Effective School Practices (ESP) Review Report

For

Metro Elementary School 1

Conducted: May 15-20, 2011

Introduction

There are a number of high-performing schools in Colorado that have, up to this point, had little opportunity to share their practices that are producing results year after year with their students. There are other under-performing schools that have yet to realize the kinds of successes these aforementioned schools have experienced. The premise for this project is that there are some highly-effective practices that must be in place for some, but not all of our Colorado schools. Therefore, the Colorado Department of Education is making available, to a select number of the schools, an opportunity to engage in a process to identify those practices through the Effective School Practices (ESP) review.

The following criteria were used to determine the selection of schools as participants in the ESP reviews:

- The school must have been a designated Title I school for at least 4 years.
- The top 34 schools were determined based on performance data including:
    - Catch-up median growth percentiles; and
    - Colorado English Language Acquisition (CELA) growth
- This narrowed the group to the top 15 schools in which additional performance data, listed below, were used:
    - Reading and Math achievement (3 year);
    - School Performance Frameworks (SPF) rating and specific "Growth Gaps" rating (3 year);
    - AYP results;
    - Colorado Basic Literacy Act (CBLA) data (for elementary schools); and
    - Graduation Rate (for high schools).
- This narrowed the list to 11 schools using the following demographics data.
    - Poverty rates;
    - Size of school based on enrollment;
    - Percent of students that are ELL and minority;
    - Location of school (rural, urban, etc.); and
    - Title I allocation and per pupil allocation.

As a result of this project, it is hoped that the highly-effective practices, identified through the ESP review process, will be revealed, triangulated with the research, and shared (in multiple ways) in order to support struggling schools in their journey to achieving high levels of student success for all.

Overview of the ESP Review Process:

Number of Interviews: 206

- School administrators: 21
- Instructional staff (regular and special program teachers):   80
- Parents/Community Members   15
- Classified Instructional Staff   16
- Students   72
- Other   2

Number of Observations:

- Classrooms   201
- Meetings (Community & Grade Level)   6

Purpose of the ESP Review:

The purpose of the ESP review is for an external team to gather information about an effective school's systems and processes. The information gathered will be provided to the school for both affirmation as well as possible next steps in their continuous improvement efforts.   The intention of the Colorado Department of Education is to use this work to inform practitioners and other schools about the practices that are working for high-performing Title I schools in the state of Colorado.

The ESP review is conducted by assessing the school in nine areas of school effectiveness, consistently identified as research-based practices, relative to:
- Curriculum;
- Classroom Assessment and Evaluation;
- Instruction;
- School Culture;
- Student, Family and Community Support;
- Professional Growth, Development and Evaluation;
- Leadership;
- Organization and Allocation of Resources; and
- Comprehensive and Effective Planning.

STANDARDS FOR THE EFFECTIVE SCHOOL PRACTICES REVIEW

Academic Performance: The following Academic Performance Standards address (1) curriculum, (2) classroom assessment and evaluation, and (3) instruction.

> **Standard 1:** The school implements an adopted curriculum that is rigorous and aligned to state and local standards.
>
> **Standard 2:** The school uses multiple evaluation and assessment strategies to continuously inform and modify instruction to meet student needs and promote proficient student work.
>
> **Standard 3:** Teachers engage all students by using effective, varied, and research-based practices to improve student academic performance.

Learning Environment: The following Learning Environment Standards address (4) school culture, (5) student, family, and community support, and (6) professional growth, development and evaluation.

> **Standard 4**: The school/district functions as an effective learning community and supports a climate conducive to performance excellence.
>
> **Standard 5:** The school works with families and community groups to remove barriers to learning in an effort to meet the intellectual, social, career, and developmental needs of students.
>
> **Standard 6:** The school/district provides research-based, results-driven professional development opportunities for staff and implements performance evaluation procedures in order to improve teaching and learning.

Organizational Effectiveness: The following Organizational Effectiveness Standards address (7) leadership, (8) organization and allocation of resources, and (9) comprehensive and effective planning.

> **Standard 7:** School instructional decisions focus on support for teaching and learning, organizational direction, high performance expectations, creation of a learning culture, and development of leadership capacity.
>
> **Standard 8:** The school is organized to maximize use of all available resources to support high student and staff performance.
>
> **Standard 9:** The school develops, implements, and evaluates a comprehensive school improvement plan that communicates a clear purpose, direction, and action plan focused on teaching and learning.

# DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE and OVERVIEW OF THE SCHOOL

Metro Elementary 1 has approximately 630 students attending the school with 87% of the students qualifying for free or reduced lunches. The number of students receiving free or reduced lunches is the standard used to determine poverty levels for Title I funding. The diversity of the school is noteworthy as several ethnic groups are represented within the student population. Forty-two percent of the students are identified as Hispanic with 18.7% identified as white, 26.2% identified as black and 12% identified as Asian. Additionally, this year, approximately twenty students at the fifth-grade level are new to the state and will be taking CSAP for the first time this year.

Metro 1 has experienced notable observed growth over the past few years and is consistently making adjustments to their work based upon the needs of the students they serve. Though growth has been high, the overall achievement of the students at Metro 1 still remains below state average in all areas. As described in the graphs below, while the observed growth for students over the last four years has been over the state average of 50%, achievement has not yet reached state averages in reading, writing or math.
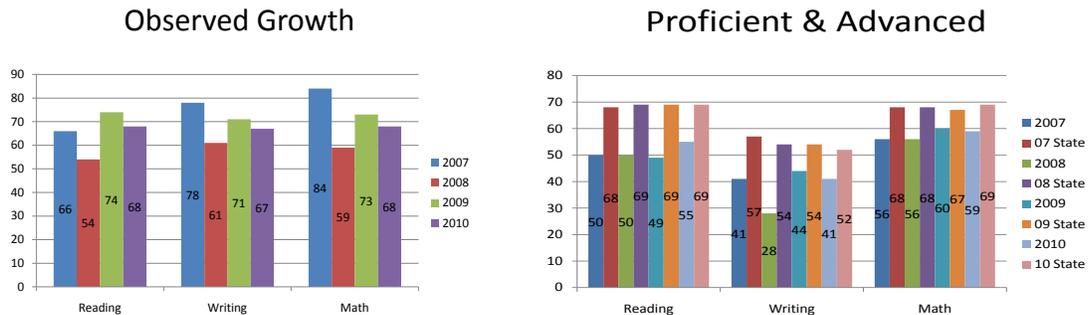
The school received a "Performance" rating on the School Performance Framework. They were rated as "exceeding" in Academic Growth and in Growth Gaps. Within the Growth Gap area, reading and writing were "exceeding" and math was "meeting". However, in the area of Academic Achievement, the rating was "approaching" with the school earning 50% of the total points possible. Based on 2010 CSAP and other data, the school focus for the Unified Improvement "Performance" Plan is writing. Close monitoring of student writing is a focus through data team work at grade levels as well as the use of appropriate rubrics. Identification of SMART goals based on data to address student needs in writing has been an expectation in order to closely monitor attainment of the UIP writing goal.

Trends across the last three years also indicate that there is a <u>decrease</u> in unsatisfactory scores on CSAP in reading at 3rd and 4th grades and in all three grades in writing and math.
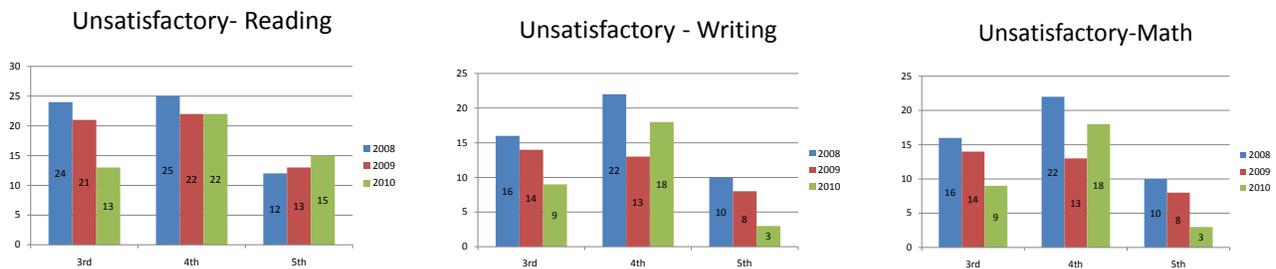
Additionally, upon examining quasi-cohort groups across three years as students move from one grade to the next, significant declines in unsatisfactory scores are noted in almost all content areas over time. For example, as shown in the chart below, 24% of the 3rd grade students in 2008 scored unsatisfactory. As students moved to 4th grade in 2009, 22% scored unsatisfactory and as 5th graders in 2010, only 15% scored at the unsatisfactory level in reading.

Quasi-Cohort groups-Reading Unsatisfactory:

3rd Graders in 2008	4th Graders in 2009	5th Graders in 2010
24%	22%	15%
4th graders in 2008	5th Graders in 2009	
25%	13%	

Quasi-Cohort groups-Writing Unsatisfactory:

3rd Graders in 2008	4th Graders in 2009	5th Graders in 2010
16%	13%	5%
4th graders in 2008	5th Graders in 2009	
22%	8%	

Quasi-Cohort groups-Math Unsatisfactory:

3rd Graders in 2008	4th Graders in 2009	5th Graders in 2010
19%	15%	19%
4th graders in 2008	5th Graders in 2009	
24%	13%	

Recently-administered district interim assessment results indicate that students in grades 2 through 5 have shown growth in reading, writing and math this year when comparing the beginning of the year assessments to those which were just completed. The chart below shows this growth in terms of proficiency in each academic area with over 30% growth in all three content areas. While growth is certainly a celebration, ensuring that students who start school below grade-level are able to make more than a year's growth in a year's time becomes a moral imperative. This ensures that students will keep up with their peers across the state. These results from the assessment are reflected in the following chart.

Grade	Reading		Writing		Math		Overall School Growth Averages
	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	R: 35% - 61% = +31%
2	29%	60%	0%	61%	22%	46%	
3	31%	61%	10%	53%	18%	56%	W: 14% - 66%= +52%
4	45%	69%	24%	75%	24%	75%	
5	31%	71%	21%	76%	21%	76%	M: 21% - 57%= +36%

The theme for the school this year is "Everyone Achieves Every Day". There is strong focus on ensuring that students "never give up" and that teachers do "whatever it takes". These messages resonate throughout the culture of the school and perpetuate attention to and value of student growth and student achievement. Philosophical shifts and changes in systems, structures and practices at the school are ongoing to support all students and to address the needs of students who aren't learning. The dedication of teachers and work ethic of all staff is obvious throughout Metro 1 Elementary School.

It is evident that many school decisions are made collaboratively and that this model of shared or distributed leadership is valued. There are structures within the culture at Metro 1 that allow teachers to participate in various collaborative teams. First and foremost is their involvement in grade-level team work through collaborative planning and data teams, as well as participation in a Student Achievement Group (SAG) for professional development purposes. Additionally, teachers are expected to be involved in one of the following collaborative teams: Positive Behavior Support (PBS), Parent, Staff, Community Engagement Team (PASCE), Technology for Kids (TFK), School Design Team (SDT), School Leadership Team (SLT), or the Student Intervention Team (SIT).

To set the stage for the findings and recommendations in this report, the review team is providing the staff with some of the current literature and research regarding high-performing, high-poverty schools in order to support the ongoing and current work of the school and to encourage the next steps for supporting student achievement as well as student growth at Metro 1.

Doug Reeves, in his work on the 90/90/90 study, found the following characteristics of high-performing schools that have 90% free or reduced lunch and 90% of students from ethnic minorities while maintaining achievement levels of 90% or more on academic-assessment measures:
- a focus on academic achievement;
- clear curriculum choices;
- frequent assessment of student progress and multiple opportunities for improvement;
- a focus on nonfiction writing; and
- collaborative scoring of student work.

Reeves describes "a focus on academic achievement" as having a laser-like focus on **student learning**. This focus includes a particular emphasis on improvement of the **professional practices** critical to improving learning. These schools have a comprehensive **accountability** system that ensures every individual is held accountable for a continual focus on the learning goals and agreed-upon professional practices of the school.

Dr. Reeves, in his latest research, is now identifying a fourth "90", where schools with a high percentage of ELL students also reach 90% proficiency levels in English language acquisition. Additionally, in these schools, he is constantly reminding that it took a minimum of 90% of the staff consistently engaging in the specific improvement goals and actions to notably impact student achievement.

In the schools that beat the odds, critical to the power of teaching and learning is *an academic press for achievement* (rigor*).* Basic to the success of effective low-socioeconomic schools is instilling in students the belief that they can learn at high levels **given the proper rigor**. In these high-performing classrooms, transparent evidence of rigor is visible and it is obvious that teachers set clear academic goals that students understand and "own". These teachers demonstrate, through their instructional practice, consistent expectations for high levels of performance by all students and align their practices to ensure success in attaining grade-level proficiency for all students.

As the school moves forward in planning for next year, it will be important to continue to focus deeply on a few of the "right" things and to fully embed those practices that will most improve student achievement. Do a few things well and build a foundation for future work on those successes. "Focus the effort and avoid initiative overload." (Blankstein, 2010).

"The art of teaching, and its major successes, relate to 'what happens next'—the manner in which the teacher reacts to how the student relates and applies the content to other tasks, and how the student reacts in light of success and failure apropos the content and methods that the teacher has taught." (Hattie, 2009). Intentionally and purposefully bring attention to the instructional practices that impact student learning each and every day and commit to these practices. There are schools that have proven that "…the single greatest determinant of learning is not socioeconomic factors or funding levels. It is instruction." (Schmoker, 2006). You, as a school staff, are beginning to ensure that demography is not a destiny for your children, but a teaching and learning cycle that ensures student success through highly-precise instruction will be the key to moving from a school of high growth to a school with high achievement.

ESP Review Narrative Report

Findings Academic Performance

The area of Academic Performance contains the following key components, as reflected in the research-based Comprehensive School Support Rubric:

- ✓ Implementation of an **adopted curriculum** that is rigorous and aligned to state and local standards and that the school provides access to a curriculum that emphasizes a challenging academic core for all students.

- ✓ The school uses **multiple evaluation and assessment strategies** to continuously inform and modify instruction to meet student needs and promote proficient student work. Assessments are frequent, rigorous, and aligned with district and state content standards. Students can articulate the academic expectations in each class and know what is required to be proficient.

- ✓ Teachers engage all students by using **effective, varied, and research-based practices** to improve student academic performance. Instructional strategies, practices, and programs are planned, delivered, and monitored to meet the changing needs of a diverse student population. Instructional services are provided to students to address individual needs and to close the learning gaps.

The following findings encompass the work that has been accomplished at METRO 1 ELEMENTARY and support the practices that result in the high student achievement the school is realizing.

Curriculum: *The school implements an adopted curriculum that is rigorous and aligned to state and local standards.*

- Denver Public Schools (DPS) provides a reading and writing curriculum in grade-level Literacy Instruction Planning Guides which is fully aligned to Colorado State standards. This curriculum is mapped for teachers. Essential learning objectives are identified for each unit of study at each grade level. Unit and lesson plans are available and include materials that are culturally and developmentally appropriate. Anchor papers are included for writing workshops. Teachers at Metro 1 Elementary report that they use this curriculum only as a resource for instruction and do not follow it explicitly. The reading portion is generally used to plan units of instruction, but essential learning objectives are prioritized and some may not be taught. The writing portion has generally been supplanted with the *Writing Alive* program, but some grade levels are attempting to align the *Writing Alive* program to more closely support the DPS curriculum.

- The district considers the *Everyday Math* (EDM) instructional program to be the math curriculum. Teachers determine essential learning objectives from this program. Although the EDM program is aligned with National Council Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) standards, its alignment with Colorado Common Core Standards and particularly CSAP requirements in terms of curriculum mapping is questionable. Math learning objectives within the EDM program are mapped to follow the sequence in the text.

- Horizontal alignment of the curriculum across the school is facilitated by weekly curriculum planning meetings that are expected of each grade level. This expected collaboration may not always take place. There may also be a question of vertical articulation. Teachers report that there is a process for vertical articulation within the Student Achievement Groups (SAG), but it may not always be effective. As teams and teachers prioritize objectives they wish to teach, gaps may develop between grade-level curricula. The DPS curriculum is articulated between schools, but it is not clear that Metro 1 curriculum is always articulated with DPS middle school curriculum.

- Teachers report high expectations for all students, but some teachers and parents express concern that advanced learners and high-achieving students may not be challenged. There is an understanding among staff that students who achieve below grade level will require more than a year's growth in a year's time to reach proficiency.

- Although there are some instances of standards-based practice being implemented in some classrooms, a consensus on what it means to be standards-based and/or an expectation of standards-based practice outside of the district curriculum documents is not evident. Although data team meetings are held weekly and teachers have access to multiple sources of data, a standards-based teaching-learning cycle is not always evident. Formative assessment is used effectively in some classrooms through the use of exit slips, white boards, etc., but does not seem to be a pervasive practice.

- An early childhood education (ECE) program is provided to pre-kindergarten students. The program focuses intentionally on developing language skills for second language learners and students of poverty. Parents may choose between an ELA-S program, with instruction in Spanish and an ELA-E program with instruction in English. The curriculum for the program is drawn from *Avenues* (a language acquisition instructional program), the DPS literacy guide for ECE, and *Everyday Math*. Teachers work to align instruction with a focus on phonological awareness. Primary teachers feel the program is valuable in fostering early academic achievement with primary students.

Classroom Assessment/Evaluation: *The school uses multiple evaluation and assessment strategies to continually inform and modify instruction to meet student needs and promote proficient student work.*

- Metro Elementary 1 collects assessment data from multiple sources. Assessment for literacy includes Developmental Reading Assessment 2 (DRA2) and district interim assessments, given three times a year. In addition, Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) is used to progress monitor students receiving interventions and to provide benchmark data in kindergarten. Observational data is also collected in primary classrooms. Writing is assessed through the district interim assessments and also through writing scored with both student-created rubrics and *Writing Alive* rubrics. Math is assessed through the *Everyday Math* assessments and through the district interim assessments. Reading, writing and math are assessed on CSAP in grades 3 and above. Non-English Proficient (NEP) and Limited-English Proficient (LEP) students are also assessed annually with Colorado English Language Assessment (CELA). The *Avenues* language acquisition instructional program also provides ongoing assessment and progress monitoring. In some grade levels, teachers collaborate to create common assessments in some content areas.

- Metro 1 has worked to develop a data-driven culture through weekly data team meetings at each grade level. Teachers are expected to follow a process outlined in their Data Team Action Plan. The process begins with identification of a SMART goal based on pre-assessment results. These goals are directly tied to the goals expressed in the school's Unified Improvement Plan. Teams then identify the instructional strategies they believe will best enable them to reach their goal and the data results they expect to see if those strategies are implemented. Following post-assessment, teachers analyze the results of the assessment and determine which students demonstrate proficiency and which do not. They then analyze the strengths and obstacles students demonstrate, including which obstacles are within the teacher's "sphere of control". Teachers then are expected to use this information to make adjustments to upcoming instruction, as well as determine the need for intervention, reteaching and reassessing. This process may not be clearly understood by all members of all teams and analysis may not always lead to instructional changes.

- Data are also used to identify students for intervention in reading through the Response to Intervention (RtI) process and to progress monitor students receiving interventions. In addition, teachers maintain data notebooks which contain all of the relevant assessment data for their class and provide a body of evidence on student learning, achievement gaps, and instructional needs. Teachers input DRA2 data to the district website and are then able to access reports. DIBELS data is recorded in the DIBELS online program. Although teachers have a wealth of data, it appears that some may be "data-rich, information-poor", in their understanding of the value and effective use of data to drive instruction.

- Teacher teams set two Student Growth Objectives (SGO) each year. These goals must reflect student proficiency of at least 70%. Teams set the goals collaboratively and goals reflect high expectations in reading, writing and math. Interim assessments are used to assess proficiency and determine if objectives are met. Interim assessment results are available for individual students, classes, grade levels, and the school as a whole. These results are shared with both teachers and parents.

- Student data notebooks are provided for students as a means of increasing student responsibility and motivation for their own learning, but there is variability in the use of this practice across the school. These notebooks allow students to predict and monitor their own progress, reflect on why they scored as they did, and set goals for their achievement. Data provided include results from interim assessments as well as CSAP and CELA, and any other classroom assessments that the student might take. Students demonstrate a clear understanding of assessment results and a real satisfaction with improved performance.

- Content objectives are expected to be posted in kid-friendly language and articulated to students. Teachers draw objectives from a number of sources, including the district curriculum documents, curriculum maps, and instructional resource materials. This practice varies across the school regarding what is posted. Some teachers also delineate language objectives or describe the rationale for each objective; a few teachers only list activities. Some teachers review the objective with students before and following instruction. Students are sometimes able to articulate the learning objective or how they will know if they have learned it. Few objectives seem to represent higher-order thinking skills and there may not be a clear understanding of what constitutes proficiency on a learning objective.

- With the work in *Understanding by Design* and the focus on writing this year, there has been an emphasis on the use of rubrics in writing. Teachers use the rubrics from the *Writing Alive* instructional program, as well as the rubrics provided by the Colorado Department of Education for CSAP writing assessment. In addition, teachers have worked with students to develop their own student-created rubrics. Rubrics are used both to score student work and to help students understand what constitutes a proficient level of performance. In many classrooms, rubrics are posted for other content areas to communicate standards for proficiency and some classrooms provide effort rubrics to help students understand how their level of effort impacts their achievement.

Instruction: *Teachers engage all students by using effective, varied, and research-based practices to improve student academic performance.*

- Through classrooms observations, the Effective School Practices (ESP) team identified a common, but not pervasive, use of best instructional practices such as gradual release of responsibility, utilization of Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP), scaffolding of learning tasks, turn and talk dialogue, differentiated small group and individual instruction when appropriate, presentation of content through up-to-date technology when available, and performance-level grouping of students during a differentiation block. These are effective strategies for all students but particularly for ELL students and students of poverty.

- Accessing the level of student background knowledge in order to correct misconceptions and build upon new learning does not seem to be a deeply-embedded practice in all classrooms.

- The value of pre-teaching and systemic teaching of academic vocabulary is generally understood by Metro 1 staff as an effective practice, but this appears to be underutilized at this time.

- A three-year effort to improve student writing achievement has focused on utilizing *Writing Alive* methodology. Components of this program include four-step skills instruction, sentence building, a planning guide, interactive writing across curriculum, writing to prompts, and writing in a variety of genre. This year, data teams developed SMART goals and examined writing achievement with at least three goals directly tied to writing. Development and use of kid-friendly rubrics, comparison of student work with exemplars, and assessing quality through anchor papers to provide effective feedback to student writing are benefits of this writing initiative.

- There is a school-wide expectation for grade-level articulation generally focused on curriculum, instruction and assessment. Teachers collaborate weekly at most grade levels in order to agree on curricular content, discuss methodology, concur on pacing, formulate assessments, and further develop lesson plans as needed.

- A Denver Public Schools (DPS) initiative, involving the use of *Understanding by Design*, Wiggins & McTighe, (2005), has introduced a backwards-design model for lesson plan development. Many teachers indicate that they are in the formative stage of using backwards design. Some teachers have utilized salient components of this model (e.g. to create SMART goals).

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- Intentional instruction to elicit higher-order thinking does not appear to be prevalent. While Bloom's Taxonomy has been reviewed as a nexus for the process of adding rigor to instruction, instructional rigor seems only moderately apparent. The use of big ideas, essential questions and enduring understandings to create rigor are still formative in nature. Many teachers utilize an instructional delivery model which offers a blend of inquiry and explicit instruction.

- Performance-level groups are created for the literacy intervention block at each grade level. These groups are determined by analyzing data results. Operationally, grade-level classes are reorganized into instructional groups based on an analysis of literacy data. This second dose of literacy instruction provides opportunities for focused instruction. There appears to be some mobility between these groups.

- Staff embraces high-academic expectations for all students and much of the school culture is predicated on this stated norm. Classroom posters delineate these expectations and teachers reference them. However, common use of effective instructional techniques to hold all students accountable for their learning was not consistently observed.

- Teachers actively work to enhance student engagement in learning. A few common techniques to engage students were observed in most classrooms (e.g. turn and talk, choral response, thumbs up, use of white boards). The effectiveness of these techniques varied from classroom to classroom. Generally, students seem to be engaged but are not always held accountable for the quality of their participation.

- The No-Nonsense Nurturer Classroom Culture Program emphasizes that the key to raising academic achievement of students is the ability to manage the classroom and to create a positive classroom culture. The program was launched this year at Metro 1. Differing levels of implementation have led to various degrees of fidelity. Adherence appears to be particularly evident in classrooms where teachers had previous experience with the program.

- Teachers at Metro 1 expect students to exhibit appropriate behavior at all times, but particularly during instruction. Teachers post lists of appropriate student behaviors and endeavor to hold students to a high behavioral standard. Some teachers attempt to shape behavior through narrating the desired behavior before correction, using a hierarchy of responses to negative behavior, appropriately correcting disruptive behavior, and expanding the role of the teacher to positively impact behavior. Other teachers appear to use variations of I Can Manage Myself (ICMM). Use of these techniques results in varying levels of effectiveness. In some classrooms, the few students exhibiting off-task behaviors lead teachers to repeatedly redirect student misbehavior. This interferes with instructional pacing, causes an inordinate amount of lost instructional time, and results in reduced student focus.

- The use of rituals and routines is evident in most classrooms. These practices are primarily used to shape behavior, keep students safe, create efficiencies, and support a positive classroom culture. Overall, they appear to have a positive impact on classroom culture which should impact academic performance. The teaching of rituals and routines does not appear to be completely standardized and, as a result, the efficacy of these practices may be somewhat diminished.

- Student requests involving classroom routines (e.g. getting a drink, going to the bathroom) tend to negatively impact the pacing of instruction. As these interruptions appear to occur frequently in some classrooms, instructional time is lost.

- A contract involving homework completion, which includes tips to parents, is sent home for parental signature and return. Each grade level is expected to assign meaningful homework and strive for student compliance by attaching consequences to incomplete homework. However, a clearly defined and articulated homework policy and systemic support for homework completion are not evident. Some students do not appear to understand the connection between homework and achievement. There appears to be minimal focus on developing student study skills.

- In all regular classrooms, student seating is typically arranged in groups of from three to eleven students with an average of four to five students per group. These arrangements are conducive to cooperative learning strategies and afford socialization opportunities to a diverse student population. Under certain finite circumstances, grouping might present a barrier to instructional efficiencies. Grouping might not best serve the needs of students in those classrooms where a significant level of direct instruction is delivered with an overhead projector or a Promethean Board. In a few classrooms, students seated in groups appear to have difficulty facing the teacher while simultaneously taking notes. Some students may be more prone to visual distraction when facing a peer instead of facing the teacher.

- Staff Interventionists provide focused, small-group instruction to students identified through the Student Intervention Team (SIT) process. While these interventions accurately delineate which students are to be provided Tier II support and receive an appropriate level of progress monitoring, they may not be strategically targeted to fully address specific skill deficiencies.

- Teachers express that vertical articulation does not typically occur. While SAG offers a limited vehicle for vertical grouping, opportunities for cross-grade teams to create and refine cohesive instructional practices are not evident.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:
ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

- The way to improve achievement for students of poverty, according to Eric Jensen, "….is to align curriculum and instruction with state standards." (Jensen, 2009). Begin the work to ensure a guaranteed and viable curriculum in reading, writing and math by building on the training associated with *Understanding by Design*. Consider starting with math to identify and prioritize the truly essential learning objectives within the new Colorado Common Core Standards. Analyze those objectives for the level of cognition, products, skills, and content required. Ensure that those objectives are vertically articulated with each grade level and with middle school expectations by creating formal processes for vertical team collaboration. Develop curriculum maps that align instruction, targeting essential learning objectives, particularly in *Everyday Math*, to the requirements for CSAP.

- "Standards-based education in Colorado is defined as an ongoing teaching/learning cycle that ensures all students learn and can demonstrate proficiency in their district's adopted content standards and associated benchmark concepts and skills. This teaching/learning cycle frequently

measures student achievement through a variety of formats and assessments and ensures multiple opportunities for students to learn until they reach a proficient or advanced level of performance." (The Standards-Based Teaching/Learning Cycle, CDE 2008) There appears to be a disconnect at this time between the written (DPS) curriculum, the learning objectives addressed in the classroom, and the objectives assessed on the district interim assessments and CSAP.

- Identified essential objectives should be used for unit and lesson planning in collaborative team planning, posted in classrooms, communicated to students and taught to mastery. Through collaborative team planning and data team meetings, define proficiency on learning objectives and develop or identify common formative assessments that will accurately assess student learning on those objectives. Through the data team process, analyze the results of assessments and make adjustments and modifications to the instructional plans.

- Implement the lesson design components developed in the *Understanding by Design* process through the use of a school-wide lesson template. Ensure that lessons designed include those components of instruction found to be particularly effective with second language learners and students of poverty, including activating prior knowledge, teaching academic vocabulary, and the use of non-linguistic representation and graphic organizers.

- Increase the level of cognition in the curriculum by ensuring attention to higher-order thinking skills in the written curriculum. Identify the level of cognition of the daily objectives and include extended-learning opportunities for advanced learners in both unit plans and daily packets. "Rigor is a quality of instruction that requires students to "construct meaning and impose structure on situations rather than expect to find them already apparent" (Resnick, 1987). Whereas most units work toward what students will know and be able to do by the end of instruction, rigorous learning units also ask what students will understand and how students will be able to think………In short, rigor is quality of instruction that goes beyond helping students memorize facts, acquire an understanding of concepts, and develop basic skill proficiency. Rigorous instruction asks students to create their own meaning, integrate skills into processes, and use what they have learned to solve real-world problems, even when the "correct" answer is unclear and they are faced with perplexing unknowns." (Jackson, 2011).

- Continue to refine the data team meeting process and provide teachers with guidance in analyzing data to inform instructional practice. "Data identifies specific student learning gaps in knowledge, skills, and processes enabling teachers to work collaboratively to identify strategies to better target instruction and to monitor progress." (Schmoker, 1999). Ensure that teachers understand the role of data in planning instruction in a standards-based teaching/learning cycle.

- Continue to work towards deeper implementation of agreed-upon best instructional practices. In order to go from good to great, it is vital to constantly build a staff-wide, collective capacity. "Collective capacity is essential because it produces many more quality teachers who operate in concert." (Fullan, 2010). Not only should professional development be differentiated to increase collective capacity, but teachers must be provided peer-to-peer opportunities to learn with and from each other. "Direct observation of the professional practices of teachers by teachers must become the new foundation of professional development." (Reeves, 2008). Additionally, it is imperative to create an intentional focus on only a few high-impact strategies and take all necessary steps to ensure they are implemented with complete fidelity. "We will never master or implement what is most important for kids if we continue to pursue multiple new initiatives

before we implement our highest-priority strategies and structures. Success depends largely on implementing what is already known." (Schmoker, 2011). The more initiatives a staff pursues, the less successful it will be with those actions that matter most. "We accomplish more when we focus on less." (Buckingham, 2005). Collectively, in light of all the hard work and dedication Metro 1 staff consistently demonstrates, collectively, they must learn to prioritize and just say no to the latest – greatest. Instead of starting a new program or bringing on new resources that require training, look to identify and refine explicit techniques already in place that improve academic achievement. Utilize the most salient aspects of what has been launched and what is mandated. Finally, even the very best strategy will not prove to be successful with a student population unless it is implemented with a high degree of fidelity. Instructional leadership includes strictly reinforcing priorities.

- When decisions need to be made about determining priorities to give a common focus, when improvement is sought with an existing practice, or a decision must be made about taking on something new, the following questions could be helpful in making determinations:
    - **What do we want all students to know and be able to do?** (DuFour, 2004).
        - How will we access prior knowledge?
        - How can we provoke thinking on the big idea?
        - What steps must be taken to elicit higher-order thinking skills?
        - Is the new knowledge/learning authentic?
    - **How will we best teach that which is to be learned?**
        - What essential questions will promote inquiry?
        - How can we improve explicit, guided instruction?
        - How do we accommodate students with differentiated instruction?
        - What instructional techniques will ensure and high level of accountability?
    - **How do we know if students have learned?**
        - How do we incorporate multiple checks for understanding?
        - How do we motivate high-quality independent student practice?
    - **What will we do if students don't learn?**
        - How can we improve first-line instruction?
        - How can we improve the RtI process?
        - What can we do to ensure that our interventions are effective?
    - **What do we do if students already know?**
        - How do we facilitate transfer of knowledge to new learning?
        - How do we facilitate creating enduring understandings?
        - How do we help students make connections?
        - How do we increase relevancy?
        - How do we provide enrichment and extended-learning opportunities?

- Refine techniques to fully engage students and hold them accountable for their own learning. "In order to make engaged participation the expectation, call on students regardless of whether they have raised their hands." (Lemov, 2010). Effective administrators and facilitators encourage full assimilation and ensure ultimate fidelity to a few critical student engagement techniques. They provide resources, facilitate implementation, support teachers through the implementation dip, and ensure efficacy through frequent informal observations. Effective observations result in specific feedback on one or two techniques at a time. One day of brief walkthroughs will yield data for the staff to get a handle on the fidelity of their implementation efforts. "It is not the mere presence of a program that influences student achievement, but rather the ability of educational

leaders to assess the degree of implementation of instructional initiatives and then use that information to improve implementation at every level." (Reeves, 2011).

- Capture more instructional time. Deeper implementation of No-Nonsense Nurturing will help in this regard. Outline on a poster what students need in order to be prepared at the beginning of class. Become accustomed to referring to this poster nonverbally before class begins until perfect practice makes perfect. Expedite routines in each classroom to ensure more instructional time (e.g. passing out papers, collecting homework, transitioning to another task). Thoroughly teach and continue to reinforce these routines to students. Consider identifying three of the most common requests students make during instruction. Describe the steps to these routines on a poster. Develop and teach appropriate visual cues that students can use to make their requests known without interrupting instruction. Reply to student requests in a similar nonintrusive manner. Ask students to return to their seat if they do not ask for and receive a visual cue for approval. Do not always give approval if the request comes during key instructional time. Consider utilizing *Teach Like a Champion,* (Lemov, 2010), which offers effective instructional techniques for setting high academic expectations, delivering lessons, engaging students, creating a strong classroom culture, maintaining high behavioral expectations, improving pacing, and challenging students to think critically.

- A systemic approach to teaching academic vocabulary can have a profound impact on learning for the ELL student and the student with limited background knowledge. Consider developing systemic instruction on important academic terms. (Marzano & Pickering, 2005).

Learning Environment

The section on Learning Environment addresses:

- ✓ **School Culture and Climate:** The school functions as an effective learning community and supports a climate conducive to performance excellence. Factors such as a safe, orderly and equitable learning environment, an appreciation for diversity, and the belief that all children can learn at high levels is fostered by district and school leadership and staff.

- ✓ **Parent and Community Partnerships:** The school partners with families and community groups to remove barriers to learning in an effort to meet the intellectual, social, career and developmental needs of students. Communication efforts are varied and effective. The school uses multiple ways for working effectively with parents and the community.

- ✓ **Professional Development and Evaluation:** The school provides research-based, results-driven professional development for staff and implements performance evaluation procedures in order to improve teaching and learning. There is a comprehensive, collaboratively-developed professional development plan. Data are used to determine professional development priorities. Educators have professional growth plans to improve performance. Professional development efforts are evaluated for their impact on student achievement.

These components define a context for decisions affecting every other aspect of a school from curriculum and instructional programs to budget and improvement planning processes. Specific attention to the characteristics of the community, the academic needs of students and the unique developmental attributes of the age group pays dividends in higher achievement and greater organizational success.

School Culture: *The school functions as an effective learning community and supports a climate conducive to performance excellence.*

- Metro Elementary School 1 establishes a safe and orderly learning environment. The staff creates a climate that is caring, nurturing and focused on high expectations for achievement and behavior.

- The school operates as a collegial community with a high level of collaboration. The staff demonstrates respect for students, families, and one another, and a strong commitment to the students and families. There is a culture of "work" at Metro 1, a sense of urgency and desire for success that is evidenced in student growth for every student.

- The staff implements Positive Behavior Support (PBS). Using the PBS framework, the staff develops expectations for behavior and posts them in classrooms. The school also incorporates a character-education program into the behavior-support system. The program emphasizes four character traits and the school adds a fifth trait, academic achievement. These five traits include: compassion, responsibility, respect, perseverance, and academic achievement. The Metro 1 All Star Student Pledge states these traits in kid-friendly language and is repeated each morning by all students. Students are recognized for accomplishments in the classroom and within the building and are awarded "Starbucks" which are used to purchase prizes. Assemblies are

designed to recognize Super Citizen of the Month, academic achievement, and outstanding artists.

- While the school has created a culture of high expectations and standards for student behavior, the use of universally-applied specific techniques or cues for managing behavior and transitions was not consistently observed. Some teachers and other staff members use valuable instructional time redirecting students and reviewing expectations or routines.

- The school creates supports for students who are struggling to meet behavior standards. Teachers meet with the PBS committee to brainstorm strategies for behavior interventions and behavior plans are developed for some students. The majority of concerns are handled with the use of student behavior contracts. Individual students and targeted groups of students may receive support in whole-class interventions that may include support with social skills and problem solving or conflict resolution. Through analysis of data from School-Wide Information System (SWIS) and teacher input, the PBS team is able to analyze trends and provide appropriate supports to ensure students are meeting behavioral expectations.

- The staff believes that all students can learn at high levels. It is a "no excuses and whatever it takes" environment where teachers do not give up on students. Some teachers provide supports, including scaffolding and differentiated instruction, to enable students to learn at high levels.

- Students at Metro 1 are able to assume leadership roles by participating in after-school clubs and by assuming responsibilities within the classroom. The Action Council is a student government organization for fourth and fifth graders. Students are charged with promoting school spirit, fundraising and participating in charitable events. The *Round Up* is a student newspaper produced by third-fifth graders. Students take on leadership roles and are able to showcase their writing.

- The commitment for high academic achievement is shared by building leadership and staff. The school-wide theme of this school year is "Everyone Achieves Every Day." Students are involved in goal setting. Some teachers use student data notebooks to support this process and successfully inspire students to reach for high levels of achievement. Many students articulate what they need to do in order to produce proficient or advanced work. Rubrics and exemplary work are displayed in classrooms and in hallways. Teachers are given guidelines for displays to ensure work is high quality and includes rubrics and learning objectives.

- Many teachers promote student development of self efficacy, a belief in self that they can learn at high levels and set goals for high achievement. Student-led conferences are not an established part of this process.

- Non-teaching staff are included in decision making in the building through representation on the Collaborative School Committee. Paraprofessionals work directly with students and are active in supporting achievement. School leadership meets with some non-teaching groups to support the communication process.

- Students are encouraged to participate in after-school programs to extend their learning. The Lights on After-School Program provides activities and leadership opportunities. The Science Matters offerings include Zany Zoology, Extreme Electricity, Radical Reactions, and Unsolved

Science. Other after-school activities include: art, Metro 1 Round Up and Action Council. Club sponsors report the participants are reflective of the school's diversity.

- Effective home school communication is a priority at Metro 1. Parents are informed about up-coming assessments and how to support their students at home. Parent Involvement/Communication is addressed in the Unified Improvement Plan. Action Steps include a school-wide policy for contacts including frequent phone calls, class newsletters or emails, parent conferences, and progress reports. All of these forms of communication are used to help parents understand learning goals and student progress. Teachers reach out to parents, encouraging them to attend parent nights.

- Teachers use parent conferences as an opportunity to help parents understand student learning goals and assessment results. Additional information is provided on the school website, in school newsletters, class or grade-level newsletters, and during parent evenings. Goals for school improvement (Unified Improvement Plan) are shared in the newsletter. Parent survey results indicate that most parents feel the school is doing a good job of sharing information about academic achievement. Parent interviews support this finding, "I see the relationship between the intentional-purposeful learning in the class and my child's academic growth."

- Parent surveys are conducted yearly. On the DPS Parent Satisfaction Survey, parents reported 85% or better satisfaction for the following indicators:
  - My child/children feel safe in the classrooms.
  - The school is a place where parents are treated with respect.
  - The faculty and staff promote understanding of various family cultures and backgrounds.
  - The school encourages parents to be involved with their children's education.

- The teachers and staff provide a nurturing and caring environment.   Most students interviewed report their teachers like them and treat them fairly. Students report having multiple adults in the building they can go to for help. They also report feeling safe at school. Parents report the teachers create a culture of partnered responsibility for student learning and emotional support. "When I get a call about my child's behavior, I never feel the teacher is upset that my child is interrupting the classroom. The teacher is genuinely concerned about how to help my child to be successful."

- Students do not always have a clear understanding of the difference between bullying and an occasional scuffle on the playground. This may cause some confusion when adults are determining appropriate interventions.

- A building mentoring program provides targeted support for students identified as at risk. This nurturing environment extends beyond the school walls. Teachers identify an informal "Moms Group" that meets outside the building before and after school. The moms help each other access resources in the community and take care of each other. They make sure students get home safely if another parent is sick or unable to pick up a child. This sense of community is extended to families who are new to this country. These parents may not trust the "school system" because of previous experiences. Through a word-of mouth network, these families are encouraged to become a part of the school community.

- While the staff clearly believes that all students can achieve at high levels and that post-secondary education is important for students at Metro 1, parent survey information indicates that many parents are not yet focusing on possible post-secondary goals. Many students list careers they are interested in pursuing, and also know what post secondary education is needed for a specific career. Some teachers use college names to designate instructional groups.

- The staff embraces the diversity within the student body. Teachers view this diversity as an asset that allows for unique learning opportunities and they encourage parents to share cultural traditions or life experiences with the class. Many teachers are creative in finding ways to involve parents who might feel reluctant because of language barriers.

- The belief that all students can learn is evidenced in some school practices that minimize the impact of physical, cultural, and socio-economical factors on learning. A teacher at each grade level speaks Spanish allowing for instruction to take place in both languages. Additionally, systems are in place to ensure student access to building supports and community resources.

- Teachers freely share materials and ideas. While there is an awareness of the need to have teachers formally share successful practices with other grade levels, time is not always allocated for this sharing.

Student, Family and Community Support: *The school works with families and community groups to remove barriers to learning in an effort to meet the intellectual, social, career, and developmental needs of students.*

- The Parent Engagement Staff Community Engagement Team (PASCE) is charged with the task of designing and implementing communication and support systems for parents. They plan events and activities for parents and staff. The focus is on parent involvement, evening parent events, staff/parent communication, and social activities for all staff. Nine staff members are part of this team. The school reports excellent participation in parent/teacher conferences. Other activities the school sponsors are a back to school night and music programs for each grade level. The school received an $8000 grant from the Title I parent coalition which supports numerous parent education nights:
  - Reading night;
  - Family literacy (in Spanish);
  - Parenting with love and logic;
  - Family math night;
  - Cultural night;
  - Family art night;
  - Parenting night;
  - Multicultural night;
  - Community resource family night; and
  - Summer learning night.

- Students and parents are provided incentives to attend many of these events. Incentives include meals and child care supplemented by grant funding. Invitations are sent in English, Spanish and Arabic.

- Some staff members demonstrate high levels of professional practice in creating opportunities to teach parents how to interact with their children in reading and literacy practices. Staff members honor the culture of families by teaching them that reading together and discussing books in their native languages becomes more meaningful when parents learn and develop ownership of strategies such as asking open-ended questions, thinking aloud, and making predictions and connections.

- The PTO sponsors activities such as the fall carnival, movie night, spring auction, and spring carnival. Fund-raising events include: cookie dough, frozen food, sweatshirt and backpack sales. Funds raised pay for bus services for field trips and provide tuition for students to attend outdoor education. In addition to fund raising, the PTO also serves as a social network for the community. The PTO board encourages families to participate in school activities and provides help with accessing school support.

- No teacher representation is apparent on the PTO board. It is reported that teachers do not typically participate in PTO fundraising activities or provide direct input related to classroom needs that might guide allocation of funds.

- Some of the school partnerships include the following:
    - Reading is Fundamental (RIF) -- a free book to each student three times a year.
    - Jewish Literacy Foundation -- volunteers for classroom help;
    - South Monaco Optimists Club -- incentives for the Super Citizen awards (Starbucks) and Christmas baskets of food for families in need;
    - The Department of Agriculture -- classroom snacks (fresh fruit) two times a day;
    - Centers for Excellence -- funds for field trips;
    - AmeriCorps -- volunteers to make phone calls regarding attendance to non-English speaking families;
    - Operation School Bell -- school supplies for all students;
    - A Karen Berland Counseling Grant -- curriculum to support the academic and social-emotional success of ECE students;
    - Clothes to Kids -- clothing and shoes for students at the beginning of school;
    - The Denver Public Library -- encouragement for students to maintain or increase their reading levels throughout the summer. Incentives include:
        - Entering a drawing for an IPOD for each online book report completed;
        - Receiving a book bag for four hours of reading;
        - Receiving a ticket to Elitches for eight hours of reading; and
        - Receiving a free book for twelve hours of reading plus entry into a drawing for three Dell laptops.
    - In addition, the Gates Foundation provided $30,000 for the initial purchase of computers to be matched by the recent partnership with Carmel Hill which provides matching funds for instructional resources that support independent reading. This organization will designate the reading level for each book in the entire school library and for an additional 250 books from each classroom library. As a result of these partnerships, the school will receive three I-Mac laptops in each third, fourth, and fifth grade classroom; one I-Mac in first and second grade classrooms, and I-Pads for ECE.

- Rubrics for students to identify and measure effort are visible in the school. When students put forth effort and become efficacious in their learning, student achievement improves.

- Students have access to extended opportunities to learn both within and outside the school day: the differentiation block during the school day matches teacher expertise with specific learner needs; an extended-day interventionist provides after-school support; after-school clubs and activities on Tuesdays support student leadership development, art and science; and CSAP prep sessions are provided for targeted students.

- Staff members collaborate in grade-level teams, on numerous committees, and informally about school work. Each staff member is required to be a member of one of four collaborative teams:
  - School Design Team (SDT) – provides guidance and training for district and building professional development;
  - Positive Behavior Support (PBS) – provides systematic support for positive student behavior and learning climate;
  - Parent Engagement Staff Community Engagement Team (PASCE) -- design and implement communication and support systems for parents; and
  - Technology for Kids – identifies appropriate technology for students and helps teachers implement such technology in the classroom.

- Staff members are expected to publish and disseminate a weekly grade-level newsletter, and provide regular reports to parents regarding student concerns and accomplishments, discipline issues, and attendance and tardy issues. An auto-dialing calling system is used to remind parents of special events, emergencies and attendance concerns. The school also has an active and updated website. Some teachers routinely visit with parents as their students are picked up after school.

Professional Growth, Development and Support: *The school/district provides research-based, results-driven professional development opportunities for staff and implements performance evaluation procedures in order to improve teaching and learning.*

- School leadership hires a diverse staff to deliver instruction at this school. Teach for America members, Denver Teachers in Residence, and Denver Teacher Fellows add to the diverse methods of teacher preparation. One member of each grade-level team is bilingual. While a number of staff members have diverse teacher-training backgrounds, this diversity in preparation does not appear to consistently be valued.

- The mentoring program of the school may not fully support for new teachers.

- A combination of district and building professional development days are specified in the school calendar. In addition, two staff meetings a month are designated as professional development time.

- New teachers are required to attend a menu of district summer professional development choices. They collaborate with administration to establish priorities for their position and needs to select from these options:
  - Counseling;

- o ECE and Kindergarten;
- o English language acquisition;
- o Literacy;
- o Mathematics;
- o Science;
- o Social studies; and
- o World languages.

- The SLT, an overarching school leadership team with representation from all collaborative committees, shares in major decision-making. The SDT, comprised of Teacher Leaders (TL) and Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) team members who are resident experts, propose the professional development priorities for faculty consideration. It is not apparent what student achievement data are analyzed as an integral part of the process in making professional development recommendations to the SLT. The TL and the PCK members are responsible for delivering and/or arranging for trainers of each professional development area. The proposed menu of options is extensive and diverse and includes three levels of time commitments:
  - o mini, specific skill-sets with minimal follow-up options (wiki, new teacher welcome);
  - o short, (perhaps frequent) follow-up sustainability training (writing); and
  - o multi-year training and implementation initiatives (LEAP, Kagan).

- Leadership recognizes the need for sustainability of current professional development initiatives along with an analysis of building resources needed for sustainability.

- Some professional development options are delivered in Student Achievement Groups (SAGs) which meet bi-monthly for 45 minutes before school. Before the district strands for *Understanding by Design* were developed, teachers participated in a study of *No Nonsense Nurture* and a presentation on "the bookroom." After the district developed units on *Understanding by Design,* teachers rotated through four main areas of training this year:
  - o Strand 1: *Understanding by Design;*
  - o Strand 2: DPS Best Practices in Content Areas;
  - o Strand 3: a book study *Better Learning through Structured Teaching*; and
  - o Strand 4: Writing – constructing rubrics, anchor papers and other topics pertaining to writing that support the Unified Improvement Plan.

- Expected "look-for's" based on professional development in classroom techniques are difficult to ascertain. Some teachers report they are able to monitor themselves on implementation of these techniques; others indicate no one monitors the fidelity of implementation.

- Some professional development does not appear to be supported by coaching, demonstration teaching, modeling and reflection which might hinder the full implementation of high-impact instructional strategies. Walk through observations do not appear to monitor the implementation of professional development strategies.

- In collaboration with administration, each staff member sets two Student Growth Objectives each year. The goals must include at least 70% of students and must be measureable with student achievement results. Administrators collaborate three times a year with staff members on the completion of the goals. If the staff member has elected to participate in ProComp and they reach both goals, they can receive a percentage of the base.

- As a part of the Denver ProComp plan, staff members may elect to complete a Professional Development Unit (PDU) which must include study, demonstration of learning in the classroom and reflection on the learning that occurred. Many staff members of Metro 1 completed the PDU for *Understanding by Design*.

- As part of the evaluation plan, staff members develop an action plan to address self-determined growth goals.

- The teacher evaluation process appears to be valued as a tool to help staff increase their professional skills. Staff members report frequent observations and walkthroughs by administration. Most staff report feedback from these classroom visits is beneficial.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:
LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

- Ensure students have a clear understanding and can articulate the differences between bullying and a scuffle in the lunch line or on the playground. This differentiation is critical as students need to be able to access appropriate supports or use specific strategies to deal with these distinctly different issues.

- Ensure that teachers share successful practices that increase self-efficacy and improve achievement. Additionally, ensure these practices, such as the student data notebook and student led conferences, are used universally in appropriate grade levels. They can be used successfully in all grade levels.

- Allow opportunities for teachers to learn with and from each other by implementing the proposed learning labs.

- Ensure that the process of family participation evolves from a level of involvement to full engagement. Expand the two-way communication practices that are currently in place. Continually ask the question: "Is our process focused on one-way communication or on two-way conversation?" Very successful and well-attended family events, as well as high levels of conference attendance are indicators of strong involvement. Metro 1 is poised, at this time, to embrace the full and rich opportunities that come with true engagement. This is a process that is founded on deep listening.

  o Our primary goal is to listen to the wisdom that parents and families have gained from years of raising their children. We want to hear from them their hopes and dreams for their children and discuss how the school can work with them to make these dreams a reality. One way to begin this process is for teachers and other staff members to make pre-arranged visits to students' homes. Teachers and administrators already have a very heavy workload and parent outreach may seem like an add-on, but family outreach has been proven to be a powerful link to increased student achievement and success. (Ferlazzo, 2011).

- o "Research shows that, across races and income levels, students whose families are engaged tend to do better on tests, attend school more regularly, adapt to school better, and go on to postsecondary education." (Henderson, A.T. and Mapp, K. L., 2002).

- Continue to monitor the community and social initiatives that remove barriers to student learning. As outside resources and sources of funding are pared back, investigate methods to allow for sustainability of these initiatives.

- Continue the parent education nights. If at all possible, replicate and celebrate the achievements of well-organized and purposeful parent literacy initiatives.

- Consider increasing the collaborative support for the PTO:
  - o Teacher representation in the membership;
  - o Inclusion of a PTO board member on the CSC;
  - o Input on types of fundraisers that would appeal to this population; and
  - o Suggestions for how money from the fundraisers might be used to support student achievement in classrooms.

- Examine the list of professional development priorities. Identify which of these trainings require a short amount of time, which require follow-up and reinforcement and which are long-term, multi-year commitments. Create a long-term, multi-year professional development plan based on multiple sources of data including student achievement data, classroom observation and evaluation results, district initiatives, and staff needs assessments.

- Create or replicate structures and processes for evaluating the effects of professional development. In *Evaluating Professional Development* (Guskey, 2000), five levels of evaluation of professional development are specified:
  - o Participants' Reactions – Initial satisfaction with the training experience;
  - o Participants' Learning – New knowledge and skills of participants;
  - o Organization Support and Change – The organization's advocacy, support, accommodation, facilitation, and recognition;
  - o Participants' use of new knowledge and skills – Degree and quality of implementation; and
  - o Student Learning Outcomes – Cognitive (performance and achievement), Affective (attitudes and dispositions), Psychomotor (skills and behaviors).

- Intentionally design the use of peer observation/and or coaching time in the schedule. "Just as Marzano (2007) found that the frequency of feedback from teachers to students is directly related to gains in student performance, so Colvin (2008) has more recently documented that adults who aspire to professional levels of expertise require frequent observation, coaching, and feedback in order to make substantive improvement." (Reeves, 2010).

- Consider ways of increasing the level of support and follow up for teachers new to the building and/or district. Attempt to make certain the mentors chosen are highly supportive and compatible. Expand the role of grade-level teams in nurturing and supporting new teachers.

- Take the opportunity to learn from, collaborate with, and embrace the diversity of various teacher preparation programs.

Organizational Effectiveness

Organizational Effectiveness involves the areas of improvement planning, school leadership, and the allocation and use of resources to support high performance. The organizational work of leadership needs to ensure that the school has clear direction, goals and action plans to improve student learning. Both administrative and teacher leadership are responsible to guide the work of the school (e.g. the teaching and learning processes) by providing direction and high performance expectations, by creating a learning culture, and by developing the leadership capacity of staff. Additionally, school leadership is responsible to ensure the school maximizes the use of all resources to support high student and staff performance.

This section of the report addresses the core practices of highly-effective schools in regard to the following areas:

> **Leadership** for providing focus and support to improve student achievement, high-quality teaching, organizational direction, high expectations, the development of a school-wide learning culture, and building of leadership capacity. Both administrative and teacher leadership are responsible to guide the work of the school to fully implement the teaching and learning processes.

> **Clear direction, goals and action plans** focused on the improvement of student learning. Collaborative processes are in place and there is intentional focus on closing achievement gaps. Efforts are evaluated for effectiveness on impacting student achievement and fidelity to implementation.

The following findings and recommendations are provided for consideration as Metro 1 moves forward in the ongoing focus on improvement.

Leadership: *School instructional decisions focus on support for teaching and learning, organizational direction, high performance expectations, creation of a learning culture, and development of leadership capacity.*

- The school webpage states that the school mission is: *"…to offer standards based instruction, focused on developing the gifts and talents of the whole child through a partnership of parents teachers, and students. Metro 1 uses a positive behavior system (PBS) that teaches affirmative character traits and encourages appropriate student and adult behaviors."* However, no one was able to recite the mission statement or recall that it was on the website. The principal states that the mission was developed before he came to the school, and was reviewed once since that time. School administration does not use the mission as a guiding document against which decisions and actions can be measured, but staff members report being very clear about the school's focus on student achievement. They indicate that this is the driving force in the decisions and actions in the building.

- Leadership provides opportunities for teachers to regularly analyze student data to determine individual levels of proficiency. CSAP data is closely reviewed at the beginning of the school

year. District interim-assessment data is reviewed following the fall, winter, and spring administration.

- The analysis of this interim-assessment data is directly used to determine the primary unified improvement goal of 50% of students scoring proficient on the Writing CSAP exam by the end of the 2010-2011 school year. CSAP and interim assessment data are also used to make programmatic decisions. For example, the analysis of CSAP writing data resulted in a school-wide focus on writing, including the development of student-friendly, grade-level writing rubrics, and additional opportunities for students to write to a prompt. The most recent analysis of interim-assessment data revealed a drop in mathematics scores from mid- to end-of-year testing which is resulting in conversations about having one of the four interventionists focus on math.

- Interim Assessment data is also disaggregated by subgroups, but the primary focus of the data teams is on individual student achievement. The primary focus of the data teams is on individual student achievement. Teachers also engage in a comparison of classroom data which sometimes results in modification of instruction.

- The school makes a significant effort to get a high-return rate on the Parent Satisfaction Surveys. Individual teachers provide rewards for students who return the surveys, and teachers call parents who don't return the survey. Parent Satisfaction Survey data are analyzed and used to determine parent engagement strategies for the next year. It is also used to provide evidence of parent satisfaction when applying for grants.

- The building is clean and well-maintained. Staff members report that repairs to the physical plant are conducted in a reasonable time frame. At times, small amounts of additional facility funding are provided by the school when it is not available through the district. Fire and lock-down drills are regularly conducted. An unexpected before-school fire drill and a planned inside shelter in place drill occurred during the team visit. The students and teachers responded quickly, appropriately, and safely.

- Procedures are in place to protect instructional time. Office personnel state that there are to be no intercom announcements except for the "morning message" and a couple at the end of the day, when necessary. The student/parent handbook states that parents are to notify the office in advance of any appointments that might result in the student leaving school early. Parents may pick a child up at the classroom door once they have signed in at the office. If a parent wishes to attend class with a student, this visit must be prearranged and approved by the teacher. Teachers report much conversation and emphasis on "bell-to-bell" instruction. However, it was noted that much time is lost to inefficient transitions and multiple teacher redirections of student misbehavior.

- There are opportunities for extended-learning time for students beyond the school day. One of the reading interventionists works a flexible schedule which allows for the delivery of services to students after school. CSAP tutoring was offered after school between November 29th and February 16th for fourth- and fifth-grade students. Mathematics tutoring for CSAP was offered for third-grade students in three-hour sessions on six Saturdays between December 4th and January 26th. After CSAP testing was complete, there was after-school tutoring available to students nominated by grade-level teachers who need additional help on a particular skill, e.g.

comprehension. The district offers summer school to all students who have limited English proficiency. There is no cap on enrollment and attendance is not mandatory.

- Teachers report that school administrators visit classrooms several times a week. Formal observations culminate in a formal evaluation with written recommendations for improvement. In addition to formal observations, frequent walkthroughs are conducted. Teachers receive written feedback on these walkthroughs which includes "Glows and Grows". Teachers express the feedback given as a part of these processes is useful in improving their professional practices. Some teachers express a need for more specific assistance on how to follow through on the recommendations.

- Teachers report that the school administrators routinely discuss student achievement during staff meetings, data team meetings, and casual conversations. The school administrators also talk to students about their achievement as they conduct classroom walkthroughs.

- There are multiple opportunities for teacher leadership in the school. All teachers are required to serve on two committees. Minutes are taken at these meetings and are distributed to staff members via email. While most staff members express appreciation for the efforts to keep them informed, some also state that with so many committees, and such a high volume of email, it is difficult to keep it all straight.

- There is an effort to ensure that the staff at Metro 1 is representative of the diversity of the student population. Strong efforts are made to accommodate the diverse language needs of the students. All staff members have the Denver Public Schools endorsement in ELA-E or ELA-S. There is one Spanish-speaking teacher at each grade level and support for Arabic students is provided as well.

Organization and Allocation of Resources: *The school is organized to maximize use of all available resources to support high student and staff performance.*

- Metro 1 maximizes available resources to support high student and staff performance. Student learning needs (e.g. academic, language, special needs) are identified through a variety of assessments, along with staff/parent input. With a high ELL population, additional resources are provided in terms of staff and materials. The use of resources to address the achievement of identified gifted and talented students is also noted. Standing committees work in a collaborative manner to provide input to faculty and administration in identifying school needs.

- The school follows the formalized district budget process. The budget is largely developed by administration; however, teachers express that budget parameters and constraints are shared with them. They also state that there are opportunities to give input into the development of budget priorities. Teachers have input through their representatives on the SLT and both teachers and parents have input through their representatives on the CSC. State and federal program resources are allocated primarily for staffing to meet identified student needs. Additional staff include interventionists, paraprofessionals, student literacy-development facilitator and a native language tutor. Staff members submit material and supply orders in the spring and the administration makes disbursements from the discretionary fund as appropriate. The staff feels they have the resources necessary to deliver quality instruction. The budget is augmented with grants (e.g.

Partnership for Great Schools, Centers for Excellence, Carmel Hill Partnership) along with community partnerships.

- The schedule is designed to provide a common grade-level planning time each day. Two days a week are set aside for grade-level data analysis and coordination of instruction. Additionally, a block of time each day is designated as a differentiation block to allow teachers to meet the instructional needs of identified groups of students. Multiple data sources (CSAP, CELA, DRA2, DIBELS, and interim assessments) are used to group students by performance levels. During this time some students receive targeted interventions and others receive enrichment. With multiple classrooms at each grade level, teachers are able to place students in the best learning environment to meet specific learning objectives (e.g. small-group instruction). The teacher work day (8 hours) provides flexibility to better meet the needs of all students. Teachers start time vary from 7:15 to 8:00.

Comprehensive and Effective Planning: *The school develops, implements, and evaluates a comprehensive school improvement plan that communicates a clear purpose, direction, and action plan focused on teaching and learning.*

- Metro Elementary 1 is using the Unified Improvement Plan (UIP) template which incorporates state and federal improvement and accountability requirements along with Title I improvement planning. In addition to the CSAP data that are included in the template, the school uses their grade-level data analysis process which includes DRA2, DIBELS, interim assessments and student work to set their goals. Multiple sources of data are collected and analyzed, but disaggregated data (gender, ethnicity, socio-economic) comes generally from CSAP testing.

- Along with the *Writing Alive* curriculum, the staff uses evidence-based practices such as weekly data analysis, SMART goals, rubrics, and exemplars to meet their UIP goal. Additionally, there is administrative support with walkthrough observations and written feedback. SAG cross-grade and cross-department level teams meet regularly to take part in school-designed professional development.

- Administration and staff are clear on the academic focus of improving writing proficiency as the building-wide goal stated in the UIP. Beyond that, definitive school-wide goals are not evident. Staff indicated the school goals to be:
    - o Raise student achievement;
    - o Improve student attendance;
    - o Move them as far as we can;
    - o Provide a safe learning environment;
    - o Promote PBS; and
    - o Increase parent involvement.

- Teachers identify student learning goals through the development of SGOs. Teachers are required to develop SMART goals based on formative assessment data every six weeks. One of the goals must be tied to the UIP goal of improving writing proficiency.

- There is a clear action plan to meet the goal of increasing writing proficiency defined in the UIP which includes timelines, key personnel, and resources. The means for evaluation are established through review of implementation benchmarks and on-going data analysis at the

teacher level – kindergarten through 5th grade. The UIP is implemented as developed with the exception of vertical articulation and learning lab opportunities. The school evaluates the degree to which it is achieving increased writing proficiency by regular grade-level data analysis of student work and classroom and district assessments.

- The school sustains a commitment to continuous improvement by working collaboratively to enhance and support student achievement by holding high expectations, on-going data analysis, the use of data to adjust instruction, and accountability. Furthermore, this year, administrators are encouraging teachers to assist students in developing their own data notebooks in order to further the students' sense of responsibility for their own learning. Students can use these notebooks to track and set goals for their own progress toward grade-level proficiency. Some teachers have adopted this practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION: ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

- Revisit the school's mission and vision. Include all stakeholders, (staff, students, parents, and community members). Use these as guiding documents against which all decisions and actions can be evaluated. Provide all stakeholders with regular updates on the school's progress toward accomplishing the mission and vision. DuFour and Eakers (1998) inform us "…the lack of a compelling vision for public schools continues to be a major obstacle in any effort to improve schools. Those who hope to develop a school's capacity to function as a learning community cannot overlook the importance of this critical building block in achieving that goal….building a shared vision is the ongoing, never-ending, daily challenge confronting all those who hope to transform their schools into learning communities."

- In addition to the goals identified in the Unified Improvement Plan, develop and consistently articulate school goals that directly link the mission and vision of the school.

- Ensure that the performance of all subgroups is regularly monitored and discussed using the available disaggregated data, (e.g. CSAP and district interim assessments).

- Provide additional opportunities for extended-learning time beyond the school day. Consider the use of before or after school tutoring for students who are not yet proficient. Provide summer school for all students who are not proficient. Also, explore the possibility of additional learning opportunities for advanced learners. Link advanced learners with summer opportunities available through local colleges and universities. Seek sponsorships to fund those students who cannot afford these expanded opportunities.

- Provide professional development, particularly to new teachers, on effective classroom procedures to assist with classroom management, the elimination of disruptions, and the efficient use of daily classroom routines. Consider exploring the strategies suggested in *Teach Like A Champion* by Doug Lemov (2010). Ensure that agreed upon PBIS protocols are fully and consistently implemented in every classroom.

- Peter Drucker reminds us "The easiest and the greatest increases in productivity in knowledge work come from redefining the task and **especially from eliminating what needs not be done**."

(Drucker, 1992)   Re-evaluate the purpose and impact of the existing committees in accomplishing the mission and vision. Could some of them be eliminated or combined? Make explicit links between the work of the committees, in order to assist staff members in developing a deeper understanding of the nature and value of the work.

- Review the protocols for both data and collaborative planning teams to ensure fidelity to the process and accountability for the intended outcomes.

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