

# School Support and Readiness Assessment Summary Report

<b>School:</b> Thoreau Elementary School	<b>LEA:</b> Gallup McKinley County Schools
<b>School Leader:</b> Kandas Gonzalez	<b>LEA Leader:</b> Mike Hyatt
<b>SSRA Team Leader:</b> Celeste Murray	<b>Date:</b> October 26, 2023
<b>School Description</b>	
<p>Thoreau Elementary School is located about 35 miles to the east of Gallup, where the district’s central office is located. It is a rural location, nestled next to red rock bluffs. It serves around 340 students, though the student population has declined slightly this year, primarily due to a large group of students being promoted to middle school. There are 16 teachers, and this is Principal Gonzalez’s second year with the school. She is supported by a dean who has been with the school for less than a year.</p> <p>Based on surveys completed by families, 80% of the students attending the school are English Learners, though the leadership at the school suspects the actual number is closer to 95%. Approximately 30 students are identified for special education services, and 10 fall under the McKinney Vento Act. Five students receive gifted education services. The school is a Title I school. It offers a heritage bilingual program and grant-funded after-school tutoring.</p> <p><i>Mission: Thoreau Elementary will cultivate a positive environment to educate the whole child by providing them with tools and strategies to help them become life-long learners.</i></p> <p><i>Vision: Empower all students to become productive and responsible citizens in a multicultural society.</i></p> <p>The school’s motto incorporates its mascot into an acronym:  <i>Helping students  Achieve  Wisdom  Kindness and  Success</i></p>	
<b>School Successes and Celebrations</b>	
<p>Thoreau Elementary School has made tremendous gains in student attendance after intentionally focusing on this area for improvement. Two years ago, the attendance rate was 73%. This year, the attendance rate is approximately 94%. A powerful example of a specific classroom was</p>	

shared: two years ago, it was common for only 12 of the 25 assigned students to be present on any given day, and this year, there are usually only two students missing a day.

Many interviews identified the school's leadership team (principal and dean) as strengths. Faculty members described Principal Gonzalez as an advocate for teachers. Her enthusiasm, energy, and optimism were also evident and mentioned by many interviewed. The leadership team agreed that one of their strengths was their ability to work together as a united team.

Adults at Thoreau care about the students; the school feels like a family. This language surfaced in many interviews, and there are family connections for several of the staff and students. Students are in classrooms with their cousins, and staff have family members attending the school. These relationships allow for familiarity and help staff recognize the importance of the learning going on in the school.

## **DOMAIN 2: LEADERSHIP**

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

### **Promising Practices:**

The leadership team cultivates the respect of all staff by supporting them as they implement change. Leadership supports and affirms teachers' decision-making because teachers know their students and have their best interests at heart. The administration has communicated which guidelines are tight (non-negotiable) and which are loose – they hold staff accountable while also providing needed support.

The non-negotiable guidelines ensure that all students have access to academic standards. District pacing guides support continuity within and between schools in the district. As schools adapt to these guidelines, it is helpful to support teachers in understanding vertical alignment within state standards to help differentiate instructions for students. Similarly, efforts to help teachers in scaffolding formative assessments ensure that students have access to the same rigorous tasks and that teachers can accurately measure students' proficiency relative to grade-level standards.

The leadership team supports teachers meeting district and state guidelines through a cycle of observations and feedback. Routine classroom walkthroughs ensure frequent and systematic observations. Under district guidelines, the principal and dean each visit at least five classrooms weekly for walkthroughs, provide feedback to at least three of these teachers, and follow up with at least two. The leadership team has identified the teachers they feel need the most support as their focus, and they are clear on their look-fors.

### **Opportunities for Growth:**

Principal Gonzalez has created a culture of trust and support. There is an opportunity to build

on the systems at Thoreau to increase teachers' capacity to meet the needs of all learners. The primary instructional strategies the school has prioritized, including the Gradual Release of Responsibility model (I do, we do, you do), protocols for small groups, and increased student talk, are all high-leverage methods that improve English proficiency while building students' academic skills and content knowledge.

Interviews and walkthroughs indicated that implementing these prioritized instructional strategies could be more consistent; some teachers were observed to be in the early stages of adoption. To refine teachers' implementation to increase student engagement and learning, the leadership team has an opportunity to deepen and personalize the feedback for teachers at all execution levels. In-person feedback can be used as a coaching tool to grow teacher efficacy and reflective practices.

**Potential Next Steps:**

Principal Gonzalez plans to immediately respond to the feedback she has received about teachers' varying levels of implementation of the school's instructional priorities. In their teacher feedback sessions, she and her dean plan to highlight specific strengths and areas for improvement.

To follow up on initial feedback sessions, Principal Gonzalez plans to model the Gradual Release of Responsibility and facilitate small groups for teachers struggling with these strategies. This hands-on, embedded support is invaluable to new and veteran teachers. Teachers respect instructional leaders who can also connect with classrooms full of students.

Principal Gonzalez plans to offer face-to-face feedback during specials or after school to improve strengths-based and direct instructional coaching. Transparency, timely feedback, and consistency will aid her teaching staff as they become accustomed to more detail-oriented data collection and feedback. With the strong, trusting relationships the leadership team has built, they have a solid foundation to become thought partners with teachers as they reflect upon and refine critical instructional practices.

**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:**

Thoreau Elementary School has a clear and functioning system for instruction. They use the district's scope and sequence, known as the Year at a Glance (YAG). Teachers use the district-provided lesson plans to construct PowerPoints, which they submit for review and feedback. They also follow an assessment calendar and give assessments aligned to standards. Staff have been provided professional development on SIOP (sheltered instruction observation protocol), student engagement, Gradual Release of Responsibility, and small group strategies, which the

school has identified as instructional priorities this year. While teachers feel the weight of all that is being asked of them, school leadership is flexible when possible and proactive about identifying support.

### **Opportunities for Growth:**

There is an opportunity to increase the use of data to drive instruction. As more teachers conduct small group instruction, there is an opportunity to identify struggling students and provide differentiated tasks. There was little evidence that students were tracking their data or that teachers were engaging students with data meetings as a common practice in the school. Using data regularly, such as formative data gathered from exit tickets, allows teachers to reteach misunderstandings, fill gaps in understanding, or extend instruction when students have already mastered a skill.

The leadership team can communicate and standardize expectations around data use. Interviews found that staff could not speak to how data was viewed schoolwide or how other teachers were using data. Some comments indicated the staff felt it was inconsistent. When teachers share standard protocols for collecting, analyzing, and responding to student data, it opens the doors for further collaboration. It increases feelings of efficacy when they can see connections between instructional strategies and student outcomes.

There is also an opportunity to foster deeper collaboration between special and general education teachers. Special education teachers' schedules prevent them from attending professional learning community (PLC) meetings. During core instruction, general education teachers support students with individualized education plans (IEPs), and interviews indicated some teachers would like additional support in meeting their students' needs. The school uses a pull-out/resource model, so students with IEPs are also experiencing two lessons (one in general education and one in their pull-out class) that are not aligned. Increased collaboration between special education and general education teachers could create more alignment and support general education teachers in meeting special education students' needs.

### **Potential Next Steps:**

The leadership team plans to ensure that grade-level meetings are data-driven. They plan to lead teachers in aligning the development of exit tickets that can be used as formative data. They plan to use the DuFours' PLC questions to structure teachers' discussions during these meetings.

The team also plans to provide collaboration time during PLC on Thursdays for general and special education teachers to share strategies and accommodations, especially for English language arts (ELA) instruction. They also plan to consider the possibility of special education teachers pre-teaching the concepts before the general education teacher teaches the same content. When special education students are present in the inclusion model setting, this pre-teaching model promotes confidence and fluency for special education students.