

School Support and Readiness Assessment Summary Report

School: Albuquerque Talent Development Academy	LEA: Albuquerque
School Leader: Lucinda Montano-Molina	LEA Leader: Scott Elder
SSRA Team Leader: Celeste Murray	Date: October 18, 2023
School Description	
<p>Albuquerque Talent Development Academy (ATDA) is a Title I charter high school serving 135 students with nine full-time faculty. The population of students designated as English learners is 26.7%, and the population of students who qualify for special education services is 15.6%.</p> <p>The school’s mission statement is:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>ATDA engages students in a community-oriented environment that facilitates personal autonomy and academic growth through the use of Personalized Education Plans and research-based instructional methods in preparation for a dynamic and interconnected future.</i></p> <p>Their vision statement is:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>We strive to become a premier charter school option for college and career readiness.</i></p>	
School Successes and Celebrations	
<p>Each Albuquerque Talent Development Academy student is provided with a Personal Education Plan (PEP) to ensure their needs are met. GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs, a federal college access program) has a robust and wide-reaching presence on campus. Many adults credit GEAR UP for the shift in school culture; before GEAR UP, the focus was on graduation. Now, more students seek post-secondary opportunities after exploring them during high school.</p>	
DOMAIN 1: CULTURE & EQUITY	
<p><i>To what degree has the school established equitable practices that ensure ALL students and staff have an opportunity to reach their full potential?</i></p>	
Promising Practices:	
<p>There has been a distinct shift in how staff see students and how the students see themselves—</p>	

as capable of more than graduating high school. Interviews spoke about the lack of credits many students came with and efforts to help recover them. For years, the school focused on getting students to graduation, which seemed a challenging goal.

After GEAR UP became part of the school, a shift happened in both staff and students. Because of the opportunities to explore and visit post-secondary options, such as college campuses and trade schools, students began to identify goals for themselves after graduating. After three years of partnering with GEAR UP, many students and all of the staff are speaking about and promoting pathways students may take after high school.

Opportunities for Growth:

The school has successfully focused on building relationships with students that help them feel comfortable on campus. There is an opportunity to enlist families into this model and help them feel more comfortable supporting their child’s education. Interviews surfaced that families are not always actively involved in student learning. Offering opportunities to understand how to log into Synergy to monitor student grades, helping parents find ways to support the school that may not require being on campus during business hours, and creating more events that bring families to the campus can foster deeper relationships with families.

To better address students’ social-emotional learning (SEL) needs, the school can provide more physical recreation opportunities and spaces supporting social interaction and wellness. Interviews often mentioned the limitations of the physical space and the lack of extracurricular activities. The school has partnered with the school next door (a charter school serving elementary and middle school) to use their gym for basketball, but there is a desire for more sports options.

Potential Next Steps:

The school has ambitious projects to increase student and family access to school resources. Much of this depends on funding allocations and is detailed in the school’s 90-Day Plan. A new building would be most beneficial, but there are also opportunities to enhance the existing one.

The leadership team is creating a family room and a garden to draw more families to the school. A staff member is attending district-level professional development and visiting nearby programs to establish a vision and plan for this center at the school. The school employs a parent liaison to increase communication between school and home. Students are invited to eat lunch in various spaces on campus, contributing to feelings of belonging. Additional spaces and resources on campus would be a welcome addition.

DOMAIN 2: LEADERSHIP

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

Promising Practices:

Leadership's willingness to host and engage outside partners to support student success is a promising practice. Multiple interviews evidenced the cultural shift at the school as a direct result of GEAR UP's involvement and how it is a high-value asset for the students. The grant pays for the GEAR UP Coordinator, an AVID position/data coordinator, and a math intervention position; it also funds a math tutor who provides Algebra I and Geometry push-in tutoring. GEAR UP offers credit recovery on Friday mornings. This year, GEAR UP has provided over 5,000 hours of programming with over 1,000 student interactions between ATDA and Christine Duncan Heritage Academy, a neighboring school.

ATDA students get mentors (called agents) through the Student Success Agency. This program matches high school students with highly successful young adults in various fields. These volunteers provide mentoring through text messages.

Leadership has been responsive to the need for additional family engagement, creating a position for and hiring a parent liaison for the first time.

Opportunities for Growth:

One possible opportunity for growth is helping staff focus on things within the school's control. Interviews indicated a common theme that many of the staff attribute student success to variables outside of the school's control or influence. The school leaders and staff would be more productive if they focused on conditions they can improve, monitor, and adjust to increase graduation rates.

Potential Next Steps:

Principal Lucinda Montano-Molina and Assistant Principal Michael Davis did not identify the next steps in this area. Issues beyond the school's control were cited by many as needing to be changed. While these can significantly affect outcomes, a mindset shift might support teachers and school leaders in diagnosing gaps in student learning and working to close those gaps. The school's reception of GEAR UP services is a model on which other interventions might be based. When exposed to additional post-secondary options, students and teachers began to reframe future possibilities. The same could be true for instructional practices within the school.

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:

Albuquerque Talent Development Academy utilizes research-backed, high-quality curricula from Reading Plus and AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) to enhance their program. Using Reading Plus to address deficits in reading ability was identified as a possible promising practice. Interviews indicated most students are coming to the school reading well below grade level. Some interviewees shared frustration with how low reading skills impacted the ability to teach grade-level content and identified it as a significant contributor to low graduation rates. Beyond this, as students graduate and pursue additional post-secondary options, reading on grade level will help them access documents in careers and college settings.

The school provides four sections of AVID in the morning, one for each grade level, each with a unique and vertically aligned curriculum. Critical reading is individual to each grade level; the AVID teacher's goal is to "create a learning culture through focused note-taking that will improve student processing. Students are using, revising, and sharing their notes." AVID strategies like note-taking, organization, critical reading, writing, and collaboration support students in their academic classes. Like GEAR UP, the AVID curriculum systematically shifts the focus from high school attainment to post-secondary matriculation.

Opportunities for Growth:

Improved teaching practices that engage students and increase learning could be an opportunity for this school. Research shows that engagement is critical for student learning, and in most classes observed, engagement was low. During walkthroughs, students were off task and using cell phones. Instruction was predominantly teacher talk. Manipulatives or hands-on materials would enhance student learning. Interviews revealed in-person classes are less challenging than the coursework on Acellaas.

Potential Next Steps:

Principal Montano-Molina has also identified online classes as an area to explore. She has wondered about the level of rigor required and plans to discuss this topic more in PLCs.

Principal Montano-Molina acknowledges that in-person instruction is an area for improvement. As evidenced by the evaluation system, teachers need support in questioning techniques that help spur students' thoughts, conversations, and pursuits. She wants to support staff in enhancing their ability to deepen students' depth of knowledge by expanding their instructional capabilities. She thinks this could be an opportunity for future professional development sessions.

As with any professional development, teachers will likely need ongoing, embedded professional development to make lasting changes to well-trodden instructional practices. Accountability in the form of regular observations and feedback would help systematize these changes and provide coaching to teachers. Tying instructional practices to student outcomes

and examining the connections between student engagement and performance might also be fruitful areas of study.

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:

The school's small size allows all teachers to hear their perspectives and suggestions from the administration. PLCs and staff meetings include all staff. A culture of trust exists that allows everyone to feel safe in presenting ideas and negotiating decisions. As was stated in an interview, "All the staff have big voices, and the administration have big ears." There is a feeling of comfort and trust.

Opportunities for Growth:

There is an opportunity to formalize the observation, feedback, and coaching cycle (OFCC) to emphasize instructional strategies that increase student engagement. This process should be a priority, even when using computer-assisted instruction.

The administrative team visits classrooms informally once or twice a week, typically in the afternoons. The feedback provided has trended towards the general and anonymous ("I saw a lot of ___ this week, but not a lot of ____.") There is an opportunity to more closely tie observational data and feedback, such that teachers are given insight into their instruction that helps them develop a reflective practice. At times, feedback has been unrelated to instructional priorities. There is an opportunity to strengthen connections between student outcomes and teacher practices.

As ATDA sharpens its focus on post-secondary attainment, classroom practices should more closely align with the level of instruction that will prepare students for college and careers. OFCCs are one opportunity to reframe instructional practices in light of this higher set of expectations.

Potential Next Steps:

Principal Montano-Molina is reflective about her role as a leader at ATDA. She is aware that the OFCC could be more frequent and specific. She has been out for 20 training days, making it a challenge to attend to these matters as expeditiously as she would have liked.

Principal Montano-Molina was a teacher at the school, so she knows her perspective can be valuable when offering feedback. After processing the responses from a peer review, she also realizes that sometimes her feedback is suggestive. She has plans to develop her observation and feedback skills through additional training. Sometimes, as former teachers, new

administrators can lean heavily on their prior practices. Utilizing an observation protocol, varied methods of tracking student engagement data, and practicing formulating probing questions and action steps with teachers can all facilitate more targeted support and interventions.

Principal Montano-Molina and Assistant Principal Davis are registered for the two-day School Improvement session provided by the Priority Schools Bureau (PSB).