

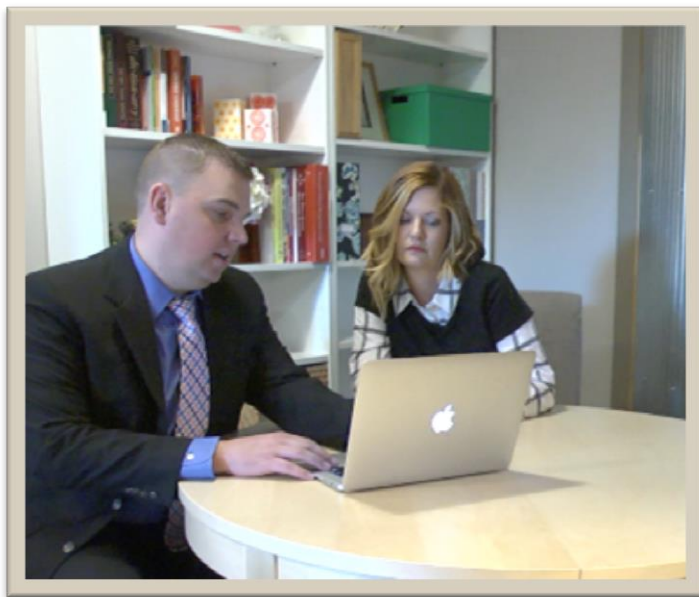


Success Spotlight



COLORADO
Department of Education

STORIES OF PROMISING PRACTICE



Colorado Academic Standards and Assessment Data: How Compass Montessori is Elevating Learning Experiences

COMPASS MONTESSORI, a K-12 public Montessori charter school, elevated its Montessori teaching practice by mapping its curriculum to the Colorado Academic Standards and introducing interim assessments and an online data management system. Teachers at Compass are now equipped with the resources and performance data they need to deliver rigorous, personalized, standards-aligned Montessori learning experiences to all students every day.

Colorado Department of Education surfaces and shares powerful stories from the field that get at the “why” and “how” behind the experiences and success stories teachers, students and administrators are having across the state so other districts can easily find models to apply in their own schools and foster positive learning environments for students. <http://getinspired.2revolutions.net>

Objective

[Compass Montessori](#) is a preschool through 12th grade Colorado charter school that has operated in [Jefferson County](#) since 1998. Compass is the first public school in the nation to offer Montessori education from pre-K through 12th grade.

The school's mission is "to provide appropriate challenges and support to enable each student to prepare for the intellectual, spiritual, emotional, social, physical, and societal transitions appropriate to each student's inner vocation."

Compass has campuses in Wheat Ridge and Golden, and serves just under 700 students, about one quarter of whom qualify for federally subsidized school lunches.

In keeping with the Montessori method of education, Compass' campuses have ample space for indoor and outdoor education and play. Children act as both students and teachers in multi-age classrooms. Each student moves at his or her own pace through a set progression of skills and learning objectives.

Compass school uses traditional Montessori materials to encourage independence, problem solving, and a lifelong love of learning in its students.

Compass staff are passionate about Montessori education. It's the foundation of the school's teaching philosophy and strategic vision. However, as a public charter school Compass is also responsible for meeting the requirements of Colorado's accountability framework. When the new state standards were first introduced, staff at Compass faced a challenge: how were they going to ensure that students were receiving a top-flight Montessori education that met and even exceeded the new standards?

Compass' leadership knew that effectively combining state standards with the Montessori method would require the support of the entire school community – from its governing board to school staff to families. Without a shared vision, implementing the new standards could become an exercise in compliance rather than an opportunity to elevate the school's Montessori teaching practice.

Bearing that in mind, Compass embarked on a multi-year strategic planning process to transform Compass into a preeminent Montessori public school that was fully aligned with the state's new accountability framework.

Strategy

To begin the hard work of incorporating the new state standards into its Montessori practice, staff at Compass began with the end in mind. Over the course of the 2013-2014 academic year, the school engaged in a comprehensive school community feedback process to inform a strategic plan and vision of success for the school. This included developing specific and measurable academic goals and a set of strategies to achieve them.

Compass also began incorporating the state-mandated School Accountability Committee and Unified Improvement Plan as primary tools for reaching academic goals set in the school's new strategic plan.

Once that roadmap was in place, Compass staff moved toward full implementation of the new accountability framework. They mapped their Montessori curriculum to the Colorado Academic Standards. Occasionally they came across an instructional area where classic Montessori materials alone couldn't teach a skill embedded in the standards. In those instances, instructional coaches would develop materials consistent with Montessori practice that would teach those lessons.

"Let's say there were some gaps in how to divide with decimals," said Bill Kottenstette, the school's executive director. Compass wouldn't fill the gap by "forcing an intervention using a worksheet, which would contradict the Montessori approach."

Instead, the instructional coach would develop "custom creative materials that would be hands-on and provide a visual representation" of how to divide with decimals," Kottenstette said.

The school's leadership made some structural changes aimed at helping students struggling in one or more subject areas. Teachers received training in how to use Montessori materials to work one-on-one with students to strengthen skills.

Typically, pulling students out of class for individual instruction isn't part of a strictly doctrinaire Montessori education. However, Kottenstette said, "providing a structured intervention will help a struggling student catch up. We think that is a good thing."

Compass also introduced two new progress-monitoring tools -- the Measures of Academic Progress ([MAP](#)) assessment and the online record keeping system Montessori Records Xpress ([MRX](#)). MAP provides school staff with more frequent and timelier student performance data

"We're seeing growth, particularly in math and in writing, where being much more intentional about how our work aligns with the standards is helping our students accelerate at a faster rate."

*Bill Kottenstette, Executive Director
Compass Montessori School*

and the record-keeping system has a range of capabilities that support in-depth analysis of student progress.

Finally, school leadership began using a [Montessori School Quality Rubric](#) to hold administrators and teachers accountable for continuous improvement in academics and Montessori practice. This self-assessment tool includes practical next steps to ensure Compass is delivering an exemplary Montessori experience to children and families.

Taken together, these strategies equip teachers and administrators at Compass with the tools, resources, and data they need to deliver rigorous, personalized, standards-aligned Montessori learning experiences to all students.

Results

Compass' transformation is a work in progress. Now beginning its third year of focused alignment of Montessori practice to the Colorado Academic Standards, staff see positive results at all levels. In 2013-2014, Compass' TCAP scores improved by 11 percentage points in math and writing, along with overall growth in the one-year state School Performance Framework of 30.6 points. Data from last year's MAP assessment shows continuous improvement in all academic areas.

Compass' culture has evolved as well. "The experience of integrating the Colorado Academic Standards into our day-to-day work helped shift our staff to more of a growth mindset – both for themselves and for their students," said Kottenstette. "It's been hard work but it has also challenged us to grow, improve our Montessori practice and ultimately better meet the needs of our students."



Kottenstette attributes Compass' success to date in large part to strategic planning. "Now when we talk about standards alignment or accountability and why it matters, it's in the DNA of everyone at the school from the board to teachers to principals and parents," he said.

The school's focus on professional development has been another key driver of progress, Kottenstette said. Since the new standards were introduced, Compass has invested heavily in its teachers. Last summer alone, staff completed over 7,000 hours of training in areas including development of Montessori practice, effective use of data from the MAP test, improving services for students with diverse learning needs, and leadership development.

Compass also built flexibility into its professional development strategy. For example, when the school introduced MRX, teachers received upfront training but were then allowed whether to opt in for the first year. This approach allowed teachers who were excited to test the new system to become early adopters while giving extra time to those still struggling to learn the technology.

“The opt-in policy was important to us. It ensured our teachers felt like true partners in the implementation process and accounted for individual learning needs, and it provided the space to ensure the technology provided the right solution for us,” said Kottenstette.

In addition to building knowledge and skills, the emphasis on professional development at Compass also resulted in a more confident and autonomous teaching staff. “Our teachers are more self-governing now,” said Cameron Gehlen, K-6 principal at Compass. “They know what our goals are, and they feel equipped to work toward them. They are now more likely to work together to solve problems rather than looking directly to the administration for answers.”

Professional development has proven so transformative over the past few years that Compass’ leaders wish they had done even more. “We ran into some implementation challenges when we started using (MAP and MRX) that could have been avoided if we spent more time learning the technology up-front,” says Gehlen.

Looking Ahead

Halfway through the 2015-16 academic year, the Compass community is excited to build on its results to date. Indeed, with their commitment to continuous learning, and with new tools and resources in place, Compass staff are well positioned to offer a strong Montessori learning experience that supports all students in mastering Colorado’s Academic Standards.



How to Do It: Tips for Effectively Using Standards and Assessment Data for Schoolwide Planning in a Public Montessori Charter School

1. Define your overall objective

- How will a schoolwide system that incorporates student performance standards, assessments, curriculum, and instructional methods improve student work?
- What pieces can be incorporated into your current system?

2. Preparation

- Identify resources, tools and materials that will inform and support your work.

I. General Resources:

1. [Colorado Academic Standards](#)
2. [Unified Improvement Planning](#)
3. [Strategic Planning Guidebook](#)
4. [Colorado League of Charter Schools](#)
5. [Achieve the Core](#)

II. Tools and Resources for Montessori Schools:

1. [Association Montessori Internationale](#)
2. [American Montessori Society](#)
3. [National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector](#)
4. [Montessori curriculum aligned to the Common Core State Standards](#)

III. Montessori Teacher Professional Development:

1. [North American Montessori Teachers' Association](#)
2. [Montessori Education Center of the Rockies](#)
3. [Montessori Institute of Atlanta](#)
4. [Hershey Montessori Training Institute](#)

- Determine how you will engage your school community in the planning and integration process.



3. Implementation

- Choose a planning tool to guide your work. In partnership with your school community, develop a strategic plan including specific and measurable academic goals and the strategies you will use to achieve them.
- Set up an accountability committee or other leadership structure that is responsible for keeping track of your school's progress against your strategic goals.
- Provide training and support to staff and other stakeholders to ensure they have a detailed understanding of each piece.
- Identify benchmarks.
- Select the resources you need to support standards-based teaching and learning at your school, including appropriate assessments, data management systems and professional development experiences.
- Continuously monitor your performance. Meet regularly with your accountability committee and staff to reflect on progress against your goals and use data on student progress to inform the teaching and learning cycle.

4. Assessment/reflection

- What worked?
- What did not work?
- How can it be adjusted?