

Date: August 21, 2019

Prepared By: Bedeaux

Purpose: Review implementation of school turnaround efforts at Dulce Elementary School.

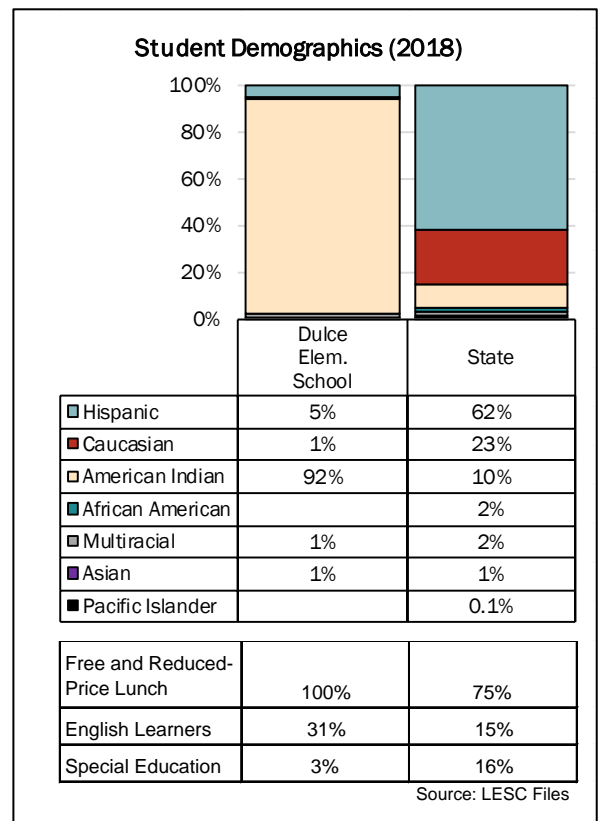
Witness: James Cammon, Interim Superintendent, Dulce Independent School District and Principal, Dulce Elementary School; Katarina Sandoval, Deputy Secretary of Academic Engagement and Student Success, PED.

Expected Outcome: Learn innovative strategies for improving academic outcomes for students with the greatest needs.

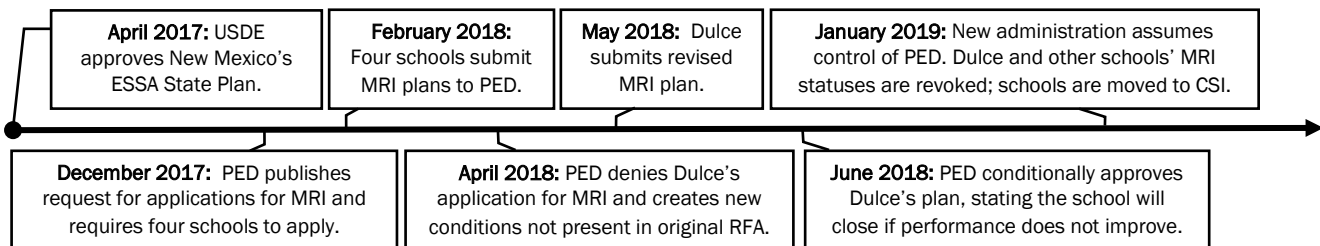
Dulce Public Schools Turnaround Efforts: Dulce Elementary School

With the passage of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the United States Department of Education (USDE) required states to author plans specifying how states would identify and support their lowest performing schools. To comply with the requirements of ESSA, the previous administration of the Public Education Department (PED) submitted a state plan describing its intent to identify schools with one or more underperforming subgroups of students for targeted support and improvement (TSI), and schools that underperform overall for comprehensive support and improvement (CSI).

In the New Mexico ESSA state plan, PED further described the immediate application of a final intensive tier of support, more rigorous interventions (MRI), for schools that received five to six consecutive years of a school grade of F. Hawthorne, Los Padillas, and Whittier elementary schools in Albuquerque and Dulce Elementary School in Dulce were identified as MRI schools. PED required Dulce Elementary School and the other three schools to complete intensive school improvement plans with a detailed budget describing how the schools would improve leadership, support human capital, reimagine the school program, and employ evidence-based interventions.



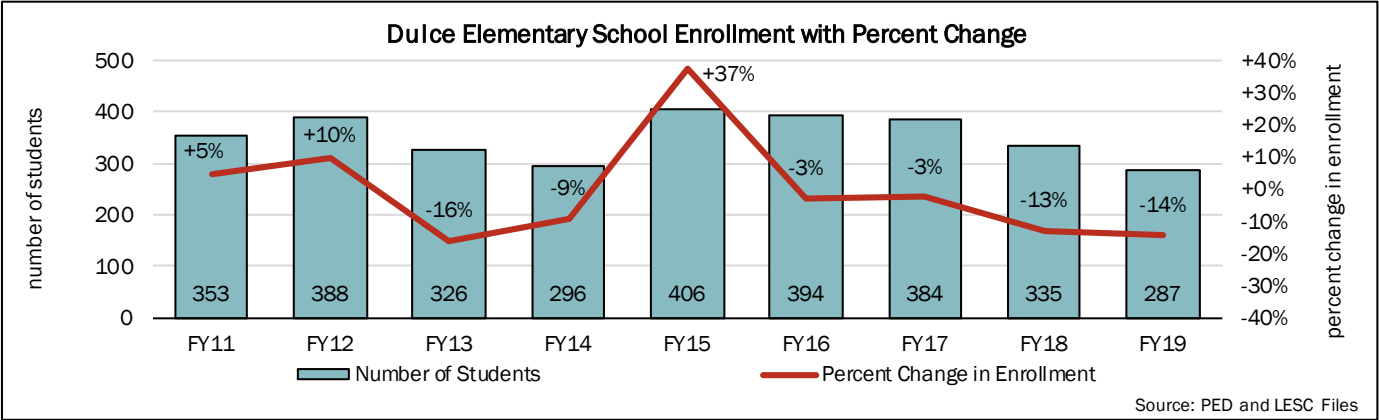
Timeline of Dulce Elementary School Improvement Status



PED’s current administration has since revoked the MRI status of all four schools, redesignating the schools as CSI. In amendments to the New Mexico ESSA state plan, PED describes its intent to support schools under CSI for three years before designating the schools MRI. However, Dulce Elementary School received \$775 thousand from a Title I funds set aside for ESSA implementation to begin school improvement efforts in FY19. The school plans to continue these improvement initiatives into FY20, but the school now needs to apply for CSI funding alongside approximately 90 other CSI schools statewide, reducing its school improvement grant by 90 percent to less than \$70 thousand for the coming school year.

Dulce Elementary School Improvement Platform

Under the leadership of the school’s principal, who also serves as the interim superintendent of Dulce Independent School District, Dulce Elementary School’s turnaround efforts emphasize opportunities and environments for meeting individual student needs through a variety of strategic initiatives. The school district has seen declining enrollment in recent years, with FY19 enrollment at the lowest in the school district’s recent history.



For this reason, Dulce Elementary School’s improvement strategies focus on building students’ foundations by improving the academic engagement of students. Other changes include providing aligned and relevant curriculum, improving the capacity of teachers in the school district, and increasing instructional time. The superintendent is also engaged in building relationships between the school district and the greater Dulce community, including strengthening the relationship between the school district and the Jicarilla Apache Nation.

Student Engagement. Several of the elementary school’s initiatives reflect an emphasis on student engagement, including the construction of a fitness course and a greenhouse, the implementation of a “human performance” physical education lab, the facilitation of Jicarilla language and culture fieldwork, a hands-on science workshop in conjunction with the Los Alamos National Laboratory Foundation, and an applied robotics and energy science lab. Additional hands-on learning opportunities will be facilitated by student mentors from Dulce High School.

Programs for At-Risk Students. Dulce Elementary School established a “transitional” classroom with one teacher and one educational assistant intended to serve students

showing high levels of trauma. While students with many adverse childhood experiences may struggle in a traditional classroom setting, students in the transitional classroom receive specialized social and emotional supports and receive the added benefit of a lower student-to-teacher ratio. At the district level, Dulce Independent School District also established an alternative school for middle and high school students for the 2019-2020 school year, which will focus on reengagement of students through place- and project-based instruction.

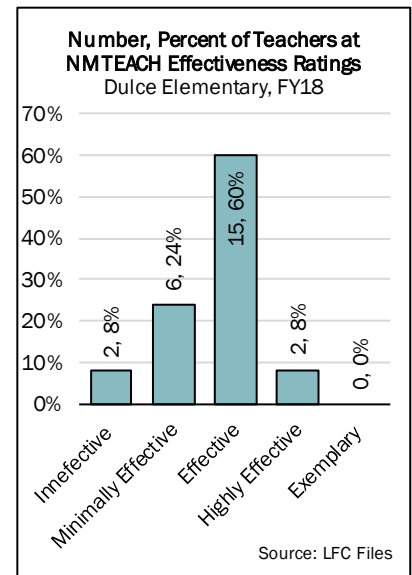
Curriculum and Assessments. Dulce Elementary School contracted with content provider Houghton Mifflin Harcourt to provide comprehensive school reform services. The contract provides for aligned curriculum from kindergarten through 12th grade and professional development services to assist teachers in how to best teach the content. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt also offers strong bilingual programs that emphasize cultural engagement and the embedded use of authentic texts. The publishing company is also providing student-level interventions with [the iRead platform](#), an adaptive reading software built on personalized progression for each student with embedded reading assessments throughout.

The iRead Platform, available for students on iPads and tablets, is built to emphasize student engagement, with colorful characters and interactive reading assessments.



Teachers and Leadership. Early in the turnaround process, Dulce Elementary School reported difficulty recruiting and retaining teachers to the school district. While the budget for the school’s MRI plan allowed for a large stipend for Dulce’s teachers, the isolated nature of the school district made the prospect unattractive for many highly qualified teachers. Additionally, with the onset of the school’s MRI plan, Dulce Elementary School staff report many teachers left the school district due to a caustic relationship with Dulce’s administrative leadership. Struggling to find New Mexico teachers, the school district turned its recruiting efforts outward and hired several international teachers and supported them in learning New Mexico standards. The school district will continue to provide ongoing professional development for all teachers throughout the school year.

Instructional Time. Dulce Elementary School extended its school day by 75 minutes, which equates to 1,245 instructional hours per year, or 255 hours more than the statutorily required 990 instructional hours per year. The schedule includes dedicated blocks of 90 minutes for English language arts, 90 minutes for math, 60 minutes for targeted interventions, and 60 minutes for instruction in the Jicarilla Apache language.



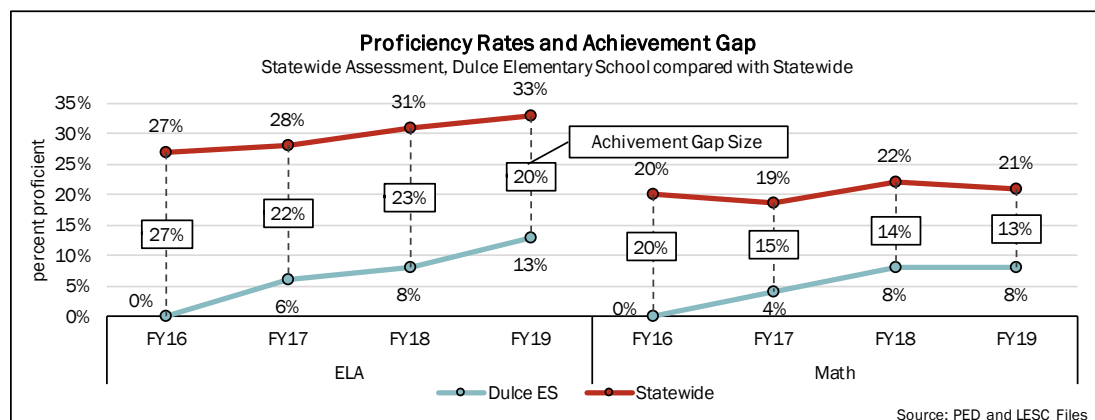
Administrative Reform and Community Engagement. Though not focused at the elementary school, several efforts within Dulce Independent School District are working to better use funds and improve the relationship between the school district and the community. Dulce Independent School District’s students are predominantly Native American due to the school district’s proximity to the Jicarilla Apache Nation. Dulce has committed to improving its relationship with Jicarilla Apache leadership, which has historically been tenuous, to meaningfully engage the Nation in students’ education. Additionally, the school district has begun reviewing administrative staffing and has found ways to eliminate redundant top-down administrative staff

and redirect resources toward students. The school district downsized associate superintendent positions and eliminated assistant principal roles in favor of deans of students and counselors, reemphasizing the district's commitment to focusing on students. Additionally, the district will begin conducting its own information technology services rather than contracting those services off-site, which will save the district approximately \$195 thousand per year.

Year One Achievement Results

Standardized assessment scores are useful to track student academic achievement and proficiency in third grade and up. Istation scores show literacy for students in kindergarten through second grade; however, due to a change in PED reporting techniques under the new administration, comparisons between 2018 and 2019 are extremely difficult without access to source data.

Because FY19 was the first year of implementation of Dulce's school turnaround efforts, only one year of standardized testing data is available to examine the impact of school turnaround efforts in Dulce. As shown in the graph below, the percent of students proficient in English language arts at Dulce Elementary School increased by 5 percentage points between FY18 and FY19, narrowing the literacy gap between Dulce and the rest of the state by 3 percentage points. The percent of students proficient in math held steady at 8 percent, but due to a statewide decrease in math proficiency, the achievement gap between Dulce Elementary School and the rest of the state decreased by 1 percentage point.



While the initial results are encouraging, additional years of achievement data are needed to identify a trend in student achievement. Before academic achievement is impacted, school improvement activities must first improve primary indicators of student success, including attendance and student engagement; students must be physically and mentally present at the school for learning to occur. Historically, LESC staff has had difficulty using attendance and discipline data due to inconsistent reporting techniques by school staff, and less than robust school quality data from the state's opportunity to learn survey. These domains are also integral to the elementary school's ability to conduct accurate needs assessment within its New Mexico Data, Assessment, Sustainability, and High Achievement (NM DASH) 90-day plan. For these reasons, Dulce Independent School District and PED's Priority Schools Bureau should continue work to improve data collection and reporting practices, especially centered in realms of student attendance, chronic absenteeism, disciplinary actions, and school quality and student engagement.

The New Mexico Spotlight Dashboard, the school accountability system slated to replace school grades in Fall 2019, is required by statute to report chronic absenteeism and the educational climate of a school.