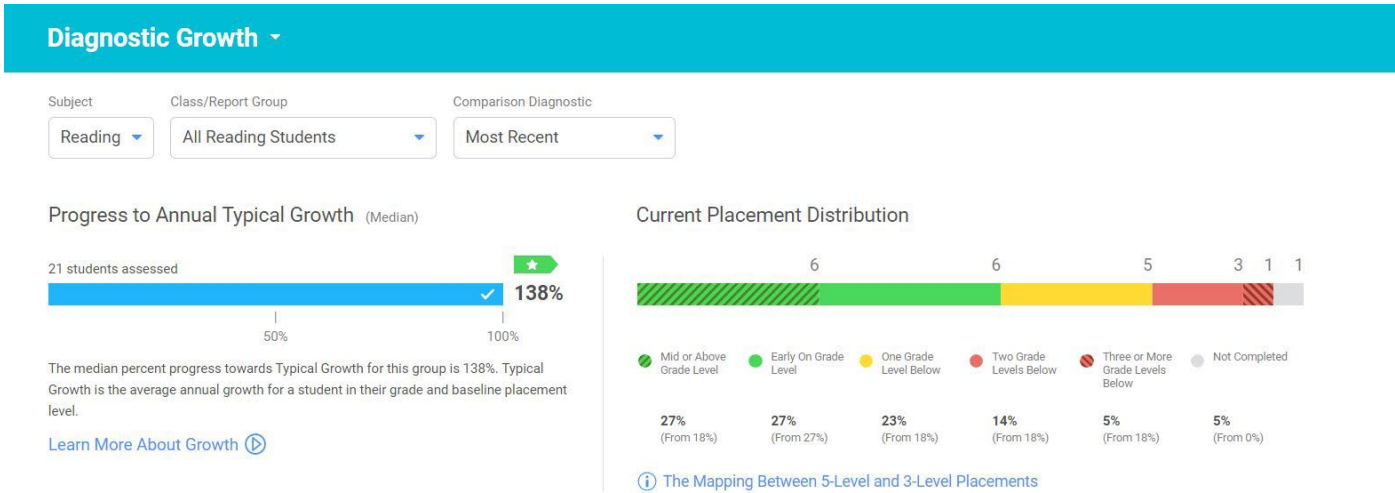
Robbi Berry, Monte Vista Elementary

In brief: Monte Vista Elementary, a Title I, serves 616 K-5 students in the Las Cruces Public Schools (LCPS). At the school, 81% of the student population is Hispanic, and 71% are from low socio-economic households.

Robbi Berry is a 5th grade teacher at the school and the 2021 Las Cruces Public Schools Teacher of the Year. Robbi implements project-based learning (PBL) in her classroom, using student-identified, real-world challenges to guide learning and mastery of standards. During the 2022 Legislative Session, Robbi and her students gave testimony advocating for outdoor learning spaces with legislators.

The Innovation: Robbi uses the PBL approach in her classroom because she finds that it engages her students in learning and motivates them to go deeper into the content standards. Her students recognized a need for outdoor learning spaces during the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, schools navigated between remote, hybrid, and in-person learning models and a need for a different way to learn was especially acute. Using what they researched about outdoor learning spaces, Robbi's students, also known as "Ms. Berry's Berry Bunch," designed their own space which included bench seating around trees, picnic tables, and other surfaces for writing and reading, and easels for presentations. The students' prototype was approved by LCPS and will be launched districtwide. One student said, "I had no idea that I could impact my community in a positive way because I'm a kid!"

How students benefit: Problem-based learning in Robbi's classroom fosters community among learners. With this project, her students solved a real-world issue, advocated for change, and made an impact on their community and state. They also learned collaboration and project management skills and character traits such as responsibility for one's self, perseverance through hard tasks, and commitment to improving their community through developing solutions-driven approaches to challenges. All students demonstrated academic growth on the 2021-2022 iReady Reading and Math Assessments. In reading, proficiency grew from 45% to 54%, with all students indicating growth. In math, 77% of students were one or more grade levels behind, however, proficiency grew to 55%, again with all students indicating growth.



Ms. Berry's iReady Reading Assessment Data SY 2021-2022

The importance of social-emotional learning in Robbi's classroom: Robbi incorporates her students' interests and passions in her work. She describes her innovative approach to learning as *"an instructional vehicle to value all students' ideas, foster collaboration amongst peers, build classroom community, and increase student engagement."* And she says, *"There are both social and academic benefits to a strong learning community. To start, the foundation of a safe community allows students to take academic risks and feel comfortable facing new challenges, which shape and contribute to learning experiences."*

CONCLUSION

The work of innovator schools and teachers demonstrates the importance of providing intentional professional development, targeted coaching, and explicit instruction in social-emotional learning skills. We encourage our state and districts to adapt these practices and to assess and meet student needs based on valid, reliable data.

2022 Innovative Strategies to Consider:

- + Provide teachers, especially new and struggling teachers, with **frequent and intensive professional development** and **one-on-one coaching** to ensure best classroom and instructional practices are used effectively.
- + Consider roles like **content specialists**, which give teachers more time to thoroughly teach their subject area and provide students with a learning environment where each subject is taught with fidelity and dedication to student mastery.
- + Implement programs that provide students with **explicit instruction in personal success skills, goal-setting, planning, and decision-making**, as these skills help to better prepare students for college and careers.
- + **Support teacher leadership efforts**, empowering champion educators to develop and lead programs to support student social emotional learning and problems based learning.

Finally, New Mexico decision makers should continue to strive for innovation in education and pursue systemic change to better meet the learning needs of our students.

REFERENCES

- + [Teacher and Student Engagement During COVID-19: Recommendations from Teach Plus New Mexico Policy Fellows](#)
- + [Recruiting and Retaining an Early Childhood Workforce in New Mexico](#)
- + [The Phoenix Project: Building an Equitable Educational System Beyond the Pandemic](#)
- + [Annie E. Casey Foundation 2021 Kids Count Data Book](#)

CONTACT

To nominate a classroom, school, or district to be spotlighted for innovative practices, contact Aimee Parra, Teach Plus Network Coordinator, aparra@teachplus.org

ABOUT TEACH PLUS

The mission of Teach Plus is to empower excellent, experienced, and diverse teachers to take leadership over key policy and practice issues that affect their students' success. Since 2009, Teach Plus has developed thousands of teacher leaders across the country to exercise their leadership in shaping education policy and improving teaching and learning, to create an education system driven by access and excellence for all. teachplus.org



teachplus.org/NM

 [@TeachPlusNM](https://twitter.com/TeachPlusNM)

 facebook.com/TeachPlusNM