Effective Practices School Profile: Metro Elementary School 1

Introduction

The central objective of Title I, Part A is to ensure that all children reach challenging standards. The program provides supplemental resources to those schools and students who have farthest to go in achieving these standards. Over the years, many researchers have analyzed the effectiveness of Title IA on improving student academic performance. The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) has been conducting its own evaluation of Title I programs in the state. As part of this evaluation, CDE has identified a number of Title I schools in Colorado that are achieving high growth with their students. Schools that had been Title I for at least 4 years were ranked based on catch-up median growth percentiles (MGP) on reading and math. The top 34 schools with the highest MGP were compared to each other on their CELA, CBLA, reading and math achievement data, as well as AYP, SPF rating and growth gaps rating to identify the top 11 performing schools. Demographic data were reviewed to ensure that the identified schools represented diverse school demographics.

After identifying these high growth Title I schools, CDE conducted a project to ascertain some of the key practices that are contributing to each school's success. Selected schools were provided the opportunity to participate in an Effective School Practices (ESP) review, an external, objective review of the school based on nine standards: (1) Curriculum; (2) Classroom Evaluation/Assessment; (3) Instruction; (4) School Culture; (5) Professional Growth, Development, and Evaluation; (6) Student, Family, and Community Support; (7) Leadership; (8) Organizational Structure and Resources; and (9) Comprehensive and Effective Planning. Nine schools participated in the study. The ESP review followed the same protocols and structure as a School Support Team (SST) review conducted in a Title I school identified for Improvement. However, in the ESP reviews, the team specifically focused on those practices responsible for the high achievement and growth of students. The intent of this report is to share some of the highly effective practices identified through the ESP.

School Profile

Metro 1 is an elementary school located in Denver Public Schools with a diverse student population with forty-two percent of students identified as Hispanic, 18.7% identified as white, 26.2% identified as black and 12% identified as Asian.

Demographics		Performance				
		Growth Data (3 years - 08-10)			**Accountability Data**	
IA Program	School-wide	**Catch Up MGP**	R = 68	M = 63.5	**SPF – Growth Gaps Rating**	Exceeds
Enrollment	641	**F/R Lunch MGP**	R = 64	M = 64	**SPF – Growth Gaps Reading**	Exceeds
F/R Lunch	83.28 %	**ELL MGP**	R = 71	M = 67	**SPF – Growth Gaps Math**	Meets
ELLs	49.92%	**CELA (% making at least 1 yr. PL growth**	64.69%		**AYP – Overall 08**	Yes
Hispanic	44.62%	**CELA MGP 08**	59		**AYP – Overall 09**	No
Non-White	81.28%	**CELA MGP 09**	62.5		**AYP – Overall 10**	No
IA Allocation	$162,400.00	**CELA MGP 10**	74			
PPA	$400.00	**CBLA (% making progress)**	60.10%			

Figure 1   **Figure 2**

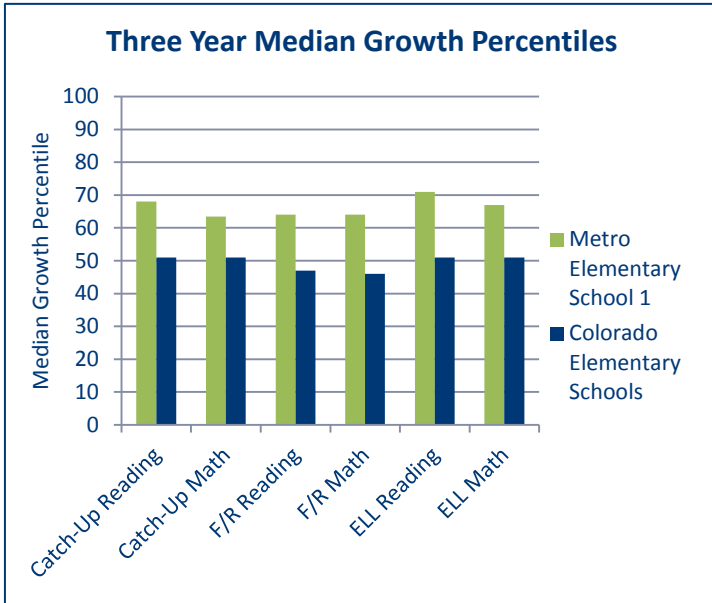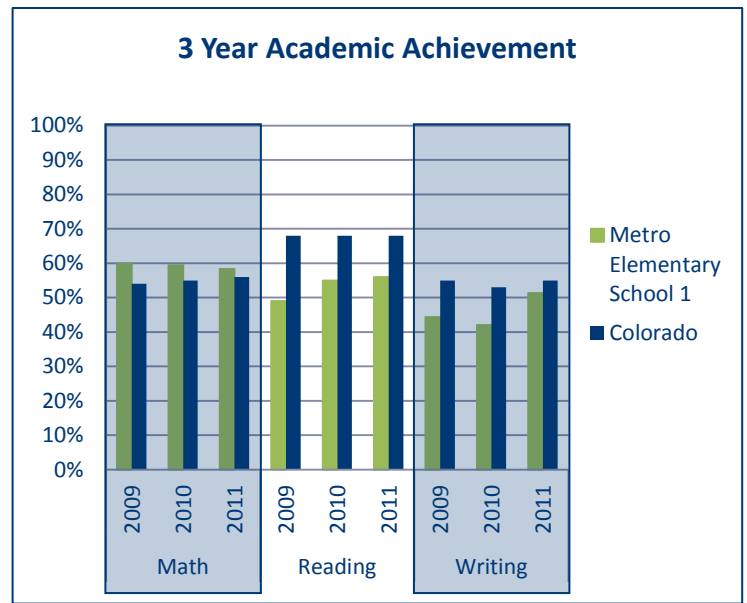### Three Year Median Growth Percentiles

3 Year Academic Achievement

Metro 1 has experienced notable observed growth over the past few years and staff consistently make adjustments based upon the needs of the students they serve. Although growth has been high (see Figure 1), the overall achievement of the students at Metro 1 still remains below state average in all areas, as evidenced in Figure 2 below.

Several key areas of effective practices stand out among the many efforts that are contributing to Metro Elementary School 1's success. The practices can be categorized into four main areas: 1) Culture; 2) Leadership; 3) Use of Data; and 4) Focused Improvement Planning. More detail on the specific practices identified in each of these categories is outlined below.

Culture

The culture of Metro Elementary 1 is predicated on high expectations for students. Through a variety of efforts, the school has established a culture that is focused on student achievement and providing a safe learning environment for all the diverse students in the school. Teachers at Metro 1 are dedicated to student learning, and supports are in place for struggling students, both academic and behaviorial.

> *"Everyone Achieves*
> *Every Day"*
>
> *~School Theme*

The commitment to high academic achievement is shared by building leadership and staff. Staff members report being very clear about the school's focus on student achievement - this is the driving force in the decisions and actions in the building. Teachers perpetutate a belief that all students can learn at high levels, and 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.

Staff members actively work to create a climate that is caring, nurturing and focused on high expectations for achievement and behavior. This belief is evidenced in school practices that minimize the impact of cultural and socio-economical factors on learning. For example, a teacher at each grade level speaks Spanish, allowing for instruction to take place in both English and Spanish. 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 Elementary School 1.

Teachers make every effort to enhance student engagement in learning. Common techniques to engage students occur in most classrooms (e.g. turn and talk, choral response, thumbs up, use of white boards). Additionally, students at Metro 1 are encouraged to participate in after-school programs to extend their learning. Students are able to assume leadership roles by participating in after-school clubs and by assuming responsibilities within the classroom. After-school activities include: Lights on After-School Program which provides activities and leadership opportunities; Science Matters which offers programs like Zany Zoology, Extreme Electricity, Radical Reactions, and Unsolved Science; a student newspaper produced by 3rd-5th graders; and the Action Council which is a student government organization for 4th and 5th graders.

Positive Behavior Support (PBS) is implemented schoolwide. Using this framework, teachers develop expectations for behavior and posts these expectations in classrooms. A character-education program is also incorporated into the behavior-support system. This program emphasizes four character traits - compassion, responsibility, respect, perseverance, and the school adds a fifth trait - academic achievement. The Metro 1 All Star Student Pledge states these traits in kid-friendly language and is repeated each morning by all students. 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. Teachers use rituals and routines to shape behavior, keep students safe, create efficiencies, and support a positive classroom culture. Students have multiple adults in the building they can go to for help, and they report feeling safe at school. Parents also feel that teachers create a culture of partnered responsibility for student learning and emotional support.

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. Through analysis of data from School-Wide Information System and teacher input, the PBS team is able to analyze trends and provide appropriate supports to ensure students are meeting behavioral expectations. The majority of concerns are handled with the use of student behavior contracts. Individual students and targeted groups of students receive support in whole-class interventions that include support with social skills and problem solving or conflict resolution.

Community Support

Parent support and outreach is prioritized at Metro 1. Parent input is solicited through various forms of communication and parental satisfaction with the school is regularly evaluated. Staff members actively work to engage families in their children's learning.

Effective home school communication is a priority at Metro 1. 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. All of these forms of communication are used to help parents understand learning goals and student progress.

"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 be successful"

~ Metro 1 Parent

Parent Satisfaction Surveys are conducted yearly, and the school makes a significant effort to get a high-return rate on the surveys. Individual teachers provide rewards for students who return the surveys, and teachers call parents who don't return the survey. Survey data are analyzed and used to determine parent engagement strategies for the next year. Survey results indicate that most parents feel the school is doing a good job of sharing information about academic achievement. For example, one parent stated: "I see the relationship between the intentional-purposeful learning in the class and my child's academic growth."

Staff members demonstrate high levels of professional practice in creating opportunities to teach parents how to interact with their children in reading and literacy. Staff members honor the culture of families by teaching them the importance of reading together and discussing books in their native language. The staff embraces the diversity within the student body, and they encourage parents to share cultural traditions or life experiences with the class.

The school operates as a collegial community with a high level of collaboration. The Parent Engagement Staff Community Engagement Team is charged with designing and implementing communication and support systems for parents. They plan events and activities for parents and staff with a focus on parent involvement, evening parent events, staff/parent communication, and social activities for all staff. Nine staff members are part of this team.

The nurturing environment of Metro 1 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. Through a word-of mouth network, these families are encouraged to become a part of the school community.

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

Use of Data

Metro 1 has worked to develop a data-driven culture. The school utilizes multiple assessments and uses data tools to assist in accessing and reporting on assessment results. Time is set aside to analyze data, and that data is used to inform instruction.

Multiple assessments are used at Metro 1. For reading, the DRA2 is given three times a year. Teachers input DRA2 data to the district website and are then able to access reports. DIBELS is used for progress monitoring and to provide benchmark data in kindergarten. The data is recorded in the DIBELS online program. Individual program assessments are utilized in other content areas - Everyday Math assessments for mathematics, and Avenues program assessments for English language acquisition. CSAP data is closely reviewed at the beginning of the school year, and district interim-assessment data is reviewed following the fall, winter, and spring administration. 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.

Leadership provides opportunities for teachers to regularly analyze student data to determine individual levels of proficiency. 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. During these weekly data team meetings, teachers are expected to follow an established data analysis process. The process begins with identification of a SMART goal based on assessment results. These goals are directly tied to the school's Unified Improvement Plan (UIP). Teams then identify the instructional strategies that will help them reach their goal. In addtion, teacher teams set two Student Growth Objectives 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.

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

Teachers continually analyze the results of assessments to determine whether students demonstrate proficiency and to identify students' strengths and weaknesses. Teachers are expected to use this information to make adjustments to instruction, and multiple data sources are used to group students by performance levels. 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. 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).

Student data notebooks are provided for students as a means of increasing student responsibility and motivation for their own learning. 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 include results from interim assessments as well as CSAP and CELA, and any other classroom assessments that the student might take. Many students are able to articulate what they need to do in order to produce proficient or advanced work, and students demonstrate a clear understanding of assessment results and a real satisfaction with improved performance.

Leadership

One of the key features of Metro 1 is the strong, shared leadership in the buliding. Teachers are involved in decision-making, and school administrators are engaged in the work to increase student acheivement. Teacher evaluations are valued and the process is used to support professional growth.

Decisions at Metro 1 are made collaboratively and this model of shared or distributed leadership is highly valued at the school. There are structures in place 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 at least 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). The SLT, an overarching school leadership team with representation from all collaborative committees, shares in major decision-making. The school follows the formalized district budget process. While the budget is largely developed by administration, 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.

> *Collective capacity is essential because it produces many more quality teachers who operate in concert.*
>
> *~ Fullan, 2010*

School administrators help maintain a focus on increasing student achieveement and actively participate in the work to accomplish this goal. 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.

The teacher evaluation process appears to be valued as a tool to help staff increase their professional skills. As part of the evaluation plan, staff members develop an action plan to address self-determined growth goals. 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. Most staff report feedback from these classroom visits is beneficial.

Focused Improvement

Metro 1 sustains a commitment to continuous improvement through focused improvement planning using the Unified Improvement Plan (UIP) template and frequent monitoring of data to determine progress towards meeting established goals. All teachers are focused on the UIP goals and these goals are shared with students.

Through the UIP process, Metro 1 identified writing as the primary improvement goal for the year. In addition to the CSAP data included in the UIP template, the school used their grade-level data analysis process which includes DRA2, DIBELS, interim assessments and student work to set their goals. The analysis of this interim-assessment data was directly used to determine the primary UIP goal of 50% of students scoring proficient on the Writing CSAP in 2010-2011.

The school has a clear action plan to meet the goal of increasing writing proficiency defined in the UIP. The plan includes timelines, key personnel, and resources. Progress toward meeting the goals is evaluated through review of implementation benchmarks and by on-going data analysis of student work and classroom and district assessments.

With the focus on writing, 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 CDE 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. Content objectives are expected to be posted in kid-friendly language and articulated to students. Furthermore, 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.

> *"The single most important event of the school year is the time we set aside for annual improvement planning. As goes planning, so go the school's changes for improvement that year."*
>
> *~ Mike Schmoker, 2001*

Data are continually analyzed and used to identify needs, and the school stategically allocates its resources to meet identified needs. State and federal program resources are allocated primarily for staffing. Additional staff include interventionists, paraprofessionals, student literacy-development facilitator and a native language tutor. CSAP and interim assessment data are used not only to initially identify needs but also to monitor progress toward improvement goals and make programmatic decisions and adjustments. For example, an analysis of interim-assessment data revealed a drop in mathematics scores from mid- to end-of-year testing. This resulted in having one of the four interventionists focus on math.