

# School Support and Readiness Assessment Summary Report

<b>School:</b> Navajo Elementary School	<b>LEA:</b> Gallup McKinley County Schools
<b>School Leader:</b> Joshua Stepney	<b>LEA Leader:</b> Mike Hyatt
<b>SSRA Team Leader:</b> Celeste Murray	<b>Date:</b> October 24, 2023
<b>School Description</b>	
<p>Navajo Elementary School is located in Navajo, New Mexico, on the rural border between New Mexico and Arizona. The drive to the school from the district’s central office takes almost an hour and requires slipping into AZ before returning to NM.</p> <p>Navajo Elementary serves 206 students in grades pre-kindergarten through five. 20% of the students at Navajo are classified as English learners (ELs), and 12% of students qualify for special education services. The school is designated as a Title I school and offers a Heritage Bilingual program</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i><b>Vision:</b> The community of Navajo Elementary has a unified vision based on kè, respect, responsibility, and safety to nurture a love of learning through high expectations, academic excellence, and in a collaborative environment geared towards quality education.</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i><b>Mission:</b> All students will receive standards-based instruction from highly-trained and continuously learning staff who are focused on providing quality instruction.</i></p>	
<b>School Successes and Celebrations</b>	
<p>There has been a marked improvement in internal and external communications since Principal Stepney assumed the leadership role. Teachers credit him with improving the climate and instilling a sense of lightness and laughter in the school. Family involvement is increasing due to his communication efforts, and overall, everyone indicated a greater sense of optimism.</p> <p>The implementation of observation, feedback, and coaching cycles (OFCC) in a systematic way is another strength. Each member of the administrative team has a specific number of classrooms to visit (five), feedback sessions (three face-to-face), and follow-ups (two). This efficient and balanced structure ensures leadership monitors classroom instruction and learning and provides opportunities to support teachers’ growth.</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:**

In New Mexico, Native American students are often in schools with teachers and leadership that do not reflect the students’ cultures. At Navajo ES, the percentage of teachers and school personnel who are Native American allows students to see people who look like them leading and communicating a belief in the importance of education. In addition, several of the staff are from the area and understand the community.

Since Principal Stepney came to the school, there has been a shift in climate. There is a collective understanding of the implementation and importance of “Customer Service” to include all stakeholders. Community members, families, students, and staff are being empowered to take ownership to build a school community. This opportunity has increased stakeholder and community engagement.

**Opportunities for Growth:**

Teachers commonly experience tension between staying on course of a scope and sequence (the district’s Year at a Glance) and meeting lesson planning expectations (Sways). More discussion and collaboration among teachers could prompt understanding, innovation, and process enhancements to make the daily work more efficient. It was evident from interviews that teachers know the importance of attending to students’ needs for background knowledge, reteaching, and differentiation and simultaneously meeting the expectations for planning and delivery. There are ways to address student learning needs without lowering learning expectations or disregarding the expected pacing of lessons.

The school serves a community where many speak Navajo, some as a first language. During the focus group interview, parents wondered if anyone at the school spoke fluent Navajo and indicated they had only received communications (emails, texts, newsletters) in English. Focus group interviews spoke to the lack of communication in Navajo and how this inhibits some families, like when grandparents are raising grandchildren or are supporting the family, from being fully welcomed or aware of what is happening in the school. While bits of Navajo hung in public locations around the school, site team observers did not notice any in classrooms.

**Potential Next Steps:**

Principal Stepney appreciates teachers’ desire to meet the needs of the students and plans to develop steps to help teachers adjust lesson plans in responsible and rigorous ways. Once teachers truly understand the purpose of such expectations (YAG and Sways), they often find greater purpose and improvement, which moves them out of compliance mode. Additionally, providing meaningful feedback to teachers on the planning they submit will further deepen the

intention of the expected work.

Additional training and coaching would help teachers adjust strategies to meet the rigorous demands of grade-level learning. Accelerated learning of essential standards is a shift in the mindset of many teachers who have previously been told to focus on remediation. And specific scaffolding priorities should be identified for schoolwide improvement.

Principal Stepney plans to address concerns about a lack of Navajo translation by getting school communications translated in the future. Making school communications understandable to students, families, and the broader community will help fully engage all stakeholders and signal that the school is open to all. Organizations thrive when comprised of diverse perspectives; inviting families with all language backgrounds will enhance the community.

## **DOMAIN 2: LEADERSHIP**

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

### **Promising Practices:**

Principal Stepney is changing the climate of the school. He and the Dean of Students are attending Chapter House meetings. There is a focus on creating a “Customer Service” culture where everyone is greeted at the door, which is a significant change, as interviews indicated many people feel more welcome in the school. There are committees within the school to support the stakeholders’ participation. Communication has increased from school to families; newsletters are posted in community spaces like the gas station.

### **Opportunities for Growth:**

The building shows evidence of clutter, disorganization, and possible safety issues. Clutter is present in most classrooms and public spaces. Space heaters are within reach of young children. There are tripping hazards. Portions of some classrooms are rendered unusable by students and teachers due to the storage of items piled in corners.

This environment may not be conducive to learning—an unorganized environment can contribute to unorganized learning. Similarly, procedural routines and systems for equipment and materials are lacking. When equipment is stored improperly and not routinely cataloged, it can lead to wasted resources and frustration for school staff.

### **Potential Next Steps:**

The school is in the process of cleaning spaces. At least three classrooms have been identified as needing a purge of materials and a thorough cleaning. There are plans to organize the preschool. Attending to these matters will tell students that the work done in these spaces is essential. It will also support teachers in creating learning environments that are visually calmer

and more conducive to student focus.

### **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 at Navajo Elementary use High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM). Observations found several classes using the adopted curriculum, and interviews spoke to it. When teachers are aligned on grade-level curriculum and instructional strategies, it makes everyone's job easier; teachers can rely on standard practices when discussing vertical alignment. Students learn processes that are repeated throughout their school day and from year to year, increasing feelings of security. When instructional routines are consistent, the focus can shift to deepening the learning.

It was evident that specific instructional strategies have been a focus at Navajo Elementary and that there is a shared understanding of what they look like and how they are used. Teachers used the gradual release of responsibility (I Do, We Do, You Do) to model their thinking, support students during initial practice, and move them to independent practice before assessing a skill or understanding. Observers saw classrooms in various stages of gradual release, and interviews all identified it as an expectation of instruction. Interviews also indicated that teachers were encouraged to check for understanding using small, daily formative assessments such as bell work and exit tickets.

The staff at Navajo has discussed strategies that have students doing the talking—particularly with other students. The ratio of student-student talk is a strong indicator of student engagement. When students are provided with structured opportunities to use academic vocabulary, their oral and written fluencies increase. In a school with many language learners, student voice is critical.

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

An initial interview with the principal indicated the school was beginning to focus on increased use of strategies that have students doing the talking—particularly with other students. Several interviews mentioned Think, Pair, and Share. However, during walkthroughs, only one classroom provided evidence of students talking to each other. Most classrooms were characterized by teacher talk or quiet independent work. In interviews, the lack of student interactions also surfaced.

Teachers are adjusting to district requirements, and some have expressed how challenging it is to complete the required lesson plans (formatted as Microsoft Sways) while monitoring the learning in their classrooms. They desire to differentiate instruction and pacing to meet the needs of their students.

**Potential Next Steps:**

Principal Stepney acknowledges district expectations and wants to remind teachers they have classroom autonomy within parameters. There is an opportunity to build teachers' abilities to deliver instruction to meet district and state grade-level requirements while supporting individual learning needs. Pacing guides and objectives are the starting place. Strong layer one instruction will minimize the need for reteaching. Specific scaffolding strategies, flexible student groups, vertical alignment, and short data cycles are high-leverage priorities the school can focus on. Principal Sphney can highlight successful student data so teachers identify what works in layer one instruction and make adjustments as necessary.