

School Support and Readiness Assessment Summary Report

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| School: Rio Grande Preparatory Institute | LEA: Las Cruces Public Schools |
| School Leader: Julie Maestas | LEA Leader: Ignacio Ruiz |
| SSRA Team Leader: Andrea Fletcher | Date: October 9, 2023 |
| School Description | |
| <p>Rio Grande Preparatory Institute (RGPI) consists of two campuses. The first is an alternative high school of approximately 130 students. Their mission is to provide students with an alternative to the traditional high school setting and an environment that will allow for opportunities for high school graduation. The second campus, Student Success Academy (SSA), is a middle and high school of approximately 40 students who have received some form of long-term suspension from their traditional school.</p> <p>RGPI provides credit recovery opportunities for students not on track for graduation and three Career and Technical Education (CTE) pathways for students who wish to receive certification in construction, hospitality and tourism, or culinary arts. Principal Julie Maestes has been in her position since July of 2023.</p> | |
| School Successes and Celebrations | |
| <p>Teachers at RGPI report that they are genuinely dedicated to their students. The size of the school has allowed teachers to build relationships with students and families, which fosters a deep sense of caring.</p> | |
| DOMAIN 1: CULTURE & EQUITY | |
| <p>To what degree has the school established equitable practices that ensure ALL students and staff have an opportunity to reach their full potential?</p> | |
| <p>Promising Practices:</p> <p>Principal Maestes has implemented more equitable discipline policies and procedures to ensure all staff and students feel safe. Students who feel safe are more available to learn. A dedicated Seminar time at the high school provides time for Social Emotional Learning (SEL) support for students.</p> | |

Student Success Academy has implemented Boys Town and Girls Town courses to promote life skills and a leadership class focusing on essential career skills for all students. In addition, SSA employs two full-time social workers who lead small SEL groups each day where students can be part of discussions that teach coping skills, anger management, and self-regulation.

Opportunities for Growth:

The high school may benefit from utilizing a more structured SEL program like the one already in use at SSA to offer more specific SEL strategies to its students.

Teachers report that students do not feel a sense of school pride due to issues with building maintenance. A campus improvement campaign may improve the negative associations and connotations associated with their building.

Staff and leadership desire a clearer vision and direction for their school. Creating a shared vision and capitalizing on the synergies of the high school and SSA is one potential area to ensure a more compelling focus. Involving the district's central office will be critical to ensure alignment with the district's vision and policies.

Potential Next Steps:

Staff, leadership, and central office representation should begin a mission and visioning process for the combined campuses, considering how they fit together. There are many facets of the school that need to be considered while crafting the mission and vision: the social and emotional well-being of students, alternative setting to traditional schooling, equitable discipline practices, career preparation opportunities, and credit recovery. Allowing students to be part of this process could bring about pride, community, and value.

The administration and the building and district maintenance departments should continue communicating to address operational and maintenance issues within the building. The environment where students learn can significantly impact attitude, pride, comfort, and safety. Perhaps the CTE classes might be able to contribute to the improvement of the school.

DOMAIN 2: LEADERSHIP

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

Promising Practices:

Principal Maestes has created two leadership teams: 1. Operations and 2. Instruction. All teachers participate on a leadership team, which creates more ownership in school policies, direction, and implementation of the 90-Day Plan. This distributed leadership model is just one-way staff reports that she engages their input. Principal Maestes added a part-time attendance clerk and created an incentive program to improve student attendance.

Opportunities for Growth:

A more structured and systematic evaluation of students' graduation progress would be beneficial. In addition, students would benefit from more opportunities to check on their graduation progress and receive guidance from the adults in the building regarding their graduation plan.

Potential Next Steps:

The school may benefit from looking at ways similar high schools track graduation progress with their students. There are several ways students can monitor their progress: checking assignment completion, attendance, grades, credits toward graduation, and credits toward a CTE program. Depending on where a particular student is in their schooling, they may be motivated more by one tracking method versus another.

School leaders need to create the structure, time, and tools for students to do this. They could inquire of other alternative schools for ideas or adapt the tools and processes their district's comprehensive high schools are using.

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:

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are in place with a focus on instructional strategies aligned to the school's 90-Day Plan. Teachers are expected to bring artifacts of learning that demonstrate the use of the RGPI Three (Cornell notes, vocabulary strategies, and text annotation). Leadership has provided a Universal Classroom Document that defines the instructional non-negotiables, such as posting the day's objectives, warm-ups, hall pass usage, and lesson planning. Principal Maestes has begun walk-throughs, and the instructional specialist, who has a strong background in student engagement, provides specific strategies at every PLC.

The school has been focusing on creating more academic engagement through the CTE program by using Project-Based Learning, embedding a business pathway into every other pathway, and combining courses like Algebra and Construction. This integration helps create a bridge for students to understand how the content will impact their future lives.

Opportunities for Growth:

While expectations have been shared with teachers, they may not yet be consistently in place. Gathering data through frequent informal walk-throughs and providing feedback may help deepen the instructional strategies until they become a habit.

Potential Next Steps:

As teachers develop their skills for lesson planning in PLCs, there needs to be accountability for the collaborative discussions to translate into instructional practices. Both leadership and staff would benefit from creating a walkthrough or informal observation protocol that reflects the RGPI Three and Universal Classroom Expectations. The protocol could be used for leaders to give teachers feedback and for teachers to reflect on their instructional growth and impact on student learning. When teachers know what is expected of them, they feel more confident making instructional decisions. When there is a shared vocabulary, as RGPI has implemented, there is an increased opportunity for collaboration and peer accountability.