

Effective Practices School Profile: Metro Middle 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 Middle School 1 (MM1) is a metro-area charter school in Denver Public Schools. MM1 is a middle school with students in grades 6-8. The student population is majority Hispanic (97%) with 94 percent of the students qualifying for free or reduced lunch.

Demographics		Performance				
		Growth Data (3 year)		Accountability Data		
IA Program	SW	Catch Up MGP	R = 71	M = 94	SPF – Growth Gaps Rating	Exceeds
Enrollment	322	F/R Lunch MGP	R = 73	M = 92	SPF – Growth Gaps Reading	Exceeds
F/R Lunch	91%	ELL MGP	R = 74	M = 93	SPF – Growth Gaps Math	Exceeds
ELLs	63%	CELA (% making at least 1 yr of PL growth)	42.39%		AYP – Overall 08	Yes
Hispanic	97%	CELA MGP 08	71		AYP – Overall 09	No
Non-White	98%	CELA MGP 09	72		AYP – Overall 10	Yes
PPA	\$400	CELA MGP 10	61			
IA Allocation	\$70,800	CBLA (% making progress)	N/A			

Although MM1 is a charter school, the school staff members and the central office personnel view the school 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. Entering students receive a home visit from the administrators where expectations and information are shared. 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 school operates on an extended-day and extended-year calendar, knowing that students often come to middle school with skills below grade level.

As evidenced in Figure 1 below, MM1 students exceeded the state averages in median growth percentiles in all tested subjects and made the second highest academic growth among all public secondary schools in the state. Additionally, MM1 students exceeded the state average for academic achievement (percent proficient and advanced) in math and writing.

Figure 1

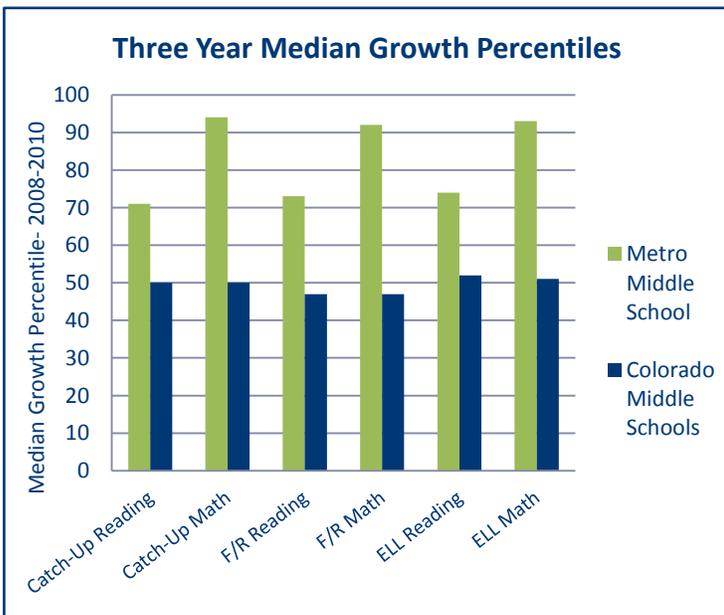
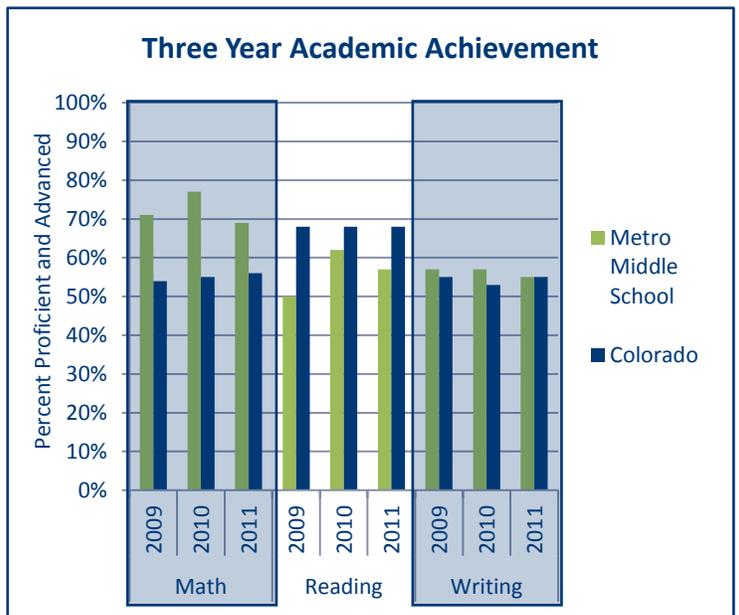


Figure 2



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.

Several key features stand out including: 1) a high-quality, standards-based curriculum; 2) effective use of data; 3) a school-wide focus on learning; and 4) a culture of high expectations. More detail on each of these is included below.

Curriculum

Metro Middle 1 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. Textbooks and “off-the-shelf” curriculum are not used in most classes or content areas. Instead, the school relies on standards that were specifically developed for Metro Middle 1 and daily learning objectives defined from those standards. The standards were developed to be rigorous and exceed the requirements of the Colorado Model Content Standards and are currently being reviewed and revised to align with the new Colorado Academic Standards.

The curriculum at Metro Middle 1 is designed to meet the needs of students who enter the sixth grade with learning deficits but with the expectation of leaving eighth grade 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. Unit plans identify key vocabulary for the unit topic, enduring understandings, essential questions, and the evidence that will be used to demonstrate student understanding. Additionally, plans identify daily learning objectives and provide a rigorous pacing guide.

Daily learning packets and exit tickets (formative assessments administered at the end of each day’s lesson) are collaboratively created for each day’s objective. The daily packets provide content resources for student learning and replace textbooks in most cases. 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 homework.

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 teams from the other network schools. Content specialists facilitate a review of assessment data and determine the need to review or re-teach content. During the summer, 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.

Use of Data

Both formative and summative assessment results are well 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; and CSAP. 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 MM1 standards and learning objectives. Scoring guides and rubrics are created and teachers are expected to grade the assessments for their classes. Results are entered into Alpine Achievement which generates reports that provide proficiency information on each objective and standard as well as individual student achievement data. RAP results are shared with students and reported to parents as grades - accounting for 25% of the Trimester Grade.

Immediately following each RAP administration, staff data days are held. These are day-long opportunities for teachers to work together to analyze the results of the assessment and make adjustments and modifications to instructional plans. The day is tightly organized and begins with analyzing and interpreting data in order to identify standards in need of review or re-teaching. 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 re-teaching. It also identifies 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.

Formative assessment occurs in all classrooms in the form of an Exit Ticket, and continuous checks for understanding 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 use the information to identify students in need of review or re-teaching 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.

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 re-teaching so that students are assured success in mastering the curriculum. 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.

Focus on Learning

Metro Middle 1 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:

- An intensive curriculum with strong focus on skill development;
- A longer day and school year that includes 20% more instructional time;
- Extended class time in literacy and mathematics;
- Regular homework to ensure skill development and mastery;
- High school preparatory activities for 8th graders; and
- A simple uniform to foster respect and diminish social stress.

The master schedule includes morning meetings, two advisory periods, enrichment opportunities, homework center, and detention. The schedule provides all 6th and 7th grade students with a daily 100 minute reading block and 100 minute math block. Eighth-grade students do not have double periods of reading and math, but instead have longer class periods.

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. Advisory periods provide opportunities for students to develop trusting relationship with teachers. Two teachers share an advisory group. Advisory teachers are expected to send written progress reports every three weeks regarding academic effort, classroom behavior, respect for teachers and classmates, and additional student recognition/advisor comments. A parent signature is required on the progress report.

Instructional time is a tightly-guarded priority. 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. Interruptions are completely minimized throughout the school – in fact, no intercom exists. Students do not move between classes, rather teachers move classrooms which minimizes transition time and maximizes instructional time.

Teachers consistently use high-quality instructional strategies at MM1. The consistent application of these strategies in classrooms results in a high level of student engagement and increased academic achievement. High impact classroom strategies are consistently used to improve student engagement and learning. Classrooms feature a rich oral language environment, and students are expected to respond in complete sentences. Instructional delivery is further enhanced through challenging pacing, efficient transitions, varied and appropriate use of praise, a comprehensive behavior management system, use of 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.

With each lesson, teachers consistently and routinely communicate learning objectives to students through a variety of methods. 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. They are also displayed on the front of daily learning packets for further delineation and brief discussion.

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, and there is a high level of student compliance with the homework policy. The homework policy is clearly articulated through a signed contract between the student, parent and school. The expectations for homework are reinforced by every teacher at the conclusion of a lesson, clearly communicated on classroom white boards, and monitored daily through teacher-student advisory.

Culture of High Expectations

The mission and core beliefs for Metro Middle 1 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. 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. The mission is reinforced for students 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. 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. In fact, all grade levels visit a college or university each year to expose students to the concept of going to college.

There are high expectations for student learning and behavior at MM1. A strict Code of Conduct is implemented at the school, 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. 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 in order to help ensure that major infractions will not take place.

Consistent classroom learning behaviors are identified and reinforced throughout the school – SLANT (Sit up Straight, Listen, Ask and Answer, Nod in Understanding, Track the Speaker). Students are expected to show the various components and can be quickly reminded of this by teachers: “Show your SLANT.” Teachers consistently apply both positive and negative reinforcement 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.

Students are eligible to receive six dollars of school money per day by following the Code of Conduct. Failure to exhibit the STRIVE values results in a deduction while positive behaviors above expectations result in the earning of dollars. Students receive weekly conduct reports and paychecks and every six weeks have the opportunity to spend their school dollars. Students who do not receive a paycheck must have their behavior report signed by a parent or guardian.

Just as there are high expectations for students at MM1, there are consistent and high expectations for teachers. Before teachers are hired, they are explicitly told of five major expectations that must be done well: 1) teach; 2) plan; 3) grade student work; 4) call parents; and 5) run an enrichment program. 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 parents frequently; and maintaining the highest academic performance and student conduct.

Teachers are expected to monitor student academic and behavioral progress. A checklist is provided to teachers that lists required tasks during six-week intervals. Administrators hold the teachers accountable for adherence to task completion. Teachers are formally observed by administrators at least three times a year. After each observation, feedback is provided in a written narrative, in oral conversation, and in ratings on an observation checklist. The teacher evaluation process is valued by teachers, and there is a mutually perceived focus on continuous improvement of instructional practices.

Teachers at MM1 are motivated to succeed. They express the belief that the long hours and hard work are paying off, and they hold each other accountable for student achievement results. Staff members hold a strong belief that all students can achieve high academic standards, and they successfully instill this belief in their students.