

Two Collaborative Approaches to (Re) Designing a Middle and High School

In January, 2009, Albuquerque Public Schools Superintendent Brooks announced that the district would identify two schools that had failed to make AYP for five years. Those schools had high concentrations of economically disadvantaged minority students. The middle school selected, was a feeder school to the high school and both schools were Title I. Two years prior, the Albuquerque Teacher Federation (ATF) and the district administration worked collaboratively to develop a framework by which schools could avoid state take-over and carry out a teacher-based design process. This Framework of Possibilities was the key document that was the foundation for the design work for both schools. The authority for this re-design was a part of NCLB, Option 5.

The process of the re-design for both schools began in mid-February. Six teachers from each school were selected to meet with their Associate Superintendent and staff. Four of those teachers were selected by the ATF and two were selected by the principal of the school. These groups of teachers met weekly to develop specific activities (called teacher commitments) that each teacher would be required to engage in, as a condition of working at the school. Teachers would be paid an additional \$5000 stipend over the year for making a commitment to the school and engaging in the teacher commitment activities. Teachers who did not wish to make the commitments were assured a teaching position at another school. A District Design Team was made up of district leadership and ATF leadership. The District Design Team reviewed the drafts and made recommendations to the school design teams; they did not guide them in developing the design.

The teacher commitments were grouped into four areas; quality instruction, governance and leadership, resources and working conditions, and health and welfare of students. As the teacher group, known as the School Design Team, began work, they decided to seek input from four work groups. Those work groups were Parents and Community, Teachers at the School, a Student group and a Work Group consisting of members from all the groups. The Work Group included six teachers, two parents/community members and two students. The Work Group added the details to the framework and to the beginning of the teacher commitments.

The Associate Superintendent met with the Parent group three times between February and April. These meetings established the foundation of the parent input and involvement. Parents reviewed the work of the school design team and made recommendations. These recommendations were incorporated into the resulting document.

By mid-April, the commitment documents and plans were shared with the both schools' staffs. Teachers were given a week to review the commitments and decide whether to stay at the school. More than 90% of the teachers chose to stay and honor the commitments. A variety of options were available to teachers for selection of their commitment to the design.

The resulting design documents proposed new school governance structures, greater inclusion of English Language Learners and IEP Students, greater student choice and voice, professional development, extended day, teaming and collaboration, instructional, advisory, professionalism, feedback and evaluation, and governance. These design plans are currently being implemented.

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