



402 W. Court Ave.
Las Cruces, NM 88005
Telephone: 575-541-0145
Fax: 575-527-5329

May 1, 2019

Patricia Gipson
Public Education Commission Chair
State of New Mexico
Public Education Commission
309 Don Gaspar
Santa Fe, NM 87501

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Dear Madame Chair Gipson,

In response to your letter to Ms. Patricia Matthews dated April 22, 2019, following is our narrative regarding concerns raised by the Language and Culture Bureau and the Special Education Bureau related to the Alma d'arte Corrective Action Plan.

ELL Students (Language and Culture Bureau)

Identification/Screening

Currently we have 14 ELL students. We identified (through STARS Data, Cumulative and Special Education reviews) and provide services to the 14 students.

The personnel involved in the process include the Principal, the Registrar, the IT Coordinator, and 3 TESOL certified and 1 Bilingual Endorsed teachers.

The identification is a two-step process—

1. *Language Usage Survey (LUS)*. Parents complete this survey. This is only completed once in a student's academic career. The LUS is kept in the student's cumulative folder.
2. *LUS answers*. If any answers to question 1-6 are yes, or if a language other than English is indicated in question 7, an English language proficiency screener is administered to the students.

Our Registrar determines at registration if the student has ever attended a public school in NM. If not, the parent completes the Language Usage Survey (LUS). If yes, the IT Coordinator checks STARS to determine if an ACCESS assessment was completed in prior years and what were the composite scores.

The ELP composite score(s) determines the identification of the student. If the composite score is under 5, the student is a **current** EL. If the composite score is 5 or higher, the student has exited from EL status and is identified as Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (RFEP). We have done a thorough audit of all cumulative folders and student records and can move forward with the knowledge that all students have been identified.

Alma uses and has only used the WIDA Screener for assessment.

Alma has an “opt out” letter available for parents who do not want their child to receive EL services. When parents are notified of test results, there is also a parental “opt out” letter; however, the EL student is tested annually on the WIDA ACCESS until or unless the student scores 5.0 or better. The Principal shares results with teachers who build target goals for areas of weakness. Results are kept in the student’s cumulative folder.

Placement

It was noted by the Language and Culture Bureau that Alma took 14 days for a placement after the WIDA Screener results. This is incorrect. The results for use in placement are done within 5 days or less at registration. In addition, Alma, depending on the needs of the student, offers the assessment to be administered either in a paper-based or online format.

We will place students in 2019-20 in an ELD course (beginner or intermediate/advanced) and strategies will be used across all curriculum.

Servicing ELs

We monitor student progress through PowerSchool, student records, teacher feedback, and Zeros Aren’t Possible (ZAP) tutoring. We have hired an ELA 11 teacher who was an ELD tutor at New America Charter High School. Our Special Education teacher is also TESOL endorsed.

Exiting ELs

Alma uses the Next Step Plan format to ensure that the exiting EL students continue to be monitored for academic progress for at least two years. This is a school-wide system that monitors if students are succeeding in their academic success and receive adequate support. In addition, the Platica teacher (homeroom) has access to all the academic records and regularly reviews their student’s grades and needs in all their classes. They work with the individual student and the parent to ensure all courses and academic needs are addressed.

Staffing and Professional Development

In addition to TESOL and Bilingual endorsed teachers, we have a bilingual support staff (registrar, Secretary, custodian, and accountant). Predominantly, all teachers received training through Las Cruces Schools on ELD in 2017. We reviewed this training in PD for returning and faculty and new hires. Currently, we are reviewing resources for ELD, short cycle assessment

(NWEA MAP) and additional PD for the Principal and Staff. Each teacher maintains a folder of touchstone strategies for serving students.

An ELD Coordinator will be a new position in the 2019-20 budget. Currently, we have designated Katherine Cady, TESOL endorsed ELA teacher (who is also an expert in dyslexia and tutors for the Dyslexia Institute) who holds a Master of Arts in Special Education (earned because she wanted to reach more of our students) as our coordinator. A delay in recruiting and hiring EL staff is one of the issues for PEC underlying the Notice of Concern. However, we believe we were not given credit that currently we have 3 staff that are TESOL/Bilingual endorsed and our Special Education Coordinator is also endorsed in TESOL. In addition, we hired two new faculty to support math and English. Both are bilingual and have extensive experience supporting and tutoring EL students. Further, any new teacher position hired will require a TESOL/Bilingual endorsement.

Special Education Students (Special Education Bureau)

I respectfully disagree with your characterization of Alma's model of service and failure to grasp the fundamental concepts of IDEA. Alma is committed to providing exceptional services to Special Education students and to correct any missteps by the prior administrator. On November 12, 2018, I hired a new Special Education Coordinator to review our records and systems and to ensure that we are meeting all requirements. Ms. Beidler has 17 years of special education experience and has the following endorsements: Level 3A, Special Education TESOL, and Level 3B Administration. Before being hired permanently, we audited all special education files with a licensed diagnostician. The deficiencies found are what led to the absence of a special education teacher who was placed on administrative leave. Our new coordinator has been working diligently reviewing all IEPs and verifying that services are provided in accordance with the IEP and evaluation data. As a matter of practice she meets with staff regularly to ensure that these documents are implemented appropriately.

The current special education teacher at Alma d' arte was a Special Education Coordinator in the second largest school district in the state of NM, and has provided numerous trainings on Special Education compliance. She is very familiar with 34 CFR Parts 300 and 301, and NMAC Title 6 Chapter 29. She has taught Special Education classes at the college level teaching aspiring teachers about the laws that govern special education. She brought Las Cruces Public Schools from 41% compliance on State Performance Indicator 13 to 100% in less than one year. She has attended numerous LRP conferences and trainings to stay abreast of trends in litigious situations surrounding special education. There is an absolute awareness that IEPs need to be written according to a student's educational need. A review of existing educational data (REED), (to include teacher feedback, test scores, grades, attendance) is done prior to every IEP, and discussions are held with all IEP members present, (Parent, Student, General Education Teacher, Special Education Teacher, Administrator, and Ancillary Staff as needed) and placement is made as a team decision.

Another factor that should be considered is the class size at Alma d'arte. Alma d' arte normally does not have a class size of more than fifteen students which allows teachers to give students more individualized attention. A student at Alma d'arte can have special education support up to

three periods and maintain their eligibility as a “B” level student. Student schedules were modified only for the brief time that Alma d’arte was without a special education teacher. No other movement has taken place without an IEP decision. To clear the record, (Study Skills, Learning Lab, and Content Mastery) are an elective class to which students were previously assigned, to work on specific areas of weakness identified in the IEP. This elective class is used to help students with reading, writing, math, and core content the student may need assistance with. Students are placed in the least restrictive environment (LRE) with their non-disabled peers to the maximum extent possible. Student services are tracked through service logs.

Compensatory services have been offered through an amendment to the student’s IEP. There are seven remaining amendments that need to be held due to cancellations or parents not responding to the meeting request. These meetings will be held no later than May 10, 2019. A description of the services to be provided is described in the amendment. Options of the services to be provided are: the students being provided compensatory minutes during a portion of elective periods, after school, and summer for those who elected that service. Time not provided this school year will be carried over to the next school year as proposed by some parents.

As you are aware, Alma has been working diligently since the start of the 2018/2019 school year to address the malfeasance perpetrated by the previous principal and business manager. I have worked alongside many dedicated staff members to address the concerns raised by the Public Education Department, and this narrative further demonstrates our commitment to restoring our school to the excellent artistic/creative and rigorous academic program that was started in 2002. Our parents, students and Board share this commitment. We are thankful for your support and guidance, and look forward to presenting to the Public Education Commission and Charter School Division on May 10, 2019.

Respectfully,

s/ Holly A. Schullo

Holly Schullo, Principal

cc: Alan Brauer, Director, Charter School Division
Ami S. Jaeger, Counsel to PEC
Patty Matthews, Counsel to ADA
Gene Elliott, Board President ADA