

# School Support and Readiness Assessment Summary Report

<b>School:</b> Zia Middle School	<b>LEA:</b> Las Cruces Public Schools
<b>School Leader:</b> Tisha Apodaca	<b>LEA Leader:</b> Mr. Ignacio Ruiz
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## School Description

Zia Middle School, located in Mesilla, New Mexico, serves approximately 620 students in grades six through eight, with additional enrollment in the Virtual Learning Academy and Student Success Academy. The school hosts a diverse population, including 130 English Learners (ELs) and 105 participants in its dual language program. Its robust special education department supports 165 students with various needs, including alternative educational settings, specific learning disabilities, and other designations. After significant staff turnover in recent years, Zia is fully staffed with certified teachers, including bilingual educators in core subjects, ensuring equitable instruction for all students. They currently have one bilingual educational assistant vacancy.

The school focuses on three key goals: academic growth in language arts and math for all students, achieving 90% attendance, and fostering family engagement with quarterly events. As a Disciplinary Literacy Model School for New Mexico, Zia emphasizes consistency in literacy practices across subjects using the Zia 3 framework: annotation symbols, Cornell Notes, and the claim, evidence, and explanation writing strategy. Students also engage with Lexia PowerUp to support literacy.

Led by a principal who transitioned from assistant principal this school year, Zia maintains a stable and visionary leadership team, reflecting its motto "Dream, Believe, Achieve." Grade-level initiatives align with this vision, with 6th graders focusing on dreams, 7th graders on belief, and 8th graders on achievement through monthly advisory sessions. This structured approach to academics, attendance, and student engagement highlights Zia's commitment to building a thriving school community.

## School Successes and Celebrations

Zia Middle School has much to celebrate this year, reflecting significant strides in student achievement, staff stability, and community engagement. Attendance and academic performance have steadily improved, while behaviors and classroom disruptions have notably decreased, thanks to effective systems and structures. Implementing a no-cell phone policy has boosted student engagement, reduced bullying, and improved social interactions inside and outside the classroom. Additionally, weekly grade checks for extracurricular participants have

enhanced accountability and reduced the number of failing students.

Zia is nearly fully staffed, with only one bilingual educational assistant position currently unfilled. The addition of bilingual-certified teachers has expanded scheduling opportunities for the next school year. The school's bilingual program has seen remarkable success, with 26 out of 29 students earning the pre-seal for biliteracy last year and Zia being one of only two middle schools offering students the chance to work toward the Seal of Biliteracy. Increased family engagement, particularly among bilingual families, is another highlight, driven by personal outreach from staff.

The music program is flourishing, with participation in band, orchestra, and choir more than doubling over the past year and a half. New offerings, including Mariachi and the school's first middle school guitar class, reflect the dedication of passionate music educators. These successes and a strong focus on engagement and accountability have created a thriving and dynamic environment at Zia Middle School.

## **DOMAIN 1: CULTURE & EQUITY**

### **Promising Practices:**

Zia Middle School is implementing several promising practices to foster a positive culture and promote equity, creating a safe and inclusive environment for students and staff. The administration has prioritized building a supportive culture through Fun Fridays and other attendance incentives, boosting morale and engagement among students and teachers. A strict cell phone ban has significantly improved classroom focus, reduced cyberbullying, and curbed behavioral issues, contributing to a safer and more welcoming atmosphere.

The school has minimized chaos by introducing effective systems and structures, allowing students and staff to focus on learning and growth. These changes have positively impacted the school community, with students expressing that they feel safer and parents echoing this sentiment in focus groups. The administration's commitment to creating a safe and equitable environment has strengthened trust, belonging, and pride among all stakeholders at Zia Middle School.

### **Opportunities for Growth:**

While culture and equity are notable strengths of Zia Middle School's administration, an opportunity for growth lies in reflecting on and clearly articulating the effective cultural practices already in place. By ensuring that all stakeholders understand and recognize these practices, the administration and staff can continue to build on their successes, further strengthening the school's positive culture and equitable environment.

### **Potential Next Steps:**

As a next step, Zia Middle School aims to reflect, with staff, on its effective cultural practices and ensure these are clearly articulated to all stakeholders. By highlighting and celebrating these positive practices, the school can strengthen its culture further and create more opportunities to recognize and celebrate the contributions of both staff and students, fostering a more profound sense of community and shared success. They plan to help students create a video to explain the true meaning of their school motto, “Dream, Believe, Achieve.” They want the students to be the “storytellers” of their school vision.

The principal will highlight celebrations and positive cultural practices in her weekly newsletter to staff and parents.

## **DOMAIN 2: LEADERSHIP**

### **Promising Practices:**

Zia Middle School demonstrates strong leadership practices emphasizing transparency, collaboration, and support. The administrative team is highly visible, compassionate, and organized, fostering an environment where staff feel safe and comfortable sharing ideas. The leadership promotes collaboration through frequent communication, attendance at weekly Professional Learning Community meetings (PLCs), and effective staff meetings. Initiatives such as the Beginning Teacher Support Group and an active leadership team of about 20 members further enhance staff engagement.

The principal, recognized for her openness to feedback and dedication to growth, recognizes that there needs to be a focus on a data-driven approach to planning. She independently developed the current 90-Day Plan and engaged the leadership team for review, with plans to include all stakeholders in crafting the Spring 2025 plan. Administrators prioritize classroom walkthroughs to provide timely feedback despite the challenges of managing competing demands. Their visible presence throughout the school, combined with structured leadership team meetings, ensures a focus on improving teaching, learning, and the overall school environment. The principal recognizes that this focus needs to be fine-tuned, with more structured systems implemented.

### **Opportunities for Growth:**

Opportunities for growth at Zia Middle School include making the 90-Day Plan a living, guiding document by involving the leadership team in its development, conducting a root cause analysis, and engaging staff and students for feedback. Sharing the plan more broadly with staff and creating systems to monitor progress would ensure alignment and transparency. Enhancing classroom walkthrough practices by protecting designated time, differentiating observations based on specific needs, and providing structured, growth-oriented feedback could further support instructional improvement.

Additionally, refining leadership structures, such as reducing the size of both the leadership and CORE teams, could foster more productive conversations and targeted decision-making.

Establishing structured time for leadership members to share meeting outcomes with their departments and grade-level teams would improve communication and collaboration. Other opportunities include facilitating access to incoming sixth-grade data for better transition planning and increasing cross-training among assistant principals to ensure a unified approach to leadership responsibilities.

**Potential Next Steps:**

To strengthen leadership practices, Zia Middle School plans to engage the leadership team in co-developing the Spring 90-Day Plan, fostering greater collaboration and shared ownership. Additionally, the school aims to establish a smaller leadership team that is distinct from the CORE team. This new team will focus on broader decision-making and address areas beyond the 90-Day Plan, enhancing the school’s capacity for comprehensive and responsive leadership.

The Zia administration will use the newly formed leadership team to create a plan for prioritizing the observation and feedback cycle and will begin implementing this plan in the Spring of 2025.

**DOMAIN 3: INSTRUCTIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE**

**Promising Practices:**

Zia Middle School has implemented several promising practices to enhance teaching and learning. Teachers engage in collaborative planning during PLC meetings, focusing on teachable moments and strategies to engage students. The school prioritizes data-driven instruction, supported by math content specialists and district resources, to address student needs across all subjects. Utilizing Marzano training, department heads and teachers integrate proficiency scales and evidence-based strategies into lesson planning, with regular visits from a Marzano consultant to provide ongoing guidance.

Support for new and alternative-licensure teachers is a priority, with a Beginning Teacher Support Team (BTST) fostering mentorship and collaboration. Teachers receive targeted training in sheltered instruction strategies like Conversation, Help, Activity, Movement, Participation, and Success (CHAMPS) and Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) to support ELs not enrolled in bilingual programs. Intervention classes for sixth and seventh graders who are two years behind provide tailored instruction using programs like Fusion, Lexia, and iReady, with frequent assessments to track progress. Additionally, 14-16 teachers, including special education language arts staff, participate in the Reading Apprenticeship program to improve literacy outcomes.

The school is also working to develop consistent common formative assessments (CFAs) and establish systems to address the needs of students in layer two instruction with district support in identifying appropriate interventions or referrals to the Student Assistance Team (SAT). These efforts, combined with weekly visits from district content specialists and a clear pathway to a dual-language program at the feeder high school, demonstrate a commitment to continuous

improvement and equitable instruction.

**Opportunities for Growth:**

Zia Middle School has several growth opportunities that can enhance teaching practices and student outcomes. While the principal values teacher autonomy in lesson planning, there is room to establish greater collaboration and intentionality in planning for student engagement. Encouraging teachers through PLC agendas to consistently include engagement strategies in their lesson plans can foster creative and confident teaching. Facilitating peer observation between teachers of various experiences and skills can further build capacity. Adopting the district-required three-tier lesson planning structure, including backward planning in two-week cycles, can help refine engagement strategies and formative assessments.

Professional development in data-driven instruction is essential, focusing on using data to plan interventions, acceleration, and rigorous instruction. Additional support for English-only teachers working with ELs is also needed, including training in sheltered instruction strategies and progress monitoring for dual-language programs. Conducting an inventory of staff training and providing further development in implementing the dual-language model with fidelity would strengthen support for ELs.

Developing a structured system for CFAs and intervention processes is another area for growth, including utilizing staff with EL expertise to support all students. Establishing schoolwide expectations for dual-language students to test in English and Spanish and monitoring fidelity to WIDA standards can enhance language equity.

Administrators can improve classroom walkthroughs by identifying rigor and engagement using data-informed “look-fors” that evolve based on observations. Transparent feedback meetings after walkthroughs can provide actionable growth-oriented insights for teachers. Lastly, increasing student ownership of their learning by helping them understand the relevance of assessments and their direct impact will promote deeper engagement and motivation. These steps will further strengthen instructional practices and outcomes at Zia Middle School.

**Potential Next Steps:**

The next steps for improving instructional infrastructure at Zia include integrating accountability into lesson planning and establishing a system for reviewing and discussing lesson plans during PLC meetings. The school will also explore the Heritage model in collaboration with the district bilingual department to better support dual language students and ELs not in the dual language program. Additionally, WIDA scores will be used to guide teachers in planning lessons that address key areas like listening and speaking, and professional development will focus on how to implement these strategies effectively while tracking their progress. Zia will explore strategies that increase student ownership of their learning to enhance instruction further.