

Effective Practices School Profile: Northeast 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

Northeast Elementary School is located in rural, northeastern Colorado. The school is an integral part of the agricultural community surrounding the small town. Most students are transported by buses, coming in from outlying farms, and about 25% of students are enrolled from other neighboring districts because of its reputation as being an excellent school. Northeast Elementary is a PreK-6 school, with one classroom per grade. All students are known by adults in the school and feel they are an integral part of a warm, secure, and stable environment. At least 75% of students enrolling in kindergarten graduate from the Northeast school system.

| Demographics | | Performance | | | | |
|---------------|----------|--------------------------|--------|--------|---------------------------|---------|
| | | Growth Data (3 year) | | | Accountability Data | |
| IA Program | TA | Catch Up MGP | R = 64 | M = 65 | SPF – Growth Gaps Rating | Meets |
| Enrollment | 118 | F/R Lunch MGP | R = 50 | M = 62 | SPF – Growth Gaps Reading | Exceeds |
| F/R Lunch | 52% | ELL MGP | N/A | N/A | SPF – Growth Gaps Math | Meets |
| ELLs | 0% | CELA | N/A | N/A | AYP – Overall 08 | Yes |
| Hispanic | 8% | CBLA (% making progress) | N/A | N/A | AYP – Overall 09 | Yes |
| Non-White | 12% | | | | AYP – Overall 10 | Yes |
| PPA | \$13,770 | | | | | |
| IA Allocation | \$372 | | | | | |

Northeast Elementary School currently enrolls 106 PreK-6 students with a teaching staff of nine. The small size of the school fosters communication and collegiality. All staff members take responsibility for the learning needs of each student. As evidenced in Figure 1 below, median growth at Northeast exceeds the state's median growth percentiles.

Figure 1

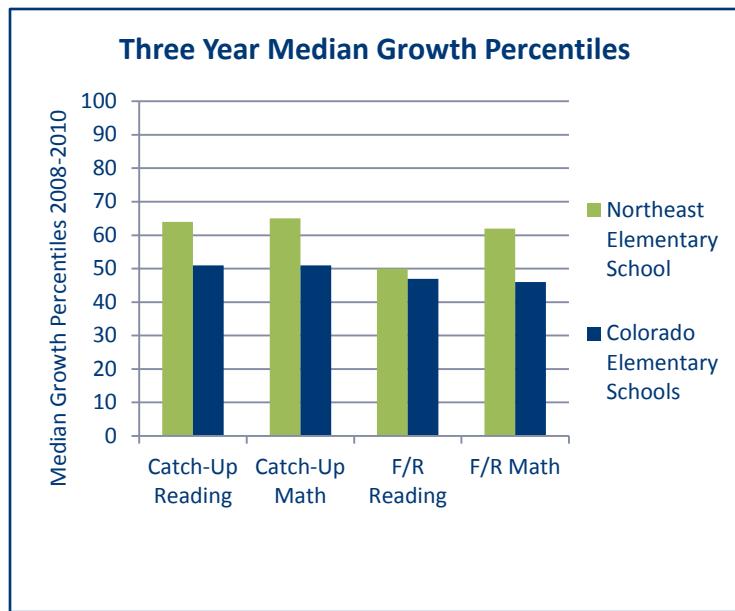
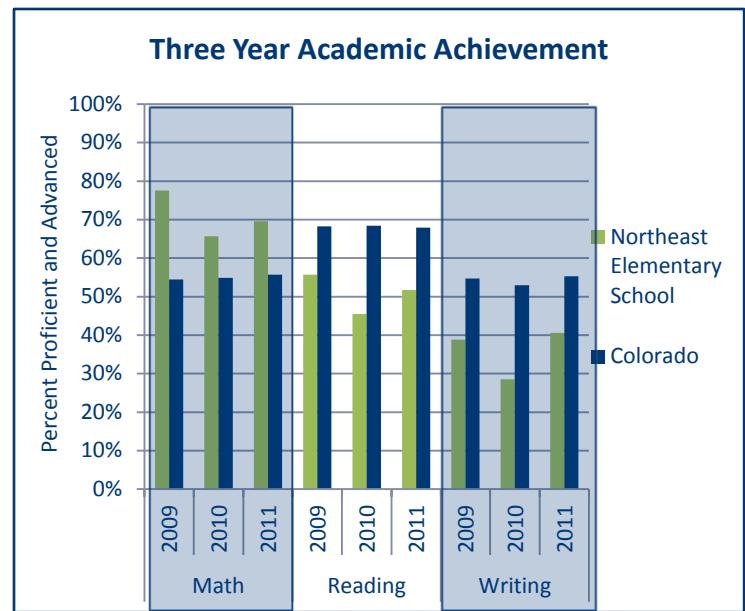


Figure 2



Key practices that contribute to the school's strong growth performance include: 1) Strong Principal Leadership, 2) Positive School Culture, and 3) Well-functioning Response to Intervention Process. More detail on the specific practices is outlined below.

Leadership

The principal is an instructional leader who is highly respected by staff for her knowledge, work ethic, and supportive behaviors. Staff members recognize her abilities and know she has the skills to make the school work efficiently and effectively. The principal continually works with teachers to provide guidance and support, often serving as the “go-to person” for help. Staff members share in leadership through committee participation and by informally sharing ideas and initiatives with the principal and colleagues.

Staff members report that the principal is very knowledgeable about instruction and offers good suggestions for their professional practice. They state that interactions with the principal are informative and supportive and that she is a “team player.” She holds high expectations for all who work and learn at the school. Communication within the school, and with the principal, is perceived as timely, ongoing and satisfactory. Teachers receive information in one-on-one conversations, e-mails and a daily bulletin. The principal provides structure and support for staff members to use instructional time as a resource to maximize student learning.

The principal uses the district’s evaluation processes and procedures with fidelity, including care in providing information to staff about the evaluation process annually. Criteria included in the evaluation document are connected to student learning and designed to support student learning. Teachers report that the evaluation conferences are valuable and supportive in helping them improve instructional practice. In addition to formal observations, the principal frequently visit classrooms. She gives teachers feedback by email, hand-written notes, and face-to-face conversations.

Teachers construct professional growth plans each year. These are submitted to the principal for approval. Usually the principal and teacher meet to discuss the proposed goals, and at times modify them. Mid-year monitoring and end-of-year discussions are held between the principal and teacher regarding how well the goals are being met. Teachers write an end-of-year report outlining accomplishments, including any data to support results and impact.

Culture

One of the greatest strengths of Northeast Elementary School is the close-knit community and family-like atmosphere of the school. Staff members and students report that the school is a safe, healthy, orderly and equitable place to work and learn. The family-type atmosphere and culture helps students to be clear about expectations for their behavior and learning, and about their responsibilities. Students and faculty express how much they care about each other.

The school uses various means to communicate within the school, with parents, and community members. Communication is ongoing, timely, and interactive for staff, parents, and the community. Teachers indicate that the school has a culture of constant communication and sharing of ideas about instruction. Email and face-to-face communication are used extensively to communicate among staff. Teachers informally communicate and share information on a regular basis.

The principal and staff have committed to developing a communication structure with parents through a “Friday Folder” process. Included in the folder is a weekly classroom newsletter created by the teachers. Besides letting parents know what is occurring instructionally, many of these letters contain suggestions for parent involvement in the child’s learning or an explanation of an instructional concept their child is learning at school. Teachers routinely add written personal notes to parents and include them in the Friday Folders, with the goal of reaching all parents in a targeted amount of time.

The casual collaboration that occurs between teachers is a strong attribute of the school. Teachers at Northeast Elementary School are a rich resource for each other. The culture of the school affords an environment of cooperation that is based on meeting students’ needs. Staff members spend many hours in the school before and after the school day preparing lessons, collaborating informally, or supervising and assisting students.

PBIS principles are embedded throughout the school, and there are few behavioral problems to disrupt the learning environment. Students feel safe and supported in school and are known as persons, not just students. A PBIS Committee focuses on student behavioral expectations at the classroom and school level. They meet throughout the school year planning, collecting and reviewing student, classroom, and building behavioral data to determine reward structures and respond to ongoing questions and issues.

A program matching high school students with elementary students provides support for students needing some additional care and emotional support. This “Big Buddy” program is designed for older students to meet with younger students one-on-one at the school to play games, talk, or assist with academic work. Students in the upper intermediate classrooms are often paired as “Kinder Buddies” with kindergarten students to assist in reading activities.

Student work is displayed throughout the building. There is a focus on including work from all students rather than displaying and recognizing outstanding work.

Parents and community members are involved in the school. Volunteers are willing to help in classrooms, lunchrooms, office, library, and at special events. Each year the staff hosts a “Parent Academy” that focuses on ways parents can be a part of their child’s learning process. Staff members plan this yearly Parent Academy evening and have increased parent participation by including students and making the activities more family-oriented.

“We are one big family.”

“We treat each other like family here.”

“We lean on each other.”

Response to Intervention

A vital Response to Intervention (RtI) process is in place at Northeast Elementary School. Students who have academic needs are identified quickly and provided targeted interventions. Teachers strive to do whatever they need to do to meet the needs of the students. The school is successful at addressing needs quickly, before learning struggles become deeply embedded.

Teachers bring information about students who are experiencing difficulty in learning or behavior areas to the PreK-12 RtI team for problem-solving. Most concerns are addressed at the Tier I (universal) level through classroom instruction, re-teaching, and supplementary support. If a student continues to not make progress, additional support is added first at the Tier II level through in-class intervention and/or Title I placement. At Tier III, intensive intervention is employed, using specific intervention programs. Intervention support is scheduled in addition to universal instruction in the classroom. Efforts are made to not pull students out of the universal instruction for core content areas.

The RtI Team meets monthly, with an average of ten students addressed each year. Monitoring meetings are held every six weeks or more often. The RtI process includes use of well-defined protocols and procedures. Data from multiple sources are used to identify students who are not proficient and have need of intervention support. A body of evidence is used in assessing student needs for referral to the RtI process. This body of evidence includes CSAP, AIMS Web, NWEA MAPS, teacher observations and recommendations, classroom assessments, and parent recommendation. Analysis of summative assessment results are provided to teachers by members of the RtI committee. Teachers are assisted with understanding the results of these assessments on an as-needed, individual basis by the principal, counselor, or special education teacher.

Teachers understand the importance of using supplementary materials to support Tier I, universal instruction, as well as to provide Tier II and III interventions. At times, several primary resources are used within a grade level and from one grade level to another for reading and writing instruction, and at times for math.