School Support and Readiness Assessment
Summary Report

School: Desert Pride Academy	**LEA:** Gadsden Independent School District
School Leader: Diane Ludwig	**LEA Leader:** Travis Dempsey
SSRA Team Leader: Andrea Fletcher	**Date:** January 24, 2024

School Description

Desert Pride Academy is an alternative high school serving approximately 200 students seeking credit recovery or an alternative to long-term suspension. The school aims to provide a safe and supportive learning environment to empower all students to graduate. The school offers morning and evening classes to accommodate students' work schedules. All credits are semester-long, as opposed to year-long. There are several Career & Technical Education (CTE) pathways for students.

School Successes and Celebrations

Student surveys given by the district consistently show that students at Desert Pride Academy feel safe in the school environment. There are few discipline issues, and staff consistently describe the school culture as family-like. The school does an exceptional job of tracking student progress toward graduation and providing support to keep students moving toward their goals. The school graduated 42 students in December of 2023. There is a solid instructional focus with high expectations for teachers and feedback on performance. Student data is analyzed frequently and consistently.

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:

Desert Pride Academy is staffed to provide excellent support for social and emotional issues. The school is student-oriented, continuously monitoring students' progress toward graduation and social and emotional health. Teachers meet weekly to discuss student progress and any identified areas where students need support. The administration holds a weekly meeting to review the progress of every student and determine what additional community supports might be necessary, such as child care, access to the food bank, and mental health services. La Clinica comes in weekly to provide services for mental and physical health. Because the school offers

such strong support for students, there are few discipline issues. Students who exhibit behavior issues in other schools thrive here.

Teachers use Google Classroom so that absent students can access lesson plans and assignments, watch supplementary videos to help them understand the content, and provide additional support for students who may be struggling.

Opportunities for Growth:

It is a common misconception in the broader community that students who attend Desert Pride have discipline issues, creating an inaccurate picture of what the school accomplishes. Desert Pride can combat this by sharing the successes of its students with their community.

As the school collects and analyzes data frequently, there is an opportunity to share data related to schoolwide and classroom-level instructional goals. Teachers, students, and families benefit from goal-setting and attainment transparency.

Potential Next Steps:

Desert Pride Academy might find ways to advertise the successes and accomplishments of its students. One example would be the creation of brochures and other materials to share with parents and community members, including testimonials from staff and students.

As students at the school continue to experience success in credit recovery, graduation, and post-secondary attainment, there will be an opportunity to build connections with alumni in the community and continue to share success stories.

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 collect data for each student on current assessments and grades, along with grades and assessments for the previous year, to understand trends. This data is stored in a spreadsheet and is shared schoolwide. Interventions and next steps are discussed in weekly Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) by subject area and whole school so that teachers who see students in different contexts can share strategies and successful interventions and scaffolds. In planning, content areas use common strategies across grade levels to address student needs.

Through the work with the Marzano Proficiency Scales, teachers identify the five levels of proficiency: not using, beginning, developing, applying, and sustaining. Then, using those levels, teachers ensure learning tasks are aligned with the proficiency scales. Students are also encouraged to rate themselves on the proficiency scales.

The school has several CTE pathways leading to student certification, such as CPR and childcare. Opportunities for certifications in these areas provide students an advantage when entering the job market after high school.

Opportunities for Growth:

There may be additional CTE pathways that could lead to more certification opportunities for students. High school students enjoy the opportunity to try multiple career paths through these types of courses. They also help students build skills and certifications that make them immediately employable upon graduation. Finally, these courses can be the foundation for powerful partnerships with local businesses and industries, opening opportunities for internships, apprenticeships, and employment pipelines.

Potential Next Steps:

A new campus greenhouse provides an exciting opportunity for potential agricultural career pathways and certifications. School leaders have invested in the infrastructure that will support the hands-on application of science content. Greenhouses also provide opportunities to explore community-supported agriculture and small business management. There is additional potential for context-embedded learning and community partnerships.

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:

Expectations for teachers are clear, and teachers are given professional development aligned to district priorities and school performance challenges. Professional development is not a "flavor of the month" model. It is purposeful and sustained over time, deepening as teachers gain more knowledge and experience. Highly effective teachers are recognized, and their expertise is leveraged to mentor and onboard new teachers. Research supports a structured mentor relationship for new teachers in the first three years. This model also allows teachers to develop leadership capacity for future administrative roles.

The administration monitors teachers' Google Classrooms and gives clear feedback on lesson planning and instruction aligned with professional development. Teachers appreciate the clear expectations and specific feedback.

Opportunities for Growth:

While teachers report receiving quality feedback, a more structured and systematic observation

and feedback cycle might offer more targeted and spiraled feedback. There is an opportunity to connect observations with the well-established weekly data analysis practice at Desert Pride. When teachers are enlisted as thought partners, they feel empowered to make instructional changes.

The existing mentor structure may also provide opportunities for teachers to share in peer and mentor observation cycles. Shared observation tools and identified look-fors improve consistency across grades and content areas, creating a more cohesive student experience.

Potential Next Steps:

Principal Ludwig recognizes the need to establish a consistent framework for observation and conducting feedback cycles, such as Paul Bambrick-Santoyo's six steps of effective feedback. A specific research-based observation tool will allow targeted, growth-producing feedback that recognizes progress and responds to individual needs. Creating a formal schedule for observations and feedback sessions allows face-to-face feedback and regular debriefs. Teachers who feel supported through targeted and specific feedback increase efficacy in their classroom practice.