

School Support and Readiness Assessment Summary Report

School: Española Valley High School	LEA: Española
School Leader: Kelly Miller	LEA Leader: Holly Martinez
SSRA Team Leader: Celeste Murray	Date: October 16, 2023
School Description	
<p>Española Valley High School is the high school for all students in Española. The school serves 850 students, 21% designated as English language learners (ELs) and approximately 17% eligible for special education services.</p> <p>Española Valley High School is a Title I school that hosts various programs, including Heritage Bilingual, Career Pathways, Future Focus Education, and College and Career Plaza.</p> <p>Principal Kelly Miller is entering her second year at the school; she served as an assistant principal last year.</p> <p><i>Mission: Española Valley High School provides relevant and challenging learning experiences that enhance and expand students' potential to adapt and meet the demands of the changing times.</i></p> <p><i>Vision: Española Valley High School is committed to ensuring academic success and life-long learning skills for all students to become independent, functional, productive and globally competitive citizens.</i></p>	
School Successes and Celebrations	
<p>Española Valley partners with many organizations that help the school prepare its students for post-secondary success. These include Future Focus Education, College and Career Plaza, Upward Bound, and GEAR UP. These programs provide career counseling and internship opportunities (including group internships). They also bring in resources such as FASFA support and military options.</p> <p>One of the lasting benefits of the pandemic is the technology infrastructure that was created within the school. As a necessity, teachers had support and training to use technology more</p>	

effectively. Teachers have continued using the skills honed during the pandemic, and all students now have a laptop, allowing for more technology-driven assignments.

The graduation rate at Española Valley increased last year to 74% of the 4-year cohort.

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:

Starting last year, the school has intentionally worked to increase staff-to-staff connections. Events are planned at least once a month to bring staff together for celebrations and community building. These include potluck lunches, where a different team hosts the event. Birthdays are celebrated monthly, and holiday get-togethers and other social events are planned to ensure staff can build relationships on a personal level.

Additionally, Principal Miller has instituted the use of notebooks as a means of fostering communication between herself and teachers. The school leadership team is not fully staffed, which significantly reduces the principal's opportunities to get into classrooms to monitor learning, support teachers, and deepen connections. Teachers keep a composition notebook to journal thoughts, questions, successes, and struggles. The principal looks over the notebooks, provides feedback, and answers questions.

Opportunities for Growth:

There is a potential to build a stronger, more impactful culture between adults and students. Interviews found that staff uses the language of deficit more often than the language of asset, and students feel many adults on campus, including security and teachers, treat students as presumed guilty until proven innocent. Comments of the responsibility to learn is on the students and that some students are just here because they have to be and don't want to do the work came up in interviews.

Additionally, the communication between adults and students was described by students as lacking. Students described having to repeatedly ask why they were not allowed certain options, like working in the library during lunch. Some described having to ask teachers to enter grades so they can know how they are doing in class.

To properly equip teachers to bridge this communication gap, the school might prioritize professional development on social-emotional learning (SEL), brain development, and restorative practices. Many of the students and staff have experienced trauma or secondary trauma and spoke to the heaviness of their experiences. Developing asset-based mindsets and using trauma-informed strategies may foster a sense of emotional and intellectual safety that supports learning. Focus group interviews indicated some teachers communicate their belief in

the students by the quality of work they ask of students, and there was a clear consensus that students work harder for teachers with whom they have built relationships.

Students and families are eager to use campus programs, partnerships, and facilities. There is a potential opportunity to decrease barriers to entry for students and families to participate. One idea that surfaced through interviews was about the possibility of offering some services traditionally offered after school during the day. FAFSA support became an area where more families want increased offerings and access.

The school includes a student-based healthcare clinic many families would like to access. Some families voiced frustration that multiple prerequisite requirements exist for students to receive services through that clinic. Efforts to streamline this process and support other student needs, like transportation, would be appreciated by the school community.

Potential Next Steps:

Principal Miller suggested that the school might record or livestream Parent Advisor Council meetings so families who cannot participate can access the information. Making families aware of these meetings ahead of time, including translation services, and inviting parents to attend can all go a long way towards making families feel welcome and equal participants in school decisions.

Principal Miller is committed to doing the deep work required to build teacher-student trust and school-family partnerships. She believes no significant learning occurs without a meaningful relationship as a foundation.

Principal Miller addresses staff culture carefully; she acknowledges that race, class, and gender affect workplace and team dynamics. She knows no one wants someone from the outside to come in and tell them what to do, so she is methodically planning how to institute necessary changes. She is poised to act in professional learning communities (PLCs) to help push people out of their comfort zones; she sees role-playing as one method that could be used to build empathy and coach teachers in effective communication practices.

DOMAIN 2: LEADERSHIP

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

Promising Practices:

The leadership team recognizes the power of student buy-in and wants to increase career pathways to engage more students in their learning. Staff attribute increased academic engagement and attendance to career programming currently in place.

Principal Miller has clear expectations for lesson plan elements, including support for English

language learners and students with disabilities. Interviews indicated the lesson plan expectations are simple and that they do aid some teachers in being more reflective. The common expectations for these lesson plans also assist Principal Miller in conducting walkthroughs, as she has “look-fors” clearly described and identified ahead of time. The principal continues to participate in programs offered by the Priority Schools Bureau such as RISE and THRIVE to improve leadership practices.

Opportunities for Growth:

As Principal Miller makes considerable changes to school culture and instructional priorities, it would be helpful to clarify priorities by limiting how much they try to change at a time. In the NM School DASH, leaders identify one to three fundamental changes in adult behavior that can be accomplished in two 90-day segments. Then, the focus will shift to communicating these critical changes to staff, providing PD to support them, and using walkthroughs to look for evidence of implementation. As these changes affect student outcomes, results can be shared with teachers and the larger school community.

Another potential opportunity is identifying teachers with robust systems or strategies that support the school’s improvement plan (DASH) and using them to coach other teachers or as a resource for modeling (peer observation) to provide support to classrooms. Interviews stated how overwhelmed leadership is while assistant principal positions are vacant. Additionally, lacking a head special education teacher means Principal Miller attends all Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings. Principal Miller spoke about the lack of time to do everything needed.

Potential Next Steps:

Principal Miller is advocating for increased support from the district and has contacted the superintendent for help with the teacher formal evaluation process. She has 41 teachers to evaluate; she will do 21, and the Special Education director will do three. The district has committed to helping the principal complete the additional teacher evaluations and provide teachers with feedback.

Principal Miller also sees an opportunity to reshape the narrative about Española Valley High School and change their trajectory. She has been talking about branding – creating an enhanced image of what Española Valley can do.

When schools undergo significant transformations, changes in school mottos, signs, and protocols can help signal teachers, students, and families that deep-level work is happening. Principal Miller’s awareness of the optics of change and the limitations of how much can be done by one person in one year provide a realistic assessment for moving forward.

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:

Teachers' consistent use of a lesson plan template ensures that lessons are aligned to standards, include a daily objective, and support for English learners and special education students. The use of lesson plans with specific criteria around differentiated supports allows for feedback to improve the work teachers do to support student groups constantly. Heightened visibility and accountability increase the use of the strategies in general.

Opportunities for Growth:

Interviews and observations suggest many classrooms lack rigor and student engagement. Interviews identified the need to connect to careers to get more students engaged. Data collected during interviews and walkthroughs suggest that teachers can make stronger connections between classwork and college and career goals. Student work in classrooms was often low rigor. Focus group interviews found that most students feel the work being asked of them is below grade level and that classes with more challenging work usually do not provide needed scaffolding. However, students are more engaged in classrooms with rigorous work and feel it communicates a belief in their ability to do rigorous tasks. They also report having more positive relationships with teachers, pushing them to meet high expectations.

Student engagement also developed as an area to improve after walkthroughs and the student focus group interview. Most of the instruction on the day of the site visit included a high ratio of teacher talk in a whole group setting. Increasing student voice (from all students), offering more hands-on learning tasks, and using small groups and differentiation would likely increase student engagement and sense of efficacy. Setting expectations around how content is delivered, how students interact with it, and how it is assessed may be needed as a starting point.

Potential Next Steps:

Principal Miller gives a lot of attention to equity of voice. As the school creates a learning environment that feels more conducive to students' academic engagement and risk-taking, she acknowledges that more consistent feedback is one way to create and sustain positive change. This feedback could come from students, families, teachers, partners, and the broader school community.

Principal Miller also sees the need to share data more holistically. Attendance data, connections between course-taking patterns and post-secondary outcomes, and qualitative data (such as the trends that emerge from student focus groups) would all help staff see the link between school initiatives, DASH priorities, the 90-day plan, and student outcomes.

As Principal Miller reshapes the school culture, she also understands that her staff needs more consistent feedback about the expectations that she is setting. Change can be challenging, and teachers benefit from being acknowledged for taking risks, trying new strategies, and recognizing their areas of strength and struggle.

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:

Principal Miller has been as efficient as possible in conducting observations and providing feedback. Because only she is available for teacher coaching, identifying the most impactful space to spend time and energy is essential. She has identified those teachers who would be most receptive to feedback and most in need of support as the first ones to coach.

Opportunities for Growth:

Providing professional development tightly aligned to school priorities identified in NM School DASH communicates and reinforces a commitment to the school's goals, reduces the look-fors during walkthroughs, and reduces improvement fatigue from trying to do too much at once. A potential focus emerged as SEL/trauma-informed practices and increasing rigor through questioning and student talk.

Developing a district-wide plan to fill leadership team positions at the high school should be a priority. Although this is not something specifically within the control of the school, it is a highly needed step. Hiring the missing leadership team is necessary for effective observation and feedback coaching cycles (OFCCs) to occur schoolwide.

Potential Next Steps:

Principal Miller is thinking big while remaining conscious of financial and temporal challenges. She wants to explore contracting with outside partners to provide some of the professional development they need. The LANL Foundation has grantees that work with schools and might be a source of funding and support.

Principal Miller wants to inspire the school community and the local community to take a second look at Española because they are doing good things. She is considering how visual indications of positive changes could have a wide-reaching effect. She wants to engage in rebranding to reflect the enhanced capacity of students and staff.