

School Support and Readiness Assessment Summary Report

School: New Mexico Connections Academy	LEA: New Mexico Connections Academy
School Leader: Sandy Beery, Ed.D.	LEA Leader: Sandy Beery, Ed.D
SSRA Team Leader: Lizette Ridgeway	Date: April 5, 2024
School Description	
<p>New Mexico Connections Academy (NMCA), established in 2013, provides free online education for students in grades 4–12. The school focuses on offering personalized support and flexible scheduling. It serves 1423 students, about 800 in grades 9-12, and aims to expand further in the coming years, with a target enrollment of 2000 students. Certified teachers guide students using digital and physical resources, ensuring they receive a high-quality education supported by robust technology and Pearson-crafted curriculum tailored to student needs.</p> <p>The school has a diverse student body, with 56.9% identifying as Hispanic or Latino, 34.5% as White, and 5.3% as American Indian or Alaskan Native. In terms of gender, the student population is composed of 55% females and 45% males. Additionally, 22% of students receive special education services, 5% are covered under 504 plans, and 6% are identified as gifted. NMCA also has 180 English learners in the school.</p> <p>School Mission: <i>The mission of New Mexico Connections Academy is to help each 4–12th-grade student, throughout the state of New Mexico who needs an alternative to the traditional classroom, maximize his or her potential and meet the highest performance standards through a uniquely individualized learning programs, access to high-quality NM-certified teachers, and high parental involvement.</i></p> <p>School Vision: <i>NMCA is the innovative, cutting-edge school. NMCA is an engaged community fostering student success with an exemplary team that is committed to each other and our students.</i></p>	
School Successes and Celebrations	
<p>New Mexico Connections Academy is proud of its ability to offer a comprehensive support system for students, including teachers dedicated to their well-being. From social workers and counselors to college advisors and academic mentors, the school is committed to fostering an environment where every student feels supported and valued. The goal is to ensure that students have access to the assistance they need to thrive academically, emotionally, and socially.</p> <p>With a significant number of support staff, including advisors specifically for students who may be off-target and interventionists, New Mexico Connections Academy operates as a team</p>	

dedicated to student success. The school prioritizes collaboration and communication among the staff to ensure that students receive the support and personalized assistance to help each student reach their full potential.

The school culture at New Mexico Connections Academy emphasizes the importance of care and collaboration with teachers who prioritize building solid relationships with their students. The staff believes in the power of positive connections and their impact on student success. By empowering the professionals to drive their development, New Mexico Connections Academy fosters a community where everyone is invested in the collective goal of supporting students throughout their education at NMCA and preparing for college or career.

The leadership and faculty of NMCA are very committed to ensuring all students are successful. There is a strong culture of collaboration within and among teams to identify and support students. A frequent refrain at NMCA is a "*whatever it takes*" mindset. The early warning "watch list" and the multi-step monitoring and intervention process identify students at risk of failure. Additionally, NMCA offers dual credit and career exploration courses to increase post-secondary opportunities for their students. For example, a recent student graduated with a Bachelor's degree and enrolled in a Master's degree program after graduation.

DOMAIN 2: LEADERSHIP

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

Promising Practices:

The school strongly emphasizes systems, striving to be as dynamic and responsive as possible. Staff prioritize student needs and focus on the success of the whole child. All stakeholder groups concur that the leadership team at NMCA is solid and supportive.

Efforts to improve data quality have been underway, particularly in reducing the number of students counted as dropouts. Strategies include proactive engagement with students who plan to withdraw, seeking to understand their plans, and monitoring those who do leave to ensure they follow through enrolling elsewhere. While data collection is cohort-based and a year behind, improvements in cohort graduation rates are beginning to reflect the impact of implemented systems, especially among continually enrolled students. As a result of these systematic approaches, the school is witnessing positive effects, particularly in terms of improved graduation rates among cohorts and the successful management of student transitions. These efforts underscore the commitment to data-driven decision-making and continuous improvement in supporting student success.

Opportunities for Growth:

There may be an opportunity to further engage parents as active partners in their student's education. While the school provides a parent's page for monitoring student work, there is

potential to expand parent involvement through targeted communication and involvement initiatives. Hosting informational sessions, workshops, or online forums can empower parents as learning coaches, equipping them with the tools and resources to support their child's academic and graduation goals. The school can create a more supportive and collaborative learning environment by strengthening the partnership between parents and educators. It may be beneficial to recognize parents who effectively embrace role responsibilities and identify and provide additional support to learning coaches (parents/guardians) who are not playing active roles. School leadership can further support students by ensuring that learning coaches understand the critical nature of their role and have a complete understanding of their ongoing responsibilities.

Potential Next Steps:

The advisors continually work on parental engagement and plan to continue doing so. The school created the learning coach specialist program two years ago to get more support for students. The platform vendor has added additional resources within the system to support the learning coach role. Every family receives a welcome call at the beginning of the year to check in on and remind them about what they need to do. NMCA plans to continue to remind families of the available resources. Some Connections schools have created a parent support group/network; NMCA is currently exploring this.

Dr. Beery plans to actively involve parents in academic support meetings, formally soliciting parents' feedback about what would be helpful. She plans to be more intentional in creating these systems with parental input. She also plans to incorporate the New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) parental engagement requirements with more authenticity.

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 school's support of staff is significant, but there is also an emphasis on flexibility to ensure that these positions are deployed most effectively. To maintain this flexibility, the leadership team assesses whether the roles align with the needs of the student body and adjusts as necessary. For example, there has been a shift to establish structures that can better respond to student needs without the reliance on one individual. This includes implementing an advisory system where designated individuals oversee interventions like truancy discussions, which have expanded to encompass all grade levels for comprehensive support.

The school's professional development (PD) is designed to align with schoolwide goals and individual teams' specific objectives. During the three-day PD session in July, approximately 25%- 30% of the time is dedicated to whole-group delivery of information, while the remainder focuses on team engagement and team-driven topics. The focus is on organizing teams around

specific tasks rather than generic Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), empowering teams to identify and address their challenges. At the same time, leadership secures necessary resources and removes barriers to success. Groups are formed based on tasks or identified needs, allowing for targeted collaboration. New teachers receive support from mentors and team members within their grade level bands, facilitating a smooth transition into their roles and ensuring proficiency with instructional platforms.

The school provides ample opportunities for ongoing teacher development, including access to instructional coaches who delve into the finer details of teaching practices. Various avenues for professional growth are available, ranging from onboarding courses to monthly PD sessions covering essential topics such as first-year teacher mentorship, lesson planning, and structuring the school day. This personalized approach to professional development underscores the school's commitment to its educators in continuously enhancing their skills and effectiveness in the classroom.

The school's PD vendor switched their platform from one-size-fits-all to a menu. Rather than being offered PD based on years of teaching experience, teachers can now select from a list of the latest topics offered using an online approach. This is another resource that supports individualization of professional learning.

Opportunities for Growth:

The campus might continue to focus on enhancing teachers' understanding of assessing and teaching mastery of content standards through their vendor's comprehensive services and tools, allowing teachers to create standards-based assessments. By continuing to support teachers in deepening their knowledge and refining their instructional practices, teachers will be better equipped to provide rigorous and engaging live lessons and small group sessions, ultimately leading to more effective student learning outcomes. Emphasizing mastery-based learning and strong lesson design will ensure alignment with academic standards and promote a deeper understanding of the material among students.

Potential Next Steps:

The school leadership works with faculty annually to develop two to three schoolwide multi-year goals. This collaborative and transparent approach to schoolwide change ensures that teachers are informed and engaged participants. The latest goal-setting process is focused on moving to mastery. Custom assessments are integrated to address specific standards.

During the next iteration of this process, each teacher will develop at least one custom assessment, align it to the standards, and share it with colleagues, identifying how this can fit into more extensive student assignments. The leadership team will also have teachers examine the data to determine the alignment to the assessment. They will then look at how to use the insights to inform instruction.