



Albuquerque Institute for Mathematics and Science at UNM
Best Practices: [Creating a school culture that supports students high performance](#)

Mission: Albuquerque Institute for Mathematics and Science @UNM (AIMS@UNM) is committed to preparing its students, grades six thru twelve, for college, community, and beyond through a rigorous focus on math and science and an emphasis global participation. AIMS@UNM has created a highly structured school environment that sets high academic and behavioral expectations for its students. With an emphasis on mathematics and science, and a requirement for “Critical Language” study, the school’s mission is to prepare all students for college. Beginning in the sixth grade and continuing through their graduation, all students enjoy a common culture of college preparation.

Performance: According to the CREDO study, AIMS is one of only six schools in the State that outperforms more traditional public schools. The school has consistently met AYP goals each year, increasing student proficiency yearly. Math proficiency has increased by 40%, science by 45%, and reading by 38% over a three year period. The achievement gap has diminished from 38% in reading to 2% currently, and math from 28% to 5%. Our graduation rate is 93.3%, with 100% of our graduates attending college.

Goal: To establish a school culture of high student performance through a school wide expectation of behavior and achievement

Practice: The House and Demerit system

Houses: An essential aspect of the AIMS@UNM program that has allowed us to maintain our small-school feel is our Advisory program. Put in place during the current Administration, the Albuquerque Institute for Mathematics and Science @UNM incorporates Advisory, discipline and responsibility for ones own education through the “House” system. Students are arranged longitudinally, grades six through twelve in “Houses”; each named for a historical “Archer”. Houses are led by a “senior of distinction” who has demonstrated the leadership skills necessary to advise their younger classmates as they move up through the AIMS program. Houses meet for 20 minutes each day, and also provide the structure for the “Student Success Seminars” at the end of the day. Competitions between “Houses” incorporate project based learning and also provide a venue for “House Pride”. Additionally, Houses design their own “uniforms”, lore, culture and traditions, thereby giving their House community a common language and custom.

Demerit System: AIMS@UNM has created a highly structured school environment that sets high academic and behavioral expectations. Critical to the implementation and support of this environment is the disciplinary structure and its corresponding demerit system, both of which are handled through the House system. When they arrive at

AIMS@UNM, all students and their families sign a Student and Family contract, which clearly outlines the policies and expectations for such behavior as attendance, tardiness, dress code violations, ethical conduct, and necessity for a distraction free learning time to name a few. The demerit system enforces school expectations throughout the middle school and high school, reinforces responsibility and citizenship as well as accountability to the community. Students who exceed the number of demerits receive detention. Demerits are recorded on cards which students carry on them at all times. If students do not have their card when an adult asks for it, they receive another card with a fewer number of demerits available. The cards are collected once a week, and a data base is kept of the demerits.

Data: Analysis of the database demonstrates that by the sixth week of school, infractions are diminished by 82 percent. By the twelfth week, infractions are diminished by 91 percent. Eventually students graduate to a green “go card” which acknowledges their good citizenship and performance within the community and allows them expanded privileges due to their exemplary “role model” demeanor.

Contact: Kathy Sandoval, Director (ksandoval@aims-unm.org/505.559.4249)