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x studio



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Explora Mission and Values

Explora's Mission:

Creating opportunities for inspirational discovery and the joy of lifelong learning through interactive experiences in science, technology, engineering, art, and math (STEAM).



Our Values:

Learning: Explora is a learning place for people of all races, ages, genders, abilities, and backgrounds; family, caregivers, peers, and colleagues are essential partners in learning. Explora advocates for lifelong, materials-rich inquiry, while acknowledging that it isn't always easy. We value curiosity, hands-on trial and error, and the agency and growth that comes with both failing and succeeding.

Community: Explora's essential value derives from our relevance to our communities, connection to everyday lives, and role as a trusted community resource. We value diversity, in all its forms, as a source of strength; a diverse board, staff, and membership are critical to Explora's effectiveness. We value listening to our community and understand that Explora is stronger when working in partnership with others toward common goals, like helping New Mexico achieve racial equity in STEAM by creating opportunities for people of color and others who have been excluded from STEAM courses and careers.

Flexibility: We recognize power in Explora's ability to be nimble and adapt to change, and we provide staff and visitors freedom to think outside the box. We experiment and try things, even if they aren't perfect, and value creativity and innovation. We push boundaries, bend edges, and try on new roles, in order to best accomplish Explora's mission and serve our community. Organizational and financial health, along with sustainable practices, allows us to pursue new ideas, be responsive to the needs of our community, and contribute solutions to community-defined problems.

People: Explora identifies our staff and volunteers as our greatest resources, and we invest in their work and growth. We are motivated by hard work and positive collaboration to affect change in New Mexico. We believe in inclusive planning and iterate based on feedback from staff and visitors. Explora practices and cultivates generosity through listening, respect, and the sharing of time, ideas, resources, and access.

Letter from President & Executive Directors

Dear Friends,

What a gratifying year it was, as Explora re-opened our doors after a 15-month-long closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a science and learning organization, we focused on incorporating COVID-safe practices into our operating procedures and developing new health-focused exhibits and programs. We also invested time and resources to rebuild our Explora staff post-pandemic, training our team on Explora's pedagogy and culture.

During the pandemic, Explora transformed to provide virtual, hybrid, and limited in-person programs and learning kits, serving 7,000+ participants statewide during the closure. Now fully re-opened and re-staffed, we are approaching pre-pandemic attendance levels, with over 200,000 people served during FY22. We work with over 100 partner organizations to co-develop projects that increase access to educational opportunities. Explora is committed to working systemically to improve educational outcomes, drive economic development, and build community prosperity through our *Cradle through Career STEAM Learning Strategic Focus*.

Explora sharpened our focus on increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion, in order to remain relevant and reflective of the diverse communities we serve. Explora staff participated in a two-part series on Asset-Based Community Development, and a team of local consultants supported Explora staff through coaching, trainings, and facilitated small-group work to further develop understanding about diversity, equity and inclusion. All of Explora's working groups established DEI-focused performance goals and metrics for success. Five new Donor Societies were established and named after women of color in STEM, and the Explora Board of Directors Nominating & Development Committee focused on DEI and increased representation of BIPOC business leaders on the Board.

Explora is a values-based organization and has prioritized informally sharing power and working collaboratively with partners and the community; this year we formalized additional aspects of this work as we moved into a co-leadership model. Kristin Leigh, Explora's Deputy Director and a 20-year Explora employee, joined Joe Hastings as they became Co-Executive Directors of Explora. Sharing the power of the executive director role aligns with our values and highlights this way of working collectively in an overt and visible way, and we look forward to the work that can be accomplished by this leadership team and outstanding staff.

We understand how fortunate we were to find new opportunities within COVID-era challenges and to have the financial strength to provide STEAM engagement in new and innovative ways. Thanks to friends like you, Explora continues to provide quality STEAM education for New Mexico's children and families. Thank you for your steadfast support.

Sincerely,



Benjamin Gardner
Board President



Joe Hastings
Co-Executive Director



Kristin Leigh
Co-Executive Director

Starting Early: Engaging our Littlest Scientists

The achievement gap between kids in poverty and their more economically-advantaged peers is evident as early as a child's first 18 months (Hart & Risley, 1995). Explora values its role in promoting early childhood education by providing critically-important STEAM learning experiences that close opportunity gaps and provide parents and teachers much-needed support to enhance young children's learning. Research shows that investment in high-quality early childhood education provides an excellent return. James Heckman, Nobel Memorial Prize winner in economics and Professor of Economics at the University of Chicago writes, "The rate of return for investment in early childhood education is 13% per annum through better outcomes in education, health, sociability, economic productivity, and reduced crime" (heckmanequation.org).

Our signature early childhood programs, *Growing a Scientist* (for preschoolers and caregivers) and *Science to Grow On* (for children in grades K-3) provide quality, experiential engagement that supports questioning, investigating, and playing with the building blocks of science, math, and art. These programs returned to in-person sessions this year, with over 60 families participating. In addition, over 30 families participated in a virtual *Growing a Scientist* programs, facilitated in partnership with *Parents as Teachers* through the *UNM Center for Development and Disability*. *Toddler Time*, a special time for our youngest visitors, began again in 2022, featuring special storytimes, music, and shared exploration of science topics.



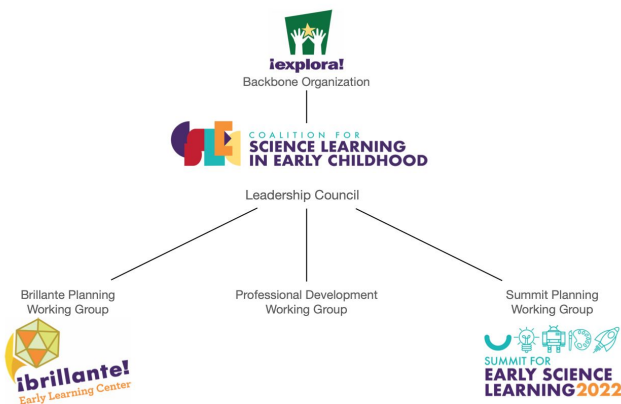
Partner Spotlight

Supporting our youngest scientists means also supporting their teachers. Through generous support from the LANL Foundation and the New Mexico Association for the Education of Young Children, over 400 educators participated in professional development workshops offered virtually with a corresponding kit of materials. These teachers then implemented their new learning with students and families. As a result, an estimated 4,000 young children and their family members were provided opportunities to engage in STEAM learning.

Building a System to Support Early Childhood Educators

In November of 2021, Explora was awarded a two-year, \$250,000 Local Early Childhood Systems Building Grant from New Mexico's Early Childhood Education and Care Department, in order to serve as the backbone organization for the brand-new **Coalition for Science Learning in Early Childhood**. This coalition of professionals, advocates, families, and community members will leverage the power of STEAM learning opportunities to address opportunity and achievement gaps for young children and their families by building systems and networks that increase access to early STEAM learning.

The Coalition wants all families and early childhood providers to know that they, too, can do STEAM with children. In the spring of 2022, Explora hired a Coalition director to oversee this work and convened our first Coalition meetings in May. Working groups of the Coalition will advise planning for **Brillante Early Learning Center**, host the **Summit for Early Science Learning**, and serve as a resource for early childhood professional development throughout Central New Mexico, reaching over 250 educators and the families and children they serve.



Professional Development workshops for educators continued to be robust this year, with over 2,000 educators, after school staff, and librarians participating in online workshops via Zoom. Participating teachers shared:

- *Our organization has participated in several of your presentations and have gained so much.*
- *I plan to use your ideas to bolster my thinking outside the box when it comes to creating and preparing STEAM activities for my students.*
- *Thank you for providing and sending the kits. You all ROCK!!!!*
- *I am appreciative of this opportunity to elevate my teaching career.*
- *I am very excited about this opportunity and enhancing NM preschool/PreK children!*

Supporting Future Leaders: Workforce & Youth Development

During Explora's community listening sessions, we've heard, loud and clear, that we need to stick with our kids longer, preparing them for jobs that can keep them here in New Mexico and end generational cycles of poverty. Rather than simply attending our programs and events, at Explora teens take an active role in program development and museum operations. During FY22, these amazing students had a hand in designing, planning, and testing ideas for Explora's STEAM workforce development center for teens, [X Studio](#).

Our longest-running and most popular teen program is the [Career Pathways Initiative](#), or CPI. CPI provides vocational and life resources to high school and college students, who are employed as Explora staff. The paid interns serve important roles, acting as advisors on different initiatives within the museum, facilitating exhibits and programs with visitors, and building their leadership skills with the support of our Youth Development Specialist.

The CPI interns and staff participated in a new program this year, supported with funds from the Institute for Museum & Library Services and PNM. [Thinking about Mental Health](#) provided therapy resources and helped us design a dedicated mental health corner for teens to de-stress while at work. Featuring bean bags, immersive headphones, and access to the Headspace app, the mental health corner is highly used by our CPI interns. We also hosted a [Teen Science Café](#) featuring a mental health professional, who discussed careers in the mental health industry and taught self-care skills.



This fiscal year, 44 teens participated in the *Career Pathways Initiative*, and 14 teens participated in Explora's *Teen Advisory Group*. Our teen interns, volunteers, and program participants provide valued, unique perspectives that help us create programs and spaces that will serve and impact our community.





Providing youth with real-world experiences has been a priority this year. Through generous support from [AFRL-NM](#), our CPI interns and [Teen Advisory Group](#) members were paid to participate in the prototyping phase of the brand-new exhibits for the upcoming [STEM in the Burque](#) exhibition. Side-by-side with our professional exhibit developers, these teens offered their opinions on important exhibit criteria, like usability, look and feel, and opportunities for visitor engagement.

As part of Explora's work as the backbone organization for [STEM-NM](#), central New Mexico's designated STEM Learning Ecosystem, the seventh annual [New Mexico Science Fiesta](#) took place June 11-18, 2022. This year's fest featured a variety of activities and presentations, all free to the public. This was our first-ever hybrid Science Fiesta with 30% of events being held virtually and the other 70% being held in person. A total of 41 STEAM organizations & professionals presented programming and engaged with over 1,450 children, families, and teachers during the week-long celebration. Together, we engaged the community in fun, meaningful activities, while showcasing STEAM and its impact on our everyday lives, our community, and our future.

During our pandemic-related closure, work continued on the new [X Studio](#) teen center, thanks to our many private donors, the [State of New Mexico](#), and the [City of Albuquerque](#). X Studio construction began in the fall of 2020 and continued throughout the year, while Explora staff implemented teen programs in our current space and piloted several new workforce development initiatives, focused on topics like creating digital media, physical computing, fabrication, and music production.

Teens created rotoscope animations, 3D-printed game tokens, developed 8-bit video games, assembled their own computers, recorded and edited movies, and much more. Mentorship is an important part of the X Studio pedagogy, and a variety of STEAM professionals and industry experts engaged with teens during X Studio program opportunities.

Partner Spotlight

With support from Air Force Research Lab–New Mexico, Explora facilitated a series of professional development workshops to equip teachers with knowledge, tools, and strategies to implement the [NM STEM Ready!](#) science standards.

We engaged over 440 teachers through 36 workshops, Project STEAM ECHO, and the [Maker Educator Community of Practice](#). In addition, we matched 33 educators with 20 STEAM professionals through the [Classroom Connections](#) program.

Narrowing the Opportunity Gap

At Explora, we believe that children should have equitable access to STEAM learning opportunities. *Square Roots* is a collaborative project, funded by the *Institute of Museum and Library Services*, with the purpose of increasing access to STEAM learning and formalizing opportunities for Black students to participate in STEAM programs. The project also increased availability of paid internships, work experiences, and scholarship programs for post-secondary study in STEAM. Students at *Emerson Elementary* and *Casa Feliz* participated in community-focused, collaborative, project-based, out-of-school programs provided by *Explora* and *New Mexico Black Leadership Council*. Topics covered a variety of content areas, including acids and bases, robotics, plants, and mirrors & reflections, with a culturally-relevant, interdisciplinary focus.

In 2021, Explora launched a scholarship program for promising high school students of color, called *STEM Scholars*. Through this initiative, we directly support the aspirations of amazing students seeking to earn STEM degrees right here in New Mexico! This year we awarded \$2,500 scholarships to four New Mexico high school seniors from *Native American Community Academy*, *Eldorado High School*, *Early College Academy*, and *Pecos Connections* (in Mora). These students were recognized at an evening event this June, where we celebrated their impressive accomplishments. All planned to attend UNM, and we can't wait to see what they do next!

This year's *STEM Scholars* are:

- Crystal Coriz
- Dominique James
- Hector Triana Ruiz
- Kaitlyn Vigil



Partner Spotlight

Our statewide network of partners was essential to Explora's success engaging students in critical need of enrichment opportunities after school closures. We kept in close contact to find out how best to support STEAM learning in their communities. *"Home care providers operate on a shoestring budget and sometimes need more resources to provide learning activities to the children they serve. Being able to distribute to them the STEAM kits from Explora was a honor."* – Home Visitor in Doña Ana County.



Every year, Explora's educators travel to communities across the state to bring hands-on STEAM education to thousands of children & families. This year saw a return to in-person programs, alongside hybrid and online programs and STEAM Learning Kits, in order to support educators, out-of school time staff, and librarians as they created STEAM learning opportunities for youth across New Mexico. Explora developed and shipped over 5,400 *STEAM Learning Kits*—self-contained science activities, complete with materials and instructions written in English, Spanish, and Diné—which we mailed and delivered statewide. Our efforts to keep kids across New Mexico connected to STEAM learning were made possible thanks to community-wide support.

In collaboration with the [Thomas Branigan Memorial Library](#) and [Ngage New Mexico](#), Explora's *Inspiring Discovery!* project provided over 500 non-digital, cross-disciplinary (STEAM and foundational reading & writing) kits free of charge to Doña Ana County students to keep those most in-need engaged in STEAM learning. Kits were distributed to families at preschool storytimes at the Thomas Branigan Memorial Library and through home visits and community engagement events with Ngage New Mexico. Each kit included a book, as well as curricula written in both English and Spanish, to encourage the entire family to engage in active exploration and discovery by asking questions, making observations, and problem solving. While all kits came with the materials necessary to complete the activities, we also encouraged families to get creative by using easily-found household materials for further exploration.

Statewide Outreach: Taking Explora on the Road

With support from the NM Public Education Department and ESSER Funding, Explora partnered with Dorn Community Charter School to run an after school program, where students increased their awareness of the STEAM embedded in local farming & gardening practices. Students did experiments; worked in the community garden; met local professionals involved in food, agriculture, and conservation of natural resources; and increased their identities as scientists, gardeners, and stewards of the land. In partnership with Albuquerque School of Excellence, a K-12 public charter school, Explora educators offered after school programs four times a week for middle school students. Through the course of the year, students developed the 21st-century skills of design, engineering, and innovation by designing bridges, learning to program micro:bits, delving into 3D printing, and animating their own clay models.

Partner Highlight

Explora continued its partnership with Zuni Youth Enrichment Project (ZYEP), whose mission is to promote resilience among Zuni youth, so they will grow into strong and healthy adults connected to Zuni traditions. Explora and ZYEP worked together to develop programs that highlighted STEM practices in agriculture and traditional ways of knowing. Explora educators and Zuni students engineered and built bee hotels to encourage pollination. Explora also partnered with Pueblo of Isleta Department of Education for hands-on summer learning in Isleta and collaborated with the Office of Diné Youth through professional development workshops, STEAM kits, and outreach programs at Office of Diné Youth sites on the Navajo Nation.



Explora Experience: Finding New Ways to Welcome Visitors

Explora has provided hands-on STEAM education in New Mexico for over 30 years and serves our state as a trusted resource for STEAM learning for people of all ages and abilities. Since opening our doors in 2003, we have welcomed 2.5 million visitors. Additionally, Explora has served as a host for partner workshops and competitions; a unique venue to celebrate a birthday, high school prom, or a wedding; and a safe space for home visits, occupational therapy, and more.

Summer 2021 marked the official public reopening of Explora's exhibit floor after the pandemic closure. As the year progressed, Explora's operations and visitation got back into full swing. The reopening of our exhibitions also marked the return of visitor-favorite programs, like [Family Science Nights](#), [Adult Nights](#), [Sensory Friendly Hours](#), and [Toddler Time](#). We continued to collaborate with partners to develop new exhibitions, as highlighted below.

Partner Spotlight

Throughout 2021 and 2022, Explora teamed up with dozens of community partners to develop and prototype the upcoming *STEM in the Burque* exhibition. *STEM in the Burque* is all about cool jobs that solve big problems and pay well—right here in Albuquerque. This co-developed exhibition will be the first in X Studio, Explora's state-of-the-art teen workforce development center.

Our partners on this project include the Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority, AFRL-NM (Air Force Research Laboratory), Delta Dental, New Mexico Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (NM EPSCoR), Sandia National Laboratories, Positive Energy Solar, Build with Robots, the New Mexico Optometric Association, and local trades partners, including JB Henderson, Summit Construction, NM Building and Construction Trades Council, IBEW-NECA Local 611, Southwest Regional Council of Carpenters, and the United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters.



Thank You To Our Explora Members!

After a year-long closure due to the pandemic, we were happy to welcome our members back to Explora. This year, we resumed our partnership with twenty-two community organizations and eighty-one schools that serve families in financial need. Through these partnerships, we offered over 30,000 free memberships to families across the state through our *Community Partner Membership Program*.

While active memberships were active extended by 13 months to make up for our COVID-closure, we also succeeded in growing our paid membership program with over 1,000 new families becoming members. 53,431 member families enjoyed our exhibit floor in FY22, and we are grateful for their ongoing commitment to and support of Explora!



A new Campus in Old Town: Explora's expanding Cradle through Career STEAM Learning Campus



Explora has thrived in Old Town, Albuquerque, adjacent to exemplary museums, art centers, parks, and the Old Town, Sawmill, and Wells Park neighborhoods, all of which have a long, proud history. Explora is honored to be part of this community. After years of planning, Explora is expanding on our current site and on an additional 4.5-acre parcel across 18th Street. Phase One of our Cradle through Career STEAM Learning Campus capital project is [X Studio](#), our STEAM workforce development center for teens, which is currently under construction and set to open in the winter of 2022.



Phase 2 of the expanded Campus is in the planning stage now. [Brillante Early Learning Center](#) will be the state's only full-time, museum-based, STEAM early learning center. It will be inspired by the world-famous Reggio Emilia Approach and serve over 100 infants, toddlers, and young children with rich, STEAM learning experiences. Brillante will develop our state's next generation of early childhood professionals, serving as a lab school for local institutions of higher education, such as CNM. Additionally, it will provide ongoing professional development for early childhood educators from across New Mexico and feature state-of-the-art facilities, including a materials-rich atelier that can be used by other community programs.

Financials - Explora Organizational Health

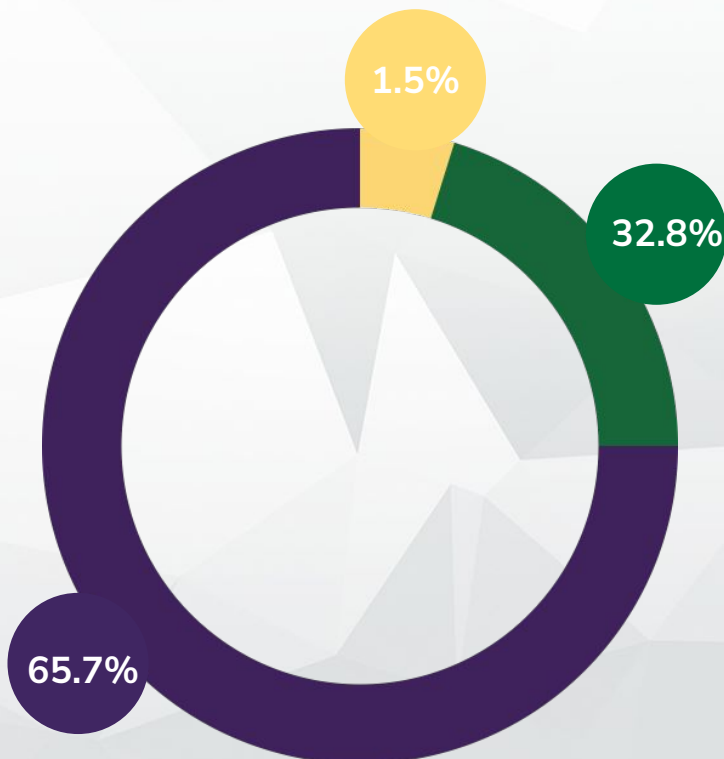
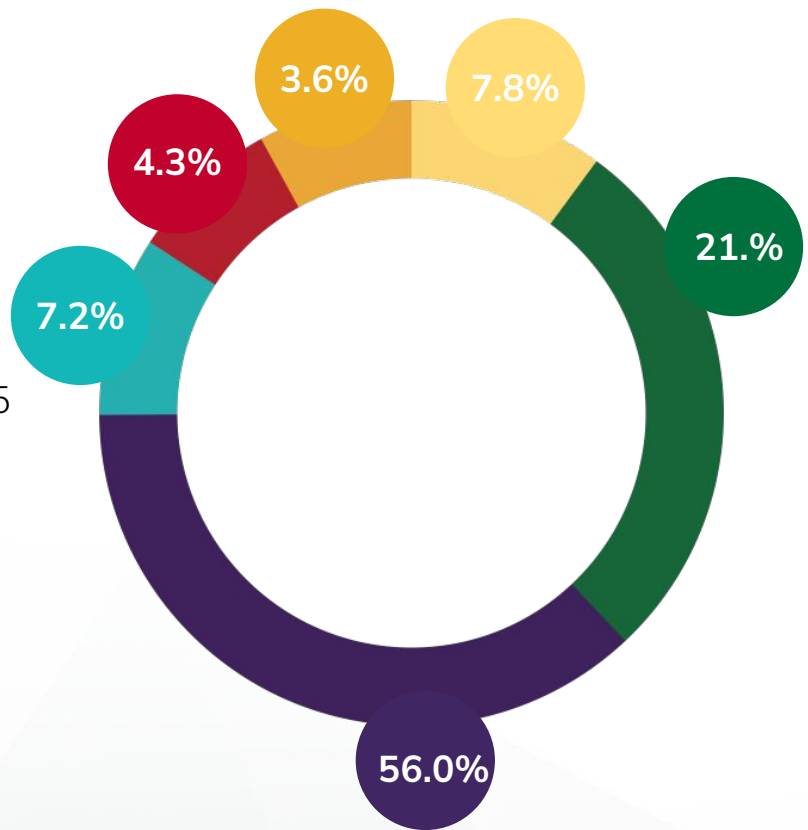
July 1, 2021-June 30, 2022

Audited numbers for Expenses and Revenue

Like all organizations this fiscal year, Explora saw atypical revenue and expense due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and recovery from a 15-month museum closure.

- In-Kind: \$563,512
- Earned Income: \$1,530,097
- Government: \$4,074,682
- Foundation Grants: \$526,039
- Corporate Gifts & Grants: \$311,865
- Individual Contributions: \$261,752

TOTAL AUDITED REVENUE:
\$ 7,267,947



- Fundraising: \$74,360
- General & Administrative: \$1,668,212
- Programs: \$3,342,764

TOTAL AUDITED EXPENSES:
\$ 5,085,336

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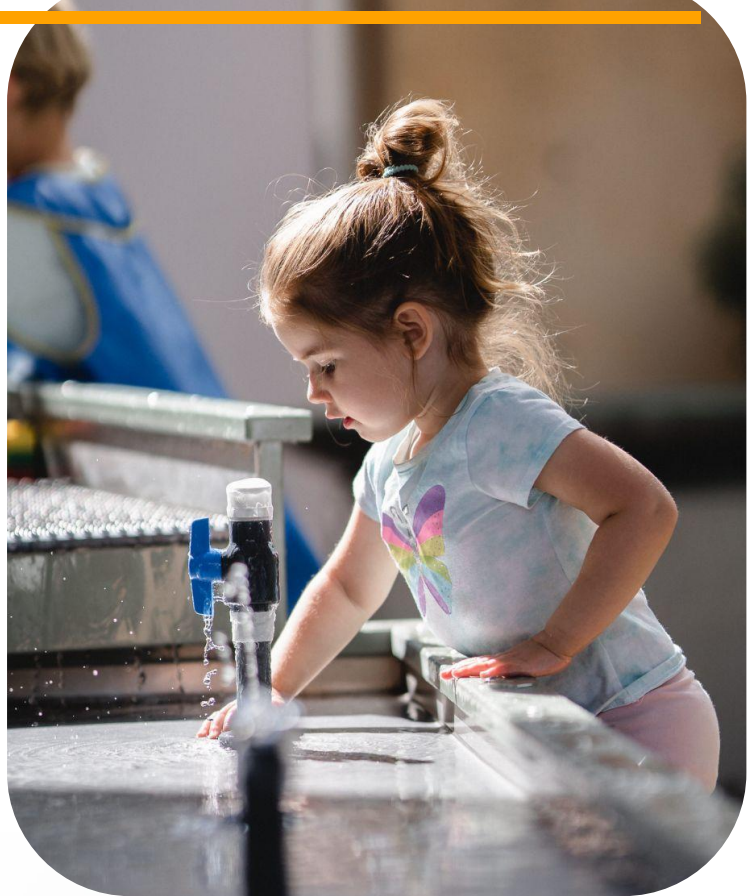
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Vintage Albuquerque

Programs Snapshot

- 23,628 students and families participated in Explora outreach programs
- 14,960 people enjoyed APS Title I Family Science Nights at Explora
- 53,720 students participants in school-based programs
- 6,671 people participated in family programs and seasonal camps at Explora

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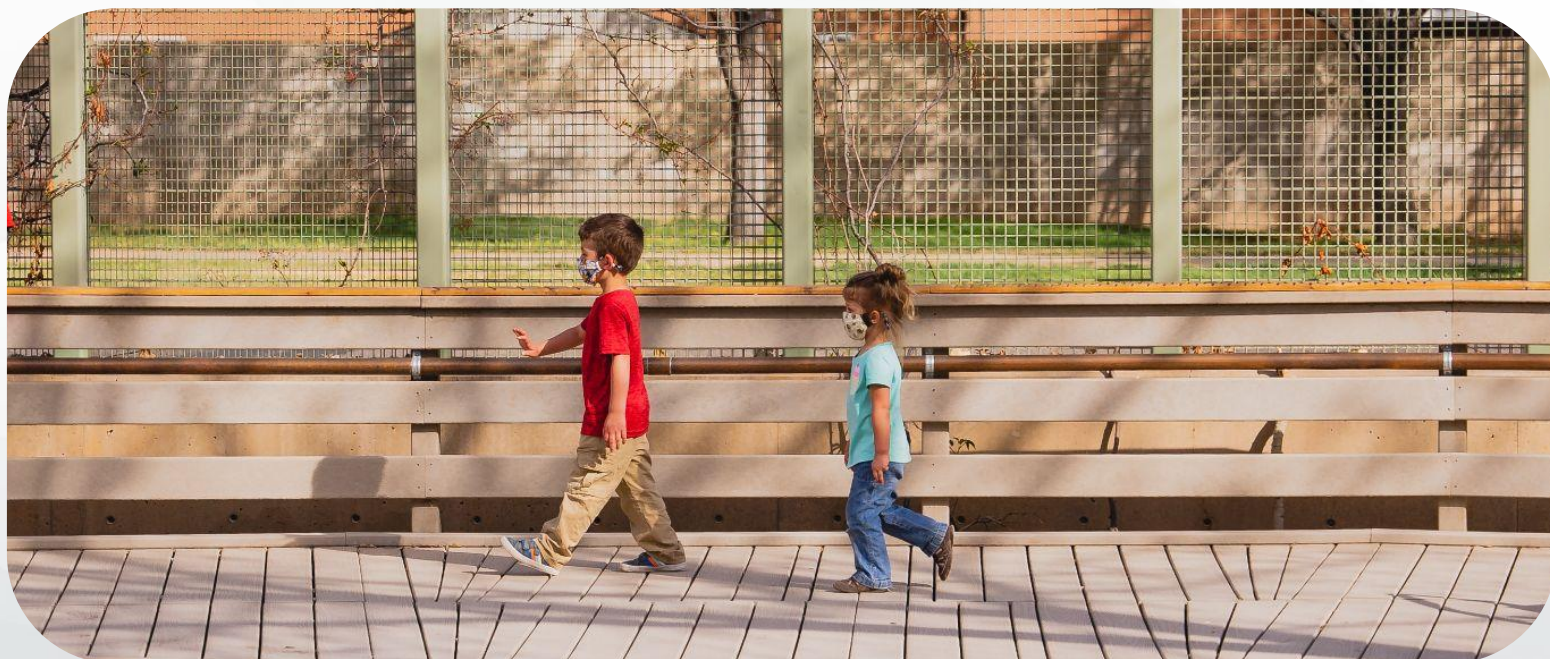
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