

# School Support and Readiness Assessment Summary Report

<b>School:</b> Siembra Leadership High School	<b>LEA:</b> Albuquerque Public Schools
<b>School Leader:</b> Jaqi Baldwin	<b>LEA Leader:</b> Scott Elder
<b>SSRA Team Leader:</b> Celeste Murray	<b>Date:</b> November 1, 2023
<b>School Description</b>	
<p>Siembra Leadership High School is located on Central Avenue in the heart of Albuquerque's downtown. Its urban surroundings facilitate students learning about entrepreneurship next door to diverse small businesses.</p> <p>Three hundred sixty-six students attend Siembra: 270 during the day and 96 as night students. 37% of the students at Siembra qualify for special education services, and 22% are designated as English language learners. Forty students qualify for services under the McKinney Vento designation. Most students (around 75%) identify as Latino/a.</p> <p>The school offers 360-degree support academically, emotionally, and physically. Classes are based on a learning-by-doing model where creativity, imagination, and innovation are championed. Siembra also has strong community outreach and requires students to engage in community service. The executive director, Jaqi Baldwin, has been with the school since its inception and is the driving force behind its mission and vision.</p> <p>The school's core values are <i>Opportunity, Creativity and Imagination, Ability to Fail, and Making a Difference.</i></p> <p>Their vision is as follows: <i>As the only entrepreneurship-focused high school in New Mexico, Siembra Leadership combines passionate and innovative educators, high-growth employers, and local entrepreneurs to offer innovative, real-world learning that prepares students for the future. Siembra Leadership students develop 21st century skills, and an entrepreneurial mindset, that prepares them for success in college and their career. Students and families benefit from 360-degree support to ensure students can focus on hands-on, rigorous learning each day.</i></p>	
<b>School Successes and Celebrations</b>	
<p>Siembra intentionally serves vulnerable youth and has not wavered from this goal. The school will not turn students away if they want to attend, regardless of their age, level of credits, or past behavior infractions. To meet students' needs, they offer a variety of supports, including a focus</p>	

on social-emotional learning (SEL), many paths to graduation, and many members of staff who are social workers or hold degrees in social work.

Siembra saw an increase in enrollment during the COVID-19 pandemic and has seen continued increases since. Recently, they hired new teachers to meet the demand. The school gets referrals through word of mouth – students and parents share their successes with others who choose to attend. The school's flexibility is noteworthy: following COVID, they provided their signature project-based learning curricula virtually. Thirty-five students (9.6%) and forty-four night students (12%, mostly older) take advantage of this option. The remaining 74% of students complete their coursework in person. Additionally, the school bought Acellus credit recovery services for the seventeen students pursuing coursework in this way.

To meet the needs of students and families, Siembra does extensive fundraising and grant-writing, recently securing a \$1.8 million federal grant – the school's largest to date. The school has a 3-year plan that includes purchasing apartments and condos nearby to offer as transitional housing for students whose families are experiencing homelessness.

As another impressive measure of success at a school dedicated to business and entrepreneurship, three former students have started and are running businesses: Quesadilla Way Restaurant, With Love Waffles, and NM Shoe Plug.

## **DOMAIN 2: LEADERSHIP**

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

### **Promising Practices:**

Siembra employs innovative practices to recruit, nurture, and retain educators. Through their Grow Your Own initiative, alums can work at the school as education assistants (EAs) on the student support team; EAs make \$35,000 for the first six months and then \$58,000 after that, the same as a level one teacher salary. The school currently employs four EAs. In addition to their wages, the school financially supports them in getting teaching or social work degrees.

Siembra started an internal paid internship program for students integrated into their school day. They earn credit and are paid \$15 per hour. Students at Siembra have earned 456 college credits in the last two years and 506 career and technical education (CTE) credits in business and entrepreneurship. Students in the school interact with the former students who are employed there. They are also aware of the companies former students have started, and they are keenly aware this could be them in a couple of years.

Sustainability through resource and financial management practices is a focus for the school. The staff, particularly the executive director, want to ensure the school and its success continue regardless of personnel. There is focused recruitment and retention of staff. The school offers at least 10% above the Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) salary to pay stipends for hard-to-staff licenses, such as math, special education, science, English as a second language (TESOL), and

dual enrollment. They also offer a yearly retention bonus and sabbatical leave for teachers who have been at the school for five or ten years (four and eight weeks off, respectively). The school prioritizes finding teachers who speak Spanish by offering an additional stipend. They also reimburse tuition, helping teachers pay for bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees. They have pursued many grants to fund the school's growth, including Community Schools, an Innovation Grant, and the \$1.872 million federal government grant.

### **Opportunities for Growth:**

The project-based assets at Siembra present some challenges for instructional leadership. During the site visit, interviews indicated that co-teaching meant feedback flowed regularly between peers – a strength of the model. With the informal nature of this type of feedback, however, it can be difficult for school leaders to provide targeted observational data and feedback that can help ensure all students are getting access to appropriately rigorous instruction.

The school is structured around emotional learning and student support; there is an opportunity to bring this same clarity of purpose to academics. Student support coaches help monitor student progress toward graduation and can provide academic support if needed. However, there was no evidence of this kind of progress monitoring and communication around students' reading levels. There is an opportunity to build on the success of the project-based learning model, in which two standards are addressed per semester, to a more robust, grade-level aligned, clearly communicated set of outcomes that students, teachers, families, and school leaders can expect students to master.

### **Potential Next Steps:**

Director Baldwin sees an increased focus on academic outcomes as having the potential to foster growth and an entrepreneurial mindset. She sees how regular, standardized observation and feedback coaching cycles (OFCCs) would support the development of new teachers, especially with the project-based model. She plans to create an observation form to use when providing feedback and conducting follow-up sessions.

The school recently offered a professional development session to help teachers understand students' test scores. Director Baldwin plans to build a system to support students in understanding and taking their test scores seriously. Standardized tests are a part of licensure for many careers; by being transparent with students about their progress on these tests, the school is preparing them to be college and career-ready. Similarly, as they grow educators, data literacy and fluency with summative and formative assessments will prove valuable in any school environment.

### **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:**

Siembra has had great success creating high interest in self-directed student learning. Students commented that the project-based learning format in their classes made the learning more interesting, particularly when they could see the real-world connections. For the capstone project, students can choose careers of interest as the focus of their projects. The PBL units are also highly collaborative, which students enjoy, and the facility offers lots of opportunities for students to move while learning.

Students can see that they are learning life skills through their lessons. They feel that the real-world connections for skills like budgeting make the work they are doing feel more purposeful.

Finally, and crucially for many students, the school has intentionally created a variety of ways for students to learn and earn credits: in-person project-based classes, online credit recovery supported by classroom teachers, virtual project-based learning, night classes, tutoring, academic support coaches, dual credits, and the ability to take college classes provide flexible options.

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

There is an opportunity to build on the high-interest project-based learning model to enhance the rigor of academic instruction and expectations at Siembra. Students indicated that they are capable of more challenging lessons. The flexibility and autonomy many at the school praise also open the door for some students to use the time to play video games or socialize. Students enjoy being able to move around the building, and at times, students leave class spaces to go elsewhere, including other classes, to visit with friends. During the site visit, some students appeared to be off task. In project-based learning, checkpoints for understanding and accountability can increase feelings of urgency and help more students stay on task.

Teachers at Siembra indicated that they want to meet students where they are. To support students reading below grade level, teachers must identify scaffolds and activities that allow students access to grade-level standards. As the faculty tightens its cycles of observations and feedback and learns to use assessment data to drive instruction, teachers can implement their enhanced knowledge of students' strengths while intentionally planning for differentiated instruction.

Project-based learning provides a profound opportunity for students to practice the skills needed to master priority standards. Teachers typically identify two priority standards per project. There is an opportunity to spread the project's scope to include greater alignment to standards and a balance between multiple standards that students practice in increasing complexity over the year. Similarly, while students are clear about the goals for project

completion, there could be built-in checks for mastery of standards. There is also an opportunity to educate and enlist parents when communicating about how reading and writing are taught at the school.

These skills all have real-world applications for career and college readiness; the staff has done the challenging work of creating projects that appeal to students' interests. The focus on standards can dovetail with the work already done to build students' capacity for increasingly complex tasks.

**Potential Next Steps:**

Director Baldwin was not surprised that rigor emerged as an area of focus; her faculty recently identified this as an area of growth. She knows that some teachers hear the word rigor and think it is used to describe making the work harder; she sees an opportunity to reframe rigor as elevating students' thinking and engaging them in creating a higher level of questioning and problem-solving.

Director Baldwin sees that the standards are interconnected and wants to find more ways to make these connections visible to students, faculty, and families. She is thinking about displaying student work and asking students to help make connections between their learning on different projects. The standards do not have to be the start and end of the discussion; learning can still be embedded within the driving question that prompts collaborative work in the project-based model at Siembra. Director Baldwin points out that the students begin and end with an entrepreneurial mindset. The standards can be process-oriented and embedded in how students create the product.

**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:**

In addition to recruiting, compensating fairly, and supporting new and veteran teachers, Siembra leverages the talents of its faculty by providing structures and dedicated time for them to develop projects collaboratively. Teachers are given three weeks before the school year of targeted professional development and time. They use backward design to create projects and then have opportunities to receive feedback from peers and community partners. They are also given two weeks mid-year and weekly meetings with the Curriculum and Instruction Director. The collaborative focus extends into staffing meetings, co-teaching opportunities, and staffing meetings about students. The school sends staff to convenings and learning opportunities out of state and provides tuition reimbursements. These opportunities ensure that teachers are continually engaged in creating and collaborating.

**Opportunities for Growth:**

There is an opportunity to strengthen systems of accountability for faculty and students. When teachers know they will be observed and given feedback, they are more intentional in designing instruction. When student outcomes are measured, and teachers dissect and reflect on this data, they can better prepare lessons that align with grade-level expectations. Teachers at Siembra receive feedback from peers and community partners and would benefit from similarly in-depth discussions about their lessons with school leadership. This dialogue, in turn, would provide school leadership with data about instructional practices at the school, which would help them plan future professional development and determine which skills and strategies would be most beneficial for the teaching staff.

The faculty at Siembra is student-centered to the point that many adults are willing to let students have great freedom and autonomy. In a setting such as Siembra, which operates within a project-based model, student accountability must be clear and connected to larger objectives, such as employability and college readiness. As teachers and administrators signal to students that their work in school matters, they can challenge students more deeply and use pacing to build urgency.

Teachers at Siembra plan extensive projects that hold the attention of students who may not have experienced success in more traditional school settings. There is an opportunity to support these teachers in breaking down projects into more discrete daily lessons and objectives that students and teachers can use as mastery benchmarks.

**Potential Next Steps:**

Director Baldwin is thinking about programs that could come in to support students as they transition out of high school and into the larger community, such as the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). She sees an opportunity to connect students to helpful resources and believes there is power in knowing that so many people are willing to help.

She also mentioned the Success Project component of the program at Siembra. It is designed to help students develop themselves. At the end of every day or every week, teachers and school staff can check in with students and have them be reflective, with questions like: How did you do on your goals? Were you where you need to be? Did you do what you needed to do?

Director Baldwin is thinking about long-term support and near-term accountability. Holding teachers and students to high expectations communicates that she believes in their potential for long-term success in and out of the classroom.