

# School Support and Readiness Assessment Summary Report

<b>School:</b> Zia Elementary School	<b>LEA:</b> Albuquerque Public Schools
<b>School Leader:</b> Erika Montano	<b>LEA Leader:</b> Scott Elder
<b>SSRA Team Leader:</b> Celeste Murray	<b>Date:</b> September 21, 2023
<b>School Description</b>	
<p>Zia Elementary School serves 232 students in kindergarten through fifth grade. The school serves many specialized groups, including visually impaired students, students who qualify for special education and gifted education, students for whom English is an additional language, and dual language students (based on space and family choice). The school recently implemented an Eagle Hour program based on the "Genius Hour" concept, in which students can access various enrichment activities that support personal and academic growth. Zia Elementary prides itself on offering multiple field trips during the school year and a new STEM Lab and Makerspace.</p> <p>Zia's school mission statement is as follows:  <i>Zia Elementary is committed to fostering the development of the whole child. Our teachers focus on an educational style that is sensitive to individual learning needs and is adaptive to each child's unique learning style. We value diversity and inclusion, teamwork and collaboration, and seek out multiple opportunities for each child to learn and succeed.</i></p>	
<b>School Successes and Celebrations</b>	
<p>Principal Montano, the school staff, and families all believe that the faculty at Zia Elementary School has children's best interests at the center of their work. Family members are welcome on campus. Before the new leadership at the school, the culture did not encourage or welcome family involvement, according to interviews with staff and families. In partnership with the Family Liaison, who helps family members get background checks to be in the school, parents are now welcomed and encouraged to be on campus and to help out as recess duty supervisors, volunteers during drop off/pick up, and lunchroom duty, classroom supports, and more. A concerted effort has been made to schedule school events to build community with families.</p>	

**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:**

Families at Zia have reported that the new leadership team has made genuine efforts and strides in welcoming families into the building, facilitating their involvement in school activities, and assisting families in completing background checks to help lead activities. The Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) is actively involved, and families love the school and sense of community.

The Family Liaison helps identify families' needs and secures resources. Examples have included access to phones without minute limits and GEDs for family members. Whereas the school felt uninviting for years, families have noticed the new administrative team's welcoming environment and open-door policy. During the site visit, staff in the office were observed helping families. Principal Montano has also prioritized getting more information about students to families, continuing the trend towards more significant connections between school and home.

**Opportunities for Growth:**

While Zia Elementary has robust academic and non-academic enrichment offerings and services for students with disabilities (SWD), there is a potential for greater inclusion between the two groups. During the site visit, visually impaired students were rarely seen in general education settings, and there was little evidence of push-in services for students receiving special education. The school does offer a pull-out model of instruction.

During interviews, teachers and Principal Montano acknowledged that greater inclusion (including non-academic classes) is an area of growth. This increased inclusion would also help raise the visibility of students with special needs and decrease the stigma for students identified as needing services. The model of the least restrictive environment would help all adults and students continue to keep high expectations and provide equitable treatment.

**Potential Next Steps:**

Principal Montano is making the first steps towards greater inclusion of students with special needs in general education classes, beginning with science and social studies instruction this year. Although there are funding challenges to overcome, she is committed to starting small and building schoolwide efforts in the future.

**DOMAIN 2: LEADERSHIP**

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

**Promising Practices:**

Principal Montano has earned the trust of her staff by having an open-door policy and helping teachers feel supported when they go to her. Teachers noted that she is receptive, helpful, and safe. There is a growing sense of hope and community.

Principal Montano and teachers are reflective and open about areas for improvement. This eagerness to build systems to raise the level of instruction bodes well as the school formalizes and routinizes strategies that teachers learn in professional development sessions.

**Opportunities for Growth:**

Many interviewees indicated a need for systems to support professional development, student behaviors, collaboration, and expectations for instructional practices. Several opportunity areas were found, including developing schoolwide, agreed-upon strategies for questioning, instruction, and assessments. While teachers were observed conducting basic checks for understanding ("thumbs up if you understand"), there was an opportunity to raise student engagement through questioning and additional opportunities to respond.

Teachers are ready and eager to learn about instructional strategies but feel limited by the time dedicated to collaboration during their contract day. Protocols for collaboration would help teachers make the most of this limited time while also ensuring broader implementation of agreed-upon instructional practices. When students are introduced to consistent language and expectations across content areas and grade levels, it lessens their cognitive load and frees them to focus more on content; the same is true when teachers can collaborate to solve schoolwide challenges in an organized, predictable, efficient manner.

**Potential Next Steps:**

Principal Montano is already planning the next steps for professional development. Teachers have attended professional development and been given a book; with clear expectations of the expected change in adult behavior, teachers will benefit from accountability and feedback on implementation.

Principal Montano plans to help teachers support students in applying their depth of knowledge (DOK) through mastery of grade-level standards, leveraging warm-ups, and frequent checks for understanding. Building more opportunities for student talk into the school day will ensure that more students are engaged, on-task, and reaching the standards.

### **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:**

As mentioned in the preceding section, principal and faculty openness and disposition for collaboration are solid indicators for continued improvements in instructional infrastructure. There are some other positive signs. During the site visit, many of the teachers were observed using manipulatives during instruction and practice. In those classrooms, observers noted that teachers using manipulatives, movement, or questioning had increased student engagement.

#### **Opportunities for Growth:**

There are opportunities to grow in connection with the school's 90-day plan, which includes the following desired outcome: "Teachers will use formative and summative assessments to determine levels of proficiency to focus on differentiation and effective interventions needed to support at-risk students' growth and increase overall proficiency rates, with a close look at phonics and vocabulary growth."

Teachers and Principal Montano have identified small group instruction and differentiation as levers to reach more learners. There is an opportunity to collect and use more formative data to track the progress of these interventions and monitor students' mastery of standards to group students appropriately. Teachers might collaborate to create common formative assessments and work to disaggregate the data to determine necessary classroom interventions.

#### **Potential Next Steps:**

Principal Montano indicated that one next step might be to look at data as a whole school first and then support all teachers in tracking their own student data. She wants to make the data approachable and helpful rather than shaming or blaming individual teachers. This sensitivity is admirable, especially when combined with Principal Montano's transparency about the need for schoolwide change.

As the school moves from whole-school to individual teacher data, teachers will be able to see closer connections between classroom strategies learned in professional development and student outcomes. Both holistic and granular data analysis support this type of reflective teaching practice.

**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:**

New teachers and teachers needing support are provided regular observation and feedback cycles. Principal Montano continues to build her instructional leadership capacity by establishing systems and implementing skills she has learned in the THRIVE Program, which support teacher development.

**Opportunities for Growth:**

Principal Montano and her leadership team might standardize the observation and coaching cycle to include more teachers, not just those identified as new or struggling. Perhaps there is an opportunity for peer observation with the increased focus on schoolwide strategies and collaboration.

**Potential Next Steps:**

Principal Montano plans to start with grade-level observation and feedback and then focus on individual teachers. Again, her sensitivity to starting small, building trust, and implementing more broadly seems wise in a school context where teachers and administration are building positive rapport with each other.

**DOMAIN 5: SUPPORT & ACCOUNTABILITY**

*To what degree do school leaders establish and communicate expectations, monitor progress, provide support, and hold staff accountable?*

**Promising Practices:**

There is an established expectation and curriculum for social-emotional learning (SEL). A counselor created the curriculum to systematize the school's approach and remove the planning burden from teachers. In every interview with the site team, interviewees mentioned the connection and emotional safety of the school.

**Opportunities for Growth:**

As Principal Montano implements more schoolwide instructional practices, there is an opportunity to identify and communicate "look-fors" and then support staff in meeting expectations. Examples might include consistency across lesson plans, instruction, and classroom assessments. When teachers have clear expectations, models, and feedback on implementation, they feel safer taking risks, trying new strategies, and asking for support.

**Potential Next Steps:**

Principal Montano is working to identify the most critical and highest-leverage systems to prioritize. She will then strategize how to communicate that expectation and support it with professional learning, observations, and feedback. There is strong positive momentum, trust, and confidence in the school leader. With these advantages, she is poised to support her staff as they experiment with new instructional priorities and tighten connections between schoolwide goals and instructional practices.