



Regional Partnership School hits its stride

February 4, 2020

It has been 17 months since the Regional Partnership School (RPS) project was launched, combining Pojoaque Valley Schools, Laboratory and New Mexico Highlands University (NMHU) expertise and resources to improve teaching and learning (particularly in the crucial grades 4-8) in Pojoaque, and Mario Vigil, principal at Pojoaque Valley Middle School, is clear on the progress that's been made so far.

"Gone are the random acts of teacher professional development [from before the RPS] and we are now able to have a long-term focus towards academic improvement by working with all partners, including our Highlands partners," he says.

The RPS is the first school in New Mexico to partner strategically with a school district, a university school of education, and a major employer. It is also intended to be a model of innovation for New Mexico educators and policy makers.

Based on successful national model

The five-year program follows the professional development school approach that has enjoyed success across the country. In this model a school becomes a center of excellence in teacher development in much the same way as a teaching hospital fosters the development of doctors and medical research.

"The partnership has opened new opportunities for teachers to work together during mathematics content-knowledge and professional development and coaching sessions that are transformative," says Lorenzo Gonzales, another of the four education specialists from the Laboratory who are based at Pojoaque Valley Middle School.

In addition to supporting teacher development, the RPS is also focused on extended learning opportunities for students.

"Students begin to see math as a creative endeavor that they can enter and where they can be successful," says Randy Merker, education specialist with the Laboratory's Math and Science Academy. "They also come to know that their math abilities are not fixed and that they can grow their ability and math potential."

Rick Kitchen, professor of mathematics education at the University of Wyoming, leads a teacher professional development session as part of the RPS program.

More than mathematics

The focus goes beyond mathematics, however. “In English language arts (ELA), we are using data from our intervention programs to plan professional development for ELA, social studies, and elective teachers,” says Vigil, and teachers recently had a training session from NMHU on reading strategies.

The RPS is in the second year of development and implementation, and focuses on three key strategies:

1. supporting teacher development and advancement,
2. providing enhanced and extended learning opportunities for students, and
3. developing and implementing a teacher clinical residency program for teachers new to the profession.

Monthly professional learning sessions, and instructional coaching in the classroom support teacher development, along with 5 full-day math-teaching sessions for the 19 mathematics teachers in grades 4 through 8.

“We’ve also started a Master’s degree program in Mathematics and Teacher Leadership through New Mexico Highlands University which has an initial cohort of 8 teachers,” says Monica Martinez-Archuleta from the MSA.

The RPS provided a [Mindset Math Summer Camp](#) for 50 students in grades 6, 7, and 8 in the summer of 2019, and is currently offering an after-school program for middle school students. Both the camp and the after-school program also serve as an opportunity for teacher professional development.

An initial structure for a teacher clinical residency program for student teachers from NMHU has been developed, which has been used to start the process of seeking funding for its implementation from foundations and public agencies. Rep. Andrea Romero has [introduced a bill](#) in the New Mexico legislature to provide support for the RPS.

“We are looking forward to continued professional development and also to establish the residency model in which students in the college of education at NMHU can work alongside a master teacher at PVS,” says Vigil. “It is important that new teachers have the support required to be effective and successful, even before they begin teaching.”

Los Alamos National Laboratory

www.lanl.gov

(505) 667-7000

Los Alamos, NM

Managed by Triad National Security, LLC for the U.S Department of Energy's NNSA

