



Hiroshi Miyamura High School, Gallup-McKinley County Schools

District Overview:

Gallup, NM, with a population of 19,200, lies on Interstate 40 (Historic Route 66), 139 miles west of Albuquerque and 25 miles east of the Arizona border. The city is the seat of McKinley County in northwestern New Mexico and serves as the tourist hub for the famous Four Corners region.

The largest industries in Gallup, NM, are Health Care & Social Assistance (1,711 people), Educational Services (1,156 people), and Public Administration (823 people). Gallup is also the most significant Native American center in the Southwest and the ceremonial capital of Native America. There are many American peoples in the Gallup/Four Corners region. By far, the most numerous are the Navajo.

McKinley County has a population of approximately 75,000 residents, with 11,631 students enrolled in 34 schools. McKinley County includes the Navajo Nation and the Zuni Pueblo.

School Information:

Hiroshi Miyamura High School (HMHS) serves approximately 1200 students in grades 9-12. The student body is 92% minority enrollment, with about 65% American Indian/Alaskan Native and 24% Hispanic. 99% of the students attending HMHS are identified as Economically Disadvantaged.

Project Lead:

Jack McFarland, Director of Virtual and Career Learning

School Challenge

Hiroshi Miyamura High School (HMHS) in Gallup, New Mexico, struggled because many students did not see the relevance of their traditional high school coursework. School and district leaders believed this contributed to low levels of engagement and high levels of absenteeism resulting in a four-year graduation rate of just 69% during the 2016-17 school year.

To address this challenge, the school determined that they needed to do a better job ensuring students who chose not to attend college were prepared for high-skill, high-wage jobs in the local community. When the NMPED announced the option of participating in a three-year high school redesign grant program as an opportunity for high schools identified for targeted assistance, the district leaped at the chance to pursue its vision of redesigning courses around career pathways. Director McFarland said it best. *“Graduation was our motivation — it was pretty low in the district, and we thought if we could bring in pathways to make it more relevant for students, that would enhance and impact our graduation rates.”*

Actions Taken

The first step was to understand better the problems facing the school. To get things started, HMHS established a school-based redesign team. The team attended NMPED convenings where they learned from nationally recognized experts, state leaders, and other schools in the network. After each convening, the redesign team took their learning and potential next steps back to the school to share with the entire faculty to keep them engaged in the process and create a sense of ownership. This engagement was an essential step in the redesign process.

The HMHS redesign team approached the development of career pathways by first researching employment trends nationally, using the Kellogg School of Management annual report, and identifying the major employers in the Gallup, NM area. Based on these data, the team developed an exploratory sequence of three courses for freshman students in Engineering, Health, and Business Technology. The courses within the career pathways were designed around the project-based learning methodology and were cross-curricular, hands-on, and application-based. For example, in one project, students constructed a tiny home under the joint leadership of the engineering and math teachers.

After launching additional pathways, HMHS finally settled on the five career pathways that best represented student interests, enrollment, and opportunities for community internships: Health, Engineering, Small Business, Technology, and Art-Tech.

Successes

Following the implementation of redesign efforts, the school experienced dramatic increases in student attendance, and the four-year graduation rate skyrocketed from 69% in the 2016-17 school year to 82% in 2018-19. Notably, HMHS achieved this improvement despite the complications introduced by the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, the school now boasts several related successes, including improved teacher practice and new project-based learning courses connected to the local community. Furthermore, the school has transformed its vocational education program to focus on high-skill, high-wage jobs in the local community while offering more innovative dual-credit courses.

While school leadership recognizes there is still more work ahead, the team is excited about the level of improvement and the ability to offer more intentional opportunities for students to guide systemic school improvement efforts.

Challenges

One of the biggest challenges HMHS faced was effectively aligning the courses built around project-based learning with the district's standards-based curriculum. To overcome this challenge, the redesign team met biweekly to align the revised course content with their Year-At-A Glance (YAG) curriculum documents to meet their students' needs and address the requisite standards. Teachers and administrators also participated in this work, and HMHS leadership noted it served as a powerful teacher leadership development strategy. *"Working with the team,"* Arnel Dela Cruz, a science teacher, stated, *"Teachers are leaders within their particular pathway."*

Key Takeaways

The school leadership team indicated that the opportunity to work with national-level experts shortened their learning curve and increased the quality of the redesign of their courses. They noted that their lack of knowledge about what authentic project-based learning looks like was overcome by the professional development and guidance they received from external consultants they could access through the grant. Director McFarland stated, *"You need to work with an experienced*

consultant/organization to guide the team that's building it out....it helped us understand what's next and better anticipate future challenges.”

The HMHS redesign team also spoke to the value and benefit of the design year built into the grant program structure. School leaders stated that if it were not for the inclusion of a design year that provided time to learn and create a high-quality plan, they would not have progressed as quickly as they did.