

Effective Practices School Profile: North Central Elementary

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.

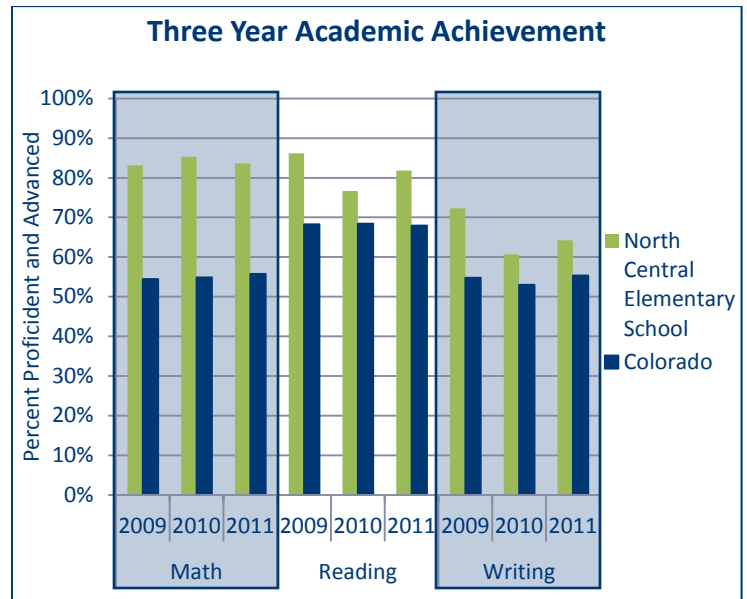
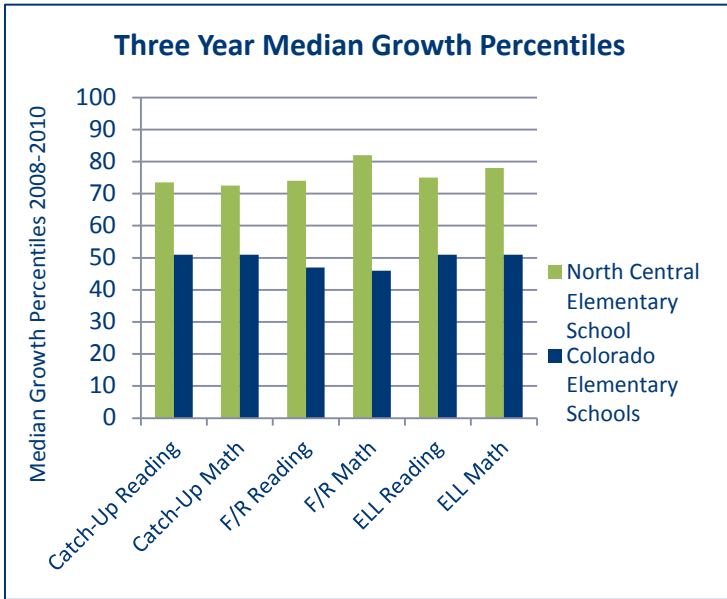
After identifying these high growth Title I schools, CDE conducted a project to ascertain some of the key practices that are contributing to each school's success. Selected schools were provided the opportunity to participate in an Effective School Practices (ESP) review, an external, objective review 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

North Central Elementary School is located in rural Colorado. The student population is stable, with many enrolling in kindergarten and continuing to exit North Central Elementary at fifth grade to attend middle school. Families are predominately long-term owners of large agricultural operations, and employees and laborers of these farms. North Central Elementary School is a central gathering place, with parents, extended family and community members attending school events. The community is proud of its school and considers it to be an excellent place for students.

Demographics		Performance				
IA Program	TA	Growth Data (3 year)		Accountability Data		
Enrollment	146	Catch Up MGP	R = 73.5	M = 72.5	SPF – Growth Gaps Rating	Exceeds
F/R Lunch	43%	F/R Lunch MGP	R = 74	M = 82	SPF – Growth Gaps Reading	Exceeds
ELLs	21%	ELL MGP	R = 75	M = 78	SPF – Growth Gaps Math	Exceeds
Hispanic	26%	CELA (% making at least 1 yr of PL growth)		50%	AYP – Overall 08	Yes
Non-White	28%	CELA MGP 08, 09, 10		**	AYP – Overall 09	Yes
PPA	975	CBLA (% making progress)		80%	AYP – Overall 10	Yes
IA Allocation	\$42,900	** Number in group is not large enough (less than 20) to report growth data				

Figure 1 below shows the three year median growth percentiles while Figure 2 shows the three year academic achievement. Although the school’s achievement shows a slight downward trend, it is still above the state average in all subject areas.



Five years ago the principal and staff embarked on an intense effort to bring 100% of its students to proficiency in reading. This entailed a change in how literacy instruction “had always been done,” from general literacy instruction to strategically matching below proficient students with interventions for additional instruction outside of the regular literacy block. These efforts have served to raise student achievement. The principal and teachers are keenly aware that to sustain students’ trajectory of continuous improvement, there is additional work to be done and express in multiple ways: “We are all learners at North Central.”

While many factors have contributed to the success at North Central, three key practices rise to the top as key contributors to the school’s success: 1) Positive School Culture, 2) Strong Principal Leadership, and 3) Coherent System of Interventions and Support. More detail on the specific practices identified in each of these categories is outlined below.

Culture

One of the greatest strengths of North Central Elementary School is its close-knit community. North Central has a rich history in the community, and pride in the school extends to multiple generations of families in the area and beyond. Parents and community members are comfortable coming into the school. Many parents and grandparents come into the building to have lunch with their children/grandchildren or to volunteer.

North Central Elementary has always been a small school and currently enrolls 147 students in grades K-5 with a teaching staff of seven. The small size of the school fosters communication and collegiality, and the principal has intentionally promoted a collaborative organization. The current principal has built processes and a culture that have led to increased student growth and achievement in reading and mathematics.

The school culture is supportive and caring, both within and outside the school. Parents, principal, and teachers are supportive of the school and what it does for students. The principal and staff work together collaboratively, with each other, and with parents. The staff members are caring and loving towards students.

Teachers support each other by asking for and receiving ideas and resources for more effective instruction. Staff expertise is shared. The North Central staff work together as a team. Non-teaching personnel express they feel included and respected as staff members at North Central Elementary School. They receive the building communications and have professional development opportunities directed specifically to support their job responsibilities. The principal values positive professional and personal relationship building among staff members. For example, each day the teachers have time together at lunch because the principal supervises the lunchroom.

There is a recognizable positive synergy in the school. Staff members continuously talk about the successes occurring in the school and speak of all students in the school as “our students”. Students are addressed by name in the hallways, lunchroom, and on the playground. Staff report these practices contribute to the positive energy of the school. Students indicate that they are proud of their school. They know that the teachers at North Central Elementary School care about them and want them to succeed. One student summed up the atmosphere of the school with the comment, “This is a happy place.”

The school provides a safe, orderly, and equitable learning environment for students. Priority is given to ensuring that an effective school and classroom environment is created to provide high levels of learning for all students. Academic successes for students that have met established goals are celebrated with school-wide field trips, classroom parties, and recognitions at end-of-year all-student assemblies. Many of these celebrations are geared to provide students with a variety of opportunities for new experiences (i.e., trips to the mountains).

Relational trust is apparent in the school. Staff members report that they regard each other as skilled, credible, and able to do the right work together. The principal and teachers provide support to each other to become a stronger community of learning and effective practice.

“Nothing bad happens here.”

“We know we have great teachers that help and support us.”

“The principal cares about us and worries about us.”

~ Comments from students at North Central Elementary

Leadership

North Central's principal is an organizational and instructional leader who succeeds in building relationships and trust with staff, students, and parents. The principal models high expectations in classrooms and in how she conducts all school business. She possesses high levels of expertise in instruction, data analysis, and technology, and teachers value her guidance and support.

The principal demonstrates a variety of skills and depth of knowledge that are respected by staff and give credibility to her role as an instructional leader. She knows the students and their achievement data well and is deeply engaged in work that will help them achieve at higher levels. She follows up with consistent actions, dedicating the time and effort needed to produce results. Her efforts and the one-on-one relationships she has developed provide an environment in which the school can function with collegiality, commitment, and determination.

Staff members express confidence in the leadership of the principal. They feel supported to do their best work with students. They say she is personable, flexible, and approachable and they can speak their minds and offer input without concern because her focus is on the work and meeting the needs of students. She is viewed as a member of the team engaging in the work.

The principal encourages and supports teachers to increase instructional effectiveness. Classrooms are routinely monitored, and teachers report that the principal provides meaningful feedback to enhance their practice. A clearly defined evaluation process is implemented in the school. Staff members understand the process and view it as a route to improving their professional proficiency. Staff report receiving necessary resources, support, and guidance to address evaluation feedback.

Each staff member annually develops professional growth goals in collaboration with the principal. Together they have a goal-setting conference at the beginning of the school year and a review-of-progress conference at the end of the school year. The principal informally checks on progress of teachers' goals throughout the year and includes the information in the formal evaluation process.

While the principal persists in promoting the intervention actions put in place to improve student achievement, she is also viewed as collaborative and approachable. Communication between staff and the principal is open, input is received and acted upon, and rationale for all actions is explained and discussed.

Parents also express great confidence in both the principal and the teachers to provide an excellent education and nurturing environment for their children. Students say the principal is serious about students doing their work well, and that she is fun and knows each one of them as an individual. They also report that they see her every day and they feel that everyone at the school - students, teachers, staff and the principal - are like family.

"She keeps us safe and learning."

~ North Central students regarding their principal

"The role of the leader . . . is one of orchestrator . . . taking what can be developed in the way of action and shaping it into lasting commitment to a new strategic direction. The leader makes meaning and develops commitment to a new moral purpose."

~ Sergiovanni, 2007

Intentional Use of Interventions and Support

Five years ago the current principal of North Central Elementary School determined that in order to improve the percentage of students who performed on grade level for reading, a system of individualized interventions needed to be developed and implemented. Students who were not reading on grade level were provided intensive and targeted interventions to meet their reading needs. Over the past five years, the school's menu of carefully selected literacy interventions to meet a variety of needs and levels of intensity has grown into a rich resource bank. These efforts produced an increase in the percentage of students with proficient and advanced CSAP reading scores. Individualized interventions were recently implemented for mathematics as a continuation of targeted support for students not proficient.

These intervention efforts also began to produce a stronger all-school learning community. Teachers became more committed to the achievement of all students and more concerned about what they need to learn to better meet all students' needs and improve the school as a whole. "We teach reading" is the mantra that has guided instruction at North Central Elementary School. This philosophy has helped to meet individual student needs and to close learning gaps.

A well-developed Response to Intervention (RtI) Process is designed around this philosophy. The RtI process frames the school's understanding of Tier II and Tier III intervention and fosters the use of multiple programs and resources to move students to proficiency in reading. Data are used to match appropriate intervention with each student and to monitor and adjust as needed. Additionally, multiple ways are employed to ensure that students have extended time to read text – in the classroom, during flooding groups, silent AR time, and at home to meet reading calendar expectations.

The RtI Process begins with benchmark assessments that are given and analyzed at the beginning of the school year. Students who are below proficiency are identified and placed in appropriate interventions (time and programs). Students are progress-monitored using Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) testing approximately every six weeks. After analysis of results, a decision is made as to whether to maintain current interventions or to refer the student to the Student Intervention Team (SIT). Additional intervention suggestions are made and the frequency of monitoring is increased as the process continues.

The school's master schedule is planned around specials classes (music, art, physical education, and computer) and a flooding schedule. The district has established minimum time allocations of 60 minutes for literacy and mathematics. A 30-minute flooding (clustered reading groups) session is scheduled each day in addition to the core literacy block. Interventions are scheduled for an additional 30 or more minutes per day for those students needing additional intensive support. The major focus of the school is to dedicate enough time and support for every student in the school to accelerate their literacy development to perform at grade level. In mathematics, two intervention options are now available, with targeted students receiving additional instruction beyond their core mathematics block.

In addition to teachers providing extra individual academic support to students during the school day, the school provides several after-school learning experiences. These include a 30-minute "Reading Buddies" session for selected students who are unable to complete their daily home reading log and "Summer Bridge Books" for students to complete at home to support retention of skills throughout the summer.

"We don't believe in failing a student. We will spend an incredible amount of time to provide the support to help a child 'get there' by re-teaching and providing supplementary help. When a child fails, so does the teacher and parent. We can't control the parents, but we can manage what we do at school."

~ North Central Principal