

School Support and Readiness Assessment Monitoring Visit Summary Report

School: Desert Pride Academy	LEA: Gadsden Independent School District
School Leader: Diane Ludwig	LEA Leader: Travis Dempsey
SSRA Team Leader: Lizette Ridgeway	Date: May 22, 2024

School Successes and Celebrations

Desert Pride Academy proudly helped 42 students graduate this school year in December and aims to graduate an additional 103 students in May, totaling 145 graduates for the 2023-2024 academic year. Given that many of these students have experienced substantial challenges, their ability to persevere and graduate is the academy's greatest success and celebration. For many students, Desert Pride Academy represents their last chance to succeed academically or return after dropping out. Upon arrival, each student undergoes a thorough intake process, including discussing rules and expectations. The campus believes it must create an environment where students feel safe, supported, and believed in. Despite declining overall enrollment, graduation numbers have remained steady, underscoring the academy's commitment to student success.

A point of immense pride for Desert Pride Academy is the strong relationships built with students. These students are often referred from three comprehensive high schools for being behind in credits or facing significant discipline or attendance issues. At Desert Pride, these students find an environment where they can succeed for the first time. The staff's dedication to knowing each student personally and understanding their unique needs fosters a sense of self-belief in the students. Staff members greet students at the bus stop every morning, making them feel valued and understood. This year, the academy has had few discipline referrals.

Desert Pride Academy has a highly accomplished teaching staff, including two individuals with doctorate degrees and one National Board-certified teacher. These dedicated educators believe strongly in the school's direction and have contributed to a stable teaching environment year after year.

Progress Toward Next Steps Identified in SSRA Summary

SSRA Summary Next Step #1: Desert Pride Academy might find ways to advertise the successes and accomplishments of its students.

To combat the negative perceptions that Desert Pride Academy has faced, the school created a brochure to educate the community about its true nature and mission. The campus has made significant progress in this area by distributing it to the district's comprehensive high schools to share with parents and families when students are referred to Desert Pride. This communication aims to alleviate fears and misconceptions by providing clear information about the school and

helping families feel more comfortable and less apprehensive about the referral.

The brochure highlights quick facts and includes student testimonials that showcase the positive experiences at Desert Pride Academy. The school hopes to change outdated and negative perceptions by sharing these testimonials. Historically, the school struggled with a reputation for gang activity and disciplinary issues. However, Desert Pride has since evolved into an alternative credit recovery school where students report feeling very safe. This transformation is central to the message conveyed in the new brochure, now available at referring high schools to better inform and reassure incoming students and their families.

SSRA Summary Next Step #2: School leaders are investing in expanding vocational opportunities and a greenhouse to support the hands-on application of science content, opportunities to explore community-supported agriculture and small business management, and context-embedded learning and community partnerships.

Desert Pride Academy aims to ensure that students graduate with a diploma and a certification that will enhance their job prospects. The school has been focused on adding Career and Technical Education (CTE) pathways to its program. Currently, the school offers pathways in Health Care Occupations, Teacher Academy, and Cyber Security. Starting next school year, a new path in Agriculture will be introduced.

In addition to these pathways, Desert Pride Academy offers a class in Drone Technology and recently added the NM GRADS program, which supports students who are parents or expectant parents. The school hopes to establish a daycare on campus to help these students further. This semester, 48 students earned First Aid and CPR certification from the American Heart Association. In addition, 14 students passed the Precision Exams in Medical Anatomy, 14 in Child Development, one in Teacher Academy, and seven in Computer Essentials.

The school's greenhouse is also nearing completion and will be operational by next fall to support the new Agriculture Pathway. This new pathway will also be supported by a New Mexico State University agriculture professor, who has included Desert Pride Academy in a grant program. This collaboration will provide additional support for students in the pathway. The greenhouse's completion will also pave the way for more educational activities and pathways, such as greenhouse management and business math classes, enhancing students' practical and academic opportunities.

SSRA Summary Next Step #3: Principal Ludwig recognizes the need to establish a consistent observation framework and conduct feedback cycles, allowing targeted, growth-producing feedback to acknowledge progress and respond to individual needs.

The school leader at Desert Pride Academy has made progress in strengthening instructional practices through more intentional time allocation and classroom observations. Each morning, she conducts quick walkthroughs of the classrooms as she heads out for duty, and upon

returning, she takes more time to stop and observe the teachers' lessons and student activities. During these informal walkthroughs, she focuses on identifying which category of the instructional model the teachers are addressing, examining the lesson design, and noting the elements and strategies being used.

Teachers are expected to consistently address one of the components of the school's instructional model, incorporate one of the proficiency scales, and post their lesson objectives. This instructional model, mandated by the district, encompasses numerous strategies aligned with 43 elements. Teachers have received several hours of professional development on aligning these strategies with the standards.

The school leader has been providing feedback to teachers using the language and small bite-sized action steps tied back to the instructional model when she shares her feedback. This approach helps reinforce their understanding and guides them closer to the desired instructional outcomes. The focus has been ensuring teachers effectively utilize proficiency scales, standards, and data.

Every Wednesday, the school holds PLC meetings where teachers analyze student assessment data. The goal is to ensure teachers are comfortable accessing and interpreting this data to inform their instruction. They discuss how many students understand the material, what instructional changes are needed, and how to improve teaching methods to enhance student learning.

School Leader's Next Steps

Desert Pride Academy's principal has announced her retirement at the end of this academic year. She has been a dedicated leader, mainly focusing on the growth of the CTE program. She hopes that the new school leader will continue to prioritize vocational certifications and the expansion of CTE pathways, which have greatly benefited the students and prepared them for life after graduation.

Principal Ludwig is pleased that the Agriculture Pathway, the greenhouse, and the potential start of a farmer's market will be ready for the next academic year. This new pathway will offer exciting opportunities for the school to nurture and expand the CTE program further. She is confident that the new principal will continue the great work at Desert Pride Academy and is eager to see the school thrive under the new leadership.

In addition to the focus on CTE pathways, the retiring principal hopes that the work of coaching and supporting teachers will continue. This includes ongoing efforts to help teachers effectively use data to drive instruction and align standards. By emphasizing professional development and data-driven teaching strategies, the new school leader can build on the existing foundation and further enhance the educational experience for all students at Desert Pride Academy.