Effective School Practices (ESP) Review Report

For

Metro Middle School 1

Conducted: April 24-29, 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:
  - o Catch -up median growth percentiles; and
  - o Colorado English Language Acquisition (CELA) growth
- This narrowed the group to the top 15 schools in which additional performance data, listed below, were used:
  - o Reading and Math achievement (3 year);
  - o School Performance Frameworks (SPF) rating and specific "Growth Gaps" rating (3 year);
  - o AYP results;
  - o Colorado Basic Literacy Act (CBLA) data (for elementary schools); and
  - o Graduation Rate (for high schools).
- This narrowed the list to 11 schools using the following demographics data.
  - o Poverty rates;
  - o Size of school based on enrollment;
  - o Percent of students that are ELL and minority;
  - o Location of school (rural, urban, etc.); and
  - o 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: 159

- School administrators: <u>18</u>
- Instructional staff (regular and special program teachers):   <u>41</u>
- Central Office Personnel: <u>16</u>
- Parents/Community Members   <u>7</u>
- Classified Instructional Staff   <u>2</u>
- Students   <u>75</u>

Number of Observations:

- Classrooms   <u>112</u>
- Meetings (Community & Grade Level)   <u>5</u>
- Advisory Meetings   <u>16</u>
- Enrichment Sessions   <u>22</u>

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 Middle 1 (MM1) is a charter school organization operating under the Denver Public School (DPS) System. The organizational design is collaborative and includes central office and building leadership in many of the decisions that are made for the campuses that make up the organization. MM1 has been in existence for five years and includes grades 6-8. The school operates on an extended-day and extended-year calendar, knowing that the populations of students served often come to middle school with skills below grade level that require more time in order to accelerate learning and skill development. The mission and core beliefs of the school are foundational in the organization and clearly define who they are as an educational community. It is expected that every student strive for college and leave the school with the skills necessary to be successful in both high school and college.

Currently there are 314 students in grades 6-8 at this school. Ninety-four percent of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. More than 97.5% of the students are of Hispanic ethnicity. That being said, DPS has identified this school as "distinguished" based on a range of longitudinal measures, demonstrating high growth and high status. The school was rated second among secondary schools in DPS and fourth overall out of 132 schools evaluated. In terms of Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) and the federal No Child Left Behind legislation, the school exceeded the AYP targets in each subject. Students at MM1 exceeded the state average (percent proficient and advanced) in seven out of ten tested areas and made the second highest academic growth among ALL public secondary schools in the state, exceeding district and state median growth percentiles in all tested subjects.

MM1 has clearly-defined non-negotiables when it comes to teaching and learning. The curriculum has been carefully crafted to ensure that students are accessing and mastering the skills that align to the standards expected to be learned. Teachers use, and consistently apply, classroom strategies that permeate the culture of learning in the school. Not only are there high expectations for student learning, there are consistent expectations for teachers regarding the support and reteaching that is often necessary for students to master the content and skills required of them.   Teachers are expected to do five things well---teach, plan, grade student work, call parents and provide great enrichment opportunities. It is evident that teachers embrace a mission and belief about teaching urban students and thus maximize their ability to make a difference for these students. They are motivated to succeed with the students at MM1 and demonstrate a work ethic that makes it possible to highly-impact student achievement in this school. An organizational underpinning is the belief that the building principal is expected to be the instructional leader of the building. As such, many of the other duties and responsibilities that tend to dilute the ability of principals to focus on teachers teaching and students learning are delegated to other individuals within the organization and school.

Interruptions are completely minimized throughout the school.   No intercom exists.   Student misbehavior is quickly addressed by the words, "not accomplished" which results in a mark by the student's name on a clipboard. Students earn a weekly "paycheck" and deductions are made on their paycheck based on this and/or demerits earned throughout the week. Once the statement is made, teachers, without missing a beat, continue the lesson.

There is a shared belief and sense of urgency among teachers regarding the work of educating students to reduce the learning gaps they might bring to MM1.   Lesson design incorporates a gradual release

model in which modeling and guided practice lead to independent practice that is closely monitored. Pacing of the instruction is rigorous with minimal time lost due to behavior issues. Homework is intentionally aligned to the "students will be able to" (SWBAT) learning objective of the day. Classroom strategies that are consistently used are high-impact strategies identified in the literature for improving student engagement and learning for all students, but especially for students of poverty. Lost time due to transitions from one class to another is non-existent as teachers move to the classroom rather than students moving. These highly-structured, intentional and purposeful transitions exemplify the concept of bell-to-bell instruction and learning.

Consistent classroom learning behaviors are identified and reinforced throughout the school under the acronym SLANT. Students are expected to show the various components (Sit up straight, Listen, Ask & answer, Nod in understanding, and Track the speaker) and can be reminded of this behavior with a simple reminder by the teacher such as, "Show your SLANT".

The system allows for a gradual release over time from teacher-controlled to student-centered opportunities and responsibilities as students progress from 6th to 8th grade. These include such practices as walking silently in line from one place to another in the building in grades 6 and 7 to less structured movement for 8th graders in that they no longer move in lines. Students in 6th and 7th grades have a mandatory homework center while in 8th grade students have a study hall and after school teachers provide "office hours" to replace the center.

Though MM1 is a charter school, the school staff members and the central office personnel view the school to be part of the public school system. Students come from public elementary schools and the school is considered to be a neighborhood school. Administrators "walk" the neighborhood each year to share information about the school and to inform parents about the opportunities the school offers its students and parents. Students are selected by lottery as 6th graders and then receive a home visit from the administrators where expectations and information are shared and explained to the family and a written contract is signed.

The success of this school is to be commended. The following report serves to capture the effective practices that permeate this system and which support students in achieving academically at high levels.

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 **<u>adopted curriculum</u>** 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 **<u>multiple evaluation and assessment strategies</u>** 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 **<u>effective, varied, and research-based practices</u>** 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 embrace the fine work that has been accomplished at MM1 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.*

- "Curriculum may be the single largest factor that determines how many students in a school will learn" (Marzano, 2003). A guaranteed and viable curriculum, with clearly-identified learning objectives aligned with standards, has been identified by many researchers as critical to the improvement of student achievement. Such a curriculum provides the non-negotiables of what will be taught and learned. Metro Middle 1 (MM1) has provided that curriculum. At MM1, an aligned curriculum has been developed by teams of content area teachers. Effective schools research has determined that "To ensure their participation and commitment, administrators must allot adequate time for the alignment process; ensure the process remains focused and relevant to teachers; involve teachers in developing instructional pacing charts; review content standards across disciplines and grades…." (Lezotte, 2011). This process began 5 years ago at Metro Middle 1, using Colorado Model Content Standards, standards from other states, including California and Massachusetts, and curriculum from Roxbury Prep in Boston. Metro Middle 1 Standards were developed and daily learning objectives defined from those standards. The Standards developed were intended to be, and are, rigorous and exceed the requirements of the Colorado Model Content Standards. These standards are currently being reviewed and revised to align with the Colorado Academic Standards which incorporate the Common Core Standards.

- The curriculum, as it is defined through the identified standards and daily learning objectives, is guaranteed and viable when it provides the "opportunity to learn" (Marzano, 2003). "Opportunity to learn involves recognizing students' individual differences and their readiness for new learning, accommodating those differences through adjustments in the curriculum and delivery of instruction, and aligning the intended, taught, and assessed curriculum" (Lezotte, 2011). The curriculum at Metro Middle 1 is designed to meet the needs of students who enter the sixth grade with a wide variety of learning deficits and are expected to leave eighth grade prepared with the academic skills required to be successful in high school and beyond. Reading and math curricula include both grade-level expectations and basic skills objectives.

- From the developed curriculum, unit plans are created by using a backward design model. Unit plans provide a brief summary of the overarching purpose of the unit. Plans identify key vocabulary for the unit topic, enduring understandings, essential questions, and the evidence that will be used to demonstrate student understanding. Finally the plan identifies the daily learning objectives being addressed and provides a pacing guide. There is an expectation that while teachers may and should adapt curriculum to meet the needs of their students, the basic outline of the unit plan will be followed.

- Exit tickets (formative assessments administered at the end of each day's lesson) and daily learning packets are then collaboratively created for each day's objective. The daily packets provide content resources for student learning. Packets begin with the daily objective, the goal of the day's learning. Vocabulary for the day is identified and notes-catchers or graphic organizers provided, in addition to reading source materials. The daily packet in most cases, replaces the textbook. Daily packets may be, and often are, modified by individual teachers to meet student needs. Packets include a heavy emphasis on vocabulary instruction and non-linguistic representation, reflecting attention to the needs of the school's second-language population. Daily packets from past years are adapted and modified routinely. Packet contents are used throughout the lesson as students complete notes-catchers, graphic organizers, partner activities, and finally homework.

- Textbooks and "off-the-shelf" curriculum are not used in most classes or content areas. The rationale behind this decision stems from the need to meet the widely-varying skill levels of the student population, particularly in reading. It is also felt that no existing textbook or packaged curriculum is aligned with the standards identified by Metro Middle 1. Teachers are expected to identify, locate, and/or develop the materials necessary for instruction in their classes. A wide variety of instructional materials are used, including authentic literature, primary source documents, and video clips. There is an expectation that the materials utilized will be culturally sensitive and provide a multicultural focus. Textbooks are introduced in eighth grade to help students develop the technical reading skills they will need in high school.

- Ongoing revision and review of the curriculum occurs throughout the school year and during the 3-4 weeks teachers meet in the summer. During the school year, teachers meet with grade-level, cohort teams from the other network schools. Content specialists facilitate a review of assessment data and determine needs to review or reteach content. During the summer, these same teachers use data on student learning collected throughout the school year to make changes to the established curriculum and modify unit plans and daily packets for the upcoming school

year. The teams that review and revise the curriculum are made up of grade-level teachers only. As changes are made to specific grade-level curricula, gaps or overlaps with other grades may occur, resulting in a curriculum that is not vertically aligned.

- The Daily Learning Objectives and Regular Assessment Program (RAP) assessment items are analyzed for levels of cognition using Bloom's Taxonomy, but a high level of rigor using questioning that elicits higher-order thinking by students is not always evident. Explicit instruction in and focus on use of higher-order thinking skills in daily packets is not a pervasive practice. Unit plans do not include extended learning opportunities for advanced learners.

- Special education needs are addressed within the curriculum and classroom instruction through the emphasis on basic skills acquisition and vocabulary. Differentiation is not built into daily packets. Special education students are pulled out of enrichment classes, and science and social studies classes for resource room and intervention in reading and math.

- During classroom observations, the team had the opportunity to observe several student presentations. Many of these students appeared to lack the oral presentation skills that might be required of them in high school. Presentations did not appear to be well organized, and the students did not appear to demonstrate the requisite public speaking skills in the few presentations observed.

- While teachers are making excellent use of technology in instruction, i.e., SMART Board and Elmos, there is little evidence of the integration of information literacy and technology standards in the written curriculum and limited evidence that they are taught as a part of routine classroom instruction.

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.*

- Research demonstrates that in effective schools, "student progress is monitored frequently using a variety of assessment procedures. Assessment results are used to improve individual student performance and to adapt the instructional program to meet student learning needs." (Lezotte, 2011). Both formative and summative assessment results are utilized at Metro Middle 1. Assessments include Regular Assessment Program (RAP) interim assessments given every six weeks; Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessments given three times a year, fall, winter, and spring; and Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) administered every spring in accordance with state requirements. AIMSWeb Benchmark Assessments are used to progress-monitor students who have been identified for reading intervention. Additionally, exit tickets are used by teachers to determine student learning each day.

- RAP interim assessments are used to track student learning. These assessments are developed by teachers during the curriculum development process and are tightly aligned with the curriculum and the expectations created by standards and learning objectives. Items on the assessment are developed by teams of teachers using resources such as released items from state assessments

including CSAP and Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). The assessments primarily use multiple choice questions with some opportunities for students to answer in an extended response. Scoring guides and rubrics are created and teachers are expected to grade the assessments for their classes. Results data are then entered into Alpine Achievement and reports are generated which provide proficiency information on each objective and standard as well as each student's individual achievement. RAP results are shared with students who may use the results to self-assess and set goals. They are reported to parents as grades and account for 25% of the Trimester Grade.

- Immediately following each RAP administration, "Data Days" are held. This is a day-long opportunity for teachers collaborating with their grade-level and content area peers to work together to analyze the results of the assessment and make adjustments and modifications to the instructional plans. The day is tightly organized and begins with analyzing and interpreting data in order to identify standards in need of review or reteaching. A concrete and specific RAP Analysis Action Plan for addressing the identified needs is then developed. The analysis plan identifies those standards on which fewer than 65% of students demonstrated proficiency and provides a plan for reteaching; it also identifies those students who scored between 65% and 80% mastery and provides a plan for reviewing and reassessing. Participants then share best practices related to the teaching of specific standards and review the upcoming RAP units. Finally they discuss individual students and identify plans for differentiation and intervention in the classroom, as well as reviewing which students may require tutoring and intervention placements.

- NWEA Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessments were implemented this year and are given three times a year. They are used primarily to monitor student progress against a national measure. MAP data is accessible to teachers, but is not used collaboratively for curriculum modification. The "short form" MAP reading assessment is used to monitor student progress in reading. MAP results have not been shared with students or parents.

- Formative assessment occurs in all classrooms in the form of an Exit Ticket, but continuous checks for understanding using different strategies occur throughout instruction. At the end of each class, students complete an Exit Ticket which is included in their Daily Packet and directly assesses understanding of the day's objective. Exit Ticket results are reviewed by teachers at the end of each day. Teachers then use the information to identify students in need of review or reteaching or to make adjustments to instruction for the whole class the next day. Exit tickets are also reviewed by the teacher and the principal on a weekly or biweekly basis to monitor the impact of instruction.

- Students report they monitor their own learning through grades and assessment results and set goals for themselves. Student self-assessment and reflection is included in the Daily Packet. Teachers, however, report that no formal attempts are made to have students track their progress or set specific goals relative to standards proficiency.

- Rubrics are used by teachers to evaluate student work on some assessments and projects. Student use of rubrics to understand what constitutes a proficient level of work is not common. Some teachers occasionally provide rubrics to guide student work on projects or assignments.

Students occasionally design rubrics in some classrooms but seem to receive little guidance relative to application.

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

- In high-performing schools such as MM1, teachers stay engaged in a continuous study of educational research to identify, deeply assimilate, and constantly refine educational practices that culminate in desired learning outcomes for students. Their purpose is to increase academic success for all students and to ensure effective interventions for identified students as needed. Teachers work extremely hard and sacrifice long hours to acknowledge the moral imperative of helping all students reach their highest potential. For this to transpire, teachers must have ready access to high-impact professional development, in addition to ongoing mentoring, timely and relevant coaching, and meaningful opportunities to observe with and learn from peers in the classroom.

- The Metro Middle 1 Leadership Team and the MM1 (staff) network provide a wide range of professional development opportunities with an emphasis on implementing and improving the use of effective, research-based instructional practices. Teachers new to MM1 participate in four weeks of summer training while returning teachers participate for three weeks. A major training emphasis includes introduction and review of student-centered, research-based instructional strategies proven to be of high impact with students of poverty.

- Additionally, on a six-week cycle throughout the school year, a menu of 4-5 professional development topics, generated by administrators, teacher suggestions, and RAP analysis is offered at multiple MM1 network sites. Teachers are expected to participate in at least two hours of these varied offerings every six weeks. Master teachers serve as content area specialists who facilitate teams and mentor teachers in their content area throughout the network. Many teachers have joined the staff from the Teach for America program which provides a five-week summer institute to build foundational teaching skills prior to classroom placement.

- There appears to be a significant reliance on direct instruction focused on specific learning objectives and an intentional emphasis on skills acquisition, especially in grade six. Most teachers observed were consistently utilizing a comprehensive taxonomy codified in the techniques within *Teach like a Champion*, (Lemov, 2010), in order to:
  - **Establish high academic expectations -** *No Opt Out, Right is Right, Stretch It*
  - **Structure lessons -** *The Hook, Ratio, Check for Understanding, Exit Ticket*
  - **Engage students -** *Cold Call, Call and Response, Wait Time*
  - **Create strong classroom culture -** *Do Now, Tight Transitions, Binder Control*
  - **Maintain high behavioral expectations -** *100 Percent, Sweat the Details, No Warnings*
  - **Build character and trust -** *Precise Praise, Warm/Strict, Normalize Error*
  - **Improve pacing –** *Brighten Lines, Every Minute Matters, Work the Clock*

- Through classroom observations, the Effective School Practices (ESP) team identified the functional use of many high-quality instructional strategies. These strategies include pair-share dialogue, use of cooperative learning groups, presenting authentic curriculum content,

scaffolding of learning tasks, and the utilization of sheltered instruction to address the needs of multi-lingual students. The consistent application of these strategies in classrooms appears to result in a high level of student engagement and increased academic achievement. Instructional delivery is further enhanced through challenging pacing, efficient transitions, varied and appropriate use of praise, a comprehensively applied behavior management system, presentation of content through up-to-date technology, and a shared expectation of "bell-to-bell" instruction. These instructional approaches combine to offer a significant degree of classroom rigor within the realm of lesson delivery.

- The Gradual Release of Responsibility is a research-based instructional model developed by Pearson and Gallagher (1993). In this optimal learning model, the responsibility for task completion and knowledge acquisition shifts gradually from the teacher to the student. Use of this model is pervasive within daily lessons and learning packets across subject areas at Metro Middle 1.

- Some of the above instructional techniques/strategies target an increase in the quality and quantity of active student participation and is predicated on effective behavioral management. As part of a building-wide expectation, the focus on creating and sustaining a high level of group and individual participation is emphasized in every classroom. This is consistently reinforced by teachers when students earn bonus bucks which they can exchange for privileges or material objects. Bonus bucks are rewarded as individual students demonstrate positive behavior above and beyond the expected norm. These tokens operate as secondary reinforcers to be cashed in at the STRIVE Store.

- Theoretically, all negative behavioral choices immediately receive consequences *(Sweat the Details)* with a reduction of one buck for receiving a "not accomplished (NA)", a reduction of ten bucks for receiving a demerit, or in the form of a group consequence of losing a class point for a transgression exhibited by multiple students. Not accomplished behaviors (e.g. not following directions, not completing tasks, violating norms) are recorded on the STRIVE rubric.

- Observations of teacher compliance with this behavior management system seem to demonstrate a high level of efficacy with the model ideal. Teachers consistently apply both positive and negative reinforcers in a non-judgmental manner and with an unemotional demeanor. As a rule, most teachers do not give warnings but rather, immediately apply a consequence to misbehavior. The end results of this extremely high level of teacher adherence and application include students who are attentive, track the speaker, comply with instructions, quickly learn from their mistakes and become less likely to repeat them. All students quickly internalize these high behavioral expectations and the vast majority becomes much better at focusing on instruction. Teachers are able to quickly and unobtrusively redirect misbehavior without interrupting instruction or distracting other students. They can focus more time and energy on instructional delivery and less on behavior management.

- Student responses tend to be expressed in complete sentences. Classrooms invariably feature a rich oral language environment, beneficial to all students, and so necessary to English language learners (ELL). Many instructional practices are designed to be responsive to varied student

learning styles, demonstrate cultural competence of teachers, and are culturally relevant to students.

- With each lesson, teachers consistently and routinely communicate learning objectives to students through a variety of methods. They are displayed on the front of daily learning packets for further delineation and brief discussion. Learning objectives may be enunciated through choral reading, offered as a component of an anticipatory set, introduced through a connection to previous learning, or serve as the object of a prediction. They are always presented to students for perusal and reflection.

- The teacher evaluation process appears to be valued by many teachers. There is a mutually perceived focus on continuous improvement of instructional practices. Through a series of three formal and occasional informal evaluations, administrators collaborate with teachers to ultimately arrive at strategies and ideas to share with staff, areas of focus (goals for improvement) and necessary support (next steps). Teachers are at-will employees.

- Homework is frequent, relevant, designed to reinforce recently learned objectives, extend learning opportunities, and habituate a positive work ethic among students. High expectations for accurate and timely homework completion are evident school wide. The homework policy is clearly articulated through a signed contract between the student, parent and school; reinforced by every teacher at the conclusion of a lesson; clearly communicated on all classroom white boards; monitored daily through teacher-student advisory; and consistently reinforced (Mandatory attendance at after-school Homework Center). These common homework policies and procedures are fully implemented with great efficacy as evidenced by the high level of student compliance.

- Classroom seating arrangements serve to facilitate instructional efficiency and offer opportunities for students to interact and respond to each other. Additionally, seating arrangements support a variety of instructional delivery choices. In many observed classrooms, the seating arrangement was quickly changed to accommodate a particular learning activity and immediately brought back to original specifications at the conclusion of the learning activity. Student movement within the classroom into small groups is accomplished with little disruption to the lesson and with minimal lost time in transition.

- Based on identified needs, select students may benefit from "double-dipping" in a content area in order to close an achievement gap. Frequent RAP assessments and NWEA MAPS short forms are used to identify students for targeted instructional interventions primarily through the Response to Intervention (RtI) process. Interventions are focused on reading and math. Reading interventions include *Rewards, Wilson, Reading Advantage, and Language*! *Assessment and Learning in Knowledge Spaces* (ALEKS) is used for individualized support with math skills. Progress monitoring (e.g. AIMS Web benchmark assessments, running records) is utilized to chart student progress, define exit criteria, and monitor the efficacy of interventions.

- The extended length of the school day, "bell-to-bell" instructional expectations, enrichment opportunities scheduled at the end of the day, and the added length of the school year, all provide for increased instructional time and allow for additional academic interventions.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 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 in the Curriculum Alignment Template (CAT) and include extended learning opportunities for advanced learners in both unit plans and daily packets. "Rigor is a term used to describe the processes whereby the teacher consciously increases the depth, complexity, sophistication, and novelty of thinking required by students as they acquire and process knowledge. Rigor can be attained through the curriculum content and/or instructional approaches. In other words, the "what" and "how" of classroom instruction can impact rigor. Rigor can include exposure to new ideas, skills, and concepts not previously encountered by the student. It can extend learning by delving more broadly and deeply into ideas already introduced in a particular content area or curriculum. Learning extensions can occur through advanced content, materials, and increasing levels of cognitive complexity." (Public Education & Business Coalition, 2006)

- When the curriculum was originally developed, vertical articulation to create alignment was evident. On-going curriculum review and modification now occurs only by grade-levels. Over time this omission may have lessened the strength of vertical alignment in some content areas. Ensure that vertical alignment remains tight as adjustments are made to grade-level curriculum. Provide opportunities for vertical articulation discussions during summer curriculum work and on Data-Days.

- Intentionally embed oral presentation skills and persuasive argument activities in the regular classroom curriculum in addition to enrichments. Provide students with rubrics which both guide the preparation for the presentation and enable students watching the presentation to assess it.

- Review the special education curriculum to determine the efficacy of the current practices. Ensure that progress monitoring tools and interventions are accurately diagnosing, targeting and impacting the specific areas of need for special education students.

- As teachers and content specialists collaborate to revise standards and daily learning objectives, integrate technology and information literacy standards into the curriculum and ensure that these standards are taught at each grade level and within each content area.

- Increase the use of rubrics to describe the expected levels of performance and help students to understand what constitutes a proficient level of work. Such rubrics enable students to critically analyze and understand their own performance. Consistent rubrics throughout the school help students understand the clear expectations for learning and performance (Tileston and Darling, 2009).

- As MM1 staff continues to gain expertise together, they should acknowledge and take full advantage of a powerful continuum that has the potential to build horizontal capacity throughout the entire network.

- Through the foundational work that has already been done, teachers are able to select appropriate strategies for daily Learning Packets to adequately meet their students' needs. Through a common understanding of best-first instructional practices, most teachers can collaboratively modify delivery to address learning gaps in subgroups. Through a deeper conceptual understanding and implementation of highly-leveraged educational practices, many teachers are able to model these practices for others and assist in building the collective capacity of an entire network. Through formulating and following through with action research, some teachers can self-actualize and disseminate newly-attained knowledge to others in the network. Continue to support MM1 staff as they master this continuum will ultimately help all students reach their highest potential.

- MM1 leadership and teachers should strive to perfect what they are already doing well. This entails: creating a deeper conceptual understanding of best practices when examining the level of implementation (walkthrough data helps here); recognition and celebration of accomplishments to inspire others to perform in the same manner (grow esprit de corps); meaningful, structured teacher observation of peers (great way to build capacity); increased administrative classroom observations to ensure fidelity to the learning objectives and to the taxonomy (walking the talk); and sustaining accountability to the mission (getting what is expected). While there exists a functional to high level of capability in all of the following areas, **continuing to build expertise and systemic capacity** might be appropriate in the journey from good to great. Continue to:
  o improve daily Learning Packets;
  o strive for deeper implementation of the taxonomy codified by *Teach like a Champion;*
  o further refine the use of gradual release of responsibility;
  o differentiate instruction to address gaps in subgroups and individual needs;
  o provide sheltered instruction to embrace the needs of English language learners;
  o scaffold the progression of learning tasks towards increasing difficulty;
  o utilize instructional tools such as advance organizers or visual representations;
  o actively engage students with classroom talk strategies; and
  o disaggregate formative assessment results to inform instruction.

- There are also potential focal areas to consider for improvement which may have not yet reached a high level of implementation. These include:
  o Developing cooperative learning strategies for student groups to create, problem solve, improve collaborative skills and serve as a vehicle for authentic debate;
  o Using deep questioning focused on essential ideas and including complex tasks to target higher-order thinking skills;
  o Designing more opportunities for student oral presentation and persuasive argument;
  o Explicitly teaching students to reflect on their own learning (meta-cognition strategies);
  o Providing detailed written feedback to student writing in order to reinforce what they do well and specifically target what needs improvement; and
  o Incorporating student conferences to review individual level of achievement and engage students as partners in setting academic goals.

- Metro Middle 1 should intentionally strive to nurture a culture of innovation. It is vital for MM1 to maintain coherence through deep implementation of agreed-upon best instructional practices. It is also incumbent upon this high-achieving school to foster creativity and seek out new ideas

that may be critically important to student achievement. An educational practice, *Instructional Rounds in Education,* (City, Elmore, Fiarmen and Teitel, 2009) that features a network approach to improving teaching and learning, offers a methodology to improve upon and deeply embed best instructional practices. This collaborative observation protocol also provides a setting for creating specific agreements on what constitutes effective instruction and offers a testing ground for theory of action research focused on systemic improvement.

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 Middle School 1 has established a safe, orderly, caring and supportive climate that focuses on high academic and behavioral expectations, which are consistently and equitably applied. Rigorous instruction for skill development and opportunities for student interaction are observed. Most classes include approximately 30 students.

- Staff members hold a strong belief that all students can achieve high academic standards, and they successfully instill the belief that "I can achieve; I can go to college".

- A strict Code of Conduct is implemented, which is based on the philosophy that classroom respect and order are essential for academic progress. Expected behaviors are explicitly taught and consequences are clearly delineated. The Code of conduct consists of rules that govern student behavior. The rules include:
  - o respect for fellow students, staff and school property;
  - o wearing the school uniform;
  - o daily school attendance;
  - o punctuality; and

- o prohibition of talking out of turn or causing classroom disruptions.

- The Code of Conduct is listed in the Student and Family Handbook and includes a description of rules and consequences. Also included in the handbook is a description of the STRIVE values, and the STRIVE rubrics, merits and awards.

- Scholarship, Teamwork, Respect, Intelligence, Virtue, Effort (STRIVE) values are at the center of the school culture. Students are explicitly taught the behaviors related to the values as part of the regular academic program, and they are held accountable for behavioral expectations.

- Immediate consequences are administered for minor infractions or failure to exhibit behaviors that reflect the STRIVE values. The philosophy behind the practice is that addressing small infractions will help ensure that major infractions will not take place. During classroom visits, teachers were observed addressing small infractions with a "not accomplished" comment that flowed with their instruction and reinforced student behavioral expectations.

- Students who receive three demerits serve one-hour of after-school detention. Detention involves writing activities based on reflecting on the behavioral choices the student has made. The student meets with school staff to discuss behavioral choices and a "next steps" plan is developed. The student takes the plan home for parent signature. Parents are included in contracting individual behavior plans that will help the student gain control of behaviors and accept responsibility for actions. If an in-school or out-of-school suspension is warranted for frequent or serious infractions, parents are informed and encouraged to be part of the problem-solving behavior plan.

- New sixth-grade students, their parent or guardian, and teacher together sign a Family Contract at the individual home visit prior to the start of school. The contract delineates responsibilities and commitment to actions which demonstrates knowledge of the Code of Conduct.
  - o Students are expected and commit to:
    - exemplifying the core values;
    - attending school daily;
    - exhibiting full respect and attention to every task;
    - completing and submitting daily homework;
    - obeying the Code of Conduct; and
    - speaking regularly and honestly with parents about progress at school.
  - o Parents are expected and commit to:
    - supporting the demanding high academic standards and the extended school year;
    - ensuring their child attends school daily and in uniform;
    - monitoring homework and their child's progress;
    - attending required parent meetings; and
    - communicating concerns or problems to the school.
  - o Teachers and staff are expected and commit to:
    - being at school and fully prepared each day;
    - grading and returning homework, tests, and written work in a timely manner;
    - consistently and equitably enforcing all school rules; contacting advisee parents frequently; and

- - maintaining the highest academic performance and student conduct.

- Students are eligible to receive 6 dollars of school money per day by following the Code of Conduct. Failure to exhibit the STRIVE values results in a deduction of one dollar and is known as "not accomplished". Demerits received from Code of Conduct violations result in a 10 dollar deduction. Positive behaviors above expectations result in the earning of "Bonus Bucks". Students receive weekly conduct reports and paychecks if they have received at least one dollar. Every six weeks students have the opportunity to spend their school dollars to purchase privileges or items at the STRIVE store. Students who do not receive a paycheck must have their behavior report signed by a parent or guardian.

- A set of classroom behaviors that relate to student learning is also explicitly taught. The behaviors are posted in many classes and teacher reference to the SLANT behaviors was observed during classroom visits. SLANT is an acronym for the following student behaviors:
  - Sit up straight;
  - Listen;
  - Ask and answer;
  - Nod in understanding; and
  - Track the speaker.

- Organization skills are explicitly taught and modeled at each grade level. Students are expected to organize notebooks (binder strategy) in the same way with a section for each class. All handouts are 3-hole punched. Teachers enforce a procedure for all students opening notebooks at once, putting materials in a specific section of the notebook, and then all students closing the notebooks at the same time thus eliminating disruptions and wasted time.

- Parent and student perception surveys are annually administered. For the past two years over 90% of the parents reported:
  - Their child/children showed academic growth;
  - The environment at the school supports learning;
  - The teachers care about my child/children;
  - The school is well maintained;
  - Parents feel comfortable speaking with staff; and
  - The school does a good job sharing information about their child/children's academic progress.

- For the past two years over 90% of the students reported that:
  - They understood what they need to do to learn and make progress;
  - They knew the rules at their school;
  - There are consequences for students who break the rules; and
  - Their school teachers teach them to respect people of all backgrounds.

- For the past two years, 78% of the students reported that they had at least one adult in the school they felt comfortable talking to about a problem or concern. Respect is a central value in the school. The percentage of students who reported that most adults in the school treated them with

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respect increased from 88 to 90%. The percentage related to student-to-student respect increased from 78 to 88%.

- Student survey results indicate that students understand their responsibilities. During classroom observations, students exhibit active engagement in the learning process. Progress reports are sent home every three weeks.

- The school is committed to a core belief that every child deserves a demanding, standards-based curriculum which provides solid academic preparation. To accomplish this goal the school has implemented:
  o An intensive curriculum with strong focus on skill development;
  o A longer day and school year that includes 20% more instructional time;
  o Extended class time in literacy and mathematics;
  o Regular homework to ensure skill development and mastery;
  o High school preparatory activities for 8th graders; and
  o A simple uniform to foster respect and diminish social stress.

- Teachers are expected to monitor student academic and behavioral progress. A checklist is provided to teachers that lists required tasks during six-week intervals. The checklist includes tasks in the area of curriculum, instruction and school culture. Tasks include the: submission of daily objectives and exit tickets, grading of two homework assignments each week, weekly tracking of "Battle of the Book" totals, submitting zero-dollar paychecks, entering grades for three-week project reports, RAP administration and analysis of data. Administrators hold the teachers accountable for adherence to task completion.

- Whole-school morning meetings and grade-level meetings are conducted on regularly assigned days to announce events, discuss behavior expectations, recognize accomplishments, and deliver important information. All teachers accompany advisory groups to the meeting area and students stand in assigned locations.

- Grade-level teams meet regularly to plan and coordinate strategies to maximize the skill development of students. Day-long "Data Days" are planned to analyze student growth and develop strategies to adjust instruction to meet student academic needs.

- Students are recognized for progress and accomplishments related to academic and behavioral expectations. Positive reinforcement is regularly provided in classrooms. Morning meetings that are both school-wide and grade-level specific provide opportunities to recognize and celebrate accomplishments. Awards such as "Spirit Stick" are presented to students at school-wide morning meetings for behaviors that are above expectations. Congratulatory Spirit Stick certificates and pictures of recipients are displayed in the hallway.

- Each grade-level classroom is identified for advisory through the name of a university or college. Students are assigned each year to the advisory where they remain for their academic classes. Teachers assign regular homework that provides independent practice. A homework board is maintained in each class. Homework completion is monitored during advisory time each morning. If a child's homework is not complete, parents receive notice that the student will be

attending a mandatory homework center after school that day. The advisory classes are in competition with other advisories to earn points for the highest homework completion rate.

- Advisory periods provide opportunities for students to develop trusting relationship with teachers. Two teachers share an advisory group. The administration strives to ensure one of the teachers is Spanish speaking. Advisory teachers are expected to send written progress reports every three weeks. The progress form categorizes academic effort, classroom behavior, respect for teachers and classmates and additional student recognition/advisor comments. The phone number of the advisor is listed on this report.   A parent signature is required on the progress report.

- Teachers move from class to class which minimizes transition time and maximizes instructional time. The schedule includes morning meetings, two advisory periods, enrichment opportunities, homework center and detention.   Students participate in science and social studies while receiving a double period of reading and mathematics in 6th and 7th grade. While double periods in reading and mathematics are not the case in 8th grade, each class period is longer.

- Student leadership is encouraged within the school.   The Ambassadors Program and Student Council are two formal mechanisms for leadership development. School Ambassadors are provided instruction in presentation skills and assist the staff in showcasing the school. Students are expected to be role models and are encouraged to assist classmates in areas of academic strength. Some eighth-grade students serve as tutors for sixth-grade students.

- Enrichment classes provide additional learning experiences for students who are not in needed of additional academic skill development. Staff members offer an enrichment class based on their area of interest or expertise during each six week rotation. Art ant PE enrichment classes are offered throughout the year. At the end of each six week rotation, enrichment activities such as a talent show are offered in which all students can participate.

- Multicultural understanding is developed through the World Studies curriculum and the staff selection of reading materials for instruction. Some classroom discussions include teacher-led discussions that encourage the understanding of diversity and the impact of prejudices. An enrichment program offered this school year focused on the various cultures within the Hispanic population.

- The mission of the school is to prepare students in grades six through eight for educational success from middle school through college. The mission represents a philosophy of "no excuses" regarding high expectations for all students, which is the foundation for equity.

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 Development Office of Metro Middle 1 gains support from local and national foundations, corporate donors, in-kind donors, and individuals for the start-up of the school. As much as possible, leadership stays within the per pupil allocation from the state for day-to-day operations.

- Metro Middle 1 collaborates with a variety of organizations including other high-performing charter schools. Community organizations who partner with MM1 for support and services include:
  - KIPP Colorado and University Prep;
  - Denver Parks and Recreation to run the athletic programs;
  - GRASP – a gang prevention program;
  - Check Your Head – a program of Mental Health America that runs enrichment and after-school programs;
  - Padres y Jovenas Unidos;
  - Stand for Children;
  - Mi Casa Resource Center;
  - Joshua Station; and
  - Metro State – providing education students as volunteers.

- Parents and students articulate aspirations for college attendance that they had never thought possible prior to the Metro Middle 1 experience.

- No transportation is available for students at this attendance center; therefore, parents commit to getting their students to school on time and/or picking them up after school if they are not within walking distance.

- The school holds the expectation that parents be involved in their student's school experiences by providing monitoring and structure for homework completion. In addition, parents are expected to attend four parent events throughout the year.

- A parent council composed of three parents elected by the parent body, two members of the community, the principal and one teacher serve as an advisory committee to the Board of Directors of Metro Middle 1 and to the Head of School. The council solicits input from other parents and the community regarding issues of importance. They also coordinate parent volunteer services and visits to the school. Some of the weekend activities the parent council sponsors are:
  - basketball jamboree;
  - flag football jamboree;
  - team-building parent breakfast; and
  - a picnic for meeting and greeting parents.

- The school's communication process purposely includes as much direct communication with parents and students as possible.

- Administrators walk door-to-door within the attendance area of the school to inform parents of the availability of the school. Once the lottery is complete and students are selected, school personnel conduct home visits to each new student's home to explain the philosophy of the school, and expectations of behavior, academics and home support. The signed family contract serves as documentation of the behavior and academic agreements parents and students accept in order to attend this school.

- An orientation is held in the spring for incoming 6th graders to explain the procedures and protocols of the school. A second orientation is held the week prior to the start of school to distribute uniforms, meet sixth grade teachers, and further clarify procedures and expectations.

- Students are exposed to varied experiences outside the school. Most 8th graders are privileged to participate in a trip to Washington, D.C. that is largely paid for by donations and/or corporate sponsors. Families were asked to pay $150 of the $1500 in expenses for each student.

- All grade levels visit a college or university each year to expose students to the concept of going to college.

- Outside weekend activities such as teacher-sponsored hiking in the mountains are available.

- Messages are delivered to students in person or via the computer network in classrooms. There are no intercom interruptions.

- Written communications are in English and Spanish. Parents are notified of a student's failure to complete homework and the requirement of the student's attendance at homework center the morning of the infraction.

- Each student has a cubby in the advisory classroom in lieu of lockers, locker combinations and hallway congestion. Notebooks, coats and other possessions are kept inside the advisory classroom.

- Teachers move from classroom to classroom; students stay in the same room most of the day. No instructional time is wasted on students passing from classroom to classroom.

- In cases of more severe discipline infractions, parents are asked to sign a "next steps" plan. School personnel attempt to include parents in constructing individualized behavior plans that will help the student gain control of his/her behaviors and accept responsibility for actions. If an in-school suspension or out-of-school suspension is warranted for frequent or more severe offenses, parents are informed and encouraged to be part of a problem-solving behavior plan.

- Students report having teacher phone numbers in speed-dial directories. Students are free to contact teachers with academic and/or personal questions prior to 9 p.m.

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.*

- Each new teacher attends four weeks of summer professional development. Continuing teachers attend summer professional development for three weeks. Topics include:
  - developing curriculum;
  - the gradual release model of lesson planning;

- opening and closing the lesson;
- the teacher cart;
- technology, smart board and server training; and
- classroom management strategies, [largely patterned after those illustrated in *Teach Like a Champion,* (Lemov, 2010)]. (See academic performance strand.)

- Each six weeks after the RAP tests are scored and analyzed, professional development topics are created based on student achievement results, principal observations of teacher practices and teacher requests for specific training. Topics for the first round of required PD included: differentiation, study skills, ethnicity, understanding NWEA and introduction to action research. Teachers may be assigned to attend particular sessions based on observation data or they may be allowed to choose the sessions they attend based on classroom observation data and student achievement data. Teachers are expected to attend two hours of professional development during a six-week period.

- Differentiation of individual needs of teachers is addressed with varying professional development topics and the option to create one's own professional development plan with action research. Administrators indicate teachers are provided a growth plan after each of the three annual formal observations.

- Most professional development is delivered by internal presenters. Each professional development activity offers a form for evaluation of the session. A few teachers report that some professional development is not of high quality.

- The Checklist for Faculty Tasks indicates teachers are expected to observe one other class and provide feedback to that teacher on a weekly basis. This expectation does not appear to be closely monitored or practiced.

- The teachers involved in the Teach for America program report greater depth of monitoring and feedback from that organization than other teachers receive who are not involved in this program. Instructional specialists mentor beginning teachers from the four attendance centers of this charter school organization. Some teachers report administrator support may be limited to three formal observations a year except at the beginning of the year when new teachers are informally observed more frequently.

- Teacher evaluations are completed three times per year and teachers are held accountable to standards of performance, measured by regular observation and student growth on internal (RAP), state (CSAP), and national (formerly SAT-10, currently NWEA) tests. Administrators formally observe teachers at least three times a year. After each observation, feedback is provided in a written narrative, oral conversations and ratings on the observation checklist which include:
  - lesson planning;
  - lesson delivery and development;
  - classroom management; and
  - school culture, professionalism and personal growth.

- Each category within the evaluation instrument has specific and observable expectations for the evaluator to record findings during the observation process. The lists are clearly aligned with research-based classroom practices and include look-for's in effective classrooms.

- The professionals in this school know they are making an impact on students' lives. They express the belief that long hours and hard work are paying off and they hold each other accountable for student achievement results. It appears that some are concerned with "burn out" and the ability to sustain the energy and involvement over several years. Eighty-seven percent of last year's teachers stayed within the charter school network.

- Professional development for administrators does not appear to be clearly defined nor focused on building their capacity as instructional leaders.

- Just as students have clearly-articulated non-negotiables for behavior and academic effort, before teachers are hired, they are explicitly told of five major expectations that must be done well:
    o teach;
    o plan;
    o grade student work;
    o call parents; and
    o run an enrichment program.

- In the list of "Expectations for Faculty," one item specifies that teachers are expected to ask for advice, specific ideas, and demonstrations for practices with which they are unfamiliar or uncomfortable. Further, they are expected to consult with specialists and DCIs (as per "Expectations for Faculty" document) for assistance in exploring possible new practices if current practices are ineffective. It is unclear how often this is taking place.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- It is recommended that MM1 explore methods of strengthening the delivery of professional development each six weeks after the data days.
    o How can the quality and value of the brief professional development offerings be strengthened?
    o What is the process for determining the quality of professional development before it is delivered?
    o What specific follow-up is used to make certain professional development is implemented and impacts student achievement in the manner in which it was intended?
    o What professional development would help build the instructional leadership capacity of administrators?

- Review the "Checklist for Faculty Tasks." If items on the list are not being monitored, are they important enough to be on the list?

- The ESP team recognizes the talents of several outstanding teachers in this building. In *Reframing Teacher Leadership,* (Reeves, 2008), ". . . The most important finding of the study— and the foundation of my 'New Framework for Teacher Leadership' – is that direct observation

of the professional practices of teachers by teachers must become the new foundation of professional development." Consider strengthening the expectation so that teachers observe other teachers assimilate effective instructional techniques and provide specific feedback to the teachers observed.

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 (i.e. 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 MM1 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.*

- Metro Middle 1 has a written mission and core beliefs. This mission and core beliefs permeate the actions and the visual environment of the school. A large banner that states, "Strive for College" is the first thing seen upon entering the school. Banners are posted in the morning meeting room and the cafeteria that contain student signatures by graduating class. The identification of the class is the year of college graduation. Teachers express a strong belief that their students can and will go to college. Current students and alumni also are firm in their statements that they will go to college. Alumni and students state that it is Metro Middle 1 that made them believe in their ability to go to college. They also state that they are well prepared for

high school. There are clearly-defined behavioral expectations for both students and staff. These expectations are in place to support the mission of academic success. The mission and core beliefs are sustained in part through the recruitment and interview processes. Metro Middle 1 is clear with applicants about the mission and structure of the school. Applicants are also screened for an understanding of and commitment to the mission during the interview process.

- 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. NWEA MAPS test data is reviewed following the fall, winter, and spring administration. A full day every six weeks is allotted to review RAP test benchmark data, and make adjustments to instruction based on student scores. Teachers do not report a requirement to analyze data by disaggregated subgroups. However, when questioned about which groups had achievement gaps, they all stated Special Education and ELL. Disaggregated data is formally presented to the Board of Trustees, which serves as the accountability group for all of Metro Middle 1's campuses. In addition to the Unified Improvement Plan, Metro Middle 1 has an Accountability Plan. One of the goals in the accountability plan specifically states that each subgroup of students will make Adequate Yearly Progress in reading as defined by the No Child Left Behind legislation. The Unified Improvement Plan specifically states goals for closing the achievement gaps for Special Education and English Language Learners.

- Instructional time is a tightly-guarded priority. To reduce time lost to transitions, leadership implements a schedule that requires teachers to move from class to class while students remain in the same room. There are clear expectations for how students will work together, how long each interaction should take, and what the signal is for returning attention to the teacher. There are no intercom announcements during the instructional day. When student groups must move about in the hallways, they move quickly and in silence. A parent/student/staff contract includes parents' commitments to ensure that their child is in school and on time daily. The student contract includes a commitment to daily attendance, respect, and full attention to all tasks. Students also commit to completing homework daily. Metro Middle 1 staff commit to being in attendance at Metro Middle 1 from 7:30 A.M. to 4:30 P.M. daily, and to being fully prepared for every class.

- There are multiple structures in place to provide extended learning time for students. The master schedule provides all 6th and 7th grade students with a daily100 minute reading block and 100 minute math block. Eighth-grade students do not have double periods of reading and match, but instead have longer class periods. Students who do not complete homework are required to attend a 60 minute after-school homework center. Tutoring is available either by student request or when mandated by a teacher. Individual teachers tutor students during breaks or during the enrichment block. Students who are not proficient on the most recent RAP assessment are required to attend tutoring. A three-week summer school is required for students who are not proficient on standards.

- Teachers are evaluated three times per year. The evaluation instrument encompasses the elements of thorough lesson planning; strong, evidence-based instruction; classroom management; school culture; professionalism; and personal growth. It includes an observation summary that highlights teacher strengths, goals for improvement, and the support necessary to

create this improvement. Some teachers report that these observations and feedback are helpful to them in improving their practice. Teachers also report that informal walkthroughs are more frequent at the beginning of the school year, but become much less frequent as the school year progresses.

- There is a specifically stated teacher expectation that all teachers will be familiar with and able to use all Colorado standards-related documents. Teachers are expected to access these from the Colorado Department of Education website. Teachers who do not know how to use these documents are not provided with training in their use, but are expected to seek training on their own.

- All school staff members are "at will" employees. This "at will" status allows for an expedient dismissal of any staff member who is not performing his or her job to the high level of expectations. There is also a provision for teacher merit pay. A teacher can earn up to an additional 15% of the median teacher salary. This bonus is based solely on student test results.

- The school's leadership has developed some clearly articulated non-negotiable behaviors for both students and teachers.
    - For students these include:
        - a dress code;
        - the STRIVE values (scholarship, teamwork, respect, intelligence, virtue, and effort; and
        - a strict code of conduct which involves consequences for even minor infractions.
    - For teachers these non-negotiables include:
        - an expectation for high-quality instruction based on best practices;
        - participation in ongoing professional development;
        - consistent and regular use of formative and interim assessments (exit tickets, RAP assessments) to inform instruction;
        - team planning and cross-network planning; and
        - enforcement of the student code of conduct.

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

- Few staff members understand the budgeting process and how funds are allocated. When asked, teachers expressed that they were given what they needed to teach. They express the belief that budget allocations are clearly focused on academic achievement for students. Central office administrators state that the lack of collaboration around the budget is deliberate in order to protect teacher time, and allow them to focus on teaching students and improving their own professional practice. Teachers can request to participate in the budget planning process if they choose. The budget development process is highly collaborative between the building principal and the central administration.

- The central administration provides a grant writer who seeks appropriate grant opportunities and will assist staff members with writing grants. However, there is a deliberate effort to fund day-to-day operations through the state funded per pupil operating revenues. This effort is designed to

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ensure sustainability of the school and to eliminate funding as a source of debate about the possibility of replicating the Metro Middle 1 model.

- New staff members are hired who demonstrate a belief in the school's mission as well as the manner in which the mission is implemented. There is a conscious and deliberate effort to match teacher skills with student needs.

- The master schedule does not provide opportunities for grade-level planning on a daily basis. There is a weekly early release on Fridays. This time is used for collaborative grade-level planning across content areas and within content areas. The yearly schedule also provides opportunities for collaborative planning. Teachers attend grade-level meetings seven times during the school year. The grade-level meetings involve planning across the network. Teachers also attend data days every six weeks to analyze RAP test data and discuss how to adjust instruction based on student performance on these assessments. New teachers attend a four-week summer training that is taught by returning staff members. Teacher leaders are designated as specialists in every grade and content area. These specialists meet with and assist other teachers in lesson planning and instructional delivery. Additionally, those staff members involved in Teach for America have required training and planning sessions.

- School and central leadership do not implement structures to allow for vertical articulation and planning. Consequently, any vertical articulation that may take place does so informally. Many teachers assume that appropriate vertical alignment exists because of the use of learning packets which are tightly aligned with standards.

- Some special education students are excluded from social studies and science classes in order to participate in an appropriate intervention. Therefore, the master schedule does not provide insurance that ALL students have access to the entire curriculum.

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.*

- The mission and core beliefs for Metro Middle 1 (MM1) schools are clearly defined for teachers, students and parents. However, it is not apparent that it was collaboratively developed. Students are reinforced by this mission on a daily basis through the opportunities for a demanding, standards-based education and consistent reminders that they have the potential and opportunities for attaining college degrees. Many structures are consistently implemented that support this set of beliefs about the students who attend MM1.

- Teachers have informal opportunities for helping to make decisions at the school level. Clearly-defined structures for decision making at the school level are not apparent. It does not appear that teachers had input or decision-making power in the school improvement planning process that resulted in the drafting of the Unified Improvement Plan (UIP).

- Neither the principal nor teachers are aware of the contents of the UIP for the school. This plan was developed collaboratively by central office personnel from the Metro Middle 1 organization. The school improvement plan for MM1 tightly aligns the major improvement strategies to the accountability plan. Most of the focus on improvement is directly related to the contents of the accountability plan which serves as the driving force behind school improvement. The data analysis included in the UIP and major improvement strategies are identified as needs specific to MM1.

- The decision to write the UIP at the organizational level was intentional since a primary focus of the organization is to allow the building principal to be the instructional leader of the school. Many of the structures the organization has put in place are there to reduce tasks that typically are a building principal's responsibility. Teacher participation in committee work is not a focus or a responsibility required of MM1 teachers.

- There are a variety of data collected in the process of developing the UIP. These data include CSAP proficiency percentages, CSAP median growth percentiles, RAP data, which is analyzed every six weeks by school, by network, by class and by student. RAP assessments are tightly aligned to MM1 standards. NWEA MAP assessments began this school year with a fall, winter and spring administration. Though the team was provided access to perception data from last spring, it is not apparent that perception data are included in the analysis used to develop the Unified Improvement Plan.

- The ongoing data collection process used at the school specifically identifies those students who have not mastered specific standards. Teachers are expected to plan for reteaching so that students are assured success in mastering the curriculum. This spiraling practice of looking at data, taking action for student learning and reviewing previously-learned material was observed by the team on multiple occasions. Additionally, a variety of other data are collected regarding such things as homework completion, STRIVE dollars earned each week and class participation.

- Performance expectations for student learning are included within the plan in terms of attainment of proficiency levels, AYP expectations for each disaggregated group, as well as goals for median growth percentiles and expectations for reducing the ELL and special education gaps that currently exist.

- Major improvement strategies within the school's Unified Improvement Plan are listed to address the root causes identified by the analysis of data. The strategies indicated have potential to directly impact classroom teacher practices and individual student learning, particularly for students identified as needing additional intervention and support.

- The major improvement strategy addressing coaching positions, though valid, appears to be addressing additional issues than those identified as the root cause in the plan. Utilization of grade-level and content specialists and the direct correlation to student achievement in reading and writing may be difficult to ascertain.

- There does not appear to be a structure in place for teachers and administrators to regularly and intentionally review and evaluate the progress in meeting the goals set forth by the major

improvement strategies and accompanying actions of the accountability plan or UIP. However, school personnel are continually evaluating the degree to which they are improving learning for all students in the school. The employee evaluation process is completed three times a year ensuring that there is monitoring of practices throughout the system. Every six weeks students are assessed on their learning. Teachers analyze that data to ensure that students have learned what is expected. There is review and reteaching for students who may have not yet mastered a concept. Extra time is provided for students to learn with support and tutoring to guide their learning. Expectations for academic achievement are clearly articulated, supported by teachers and valued by the entire school community.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- Continue to build capacity in the system for administrator and teacher leadership.

- Ensure that school leadership conducts frequent classroom walkthroughs. Provide regular feedback to teachers, possibly through the use of a walkthrough protocol.

- Consider providing time and implementing structures for staff to meet vertically on a regular basis to ensure the alignment of curriculum and the elimination of gaps and overlaps.

- Evaluate the importance for all students to participate fully in the entire curriculum. Consider the value of intentionally embedding science and social studies curriculum within the intervention time provided by special education educators.

- Make certain that the building principal has knowledge of the major improvement strategies and actions identified in the Unified Improvement Plan. Determine a means to help teachers have an awareness and understanding of the school's improvement efforts based on the UIP or accountability plan.

- Ensure that the actions identified under each major improvement strategy are aligned and that they will intentionally address the root cause identified by the analysis of data.

- Periodically review the progress made toward the implementation of actions addressed in the UIP or accountability plan.

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