Effective School Practices (ESP) Review Report

For

North Western Elementary School

Conducted: May 22-27, 2011

Introduction

There are a number of high-performing schools in Colorado that have, up to this point, had little opportunity to share their practices that are producing results year after year with their students. There are other under-performing schools that have yet to realize the kinds of successes these aforementioned schools have experienced. The premise for this project is that there are some highly-effective practices that must be in place for some, but not all of our Colorado schools. Therefore, the Colorado Department of Education is making available, to a select number of the schools, an opportunity to engage in a process to identify those practices through the Effective School Practices (ESP) review.

The following criteria were used to determine the selection of schools as participants in the ESP reviews:
- The school must have been a designated Title I school for at least 4 years.
- The top 34 schools were determined based on performance data including:
  - Catch-up median growth percentiles; and
  - Colorado English Language Acquisition (CELA) growth
- This narrowed the group to the top 15 schools in which additional performance data, listed below, were used:
  - Reading and Math achievement (3 year);
  - School Performance Frameworks (SPF) rating and specific "Growth Gaps" rating (3 year);
  - AYP results;
  - Colorado Basic Literacy Act (CBLA) data (for elementary schools); and
  - Graduation Rate (for high schools).
- This narrowed the list to 11 schools using the following demographics data.
  - Poverty rates;
  - Size of school based on enrollment;
  - Percent of students that are ELL and minority;
  - Location of school (rural, urban, etc.); and
  - Title I allocation and per pupil allocation.

As a result of this project, it is hoped that the highly-effective practices, identified through the ESP review process, will be revealed, triangulated with the research, and shared (in multiple ways) in order to support struggling schools in their journey to achieving high levels of student success for all.

Overview of the ESP Review Process:

Number of Interviews: <u>149</u>

- School administrators: <u>11</u>
- Instructional staff (regular and special program teachers):   <u>45</u>
- Parents/Community Members   <u>6</u>
- Classified Staff   <u>5</u>
- Students   <u>68</u>
- Other   <u>5</u>

Number of Observations:

- Classrooms   <u>124</u>
- Meetings (Community & Grade Level)   <u>9</u>

Purpose of the ESP Review:
The purpose of the ESP review is for an external team to gather information about an effective school's systems and processes. The information gathered will be provided to the school for both affirmation as well as possible next steps in their continuous improvement efforts.   The intention of the Colorado Department of Education is to use this work to inform practitioners and other schools about the practices that are working for high-performing Title I schools in the state of Colorado.

The ESP review is conducted by assessing the school in nine areas of school effectiveness, consistently identified as research-based practices, relative to:
- Curriculum;
- Classroom Assessment and Evaluation;
- Instruction;
- School Culture;
- Student, Family and Community Support;
- Professional Growth, Development and Evaluation;
- Leadership;
- Organization and Allocation of Resources; and
- Comprehensive and Effective Planning.

STANDARDS FOR THE EFFECTIVE SCHOOL PRACTICES REVIEW

<u>Academic Performance</u>: **The following Academic Performance Standards address (1) curriculum, (2) classroom assessment and evaluation, and (3) instruction.**

> **Standard 1:** The school implements an adopted curriculum that is rigorous and aligned to state and local standards.
>
> **Standard 2:** The school uses multiple evaluation and assessment strategies to continuously inform and modify instruction to meet student needs and promote proficient student work.
>
> **Standard 3:** Teachers engage all students by using effective, varied, and research-based practices to improve student academic performance.

<u>Learning Environment</u>: **The following Learning Environment Standards address (4) school culture, (5) student, family, and community support, and (6) professional growth, development and evaluation.**

> **Standard 4**: The school/district functions as an effective learning community and supports a climate conducive to performance excellence.
>
> **Standard 5:** The school works with families and community groups to remove barriers to learning in an effort to meet the intellectual, social, career, and developmental needs of students.
>
> **Standard 6:** The school/district provides research-based, results-driven professional development opportunities for staff and implements performance evaluation procedures in order to improve teaching and learning.

<u>Organizational Effectiveness:</u> **The following Organizational Effectiveness Standards address (7) leadership, (8) organization and allocation of resources, and (9) comprehensive and effective planning.**

> **Standard 7:** School instructional decisions focus on support for teaching and learning, organizational direction, high performance expectations, creation of a learning culture, and development of leadership capacity.
>
> **Standard 8:** The school is organized to maximize use of all available resources to support high student and staff performance.
>
> **Standard 9:** The school develops, implements, and evaluates a comprehensive school improvement plan that communicates a clear purpose, direction, and action plan focused on teaching and learning.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE and OVERVIEW OF THE SCHOOL

North Western Elementary School (NWE) is home to 363 students. Seventy-two percent of the students are Hispanic and 60% of the students are second-language learners. While there are significant numbers of students for whom English is not their native language, over 60% of these students, based on an average over the last three-years, have made at least one year of Performance Level (PL) growth. Students in Colorado are identified as Non-English Proficient (NEP) or Limited-English Proficient (LEP) based upon the Colorado English Language Assessment (CELA) which determines the level at which these identified students meet the Colorado English Language Standards in the four domains of listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Approximately 67% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunches. The number of students receiving free or reduced lunches is the standard used to determine poverty levels for Title I funding. For students identified in this category, the Median Growth Percentile is 54 for reading and 60 for math compared to 47 and 54 respectively in the state. The school has met the standards for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as defined in the Federal "No Child Left Behind" legislation in all areas over the past three years.
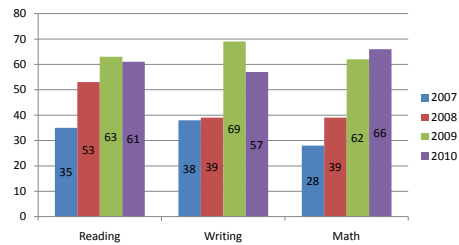
NWE decreased the achievement gap by the highest percentage of any Colorado school based on 2010 data and was one of two schools in Colorado to be named awards based on this achievement. While many schools would feel this honor was good enough, North Western Elementary has continued to show gains in student achievement as evidenced by various assessment systems used to monitor student success. The leadership responsible for the success of this school is particularly notable in that the building principal has recently been named "Principal of the Year". The selection process for this honor was coordinated by the Colorado Association of School Executives (CASE). The principal was recently formally recognized at the school, with recognition at the CASE conference this summer and in Washington, D.C. in the fall.

The theme or informal motto of the school is "These are ALL our kids" and this attitude toward students permeates the culture at North Western Elementary. The staff works diligently to educate every child for success—one student at a time. Staff and students alike are involved in student achievement through ongoing sharing, goal setting, providing and giving feedback, and monitoring of progress. This is accomplished by analysis of data for each student at the school. Student skill deficits are identified and addressed through data analysis cluster groups. Teachers working with focus groups of students are intentional and precise in addressing the needed skills of the students for whom they are responsible.

The four tenets supporting the work of this school are communication, collaboration, instruction and achievement. The five-year plan guides the work of the school and each level of the work appears to be intentionally layered to support a strong foundation of teaching and learning for both the adults and students in the school. Cluster meetings provide the structure for collaboration regarding the work which is clearly portrayed in a moral imperative and belief of the staff that: "This is the only chance we have with this child this year." Additionally, there is a sense of urgency among staff that one year of growth in one year's time is not good enough for the majority of students at North Western Elementary. The level of trust by staff, students and parents in this school community is to be commended as it clearly demonstrates confidence in the overall leadership and direction the school is taking.
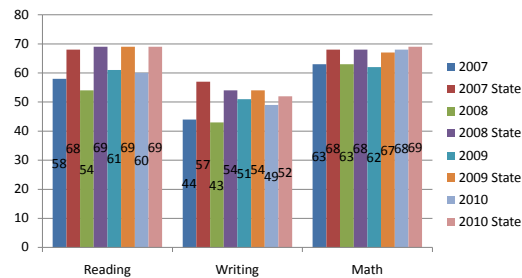
The following data chart, depicting CSAP observed growth in reading, writing and math, shows that NWE has consistently exceeded the state's median growth percentile. For 2009 and 2010, NWE has percentages above the 50th percentile which would indicate growth that is above the state's average.
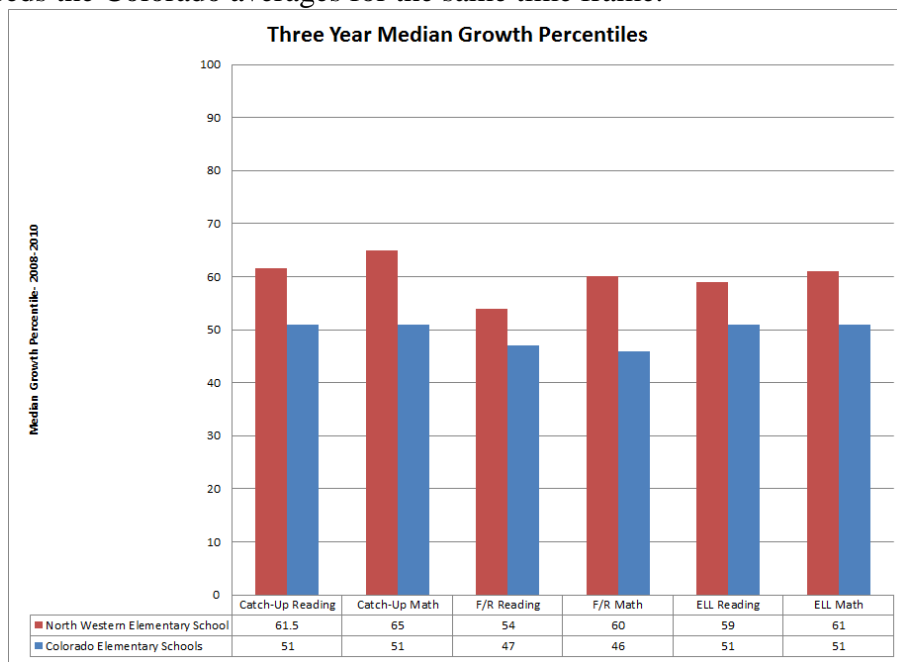
Observed Growth

While observed growth is indicated above, achievement as measured by CSAP in terms of students scoring as proficient and advanced is shown below. These data would indicate that while the school has not yet reached the state average in each area, there are upward trends toward achieving state average.

% Proficient & Advanced

Three-year median growth percentiles are listed below for 2008-2010 in subgroup areas. NWE consistently exceeds the Colorado averages for the same time frame.

Three Year Median Growth Percentiles

	Catch-Up Reading	Catch-Up Math	F/R Reading	F/R Math	ELL Reading	ELL Math
North Western Elementary School	61.5	65	54	60	59	61
Colorado Elementary Schools	51	51	47	46	51	51

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There are messages in various areas of the school that subtly provide communication and reminders to the students, parents and staff about why their work is so important. Some of these include sayings such as "We've Got the Knowledge—We're Going to College"; "You are Entering a 100% Success Zone"; and "How can you lead others if you can't control yourself?" Bulletin boards and posters throughout the school depict sayings that provide direction for appropriate behavior, aspirations for the future, positive character traits and the importance of learning every day.

The school establishes the rationale and procedures for the work that they do every day with students through a laser-like focus on instruction and what happens in the classroom. "…The power of directed teaching, enhancing what happens next (through feedback and monitoring) to inform the teacher about the success or failure of their teaching, and to provide a method to evaluate the relative efficacy of different influences teachers use," (Hattie, 2009) is apparent in this school. Although staff in other schools may read lots of research, North Western Elementary staff actually utilizes best practices where it has the most impact—in the classroom.

In his book *Failure is NOT an Option*, (2004), Alan Blankstein describes six principles which characterize high-performing schools, particularly those schools with 50% or higher levels of poverty. Those principles include:

1. Common mission, vision, values and goals;
2. Ensuring achievement for all students through systems of prevention and intervention;
3. Collaborative teaming focused on teaching and learning;
4. Using data to guide decision making and continuous improvement;
5. Gaining active engagement from family and community; and
6. Building sustainable leadership capacity.

It is apparent to this Effective School Practices Team that North Western Elementary staff has clearly and intentionally focused on each of the above components and works every day with every student to continue to improve achievement for all.

ESP Review Narrative Report

Findings Academic Performance

The area of Academic Performance contains the following key components, as reflected in the research-based Comprehensive School Support Rubric:

- ✓ Implementation of an **adopted curriculum** that is rigorous and aligned to state and local standards and that the school provides access to a curriculum that emphasizes a challenging academic core for all students.

- ✓ The school uses **multiple evaluation and assessment strategies** to continuously inform and modify instruction to meet student needs and promote proficient student work. Assessments are frequent, rigorous, and aligned with district and state content standards. Students can articulate the academic expectations in each class and know what is required to be proficient.

- ✓ Teachers engage all students by using **effective, varied, and research-based practices** to improve student academic performance. Instructional strategies, practices, and programs are planned, delivered, and monitored to meet the changing needs of a diverse student population. Instructional services are provided to students to address individual needs and to close the learning gaps.

The following findings embrace the fine work that has been accomplished at NORTH WESTERN ELEMENTARY and support the practices that result in the high student achievement the school is realizing.

Curriculum: *The school implements an adopted curriculum that is rigorous and aligned to state and local standards.*

- North Western Elementary School implements the district curriculum which is outlined in the District Curriculum Essentials document. This curriculum is aligned with Colorado Common Core Standards and identifies what students need to know and be able to do at each grade level and in each content area. The curriculum identifies and maps the evidence outcomes for each standard. Teachers use an unwrapping template to analyze these evidence outcomes. They determine what students will need to know and be able to do to demonstrate mastery of the objectives and analyze the assessment data that shows what students already know. They also look at CSAP requirements for that standard, including item maps and released items if available, as well as other assessments that are used to assess proficiency. Finally they compare the evidence outcomes to the learning objectives of the instructional programs, *Literacy by Design* and *Everyday Math*, to identify where gaps might occur. Instruction is then planned including ways to address any gaps with supplemental materials to ensure that students will know and be able to do everything that will be addressed on the CSAP prior to CSAP administration. Curriculum articulation between grades is addressed in the cluster group meetings of cross-grade teachers (K-1; 2-3; 4-5). Support services teachers, including Title I, ESL, and special education also participate in cluster group meetings to ensure that curriculum is aligned across all programs.

- The district identifies the instructional programs to be used in literacy and math as *Literacy by Design* and *Everyday Math*. Both programs are age and developmentally appropriate, culturally responsive, and standards-based, although neither fully addresses the requirements of the Colorado Common Core Standards. The needs of second-language learners are addressed through the *On Our Way to English* instructional program which is integrated with *Literacy by Design*.

- Although the term "standards-based" is not the language most teachers use to describe North Western Elementary, the most important elements of standards-based education are evident. The Formative Assessment Process (FAP) drives the work of teachers in classrooms, cluster meetings, instructional planning, and lesson delivery, and results in a standards-based teaching/learning cycle. The six components of the process are:
  o Shared learning targets and criteria for success (based on Academic Standards);
  o Feedback that feeds forward;
  o Student goal-setting;
  o Student self-assessment;
  o Strategic teacher questioning; and
  o Student engagement in asking effective questions.

- Grade-level teams have time set aside each week to engage in collaborative planning for instruction. During that time, they further analyze learning objectives, plan and score common assessments, and discuss instructional strategies and interventions. Teachers use assessment data to identify student needs and many teams develop lessons together to address those needs. Some teams use this time to develop rubrics and to begin to determine what constitutes proficiency on learning objectives. Some teams are beginning to analyze learning targets for levels of cognition using Bloom's Taxonomy.

- The focus for improvement at North Western Elementary has been on all students with additional resources directed to and targeted for the "kids on the cusp", those students who are below proficiency. The result has been significant growth for those students to reach various ranges of proficiency, but may not have provided the challenge necessary for appropriate achievement growth in higher-ability learners. As a result, the numbers of students scoring at the Advanced level on CSAP may not be an accurate representation of student ability. The curriculum, as it is taught, may not be challenging enough or require higher-order thinking skills from all students. Some teachers and grade levels are attempting to address the needs of high-achieving and gifted students by grouping all such students together; however, the instruction and activities provided for those students may not be sufficiently challenging. In some cases, there may be an assumption that those students will be able to learn independently.

Classroom Assessment/Evaluation: *The school uses multiple evaluation and assessment strategies to continually inform and modify instruction to meet student needs and promote proficient student work.*

- Sharing Learning Targets and Criteria for Success is the first component of the Formative Assessment Process. Teachers post learning objectives in student-friendly language that defines observable and measurable outcomes. Some teachers expand the practice by posting a purpose, "Why is it important?", and a description of how success is determined, "How do you know if you are successful?" Learning objectives are often posted on LED screens; sometimes they are posted on white boards or chart paper.

- North Western Elementary collects assessment data from a number of sources. The Developmental Reading Assessment 2 (DRA2) is administered each spring to all grades K-5 to determine reading benchmark level. Edison Alliance Benchmark Testing for reading is given in grades two through five monthly. Students are assessed with the Northwest Evaluation Association Measures of Academic Progress (NWEA MAP) three times a year (fall, winter and spring) in reading, language usage and math. Second language learners who are not at a fluent English proficiency level take the Colorado English Language Assessment (CELA) in January. All students in grades three through five are tested on the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) each spring. Writing is assessed in the fall and the spring on the District Writing Assessment administered and scored by the classroom teachers. In addition to standardized and district tests, students are assessed with *Literacy By Design* theme tests and *Everyday Math* unit tests. Some teachers and teacher teams also create common assessments to assess student learning on "highly-tested" CSAP objectives, often using a CSAP-like format. Students receiving literacy intervention services from Title I are progress monitored using AIMSWeb assessments and running records.

- All students are screened for placement in the gifted and talented program using the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAt) in the third and fifth grade. Concern has been expressed regarding cultural bias and high verbal emphasis in this assessment. The Naglieri Non-Verbal Ability Test (NNAT) will be used to screen second-grade students next year. Students who score at the 95th percentile on the CogAT are then further assessed using a body of evidence that includes other assessment data including NWEA, CSAP, teacher recommendation, and the Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test 2 (KBIT2).

- North Western Elementary is "data-driven" and multiple sources of data are continually analyzed and referenced down to the "kid" level. Everyone, including the principal, knows where each student is academically at all times. Students "on the cusp" of moving to proficient are especially targeted in focus groups. The proficiency levels of all students and any skill gaps they may have are identified and addressed through interventions, thus "filling the holes." This identification is accomplished through the cluster group meetings of classroom and support services teachers facilitated by a master teacher twice each week. These clusters post and analyze all assessment data and set goals for student achievement in reading, writing and math. Academic goals are set for each grade level and each student, and are continuously monitored throughout the year using multiple assessment data sources. If the results seem to warrant it, goals are revised upwards. Cluster groups also provide professional development regarding the use of assessments and assessment data, e.g., a video of a master teacher administering a DRA2 assessment to "look for the holes" in a student's reading skills.

- There is a focus on student use of data within the Formative Assessment Process. Student goal-setting and student self-assessment are promoted in different ways. Assessment data is shared with students and they are encouraged to set their own goals for future assessments that are appropriate to their level of challenge and attainment. Grade-level goals are shared with students and discussed frequently. Student-friendly rubrics have been developed in many classrooms to help students set goals for performance on assignments and activities and to assess and reflect on their own learning. In writing, teachers sometimes use the CSAP rubrics created by the Colorado Department of Education to help students understand what will be required.

- Immediate formative assessment strategies such as white boards, exit tickets or clickers are also used to provide students with a self-assessment tool to monitor their own learning. Teachers use the data collected through these activities to assess class progress toward the learning objective and to determine which students might need review or reteaching.

- "Feedback that feeds forward" is also a component of the Formative Assessment Process. Teachers giving effective feedback use the criteria that were described in the learning objective. Students learn where they met the criteria and where they did not; and through reflection, with the teacher, come to understand how and where they can improve.

- There has been an emphasis on increasing student test-taking stamina by creating assessment tasks that replicate CSAP rigor in the type, length and number of assessment items.

Instruction: *Teachers engage all students by using effective, varied, and research-based practices to improve student academic performance.*

- The Effective School Practices (ESP) team observed a range of instructional strategies used throughout the school. Gradual release of responsibility is commonly seen through modeling, guided practice, and independent practice. Use of nonlinguistic representation, (e.g., graphic organizers, drawing pictures, engagement in kinesthetic activities, etc.) is prevalent. Teachers use a variety of instructional and grouping structures attributed to Kagan Cooperative Learning training. A daily, focused literacy block features leveled reading instruction. Differentiated, small group instruction is provided for focus groups of students who are "on the cusp" below a CSAP cut point. Overall, there is a distinct focus on delivering additional instructional support to individual and groups of students performing below proficiency as determined by a body of evidence.

- North Western staff is using a book study of *Advancing Formative Assessment in Every Classroom*, (Moss & Brookhart, 2009) as a nexus for ensuring that students can understand and verbalize every learning objective, define a proficient level of performance for each objective, participate in goal setting, extend learning through effective feedback techniques, and become more accountable in the learning process.

- Teachers facilitate student understanding of what they are expected to learn by posting daily learning objectives. They may require students to determine the meaning of the objective (typically with a pair-share activity) or merely restate that which is posted. Teachers may reiterate the objective during the course of a lesson, highlight important words in the objective, discuss associated rubrics depicting varying performance levels, or ask students to expand on the objective and set their own goals. The purpose behind a posted objective is often concurrently stated and students may see descriptors of what they will know or be able to do at the conclusion of the learning activity. There are ongoing efforts to post learning objectives to ensure that students have assimilated their meaning, and apply attainment of the objective to their own learning.

- Emphasis is placed on delivering quality teacher feedback to student work with the intent being to deepen learning and empower students as partners in the learning process. The feedback response is designed to be timely so students still remember the learning objective and to allow adequate time for them to respond in turn. The feedback is individualized to provide the

appropriate amount for a given student to assimilate. Feedback represents a message which extends the learning opportunity; develops student ownership for the quality of their work; and provides metacognitive growth as students learn to self-assess, self-correct, identify next steps, and set goals for future learning.

- The Response to Intervention (RtI) process at North Western Elementary is embedded within the cluster groups. Daily classroom instruction, instructional literacy blocks, small-group differentiation, Tier II interventions, and extended-learning opportunities focus on kids who are not yet proficient. Students in need of reading intervention are identified as student assessment data are analyzed. Intervention for the lowest-proficiency students is provided through the Title I program using the *Leveled Literacy Intervention* (LLI) and *Read Naturally* programs. There is emphasis on implementing these programs with fidelity, which includes a low pupil-teacher ratio. As student proficiency improves, students continue to receive support and supplemental instruction through services delivered by specials teachers and within the classroom. Students are progress monitored at least every two weeks, but instruction includes more frequent use of running records to monitor daily instruction. Intervention services are always supplemental, ensuring that students truly receive a "double-dip".

- A school-wide literacy block from 8:00 to 9:30 includes sharing students among teachers to fully accommodate leveled reading groups. Students below proficient may be afforded a double dose of literacy instruction through pullout Title I services. The Special Education (SE) program offers individualized instruction to eleven eligible students and twice that number of primary students below grade level. Teachers state that school-wide interventions have been so successful this year that no additional students have been found eligible for SE services. In the intermediate grades, students reading below grade level still participate in leveled reading groups multiple times per week. Intermediate grade students at or above grade level tend to spend more instructional time working independently.

- Non-English speaking kindergarten students are placed in a Spanish-only classroom. A Spanish-only classroom is available through second grade. After the first trimester of second grade, the curriculum is delivered entirely in English. Pullout ESL support appears highly correlated to classroom learning activities. This support includes preteaching of academic vocabulary, introducing critical literacy content prior to classroom instruction, and reteaching lessons as deemed necessary.

- Writing instruction across the curriculum is observed in classrooms and reported by teachers to be a consistent practice. As an example, reading and writing tasks are typical adjuncts to math instruction. Students are frequently expected to go beyond a simple, singular answer and describe a process or explain the thinking behind their conclusion. Short video clips are judiciously used as an introduction to new learning in order to offer background information and provide an anticipatory set. This is a positive practice for students and can be especially beneficial for second-language learners. Science lessons are selected and developed to align with literacy instruction.

- A wealth of data is analyzed in regularly-scheduled cluster meetings. This deeply-embedded, disaggregation practice serves to identify students for focused instructional groups, trigger targeted individualized instruction, generally inform instruction, identify reteaching needs, and improve student self-awareness. To a lesser degree, data results also confirm the efficacy of

different instructional approaches. The principal is a regular participant in these deliberations and is active in following up on the progress of individuals and small groups of students.

- The North Western Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) works on inter-rater reliability with the ECS Professional Practices Rubric in order to score teachers more consistently. This team works to ensure teachers make connections between adult practices and student achievement.

- Classroom instruction is monitored by frequent principal walkthroughs and is more formally evaluated by master teacher and principal observations. Additionally, mentor teachers regularly coach teachers regarding instructional techniques. Their observations of teachers are quantified against the Professional Practices Rubric to establish a baseline of teacher practices without becoming part of the formal teacher evaluation process. All teachers participate in classroom walkabouts in other classrooms. They briefly interview students and complete a form used to monitor the practice of Sharing Learning Targets (student description of what they are learning) and Criteria for Success (student understanding of proficient performance for a given learning objective). To this end, walkabout data is collected and analyzed each month to monitor fidelity to these instructional initiatives. Results are shared in both cluster and staff meetings.

- The form used to structure a pre-observation conference aligns with components of the Professional Practices Rubric. This is reported to be helpful in regard to using data to guide instruction, suggesting key components to an effective lesson plan, and utilizing best instructional practices.

- An after-school program, Power Hours, offers 1½ hours of extended learning for approximately 110-120 students. Students functioning at grade level receive forty-five minutes of supervised homework time and forty-five minutes of a physical activity. Students below grade level are placed in leveled reading groups for forty-five minutes of focused literacy instruction and forty-five minutes of a physical activity. Many of the reading groups are taught by teachers who work with the same groups of students during the school day.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:
ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

- What gets measured gets taught might also apply to adding rigor to instructional practices. Consider reinforcing, refining and scaffolding the practices that are currently in place in order to further address rigor. Reflect on the good work already begun with the content of *Advancing Formative Assessment in Every Classroom*, (Moss & Brookhart, 2009). A natural continuum for deeper implementation of this pedagogical content might include reinforcing the standards and objectives component while continuing to refine academic feedback and student goal setting. Only as these practices become fully implemented with fidelity might the next step include the logical progression of asking strategic questions. Full implementation of this particular best practice may bring much of the instructional rigor needed to challenge all students.

- Ensure that the curriculum as it is taught is challenging enough and requires higher-order thinking skills from all students, including those above proficiency and/or identified as gifted and talented. Intentionally build in opportunities for critical thinking through problem solving, asking questions that require critical analysis, evaluating sources and decision making. "Critical

thinking enhances academic growth; the more it is integrated into content instruction, the more students will analyze the concepts they are learning (Swartz & Parks, 1994).

- Explicitly teach students to ask effective questions. Question starters and SQ3R (Moss & Brookhart, 2009) help students build questioning repertoire and provide both modeling and guided practice in framing strong questions. Inquiry is a powerful instructional strategy. Student questions symbolize a key to prior knowledge, offer a roadmap to pacing, give direction to differentiation, provide the bedrock for constructivist learning and culminate in a culture of intentional learning. Engaging students in asking effective questions is predicated on their understanding that asking questions is a potent tool for learning. The better the questions that students ask, the deeper their understanding develops and the more they become true partners in the learning process.

- Consider using the extension questions on the pre-observation form for teacher evaluation as a lever to raise the bar of rigorous lesson design and instructional delivery.

- Stay the course. With all the effective instructional practices in many different levels of implementation, a danger lies in trying to take on more to honor the continuous improvement imperative. Rather than adding initiatives, consider reinforcing, refining and building upon that which has already been implemented. Data results speak volumes. Be as deliberate and strategic in implementing initiatives. Use mandated initiatives as opportunities to benchmark against those instructional practices in which teachers are already engaging. Collaborate in trying to determine the best schedule for launching new initiatives. Always keep in the forefront that identifying, improving and expanding current best practices that have high impact on student achievement may be the best course to the desired outcome.

Learning Environment

The section on Learning Environment addresses:

- ✓ **School Culture and Climate:** The school functions as an effective learning community and supports a climate conducive to performance excellence. Factors such as a safe, orderly and equitable learning environment, an appreciation for diversity, and the belief that all children can learn at high levels is fostered by district and school leadership and staff.

- ✓ **Parent and Community Partnerships:** The school partners with families and community groups to remove barriers to learning in an effort to meet the intellectual, social, career and developmental needs of students. Communication efforts are varied and effective. The school uses multiple ways for working effectively with parents and the community.

- ✓ **Professional Development and Evaluation:** The school provides research-based, results-driven professional development for staff and implements performance evaluation procedures in order to improve teaching and learning. There is a comprehensive, collaboratively-developed professional development plan. Data are used to determine professional development priorities. Educators have professional growth plans to improve performance. Professional development efforts are evaluated for their impact on student achievement.

These components define a context for decisions affecting every other aspect of a school from curriculum and instructional programs to budget and improvement planning processes. Specific attention to the characteristics of the community, the academic needs of students and the unique developmental attributes of the age group pays dividends in higher achievement and greater organizational success.

School Culture: *The school functions as an effective learning community and supports a climate conducive to performance excellence.*

- Staff members at North Western Elementary School agree that "these are all our kids" and have established a moral imperative for their collaborative work with students:
  - o This is the only chance we have with this child this year.
  - o The time is now.
  - o Who do you see?
  - o Who do they see?
  - o Who will they be?

- Each day students and parents are greeted, often by name, by teachers as they walk through the front door and make their way to the top of the ramp before school starts. This is a regularly-assigned duty and a contributing hallmark of the strong focus on school culture.

- The learning environment is positive and orderly. Children from high-needs backgrounds experience an increasingly happy and predictable environment in which they belong and learn. School attributes that attract teachers to North Western Elementary include student achievement progress and a faculty and principal who demonstrate interpersonal caring and support for one another. Most teachers have come to the school by their own choice as opposed to being assigned by the district.

- The school seeks to continuously develop and maintain high levels of staff and student performance. Some teams have developed the collaborative trust necessary to hold one another accountable for professional learning and for student achievement. The school culture is one of intensive focus on achievement. A hallmark of this focus is the consistent collaborative use of data to set grade-level and student goals, determine student instructional groups, identify students for targeted interventions, and inform daily classroom instruction.

- The culture and structures of the school are focused on improving student achievement. As a part of its practice, the school operates with an open-door policy, encouraging teachers to visit other classrooms. This idea is intentionally advanced by the master and mentor teacher support that is provided to teachers throughout the school. North Western Elementary School has a cluster room in which student achievement data are displayed as are professional development initiatives staff members are learning to implement. Cluster groups which are the school's Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) meet twice weekly throughout the school year in this data-rich environment to collaborate about current levels of student achievement and current professional learning initiatives for staff. Cluster groups (PLCs) have been the school's way of doing business for many years.

- Some staff members indicate a primary reason students demonstrate positive achievement is that teachers are good at talking about assessments and results with students, and as an outcome, encourage each child to take ownership of his/her own learning. Other staff members clearly identify the impact of focus group student instruction (cusp kids) as a high-leverage strategy. It appears high-leverage group work may be inconsistently provided to students who are already performing at a proficient level. This may limit their access to an equitable learning environment.

- The positive influence of the principal is often noted, with attention given to his advocacy for the learning needs of each student. In this school staff do not allow student discipline consequences to include those that might prevent students from participation in special learning opportunities such as field trips.

- Student behavior is managed through various approaches used by individual teachers, centering on the Positive Behavior Intervention Support program (PBIS) using the Safety, Own it, Achieve, Respect (SOAR) core principles. Staff members are candid about the growing pains and inconsistencies the school experiences as it moves through the process of establishing clarity among all staff for explicit PBIS implementation school-wide. This year teachers are expected to implement PBIS in all common areas of the school, and may continue using other behavior strategies in individual classrooms. In addition, the school uses the dugout (time-out room) to provide time out adding a reflection component for students with more continuous behavior problems. In-school suspensions sometimes occur. Recently the Record of Consequence (ROC) sheet (a clip-boarded checklist of all students' behavior in a particular classroom group that accompanies the students throughout the school) has been initiated to track behavior outside of the regular classroom. Grabber cards are used to reinforce SOAR behaviors. In addition, Kelso strategies addressing student conflict are used to help primary students learn how to handle issues on the playground. Integration of all of these components into a wholly-unified behavior approach that is consistently implemented with precision does not yet appear to be in place.

- Teachers and other staff know the school's students. Staff members are aware of individual student goals. When students reach their goals, staff members informally recognize the achievements whenever/wherever they might encounter the students (hallways, cafeteria, playground, etc.).

- Students say that people in the school care for them, that they feel safe in the school and that teachers give them things. The school provides incentives for students to reach their goals (e.g., toppings for Friday Fun ice cream and grabber tickets to use toward purchasing prizes). There are monthly assembly celebrations of student goal attainment (e.g., NWEA, math and reading) as well as behavioral improvement, best helper, JET awards, etc. Conflict managers who will help other children resolve playground issues are chosen at the end of 4th grade. Students sometimes have lunch with the principal and students have gone to the high school for movies and ice cream.

- Teachers at North Western are part of the district's pay for performance program, initiated several years ago. In years past this program may have been a source of concern for teaching staff; however, in recent years, teachers have largely set those concerns aside. Now teacher focus and energy are more purposefully directed toward improving student achievement.

Student, Family and Community Support: *The school works with families and community groups to remove barriers to learning in an effort to meet the intellectual, social, career, and developmental needs of students.*

- The school PTO includes representatives that mirror the demographics of the school, and has both a president, and a bi-lingual co-president. All parents are welcome. Access for parents to participate in the life of the school is supported through the employment of a bi-lingual school secretary, and recent funding of a bi-lingual community liaison position. The community liaison appears to have the community connections and flexibility needed to act as an advocate for the academic/hidden hardship needs of students. Parents express a high level of trust in the school and the principal.

- The recent Cinco de Mayo Literacy night, weekly homework folders, parent-teacher conferences, and the monthly bi-lingual newsletter (with suggestions to parents about how to help their children learn) are examples of the school's efforts to remove barriers to learning for students.

- Partnerships with the Snowboard Outreach Society (free skiing, and character-building lessons for high-needs kids) and the Youth Foundation (after-school and summer programs including homework support and differentiation for extra work in reading) support the learning needs of the school's children.

Professional Growth, Development and Support: *The school/district provides research-based, results-driven professional development opportunities for staff and implements performance evaluation procedures in order to improve teaching and learning.*

- North Western Elementary embeds the district adoption of the Teacher Advancement Program (TAP), a pay for performance plan, which was implemented nine years ago as a result of the direction of the Board of Education. TAP, a creation of the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET), embodies a four-part approach to the staffing and evaluation process:

- o Multiple career paths;
- o Ongoing, applied professional growth;
- o Instructionally focused accountability; and
- o Performance-based compensation.

- North Western Elementary staff includes the following positions, in addition to career teachers, to provide multiple career paths:
  - o Four mentor teachers serve as classroom teachers 70% of the day, and in addition to classroom instruction, are responsible for these domains to:
    - Provide opportunities where the mentee is involved in collaborative planning and/or team teaching;
    - Serve as a resource for data, curriculum, assessment, instructional, and classroom management strategies and resources;
    - Guide and coach mentees in the development of their growth plans;
    - Observe and coach mentees to improve their instruction and align it with teaching standards; and
    - Complete evaluations of their mentees on the instructional components of the TAP rubric followed by coaching, peer teaching, modeling, and other support.

  - o Two .8 FTE master teachers who are responsible for these domains to:
    - Assist in assigning, matching and monitoring mentor and teacher relationships effectively;
    - Provide opportunities where the teachers are involved in team collaborative planning and/or team teaching;
    - Serve as a resource for data, curriculum, assessment, instructional, and classroom management strategies and resources;
    - Teach classes for mentor teachers as the mentors observe and coach career teachers assigned to them;
    - Observe and coach teachers to improve their instruction and align it with instructional best practices; and
    - Observe and formally evaluate half of the licensed staff members.

  - o A permanent substitute whose duties include the following:
    - Classroom substitute in priority situations;
    - Spanish-speaking substitute;
    - DRA2 examiner;
    - Teacher for some reading focus groups;
    - Office help; and
    - Other duties as assigned.

- All staff members are expected to implement professional development strategies that are consistent with school goals, aligned with state and district standards and have an impact on classroom instruction as described in the TAP rubric to:
  - o Improve either content or pedagogical knowledge regularly;
  - o Actively apply and reflect on strategies learned in cluster as part of the steps for effective learning; and
  - o Write an individual growth plan that demonstrates an awareness of the school's goals and defines measureable areas of growth and evidence of success.

- North Western Elementary School's multi-year professional development plan is specific and purposefully filtered and focused by school leadership. Areas identified in the this plan include:
  - o Standards and objectives;
  - o Assessments;
  - o Academic feedback;
  - o Planning/differentiation;
  - o Presenting instructional content; and
  - o Bringing it all together.

- District professional development time is scheduled for two days prior to the start of school; the school has 1.5 days pre-service for school professional development. Other embedded professional development occurs twice a week in cluster meetings and every Wednesday in collaborative grade-level team time.

- The school's approach to professional development is differentiated according to the needs of each staff member. The expectation is for mentor and master teachers to coach teachers and build on their strengths.

- Cluster and team time for this year involve unwrapping the standards, examining and reflecting on student achievement data, reviewing effective Kagan structures and studying formative assessments. These include the major theme of sharing learning targets (objectives) and the criteria for success with auxiliary components of :
  - o Strategic teacher questioning;
  - o Feedback that feeds forward;
  - o Student goal setting;
  - o Student self-assessment; and
  - o Engaging students in asking effective questions.

- Communication of learning objectives appears to be a strong and consistent practice throughout the school. Some teachers expand the objective to include the purpose of the objective and how students will know if they are successful in learning what is expected.

- Walkabout checklists that focus on targeted practices such as sharing learning targets and criteria for success are used by mentors and career teachers when they observe other teachers in the building. Teachers report that observing peers in action helps them refine and replicate effective practices in their own classrooms.

- The district recognizes the importance of multiple exposures to training and has invested resources over three years for professional development on Kagan Cooperative Learning. Some follow-up to this training, such as reflecting on and demonstrating structures that have been successful, occurs in cluster and team time at North Western Elementary. While some classroom teachers demonstrate thorough implementation of cooperative learning, consistent and deep implementation of this instructional strategy does not appear to be in place throughout the school at this time.

- The district's TAP rubric, (evaluation plan) based on the research of NIET, concentrates on instructional accountability. The evaluation rubric contains extensive descriptors for these components of instruction:

- o Instructional plans;
- o Assessment plans;
- o Standards and objectives;
- o Presenting instructional content;
- o Learning activities and materials;
- o Learning groups;
- o Questioning;
- o Academic feedback;
- o Critical thinking and problem solving;
- o Differentiated instruction;
- o Lesson structure; and
- o Academic expectations.

- The Certified Teacher Evaluation Process and Professional Practices Rubric is reviewed and updated every two years by the district's evaluation committee.

- Each teacher is formally evaluated three times each year. The mentor teacher conducts the first evaluation concentrating on instructional strategies from the TAP rubric. The teacher being evaluated receives feedback and coaching from this initial evaluation which is not considered in the compilation of pay for performance calculations.

- The second and third evaluations are conducted separately by a master teacher and the principal who are responsible for evaluating the implementation of the instruction descriptors (stated above) in addition to the following descriptors for teacher performance:
  - o Managing student behavior;
  - o Physical environment;
  - o Respectful culture;
  - o Classroom procedures;
  - o Interpersonal relations;
  - o Professionalism;
  - o Professional development;
  - o School responsibilities; and
  - o Community involvement.

- The district recognizes the importance of instructional leadership, deep knowledge of instructional processes and the application of high-impact strategies in the classroom. The principal, master teachers and mentors must demonstrate mastery of all domains of the evaluation rubric by participating in yearly training to refresh skills and attain inter-rater reliability on demonstration lessons evaluated by the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching. In addition, it is an expectation that every evaluator has at least one experience of visiting another school, observing and debriefing with other evaluators on the TAP rubric each year.

- The master teacher evaluation is calculated as 35% of the observation section of the TAP compensation plan; the principal observation is calculated at 65% of the formula. The master teacher observation is scheduled and requires a preconference; the principal observation is unscheduled.

- Teachers are expected to reflect on the formal observations within a 24-hour period within the parameters of a self-reflection document that focuses on the instructional process of the observed lesson. These reflections are submitted to the evaluator and considered before the post conference which is to be held within 15 working days of the end of the respective evaluation period.

- New and beginning teachers consistently report they feel support by the mentors, master teachers, grade-level team members and the principal as they learn the instructional and operational expectations and standards of North Western Elementary.

- Teachers report the principal is in their classrooms multiple times during the week. Further they report the feedback they receive from walkthroughs and observations is helpful and on target. "He inspects what he expects."

- Staff members report the effectiveness and impact of debriefing a video of master teachers as they demonstrate assessment strategies in the classroom.

- Teachers report that in recent years the amount of pay for exemplary performance is negligible and, therefore, the incentive to do well does not come from the monetary reward but from a commitment to do the right thing for students.

- School leadership intentionally hires staff who seem to be passionate about making a difference for students and who care about improvement.

- Teachers are asked for feedback in the principal's evaluation process in the form of a survey they can submit online.

- The district provides a mentor who specializes in high-needs student populations for the principal.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:
LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

- Sustain the press to shape the culture to one which continuously supports high levels of learning for staff and students.

- Consider providing high-leverage student focus groups (similar to those provided for students on the cusp of proficiency) for students who are already proficient so that they have the opportunity to secure advanced performance.

- Develop/adopt a wholly-unified behavior management system. Implement it with consistency and precision. Because of the integration of Kagan classroom practices, examine the behavior management components of Kagan (Win Win) and consider bridging these behavior components with an agreed-upon behavior management system.

- Continue to provide professional development, follow-up support and monitoring that is closely aligned with teacher needs.

- Consider ways to strengthen and deepen the structures and implementation of Kagan Cooperative Learning.

Organizational Effectiveness

Organizational Effectiveness involves the areas of improvement planning, school leadership, and the allocation and use of resources to support high performance. The organizational work of leadership needs to ensure that the school has clear direction, goals and action plans to improve student learning. Both administrative and teacher leadership are responsible to guide the work of the school (i.e. the teaching and learning processes) by providing direction and high performance expectations, by creating a learning culture, and by developing the leadership capacity of staff. Additionally, school leadership is responsible to ensure the school maximizes the use of all resources to support high student and staff performance.

This section of the report addresses the core practices of highly-effective schools in regard to the following areas:

> **Leadership** for providing focus and support to improve student achievement, high-quality teaching, organizational direction, high expectations, the development of a school-wide learning culture, and building of leadership capacity. Both administrative and teacher leadership are responsible to guide the work of the school to fully implement the teaching and learning processes.

> **Clear direction, goals and action plans** focused on the improvement of student learning. Collaborative processes are in place and there is intentional focus on closing achievement gaps. Efforts are evaluated for effectiveness on impacting student achievement and fidelity to implementation.

The following findings and recommendations are provided for consideration as North Western Elementary moves forward in the ongoing focus on improvement.

Leadership: *School instructional decisions focus on support for teaching and learning, organizational direction, high performance expectations, creation of a learning culture, and development of leadership capacity.*

- The school has embraced what staff members refer to as the "Four Tenets" since the early days of the principal's tenure at the school. The four tenets are: Communication, Collaboration, Instruction, and Achievement. Additionally, the school's "Moral Imperative" is developed. Although few staff members are able to recite these tenets, they are very clear about the mission and work of the school. Comments such as the following reflect staff members' understanding of the mission of the school:
    - "Set high expectations and they will meet them. Show them how to get there."
    - "We are educating every kid for success."
    - "We're all in this together."
    - "They're all our kids."
    - "Everyone is here to help everyone succeed, both kids and teachers."

- Leadership is intentional in its efforts to honor the district's requirements by scaffolding the implementation of initiatives to allow teachers to successfully assimilate them into existing instructional practices. This scaffolding minimizes the possibility of initiative fatigue and the threat of lowered achievement scores resulting from implementation dips.

- In addition to instruction in their own area, specials teachers also participate in helping students meet their academic goals. For example, some specials teachers assist students in learning sight words; others participate in grade-level flooding in reading.

- The master schedule provides for two ninety-minute blocks a week known as cluster. Clusters are organized by cross-grade groupings, i.e. K-1, 2-3, 4-5. The cluster meetings are used for an in-depth analysis of data. This data analysis focuses on grade-level and individual student progress. It also provides an opportunity for vertical articulation. An additional weekly ninety-minute block is used for collaborative lesson planning by grade-level teams.

- Opportunities exist for teachers to observe other classroom teachers in the building. The master/mentor teachers release classroom teachers to conduct these observations when it is determined to be helpful for the observing teacher. Protocols developed as a part of the Formative Assessment Process (FAP) guide this work.

- Teachers report that the principal is in their classrooms often. Sometimes this is only for a brief walkthrough, while at other times he stays longer, or conducts a full, formal observation. There is no formal process for feedback on his walkthrough visits; however, teachers report that the principal sometimes drops them a note, or comments to them informally following his walkthroughs and that informal reports occur during cluster meetings. Formal observations culminate in a formal evaluation which includes numerical ratings on district evaluation indicators, acknowledgements of effective practices and recommendations for improvement. Most teachers state that this formal process is helpful in improving their professional practice.

- There are multiple opportunities for teacher leadership in the school. The district has established some teacher career paths in the role of mentor and master teachers. These individuals function as leaders, coaches, and evaluators without the additional duties typically assigned to administrators. Staff members report that everyone is expected to take responsibility for something during the school year. Teachers can serve on the Management Council, the Sunshine Committee, organize literacy nights, or develop and organize the implementation of the PBIS system.

- Approximately 110-120 students are involved in an after-school program which is organized by the Youth Foundation and taught by North Western Elementary Teachers and Youth Foundation Staff. Fourteen NWE teachers participate, with six or seven involved on any one day. A teacher-coordinator provides leveled books and daily intervention lesson plans for each guided reading group on a weekly basis. Teachers are compensated for their time. Student participation is voluntary, and parents pay a fee of $25 per child per trimester. Scholarships are available through the Youth Foundation.

- As a result of grant funding there will be an opportunity to keep the library open two mornings per week for ten weeks of the summer vacation. Focus students will be specifically invited and will be provided reading help. Other students may attend, check out books, take pink dot (AR) tests, and participate in other activities.

Organization and Allocation of Resources: *The school is organized to maximize use of all available resources to support high student and staff performance.*

- Instructional time is a valued and protected priority. Staff members understand that they are not to interrupt the instructional day with intercom announcements. Parent messages to students are recorded on sticky notes and delivered to classrooms at the end of the day. Teachers report and classroom observations reveal that teachers are aware of the need to make every minute count. Quick and efficient transitions are the norm. Although the effective school practices team review was conducted in the last few weeks of the school year, classrooms were observed to be focused on instruction, and classroom walls were still adorned with student progress charts, learning objectives, student work, rubrics and other indicators that instruction and learning was very much in progress.

- The school receives an FTE allocation each year from the district. Staff members report a creative effort to expand the duties of individuals who might otherwise be part time, so they can be employed on a full-time basis. This allows the school to retain strong employees who might otherwise leave to seek full-time employment. Furthermore, these individuals' expanded duties assist with improving student achievement. Staff further report that the principal's hiring practices, coupled with his insistence that teachers work collaboratively and effectively to produce strong student outcomes is a priority for ensuring a school staff that is effective in working with NWE students and that is focused on continuous improvement.

- A collaborative process is used for the creation of class lists with purposeful attention to the creation of heterogeneous groupings of students.

- Few staff members are aware of how the building budget is created. Most state a belief that the allocations are equitable, and express appreciation for the principal's creative use of staffing dollars to maximize student achievement. Some staff members state an appreciation that the principal shelters them from concerns about budgeting, and allows them to focus on instructional needs.

- As a function of the School Accountability Committee, parents provide input into the development of the budget. In recent years, this has taken the form of suggesting what budget areas might be reduced, and what areas/programs should be retained. Parents also participate in the school planning process by giving feedback on the grade-level goals developed through the beginning-of-the year cluster meetings.

- It is district practice for principals to conduct a staff survey to assess the effectiveness of his/her leadership and management of the school. Teachers report that the principal is very open about sharing the results and comments from this survey. For the past two years, the principal has worked with a mentor provided by the district. This year he also conducted an audit of his own use of time.

Comprehensive and Effective Planning: *The school develops, implements, and evaluates a comprehensive school improvement plan that communicates a clear purpose, direction, and action plan focused on teaching and learning.*

- A five-year plan for North Western Elementary is in place that provides the foundation for the work taking place at the school. The components of the plan are supported by professional

development, coaching for implementation, practice and ultimately ensuring that the components become embedded practices for staff. The parts of the plan are as follows:
  o Standards and Objectives;
  o Assessment;
  o Academic Feedback;
  o Planning / differentiation;
  o Presenting Instructional Content; and
  o Year 6—bring it all together.

- Improvement planning for North Western Elementary is based on the student achievement data collected each year as well as the ongoing collection of data throughout the year. These data include results from CSAP, CELA, NWEA-MAPs, DRA 2, Acuity, *Literacy by Design* benchmark tests, *Everyday Math* unit tests, daily formative assessments and assorted other data that teachers collect on a regular basis. The analysis of this data drives all instructional decisions for the teachers and learning decisions for students at this school.

- Teachers are integral decision makers in determining the pathways that affect the learning trajectory of North Western Elementary students. Through cogent processes, routines, expectations and support, teachers are able to effectively make learning a non-negotiable part of each student's day.

- In the fall, CSAP data is reviewed and the performance of disaggregated subgroups is considered. Once this initial consideration of the disaggregated subgroups is accomplished, the focus is almost entirely on individual students.

- Student achievement goals are set at the beginning of the year by grade-level teachers in the areas of reading, writing and math. These goals are consistently reviewed as part of the cluster meeting protocol. As goals are met, new goals are set and celebrations of these accomplishments take place—always with the expectation that there is still more to do.

- Students set individual goals with their teachers for improved performance in reading, writing and math. Incentives are provided to students as a regular part of their working hard and achieving goals. Most students are able to articulate what they need to do to achieve proficiency. Teachers know the individual skills sets for their students and as a result they are consistently providing feedback to students in how to improve their skills.

- Teachers are provided support through the mentor and master teachers in the building by relevant professional development through peer feedback and the protocol of observing others to enhance teacher practices.   Together, these represent the epitome of true modeling for a teaching/learning cycle for adults.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:
ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

- Consider sharing data collected through **all walkthrough processes** with staff, particularly in the implementation stages of a new learning. This becomes yet another feedback loop for ensuring that identified practices become fully embedded in each teacher's toolkit.

- Explore the possibility of additional learning experiences and extensions for advanced learners. Ensure that high-performing students who are identified in the primary grades are supported and are given learning opportunities to expand thinking and problem solving. Pursue possible mentorships for your students who need extensions or additional learning opportunities in order to deepen their knowledge and challenge their thinking.

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