



Albuquerque Sign Language Academy

A Dual Language Approach to Serving Students with Diverse Backgrounds and Abilities

APRIL 25, 2019 – CHRISTI BATAMULA

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On a cool January morning at 7:50 a.m., Albuquerque Sign Language Academy (ASLA), a charter school in Albuquerque, New Mexico, comes to life as students begin arriving for another day of learning. In the front of the small school building, families are greeted by Rafe Martinez, the school's executive director, as they drop off their children for the school day. In the rear of the school, the alley is lined with school buses filled with eager, chatting children. (Although it is not required of charter schools in New Mexico, ASLA provides free transportation for students.) As the school doors open, a wave of children enter the building. Staff and teachers line the hallways to greet the children and provide assistance to students who need physical help getting off the bus or into the building. Upon entry, the children move their name tag on a board in the hallway just inside the back door to indicate if they will be eating the school lunch, or if they brought their own lunch from home. An educational assistant stands midway down the hallway greeting each child while handing them breakfast—a carton of milk, a small packaged pastry, a cheese stick, and a piece of fruit. The children take their breakfast and make their way to their classrooms.

As the students begin to settle in to start their day, conversations are being held in English, Spanish, or using

American Sign Language (ASL). ASLA is a dual language English–ASL school, and half of the students at ASLA are deaf or hard of hearing, while the other half are hearing. Many students at the school also have disabilities other than or in addition to being deaf or hard of hearing, with 56 percent of students qualifying for an Individualized Education Program (IEP), compared to 17 percent in the local school district.¹ The racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity of the student body is a microcosm of Albuquerque. ASLA's focus on diversity of ability and language, and commitment to welcoming all students, has resulted in the school serving a cross-section of students from the area in a way that few public schools do nationally.

The Exceptional Quality of Albuquerque Sign Language Academy

ASLA is the first ASL–English dual language program to be certified by the state of New Mexico. The school is committed to serving a student body that is 50 percent hearing, 50 percent deaf and hard-of-hearing—and that model has also translated into diversity of ability, race, and socioeconomic status.

This report can be found online at: <https://tcf.org/content/report/albuquerque-sign-language-academy-dual-language-approach-serving-students-diverse-backgrounds-abilities/>

Prior to ASLA's opening in 2010, a dual language ASL–English setting was not an option for students in Albuquerque and the surrounding area—as, indeed, it remains a rare option for students across the country, despite its potential benefits for deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing students alike.

ASLA strives to incorporate best practices for serving students with disabilities while addressing the unique concerns of deaf and hard of hearing students and their families. Research has repeatedly shown that, for students with most disabilities, inclusive learning environments—in contrast to segregated classrooms—provide many benefits, including increased achievement, improved attendance and graduation rates, and higher rates of employment after graduation.² Moreover, inclusive classrooms also promote benefits for students without disabilities, such as reduced prejudiced and increased sense of belonging.³

The needs and experiences of the deaf community and of the disability community as a whole do not completely correspond, however. Research suggests that the unique language needs of students who are deaf or hard of hearing require special consideration, because these students may struggle to interact academically and socially with hearing teachers and peers in inclusive learning environments.⁴

Language and communication access is a very sensitive topic in deaf education, because without language access, children are isolated and learning is stifled. Typically, students who are deaf or hard of hearing and communicate through ASL are faced with educational opportunities at opposite ends of the spectrum: they can attend a general education setting, with the support of an interpreter, in which few teachers or peers sign; or they can attend a program exclusively for deaf students. Placing an interpreter in a general education classroom is not always enough support to meet the visual language and learning needs of deaf and hard of hearing students, nor does it account for their social needs. Programs that serve exclusively deaf and hard of hearing students, on the other hand, do not provide those students with opportunities to interact with hearing peers. It also does not allow them to attend the same school as their hearing siblings.

Deaf students with additional disabilities often face more difficult challenges in finding educational settings that meet their needs, as they may not have access to either a general education setting with an interpreter or a program exclusively for deaf students. Placement decisions often are reduced to identifying which disability is the prevailing or primary disability, and then placing the child in the setting designed for that specific disability. For example, a deaf child with severe autism may be placed in an autistic classroom because the deaf education program does not have the resources to meet their needs, even though the program for autistic students might not address the language and social needs of a student who communicates using ASL.

ASLA was born out of parents' desire for a dual language approach that would provide ASL and English as supports for all members of an integrated student body. ASLA enrolls deaf and hard of hearing students—regardless of any additional disabilities that those students may have—as well as hearing students, whether those hearing students are pursuing ASL to communicate with deaf family members, have special needs and rely on ASL for their own communication, or are simply interested in learning ASL to become bilingual. “We don't want to be a niche school,” Martinez explains. “We just want to be a good school.”

History and Demographics: If You Build It, They Will Come

The birth of Rafe Martinez's second child, Ben, was anything but typical. From the moment he was born, he was fighting for his life. Medical interventions and Ben's fighting drive helped him survive. Shortly after his birth, Ben's parents were informed their son was deaf. They were referred to the early intervention program in Albuquerque. His parents were advised not to use sign language with him if they wanted him to learn to talk. They followed this advice and started him in the early learning program. While Ben was still under a year old, the staff at the program informed the family that Ben was not a good candidate for their program. He was not making eye contact correctly and not developing as expected in order to be successful in their program. The family then turned to sign language and did not give up their search to find the best educational placement for Ben.

After Ben attended a preschool for deaf and hard of hearing students, his parents began to look for elementary school options. As ASLA's charter application explains, prior to ASLA's opening, families with deaf children in the Albuquerque area had three main options in the public system. One option was to attend a traditional public school in their local school district, typically with individual supports that include an interpreter but usually do not include access to teachers or peers who are skilled in ASL. A second option for students in Albuquerque, and those in the surrounding districts who transfer in as space is available, was to attend the Albuquerque Public School's District Program for Deaf and Hard of Hearing. At the elementary school level, this program included a cohort of about thirty deaf and hard of hearing students in a school of 550 students total. Students in the district program received more access to teachers with sign language skills and deaf and hard of hearing peers, but the program did not support teaching ASL to hearing students. This meant that deaf and hard of hearing students might still have few peers with whom they could communicate directly. It also meant that hearing students who wanted to learn sign language for their own communication needs because of additional disabilities, in order to communicate with family members, or out of their own interest were often not eligible for the program. A third option was that students could attend the New Mexico School for the Deaf in Santa Fe, about an hour drive from Albuquerque. The New Mexico School for the Deaf offered access to peers and teachers who are skilled in ASL, but the school did not accept hearing students or students with certain additional disabilities.⁵

Dissatisfied with these options, the Martinez family connected with other families whom they had met through their early intervention program. Some of these families shared their desire not to send their child to school an hour away, and some families had also been shut out of schooling options due to the unique needs of their child. Through this group of advocating parents meeting to brainstorm ideals for their children's' education, ASLA was born. Ben's father, Rafe Martinez—an educator with two decades of experience as a teacher, coach, and administrator—helped found the school and later became the executive director.

ASLA was started as a charter school to meet an immediate and urgent need for deaf children, children who need ASL to communicate, and their families, filling a gap these families encountered in the rest of the public education system. Unlike most local school systems, ASLA would provide deaf and hard of hearing students with access to teachers and peers with whom they could communicate directly. Unlike the district program for deaf and hard of hearing students, ASLA would support the development of sign language skills for all students and staff members, hearing and deaf or hard of hearing. And unlike the New Mexico School for the Deaf, ASLA would integrate deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing students and accept all students regardless of disability.

ASLA opened in 2010 serving thirty-six students in grades K–4. As of 2016–17, the school had grown to serve ninety-two students in grades K–8, with a small high school program serving an additional five students.⁶

Diversity across Multiple Measures

The student body at ASLA is, by design, diverse in terms of language and ability. Half of the student body is deaf or hard of hearing, and half is hearing. Fifty-six percent of students qualify for IEPs, including students whose primary disability is deafness or hard of hearing, deaf or hard of hearing students with additional disabilities, and hearing students with disabilities. Thirty-two percent of students are English learners.⁷

Even though it is not a primary goal of the school, ASLA is also one of the most socioeconomically and racially diverse schools in Albuquerque, with diversity closely mirroring that of the district overall. "I don't think we do anything special to attract racially diverse families," Martinez explains. "This is Albuquerque." But although Albuquerque is a diverse city, few schools actually reflect that diversity. Overall enrollment in Albuquerque Public Schools is 69 percent low income (eligible for free or reduced-price lunch), but individual schools range from 0 percent to 100 percent low income. ASLA is one of relatively few schools—charter or district—that falls close to the district average, with 65 percent of

students classified as low income. Only twenty-two of Albuquerque's more than 150 district schools fall within ten percentage points above or below the district average for low-income enrollment.⁸

In terms of racial and ethnic diversity, Albuquerque Public Schools' enrollment is 67 percent Hispanic and 21 percent white, with the other 12 percent of students a mix of American Indian, Asian, black, or other/multiple races and ethnicities. ASLA again reflects the overall diversity of the district with a student body that is 61 percent Hispanic, 27 percent white, and 12 percent from other racial or ethnic groups. Less than a quarter of the district schools in Albuquerque fall within ten percentage points above or below the district average for enrollment of Hispanic students and white students, the two largest racial/ethnic groups in the district.⁹

Student Outcomes

When ASLA students took PARCC tests and participated in the state school grading system for the first time in 2017, only 20 percent of students passed in reading and 17 percent in math. The school received a D rating in the state's A–F grading system that year.¹⁰ But the following year, ASLA saw growth across almost all student subgroups and subjects and earned a B rating.¹¹ In the 2018 PARCC results, students with disabilities at ASLA significantly outperformed their peers across the district and state: 23 percent of students with disabilities at ASLA passed the reading test, compared to 9 percent of students with disabilities in Albuquerque Public Schools and 14 percent statewide; and 21 percent passed in math, compared to just 5 percent in the district and 7 percent across the state.¹² Although improving, these overall passing rates are still low, and there remains a gap in proficiency for students with and without disabilities at ASLA; however, that gap is much smaller than the difference seen in the state and district.

While ASLA continues to work to boost outcomes for all students, the school also looks beyond the state tests to measure its progress. In the accountability plan established as part of its charter, ASLA uses several nationally recognized assessments, including the NWEA MAP and

the Developmental Reading Assessment, 2nd Edition (DRA2), and looks at progress for students broken down into five cohorts:

1. general education students and students with a state special education classification of A or B, requiring “minimal” or “moderate” special education, in grades K–4;¹³
2. general education students and students with a state special education classification of A or B in grades 5–8;
3. students with a state special education classification of C or D, requiring an “extensive” or “maximum” amount of special education, grades K–4;
4. students with a state special education classification of C or D in grades 5–8; and
5. students with a state special education classification of C or D and language or hearing impairments in grades K–12.

As of the 2017–18 school year, all of these cohorts were meeting or exceeding the standards established in the charter for reading, and three of the five met or exceeded the standards in math.¹⁴ Improving math outcomes for the two cohorts that are currently short of their goals—general education and A/B grades 5–8 and C/D grades K–4—is a focus for the school. In addition to working to revise and strengthen their math curriculum, ASLA is also engaged in research partnerships to build their academic program, such as their involvement in research for a literacy assessment tool using ASL and English with Penn State University and the University of Minnesota.

Albuquerque Sign Language Academy's Unique Approach: The Family that Learns Together

The mission of ASLA is:

to improve educational outcomes for deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing students in the greater Albuquerque area by providing a rigorous standards-based bilingual educational program which utilizes American Sign Language and English to achieve academic excellence, support family involvement, and promote multicultural community partnerships.¹⁵

Each student has a unique story about how they got to the school and why they attend. One middle school student shared that she comes to ASLA because of her brother, who is hard of hearing. She said “He really appreciates that we can communicate. He is less frustrated now.” Many of the students commented that they love that they can be at the school with their siblings.

Another girl was brought to tears as she recalled her journey to ASLA. “When I was born, I had ear infections and was hard of hearing. In school, my teachers thought I was dumb. I attended several different schools and had to leave each one due to bullying.” She choked back tears as she continued, “Then we found this school and I was nervous because I did not know any sign. Now I love it here.” After she finished sharing, her classmates all around her, both deaf and hearing, rubbed her back and patted her shoulders in support.

Another student interviewed about her ASLA experience is hearing, but is nonverbal. Although the student can communicate using ASL, the public schools would not allow the student to go into the deaf and hard of hearing program because the child is not deaf.

For a different family, who recently moved to the United States from Chad as refugees, ASLA simply provided a welcoming small school community.

ASLA is a school designed to meet the needs of all of these students and families.

A Small School for a Tight-Knit Community

ASLA's school building has a capacity of one hundred students, and new students are admitted each year through a random lottery, with about forty students on the waitlist. Although the school building is quite small, ASLA utilizes space well, with every available space having a purpose. Officially, there are ten classrooms in the school, but almost every space is multipurpose. For example, there is a small nook by the rear entrance of the building where the children enter from the bus that is also set up for a computer lab. The computers are not only used for classroom needs, but also used for students and families to learn American Sign Language through online programs. Smaller auxiliary rooms are used for small group work and testing purposes. Despite the limited physical space, the staff and students are cheerful and flexible as they change space and share space throughout the day.

A Dual Language Approach

The dual language model is central to ASLA's educational approach.¹⁶ At ASLA, all students are expected to learn and use sign language. For families with a mix of hearing and deaf or hard of hearing family members, this model supports building communication skills that can be used both in school and out of school. Many families at ASLA with deaf or hard of hearing children struggled with the idea of having one of their children attend a different school than the rest of their children before finding ASLA.

All of the staff are expected to use ASL as well. In addition to meeting the state criteria for teaching, all of the teachers and staff at ASLA must have a minimum level 3 on the American Sign Language Proficiency Interview, which is graded on a scale of 0 to 5, or they must continue taking ASL classes until they attain that level.¹⁷ Most of the teachers are hearing, but one teacher and several educational assistants are deaf and serve as deaf role models in the classrooms.

Martinez clarified that they are not “language purists” in their use of ASL, as they are primarily interested in meeting the communication needs of each student. Knowing sign language is not a requirement for entering the school, and students can enroll at any time during their academic careers. In any given year, new students—deaf, hard of hearing, or hearing—come into ASLA with little to no sign language background. The teachers meet the students where they are while they learn sign language and content, using ASL, English, or simultaneous communication at different times depending on the student’s need.

Family Engagement

Family engagement is another cornerstone of ASLA’s approach. Families are very committed to the school and invested in what is happening in the school. Martinez reported that some families initially enter the doors upon acceptance through the lottery “ready to fight,” as they are accustomed to having to fight to try to get services for their child. All too familiar with IEP meetings full of tears and frustration, families soon realize that ASLA is not a place where they will have to fight for learning support—it is a place where they are part of a team. One mother shared that, through the years, she had received many negative phone calls from her severely autistic son’s previous school, calling her to say he was acting out and that she needed to leave work to pick him up. Recently, she got a call from ASLA. She was nervous as she answered, but the call was from the teacher to tell her how sweet and bright her son was.

Another mother cried as she shared the family’s frustration in finding a school for their son. In second grade, during a parent-teacher conference at a previous school, their child’s teacher told the parents that she didn’t like kids and then said that their son was failing. “An irate teacher that worked with our son pushed us to check out ASLA. We started here and all of a sudden, it was like the light bulb came on for our son.”

A father, whom Martinez describes as very leery when his child first came to ASLA, shared his journey to the school and his family’s experiences there:

When my daughter was born, we knew she had issues. There were no educational services for her in Taos, New Mexico. There was only a program that was more like daycare than education. We made the leap and moved our family to Albuquerque. My daughter went to New Mexico School for the Deaf (NMSD) [in Santa Fe]. It is a good school, but she was not doing well there despite us being involved in the deaf community, having deaf role models, and support with other families there. One day at the ballpark, I met Mr. Martinez. He told me he was going to come to NMSD for my daughter’s upcoming IEP meeting. After that, my family moved to ASLA. My older daughter fought and said she didn’t want to come. We told her to do a trial for a week. She did and she loved it. Many kids stare when they see people with disabilities. Our kids don’t stare at people with disabilities in the community. They help them. My older daughter is now graduated from ASLA and is in high school, excelling because of the education [at ASLA]. This school offers education in being a good citizen. There is no school that compares to ASLA.

ASLA encourages and supports family engagement as one of their top priorities. They have a full time, trilingual (English, Spanish, and ASL) staff member dedicated to family communication and support. She is available to families at any time to answer questions or offer support and guidance. Families are welcome and encouraged to come to the school at any time. Families can be seen hanging out in the front lobby of the school during drop off and pick up times. ASLA holds regularly scheduled family nights where families can come and learn not only about what their child is learning, but also access important information such as how to ensure internet safety for their children. They also learn the ASL to have important conversations at home as their child learns and grows. The school offers ASL classes for all of the families. They work hard to not only emphasize the importance of using ASL with their deaf child, but also making sure the family is engaged and learning ASL as well.

Growing Pains and Opportunities

The mascot of ASLA is the honey badger, a carnivorous mammal native to parts of Africa and Asia that is known for its tenacity. A child of one of the founders was very into

animals and nature. While an inpatient in the hospital, the child shared that the mascot should be a honey badger because they are so strong and tough. The adults agreed that this was the perfect animal to represent ASLA. Indeed, toughness has been an important characteristic not only for many students at ASLA who have faced personal and medical challenges, but also for the administration and teachers as they work to address challenges and improve their model. ASLA is still figuring out how best to support language development and meet the needs of all students in an integrated environment. Moreover, the school is increasingly striving to find ways to connect to a broader conversation about improving education for students with disabilities and all students.

Developing a Dual Language and Inclusion Model

Although the vision for ASLA from the start was to support English and ASL, the school's model for language support and the extent to which students experience inclusive classrooms has evolved over time. Initially, ASLA wanted to establish as a bilingual school for the deaf, using only ASL and printed English. Their policy was that all children, hearing or deaf, had to sign all of the time. But the school learned quickly that this model was not effective for all students, as many were still learning ASL. They now identify as a dual language school with ASL and English in all forms. They do not use the term bilingual as defined in deaf education.

Hiring teachers and staff for a dual language school has also proven to be challenging. ASLA has a low student-to-teacher ratio, less than eight to one. When the charter was started, those in deaf education warned Martinez and his team, "good luck finding teachers." "They were not wrong," Martinez said, chuckling. The candidate pool of teachers who can sign and who are equipped and motivated to work with a diverse population of children is small. To address this challenge, ASLA established a partnership with the University of New Mexico to create a teacher preparation program that produces teachers who come straight to ASLA after graduation. "We couldn't find teachers, so we grow our own." said Martinez. The program is a dual license program for special education in K–12 and general education

for grades K–8. According to a middle school teacher who recently graduated from the program and is in her first year of teaching at ASLA, "[UNM] teaches a lot of differentiation. . . I ask students how they want or need to learn." She noted that, "even young kids advocate for themselves here."

The current structure of the school day at ASLA is designed to meet the diverse linguistic and other needs of all of the students. While ASLA strives to promote inclusion for students, their program does still use elements of homogeneous groupings. The morning starts off with targeted literacy instruction for students in classrooms grouped by communication needs (deaf and hard of hearing students versus hearing students) as well as broad age ranges and academic levels—resulting in mixed-age classrooms rather than traditional grade levels. In the deaf and hard of hearing classrooms, ASL and simultaneous communication are used to meet the communication needs of the students while they work independently, in small groups, or one-on-one with the teachers and educational assistants. The structure is similar in the classrooms with the hearing students, with ASL or simultaneous communication being used during morning classes.

After the literacy block, most students are in heterogeneously grouped classrooms for the rest of the day. Students study science, work on math problems, and learn social studies. Most of this instructional time is in ASL and simultaneous communication since it is mixed grouping. Some children with severe disabilities, however, spend most of the school day in homogeneous classrooms for academic and life skills instruction. All students come together for elective classes, such as dance, PE, library, yearbook, drama, Zumba, art, and robotics.

In addition, while most students graduate from ASLA after eighth grade, a small number of students with significant disabilities—five students total in 2016–17—are enrolled in a high school program at ASLA. The high school program was created in response to families who were unhappy with the district high school options available to their children after determining that those programs had unacceptably low academic success rates and lacked the ASL support

that their children need. But as a result, the high school program does not integrate students with disabilities and non-disabled peers, although the students in the high school program do interact with the K–8 students at the school.

Advocating for Broader Educational Change

The experiences that led some families to ASLA—being counseled out of other public programs or being blocked from access to learning ASL because their children did not meet the right disability criteria—point to the need for better supports for disability and language in public schools, whether district, charter, or specialized deaf schools. On the 2017 National Assessment of Education Progress, students with disabilities scored an average of thirty-two points behind peers without disabilities in fourth grade math and forty-three points behind in reading.¹⁸

ASLA has begun several efforts aimed at helping to improve educational opportunities and outcomes in their community more broadly and to shape the national conversation around deaf education. ASLA has a partnership for academic research and support in literacy development assessment with University of Minnesota and Penn State University. They also work with the Partnerships in Education and Resilience (PEAR) Institute, which is a collaboration between Harvard Medical School and the McLean Hospital focused on ensuring that children are healthier mentally, emotionally, and academically. Through these partnerships, teams of researchers and professionals from these universities visit ASLA and work with the staff and students.

ASLA also has numerous local community partnerships. Their partnership with the Bosque Ecosystem Mentoring Program¹⁹ provides an opportunity for students to be active and involved in bettering their communities while learning about ecosystems during their summer break. All older students are encouraged and able to participate, with accommodations provided when needed. ASLA also offers free sign language classes to families of students and the classes open to community members for a small fee. The school is currently working toward building a new facility that will not only provide more room for staff and students but also include a community center.

Conclusion

ASLA offers one of the most diverse learning environments in Albuquerque across a variety of measures—language, disability, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. The school has provided a dual language learning environment welcoming to students of all backgrounds and shown results for students with disabilities that far outpace the district and state. But as the school approaches its tenth year, it is still wrestling with important questions about how best to promote equity and community at ASLA and beyond. How can teachers and administrators balance the need to hold all students to very high academic expectations with the goal of providing individualized supports? How can the school create the sense of community that deaf and hard of hearing students often lack in traditional public schools, while also using the best practices of inclusive education for students with disabilities? And how can Albuquerque Public Schools and other school districts across the country address the deficiencies in special education that so many families experienced before coming to ASLA?

As ASLA continues to strengthen its model and address areas for improvement, the lessons learned from this school's successes and struggles can be applied to improve education for deaf and hard of hearing students more generally, to address some of the gaps in district services for students with disabilities, and to explore the benefits of ASL–English dual language programs for all students.

Author

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Notes

¹ National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data public school data for 2016–17 school year, retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/school_detail.asp?Search=1&InstName=sign+language&SchoolType=1&SchoolType=2&SchoolType=3&SchoolType=4&SpecificSchlTypes=all&IncGrade=-1&LoGrade=-1&HiGrade=-1&ID=350012301066 and https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch/district_detail

² Thomas Hehir et al., “A Summary of the Evidence on Inclusive Education,”

- Instituto Alana (São Paulo, Brazil), December 2016, 2, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/312084483_A_Summary_of_the_Research_Evidence_on_Inclusive_Education.
- 3** Thomas Hehir et al., “A Summary of the Evidence on Inclusive Education,” Instituto Alana (São Paulo, Brazil), December 2016, 2, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/312084483_A_Summary_of_the_Research_Evidence_on_Inclusive_Education.
- 4** Khalid N. Alasim, “Participation and Interaction of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students in Inclusion Classroom,” *International Journal of Special Education* 33, no. 2 (2018): 493–506, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1185582.pdf>.
- 5** “Excerpts from Charter Application,” The Albuquerque Sign Language Academy, n.d., <http://aslacademy.com/media/51f840ca59a03.pdf>.
- 6** National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data public school data for 2016–17 school year, retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/school_detail.asp?Search=1&InstName=sign+language&SchoolType=1&SchoolType=2&SchoolType=3&SchoolType=4&SpecificSchlTypes=all&IncGrade=-1&LoGrade=-1&HiGrade=-1&ID=350012301066.
- 7** National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data public school district data for the 2016–17 school year, retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch/district_detail.
- 8** National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data public school district data for the 2016–17 school year, retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/elsi/tableGenerator.aspx>.
- 9** National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data public school district data for the 2016–17 school year, retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/elsi/tableGenerator.aspx>.
- 10** “School Grading Report Card 2017: Albuquerque Sign Language Academy Charter,” New Mexico Public Education Department, 2017, http://aae.ped.state.nm.us/docs/1617/SchoolGrading/517_001_STATE_CHARTER_ALBUQUERQUE_SIGN_LANGUAGE_ACADEMY_CHARTER_SchoolGrading_2017.pdf.
- 11** “School Grading Report Card 2018: Albuquerque Sign Language Academy Charter,” New Mexico Public Education Department, 2018, http://aae.ped.state.nm.us/docs/1718/SchoolGrading/517_001_ABQ_SIGN_LANGUAGE_ACADEMY_ALBUQUERQUE_SIGN_LANGUAGE_ACADEMY_SchoolGrading_2018.pdf.
- 12** 2018 PARCC proficiency data by state, district, and school, New Mexico Public Education Department, retrieved from <https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/bureaus/accountability/achievement-data/>.
- 13** Description of state classifications for special education levels from “NCSECS Charter School Special Education Finance Project: New Mexico,” National Center for Special Education in Charter Schools, March 2017, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/52feb326e4b069fc72abb0c8/t/59373b19e3df2854ac486f7a/1496791834955/NM+6.5.17.pdf>.
- 14** Rafe Martinez, “Progress toward the Public Education Commission Goals for the Albuquerque Sign Language Academy, Achievement and Growth Status Report,” June 30, 2018, emailed to Halley Potter on October 31, 2018.
- 15** “Mission,” Albuquerque Sign Language Academy website, <https://www.aslacademy.com/mission> (accessed March 14, 2019).
- 16** ASLA uses sign language and English as the main languages of instruction. American Sign Language is used in some classrooms by some staff and students throughout the day, but often simultaneous communication, speaking English and using sign language at the same time, is used in mixed group settings.
- 17** The ASLPI is an assessment of ASL skills evaluated on a list of language skill criteria. The lowest score is a 0 and the highest is a 5. According to the ASLPI webpage from Gallaudet University, where the assessment was designed and is given and rated, a level 3 means: “Signers at this proficiency level are able to express language with sufficient structural accuracy and vocabulary to participate in most familiar and unfamiliar topics about practical, social, and professional situations. They can discuss particular interests with reasonable ease. They demonstrate confidence discussing topics at the paragraph discourse level, but exhibit errors and breakdown when in-depth elaboration and detail is requested. Occasional groping for vocabulary can be present. There is good control of grammar but there are some noticeable imperfections and errors which may interfere with understanding. They tend to function reactively by responding to direct questions or requests for information. They are capable of asking a variety of questions when needed to gather information pertaining to certain situations. They may combine and recombine known language elements to create short paragraph length responses. Their language contains pauses and self-corrections as they search for adequate vocabulary and language forms. Comprehension is often accurate with highly familiar and predictable topics although misunderstandings may occur.” “ASLPI Proficiency Levels,” Gallaudet University, <https://www.gallaudet.edu/the-american-sign-language-proficiency-interview/aslpi/aslpi-proficiency-levels>, accessed March 14, 2019.
- 18** Laura Schifter, “One Year After Landmark Special Education Decision, Gaps Remain,” The Century Foundation, June 7, 2018, <https://tcf.org/content/commentary/one-year-landmark-special-education-decision-gaps-remain/>.
- 19** See the Bosque Ecosystem Mentoring Program website at <http://bemp.org/asla-summer-bemp/>.