



# 2021 Western Sky Community Care State Cross Country Championships

The best of the best distance runners in New Mexico lined up at Albuquerque Academy for the 3.1 mile course at the 2021 Western Sky Community Care State Cross Country Championships.

## Class A-2A

The morning started with the Class A-2A runners. Penasco senior Gilbert Valdez was out to win his second straight cross-country title and he did it. Valdez said he wanted to reach the 16-minute mark and he hit it right on, crossing the finish line first in a time of 16:00.88, a personal record. Valdez was 47 seconds faster than the competition in his classification.

"I kept hammering and hammering on the course and heard I had a 200 yard gap and stay focused," said Valdez.



The Pecos boys won the team title with 50 points, beating second place Oak Grove (105). Penasco was third (127). The Panthers won the girls team title. Penasco finished first with 81 points. There were only four points separating first from third in the girls team totals. ATC was second with 83 points and Gateway Christian was third with 85. Individually, Josette Gurule of ATC was the fastest of the bunch. She won the top individual honor in a time of 20:33.82.

"I told myself I was going to hold out until mile number two and then go for it and see what I can do," said Gurule. "It worked out and I'm so grateful it did."



## Class 3A

The Boys Class 3A race was the closest of the day. Zuni's Kameron Eustace and Tohatchi's Melvin Scott Junior entered the track side by side for the final lap. Going stride for stride in the final 100 meters, Melvin Scott, Jr just edged out Eustace at the finish line, winning his first state title in a time of 16:35.54.

"I told myself I had to give it my all," said Melvin Scott, Jr following the win.



The Zuni boys blew away the field with a team total of 32 and another first place trophy. Zuni had five of the top ten runners in their race. Tohatchi finished second (45 points), followed by Cottonwood Classical (111).

While the boys 3A race was the closest, the 3A girls race was anything but close. Raylee Hunt of St. Michael's entered the track with no one else behind her, finishing first by over a minute. Her winning time was 19:12.14.

"It feels amazing," said Hunt. "I've put years and years working toward this and I even wrote it on my mirror, I worked so hard and I'm so happy."

Cottonwood Classical girls won the team title with 54 points. Santa Fe Prep was second (100) and Santa Fe Indian School finished third (122).





## Class 4A

Repeat feat was the phrase in Class 4A. Rendon Kuykendall from Hope Christian was looking for a repeat performance from last season and the defending state champ delivered. He finished first in a time of 15:24.90.

“It’s great and we have a young team and I’m happy how far we’ve come this year,” said Kuykendall.

The Los Alamos boys dominated with 24 points on the day and another first place finish. The Hilltoppers had four of the top six runners, and everyone finished in the top 15. Albuquerque Academy finished second (87) and Hope Christian third (152). The Los Alamos girls also dominated the course. Los Alamos teammates Delaney Ulrich and Kelly Wetteland finished the race side by side. Ulrich edged out her teammate by one second, clocking the winning time at 18:56.33.

“It was great finishing side-by-side because we worked together the whole race and finishing together was really cool,” said Ulrich.

The Hilltoppers made it a boys and girls sweep as Los Alamos won both team titles in Class 4A. Los Alamos had four of the top 9 to cross the finish line. In fact, all of their runners placed in the top 20. The Los Alamos girls had 28 points followed by Albuquerque Academy (49) and St. Pius X (123). It’s the third straight state title for the Los Alamos girls.



## Class 5A

It was a year of firsts in Class 5A. It was a first for the Volcano Vista boys and girls and an inaugural championship for a couple individual runners, too. Sandia's Steven West capped off his solid season with a state title, his first. West's winning time was 16:00.16, 13 seconds ahead of the competition.

"I've been running since the 4th grade, it's super exciting to see it come to a conclusion," said West following his win.

Volcano Vista won the boys team title with 59 points from the Hawks. Rio Rancho was second with 93 points and Cleveland third with 98. All three of those teams are from the same district. Alamogordo's Ellary Battle beat out some tough competition to win her first state title. Battle crossed the finish line ahead of everyone with a time of 18:53.47.

"Going into it, I just wanted to stay up front and stick with the pack," said Battle of her strategy. "I told myself I could do it and it paid off."

The Volcano Vista girls made it a sweep for the Hawks. Volcano Vista totaled 62 points and beat out Rio Rancho (80) and Cleveland (99) for their first title.

