



Cultivate Achievement Series

Spotlight on Ruidoso Municipal Schools, Ruidoso, New Mexico

Overview

In order to help schools and districts more easily analyze the trends in their data, Cultivate Education has created a wide range of tools, services, and partnerships. One of these is the Cultivate Achievement Series of customized data analytic tools, that allow schools and districts to quickly toggle between grade levels, cohorts of students, subgroups, and buildings – and then easily compare the results of those settings to state averages as well as any other districts or buildings of your choosing.

Using this tool, the Cultivate Education staff recently came across a district in New Mexico that has achieved, and sustained, an incredible level of success on their state assessment. Intrigued, we reached out to learn more about how they have gone about achieving these results, and help to shine the “Spotlight” on what has helped lead to their successes.

Spotlight on Ruidoso Municipal School District

Nestled in the Sacramento Mountains of New Mexico, Ruidoso Municipal School District is a mid-sized district serving about 2,000 students. The “Home of the Warriors”, Ruidoso is demographically similar to much of New Mexico, with a slightly higher percentage of Caucasian, American Indian, and Economically Disadvantaged Students, and a slightly lower percentage of English Language Learners and Hispanic Students.

What sets Ruidoso apart from most other school districts in New Mexico is how over the last 5 years they have simultaneously increased the percentage of students scoring at proficiency in both English Language Arts (ELA) and Math State Assessments, as well as drastically increased their graduation rates for all subgroups of students, including English Language Learners (ELL), Students with Disabilities (SWD), and American Indian.

State assessment results are illustrated in Figure 1 below. While both the *All Students* and *Economically Disadvantaged* groups in Ruidoso started out slightly below state average in 2015, both groups have gained significant ground over the last five years. In fact, much of this growth is being spearheaded by the Economically Disadvantaged subgroup, as indicated by their early success, with drastic and sustained growth starting in 2016.

Figure 1

Year	ELA		Math	
	All Students	Economically Disadvantaged	All Students	Economically Disadvantaged
2015	-4.5	-2.6	- 2.6	- 2.4
2016	-.06	+4.9	-0.4	+ 5.3
2017	-1.0	+3	-4	+ 0
2018	+1.0	+6	-1	+6
2019	+5.0	+9	+1	+6

* Data adapted by Cultivate Education from New Mexico Public Education Department’s ‘Achievement Data’ webpage




Percentage of Students Proficient on the Annual State Assessment in Ruidoso, as Compared to State Average of Same Subgroup



What makes the academic gains in Ruidoso even more noteworthy, is that it has been paired with a sharp rise in graduation rates that coincide with those academic gains. Interestingly, and even more remarkably, Ruidoso has been able to sustain this improvement over time, as illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2



Annual Graduation Percentage of Student Subgroups in Ruidoso (RMSD) and State Averages										
Cohort Year	All Students		American Indian		Hispanic		Economically Disadvantaged		SWD	
	RMSD	State	RMSD	State	RMSD	State	RMSD	State	RMSD	State
2015	70.1	68.6	67	62.9	72.5	67.2	59.9	63.5	51.9	62.9
2016	86	71	90	63	84	71	76	67	74	62
2017	82	71	78	61	81	71	77	66	64	62
2018	83.5	73.9	73.9	65.8	89.6	73.1	83.7	69	74.3	65.6
2019	84.7	74.8	85.7	69.6	81.7	74.4	84.3	69.7	74.4	64.6
5-year Change	+14.6	+6.2	+18.7	+6.7	+9.2	+7.2	+24.4	+6.2	+22.5	+1.7

One of the more impressive aspects of the graduation data is that the growth is not confined to one demographic subgroup, but rather all students, in all demographic subgroups are showing drastic and sustained improvements in graduation rates, including Students with Disabilities (SWD) and American Indian students.



With our interest peaked, Cultivate Education reached out to Dr. George Bickert, Superintendent of Ruidoso Municipal School District, to gain insights. Dr. Bickert was kind enough to share about Ruidoso’s journey of school improvement. Through their intentional efforts, Ruidoso has followed an emerging pathway towards comprehensive school improvement and closing achievement gaps. For schools that have been successful in achieving similar results, intentional and committed efforts fall into three distinct categories:

- **Cultivate Vision and Beliefs**
- **Cultivate Leadership and Capacity**
- **Cultivate Instruction and Support**



Cultivate Vision and Beliefs

Ruidoso has a clear mission that drives their education system; “Ruidoso Municipal School District in partnership with students, families and the community, ensures a rigorous and relevant student-centered learning environment that cultivates character, fosters academic excellence and embraces diversity.” Even more succinctly, Dr. Bickert shared his vision for the district, that “Warrior Nation will be the most dominant force in academics and athletics in the state of New Mexico!”, and they aren’t far off from reaching this.

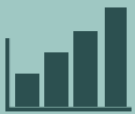


Bringing a focus on student achievement through alignment of resources and data analysis are critical components to achieving and sustaining the vision of Ruidoso Municipal School District. These components are extended throughout the entire organization, from the Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment department, to the district’s Business and Maintenance departments.



Cultivate Leadership and Capacity

Ruidoso has been intentional in refining their efforts to recruit, develop, retain, and sustain a more professional and student-centered staff. Staff are engaged in enacting the district’s vision by using mechanisms like elementary grade-level teams that collectively address student needs, and intra-department collaboration at the secondary level that address writing in a cross-curricular fashion.



Two initiatives which helped Ruidoso to raise academic achievement and graduation rates have entailed systemic changes to course enrollment options for students. Starting in 2013, after realizing that students struggled to get adequate math credits for graduation, Ruidoso began offering Algebra I to 8th graders for high school credit. Additionally, the district has been budgeting additional funds for credit recovery courses for students to get the requisite credits for graduation. While seemingly subtle changes to the system, achieving these two initiatives required staff buy-in, professional development, scheduling adjustments, and appropriate licensure in order to achieve and make available to the diverse needs of students. These examples illustrate that by clarifying the vision and direction the district is headed, increasing the capacity of their staff, and increasing opportunities for students, Ruidoso is able to create greater empowerment and creativity within their district’s culture, all the while improving student outcomes.



Cultivate Instruction and Supports

In Ruidoso, C-I-A stands for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, and is no small operation! While much of the data within this Spotlight has focused on the usage of summative data, there’s an even greater focus on utilizing formative assessment throughout the year to allow for mid-year instructional and curricular adjustments. Ruidoso utilizes a sophisticated cycle of data analysis, which enables the staff to swiftly identify the patterns that are showing up in their data, and translate that into curricular and instructional adjustments that are indicated. When new data comes in, a new cycle of improvement is launched.

“Understand that the C-I-A system requires extensive time and work in order to be done right with positive results”

*-
Dr. George Bickert,
Superintendent*



To achieve consistency and long-term improvement, every student in the district has a data folder, which carries with them as they transition between grades. All of this takes time, resources, professional expertise, and buy-in from staff. Dr. Bickert pointed out that creating buy-in for shifting towards a more data-driven education system is not always easy, their results point to it being well worth the effort.

What's Next?

For Ruidoso Municipal Schools, success is a continuous loop. Going forward, Ruidoso will continue to focus efforts on improving Prek-12 math achievement for all students, in all demographic subgroups, to better meet the needs and serve their growing community.

Learn More

To schedule a visit and/or learn more about Ruidoso Municipal School District's journey, contact Dr. George Bickert at bickertg@ruidososchools.org

For an in-depth analysis of your district's state assessment data, please visit Cultivate Education at www.cultivateeducation.org

Bibliography

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