

School Support and Readiness Assessment Site Visit Summary Report

School: Mary Ann Binford	LEA: Albuquerque Public Schools
School Leader: Stephanie Nieto	LEA Leader: Scott Elder
SSRA Team Leader: Celeste Murray	Date: September 4, 2023

School Description

Mary Ann Binford Elementary supports students from pre-kindergarten to grade five. There are typically between 400-450 students learning in the classrooms of the school who are predominantly Latino, rich in language and culture. The efforts of the educators are aimed at the following:

“As a community, we will work together to create an environment that encourages life-long learning for all stakeholders through high expectations and direct instruction.”

School Successes and Celebrations

While it can be challenging for a school community to welcome an entirely new administrative team, the educators and parents of Mary Ann Binford Elementary have communicated optimism and enthusiasm for the group leading them now. This positivity is noticed in the atmosphere when walking the halls and visiting classrooms—spaces filled with inspiration, data, and student work. Additionally, specific examples of a strong start, communication, and collaborative practices were shared during multiple interviews.

Although the new administrative team cannot speak to previous accomplishments, they have been grateful and impressed by the staff collaboratively working on the NM School DASH plan. They celebrate that as a win.

Another celebration for the school is a specific space available for parents to be more engaged in school activities.

DOMAIN 1: CULTURE & EQUITY

To what degree has the school established equitable practices that ensure ALL students and staff have an opportunity to reach their full potential?

Promising Practices:

One of the most important aspects of a school culture focusing on equity is that all students have access to grade-level content. At Mary Ann Binford Elementary, the teachers use the agreed-upon district curriculum to ensure the State’s priority standards are taught. As grade-level teams examine, understand, and plan from a common curricular program, they ensure that students in all classes are learning from common standards and materials. This equitable access to content is critical.

In addition to a common program, grade-level teams at this school are also working on mapping the curriculum for the year. Knowing in advance how much time should be spent teaching the priority standards permits teachers to pace lessons appropriately, create time for reteaching when necessary, and spiral learning when time permits.

During instructional observations, evidence of the school's Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) Plan was found in every classroom. This visual continuity is important for students to understand expectations as they move throughout different spaces in the building.

Opportunities for Growth:

While it was reported by many school staff that they care about their students and have their best interests in mind, there is an opportunity to solidify those feelings into collective and individual action. For example, as school leaders continue to refine the school's Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) Plan, they might identify ways to enhance equity practices while supporting student behavior. Equity can easily remain a vague idea until a school community collectively defines it in a way that they can put it into action through such things as decisions while managing a classroom and decisions while disciplining a student.

Potential Next Steps:

The leadership, faculty, and staff of Mary Ann Binford Elementary may benefit from crafting a shared understanding of equity. This discussion could include ideas about growth mindset among educators, students, and families, as the belief that all students can learn and grow is central to equity. And then, as they continue to design, implement, and monitor their PBIS program, the school's educators can hold themselves accountable for actualizing their definition of equity. Creating opportunities to collect informal data will be important for the school leaders as they work to monitor and deepen the implementation of equitable practices.

DOMAIN 2: LEADERSHIP

To what degree does school leadership establish, communicate, support, and monitor schoolwide priorities?

Promising Practices:

The number one priority of a school leader is to create a clear, compelling vision supported by organizational systems, procedures, and practices. Principal Nieto is focusing on developing those schoolwide systems. The curriculum mapping described in the Promising Practices listed above is a powerful example of this. Additionally, Principal Nieto uses the NM School DASH strategic planning process to align efforts across the school. The 90-Day Plan can potentially be a school's north star, and Mary Ann Binford Elementary has a strong start in that direction.

With a new school principal, faculty, staff, and parents took the opportunity to share their appreciation for specific leadership moves observed. Many educators interviewed commented on emails from the principal offering support on various school-related needs and concerns. Strong communication is a key aspect of leadership.

A handful of teachers shared that students are familiar with the principal and feel comfortable with her presence in the classroom. A leader who prioritizes time and energy to be visually present around campus can build cohesion in the school community.

Parents interviewed explained their excitement about a survey collected by Principal Nieto so she might understand what parents are looking for in their school community when creating more purposeful parent involvement opportunities. This is a significant first step to foster parents and guardians as partners in their children's education.

Opportunities for Growth:

A pattern emerged from interviews and discussions of the opportunity to clarify what it means to be in school improvement. Many educators and parents were unclear about the improvement process—what should happen, by whom, and when. Without a clear explanation, worry and suspicion may grow. With the support of district leaders, the principal might incorporate the pathway of school improvement into her vision and positively motivate her community. While this level of urgency could be stressful, a leader has the level of influence to ignite a spark for exciting, strong movement in an upward trajectory. A strategic method for Principal Nieto to do this will come from identifying frequent benchmarks of success to track progress and celebrate quick wins with her community.

Potential Next Steps:

Understanding the expectations of school improvement may require careful, supportive conversations. It may prove more effective for the administrative team to explain the process in small groups, perhaps by grade level teams or open office hours. This will allow the leaders to answer specific questions, allay fears, and champion the potential power of the collective work.

DOMAIN 3: INSTRUCTIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

To what degree is the school's instructional infrastructure in place, understood, and utilized by school leaders and teachers?

Promising Practices:

The Instructional Infrastructure comprises several essential practices related to instruction, curriculum, assessment, data analysis and action, and collaboration. It is systems-based—PLCs, curriculum mapping, data cycles, and planning. Mary Ann Binford Elementary educators started this year with strong intentions to create critical Instructional Infrastructure systems that did not exist. The school now has a weekly schedule for professional development. Teams are collaboratively mapping their curriculum. The faculty is vertically aligning the curriculum to ensure students move from one grade to the next without conceptual gaps.

In many schools, Special Educators work in isolation without a clear understanding of the content taught in the general education setting, even though their job is to support grade-level content and student IEP goals. This year, collaboration time at Mary Ann Binford Elementary includes Special Educators with grade-level teams. This will prove valuable as the specific needs of each student with an IEP will be attended to throughout each day of learning. Additionally, this type of

collaboration can inform instruction for all students as specific scaffolding ideas are shared during collaboration. It was mentioned that Principal Nieto was willing to assess school needs to truly understand the school's opportunities for growth before creating her vision and mission statements. Getting clear about the challenges a school is facing is the first step of organizational change.

Opportunities for Growth:

As the school leaders continue to establish and refine the systems for Instructional Infrastructure, it will be wise for them to focus on Layer 1 instruction. Some schools believe a lack of effective Layer 2 interventions caused them to be in school improvement. This is not typically the case. Layer 1 planning and lesson delivery will move the dial much quicker. Mary Ann Binford Elementary serves a student population rich in multiple languages. Incorporating instructional strategies from frameworks such as Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD), Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and sheltering practices for language acquisition may accelerate teachers' ability to meet their students' academic and linguistic needs.

Potential Next Steps:

It would benefit the school to continue its vertical alignment practices. Teams that engage in cross-grade level conversations deepen their content knowledge, prioritize instructional time for critical grade-level standards, and create cohesion for students through common expectations, academic language, and learning strategies as they move from one grade to the next.

Additionally, as an extension of the NM School DASH planning, school leaders can determine key instructional strategies (perhaps from GLAD, UDL, or sheltering practices) that will enhance teacher effectiveness, particularly for the school's English Learners.

DOMAIN 4: TALENT MANAGEMENT

To what degree does the school ensure effective teachers are hired, retained, developed, and leveraged to improve student outcomes?

Promising Practices:

It may seem insignificant, but when members of a school community use a common language for expectations, practices, resources, and processes, the community members can sense the spaces between them being replaced with unity and cohesion. This is happening at Mary Ann Binford Elementary. School leaders speak the same language, and the staff feels united; many staff interviewed indicated great optimism. This shared language is the first step in creating clear expectations, roles, and responsibilities.

Talent management in a school can improve teacher practices, retain effective teachers, result in schoolwide implementation of high-leverage instructional strategies, lift teacher morale, and increase student learning. One research-based form of talent management is consistent Observation and Feedback Coaching Cycles (OFCCs) done by administrators and instructional coaches. Mary Ann Binford Elementary has developed a calendar for observations and feedback. Ensuring the calendar is followed will help build the teachers' trust in coaching opportunities to

improve their instruction. The data tracked by coaching cycles can be shared with the faculty ongoingly and create celebrations of teachers' efforts individually and as a school.

Opportunities for Growth:

As previously mentioned, Principal Nieto is frequently in classrooms and has designed a calendar for observation and feedback. The research on coaching teachers to increase effectiveness in the classroom strongly supports the routine of providing feedback in person. This is where an administrator can have the most significant impact on teacher development. Face-to-face feedback strengthens the coaching relationship, minimizing misunderstandings, and helps teachers to be more open to the coach's encouragement and support in improving their instruction.

Potential Next Steps:

Despite how busy their days are, many school administrators find it helpful to schedule the feedback sessions (not just the walkthrough) with the teachers a few days in advance. This requires the administrator to enter the classroom before the face-to-face feedback session occurs. With little time before and after school for feedback sessions, administrators are getting creative about how to hold a 12-15-minute feedback session with teachers during the instructional day. Many leaders in Albuquerque Public Schools are doing so; they may be a valuable resource.