



The New America School

Success

2017

Report

NAS Schools Show Dramatic Improvement on State Performance Framework

In 2016-17 all three New America Schools made marked improvement on their School Performance Framework (SPF) scores, with each coming approximately just one point away from landing in the Performance range—the highest rating schools can achieve.

“We are extremely proud of the work our principals, teachers and staff have done to contribute to a demonstrable improvement in outcomes for our students,” said NAS Superintendent Daniel McMinimee. “Our schools’ performance in this past year only further encourages us to continue our improvement path, and reach the goal of Performance in 2017-18.”

The School Performance Framework is

Colorado’s means of assessing schools’ impact upon their students. Each Colorado school is evaluated on the basis of how well students perform on various measures of Academic Achievement, Academic Growth, Student Engagement, and Post-secondary/Workforce Readiness. Based on the ratings earned under each category, schools may be assigned a “Plan Type” of Performance, Improvement, Priority Improvement, or Turnaround. For the past year, all three NAS schools were assigned the second highest Plan Type: Improvement.

An area where NAS particularly excelled was fostering academic growth. Students at all three schools outperformed their peers nationally in terms of improvement in reading,

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New America School-Colorado Names Dan McMinimee New Superintendent

The New America School (NAS)-Colorado Board of Directors is pleased to announce that Dan McMinimee, an established education leader, has taken the helm as the next NAS superintendent. Dan assumed the position on July 1, 2017 when Superintendent Dominic DiFelice retired after heading up the network of charter high schools since 2006.

“Dan’s strong leadership while changing the teaching and learning conditions for students in some of the most challenging circumstances was an important factor in our selection,” said Board Chair, Mary Hanewall. “He is passionate about serving the public education system, and New America School is pleased to partner his dedication and experience with our mission to help our students achieve academic success.”

McMinimee has dedicated his professional and personal life to advocating on behalf of students and staff, striving to create the conditions for their success. He has an extensive background in both school and district administration.

Before his hire as the superintendent for New America School-Colorado, Mr. McMinimee was the Superintendent of Schools in Jefferson County, Colorado. Prior to that, he was the Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Education, Director of High School Education,

and various other administrative roles in Douglas County School District.

Mr. McMinimee also served as founding Principal for Rock Canyon High School in Douglas County and as Principal of Sprague High School in Salem-Keizer School District in Oregon. He has also served as an Assistant Principal and an Athletic Director, rounding out a comprehensive administrative career.



Dan McMinimee

In addition to administrative practice, Mr. McMinimee possesses considerable teaching experience, having taught in Colorado at

Cherry Creek Public Schools, Boulder Valley Public Schools and at Adams State College and in Oregon at Beaverton Public Schools, Silverton Union School District and Salem-Keizer School District.

McMinimee said, “I am inspired by NAS’ unique student population and committed to ensuring that they have the same opportunities as their peers to succeed academically and post-graduation.”

“I am thankful to the Board of NAS-CO for affording me this opportunity, and I am looking forward to working with a great group of professionals focused on students, their needs and their success,” McMinimee added. “I cannot wait to get started on this new endeavor.” ■

NAS Board members

- **Mary Hanewall** (Chair), *Nonprofit Interim Executive/Leadership*
- **Jorge Loweree** (Vice Chair), *Senior Counsel for Congressman Jared Polis*
- **Matthew DeAngelis** (Treasurer), *Senior Vice President, Public Finance, D.A. Davidson & Co.*
- **Mara Gonzalez** (Secretary), *NAS Alumni*
- **Polly Baca**, *former State Senator and Community Leader*
- **William Bethke**, *Attorney, Kutz & Bethke, LLC*
- **Deborah Brackney**, *Executive Vice President, Mountain States Employers Council*
- **David Conde, PhD**, *President, North America Chamber of the Americas*
- **Dianne Lefly**, *Director of Instructional Research and Decision Analytics, Colorado Community College System*
- **Tomás Mejía**, *State Director, Migrant Education Program, Colorado Department of Education*
- **Gina Nocera**, *Executive Director, Jared Polis Foundation*
- **Dan McMinimee**, *Superintendent, non-voting*

Mission

The mission of The New America School is to empower new immigrants, English Language Learners and academically underserved students with the educational tools and support they need to maximize their potential, succeed, and live the American dream.

A Conversation with Dan McMinimee

What do you hope to accomplish at NAS?

First and foremost, I want to continue to build on the success and momentum of the organization. There are high quality people involved in all facets of our schools, from Board members to staff, that we can continue to leverage to get great results for our students.

I want to ensure that NAS-Colorado is viewed as a high quality choice for families, a place where student needs and ultimately their success are first place in our thoughts.

Finally, I want this to be a great place to work, a place that is seen as valuing and celebrating employees for their contributions to the success of our schools.

What do you see as the greatest challenges faced by the schools and how will you address these challenges?

I think the greatest challenge we face is the current stigma that is associated with being labeled an "Alternative Education Campus".

I want to assure you that this is not the Alternative Education campus that we all grew up with...the demands on our students for what they will be asked to do in their future is entirely different and more complex. Unless they have a diploma based on a rigorous and challenging program, they will struggle for the rest of their lives to make a living. In order to address this challenge, we need to continue the conversation with legislators, authorizers and the media to share our trials and triumphs, so they can understand our uniqueness and begin to fully support our vision and mission.

Another challenge is the sheer number of obstacles that some of our students and families face on a daily basis. Because of these realities of life, our staff needs to be highly trained not only in the delivery of content, but how to successfully intervene with highly impacted students. Our support staff and administration need the adequate funding to ensure safe and secure environments and resources to provide a strong foundation for learning.

In order to address this challenge we have to start with having a highly trained and talented work force. We have to find ways to make sure we are attracting and retaining excellent staff members, and providing them with multiple personalized opportunities to grow and learn so they can continue to be high caliber. Our buildings need to be as safe and functional as possible, providing a climate of caring and expectation of success.

Where do you see NAS in five years?

NAS-Colorado will be the leader in Colorado and the western United States in serving students. We will be seen as a "sure thing" to deliver on the promise of our mission statement: ... to empower new immigrants, English language learners and academically underserved students with the educational tools and support they need to maximize their potential, succeed and live the American dream. ■

MESSAGE from the Chair:

This June, 229 enthusiastic NAS students and their proud family members and friends celebrated Graduation 2017. They had good reason to be enthusiastic; close to 1/3 of the graduates had dropped out of their previous schools and 95% of them were "high-risk" upon entering NAS.

NAS founder Jared Polis greeted them from the podium. Rep. Polis had a vision in 2004 to establish charter high schools in Colorado and the Southwest that would serve new immigrants, English language learners, and academically underserved youth and that would maximize their potential to succeed and live the American dream.

Like the NAS graduates on stage in June, this year has been a time of transition for New America Schools. The national search process to replace outgoing superintendent Dominic DeFelice began in September of 2016 and was completed when the NAS Board unanimously voted to hire Dan McMinimee in late spring. The Board of Directors announced in May to the students and parents, faculty, the charters' authorizers, policy makers, the media, and the general public news of this exceptional talent recruited to take over as the helm of New America Schools-Colorado. Dan assumed his new responsibilities July 1.

The NAS Board, principals, faculty, and administration have worked closely for years with state education policy makers as a leading voice to develop a better solution for determining the true impact an AEC school has

on its students. That effort culminated in 2016 with a state review committee in which NAS's Jennifer Turnbull provided vital expertise as a member of that body.

The three Denver-area NAS schools made dramatic progress to raise academic performance, resulting in the Lakewood school almost attaining AEC Performance status (falling just 0.15 points short of this goal), and the Thornton and Lowry schools moving up to the AEC Improvement category. All three schools are very close to the next level: Performance! This remarkable achievement was due in large part

to the efforts of the three schools' teachers and administration—and the students they serve.

Charter schools undergo a periodic renewal authorization process; it is lengthy, comprehensive and demands everyone's attention. I am proud to announce that in December 2016 NAS-Lakewood was renewed for five years by the JeffCo School Board and NAS-Lowry was granted a two-year extension by the Charter School Institute with a provisional two additional years, provided the school meets specified milestones. The re-authorization process for NAS-Thornton is still pending with decisions to be made in November 2017.

Not only has NAS gone through transition at the superintendent level, it said farewell and extended considerable gratitude to Craig Cook, Chief of Business Operations for the entire NAS system nationwide. Craig was with NAS since 2006; he retired at the beginning of 2017. Controller Ray Petersen assumed leadership for

the NAS-Colorado financial operation under Craig's tutelage last January. Craig continues along with former superintendent Dominic DeFelice in a part-time role at the national network level, meaning the NAS-Colorado network continues to have access to Dominic and Craig's expertise and commitment.

NAS Board welcomed David Conde, Ph.D. to its membership in January. David is President for the North America Chamber of the Americas; he also serves on the NAS College Board of Directors. At the same time, the governance board acknowledged outgoing members Terry Whitney, Sarah Kurz, and past board chair for many years, Vinny Badolato. All three brought valuable expertise to the Board; after their departure, both Kurz and Whitney participated on the Superintendent Search Committee.

The students and families NAS serves have been impacted by the transition following the November presidential election. The Board and staff are committed to providing uninterrupted access to a free public education to all students, and put in place guidelines for administrators to implement to protect that right.

During the next year, the NAS Board is committed to working in partnership with our new superintendent, Dan McMinimee. We are excited address the critical issues Alternative Education Campuses face — accountability, financial stability, and a rigorous education for *all students* who wish to participate in the American dream. Most importantly, we all join together in strong support of our student population. As Rep. Polis said to the students and their families at graduation, "Tú eres América — You *are* America." ■



Mary Hanewall
Chair

Graduation: NAS Students on the Road to Success 2017



On June 2nd a class of 229 New America School students and their families and friends joined in celebrating the 2017 New America School Graduation Ceremonies.

The festivities, held at the Boettcher Concert Hall in Denver, kicked-off with the singing of the national anthem, led by New America School-Thornton graduating senior, Maren Torres Nava.

In addition to honoring the 229 graduating seniors, NAS principals Mike Epke, Jon Berninzoni and Annie Trujillo individually recognized 38 students that excelled academically, earning a position on the



Principal's List. Also acknowledged were the 105 graduates who earned a National Career Readiness Certificate along with their degrees.

Sharing in the heartwarming event, emceed by NAS Superintendent Dominic DiFelice, were NAS board members and dignitaries from the New America School-Lakewood's authorizing district: Jefferson County Public Schools Board Secretary Amanda Stevens and Achievement Director Tim Matlick congratulated each

NAS-Lakewood graduate personally as they received their diploma. Incoming NAS-Superintendent Dan McMinimee also greeted graduates on stage.

Senior speakers Christian Legarreta Sosa of NAS-Lakewood, Jacqueline Rivera Lopez, NAS-Lowry, and Fernando Hernandez, NAS-Thornton, inspired their peers and the audience with accounts of the challenges they faced, and overcame, on their way to graduating — and they each shared their dreams for the future (see below).

Ceremonies were bittersweet, however, as they marked the final turn as emcee by outgoing Superintendent Dominic DiFelice, who reminisced about first coming to NAS. "As an immigrant myself I had a lot of empathy working with English language learners and

disadvantaged student populations. So when I was approached by Jared Polis, founder of NAS, to come down to Denver and help build his charter school network it didn't take me long to agree and move my roots from Toronto to Denver."

DiFelice also thanked those who had helped him grow the New America Schools into a top tiered alternative high school serving a high-risk population. "Working with dedicated Board members who are so laser focused on our student population and how they can help the organization grow and mature stands out as being one of the big reasons for me to have stayed as long as I have. When I reflect on the principals, school staff and nonprofit staff that I have worked with over the past 11 years, I am indebted to their expertise, dedication and hard work on behalf of our students."

Surprising Mr. DiFelice at the podium was NAS founder and five term congressman Hon. Jared Polis. Polis presented a heartfelt thank you and farewell to DiFelice, regaling the audience with tales of how the outgoing superintendent, along with also retiring Chief of Business Operations had turned a fledgling and struggling school system into one which now contributes to the wellbeing and success of over 1,100 students annually. ■

Student Voices

Jacqueline Rivera Lopez

Class of 2017, we made it! We are on this stage ready to receive that one piece of paper we have worked doggedly for. While our challenges may have been different, our hunger for success was the same. Whether some of us learned a new language, got a second chance, or had to play big roles within our households, we now have the satisfaction to add this event to the list of our accomplishments.

Two years ago I believed all was lost and my dreams were insurmountable. I did not graduate with my class; it was a tough punch of reality. My family went through a financial hardship my senior year. With my two younger siblings depending on us, my parents and I worked tirelessly to make ends meet thus resulting in having to make a choice to leave high school.

However, that dose of reality led me to New America School. I hadn't realized that I was meant to experience all these great new opportunities New America School had to



Jacqueline Rivera Lopez

offer me. When I enrolled at the Lowry campus, determination and steadfastness were by my side. I remember thinking, "This is it, I will not become a dropout statistic."

Graduating high school is easier said than done and keeping that same enthusiasm was difficult. This school made sure I was committed and challenged. I was quickly part of a community that not only cared about their students, but also understood the problems we face everyday, sometimes just to get to school, given all our other responsibilities. We all worked together - students, teachers, staff, friends and family. Probably that is the best word for New America School - family. We are all here for the same goal and we work together to make that dream come true.

So tonight, with the knowledge that it was a difficult journey, with many obstacles along the way, we celebrate our success. We smile and thank all those people who made tonight

possible, and we ask that they stay by our side, because tomorrow we have new paths to follow. I speak for all, and give you my word, that we will continue to succeed and shine.

Fernando Hernandez



Fernando Hernandez

Four years ago high school was nothing but a forced obligation imposed by my parents and of course the state of Colorado. Slowly, my education developed into becoming my most prized possession after January 18th, 2016: the day my baby sister was born. This is when I realized my place of being a student was no more, but a teacher to the angel of my family. I decided to become a worthier example for my younger siblings and perhaps

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Looking Back at 10 Years of Service

Mayra Ramirez

What did you hope to accomplish at NAS?

I had just graduated from Occidental College with a Bachelor's degree in Sociology and Spanish in June of 2005. I received a phone call from my Daniel's Scholarship mentor who explained a little about the mission of The New America School. I was immediately attracted by its focus on immigrant students. I am the daughter of immigrant parents and an English is my second language. I knew first-hand how difficult it was to learn a new language and the support families need to navigate the educational system in this country. When I interviewed for the job I knew I was about to embark on a journey that would allow me to help others pursue their American Dream.



Mayra Ramirez

have not lost the passion for my job. Why at the end of the day they have changed my life more than I can ever change theirs. Working with high risk youth and English language learners keeps me humble and allows me to see this ever changing society and world in new perspectives. It is not always easy, there are days when I question if I'm having any kind of impact in their lives. However, there are always those students who through their life stories, their smiles, their tears and their gratitude consistently revive my love for counseling. I am grateful and honored to work with our students. Seeing them cross the graduation stage is what makes me want to come back year after year.

How have things changed in your time here?

The New America School has gone through many changes and overcome many obstacles.

My specific campus started in a strip mall. It has been in four different locations, each time improving more and more. My campus started off with about 100 students and now we serve over 350. Over the years we have managed to create an inclusive environment where every student can thrive.

What is your most rewarding experience at NAS?

Every graduation has been a rewarding experience. Every single student has a story to tell, many of them including tragedies, obstacles, losses and failure. Yet, every single student who walks across that stage is an example of their "ganas" or their desire to succeed. Their drive to become a contributing member of society and their eagerness to achieve their American Dream. Being able to be a small part of their enormous success is what fuels my passion to work at The New America School. ■

Lisa Collins

My name is Lisa Collins, and I started working at NAS Lowry in October 2004.

What first attracted you to work at NAS? What's kept you here for 10 years?

What first attracted me and continues to keep me at NAS are the incredible students who walk through our doors. Before teaching at NAS, I worked as an ESL teacher in private language schools in Los Angeles. I enjoyed working with these international students, but working with NAS students has truly been one of the strongest, most fulfilling opportunities of my life. NAS students have met and overcome so many obstacles in their lives. They show up every day, maybe a little tired from working the night shift, but willing to try and wanting to learn. NAS students support each other despite language barriers, differences in religion and culture. It is humbling to watch these students work on projects together. The level of engagement, commitment and courage is unlike anything I saw as a teacher in LA.

I have also been the recipient of tremendous kindness from my students. During my 13 years at NAS, I have experienced personal loss. My students were so patient and giving during



Lisa Collins

these times. I received cards and food when my father died. When I was managing a difficult pregnancy, my students would not allow me to pick things up or walk around during class. That brought me gifts after my son was born. Students often ask for permission to hold class celebrations honoring the arrival of new babies or to congratulate themselves on the completion of a challenging project or assignment. They have taught me the importance of coming together to celebrate and mourn as a community. NAS has an amazing group of students.

How have things changed in your time here?

We have an active support staff and better approach to post-secondary readiness. Starting a new school is difficult. Our first few years were marked by staff turnover. Teachers and administrators had to wear many hats. Today we have a great support staff who focus on educating the whole child and introducing strategies to teachers to meet the needs of our every changing student population. We also strive to concentrate on post-secondary readiness. We have a great curriculum for seniors that includes college tours and learning events that enables their success after high school. Our graduation numbers and number of

students entering college has been increasing significantly. All but two of my 30 seniors had applied and been accepted to college last year.

What is your most rewarding experience at NAS?

It is difficult to pick one experience out of so many. I will choose an all school field trip we took to *A Raisin in the Sun*. We tackled this historic play as a school but really dug in deep in the theater class I was teaching at the time. We read the play as a class and then performed scenes for an audience. One of my students was a struggling reader. It took some convincing to get him to perform at all. On the day of our performance, his partner did not come to class. The student wanted to quit and not perform at all. I told him I would do the scene with him. We did the scene together, and I of course botched several of the lines. My student covered for me and the audience loved it. I was sitting close to this student in the theater the day we went downtown to see the professionals perform *A Raisin in the Sun*. When the student's scene came up, I looked over at him. He was mouthing the lines with the actor on the stage. It was so amazing to observe! What makes this story all the more memorable was that the following year this student was deported to Mexico. ■

A Fond Farewell

2016-17 was a watershed year for the New America School. Superintendent Dominic DiFelice and Chief of Business Operations Craig Cook, who have led the organization since 2006, both retired.

Over the course of DiFelice's and Cook's tenure, the schools have matured incredibly. A new Colorado school was founded in Lakewood. The student population has grown from approximately 450 students to 1,100 students annually, and, more significantly our graduating class has increased from 16 in 2006 to the 229 graduates earning their diplomas in 2017.

In addition, after years of bouncing from rental building to rental building, our Lakewood and Thornton schools are now housed in state-of-the-art completely refurbished facilities, giving our students a comfortable, safe place to learn while at the same time helping to revitalize the surrounding community.

Finally, under their leadership, the New America School has developed clear and defined protocols and policies, our curriculum has been revised a number of times to constantly meet the needs of our changing demographics, data



NAS Board Chair Mary Hanewell recognizes outgoing superintendent Dominic DeFelice.

“Dominic and Craig came to NAS at a time when their leadership was critical to our survival. They gave more than 11 years of their expertise and stability: they poured their passion into our mission. Today, we are so much stronger because of them.”

—Mary Hanewall

collection and analysis is as good as, if not better than any district in the country, our professional development continues to address the changing needs of our staff, we have won numerous competitive state and federal grants that bring upwards of 3-5 additional staff members to each of our schools annually, and our student successes have grown considerably.

With this as backdrop, upon leaving, DiFelice could confidently say, “I would rank our schools at the very top echelons when compared to similar schools across the country.” ■

REFLECTIONS: from Dominic DiFelice

The last 11 years or so have been my most rewarding and fulfilling in education. When I first arrived here, the schools were newly established and a great deal of work still needed to be done to establish the necessary infrastructure for the schools to grow and be successful. With the help of Craig Cook, the principals and staff, the three Denver schools have achieved a commendable performance status that speaks to the successes of our students.

We have struggled in the last number of years to prove to our key stakeholders that we are meeting the needs of a very challenged population. However, with ongoing advocacy with the Colorado Department of Education, our authorizers and state legislators, we now have a fairer accountability framework that can better judge our academic and growth measures with the student population we serve.

Our founder Jared Polis had additional goals for me and others to accomplish. He wanted us to replicate similar charter schools in the Southwestern United States. This goal has kept us busy for a number of years. We have established two schools in New Mexico, one in Albuquerque and one in Las Cruces—both highly successfully and both serving very similar student populations to our three schools in Denver. We did receive a 15 year charter in Phoenix that unfortunately did not pan out for extenuating circumstances. We also have a pending charter in Las Vegas that is still up for adjudication.

Another goal was to establish an Intensive English College that would allow non-English residents to gain English proficiency that would ultimately lead to citizenship. In order to make tuition more affordable for this group we started and continue to serve students from abroad. This helps to defray costs for residents and green card holders to pay a significantly reduced tuition to the College. Today we serve close to 320 students at the College and provide resources to the nonprofit organization that ultimately brings additional resources to our high schools. ■

SCHOLARSHIPS [continued from page 8]

Fleeing from war-torn Eritrea, **Asmait Tsegay** lived for five years in an Ethiopian refugee camp before her family was granted status and moved to Colorado. Her experience in the camp, witnessing the sick and dying, motivated Asmait to learn English and study so that she can one day become a healthcare professional. Asmait aspires to eventually return to the camp to help those in need.

Though she spoke almost no English upon



Asmait Tsegay

entering the US three years ago, step by step, Asmait has learned to speak and write English deftly, and has developed an appreciation for American culture—as well as the cultures represented by the students from across the world who attend NAS-Lowry.

Her Newcomer English teacher Kelly Boxer explains, “When Asmait started at NAS, she had very limited English language abilities. Her work ethic and depth of character were immediately apparent as

she quickly demonstrated her commitment to learning. Within her first two years in the United States, Asmait became a translator for her community members.”

Asmait volunteers as a translator for both the Colorado African Organization and the Colorado Health Network. She also volunteers at the University of Colorado Hospital, working with nurse assistants to comfort patients and visitors. At NAS, she played volleyball and soccer, where she was a peer-chosen captain. ■

NAS-Thornton Students Place Second in State STEM Competition

This spring, a six member team from NAS-Thornton participated in the Destination Imagination (DI) Tournament, and despite being a first time competitor, won first place in the Colorado North Regional competition, second in the Colorado State competition, and qualified for the Global Destination Imagination Tournament in Tennessee.

11th grader Tho Le describes his experience, "Destination Imagination was the most fun competition I have ever participated. It allowed me to make a difference that I've never thought would be possible and it changed a big part of me and who I want to be. The memories and experiences I made with my team were incredible and by getting myself in a situation where I need to do everything as a team taught me a lot about friendship."

Graduating senior Janet Reyna agrees, "Overall I would like to say that Destination Imagination was a wonderful opportunity. Not only did it help my college and work applications look better, I learned a lot of valuable information out of this experience. It helped me to learn team strategies and team composition. If I had the opportunity to continue doing DI I would gladly."

Destination Imagination is a global nonprofit educational organization based on 21st century skills and STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math). The



The NAS-Thornton Destination Imagination Team.

competitions start in kindergarten and run all the way to college level. The participants need to use their collaborative and creative problem-solving skills to accomplish a challenge. They are evaluated in creativity, imagination, time management, teamwork and the integration of ideas in one masterpiece.

The NAS-Thornton team competed in the Engineering High School Challenge, building a tower with only balsa wood and glue. The tower weighed less than 25 grams and held 600 pounds of mass. The team needed to create a story that addressed a past or present issue between two nations and how

they work together to solve the problem. The NAS-Thornton team decided to create a story about the relevant and current event topic of immigration. The Thornton students discussed when the first colonists came to North America. They emphasized that we are all immigrants and immigrants were part of the United States' foundation.

"We doubted our ideas at first," Reyna continues, "but managed to get placed in a higher rank than we expected. Anyone can accomplish anything if you put your mind to it and that's the great feeling I had when Destination Imagination reached its final peak for us. I'll be honest I was confused and not focused when I started this opportunity, yet as time went on the pieces just fit together and you realize how it all works out."

Unfortunately, the high cost of travel prevented NAS-Thornton from sending its award winning team to the global tournament and competing against teams from throughout the world. But, we will be fielding a team again in 2017-18, and hope to achieve similar results. If you would like to invest in these students' future, please call 303-894-3160 and support NAS-Thornton Destination Imagination. ■

STUDENT VOICES [continued from page 3]

ignite motivation in them so they can strive to be in the same position I am now: a graduate. At 14, the thought of enrolling in a huge high school triggered enormous anxiety. I feared that I would be overlooked in the chaos of a massive high school. That led me to the New America School Denver (well back when it was Denver) all thanks to my brother who explained to me what NAS is all about. By that I refer to the smaller environment, good relationships/communication amongst teachers and students, and most importantly: teachers who care.

I was not the student I am today. I thought it was okay to ditch school and to fail classes, but my teachers, counselors, as well as my principals pushed me to stay focused on what is ahead for me because they saw and they knew that I harbored potential just as they see it in every student they meet and teach. I refuse to stand up here and speak as if I am the only graduate here who has a struggle. I won't because I know that if I struggled, a lot of my classmates and other students from the other New Americas are struggling right along with me. I have witnessed my classmates attending school from 8:15 A.M to 6:45 P.M just to work their

way to walking across this stage here tonight. I know because I was one of them.

Many like to see life as a story and we are the authors. Not me though. I like to see life as fine art, an exquisite painting we unconsciously work on day and night. I'm positive that many here along with me see this as the end of the canvas. No. This is where the MASTERPIECE begins! After today we throw out the Acrylics and bring in the oils, we add to our canvas and craft that which has not yet been crafted. Be the difference you want to see in the world, let us all nourish the growth and cultivate the abundance we yearn for. Class of 2017, we hold the fate of this world's future in our hands; today we join hands with the class of 2016, 2015 and years prior to grab hold of this world and revitalize this diminished society. But it is up to each of us to seek and repair the damage done. For the class of 2017 I leave you this quote: "Go and make interesting mistakes, make amazing mistakes, make glorious and magnificent mistakes. Break rules. Leave the world more interesting for your being here. Make. Good. Art."

~Neil Gaiman ■

PERFORMANCE [continued from page 1]

math and language usage, as demonstrated by a national percentile ranking of high-risk students. The AEC SPF analysis also shows that NAS greatly increased our capacity to promote Post-secondary and Workplace Readiness, in large part through the adoption and delivery of the National Career Readiness Certificate program last year.

Still much room for improvement remains.

NAS School Performance Framework Plan Type			
	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18 Goal
Lowry	Priority Improvement	Improvement	Performance
	44.83	58.88	60.00
Thornton	Priority Improvement	Improvement	Performance
	43.79	59.03	60.00
Lakewood	Improvement	Improvement	Performance
	57.52	59.85	60.00

"While we recognize our growth as a school system is indeed a notable achievement," McMinimee continued, "we certainly will not rest on our laurels. We will continue our improvement efforts in the years to come, concentrating on such areas as fostering academic achievement and student engagement." ■

FEATURED INITIATIVE: Student-led Positive Behavioral Supports

This spring, with the support of the Colorado Department of Education, NAS has implemented two initiatives designed to promote positive student behaviors. In each initiative, Bullying Prevention and Education and Restorative Practices, students play a major role in encouraging their peers to create a school climate conducive to learning and responsibility.



NAS-Thornton student, Itzel Aquino Sacramento, explains the principles of Restorative Practices.

Lakewood's Noelle Jackman explains, "We all know that acts of bullying—aggression, intimidation, violence—stand in the way of students' ability to learn and perform in school. What we're working to create is a school-wide

expectation of respect, and we're tasking a student leadership team to help teach what that means. These students will both model appropriate behavior and act in partnership with faculty as mediators when inappropriate behaviors occur."

To develop students' leadership capacities,

confidence, sense of solidarity with each other, NAS-Lowry and NAS-Lakewood are scheduling a series of Leadership Development excursions throughout the year.

Similarly, NAS-Thornton and NAS-Lowry

have begun the process of using school-based restorative practices a standard first response, when appropriate, to student misconduct. "RP" moves away from harmful and counter-productive zero-tolerance discipline policies and toward collaborative approaches to addressing conflict in our schools. Again, students will help lead the process, running Connection Circles—a shared approach to problem solving—and also participating in mediation efforts to resolve issues among their peers.

"NAS-Thornton recognizes the importance of building a positive, healthy school climate," states Thornton's Jamie Garrido. "We need to partner with students to help them learn from their mistakes. Restorative Practices are the vehicle through which we will promote this learning." ■

Public, private and individual gifts facilitate robust student services and programming

The **Babies Now Foundation** granted NAS-Lowry \$2,000 to purchase diapers for use by our students' and their families' infants.

The **Temple Hoyne Buell Foundation** has funded *¡Cuidate!*, a teen pregnancy and HIV prevention curriculum, at NAS-Lakewood for the past seven years, increasing its gift to \$32,500 for calendar year 2017.

2016-17 marked the final year of the \$730,000 **School Counselor Corps** grant, funded by the **Colorado Department of Education's Postsecondary Readiness Office**. Year 4 funding of \$203,300 allowed NAS to continue efforts to improve our students' postsecondary education and workforce readiness.

Marking its final year, the **Colorado Department of Education's Dropout Prevention and Re-engagement Office's** five-year, two million dollar **21st Century Community Learning Centers (CLC)** grant (made possible through the U.S. Department of Education), allowed each NAS school to operate out-of-school-time academic and enrichment programs. NAS received \$270,000 in support during Year 5.

Now in its second year, the CDE **Student Re-engagement Grant Program** (a program of the **Dropout Prevention and Re-engagement Office**) awarded NAS \$115,579 to provide daily academic interventions to students.

The **Colorado Department of Education's Expelled and At-Risk Student Services** program granted NAS-Lakewood and NAS-Lowry a total of \$177,519 over three years (\$39,752 during 2016-17) to implement **Bullying Prevention and Education** programming.

The **Colorado Department of Education's Expelled and At-Risk Student Services** program granted NAS-Thornton and NAS-Lowry a total of \$85,726 over eighteen months

(\$29,710 during 2016-17) to implement **Restorative Practices** at each school.

The **Colorado Department of Education's Office of Student Health Services** renewed its funding of the **NAS School Health Professional Grant** program, granting NAS \$377,240 over the next three years to increase the availability of substance abuse prevention programs.

Comedy Works, Inc. held a fundraiser to support the NAS-Lakewood's 21st Century Community Learning Center, raising \$3,625.

The **Sheila Fortune Foundation** renewed its support of the NAS-Thornton **Spoken Word Poetry** program with a grant of \$4,000.

Community member **Melly Kinnard** donated \$10,000 to the **NAS Colorado Educational Opportunity Scholarship Fund** to be used specifically to support NAS-Lowry alumni in their pursuit of higher education.

The **Jared Polis Foundation** provided \$2,000 in funding to the **NAS Emergency Fund** to support students experiencing short-term financial crises. The JPF also granted NAS teacher, Jennifer Pedersen, \$1,435, to purchase iPad Minis for use in her Social Studies and Foreign Language classes.

The **Polis-Schutz Family Foundation** provided financial support for deserving NAS students to carry on their studies after graduation (see page 8) with a donation of \$25,000. In addition, The Polis-Schutz Family Foundation donated \$26,000 to support efforts to replicate the NAS educational model.

The **U.S. Department of Education**, via a pass-through grant to the **Colorado Department of Education**, granted NAS-Lowry \$33,525 to conduct a **Diagnostic Review** of the school and then utilize this review to develop a focused **School Improvement and Action Plan**.

NAS received \$61,482 in funding through

the **U.S. Schools and Libraries E-Rate**

program, a federal initiative which assists schools that enroll a high percentage of low income students pay for telecommunications and internet service.

Once again, 100% of **NAS Board Members** contributed to NAS during fiscal year 2016-2017. Members also helped raise \$53,274 to support NAS programs and students.

More than 50 local organizations, agencies and individuals provided in-kind goods and services to NAS in 2016-2017.

In total, gifts from public and private sources, corporations and individuals exclusive of in-kind contributions totaled in excess of \$1,293,705 for the year, NAS' highest fundraising total ever. ■

FUNDING CONTRIBUTIONS

SUPPORT NAS

Your support will enable the New America School to continue to provide high quality education to English Language Learners and non-traditional students. If you would like to visit our school or hear more about our programs and how your generosity can make a huge difference in the lives of NAS students, contact David Rein, drein@newamericaschool.org, 303.894.3160.

2017 Colorado Educational Opportunity Scholarship Recipients

Maricela Castaneda moved to the US when she was five years old. School wasn't always so easy for Maricela. She dropped out when she was in 9th grade and had a child the next year. But, as she describes, "My pregnancy made me realize that I needed to turn my life around, not only for me, but for my baby, too.... When my son was six months old, I decided to go back to school so I could become the role model he deserved."



Maricela Castaneda

Because she was so behind in credits, Maricela took both day and night classes at NAS-Thornton, and she enrolled in Friday school. The results, Maricela graduated in three years.

While at NAS, she was a school leader: As a member of the parenting club, she often acted as a peer mentor for other new mothers; she participated in Coffee Talk, a student group responsible for generating ideas for school improvement; and she helped plan school celebrations such as the Halloween festival—all while working weekends to support her family.

Maricela will pursue a career in the medical sciences, hoping one day to become a pediatrician. Her science and math teacher, Angela Mundt has no doubt Maricela will succeed, writing, "She has a genuine passion for biology and approaches labs and experiments with a genuine sense of enthusiasm and inquiry."

Nestor Casares was born in the United States, but his family moved back to Mexico when he was very young. While in Mexico, he discovered his love of computers, be it programming or construction—Nestor built his first PC when he was fifteen.



Nestor Casares

Unfortunately, Nestor also discovered that the educational opportunities available to him in Durango were limited. As such, he moved back to Colorado on his own in August 2016. He worked two jobs to support himself and to send small amounts of money to his parents when he was able to. And, he enrolled at NAS-Lowry where in just one short year he advanced almost three grade levels in Reading. This tremendous growth will enable Nestor to enroll in the Community College of Denver next year, where he will be the first in his family to go to college. At CCD Nestor will take foundational courses before transferring to a four year institution

where he can study computer engineering.

Inspired by a teacher who helped him learn English, **Christian Legarreta Sosa** hopes in turn to become an English language instructor.



Christian Legarreta Sosa

Christian wants to motivate English Language Learners "to be the best students and individuals they can be and hope one day to make a difference in someone's life like my teacher made in mine." Though he was born in Colorado, Christian lived most of his life in Mexico. When he was 17, he decided to return to United States on his own, in order to further his education and chances for future success. It was not easy. As an unaccompanied minor away from his family, he had to work full time to support himself. Still, he excelled academically, gaining acceptance to Regis University and being awarded a substantial financial aid package. He also earned the respect of his peers, becoming a leader of the NAS-Lakewood Student Council.

Erick Maldonado immigrated to the United States from El Salvador when he was 15, in part fleeing from pressure to join a gang. Shortly thereafter, Erick enrolled in NAS-Lowry, where he maintained a 4.0 Grade Point Average, earned multiple honor roll and attendance awards, and a National Career Readiness Certificate. The captain of the Lowry boys' soccer team, Erick has



Erick Maldonado

also worked steadfastly to help his teammates maintain their academic eligibility.

Erick hopes to become a dental hygienist and has taken significant steps to ensure he attains this goal. He enrolled concurrently in the Dental Assistance program at Pickens Technical College while completing his studies at NAS. Erick also participated in a state competition called Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA), where he won first place in both the Dental Terminology Test and Skills and the Dental Science competition.

New America School-Thornton's **Manuel Perez** is a standout leader in the classroom, and is looked to by his peers and classmates



Manuel Perez

for support and approval during class discussions and debates. As his Language Arts teacher Christina Matteucci writes, "Manuel is thirsty for knowledge and his leadership style influences his peers to participate and put their

best effort forth."

In addition to excelling in school, Manuel has demonstrated a strong desire to make a positive contribution to our society and community, volunteering with organizations such as A Precious Child and The GrowHouse. While at NAS he effectively juggled his volunteer obligations with academic demands, earning the school's highest ACT score as well as a National Career Readiness Certificate. He will be the first in his family to pursue a college education, enrolling at Front Range Community College to study business, with hopes of becoming an entrepreneur and successful business owner.

[continued on page 5]

Learn More about the New America School on –



<https://www.youtube.com/user/NewAmericaSchoolVid>