

Mesilla Park Elementary becomes sixth community school in Las Cruces



LAS CRUCES – Mesilla Park Elementary is the latest school to be recognized as a community school in Las Cruces, the sixth in the Las Cruces Public Schools district.

The community school designation is intended to go a step further than a normal school's duties, providing community-wide support, resources and guidance. Mesilla Park will be joining the ranks of Lynn Community Middle

School, Booker T. Washington Community Elementary, MacArthur Community Elementary, Doña Ana Community Elementary and Alameda Community Elementary.

"This announcement changes things considerably for our Mesilla Park community," said Naomi Chavez Lopez, who took over as LCPS's district community schools manager in December.

Chavez Lopez said the school applied with the state for the designation last summer and is part of LCPS Superintendent Ralph Ramos's strategic plan to eventually have all LCPS schools designated as community schools.

"It is a lengthy and intentional process," Chavez Lopez said. "Meetings happen with school staff to assess the unique needs of Mesilla Park, and input from families is essential to determine what specific needs will be prioritized and resourced with community partners."

Those partners, according to Chavez Lopez, include local organizations like Families and Youth Plus, the Boys and Girls Club, and Casa de Peregrinos.

"Their focus in our community schools is to assist with general needs, like food insecurity, healthcare and classroom enrichment," Chavez Lopez said. "But Mesilla Park will decide what the custom fit is for their school community through conversations with staff and families."

Chavez Lopez explained that one possible need in the Mesilla Park community could be groceries and "basic life needs," since the school — on Union Avenue between the city limits of Las Cruces and the town of Mesilla — is so rural.

"These schools truly are the hub of their communities," said Carla Ragan, executive director for federal programs at LCPS, the division that oversees

community schools. "The possibilities Mesilla Park has to connect and sustain their families to outside resources will have a tremendous impact on students' performance in the classroom. Studies show that kids who have all their needs met do better in school and have overall more positive outcomes."

More on community schools:

[Gov. Lujan Grisham touts community schools in visit to Lynn Middle School](#)
[Community schools aim to cover 'every basic need.' Here's how they do it in New Mexico](#)

[Community schools in New Mexico provided invaluable services amid pandemic, advocates say](#)

Ragan pointed to the success of an after-school program at Booker T. Washington which provides a hot meal and tutoring services for students. The program is made possible through grant funding and assistance from Families and Youth Plus.

Chavez Lopez said one of the biggest changes families at Mesilla Park will see is the addition of a dedicated community schools coordinator that will be working directly with families to provide assistance. It is a paradigm shift, she says, that is here to stay at LCPS.

"The community schools model is the future of education for our district," she said.

LCPS will be giving an update on community schools at Tuesday night's board meeting that starts at 6 p.m. View the meeting at [livestream.com/lcpstv](https://www.lcpstv.com/lcpstv).