

Effective Practices School Profile: North Western 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 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. Approximately 67% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunches.

Demographics		Performance				
		Growth Data (3 year)		Accountability Data		
IA Program	SW	Catch Up MGP	R = 61.5	M = 65	SPF – Growth Gaps Rating	Meets
Enrollment	363	F/R Lunch MGP	R = 54	M = 60	SPF – Growth Gaps Reading	Meets
F/R Lunch	63.8%	ELL MGP	R = 59	M = 61	SPF – Growth Gaps Math	Meets
ELLS	58.7%	CELA (% making at least 1 yr of PL growth)	60.7%		AYP – Overall 08	Yes
Hispanic	71.1%	CELA MGP 08	63		AYP – Overall 09	Yes
Non-White	72.2%	CELA MGP 09	68		AYP – Overall 10	Yes
PPA	\$310.55	CELA MGP 10	65			
IA Allocation	\$53,725	CBLA (% making progress)	57.1%			

In 2010, North Western Elementary decreased the achievement gap by the highest percentage of any Colorado school and was one of two schools in Colorado to be named awards based on this achievement. Additionally, the building principal has recently been named "Principal of the Year".

Figure 2

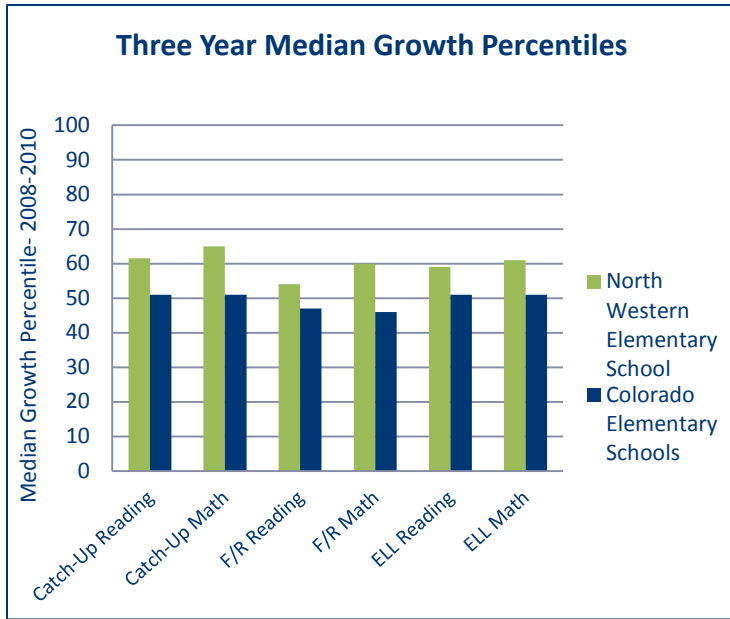


Figure 1

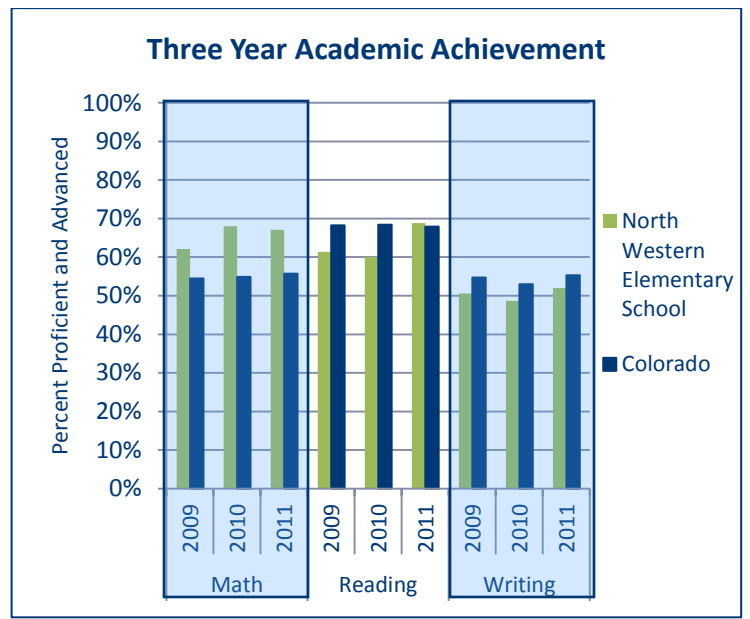


Figure 1 above demonstrates that North Western Elementary has consistently exceeded the state's median growth percentile. As evidenced in Figure 2 above, the school has not yet reached the state average for academic achievement in each area; however, there are upward trends toward achieving state average.

Several key areas of effective practices stand out among the many efforts that are contributing to Stein Elementary School's success. The practices can be categorized into five main areas:

Culture

The school culture at North Western Elementary is one of intensive focus on achievement. The theme of the school is *“These are ALL our kids”* and this attitude toward students permeates the culture at North Western. Additionally, there is a sense of urgency among staff and agreement that one year of growth in one year’s time is not good enough for the majority of students at the school.

The school maintains a laser-like focus on instruction and what happens in the classroom. A hallmark of this focus on student achievement is the consistent collaborative use of data. 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. Staff and students alike are involved in student achievement through ongoing sharing, goal setting, providing and giving feedback, and monitoring of progress.

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. Cluster groups, which are the school’s Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) meet twice weekly throughout the school year to collaborate about current levels of student achievement and current professional learning initiatives for staff. Cluster groups have been the school’s way of doing business for many years.

Teachers and other staff know the school’s students. 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. 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.).

The learning environment at North Western Elementary is positive and orderly. Children experience an increasingly happy and predictable environment in which they belong and learn. Students say that people in the school care for them and that they feel safe in the school. The level of trust by staff, students, and parents is obvious, and it clearly demonstrates confidence in the leadership of the school.

“We’ve Got the Knowledge”

“We’re Going to College”

“You are Entering a 100% Success Zone”

~ Sayings from bulletin boards and posters throughout the school

“This is the only chance we have with this child this year.”

- *“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.”*

~ Staff at North Western Elementary

Use of Data

North Western Elementary is “data-driven” and multiple sources of data are continually analyzed and referenced down to the student level. The Formative Assessment Process drives the work of teachers in classrooms, cluster meetings, instructional planning, and lesson delivery. Everyone, including the principal, knows where each student is academically at all times.

Improvement planning for North Western is based on student achievement data. The analysis of this data drives all instructional decisions for the teachers and learning decisions for students at this school. 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.

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. 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. This deeply-embedded practice serves to identify students for focused instructional groups, trigger interventions, and generally inform instruction. 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.

In addition to the cluster groups, grade-level teams have time set aside each week to engage in collaborative planning for instruction. During that time, they 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.

Another focus of the school is on student use of data. Student goal-setting and student self-assessment are promoted in different ways. Teachers post learning objectives in student-friendly language to define observable and measurable outcomes. Assessment data and grade-level goals are shared with students and discussed frequently. Students are also encouraged to set their own goals for future assessments. Student-friendly rubrics have been developed to help students set goals for performance on assignments and activities and to assess and reflect on their own learning. 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 re-teaching.

Leadership

Strong, shared leadership is an important component of North Western's success. The positive influence of the principal is often noted by staff and parents, with attention given to his advocacy for the learning needs of each student. Clear procedures for classroom observations are in place and leadership is intentionally distributed among staff.

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. While there is no formal process for feedback on these informal walkthrough visits, teachers report that the principal often drops them a note or comments to them informally following the visit. Informal reports also occur during cluster meetings.

Formal observations culminate in a formal evaluation which includes numerical ratings on the district's Professional Practices Rubric, acknowledgements of effective practices, and recommendations for improvement. Most teachers state that this formal process is helpful in improving their professional practice. The North Western Instructional Leadership Team works on inter-rater reliability with the Professional Practices Rubric in order to score teachers more consistently. This team works to ensure teachers make connections between adult practices and student achievement.

In addition to classroom observations, 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.

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. Additionally, 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). Walkabout data is collected and analyzed each month to monitor fidelity to these instructional initiatives. Results are shared in both cluster and staff meetings.

There are multiple opportunities for teacher leadership in the school. The district has established 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.

Four mentor teachers serve as classroom teachers 70 percent of the day and then are released to provide support to mentees such as collaborative planning, classroom observations, coaching, and team teaching. Mentors also complete evaluations of their mentees. There are also two master teachers at the school with multiple responsibilities. These include assisting and monitoring mentor teachers; providing opportunities for teachers to engage in collaborative planning and team teaching; observing and coaching teachers; and conducting formal evaluations of staff. 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.

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.

"The principal inspects what he expects."

~ Teachers at North Western