

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (narrative)**

Castro Elementary School is a Title I Focus School in the Southwest region of Denver Public Schools. Castro serves 612 students in grades K – 5. The current student population that Castro serves is 72.2% ELL, 11.8% SPED, and 93.6% Minority; in addition, 96.4% is eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch. Castro’s rating on the School Performance Framework has significantly declined over the past three years, from 61% in 2011 to 38% in 2013. Castro is now rated “Accredited on Priority Watch.” Castro Elementary has a new principal, Dr. Robert Villarreal, and a new assistant principal, Sun Coates. The new leadership team was hired August 2013 to lead the transformation at Castro. Dr. Villarreal has 34 years of experience in education and has led a Blue Ribbon School of Excellence at East Ridge Elementary in Cherry Creek, led a turnaround school from red to green on the SPF in 2 years at Garden Place Elementary, and led the implementation of an innovation school at West HS. In addition, Dr. Villarreal has experience as a principal of migrant education and migrant schools. His strengths are in vision building, developing positive school culture, empowering and delegating, participatory management, and creating a collaborative culture. Ms. Coates is a Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) by training with 15 years of experience and supervised the DPS SLP department of over 100 SLPs. In that role, she managed SLP assignments for 200 schools, led professional development for her team, and led her team to clear a corrective action that the district had been under for 5 years by changing practice. She has expertise in language development as well as strengths in analyzing data to diagnose learning difficulties and prescribe interventions. She is an action-oriented systems thinker. Together, they magnify each other’s strengths, providing essential leadership to the Castro school community.

In the 2013-14 school year, Castro was identified for additional supports through Denver Public School’s tiered supports process, a data driven process that identifies struggling schools and matches them with the needed level of support. As an “Intensive Supports” school, Castro was a part of the district’s UIP Plus process, a strategic planning process that was designed to identify the school’s vision, goals, and root causes of underperformance and then use this to create an improvement plan. Dr. Villarreal and Ms. Coates engaged in this process with the help of a strategic planning consultant. The school’s entire leadership team, faculty, and community were also included throughout the process. To begin, leadership and staff conducted in depth data analyses, root cause analysis, and identified priority performance challenges to be the focus for the 2013-2014 and 2014-15 years. Major improvement strategies and action steps to address the priority performance challenges were then identified by the instructional leadership team and confirmed with the full staff. The result of this process was not only a deep understanding of the school’s priority performance challenges, but a clear plan for improvement that lays out goals for the next several years. Having completed this phase of the work during the 2013-14 school year, Castro is especially well positioned to begin a turnaround effort in 2014-15.

## **SECTION I: Needs Assessment and Program Plan**

### **A. *Submit the Unified Improvement Plan Addendum (Attachment E)- Transformation Model***

Based on the needs assessment, the transformation intervention model was selected for Castro. See Attachment E for details.

### **B. *Analyze the current conditions in the proposed school(s) by providing student performance and other relevant data in relation to intervention selected for each school site.***

Castro is currently “Accredited on Priority Watch” (orange) on the School Performance Framework with very low achievement status and low-average growth. Castro did not meet its achievement targets for the 2012-13 school year and is significantly below federal and state expectations. Castro’s three key concerns in terms of quantitative data trends are low and declining overall achievement, very low writing achievement, and low growth for English language learners. Reading achievement declined from 39% in 2009 to 34% in 2013 and is 38% below the state expectation of 72%. Math achievement declined from 43% in 2009 to 40% in 2013 and is 20% below the state expectation of 70%. Writing achievement declined from 28% in 2009 to 17% in 2013 and is 38% below the state expectation of 55%. Growth for all of these subjects is also low. Median Growth Percentile in Writing was 44, 24 percentile points below the MAGP of 68. ELL MGPs have decreased over the past three years in reading, writing, and math, and are trending below the state expectation of 55 and the district expectation of 60.

In October of 2013, Castro had a two-day external quality review conducted by SchoolWorks. The review team found many of areas of concern, the following being the most pressing:

- Instruction is not intentional, engaging, and challenging for all students.
- The school has not yet created a performance-driven culture, where school leaders, teachers, and staff effectively and consistently use data to make decisions about instruction and the organization of students. (Note: The new administrative team is in the process of developing a performance driven culture.)
- The school has not yet designed or fully implemented professional development or collaborative supports to sustain a focus on instructional improvement. (Note: The new administrative team has developed a professional development plan to focus on instructional improvement, a part of it has been implemented this SY and this work will continue 14-15 SY).
- Although the principal has made progress in improving school culture, he has not yet emphasized the school’s collective focus on instruction.

In addition to a thorough review of the SchoolWorks report, Castro delved into other sources of qualitative data to diagnose their challenges and root causes. Through an analysis of LEAP data, Castro identified areas where teachers need the most development and improvement. Castro teachers scored low on rigorous tasks (I2), communication and collaboration (I8), and use of academic language (I4).

The priority performance challenges identified at Castro indicate that the best school

intervention model is transformation. The data analysis revealed positive trends as well, which indicate that with the right supports in place for teachers, instruction and culture will be able to improve. The October 2013 School Quality Review included the following in the report:

- The classroom climate supports an environment in which learning can occur.
- The school's culture reflects high levels of collective responsibility, trust, and efficacy.
- The school is beginning to engage the community and families in support of student progress and school improvement.
- The principal has made progress toward effectively orchestrating the school's operations: involving teachers in making decisions and building strong financial and operational systems.

These findings indicate that the new leadership at Castro has already begun to drive positive improvements to school culture, and is properly positioned to make dramatic gains with the current staff if provided the appropriate resources and support.

**C. *Analyze the current conditions in the proposed school(s) by identifying root causes. What is preventing the school from increased academic performance? To what does the district attribute the failure of student academic growth over time?***

Castro has struggled to meet its UIP performance targets for several key reasons. The school lacks the collaboration structures and facilitation protocols to implement reforms effectively. Writing and language were identified as school-wide focus areas last year but the process lacked urgency and changes to instruction did not result. Protocols for collaboration and facilitation were developed to use in team meetings, but not implemented with fidelity. Teachers at Castro need high quality professional development as well as productive collaboration time to ensure alignment in their classrooms; this effort has been hindered by the lack of effective structures.

Another root cause is the lack of systems and structures for data driven instruction. Teachers don't have the appropriate training to use data to drive their planning cycles, and also lack the tools. Additionally, there isn't consistency in vertical and horizontal alignment of standards. Teachers need fully aligned standards in order to effectively use data about students' performance on these standards.

A third root cause for low student achievement is a lack of opportunities for teachers to improve their teaching practice. Teachers at Castro need high quality professional development, feedback, and coaching. Teachers need language development strategies as well as improvement on core instructional practices and rigor. Castro does not currently have the systems in place to deliver the training and coaching on what teachers need.

**D. *Provide evidence to demonstrate that overall goals and performance targets are included by year. Annual math and reading/language arts academic goals are set for each school site the grant will serve. Expectations for growth after one year must be clear.***

The leadership and staff at Castro engaged in a goal setting process as a part of the UIP Plus. As a result, clear annual targets are in place and can guide the turnaround effort; specific goals for

reading, writing, and math achievement, along with English language proficiency, will be used to annually measure progress. Castro’s long term goals are to significantly increase academic achievement in reading, writing, and math, as well as increase English language proficiency. Reaching these goals would increase Castro’s school performance on the school performance framework and set Castro on a path to close the gap with state expectations. Castro has also set long term goals around culture as well. The table below is Castro’s long term goal setting tool, included in the UIP Plus.

<b>2012-13 Actual</b>	<b>2013-14 Goal</b>	<b>2014-15 Goal</b>	<b>2015-16 Goal</b>
32% P/A Reading	51% P/A Reading	58% P/A Reading	65% P/A Reading
38% P/A Math	56% P/A Math	62% P/A Math	66% P/A Math
21% P/A Writing	37% P/A Writing	41% P/A Writing	48% P/A Writing
51 MGP ACCESS	60 MGP ACCESS	60 MGP ACCESS	60 MGP ACCESS
% Attendance	94% Attendance	94.5% Attendance	95% Attendance
% Parent Satisfaction	80% Parent Satisfaction	83% Parent Satisfaction	86% Parent Satisfaction

Castro’s one, two, and three year goals set the school on a rigorous yet achievable trajectory to close the gap between the school’s current low achievement and the state’s average performance. To progress monitor these annual goals, Castro sets monthly benchmarks to ensure that students are making the necessary achievement gains to reach end of year goals. For example, in writing the monthly benchmarks are to increase the percent of students scoring proficient on the monthly writing prompt by 5% each month.

To effectively progress monitor goals, Castro uses a UIP Tracker in Google docs and holds two monthly progress monitoring meetings. The UIP Tracker includes the high leverage action steps for each Major Improvement Strategy and lays out measures, metrics, and benchmark goals by action step in order to assess whether the step is on track on a monthly basis. By having the UIP Tracker in google docs, it is accessible to all stakeholders – leadership, staff, and district support partners – and can be updated on an ongoing basis. In the first of two monthly progress monitoring meetings, the School Leadership Team (which includes staff) meets to share the data they’ve collected for the action steps they are responsible to, and update the tracker to reflect the current status of each action step. In the second of each progress monitoring meeting, school leadership meets to trouble shoot mid-course corrections to the strategies that action steps that are not on track. This meeting is facilitated by Jeanette Cornier, a strategic planning consultant, and includes the Instructional Superintendent, who uses the updated tracker and current school data and observations to determine the priority focus areas for the meeting.

**E. Provide evidence to demonstrate interventions are consistent with the final requirements.**

Please see the attached UIP Transformation addendum to see how Denver Public Schools and Castro Elementary are in compliance with the required components of the transformation model.

In addition, the improvement plan developed by the school in the UIP Plus process shows how the Major Improvement Strategies and the associated Action Steps are indeed a plan for dramatic improvement. The “UIP Plus” process is a new process developed by DPS, which provided Castro with a consultant to guide the school through a strategic planning process. The consultant met with the School Leadership Team consistently throughout the fall of 2013 to engage in this process. The team discussed the school’s mission, vision, values, and goals; conducted quantitative and qualitative data analyses; identified priority performance challenges and their root causes, and brainstormed major improvement strategies and action steps. In addition, Castro engaged in a school quality review conducted by SchoolWorks and used the findings as a key source of data. The Diagnostic Review Grant awarded by CDE supported this process. Castro now seeks to secure funding to implement the major improvement strategies identified through this diagnostic process.

Through the UIP Plus process, schools identified high level goals that will lead to dramatic improvement, a theory of action for how to reach the goal, and strategies that are aligned to the theory of action.

<b>Goals</b>			
Exceed state expectations for achievement in reading (72%), writing (55%), and math (70%). ELLs will gain in English language proficiency at above average rates (60 MGP).			
<b>Theory of Action</b>			
If we ensure the quality of instruction by defining rigorous expectations, providing professional development and opportunities for teachers to learn together, and putting systems and structures in place to use data to drive instruction, then every Castro student will be supported to achieve at high levels and every Castro ELL will become English language proficient.			
<b>Strategies</b>			
Define instructional excellence and provide teachers with frequent observation and in-person feedback from supervisor and peers.	Build the systems and structures necessary for school leaders, teachers, and staff to use data in the organization of students and instruction.	Identify and implement a structure and process to effectively teach writing and evaluate student work using research based programs, CCSS, and professional development.	Provide PD on structured language instruction in L1 and L2 (phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, grammar, syntax, semantics, etc.).

The Castro leadership team identified several key initiatives that are aligned to the school's goals and are critical to raising student achievement. These initiatives include: implementing Common Core State Standards, researching best practices in writing, reallocating personnel to identify instructional coaches, horizontal and vertical team articulation meetings, extending the school day by implementing after school tutoring programs, restructuring instructional interventions and convening a culture committee.

The needs assessments for all four elementary schools that are being supported by the EED transformation network reveal gaps in the use of data and consistent structures for supporting instruction throughout the building. Therefore, the new network will be specifically designed to support improvements in these two areas: use of data to drive instruction and literacy instruction. The network will provide support at scale, making the partnership with Achievement Network and the implementation of Guided Reading Plus strategies more efficient and economical.

**F. *Provide evidence to demonstrate proposed plan is aligned with the district Unified Improvement Plan.***

One of the Major Improvement Strategies in the district UIP is to differentiate support to schools, with a focus on the equitable distribution of resources in order to improve our lowest performing schools. Castro's transformation plan helps the district to fulfill this mission by contributing significant additional resources and supports to one of our lowest performing schools. DPS seeks to provide support to these schools that leads to both dramatic improvement and sustainable change. We believe the proposed plan will lead to both of these results, by immediately beginning to build the capacity of Castro's leaders, teachers, and systems.

The district UIP also includes "Help our educators grow" and "Shift our teaching practices with students" as Major Improvement Strategies. The proposed plan at Castro is very much aligned to this strategy. The "School Development Teams" initiative provides financial incentives and additional responsibilities to highly performing teachers in order to attract and retain them in turnaround schools; these teachers will be leveraged to help the rest of the faculty improve their instructional practices. Additionally, the partnership with Achievement Network, and other providers ensures job-embedded, high quality professional development for all teachers in a turnaround school.

**G. *Provide evidence to demonstrate sustainability after the implementation of the changes.***

Since Tiered Intervention Grant funding expires in three years, the bulk of efforts focus on developing capacity within these schools. During the three year time period, the goal of the district is to use these additional funds to make dramatic improvements in school culture and the instructional practices of teachers, which will in turn increase staff retention. This stability and increased capacity will allow the school to function effectively when the funding ends, because the right systems and structures have been put in place. The district structures for turnaround work show how our system has oriented operationally in support of our lowest performing schools. Since the beginning of the grant, the focus has been to start with intensive

interventions – and the most costly supports related to those interventions – and then to scale back over time as more students are brought to grade level and the school moves out of intervention and into continuous improvement.

## **SECTION II: Budget Narrative**

Elementary is requesting TIG funds to implement the major improvement strategies and high leverage actions included in its UIP and transformation plan in order to significantly increase student achievement and turn around the school's persistent low performance.

**Achievement Network (\$34,000)** – Grant funds will be used to contract with the Achievement Network to provide high quality formative assessments and analysis of the results in a user-friendly platform. These assessments are aligned to DPS curriculum and CCSS, and are designed to provide meaningful data on progress toward grade level proficiency and TCAP growth. In addition to the data and assessments, A-Net will provide on the ground training and coaching, in order to empower teachers to use the data to drive instruction. Data teams at the school site, led by School Development Team teachers, will enhance and sustain this work.

**Guided Reading Support/PD Supplies (\$1500)** – Grant funds will be used to purchase materials and supplies related to Guided Reading Plus, including network-based materials. Some funds will support the literacy coordinator's PD, so she can lead network-wide trainings.

**Math Facilitator (\$70,000)** – Grant funds will be used to hire a math facilitator to provide professional development, coaching, and modeling of research based instruction aligned to CCSS for teachers. This position is a short term position focused on developing sustainable systems and building the capacity of teachers to provide effective math instruction.

**ELD Expert (\$70,000)** – Grant funds will be used to hire an English Language Development expert to provide professional development, coaching, and modeling for teachers and to design and implement ELD classes for students. This position is a short term position focused on developing sustainable systems and building the capacity of teachers to provide ELD instruction and strategies to support language development and use throughout the day.

**School Psychologist (\$15,000)** – Grant funds will be used to increase psychologist services to support the social/emotional and mental health needs of students. Once systems and structures are in place and a strong positive school culture is evident, the need for additional supports will be diminished.

**Stipends (\$10,000)** – Grant funds will be used to provide stipends to teachers for after-hours professional development necessary to implement the transformation plan. Stipends are estimated based on 6 hours per teacher.

**PD Supplies (\$10,000)** – Grant funds will be used to purchase professional development materials and supplies.

**Extra Duty Pay (\$18,000)** – Grant funds will be used to compensate teachers for additional professional development time (1 hour additional per month for 31 teachers).

**Release Time (\$24,000)** – Grant funds will be used to pay for substitutes to release one team each month for horizontal and vertical alignment, data cycles, and professional development.

**Community Outreach (\$20,000)** – Funds materials and consulting support.

**Conferences or other training opportunities (\$30,000)** – School will identify additional opportunities based on need and gaps identified.

**TIG Administration Costs:**

**Turnaround Admin (\$16,000) 5%**

**Indirect Costs (\$23,575) 7.59%**

**ATTACHMENTS**

- Unified Improvement Plan Addendum
- Electronic Budget Form