

# TEXAS SCHOOL DISTRICT BUILDS PATHWAYS OF SUCCESS FOR MILITARY-CONNECTED STUDENTS



Photo Credit: Eastlake High School

In El Paso, Texas, located near the Fort Bliss U.S. Army Post, Socorro Independent School District serves a high number of military-connected students.

Children in military-connected families face unique experiences and are classified as a population furthest from opportunity, given their high mobility rate (every 2-3 years) and the limited education offerings they often face, particularly in rural locations. NMSI's [Military Family Mission](#) addresses these academic barriers through our cornerstone programs - [Laying the Foundation](#) and [College Readiness Program](#).

NMSI spoke with Janet Carrillo from El Dorado High School and Martha Juarez, M.Ed., from East Lake High School to recount their experiences since the district partnered with NMSI. During the conversations, they shared the enthusiasm and appreciation teachers have for LTF and CRP and the powerful impact on their students.

# HOW NMSI PROGRAMS CREATE A STRONG SCHOOL COMMUNITY

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LTF is built on the premise that students need a strong foundation of concepts to succeed at subsequent levels of each subject. STEM education, in particular, builds skills in critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration, which are attributes students need for post-secondary and career endeavors.

NMSI's Laying the Foundation program helps teachers model critical-thinking strategies and develop advanced levels of learning. Ms. Carrillo says that teachers from Socorro ISD's middle schools — and even elementary schools — are attending LTF training, which provides incredible vertical alignment with their feeder pattern.

Ms. Carrillo is absolutely right. When used in a district that also participates in the College Readiness Program, the hands-on training of LTF's vertical teaming strategies dovetails beautifully into CRP's holistic support for school systems, teachers, students, and communities.

NMSI's College Readiness Program leverages the College Board's proven Advanced Placement® framework while preserving local control to empower students to believe that college is within their grasp. Because this program is built upon College Board® standards, it can make the transition from one school to another much easier for military-connected students who move frequently.



## NMSI'S MILITARY FAMILIES MISSION

NMSI's Military Families Mission, a grant-funded initiative made possible by the partnership with DoD STEM, offers NMSI's cornerstone programs to schools with at least 10% military-connected students.

Although schools can implement NMSI programs by way of their military-connected students, it is by no means a pull-out program. Instead, all students attending the school benefit from NMSI - not just military-connected students.



# THE POWER OF VERTICAL ALIGNMENT

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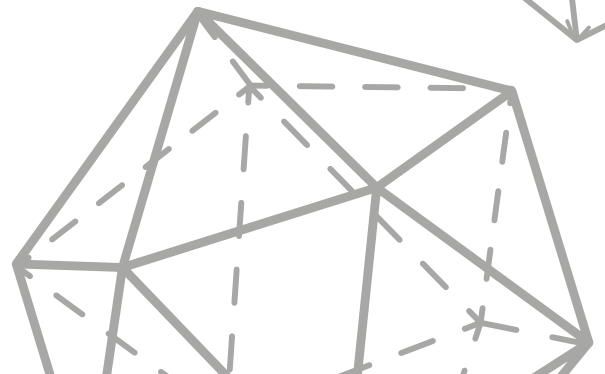
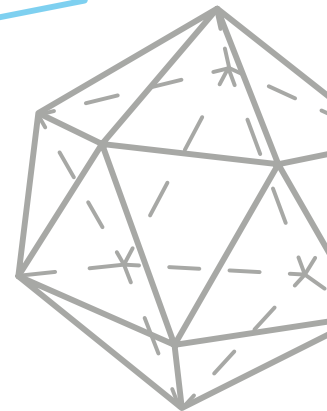
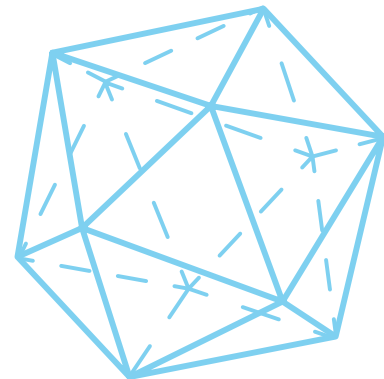
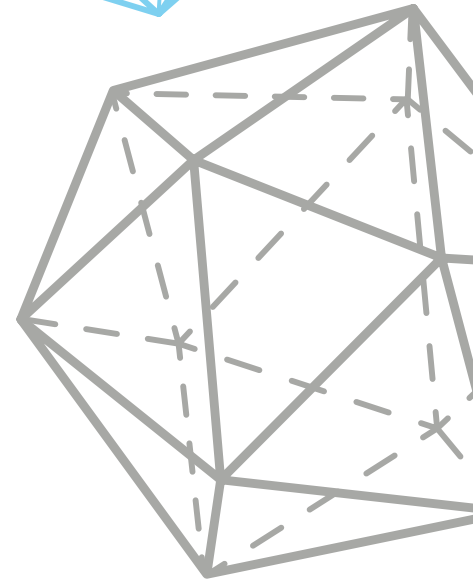
Ms. Juarez and Ms. Carrillo both agree that Laying the Foundation has enabled their schools to optimize their feeder programs by helping students envision a future full of possibilities and increasing academic rigor. Ms. Juarez has witnessed more **students feeling inspired at the middle school level and realizing there is a path to success** all thanks to the resources from NMSI's LTF program.

Subsequently, our nation's teachers are already carrying a heavy load and some educators are hesitant to jump into LTF. Many of them are concerned that these programs are one more thing to add to their long list of responsibilities. However, they quickly discover that **LTF helps with the heavy lifting and doesn't create extra work or lead into additional grading or busy work.**

Teachers who participate in NMSI's professional development through LTF have all echoed the same enthusiasm of walking away with more than just theoretical information. They leave NMSI's training with tools and plans they can actually implement into their classrooms immediately.

Ms. Carrillo describes the resources from NMSI's professional development as a playbook that provides educators with a quality strategy they can modify as needed, based on the players involved.

Teachers quickly realize that NMSI's training provide them with insight into managing their classrooms better, gaining teaching strategies, and getting support for the things they're already doing. Even the most experienced educators benefit from a new perspective or a new way to implement their lessons. Some of the teachers even have a name for it: CRP-izing their lessons. In other words, they bump up the rigor in their lesson plans providing a multiplier effect of what they're gaining from NMSI's professional development.





## GRIT AND GROWTH FOR STUDENTS

Both Ms. Carrillo and Ms. Juarez also identify the powerful intangible benefits students gain from CRP — academic grit and confidence. This program provides students a sense of what learning will be like in college, but with a safety net to help them develop the skills needed for the next stage.

When students begin to feel intimidated by the pace and depth of AP courses, school leaders remind them that it's not about learning everything; it's about building a learning foundation. It's not about memorizing facts, figures, and dates; it's about gaining skills to facilitate understanding. For AP exams, it's not about remembering everything; it's about remembering how to make the connection between concepts.

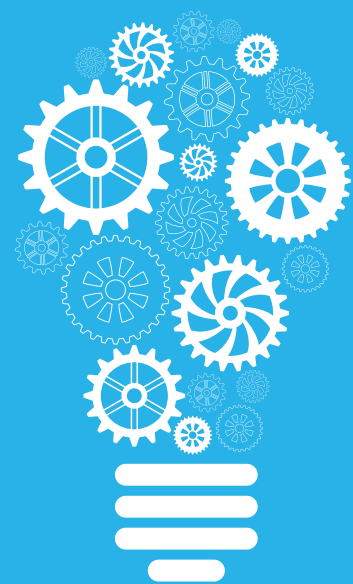
Ms. Carrillo illustrates this well when describing how she works with students who want to drop their AP classes, often because they're worried about their GPAs. During an exit meeting with the student and their parents or guardians, Ms. Carrillo helps them reframe their mindset. She explains that it's important for students to deal with challenges now while they have a high level of support. Whereas if a student faces similar academic struggles for the first time in college, it's much harder. Her pep talks must work — 9 times out of 10, the students stay in class and work through their struggles to achieve success.

## A SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR EDUCATORS

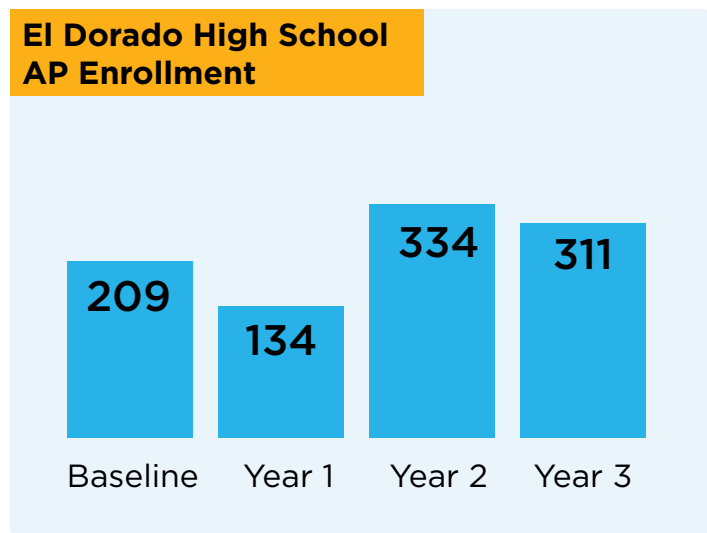
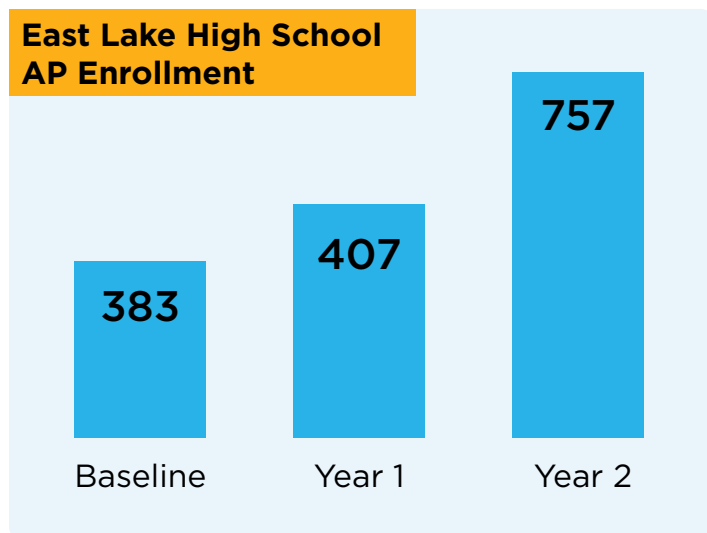
It's not just NMSI's training that increases teacher content knowledge and pedagogy, Ms. Juarez also places a heavy emphasis on the vast resources and camaraderie aspect of participating in NMSI such as NMSI's Teacher Villages.

NMSI's Teacher Villages is a community space for educators to find solutions and support. Teachers going through LTF or CRP are placed in a 'village' that align with their teaching subject and they interact with other educators across the country with additional support from a NMSI coach.

In addition to teacher resources, NMSI's robust student supports provides on-demand modules and a NMSI academic coach to guide students in their studies.



## RESULTS TELL THE STORY



“We have students who graduate with 15-36 hours of college credit,” Ms. Carrillo says. She explains that parents are pleasantly surprised and can’t believe their child is leaving high school with a year of college already under their belt. When she runs into the parents after their child is in college, they express how well their child is doing.

“My daughter is doing great! I’m so glad she did AP,” one mother said. “While some of her friends are struggling, she’s really prepared and knows how to study. She also knows how to identify her points of confusion, so when she goes to the tutoring center, she knows how to ask for help in a specific way.”

Ms. Juarez said that their school continues to have a big emphasis on making sure students know they have the opportunity to go to college. They’re specifically trying to increase populations that traditionally think they can’t do it, including SPED (Special Education) and LEP (Limited-English Proficient). Even though it will be challenging, she reminds them that they have teachers and staff who are passionate about supporting them.

Currently, **39-40% of all students at East Lake High School are taking at least one AP course and some are even taking four AP classes at a time.** She also

said that 23% of military-connected students took NMSI courses during the 2021-2022 school year, an increase over previous years. Overall, **AP enrollment increased a tremendous 49% from their baseline of 383.**

In El Dorado High School, there are **653 students enrolled in AP classes in the 21-22 school year** – an increase from their baseline of 209 – with a few scholars taking as many as five AP exams. 20% of their military-connected students are taking one or more AP courses.

El Dorado High School has added several AP class offerings, including AP Statistics and AP Physics 2 in the first year of the NMSI partnership and AP Environmental Science in the second year. Recently, after a long stint of unavailable AP computer science teachers, El Dorado HS is offering AP Computer Science Principles.

In general, after one year in a NMSI College Readiness Program, **students at military-impacted schools across the nation average a 45% increase in mastery of college-level concepts in math and science,** compared to the national average increase of 5.6%. That increase is 81.5% for Black students, 34% for Latinos and 38.4% for females.

# FORWARD, MARCH



Socorro ISD leaders want students to know they're capable of handling their academics let alone advanced courses and college can be part of their future — if that makes sense for their individual plan. They want students to be able to picture a path forward and be prepared for their post-secondary lives, even if it's not going directly to college.

In some cases, that means learning a trade, earning a certification, qualifying for professional licensing, or going into the military — but ongoing learning matters in all situations. While students in the past would sometimes look at going into the military as their only option or just a way to pay for college, today students are turning to the military for different reasons. For some, they know that joining the military will help them learn specific skills, gain discipline, or grow from unique life experiences.

The skills and relationships students form during elementary, middle, and secondary school are more than just about heading into college. They're about making connections that will equip them for life. NMSI's LTF and CRP provide the resources to make those connections click. Whether it's connecting classroom lessons to reality or making connections to fellow military kids and serving our country, NMSI can help the entire school community advance and connect.



**Are you a school serving the military community?**

**Learn how NMSI's Military Families Mission can help your students excel**

**[Bring NMSI to my school](#)**



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