

School Support and Readiness Assessment Summary Report

School: La Academia de Esperanza	LEA: Albuquerque Public Schools
School Leader: Adam Giron	LEA Leader: Scott Elder
SSRA Team Leader: Celeste Murray	Date: December 5, 2023
School Description	
<p>La Academia de Esperanza (LADE) originally began as a school to serve students in the judicial system. While that campus has closed, its second location, on Albuquerque’s west side, continues to offer students an alternative high school experience. It currently has 255 students enrolled. Eighty of its students have IEPs, and 127 are English Learners. About 45% of the student population meets the criteria for McKinney-Vento, and around 25% of the students are currently in the judicial system. LADE is a Title I school with 34 employees, 16 of whom are officially identified as teachers. Much of the student body scores high on the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) assessment.</p> <p>The school has recently developed new mission and vision statements, which are awaiting approval from the governing board:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>Vision: La Academia de Esperanza provides an engaging educational environment that empowers students to expand into their fullest life potential.</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>Mission: La Academia de Esperanza fosters academic and personal growth through cultivating creativity, adaptability, relationship building, and a culture of belonging.</i></p>	
School Successes and Celebrations	
<p>A positive and inclusive school culture is a hallmark at LADE, exemplified by its commitment to meeting student needs regardless of starting points and continuous support until graduation, irrespective of the timeline for individual students. This ethos was consistent throughout interviews, underscoring the institution’s dedication to student success. As a result of this culture, 98% of students who enroll at LADE ultimately graduate. Vista data also indicate an increase in 5 and 6-year graduation rates for the past two years.</p> <p>LADE garnered recognition as the Air Force Research Lab’s (AFRL) School of the Year three years ago. Students go to the AFRL yearly to build a catapult; this exploration project allows students to demonstrate mastery of concepts in math and science. Explora nominated the school</p>	

as a STEM school, and LADE hosts robotics competitions and participates in competitions on a national scale.

The school employs a badge system to indicate mastery of technical skills. Importantly, students learn how to strategically leverage these badges when crafting resumes or completing applications for future endeavors.

One current celebration has to do with reading data. Assisted by new programs, many students demonstrated a two-year growth in reading fluency this past year.

Natali Arango, a teacher at LADE, won the GRADS 2023 Above and Beyond Teacher Award.

DOMAIN 2: LEADERSHIP

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

Promising Practices:

The leadership team at LADE embraces a culture of openness to staff input. This engagement fosters an environment where the workforce feels validated, valued, and empowered. Throughout the school, staff input is evident in the decision-making process. Principal Giron and the assistant principal highlighted intentional efforts to solicit and incorporate staff insights during critical decision junctures, reflecting a clear commitment to shared governance.

LADE recently began an initiative titled Tiger Tickets to recognize and motivate students with commendable academic performance, attendance, and behavior. This initiative originated from a student survey to identify factors encouraging attendance and engagement in classes and the school. Most respondents indicated a desire to have some flexibility in classroom attendance. Tiger Tickets allow students to leave an hour early on Tuesdays and Thursdays if they meet specific criteria. Concurrently, those who remain on campus receive targeted academic support. One unexpected impact of this initiative is the peer-driven component, which has been instrumental in shaping the school's academic culture this year. When students feel they have a say in their educational journey, this can increase investment at multiple levels.

The school also shows a concerted effort to broaden student horizons by providing unique learning opportunities. These opportunities include the catapult activity with the AFRL and on-campus robotics competitions. Additionally, the school has consistently hosted the First Robotic Competition (FRC) community team for an impressive six years. These endeavors contribute to the diverse experiences offered to students, enriching their educational journey beyond traditional classroom settings and activities.

While still in the nascent stages of development, the administrative team at LADE is actively exploring partnerships with local unions to facilitate post-secondary paid internships for students.

Opportunities for Growth:

With the number of new school-level initiatives this year, most remain at the surface level regarding internalization. An opportunity exists to develop further and deepen the systems and initiatives to continue to impact the student level with fidelity.

The staff and leadership at LADE have been working together to personalize Next Step Plans. These plans involve student completion of a Personal Learning Plan (PLP) that includes a variety of reflective quizzes to gain insights into students' optimal learning methods, strengths, areas for development, and personal interests. The overarching objective is to empower students to comprehend and advocate for themselves; however, as this practice is new to the school, little data exists on whether the program has the intended effect. There may be an opportunity for deep, explicit instruction and guided reflection concerning the PLPs.

One element of effective leadership is communication at a system, group, or individual levels. With an alternative high school, many pathways and opportunities exist for students. Creating and implementing plans to support executive function may be helpful for the student body in the long term. Specific deadlines exist for many programs at the secondary and post-secondary levels. A uniform method of providing access to these programs pre-deadline will assist the educators and leaders at LADE in their mission to foster academic and personal growth among their students. In an alternative setting like LADE, simple communication about opportunities may prove insufficient; studies show that executive function, which typically fully matures in the early 20s, is not yet fully developed among a teenage population. For individuals who have experienced trauma, especially extended trauma, this developmental process may extend even further.

SEL is a clear focus at the school. Some opportunities exist within this sphere to further assist students along their journey. First, there is an opportunity to integrate SEL practices into the standard academic curriculum. This practice may help alleviate problematic behaviors and further enhance student feelings of safety and connectedness. A second opportunity is to strengthen access to life skills education. The administrative team may find it fruitful to explore providing classes such as financial literacy, practical life skills, and legal principles. There is a recognized need at the school related to social work services, particularly with finding housing and clothing for struggling families.

Potential Next Steps:

Principal Giron will examine school priorities with the educational staff, explicitly focusing on SEL plans and integration. There is discussion about identifying one or two high-leverage changes that can be made this year. One critical element of these changes is identifying shifts that will stick and continue to show results. The principal also plans to review the rollout of the PLP and is engaged in soliciting feedback from staff on how best to go about this. The indicator 13 process and purpose are considered a cross-reference for the PLP process.

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:

The school uses a badge system to encourage technical skill acquisition and teach students how to articulate their success through badges. This aligns with the school's aims to diversify educational experiences through activities with the AFRL and the FRC. This year, the school also boasts over sixty students who will be testing to attain the seal of biliteracy on their diplomas.

Relationship building is prioritized by staff with a focus on restorative justice practices and targeted instruction to meet student where they are, which is their Tier 3 DASH focus. This support is provided during the Tiger Ticket time on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The teachers at LADE demonstrate a commitment to scaffolding students upward and beyond.

A maker space has become an essential aspect of LADE—an area of the school with resources and space for teachers to create and carry out project-based learning opportunities with students. The nature of alternative high schools is such that spaces like this are crucial for educators and students in building relationships and carrying out learning activities.

To continue fostering a culture of continuous improvement, the school leverages “bright spots,” exemplified by exceptional teachers and vital lessons, for peer observation. This practice allows educators to observe and learn from each other's strengths, promoting a collaborative and uplifting environment to elevate every teacher's practice throughout the school.

Opportunities for Growth:

Ensuring all students have access to grade-level content with support and increased rigor is challenging at any school site, even more so at an alternative high school. Students come to LADE from many different situations and backgrounds. One aspect of a high-quality education is materials that align with the current State Standards. The leadership at LADE may find it helpful to secure more current teaching materials for certain core subjects.

There is an opportunity to align expectations and accountability across the school. Professional development on formative and summative assessment may help staff complete adequate checks for understanding (CFUs) during instructional time. This gap in procedure could be leveraged to have a significant effect in terms of academic structuring and data collection. Frequent, standards-based formative assessments allow all students to show their mastery, rather than the few students who volunteer in class or are selected to answer. In this way, they help mitigate the effects of gender and cultural bias.

Another critical aspect of the instructional infrastructure is a uniform pathway to graduation

and beyond. Acknowledging a dispersed effort without precise alignment or prioritization, Principal Giron spoke about how to shift post-secondary data in a more desirable direction. While badging initiatives include skills relevant to construction, indicating a potential pathway, the school currently does not offer a construction Career and Technical Education (CTE) pathway. A deliberate approach to establishing and strengthening pathways could show positive results for student opportunities.

Potential Next Steps:

Principal Giron plans to organize staff meetings to collaborate and discuss priorities concerning instructional rigor and accountability measures. One specific struggle has been identified as facilitating a mindset shift among staff who feel students should not deal with increased rigor due to extenuating life circumstances.

The principal is also interested in soliciting outside agencies to facilitate some system management at a higher level, which would allow decision-makers and team leaders within the school to prioritize critical action more clearly.

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 leadership team is committed to understanding classroom dynamics through weekly walkthroughs and interactions. This practice was universally acknowledged among the staff as a strength of the current administrative team. Through these observations and walkthroughs, the principal and leadership team identify “bright spots” to use as peer observation focuses to help coach other staff.

Although staffing at the school is an ongoing challenge, the school proactively addresses the contractual gaps by utilizing the Ed Fellows program. This initiative involves cultivating Educational Assistants (EAs) into teachers, ensuring emerging educators are intimately familiar with the school environment, the leadership team, and the student body. This approach addresses staffing and ensures the participants are already embedded within the school culture.

Opportunities for Growth:

One facet of practical classroom observation is a structured system emphasizing clear and actionable feedback. The leadership team may find it helpful to consider incorporating elements such as calendaring, prioritized observations, and same-day feedback to transform observations into a more purposeful coaching tool. This will ensure that walkthroughs are aligned with schoolwide priorities, facilitating targeted coaching for teachers and fostering a more intentional improvement process.

One other opportunity for growth lies in the uniform implementation of SEL strategies. While the school prioritizes academic and emotional learning, many large-scale shifts have recently occurred, and changing instructional habits can be difficult. Clear communication about priorities will assist the leadership team in monitoring efforts focused on shifting instructional practices, particularly if small-scale, day-to-day change is emphasized.

Potential Next Steps:

Principal Giron is identifying professional development (PD) to assist the leadership team in microcoaching. The principal also identified the need to delegate tasks to provide more opportunities for meaningful engagement with staff development.

Finally, there has been difficulty with establishing systems as the efforts at LADE began as a treatment program. The new vision and mission have been the first of many steps towards a more unified manifestation of priorities at the school. Principal Giron understands that consistency, accountability, clarity, and reflection must be embedded into the school's priorities.