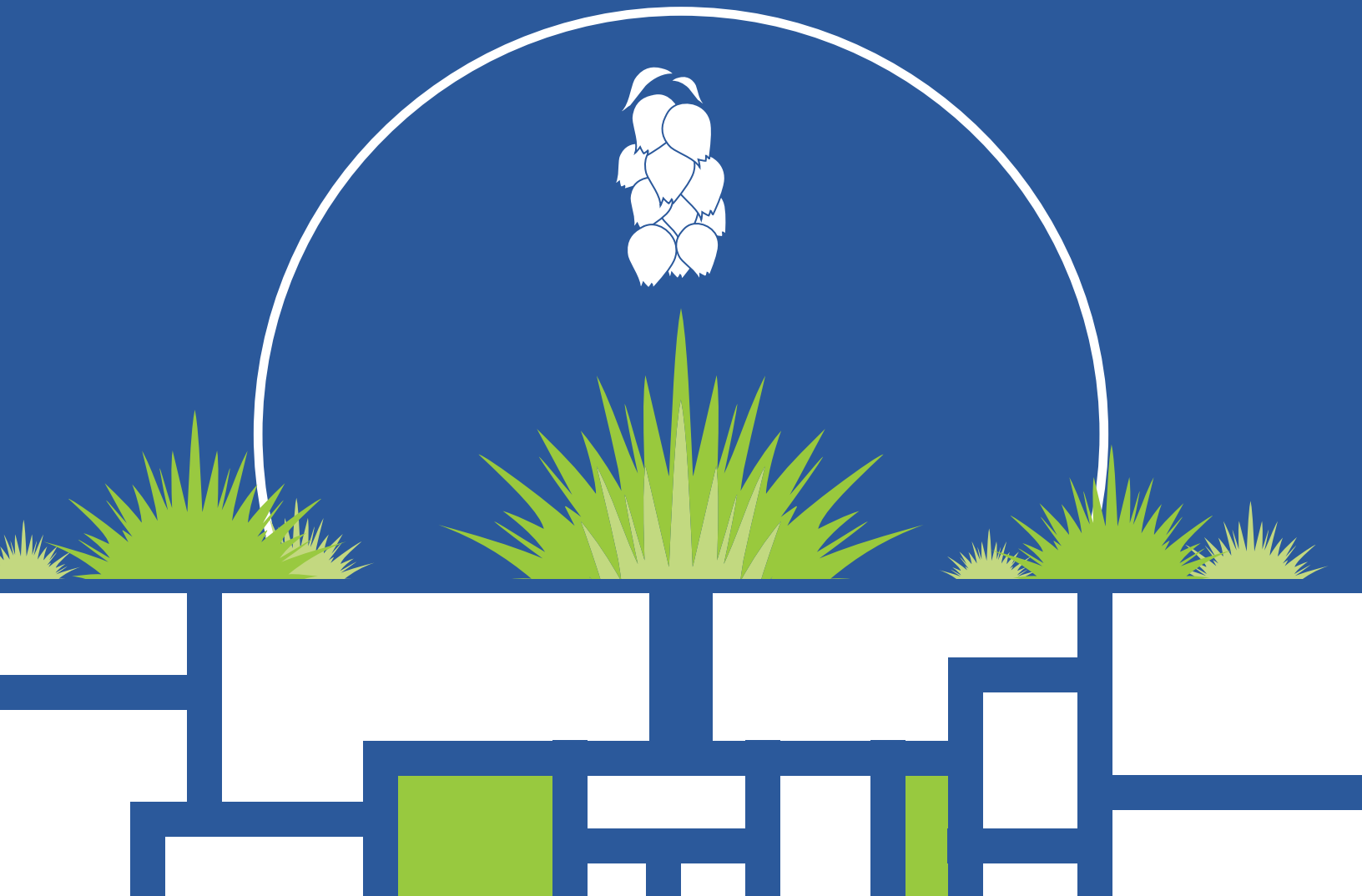




Growing Outcomes Through Innovation:

Cultivating New Mexico's
Student Success Statewide





AUTHORS

+ Hope Morales and Anya Grottel-Brown

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Innovation is one of the key drivers in education. In New Mexico, data from assessments such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) underscore the urgency to innovate across our system. In 2022, more students in our state scored below basic proficiency compared to 2019, with over half of 4th graders performing [below basic in reading](#). This disparity is even more pronounced among low-income students and students of color, with 71 percent of students who are Native American scoring below basic in 4th grade reading. Fortunately, many schools across New Mexico are pioneering innovative approaches, reimagining instruction, and creating new systems to enhance learning environments and outcomes for students.

Launched in 2022, Teach Plus's innovation work focuses on identifying and amplifying the strategies and practices that help our students grow and succeed. In our [2023 report](#), we highlighted seven schools whose innovative instructional approaches, support systems, and family and community engagement practices are improving teaching and learning. This year's report elevates the work of 10 different schools across New Mexico whose innovations in teaching early literacy and math, supporting underserved students groups, and increasing high school graduation rates are breaking barriers and paving the way for excellence. By highlighting these innovative practices and working to replicate them across more classrooms and schools, we are helping to ensure that more New Mexico students thrive in school and beyond.



2024 categories of innovation:

- + **Innovations in teaching early literacy and math:** Instructional practices focused on student-centered, individualized instruction designed to increase student engagement and outcomes in early literacy and math.
- + **Innovative support for underserved student groups:** Systems focused on providing high-quality support and connected to improved outcomes for students experiencing homelessness, in foster care, and students with disabilities.
- + **Innovations to increase high school graduation rates:** Practices that move beyond expected high school experiences, integrate unique programs or inputs, and meet the individual needs of students to increase the graduation rates and postsecondary success in order to improve quality of life.

METHODOLOGY

Teach Plus used an open nomination process to identify the schools in the three categories. Once the nominations were finalized, an expert judging panel used a rubric to score these based on the quality of the innovation, the effectiveness of the system, and its replicability. (See Appendix A for category rubrics.) The panel reviewed 49 nominations from across 33 school districts.

The judging panel included:

- + Chelsea Granillo, Teach Plus Alumna and Current Teacher; Amanda DeBell, New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) Deputy Secretary of Teaching, Learning and Innovation; and Annie Arntag, Legislative Education Study Committee Policy Analyst (***Innovations in teaching early literacy and math***)
- + Issac Rivas-Savell, Founder and Head of School at Voz Collegiate Preparatory Charter School and 2023 Innovative School Award recipient; Aimee Parra, Teach Plus Network Coordinator; and Dr. Patricia Jimenez-Lathan, Future Focused Education Senior Advisor for Communications and Outreach (***Innovative support for underserved student groups***)
- + Amanda Aragon, Executive Director NMKidsCan; Matt Pahl, Executive Director Public Charter Schools of New Mexico; and Sunny Liu, Legislative Finance Committee Policy Analyst (***Innovations to increase high school graduation rates***)

Following the selection, Teach Plus conducted interviews to gather additional information about each school's systems and practices. (See Appendix B for interview questions.) Each school provided the data for the results section of its profile. The report's writers also included data from [NMVistas](#) throughout the report.

1

INNOVATIONS IN TEACHING EARLY LITERACY AND MATH

Innovations in early literacy and math are invaluable for student learning and lay the foundation for lifelong academic success. Early literacy and math skills are fundamental building blocks that not only support academic achievement but also foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills. By incorporating innovative instructional practices such as interactive and hands-on activities, personalized learning experiences, and the integration of technology, educators can engage early learners more effectively and help them develop a strong grasp of foundational concepts. Innovative approaches in early literacy and math can also address individual student needs, allowing for differentiation and providing opportunities for students to progress at their own pace. These innovative practices not only enhance academic outcomes but also instill a love of learning and curiosity that can propel students towards future success.

Albuquerque Collegiate Charter School, Albuquerque:

Data-Driven System of Support for Math

The School

Albuquerque Collegiate Charter School is located in the South Valley area of Albuquerque. Ninety percent of the school's students identify as students of color and 70 percent qualify for free and reduced lunch. The school is located in a bustling shopping center, adjacent to the local mercado and Family Dollar. This intentional choice of location reflects the school's commitment to being accessible and close to the families it serves.

The school operates on four main principles:

- + Extended school day
- + Low student-to-teacher ratio
- + Prioritized and expanded focus on literacy and math
- + Comprehensive coaching and professional development program for staff

At the school, every classroom from kindergarten to 2nd grade is led by two fully licensed teachers, ensuring personalized attention and support for the youngest learners. Additionally, specialized content teachers in grades 3 through 5 provide tailored instruction to meet the diverse needs of students. Albuquerque Collegiate was recognized as the best charter school in Albuquerque with the Best in the City award in 2023 and also earned a "Spotlight" designation on NMVistas, with designations of excellence (top 10 percent in the state) for literacy proficiency, literacy growth, mathematics growth, and English learner progress.

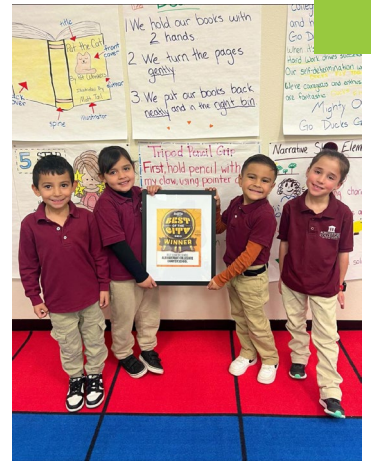
The Challenge

In the wake of COVID-19, Albuquerque Collegiate, like many schools nationwide, faced significant challenges in educating its students in math. When students returned to campus after the pandemic, the school community prioritized reading support at home, which inadvertently led to a neglect of math instruction. As a result, a large cohort of 3rd graders struggled with number sense and other foundational math skills. These areas became the focus of Albuquerque Collegiate's systemized approach to math literacy support and acceleration.

The Innovation

Albuquerque Collegiate implements frequent data meetings, in which every classroom teacher is paired with a coach and receives support analyzing student data. The data meetings allow for regular reviews and adjustments based on student performance, fostering timely, responsive teaching practices. The school utilizes a variety of data sources, including Istation, informative assessments, and state assessment exemplars to identify high-priority standards and tailor instruction accordingly. Coaches work closely with teachers to analyze data, develop appropriate interventions, and ensure that rigorous questioning techniques are employed in the classroom. In addition to the data meetings, coaches provide on-the-spot support to teachers in their classrooms.

To help its students succeed in math, Albuquerque Collegiate also has updated its math curriculum to include open educational resources, with a hyper focus on daily learning objectives. The school's 3rd grade teacher, for example, uses data from exit tickets to identify specific goals and interventions for students, providing individualized weekly or bi-weekly support that varies based on student progress.



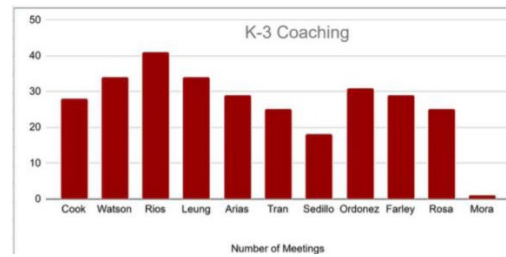
Students proudly display their school's "Best in City" award.



Administrator Kelsey McCaffrey supports a student during a classroom observation.

The school designated upper elementary teachers in 3rd-5th grades as math content specialists, empowering them to become experts in the subject and to dedicate more time to enhancing their teaching effectiveness. As a result, discourse has become an integral part of math instruction at the school, with an emphasis on supporting student thinking through various resources and activities. This approach not only strengthens students' math skills but also builds a skill that is transferable across subject areas, promoting deeper understanding and long-term academic success.

As part of the school's focus on educator quality, teachers participate in a three-week intensive summer training, 1.5 hours of professional development each week, eight data days during the school year, and weekly teacher observations and coaching sessions.



Number of coaching meetings between a school coach and classroom teachers.

The Results

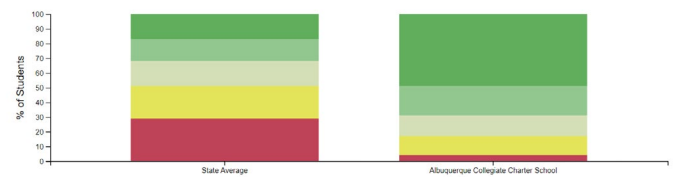
Albuquerque Collegiate's 2022-2023 student math outcomes surpassed the state average, with 31 percent proficiency compared to the state average of 24 percent, as reported by NMVistas. The school also saw an increase in the number of students on grade level, from 24 percent to 70 percent in 4th and 5th grades on the Istation Indicators of Student Progress (ISIP).

The Learnings

Initially, educators in K-2 classrooms expressed apprehension and a lack of confidence in teaching math, which prompted a deeper examination of the adult culture surrounding math at the school. The leadership team listened to educators who shared their experiences learning and teaching math. This led to the development of professional goals aimed at improving math strategies and fostering a positive learning environment for math across the entire school.

Comparison

ISIP™ Math results for Albuquerque Collegiate Charter School 2023/2024



Comparison between the state and Albuquerque Collegiate Charter School on the ISIP math assessment during the 2023-2024 school year.



Staff and students celebrate during a "March Mathness" school event.

To support continuous improvement, the school conducts ongoing educator professional development with both internal and external support. Additionally, the school has organized school-wide events such as "March Mathness" contests, celebrating students' math success and growth, to further cultivate a positive math culture. The introduction of two coaching positions has also buttressed teaching and learning efforts, ensuring that educators receive the necessary support and resources to implement effective math instruction. To ensure buy-in and alignment with the school's mission and goals, the leadership team set clear objectives and established shared agreements for high expectations for students. This comprehensive approach created a rigorous learning environment in which staff are committed to supporting student success in math.

Support for Varying Educational Needs



Kindergartener Charlette Perry reads to her "reading buddy," 1st grader Vivian Cordova.

The School

Reserve Elementary School, part of Reserve Independent Schools, is located in the northern part of the Gila National Forest, in a rural village classified as "frontier." Students from as far south as Glenwood and as far north as Luna and Aragon attend the school. Serving an average of 100 PreK-12 students annually, the campus primarily educates Caucasian and Hispanic students, with a small percentage identifying as Black and Indigenous. The school is home to a strong Future Farmers of America (FFA) program that aligns closely with the priorities of its community. Reserve Elementary earned a "Spotlight" designation on NMVistas during the 2022-2023 school year and is dedicated to providing quality learning experiences despite the challenges of its remote location.

The Challenge

During the 2017-2018 school year, Reserve Elementary faced significant challenges with student performance while the high school showed growth and achieved an "A" rating from the NMPED during the same period. This disparity underscored the urgency of addressing the varying educational needs of younger students and prompted a concerted effort from teachers. One critical issue was the over-identification of students in special education, which highlighted the need for a strategic shift in instructional approaches.

The Innovation

Reserve Elementary's comprehensive system of support for student learning is driven by strong advocacy from the school board and a strategic alignment with state initiatives. In 2023, Reserve Elementary applied for and became a NMPED Structured Literacy Support School. This initiative fostered a buy-in and a shared language among educators, bolstered by additional training and materials provided by the state.

Key components of this system are:

- + Implementation of Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) training for all PreK-6 grade teachers and reading interventionists
- + Use of sound walls
- + Support of a structured literacy coach
- + Vertical alignment and collaboration between teachers to ensure consistency in goals, academic vocabulary, and reading interventions

At Reserve Elementary, this initiative is a school priority, with funding allocated for training and salaries for reading interventionists. The school's Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are aligned with strategic classroom practices, ensuring consistency and accountability in teaching methods and data analysis.



Reserve Elementary celebrates Superhero Readers in the NMPED Level Up New Mexico Reading Challenge.

The school's implementation of the Multi-Layered System of Supports (MLSS) clarified the role of reading interventionists, which is particularly crucial in a small school setting. This process helped the school avoid over-identifying students in special education by providing targeted support and moving students through intervention layers as needed. The school's professional development days are dedicated to vertical data discussions and strategy alignment. School leader observations and walk-throughs ensure all educators are held accountable for their performance.

Teachers at Reserve Elementary review materials as a team to ensure they align with goals, deciding collectively on the best resources and tools to support their students' learning.

The expectation is that resources will be used appropriately and consistently by everyone, with a strong emphasis on implementation fidelity and accountability. This cohesive system is designed to enhance student outcomes and foster a culture of excellence and collaboration within the school.

The Results

Student outcomes have demonstrated an increase on both the Istation assessment for K-2 grades and Interim Measure of Student Success and Achievement (iMSSA) for 3rd-5th grades in the areas of reading and language arts.

"... having the vowel valley and understanding digraphs and vowel teams makes me more confident in my reading and definitely my spelling. I just love everything about words." —Vivian Cordova, 1st grade student

<p>IStation 2022-2023 April: 43% Level 3 or Higher 5% Level 4 17% Level 5</p>	<p>IStation 2023-2024 April: 50% Level 3 or Higher 16% Level 4 21% Level 5</p>
<p>iMSSA Reading 2023-2024: Beginning of Year (BOY) Elementary: ~42% near target and proficient</p>	<p>iMSSA Reading 2023-2024: Middle of Year (MOY) Elementary: ~51% near target and proficient</p>
<p>iMSSA Language Usage 2023-2024: BOY Elementary: ~59% near target and proficient</p>	<p>iMSSA Language Usage 2023-2024: MOY Elementary: ~68% near target and proficient</p>

The Learnings

One key learning has to do with the role of the reading interventionist. Initially, students were sent to the interventionist for small group work. The approach has since evolved and the reading interventionist now works with the students directly in the classroom, coaching teachers and striving to identify and implement best practices. This shift has made the interventionist a more collaborative and active team member, participating in Individual Education Program (IEP) meetings and classroom activities.

The importance of alignment and support within the school community was another key learning. Reserve Elementary embraced a growth mindset, constantly reflecting on classroom practices and collaborating through PLC discussions. Adjustments are now made based on the 90-day plan, allowing for ongoing reflection and recalibration. A school leader plays a crucial role in facilitating connections among teachers, fostering partnerships, and encouraging the sharing of ideas.

The school prizes vulnerability as part of its culture, especially because structured literacy represents a new teaching methodology for many of its teachers. The school's leadership works hard to make sure teachers feel supported in seeking new training without feeling guilty for not previously using the best strategies. Reserve Elementary takes advantage of state opportunities, such as the Level Up New Mexico Reading Challenge, and celebrates growth on assessments. PLC discussions are focused on strategies and the effective use of support staff like the reading interventionist. LETRS training is integrated into actual practice, ensuring it is not merely a checkbox but a meaningful part of the teaching approach.



Reserve Elementary students are Superhero Readers in the Level Up New Mexico Reading Challenge.

Chamisa Elementary School and Los Alamos Online Learning Academy, White Rock:

Partnerships for Effective Learning

The School

Chamisa Elementary and Los Alamos Online Learning Academy (LAOLA) are part of Los Alamos Public Schools (LAPS), located in White Rock, a community with a population of about 5,800. Chamisa Elementary serves 280 students from PreK to 6th grade, while LAOLA, created during the COVID-19 pandemic as an alternative learning environment, has 38 K-8 students. The schools attract students from across Northern New Mexico, with 35 percent of the enrollment coming from Santa Fe, Pojoaque, and the Espanola valleys. The school serves a diverse student population, with 45.71 percent Hispanic, 41.43 percent Caucasian, 6.43 percent Native American, 3.57 percent African American, 2.5 percent Asian American, and 0.36 percent Pacific Islander.

In 2019, Chamisa was honored as the Scholastic Summer Reading New Mexico School of the Year and in 2022, LAOLA received the New Mexico School Board Excellence in Student Achievement Award, highlighting its commitment to student success.



2023-2024 Chamisa/LAOLA Level Up New Mexico
Readers are honored.

The Challenge

In the fall of 2022, Chamisa's math scores lagged behind the rest of the district, making it a priority for the school to establish support programs around math. Chamisa also recognized the need for external assistance after years of independent effort. School leaders pinpointed gaps in teaching, while teachers expressed a strong desire to improve their strategies, creating a perfect storm for progress.

At LAOLA, the 2022 data from Istation and iMSSA scores, along with teacher requests for professional development and coaching, pointed to a need for support around literacy such as understanding how to work with students identified as dyslexic or those with characteristics of dyslexia. During that same year, LAPS adopted the structured literacy Amplify Core

Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) program. (The district previously used a balanced literacy approach.) Along with LETRS, this was a significant change for teachers' practice, with educators struggling with instructional delivery.

The Innovation

The partner schools worked together to tackle priorities related to reading and math. Their innovative practices included implementing programming as a state-recognized Structured Literacy Support School, the use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) tools, and participation in the Math Teacher Leader Network in partnership with Los Alamos National Labs (LANL).

Reading:

Chamisa and LAOLA were awarded a grant from NMPED to become a Structured Literacy Support School, with access to a structured literacy coach and resources to support data-driven instruction. With this in place, the schools are able to build students' structured literacy skills using the adopted CKLA curriculum aligned with LETRS. Many teachers and administrators are becoming certified LETRS instructors. Students at the schools have access to monthly English language arts (ELA) assessments and targeted instruction, enhancing their reading proficiency.

Through the New Mexico Pioneer Project, the students also use UDL tools like Snap and Read, a text-to-speech tool that supports students at all reading levels in accessing grade-level texts. Additional tools, such as Co-Writer for speech-to-text writing and EquatiO for speech-to-math text, further support student learning. These tools promote independence in reading and writing, allowing students to choose when and how to use them.

Math:

Teachers at Chamisa began using innovative interventions like Spring Math for targeted student practice to build math fluency and calculation skills. They incorporated number talks and math games into their practice to enhance number sense. In 2023, Chamisa introduced a math lab classroom where students engage in hands-on mathematical exploration, such as designing and building a pit for gaga ball, a game similar to dodgeball. This project, supported by the Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) and LANL Foundation, integrates practical math applications.

The blending of math into various subjects has been another key strategy at Chamisa. Teachers in special education classrooms, as well as music, physical education (PE), art, and library classes, have incorporated math into their lesson plans. For example, PE students track their running data to calculate averages and growth, music students use counting and fractions in measures and notes, art students integrate geometry, and library lessons connect math to the Dewey Decimal System.

Chamisa's involvement in the Math Teacher Leader Network, in collaboration with LANL and New Mexico Highlands University, has further enhanced its teachers' math instruction. The teachers work with peers across Northern New Mexico, gaining new approaches to teaching math. Participants in this program earn an endorsement as math teacher leaders. In addition, teachers at the school hold bi-weekly grade-band team meetings in which they facilitate discussions on teaching strategies, while ensuring vertical alignment and inter-grade communication.



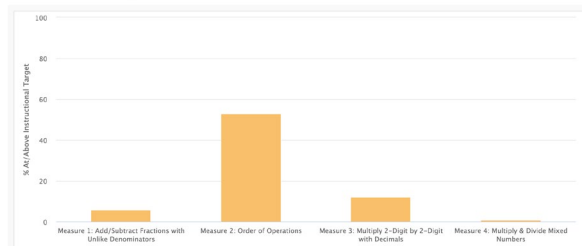
Students participate in a hands-on math activity in the math lab.

The Results

The strategic partnership between the two schools, community partners, and the state has proven effective, accelerating student learning in reading and math in-person and online, as measured by the Istation/iMSSA assessment from fall 2023-2024 to spring 2023-2024. Student proficiency increased in all four math categories. A 6th grade teacher shared, *"When the students saw their spring score they yelled, high fived each other, and jumped up and down. They were so proud of each other. It was awesome!"* In reading, 65 percent of Chamisa Elementary students were proficient on the annual reading assessment as reported by NMVistas for the 2022-2023 school year.

Fall 2023-24 Results Summary

Percent of Students At-Target for Each Measure

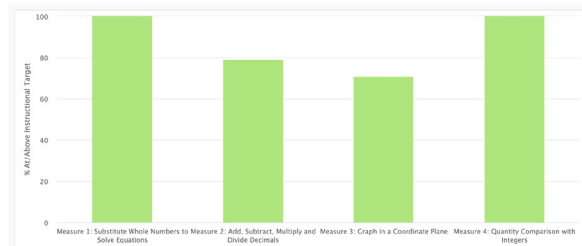


Chamisa Math IMSSA (Interim Measures of Student Success and Achievement)/Istation "On Target" Scores:

Grade	End of Year score 2021-2022	End of Year Score 22-23
2nd (Istation)	Level ½ Students 37%	Level ½ Students 69%
3rd	73%	64% (BOY was 0%)
4th	50%	69%
5th	50%	75%
6th	46%	70%

Spring 2023-24 Results Summary

Percent of Students At-Target for Each Measure



Growth on (NF)-Fraction Content in IMSSA for 3rd grade after using Frax in spring of 2022

BOY NF (Beginning of Year) 2021	EOY NF (End of Year) 2022
15 students below (58%)	2 students below (8%)
8 students at/near (31%)	3 students at/near (11%)
3 students above (11%)	21 students above (81%)

The Learnings

Reading:

Chamisa and LAOLA shifted how they taught reading, adopting methods grounded in the science of reading. Teachers benefited from working with a coach who addressed their questions. The schools learned that having a dedicated professional to keep them focused on data as a team, making time for in-depth analysis, and using resources to address individual student needs makes a substantial difference to student learning.

The schools' approach has evolved to include teacher-led mini professional development sessions to share effective instructional strategies. For example, the teachers at the two schools have collaborated with the district Certified Academic Language Practitioner (CALP) to integrate curriculum resources tailored for students with dyslexia or related characteristics.

Math:

The math initiative underwent a transformation as teachers recognized the need for a more targeted approach. They introduced an intervention block within math instruction time, dedicating additional time to computation skills, base ten strategies, and math fluency. Utilizing resources like Spring Math, Math Minutes, and the Greg Tang Math curriculum, teachers provided students with more exploratory math experiences, moving beyond simply progressing through the curriculum. This shift allowed students to deepen their math skills and overall mathematical understanding.



2

INNOVATIVE SUPPORT FOR UNDERSERVED STUDENT GROUPS

Innovative support of special education students and students experiencing homelessness or in foster care is crucial for improving their opportunities for educational success and achievement. These students often face unique challenges that can hinder their academic progress and overall well-being and therefore often have the lowest graduation rates in our state. Innovations need to be tailored to these students' specific needs, with learning experiences and wraparound services addressing barriers to learning. By implementing innovative practices that focus on developing effective educators, providing differentiated support, and fostering strong partnerships with families and communities, schools can create a more inclusive and supportive environment in which every student has the opportunity to thrive. Moreover, these innovative approaches can help break down systemic barriers and ensure that these students receive the resources and support they need to reach their full potential.

Siembra Leadership High School, Albuquerque:

Spotlight on Entrepreneurship

The School

Situated in downtown Albuquerque, Siembra Leadership High School is New Mexico's sole entrepreneurship-focused public charter high school. The student body reflects the diverse landscape of Albuquerque, with 100 percent of students coming from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Siembra serves as a hub for community involvement, with approximately 200 students actively engaged in community-based initiatives at any given time.

The Challenge

Nontraditional students face many barriers in a traditional school setting that often leave them behind academically. Among these are the need for these students to work to support a family, homelessness, and poverty. Many nontraditional students also have specific social, emotional, and mental health needs that are hard to meet in a traditional school setting.



School leader Jaqi Cornejo Baldwin.

The Innovation

Siembra Leadership prioritizes re-engaging students facing graduation barriers, including those economically disadvantaged, with disabilities, experiencing homelessness, or involved in the juvenile justice or foster care systems. The school's student-centered approach, embedded in real-world project-based learning (PBL), is bolstered by comprehensive support systems. Special education students are fully integrated into PBL, benefiting from differentiated instruction and accommodations. A transition coordinator facilitates career counseling, internships, and college applications, while students participate in capstone entrepreneurial projects that enhance workforce skills and career outcomes. Siembra Leadership's robust support network includes daily faculty advisor meetings, access to social workers, and individualized education plans for students with disabilities. Siembra's must-haves include high-quality, experienced teachers, licensed special education teachers and social workers, and emphasis on social-emotional development and community involvement.

The school has also undertaken a strategic planning process in collaboration with the school board to set clear objectives and goals. Recent updates to schedules include a later start time of 9:30 a.m. and dedicated individualized time from 2:30 to 4:00 p.m., allowing students flexibility to pursue jobs, projects, homework, or rest. Community-based learning days are scheduled on weekends or evenings, providing students with opportunities to engage in community events and reflect on their learning experiences. Following school calendar breaks, a structured onboarding process comprising a week of asynchronous learning followed by a week of field trips, activities, and reflections eases students back into regular classes and progress. The school uses data and feedback collected throughout the second semester and summer to inform adjustments and improvements for the upcoming school year.

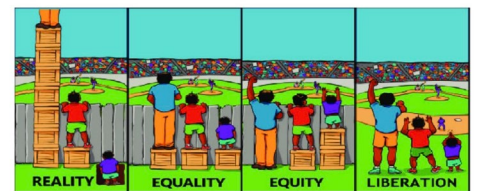
SIEMBRA'S ENTREPRENEURIAL FRAMEWORK
The Mini MBA

9TH GRADE	ENTREPRENEURIAL PROCESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discovery Concept Development Researching Actualization
9TH GRADE	ENTREPRENEURIAL TRAITS & BEHAVIORS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership Personal Assessment Personal Management
10TH GRADE	COMMUNICATION & INTERPERSONAL SKILLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fundamentals of Communication Group Communication
10TH GRADE	DIGITAL SKILLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Computer Basics Computer Applications
11TH GRADE	ECONOMICS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basic Concepts Cost profit relationships Economic indicators & trends Economic systems
11TH GRADE	FINANCIAL LITERACY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Money Basics Financial Services Personal Money Management
12TH GRADE	MARKETING MANAGEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Product & Service Creation Marketing Information Management Promotion Pricing & Selling
12TH GRADE	OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business Systems Channel Management Purchasing Daily Operations
12TH GRADE	STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning Controlling

The Results

Siembra Leadership's innovative model, which combines student-centered projects with robust support systems, has yielded promising outcomes. Out of the 80 seniors in 2023-2024, 60 were initially behind in credits but have since not only returned to school but are set to graduate. Across all graduating classes, these students earned a total of 357 college credits, showcasing their dedication and academic achievements. Furthermore, 42 seniors in 2023-2024 participated in paid internships, earning valuable real-world learning experiences.

Among those seniors, 35 operate businesses. For instance, one student established a business that functions as a community hub, offering tattoo services, coffee, barbering, and an art space. Another 2020 graduate launched a business reselling shoes. These successes highlight the entrepreneurial spirit at the school and the way students excel beyond academics.



Class of 2020 - Siembra had 40 Graduates; 97.5% of Seniors Graduated

- Enrolled on track to graduate: 21
- Enrolled behind on credits: 20
- Students that did not graduate: 1
- Total Seniors: 41

Class of 2021 - Siembra had 41 Graduates, 93.18% of Seniors Graduated

- Enrolled on track to graduate: 13
- Enrolled behind on credits: 31
- Students that did not graduate: 3
- Total Seniors: 44

Class of 2022 - Siembra had 46 Graduates, 93.87% of Seniors Graduated

- Enrolled on track to graduate: 26
- Enrolled behind on credits: 23
- Students that did not graduate: 3
- Total Seniors: 49

Class of 2023 - Siembra had 52 Graduates, 94.54% of Seniors Graduated

- Enrolled on track to graduate: 29
- Enrolled behind on credits: 26
- Students that did not graduate: 3
- Total Seniors: 55

The Learnings

The school emphasizes the importance of resilience and innovation, encouraging students to defy conventional wisdom and embrace failure as a means of growth. Through implementation and experiences, students learn that opportunities for success exist beyond traditional channels, fostering an entrepreneurial mindset. The school has developed a system that uses student-centered approaches over conventional administrative roles, focusing on building systems that empower and support learners.



Class of 2023' graduates back stage at the the KiVa Theater, preparing for their big day.

Rio Grande Academy of Fine Arts Elementary and Middle School, Albuquerque:

Arts Integration and Hands-on Learning

The School

A charter school in its second year of operation, Rio Grande Academy of Fine Arts (RioGafa) offers an arts integration program where students learn academic content through various forms of art. Located in southwest Albuquerque, the school serves a diverse student population, with seven percent of two or more races, seven percent Indigenous, three percent African American or Black, and 55 percent Hispanic. Nearly one quarter, or 22 percent, of students, have an IEP. The school also qualifies for the Community Eligibility Program (CEP), with more than 90 percent of its students qualifying for free and reduced lunch. RioGafa emphasizes professional development for its staff, with educational assistants participating in the NMPED Educator Fellows program to become future teachers.



Kindergarten students join their 6th grade mentors for a music lesson.

The Challenge

RioGafa addresses a gap in New Mexico’s educational landscape, where arts education is underrepresented and undervalued, particularly in marginalized communities. Comprehensive arts education is especially lacking in underserved areas like Albuquerque’s westside area, where access to arts programs is limited.

The Innovation

At RioGafa, arts integration is central to supporting student learning and engagement. The school leverages a variety of methods, such as surveys, parent nights, and art classes, to connect with the community. At RioGafa, teachers deliver rigorous academic content through the arts. This interdisciplinary approach includes activities such as:

- + Exploring characterization by creating costumes for characters
- + Understanding body systems by choreographing dances
- + Learning geography and storytelling by designing maps and worlds
- + Acting out math problems
- + Understanding fractions through musical notes



Kindergarten and first grade students make paper-mache balloons.

RioGafa defines the arts broadly, encompassing culinary arts, dance, drama, gardening, media, music, and visual arts. The school aims to connect local artists with students, offering art blocks in which artists from Albuquerque and the local school community share their expertise. These interactions provide windows and mirrors so that students see themselves and observe the world around them, as well as get practical knowledge and inspiration. They also demonstrate viable career paths in the arts. For instance, in a weekly gardening class students learn how to grow food, linking this knowledge to science and sustainability. Educators at RioGafa have found that arts education fosters essential 21st-century skills such as creativity, collaboration, confidence, cultural awareness, empathy, and critical thinking. Arts-integrated lessons also foster a sense of belonging, cooperation, and cultural understanding. The goal is to use the arts to develop these and other skills applicable to various life challenges.

The Results

Student proficiency at RioGafa is above the state average in math for all assessed groups. In math, the school's 2022-2023 student proficiency is 40 percent compared to 24 percent at the state level, as reported by NMVistas.


Math data:

Kinder, 1st, and 6th Grade Math Growth for English Learners			
Grade	Percent Progress to Annual Typical Growth (%)	Percent Progress to Annual Stretch Growth (%)	
K	115%	84%	
1st	105%	82%	
6th	123%	53%	
ALL	114%	73%	

Kinder, 1st, and 6th Grade Math Growth Special Education			
Grade	Percent Progress to Annual Typical Growth (%)	Percent Progress to Annual Stretch Growth (%)	
K	21%	17%	
1st	89%	63%	
6th	155%	67%	
ALL	88%	49%	


ELA data:

ELL by the Numbers



Grade	Percent Progress to Annual Typical Growth (%)	Percent Progress to Annual Stretch Growth (%)
K	67%	48%
1st	90%	60%
6th	119%	45%
ALL	92%	51%

Special Education by the Numbers



Grade	Percent Progress to Annual Typical Growth (%)	Percent Progress to Annual Stretch Growth (%)
K	79%	58%
1st	49%	29%
6th	220%	82%
ALL	116%	56%



Students participate in Balloons Aloft with the Zephyr hot-air balloon.

The Learnings

RioGAFAs has learned valuable lessons through its journey of integrating arts into its curriculum. Initially, while prospective teachers were enthusiastic about the concept, the implementation required learning and adaptation. Many teachers lacked experience with this model and needed time, support, and opportunities to align their teaching with the school’s mission and vision.

The school recognized the importance of creating a space with robust systems, embracing trial and error, and fostering a lifelong learner mentality. The school utilizes a co-director leadership model which leverages the strengths of both leaders, fostering a partnership built on trust and healthy discourse.

P.R. Leyva Middle School, Carlsbad:

Multi-Classroom Leaders™

The School

The Carlsbad Intermediate School building, also known as the P.R. Leyva School Campus—originally a high school—is home to 843 middle school students. Reflecting the diverse community of Carlsbad, 63 percent of students are Hispanic, 33 percent are Caucasian, and four percent represent other ethnic backgrounds. At the school, 44 percent of students qualify for free and reduced lunch, 11 percent for special education services, and 11 percent are English language learners. The school serves a highly transient population, including a three percent homeless student demographic and a significant number of bilingual students from Mexico, Honduras, and other countries.



Students participate in supportive group work.

Students at the schools have achieved notable successes, including winning the statewide vocabulary bowl through [vocabulary.com](https://www.vocabulary.com) and excelling in statewide Math, Engineering, Science Achievement (MESA) competitions. The school has also focused on improving attendance, winning a district-wide competition multiple times. Highlighted for their tutoring services through Focus Eduvation (FEV), P.R. Leyva embraces the Capturing Kids Hearts (CKH) initiative and has been recognized by CKH for its positive school culture.

The Challenge

P.R. Leyva faced multiple years of poor state testing data and high rates of its students failing classes. Many students repeatedly appeared on summer school lists and the school struggled with low graduation rates and high dropout rates. Only nine percent of P.R. Leyva's students showed significant growth on annual state assessments across all subjects, with math posing a special challenge. The high mobility rate further compounded these issues, as families in the oil, gas, trucking, welding, and construction industries frequently relocated due to the high cost of living and temporary housing situations. This transient lifestyle, marked by "man camps" and RV living, disrupted students' educational continuity. The situation reached a tipping point in 2023 when a record number of P.R. Leyva's students needed to complete summer school to advance to the next grade level.

The Innovation

In 2022, P.R. Leyva adopted the Opportunity Culture™ program, which aims to extend the reach of excellent teachers by empowering them to lead teaching teams that work with large numbers of students. The school's principal and leadership team spent a year on landscape analysis, intensive planning, data analysis, and strategic hiring, all in the service of improving student outcomes.

Key elements of the Opportunity Culture™ approach at P.R. Leyva include:

- + Reaching more students with excellent teachers and their teams
- + Paying teachers more for extending their reach
- + Funding additional pay for teachers within regular budgets
- + Providing protected in-school time for teachers to plan and collaborate
- + Matching authority and accountability to each person's responsibilities

Supported by Public Impact™ which leads the Opportunity Culture initiative™, a school design team consisting of the principal and two teacher representatives tailored the program to fit the school's needs. They selected full-time Multi-Classroom Leaders™ (MCLs) through a rigorous process to ensure these high-quality educators could effectively extend their reach.

In the 2023-2024 school year, MCL™ educators actively engaged with the teachers in 6th and 7th grade ELA and math classrooms. They modeled instructional and classroom management strategies and provided coaching based on classroom observations, identifying high-leverage, low-impact adjustments to maximize improvement. Deep data dives informed planning of instruction, aligning lessons with standards and pacing guides. This approach enabled the creation of targeted small groups for tutoring, addressing specific deficiencies highlighted by student assessment data.

"I have a teacher who comes in, sees what I'm doing, and gives me quick snippets of changes I can make immediately in my classroom, and for me, that is absolutely amazing."

—Tammie Hardt, 28-year veteran teacher

The implementation of Opportunity Culture™ at P.R. Leyva marked a significant shift toward a collaborative, data-driven, and supportive teaching environment. This initiative not only aimed to improve academic outcomes but also fostered a culture of continuous professional growth and development among teachers, ultimately ensuring quality instruction for all students.



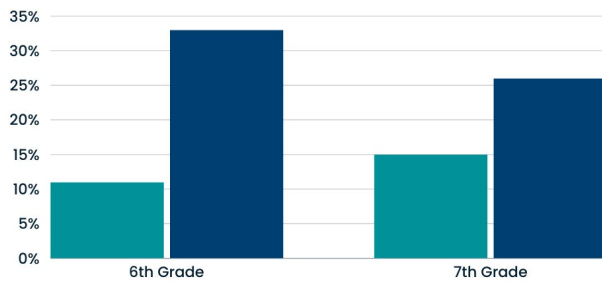
Students are celebrated for "perfect attendance."

The Results

The summer school rates at P.R. Leyva dropped by 39 percent from the 2022-2023 school year to the 2023-2024 school year, indicating a significant reduction in the number of students requiring additional academic support over the summer. Furthermore, the NWEA End of Year (EOY) data showed substantial academic growth among students. In English, 37 percent of 7th grade students and 47.5 percent of 6th grade students demonstrated growth of 1.5 years or more, as evidenced by an increase of 7.5 points or more on the NWEA Growth Reading Assessment. Similarly, in math, 44 percent of 7th grade students and 46 percent of 6th grade students achieved growth of 1.5 years or more, indicated by an increase of 10 points or more on the NWEA Growth Math Assessment.

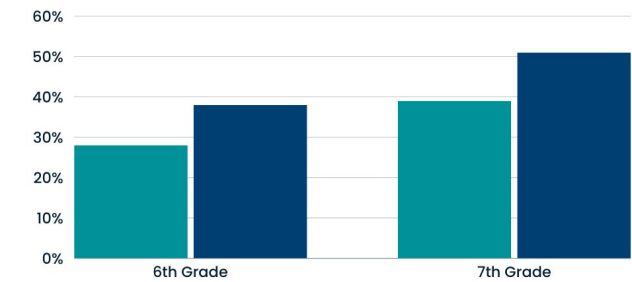
PR LEYVA MAPS MATH PROFICIENCY

BOY NWEA score vs. October Screener



PR LEYVA MAPS ELA PROFICIENCY

BOY NWEA score vs. October Screener



The Learning

Through its work, the school realized the importance of collaboration and of recognizing and leveraging each individual's strengths. The school's current approach fosters teams that work together effectively, support each other, and share strengths. The school also learned the value of optimizing classroom spaces to support individualized and small group learning. Removing traditional teacher desks in favor of kidney tables allowed for more dynamic and personalized teaching methods. This change led to a deeper understanding of student cultures and learning styles, enabling teachers to tailor their instruction more effectively. Student surveys provided qualitative data and insights, such as the belief that math lessons were progressing too quickly. This feedback helped teachers adjust their attitudes and approaches to better align with student expectations and needs.

Laguna Middle School, Laguna Pueblo:

Sustaining Language, Heritage, and Community

The School

Laguna Middle School, located on the Laguna Pueblo, serves 101 students in grades 6-8, all of whom are Laguna or members of one of the 574 federally recognized tribes and nations. The school employs 18 teachers and offers a diverse range of subjects, including home economics (sewing and cooking), physical education, music, art, and language and culture classes. After-school activities include tutoring, drumming, the Kwaika Lego club, science fair assistance, and a board game club.



Laguna Middle School focuses on integrating Laguna language and culture into all aspects of learning, fostering a deep connection to heritage and community. The school is on a path to becoming a community school, embracing the concept of whole school, whole child, and whole community. A recent grant has enabled the school to upgrade its kitchen facilities, allowing for the preparation of more traditional meals that support local agriculture and farmers, further reinforcing its cultural heritage.

The Challenge

Laguna has faced an ongoing challenge of rebuilding trust between families and the educational system, a relationship strained by a history of marginalization and cultural disconnection. For many years, families of color, particularly Indigenous families, have felt pushed out of the educational system, a sentiment rooted in the traumatic boarding school era. This historical distrust has made it difficult for schools like Laguna to engage effectively with their communities.

The Innovation

Understanding the importance of language preservation and the urgency to sustain and expand the Laguna language, the school has centered linguistic and cultural practices in its educational framework. Laguna has also brought to the forefront culturally significant events, often overlooked in tribally controlled schools, that are crucial for reinforcing social-emotional learning and resilience in young people. Such initiatives are part of a broader strategy within the tribally controlled school system, where “success” and “proficiency” are measured through lenses other than the dominant educational narrative, emphasizing community, tradition, and holistic development.



Laguna's monthly cultural activities, such as the traditional sewing club, All Soul's Day Feeding, and a special Deer Dinner, are designed to celebrate the students' heritage and traditions. For the Deer Dinner event, the school worked with the superintendent and Pueblo leadership to secure a hunting tag. This led to a traditional deer hunt, followed by a set of activities in which students learned prayers, offerings, and the history of the hunt. The “Coming Home” ceremony, where the hunted deer was presented to the community, was a profound experience for the students and the community alike.

The hands-on involvement didn't stop there. Male students were taught to butcher the deer in the traditional way, while female students learned to cook and prepare a traditional deer stew. This culminated in a community-wide Deer Dinner, celebrating Indigenous People's Month. The middle school students served the traditionally made stew, symbolizing gratitude, harvest, and the significance of tradition and identity.

The school tailors its calendar to the unique needs of Native American children. By leveraging their sovereignty, the school developed a culturally and linguistically appropriate schedule, allowing time off for feast days and significant cultural practices. The calendar includes a four-day school week, with Fridays dedicated to culturally significant field trips and community-led educational activities, such as moccasin making and fish trap crafting, as well as intensive language support from elders.

The Results

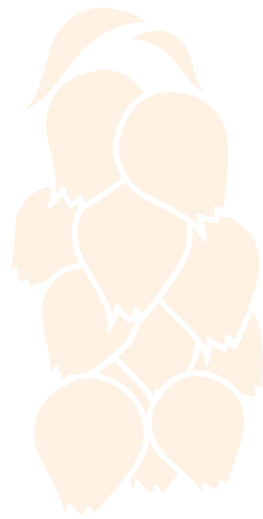
Laguna's innovative, culturally rooted educational approach has resulted in significant positive outcomes for both students and the community. Since implementing this approach, the school has seen a 50 percent increase in PTO attendance, reflecting heightened parent and community involvement. This surge in family engagement has directly correlated with higher attendance and graduation rates among students.

According to NMVistas, the school has also demonstrated growth in proficiency rates in both math and reading with an increase of 7.4 percent in math and 11.9 percent in reading in 2022-2023, compared to the 2021-2022 school year.

The Learnings

School and district leaders have engaged in empathetic listening, setting up listening sessions to fully understand the needs and aspirations of the community. Collaborating with a research scientist from the University of New Mexico, the school conducted focus groups, collecting qualitative data from approximately 300 community members. Consistently, the themes of language and culture emerged as top priorities, underscoring the community's desire to see these elements integrated into the educational system.

The school's goals are reflective of what the community values most, adopting a servant leadership model. This approach elevates community priorities, such as academic rigor and proficiency, while ensuring that cultural and linguistic heritage are preserved and celebrated. The community's voice has been pivotal in shaping a curriculum that resonates with students, thereby increasing engagement and fostering a love for learning.



3

INNOVATIONS TO INCREASE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES

Improving graduation rates in New Mexico is paramount, given the state's persistent challenges in this area. Despite efforts to address this problem, many students continue to face obstacles that impede their path to graduation. Innovative approaches are essential to identify and address the root causes of dropout rates, such as academic struggles, lack of support, and disengagement. By implementing innovative support systems that provide personalized interventions, academic and social-emotional support, and tailored pathways to graduation, schools can better meet the diverse needs of students and increase the likelihood of their success. Through collaboration, flexibility, and a commitment to equity, innovative systems have the potential to transform educational outcomes and ensure that more students in New Mexico graduate prepared for success in college, career, and life.

Academy for Technology and the Classics, Santa Fe:

College Crew Advisory

The School

The Academy for Technology and the Classics (ATC) charter school was founded in 2000 to provide a classical and technology-based approach to education in a public school setting. ATC was the third charter school established in Santa Fe, and the first in Santa Fe to open its doors to both middle and high school students. The school currently serves 390 students and enrollment remains high at 93 percent. The student body reflects the diversity of Santa Fe County, with Hispanic students comprising the majority at 65 percent. Special education students make up seven percent of the total student population, while 17 percent are identified as gifted. Additionally, 8.2 percent of students are English language learners, with 9.7 percent having either exited the program or been classified Fluent English Proficient (FEP). The school has earned an A grade during the A-F grading system, was designated as a "Spotlight" school for 2021-2022, and a school of "Excellence" in 2023 in NMVistas.

The Challenge

ATC faced a Santa Fe Public Schools suspension of their authorization in 2011, prompting the school to identify and address issues that hampered student success. During the 2012-2013 school year, ATC transitioned to become an "AP for All" school, a challenging process. The faculty realized that the school had become fractured, lacking focus and purpose and that in order to fully support all students in Advanced Placement (AP) classes, they would need to create new processes and structures to scaffold learning for all.

The Innovation

ATC's challenges led to a teacher-initiated vision, with college preparation as the school's new focus and mission for success. College Crew, the school's innovative advisory program, provides comprehensive support for students from 7th through 12th grade and draws a throughline between college curriculum and students' community-based goals. The program connects a small group of students to one teacher who serves as their advocate and home liaison throughout their ATC academic journey.

Each grade level in College Crew has a specific topic focus to ensure students are equipped with the skills and knowledge they need at each stage of their school career. From orientation in 7th grade to senior seminar in 12th grade, students receive guidance on leadership, test preparation, college success, and more. College Crew is an integral part of the curriculum for all grade levels, and a student cannot graduate without participating in the program. A key feature of College Crew is that the advisory teachers loop up every year, meaning students and families have the same teacher's support throughout their time at the school. This continuity allows for deeper connections between students and teachers, providing a consistent source of support and guidance as students navigate their academic and personal journey.

"The College Crew Advisory program is the cornerstone of our system of support for student success at ATC. As teachers guide students in the development of academic habits of success and work to grow students' social emotional skills, they engage with students and families while monitoring attendance and achievement, nurturing the development of goals, and supporting the attainment of those goals in a rich environment of care and accountability." —**Rhonda Garder, English teacher**

College Crew also serves as a platform for students to engage in community service, ensuring that their focus on college preparation is complemented by strong involvement in their community. In the 2023-2024 school year, students completed 170 hours of community service. This innovative approach not only supports students academically but also helps them develop important leadership skills and a sense of social responsibility.

Allows each student to be at their best in terms of time slot in each class at some point in the week

More sustained learning time for students

Flexible time for student enrichment/support and teacher collaboration and development

Consideration around making Crew time more meaningful for students

Total "things" per day:

	6		5		5		5		4	
M Bell Schedule	T Bell Schedule		W Bell Schedule		Th Bell Schedule		F Bell Schedule			
Per. 1	9:00 - 9:58	Per. 1	9:00 - 10:30	Per. 4	9:00 - 10:30	Per. 3	9:00 - 10:30	Per. 6	9:00 - 10:30	
Per. 2	10:03 - 11:01	Morning PAUSE	10:30-10:50	Morning PAUSE	10:30-10:50	Morning PAUSE	10:30-10:50	Morning PAUSE	10:30-10:50	
Per. 3	11:06 - 12:06	Per. 2	10:50-12:20	Per. 5	10:50 - 12:20	Per. 1	10:50 - 12:20	Per. 4	10:50-12:20	
Lunch	12:06 - 1:01	Lunch	12:20 - 1:05	Lunch	12:20 - 1:05	Lunch	12:20 - 1:05	Lunch	12:20 - 1:05	
Per. 4	1:06 - 2:04	Crew	1:10 - 1:50	Crew	1:10 - 1:50	Crew	1:10 - 1:50	Lunch	12:20 - 1:05	
Per. 5	2:09 - 3:07	Per. 3	1:55 - 3:25	Per. 6	1:55 - 3:25	Per. 2	1:55 - 3:25	Per. 5	1:10 - 2:40	
Per. 6	3:12 - 4:10	Flex Time	3:30 - 4:30	Flex Time	3:30 - 4:30	Flex Time	3:30 - 4:30	Flex Time	2:45 - 3:45	
58 min classes	90 min classes		90 min classes		90 min classes		90 min classes		90 min classes	
55 min lunch	45 min lunch/40 min Crew		45 min lunch/40 min Crew		45 min lunch/40 min Crew		45 min lunch		45 min lunch	
5 min passing time	5 min passing time		5 min passing time		5 min passing time		5 or 10 min passing time		5 or 10 min passing time	

Total time in any non-Crew class weekly: 3 hours, 58 minutes

Total prep time (prep, flex, & break): 6 hours, 18 minutes

Prep equity: weekly, every teacher gets one hour of prep at day's end

Total student time for enrichment/support: 4 hours

Student enrichment/support equity: all students have multiple times for club & academic support

M Bell Schedule	T Bell Schedule	W Bell Schedule	Th Bell Schedule	F Bell Schedule						
Per. 1	9:00 - 9:58	Per. 1	9:00 - 10:30	Per. 4	9:00 - 10:30	Per. 3	9:00 - 10:30	Per. 6	9:00 - 10:30	
Per. 2	10:03 - 11:01	Morning PAUSE	10:30-10:50	Morning PAUSE	10:30-10:50	Morning PAUSE	10:30-10:50	Morning PAUSE	10:30-10:50	
Per. 3	11:06 - 12:06	Per. 2	10:50-12:20	Per. 5	10:50 - 12:20	Per. 1	10:50 - 12:20	Per. 4	10:50-12:20	
Lunch	12:06 - 1:01	Lunch	12:20 - 1:05	Lunch	12:20 - 1:05	Lunch	12:20 - 1:05	Lunch	12:20 - 1:05	
Per. 4	1:06 - 2:04	Crew	1:10 - 1:50	Crew	1:10 - 1:50	Crew	1:10 - 1:50	Per. 5	1:10 - 2:40	
Per. 5	2:09 - 3:07	Per. 3	1:55 - 3:25	Per. 6	1:55 - 3:25	Per. 2	1:55 - 3:25			
Per. 6	3:12 - 4:10	Flex Time	3:30 - 4:30	Flex Time	3:30 - 4:30	Flex Time	3:30 - 4:30	Flex Time	2:45 - 3:45	
58 min classes	90 min classes		90 min classes		90 min classes		90 min classes		90 min classes	
55 min lunch	45 min lunch/40 min Crew		45 min lunch/40 min Crew		45 min lunch/40 min Crew		45 min lunch/40 min Crew		45 min lunch	
5 min passing time	5 min passing time		5 min passing time		5 min passing time		5 min passing time		5 or 10 min passing time	

Example of ATC bell schedule

The Results

In the class of 2023, 37.5 percent of ATC's students were first-generation college attendees. The students received \$8.7 million in financial aid, enabling many of them to pursue higher education without the burden of student debt. The implementation of "AP for All," requiring a minimum of five AP courses for all students, has further enhanced college readiness, leading to a graduation rate of over 90 percent in 2021 across all demographic groups. Recent data indicates that 80 percent of ATC's students who attend four-year programs graduate in four years or less, with 100 percent completing their degrees within five years.

The Learnings

ATC has worked to enhance its College Crew advisory program. The school implemented changes such as having a grade-level leader to ensure vertical alignment and expanding the time for College Crew meetings from 40 to 120 minutes per week. This adjustment provides more room for meaningful engagement and allows teachers to better connect with their students. The school also introduced social-emotional learning components to the curriculum, responding to the need for increased support in light of the COVID-19 pandemic's challenges.

To ensure teacher buy-in and effectiveness of the program, ATC has focused on supporting teachers through onboarding and partnership initiatives. New teachers are paired with experienced colleagues for co-teaching advisory sessions, reducing workload and fostering learning. The school conducts regular audits of advisory goals and lessons to ensure ongoing improvement and alignment to student needs. Additionally, the roles of College Crew teachers have been refined to include checking on student progress, communicating with families, and implementing self-reflection protocols to help students identify successes and challenges. Through these adjustments and ongoing evaluation, ATC is striving to create a more impactful and supportive environment for student growth and success.

University High School, Roswell:

Coaching for Attendance

The School

Roswell's University High School (UHS) is an alternative high school that became a community school in 2021. Located in the southern part of town, next to Eastern New Mexico University-Roswell, UHS currently enrolls 174 students, of whom 49 percent were seniors during the 2023-2024 school year. UHS operates as an application school, providing essential graduation support to juniors and seniors. At UHS, 39 percent of seniors are considered H5, H6, or H7, indicating years past their expected graduation date. The school maintains a maximum student count of 200, prioritizing spaces for teen parents and working closely with community partners like Assurance Home and Children, Youth, and Families Department (CYFD). UHS hosts open houses and resource fairs to support students and parents, providing assistance with housing, food insecurity, and other personal needs through initiatives such as monthly food drives with Roadrunner Food Bank, an on-campus food pantry, a community closet offering clothing assistance, and a community library.

The Challenge

UHS faces a range of challenges, including the transient nature of many of its students and their limited support systems, sparse school attendance, and limited engagement. For example, students at the school can't participate in after-school activities because most hold after-school jobs. Many UHS students are sole caregivers or providers for their families, often balancing work and familial responsibilities.

The Innovation

UHS focuses on adopting a flexible approach, meeting individual student needs with delayed or shortened schedules and offering online classes to accommodate full-time work commitments. The school employs a variety of strategies to support its students. One such strategy is the presence of an attendance coach, who greets every student at the door each morning, providing encouragement and recognition through the distribution of Phoenix Bucks, "school money" for on-time and full-day attendance. These "bucks" can be redeemed for purposeful field trips or items in the Phoenix Store, meeting both educational and household needs. The attendance coach also conducts individual meetings with students struggling with attendance, working to identify and mitigate barriers. UHS emphasizes the importance of trade certifications and skills training, linking attendance to job readiness and future success in the workforce. Trade instructors reinforce this connection by reminding students that attendance is a crucial job skill, motivating them to be in school regularly.

To provide its students with a platform to voice their ideas and concerns and increase their agency, UHS has implemented initiatives such as the Student Senate. The senate has successfully advocated for events like the prom, a unique activity for this alternative high school, and is working on solutions to improve family engagement.

In addition to student-led initiatives, UHS's administration facilitates whole-staff meetings and conversations, encouraging collaboration and innovation in addressing school-wide challenges. The leadership team has participated in school improvement and innovation programs facilitated by NMPED and has embraced restorative justice practices to help students reflect on their behavior and promote positive interactions. The staff at UHS has realized and embraced the necessity to see each UHS student as a unique individual with their own needs, struggles, and skills.

"University High is a school where everyone's voice is heard, with teachers who guide and support us every step of the way. We grow not just academically, but as individuals ready to take on the world beyond high school. It is an inclusive space where students are encouraging each other for the journey ahead." —**Isaiah Olivas, Class of 2024**



Students working in their electrical class.

The Results

In 2023, 102 students graduated from UHS. While the school has a 24 percent graduation rate using the state formula, it has a 55 percent graduation rate for the 2023 class of seniors identified as H4, H5, H6, and H7. UHS has a 51 percent graduation rate for H5 and H6 students who may have aged out of traditional schools; 86 students, about half of those enrolled, graduated in 2024. Over 100 students are currently enrolled in career

and technical education (CTE) courses and 42 of those have earned certifications. The school's Graduation Reality and Dual-Roles Skills (GRADS) program was named the top-performing program in the state, based on enrollment, attendance, and graduation rate of GRADS moms.

- + **Jenna, a young single mother, dropped out of high school at 16 but found a lifeline through UHS's GRADS program. With the school's support, she learned parenting and life skills, completed credit recovery online at home, and accessed resources like the clothing and food banks. This enabled her to graduate and pursue her dream of enrolling in the nursing program at Eastern New Mexico University-Roswell, creating a better life for herself and her son.**
- + **Jermy, a homeless teenager, faced daily instability and uncertainty. UHS adjusted his schedule to accommodate his transient lifestyle, providing him with extra meals and connecting him with local resources. Despite his challenges, Jermy is working hard to catch up on credits online and is on track to graduate at 19 years old.**

The Learnings

UHS realized the importance of fostering a collective effort towards solutions, with an emphasis on early planning and a decision-making matrix that allows for input from all parties. The school learned the value of slowing down to speed up, and of valuing diverse opinions and listening to all stakeholders to create a culture of respect and collaboration. UHS now prioritizes sustainability, engages stakeholders early, and ensures clear communication to drive meaningful and lasting change for its non-traditional students.



2023 graduating class

East Mountain High School, Sandia Park:

An Early Warning System to Support Student Success

The School

East Mountain High School (EMHS) was founded in 1999 as one of the first charter schools in the state. EMHS served 380 students during the 2022-2023 academic year and 400 students in the 2023-2024 academic year, with 420 students enrolled for the 2024-2025 academic year for grades 9-12. Twenty-five percent of students qualify for free and reduced lunch, and more than one-third of students will be first-generation college students in fall 2024. The school draws from a wide geographic area, including Tijeras, Cedar Crest, Edgewood, Chilili, Escabosa, Estancia, and beyond.

In 2018, EMHS was recognized with the U.S. Department of Education's National Blue Ribbon Award for "closing the achievement gap." The school has received an "A" rating from NMPED every year under the A-F school grading system and has earned a "Spotlight" designation for the 2022-2023 school year.

The Challenge

In the wake of COVID-19, EMHS faced the challenge of having a large number of students in need of additional support. Many students who were absent had social and emotional needs, and others in the classroom were struggling academically. The school needed a more integrated approach to improving academic rigor and social-emotional learning and a solution to treating these as interconnected elements rather than separate issues.

The Innovation

EMHS focused on maintaining high expectations coupled with providing high levels of student support. EMHS requires 28.5 credits to graduate, which is 4.5 more than state requirements, and students are only awarded credit for class grades of 70 percent and above. In order to ensure students are supported in meeting these higher standards, EMHS developed an Early Warning Systems (EWS) team composed of a social worker, college and career counselor, dean of students, director of special education, and assistant principal. At the team's core, the social worker tracks grades, attendance, and discipline issues weekly to make sure every student is on track. A student is referred to the EWS team for support if their data triggers an area of concern and is assigned a case manager who meets with the student and their family to implement an improvement plan targeted at their specific area of need. The ongoing involvement of the social worker ensures that the social-emotional well-being of each struggling student is at the forefront of any plan.



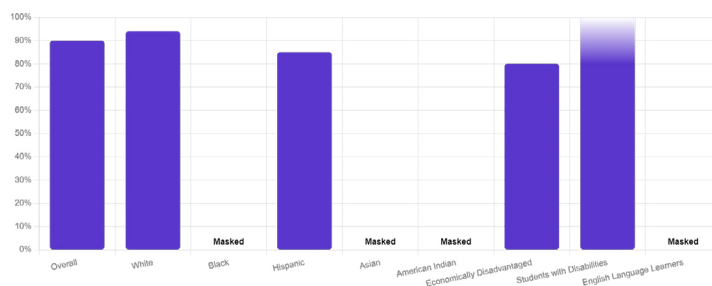
Students at East Mountain High School

To support the EWS effort, teachers post their tutoring times, or office hours, ahead of time so families and the EWS team know the availability for tutoring. Alternating Wednesday afternoons are reserved exclusively for extra tutoring in all classes, and a homework center is staffed by a faculty member in the library everyday after school to serve as a quiet place for students. Because teachers are compensated for tutoring and there is a clear schedule for support, students have access to what they need, and EMHS boasts high teacher retention with an average of 12 years experience at the school.

"Students simply do not fall through the cracks here." —
Trey Smith, Executive Director/Head Administrator, EMHS

The Results

As a result of this targeted system of student support, EMHS was acknowledged as a "best-performing school in the district (Albuquerque Public Schools) for its low chronic absentee rates during the 2022-2023 school year," with a rate of fewer than 11 percent. According to NMVistas, the school's 2022-2023 four-year graduation rate was 90 percent, with a 25 percent graduation growth for students with disabilities. Students in the 2022-2023 class earned 540 dual credits.



2023 graduation rates by student demographics.

The Learnings

The school's EWS effort required new expectations from staff. At the beginning of the system's implementation, some educators were concerned about teacher autonomy and wanted to ensure that grades were entered on a weekly basis. Since student grades are a major component of the system, up-to-date grades are a requirement and the school supports its teachers in this process. EMHS has learned not to separate academic rigor and social-emotional learning. It has also learned that school leaders need to communicate their expectations to all stakeholders and ensure that their vision becomes part of the school culture.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



Many schools in New Mexico go beyond a standard system of teaching and learning and are seeing results that are directly benefiting their students. But amplifying these best practices is not enough. Policies play a vital role in changing our educational system for the better. Below are Teach Plus New Mexico's recommendations for what state policymakers can do to support the innovative work of our schools:

1. Fully fund initiatives that allow more schools to access effective programs and resources.

Many state-level initiatives have proven effective when fully implemented and appropriately funded, including those focused on new systems of support, improved engagement, and best teaching and learning practices. One example of such an initiative is Structured Literacy Support Schools. Policymakers must prioritize such initiatives and plan for continued and increased funding that will allow for more schools to access support regardless of changes in state leadership.

2. Ensure that alternative schools that serve non-traditional students can utilize metrics that better reflect their programs and objectives for their students.

Although many alternative schools support students who have fewer credits and additional needs, and require more flexibility, these schools still use the same metrics as traditional high schools. Because most of their students do not graduate in the expected four years, alternative high schools are often designated in the lowest category. These schools ensure that many of their students graduate with additional time and resources yet they are not validated for their achievements. Far from lowering the bar for student success, appropriate metrics would support alternative schools' realities and ensure that their students' outcomes are reflected more accurately.

3. Redefine “college and career readiness” and update metrics that more accurately connect to students' postsecondary success as measured by the Higher Education Department and Human Services Department.

High schools in New Mexico often get their best score on the College and Career Data metric. Even though a high score—such as 97 percent—on this metric assumes a level of college and career readiness for our students, the average 2021-2022 college retention rate for state universities was 59 percent and the state poverty rate remained higher than the national average. While there is an effort at the state level to improve the K-12 data dashboard, there remains a need to connect data collection, sharing, and reporting among various state agencies, including updating current definitions and metrics.

4. Leverage teacher leadership programs and roles as a lever for teacher effectiveness and retention.

Organizations, districts, and schools have utilized various positions and systems to place excellent, experienced educators in leadership roles with additional responsibility and commensurate pay. Ensuring that these highly effective teachers remain in roles where they are directly connected to students and can also use their skills to develop their peers helps support an ecosystem of more effective educators across our school system.

5. Increase student access to high-performing charters by supporting the renewal, expansion and approval of schools that have shown demonstrable student success.

Data shows that students in our state who attend charter schools are outperforming students at traditional public schools. Expansion of these effective schools will give more students immediate access to high-quality school teaching and learning.

6. Implement a system that identifies, tracks, and communicates system innovations that provide targeted support to students and improves their outcomes.

Many schools across our state, including those featured in this report, have systems that are closing opportunity gaps for New Mexico's students. The NMPED has a unique responsibility to act as an amplifier of this learned success, aligned with its mission to "partner with educators, communities, and families to ensure that ALL students are healthy, secure in their identity, and holistically prepared for college, career, and life."



CLOSING

The need for innovative school systems and practices in New Mexico is more pressing than ever, especially considering the educational challenges highlighted by recent assessments and statewide data. The systems and initiatives of the schools featured in this report show a bright path forward. These schools are reimagining instruction and creating new support systems that are improving student outcomes. By showcasing these innovative practices and advocating for their replication across more schools and classrooms in our state, we are ensuring that every student in New Mexico can thrive academically and beyond.

APPENDIX A: Innovation in Education Rubrics

Category: Innovations in teaching early literacy and math	Score (1-4)
<p>Innovative Practice: The school utilizes a practice that is...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Not clearly targeted at improving early literacy or math learning outcomes 2. Somewhat targeted at improving early literacy or math learning outcomes 3. Mostly targeted at improving early literacy or math learning outcomes 4. Very targeted at improving early literacy or math learning outcomes 	
<p>Effectiveness of System: The school's implementation of the practice has produced...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No measurable increase in student engagement, student learning, and/or student performance related to early literacy or math as supported by data over time 2. Somewhat measurable increase in student engagement, student learning, and/or student performance related to early literacy or math as supported by data over time 3. Measurable increase in student engagement, student learning, and/or student performance related to early literacy or math as supported by data over time 4. Significant increase in student engagement, student learning, and/or student performance related to early literacy or math as supported by data over time 	
<p>Replication of System: The school's identified practice...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cannot be replicated in other districts/regions 2. Can be somewhat replicated in other districts/regions 3. Can be mostly replicated in other districts/regions 4. Can be fully replicated in other districts/regions 	

Category: Innovative support for underserved student groups	Score (1-4)
<p>Innovative Practice: The school provides...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No targeted system of supports for students experiencing homelessness, in foster care, or students with disabilities 2. A somewhat targeted system of supports for students experiencing homelessness, in foster care, or students with disabilities 3. A mostly targeted system of supports for students experiencing homelessness, in foster care, or students with disabilities 4. A very targeted system of supports for students experiencing homelessness, in foster care, or students with disabilities 	
<p>Effectiveness of System: The students in these groups have shown...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No progress as measured by data over time 2. Some progress as measured by data over time 3. Good progress as measured by data over time 4. Significant progress as measured by data over time 	
<p>Replication of System: The school's identified practice...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cannot be replicated in other districts/regions 2. Can be somewhat replicated in other districts/regions 3. Can be mostly replicated in other districts/regions 4. Can be fully replicated in other districts/regions 	

Category: Innovations to increase high school graduation rate	Score (1-4)
<p>Innovative Practice: The school's system/practice...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Does not move beyond expected high school experiences, integrates unique programs or inputs, or meets the individual needs of students to increase the graduation rates and postsecondary success 2. Moves somewhat beyond expected high school experiences, integrates unique programs or inputs, or meets the individual needs of students to increase the graduation rates and postsecondary success 3. Mostly moves beyond expected high school experiences, integrates unique programs or inputs, or meets the individual needs of students to increase the graduation rates and postsecondary success 4. Moves significantly beyond expected high school experiences, integrates unique programs or inputs, or meets the individual needs of students to increase the graduation rates and postsecondary success 	
<p>Effectiveness of System: The school's implementation of the system/practice...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Has not increased students' graduation rates and postsecondary success as supported by data over time 2. Has somewhat increased students' graduation rates and postsecondary success as supported by data over time 3. Has largely increased students' graduation rates and postsecondary success as supported by data over time 4. Has significantly increased students' graduation rates and postsecondary success as supported by data over time 	
<p>Replication of System: The school's identified practice...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cannot be replicated in other districts/regions 2. Can be somewhat replicated in other districts/regions 3. Can be mostly replicated in other districts/regions 4. Can be fully replicated in other districts/regions 	

APPENDIX B: Interview Protocol

1. Tell us more about your school and the population it serves. (student demographics, student population, and short paragraph about the school community/neighborhood they serve)
2. What is your school known for? Has it received any special awards or recognitions?
3. What was the challenge that led to the innovation and how long were you facing this challenge?
4. What data/resources helped you identify this challenge?
5. Tell us more about the process you used to create a system of change related to your innovation. (Ex: data collection, committee, surveys, calendar changes, staff input, etc.) Who were the partners you needed to bring on board to make the system of change happen?
6. What is your innovation and how is it implemented at your school?
7. What is the outcome of your innovation to-date? Share 1-2 pieces of data that can be presented in the report. Please also share a quote from a student and/or staff member related to the innovation.
8. What have you learned through the implementation of your innovation and how has your system of change evolved?
9. What advice do you have for others that might be interested in replicating your innovation?
10. What is your overall vision and potential outcomes if your innovation system is fully implemented?
11. What should state leaders consider when striving to increase student outcomes and innovative systems like the one at your school?

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 advance equity, opportunity, and student success. In pursuing our mission, Teach Plus is guided by our Student Opportunity Mandate: All students should have the opportunity to achieve their potential in an education system defined by its commitment to equity, its responsiveness to individual needs, and its ability to prepare students for postsecondary 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 for students.



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