

Effective Practices School Profile: Metro Elementary 2

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

The student population at Metro 2 is high-minority (92% non-white) and high poverty (93% of student qualify for free/reduced lunch). Additionally, a large number of students are English Language Learners (63%). Students are made aware of college and career opportunities through standards-based science instruction which includes thinking and problem-solving. Good nutrition for a healthy lifestyle is supported through the “Go, Slow, Whoa” program which is integrated in health education during physical education and nutrition in all grades. Many students participate in field trips to the medical center and 5th grade students receive a passport to the Denver Museum of Nature and Science: Passport to Health Program.

Demographics		Performance				
		Growth Data (3 years - 08-10)		Accountability Data		
IA Program	SW	Catch Up MGP	R = 71	M = 86	SPF – Growth Gaps Rating	Exceeds
Enrollment	450	F/R Lunch MGP	R = 60	M = 80	SPF – Growth Gaps Reading	Exceeds
F/R Lunch	93%	ELL MGP	R = 61	M = 81	SPF – Growth Gaps Math	Exceeds
ELLs	63%	CELA (% making at least 1 yr of PL growth)		65.52%	AYP – Overall 08	Yes
Hispanic	76%	CELA MGP 08		68	AYP – Overall 09	Yes
Non-White	92%	CELA MGP 09		55	AYP – Overall 10	Yes
IA Allocation	\$889	CELA MGP 10		67.5		
PPA	\$287,147	CBLA (% making progress)		3.47%		

Dramatic changes in student achievement have taken place at Metro 2 over the past ten-years. This change began in 2001 with an innovative and courageous principal, and the spirit and success has continued under the leadership of two subsequent principals and a talented cadre of committed teachers.

As evidenced in Figure 1 below, Metro 2’s growth performance has exceeded the Colorado state averages in all categories. Metro 2 students exceeded state averages for academic achievement in math; however, both reading and writing continue to fall below the state average.

Figure 2

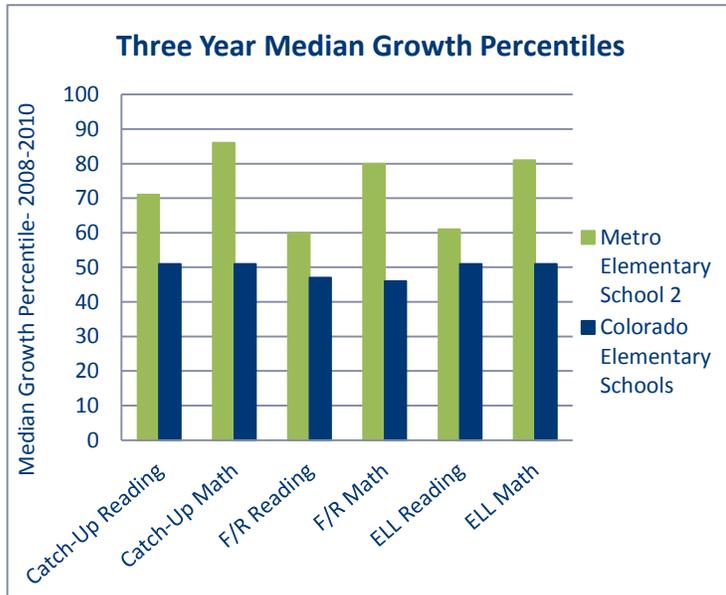
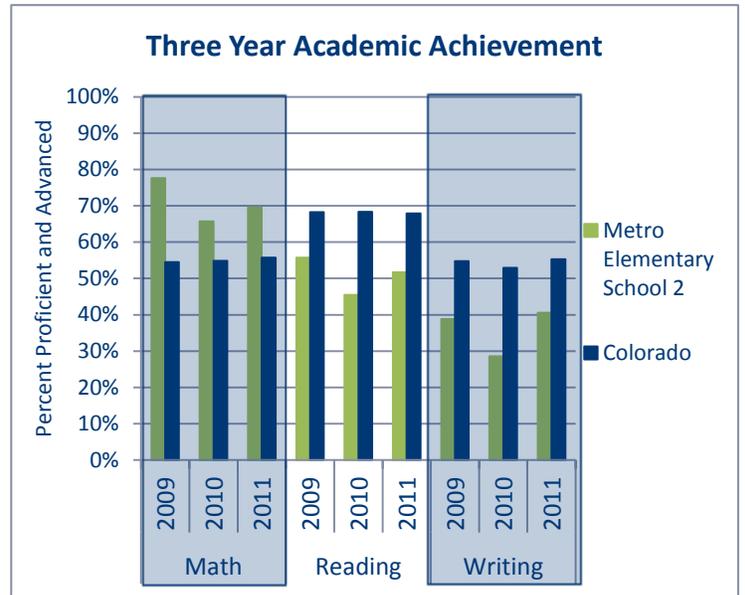


Figure 1



Key practices that contribute to the school’s high growth performance include: 1) a strong, collaborative school culture; 2) high expectations for students and staff; 3) effective use of data; 4) strong instructional practices; and 5) outstanding leadership. More detail on the specific practices is outlined below.

Culture of Collaboration

Metro Elementary 2 operates as a highly functioning system that is effective in building professional relationships, establishing collaborative processes that ensure continual learning and refinement of practice, and focusing intense energy on clearly defined outcomes for students. Teacher leaders, classroom teachers, instructional paraprofessionals, and the principal all work together to teach both students and each other. There is a high level of trust, respect, and communication among the staff.

Collaboration time is an effective resource at Metro 2. This designated time is focused on determining student learning needs and classroom instruction. Grade-level team planning occurs on a weekly basis. Teachers collaboratively examine student work, discuss instructional approaches and resources, and plan instruction.

Staff members express that their work environment is invigorating with lots of learning and growth occurring in their practice. The culture is supportive, mentoring, and collaborative. Teachers state that they are continuously learning how to refine their teaching and enjoy being part of a high-functioning team of educators. Staff members who want to work in isolation or complain are not comfortable in the culture because these behaviors are not accepted by other staff members.

“This school is about people working together. I expect teachers to continue to learn and that the students will grow.”

*~ Metro Elementary 2
Principal*

Long-term professional development for individual staff members is embedded in the structure and culture of Metro 2. Professional learning is embedded, ongoing, and based on identified needs. Embedded Professional Learning Community (PLC) practices have been in place for many years, and the school’s instructional practices are supported by the commitment to a PLC culture of high expectations.

Teachers at Metro 2 sign a commitment each year to work in a professional learning community culture. Teachers commit to being reflective about their teaching practice, being a positive and productive participant in professional development, continuing to learn and implement improved teaching practices, sharing in leadership, and participating in parent involvement events.

Instructional paraprofessionals are considered partners in classroom teaching. They receive job-embedded professional development by observing the teaching occurring in classrooms, participating in some collaborative planning with classroom teachers, and frequently discussing student needs and best instructional practices to address student needs with the classroom teachers. Paraprofessionals advance their knowledge and skills through online courses and district classes. The principal meets monthly with instructional paraprofessionals to solicit their input and identify any needs they might have.

High Expectations

The mission of Metro Elementary 2 is clearly understood by all staff members. That mission is to provide the academic work and experiences that produce proficient performance by all students. It is grounded in the shared belief that all students can learn at grade level or higher. High expectations are held for the performance of all students and teachers.

Sustaining the culture of the school transcends any one person. The actions and words of the principal and teachers at Metro 2 clearly communicate to students that high expectations are non-negotiable. The school's culture is powerfully infused with actions that demonstrate intentional and strategic efforts to promote and realize proficiency for all students. The school's learning environment is electric with active learning, joy in learning, and intense focus on the work at hand. Students state they know they can learn and the teachers are available to help them when they need assistance.

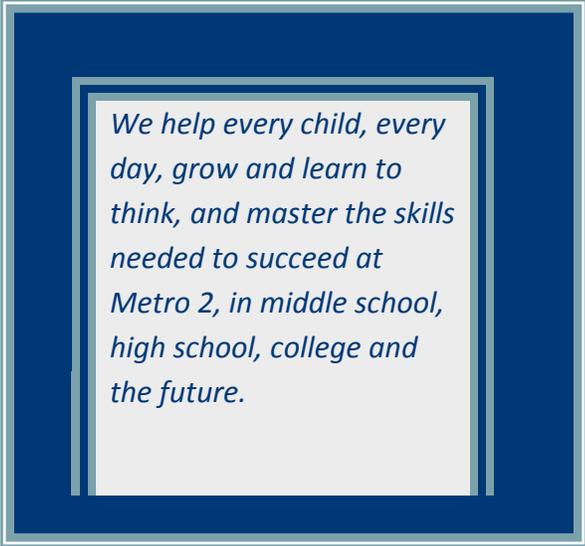
Metro 2 is a high-performing school, whose staff members focus on one objective: raising student achievement. Although this is the focus, relationships with students are paramount. Overheard throughout the school is the sentiment that we teach students, not standards. The success of the students is the success of the staff. The principal at Metro 2 has set structures and systems into place that support teachers in focusing upon the right work, keeping distractions and confusion to a minimum.

The expectation for students at Metro 2 is that every child will be fully prepared for successful life, through high school, college and beyond. The school has an intentional culture of "no excuses" for low levels of student or staff performance. Complaints about students are not accepted. The students at Metro Elementary School 2 are valued and challenged.

Staff members have created and sustained a culture of equity. Some articulate that "equity is our work and we do it through instruction." The school's equity efforts are framed around all children becoming critical thinkers and learners, preparing for a life that will be guided by critical thinking and problem solving. It is the notion of achieving equity in the creation of a successful life that guides teacher/administrator efforts.

There is a safe, orderly, and equitable environment at Metro 2. Students experience a happy, predictable environment. Teachers make it a point to get to know the background of each student. Students say that people in the school care for them and that they like being there. They can also articulate that they are at school to learn.

Instructional time is sacred and is not compromised by interruptions. Movement throughout the school by groups of students is orderly, efficient, quiet, and on time. The school discipline policy is variously described as either: "Take care of yourself, take care of others, and take care of the school," or "Respect yourself, respect others and respect the school." Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) is implemented, embedding the understanding that positive behavior is its own reward. Behavior issues are handled through a clear process that is immediate, thus supporting continuous implementation of classroom instruction for all students.



We help every child, every day, grow and learn to think, and master the skills needed to succeed at Metro 2, in middle school, high school, college and the future.

Use of Data

The use of summative and formative assessments is seamlessly embedded within the teaching and learning cycle at Metro Elementary 2. Teachers regularly collaborate to analyze data to inform decision making regarding instructional practices and flexible groupings. Teachers at Metro 2 systematically collect, analyze, and use data to raise student achievement. The building administrator expects that teachers will use multiple data sets to inform effective implementation of the teaching and learning cycle in an ongoing fashion. A culture of assessment and data literacy permeates the daily work of the school.

Teacher leaders conduct monthly Collaborative Coaching and Learning sessions (CCLs) to assist teachers with literacy and mathematics instruction. During these CCL meetings, teachers use both formative and summative data to inform instruction and flexible-grouping, and to determine student candidates for extra doses of intervention. Teachers also collaborate during weekly grade-level meetings to identify learning targets, success criteria, models of proficient work, and instructional strategies to engage learners. The principal actively and collaboratively engages in this work with teachers. Additionally, the principal meets individually with each teacher at the start of the school year to identify strengths and challenges presented by the data for each grade and class. Individual follow-up meetings occur as needed.

The school has a working data room, in which student achievement results are displayed by individual teacher, for all to see, along with individual student achievement results, survey data and various protocols the staff uses with students. Growth data are profiled using the Colorado Growth Model quadrants and posted in the data room for review and analysis. Achievement results from the district interim assessments (fall, winter, spring) are graphed for each class, by teacher, and posted in the data room for analysis. While the practice of publicly displaying each class's data initially created discomfort, it is now an understood expectation that all teachers are accountable for developing learners who achieve to their highest level each year and that this practice fits with the culture of transparency within the school.

Proficiency statements for student work, informed by district pacing guides, are collaboratively developed by teachers in team and CCL meetings. Teachers share these with students and post them alongside models of proficient writing and reading. Proficiency targets are posted in the hallways and in classrooms along with models of student work. These are used by most teachers before, during, and after lessons.

Instruction

Metro Elementary 2 has a seamless system of teaching and learning. Strong and varied instructional practices are pervasive and evident in all classrooms. Instruction is content rich and is organized around active student learning, including limited teacher talk, high-level questioning, follow-up questioning, and peer talk. Rigor, focus, and high expectations are infused across all classrooms.

Students are provided clear learning targets as classes begin, frequent opportunities for reflection during instruction, and review of lesson activities at the close of the lesson. Effective structures for using large and small instructional groups and learning stations are in place within all classrooms during reading and math instruction. Teachers make sure what they want to have students learn is repeated within the lesson, throughout the week, and beyond.

First best instruction is endemic and foundational in the belief system of the school. Teachers expect first best instruction within each classroom and hold each other accountable. All students have access to the core curriculum through sheltered and scaffolded instructional practices. As a student needs additional support, interventions are provided. However, a high return from first best instruction is realized in pronounced reduction of needed remediation and intervention.

Structures to accelerate student learning and secure mastery of essential learning targets are always at the forefront of planning and instruction at Metro 2. Instruction is designed to meet the needs of students and close the learning gaps. Identification and monitoring of students is ongoing as team members continually analyze student data. Data walls provide a “living” visual representation of individual student progress. Conversations centered on meeting these students’ needs are a key feature of the school’s culture.

Teachers carefully plan their lessons with team mates. Teacher teams purposefully determine the academic vocabulary and common instructional strategies to be used so they can provide coordinated instruction across grade-level classrooms and from one grade to another.

The development of language is strategic and immersed in all content areas. Every teacher is considered an active teacher of language. Teachers consciously weave language supports into instruction throughout the school day. These practices support all students in acquiring proficient English language structures and concepts and particularly strengthen the skill of English Language Learners. Intentional expansion of vocabulary, including high-level words, and the structures of language are embedded within instructional practices all day, every day. Both oral and written language development is pervasive.

Effective instruction is what causes students to learn.

~ Benson, 2008

Leadership

Leadership is effectively distributed across individuals and groups at Metro Elementary 2. School leadership gains the cooperation and trust of staff members by engaging them in genuine dialogue about student achievement. An instructional leadership team composed of the principal and teacher leaders plans targeted professional development, while a grade-level leadership team monitors progress on school improvement goals. In addition, an instructional support team meets to develop strategies for students in need of more interventions.

Staff members and the principal know that working as a highly functioning team is more satisfying and produces better outcomes than working in isolation. Teacher leaders support teachers by observing their implementation of instructional practices and facilitating a dialogue to collaboratively reflect on the application of best practices and determine next learning steps. A math and a literacy teacher share a primary classroom and another set share an intermediate classroom so that each are available half time to plan, lead, and provide ongoing, in-depth professional development. Teacher leader tasks include facilitating the weekly dialogue sessions; planning and facilitating CCL sessions; coaching and providing feedback for groups or individual teachers; and demonstrating teaching/modeling lessons. There is also a half-time English Language Acquisition (ELA) teacher leader who supports teachers by organizing materials and lessons for the English Language Development (ELD) block. She co-plans the content of the ELD session with teachers and provides theory and suggestions to individual staff members about effective teaching of language structures.

The principal demonstrates instructional leadership by focusing the work on developing best instructional practices to continually move student achievement forward. She sets expectations around the work and then empowers people to do it. She makes appropriate decisions and does so decisively. Staff members report that the principal knows the professional literature and research and chooses professional development activities that are relevant and useful to advancing their work with respect to the improvement goals.

The principal visits each classroom at least weekly. While there, she records strengths of instruction and areas of concern. She emails the notes to the teacher and may conduct a follow-up conversation if an area of concern is identified. The principal personally interacts about teaching points, language structures, and guiding questions with each teacher each week.

Staff members say that the weekly presence of the principal in each classroom with immediate feedback is an important factor in keeping the focus on quality instruction. The principal gives feedback to teachers about observed strengths in practice and offers questions to consider for improvement. They report that this continual feedback “keeps them on their toes” and empowers them to do their best work. Suggestions for improvement that are offered by the principal and teacher leaders are welcomed because the regular informal observations are affirming, encouraging, and focused on teacher learning rather than on evaluation.

The principal knows what is happening in our classrooms and she is always there.

She knows us.

She motivates us and makes us believe we can do it.

~ Metro 2 Students describing the principal