

Effective Practices School Profile: Metro Elementary 3

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

Demographics		Performance				
		Growth Data (3 year)			Accountability Data	
IA Program	SW	Catch Up MGP	R=70	M=69	SPF – Growth Gaps Rating	Meets
Enrollment	763	F/R Lunch MGP	R=59	M=65	SPF – Growth Gaps Reading	Meets
F/R Lunch	91%	ELL MGP	R=62	M=67	SPF – Growth Gaps Math	Meets
ELLs	47%	CELA (% making at least 1 yr of PL growth)	55.67%		AYP – Overall 08	No
Hispanic	79%	CELA MGP 08	57		AYP – Overall 09	Yes
Non-White	86%	CELA MGP 09	58		AYP – Overall 10	Yes
School IA Allocation	\$582,500	CELA MGP 10	53			
PPA	\$1,250	CBLA (% making progress)	43.3%			

As evidenced in the graphs below, the school has seen a much higher academic growth rate than the state average while academic achievement has been on an upward trajectory for the past four years. This positive performance is the result of focused, targeted work.

Figure 1

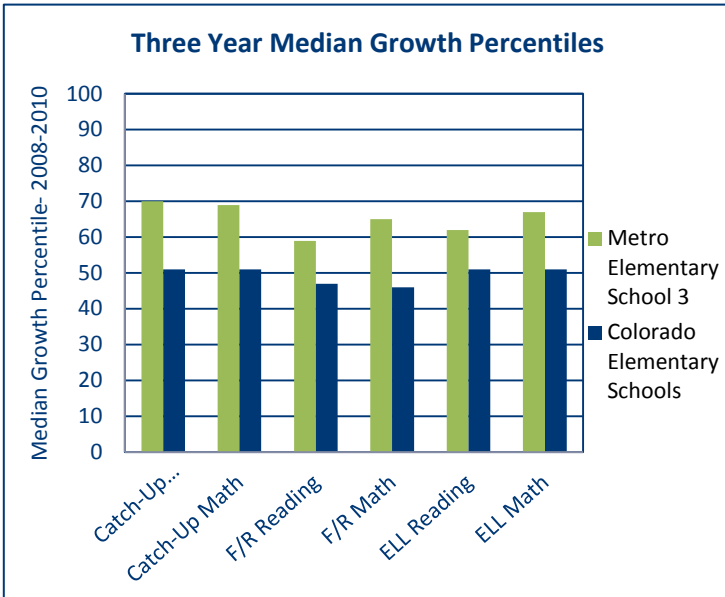
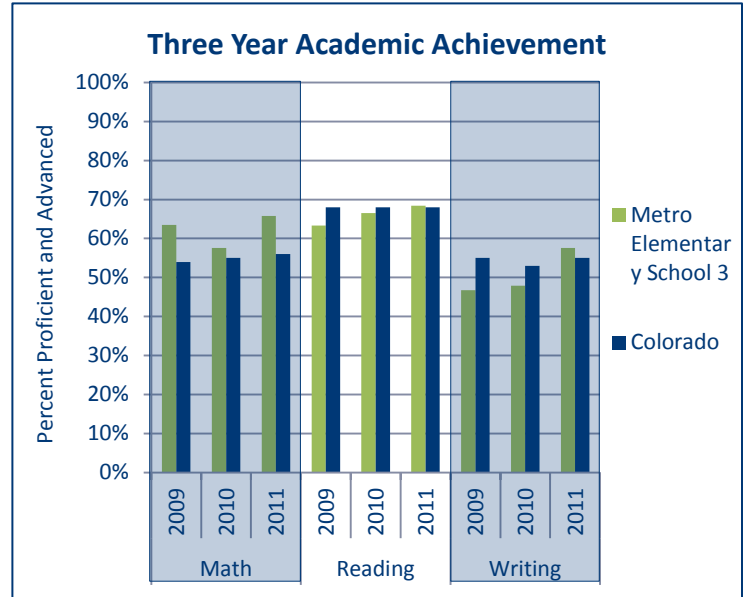


Figure 2



Several key areas of effective practices stand out among the many efforts that are contributing to Metro Elementary School 3's success. The practices can be categorized into five main areas:

1. **Culture:** The school culture is constructive with everyone contributing to the well-being of the students.
2. **Leadership:** Strong, shared leadership provides clear guidance, sets high expectations and promotes a culture of success.
3. **Use of Data:** Data are used to inform decisions and set goals for individual students, classrooms, grade levels, and the school.
4. **Response to Intervention:** A well-designed RtI process is effectively implemented throughout the school.
5. **Effective Planning and Use of Resources:** Well developed Improved Plan with buy-in from all staff and effective use of resources to accomplish the school's goals.

More detail on the specific practices identified in each of these categories is outlined below.

Culture

Culture can be the ultimate form of capacity – a reservoir of energy and wisdom to sustain motivation and cooperation, shape relationships and aspirations, and guide effective choices at every level of the school. (Hobby, 2004)

Through an intentional effort, Metro Elementary School 3 aspires to a culture of high expectations for staff and students. The staff members are focused on “getting the work done”, they know that “good is not good enough”, and believe that every child deserves a quality education. This strong belief that students can and will learn has been a pivotal factor in the increased student achievement at the school.

Staff members take appropriate responsibility for students’ learning. No excuses or rationalizing are heard. A sense of urgency and commitment to improved achievement is apparent in the classrooms, and teachers hold themselves accountable for results. They have high expectations of themselves and their students. Expectations are consistent and non-negotiable. The principal and staff find ways to work around barriers and changes in resources. They describe themselves as change adept.

Teachers who are hired for Metro Elementary 3 are well informed about the high expectations for how staff members work at the school with the focus on results, not on the number of minutes in the work day. The staff is characterized as dedicated, extremely hard working, collaborative, focused on the task. They are also noted for their caring, nurturing relationships with students that go beyond instruction. As an indication of the staff’s commitment to the students, parents, and school, Metro has enjoyed a low turnover of teachers during the past few years.

Respect, Others, Self, Environment is the school motto and is displayed throughout the school. The “Second Step” program addresses issues of empathy, problem-solving, and anger management. This program has been in place for many years and is embedded in the school culture.

The positive culture of Metro Elementary 3 is evident in the data collected from three surveys done in the past two years. Results indicate that students, staff, and parents perceive the school to have a positive and welcoming environment, and a strong academic culture. Parents are encouraged to be part of the school and are supported in learning how to help their children succeed.

Teachers and principals at Metro Elementary 3 state that they believe all students can learn and they demonstrate this in a variety of ways.

“We know our students can successfully master the challenging academic material they need to function as life-long learners in a diverse, democratic society. As Educators, we will provide the environment and instruction necessary to produce this achievement. At Metro, we will always work openly with students, parents and the community at large toward this purpose.”

-Metro Elementary 3 Mission Statement

Data

Administrators and teachers routinely engage in data dialogues to inform instruction. It is clear that staff understand the demands of the curriculum and the importance of assessment data within the teaching and learning cycle.

Students are assessed using a combination of state, district, and school-selected assessments. In addition to informal teacher-selected assessments, the following assessments are used:

It is the unwavering belief of the principal, assistant principal and instructional staff that collaborative data analysis to inform instruction is key to successful student learning.

- Primary students (K-2):
 - Basic Early Assessment of Reading (BEAR) - spring,
 - Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) - ongoing,
 - DRA2/EDL (Dual Language Classes) - ongoing,
 - The Math Screener - three times per year,
 - Colorado English Language Acquisition (CELA) - once yearly,
 - Scott Foresman *Reading Street* weekly and unit reading assessments - ongoing,
 - Investigations (math resource) unit and chapter assessments - ongoing, and
 - Writing Sample analysis using a rubric - three times per year.
- Intermediate students (grades 3-6):
 - Acuity (reading, writing, and mathematics) - fall, winter, spring,
 - Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) (math, reading, writing and science-grade 5 only),
 - Colorado English Language Acquisition (CELA) - once yearly,
 - Unit program assessments (Reading Street, Investigations) - ongoing,
 - Writing Sample analysis using a rubric - three times per year, and
 - DIBELS - as needed.

Assessment data are stored and accessed in the Student Online Assessment Reporting System (SOARS).

Data analysis meetings are embedded within the daily, weekly, and monthly work of instructional staff. Acuity data meetings are held three times yearly to analyze the results of the assessments in reading, writing, and mathematics. These data dialogues are led by instructional coaches and attended by teachers and administrators. Teachers look at and comment upon color-coded (to indicate proficiency levels) data reports. They share feedback on their successes and challenges, identify strategies and ideas, and craft next steps for instruction. Comments and reflections are captured electronically and projected for all to review during the meeting. Meeting notes are sent electronically to participants.

Weekly horizontal grade level team meetings are designated times for grade levels to use data to set goals, plan for instruction, and adjust groupings when warranted. The content focus of these meetings rotates weekly and includes a focus on reading, writing, math, and other pertinent topics (e.g., CELA data). Teachers use Data Team Discussion Protocols as a working tool before, during, and after these meetings. The meetings occur during common planning time and include teachers, coaches, and instructional paras.

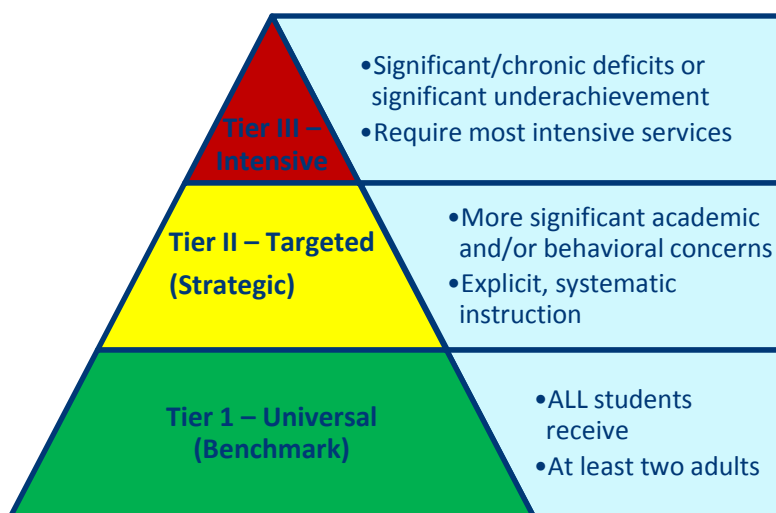
“We are data-driven.”

Response to Intervention

A well-organized Response to Intervention (RtI) process is implemented at Metro Elementary 3. Student data are reviewed by grade level, with participation from all appropriate staff and may include classroom teachers, interventionists, SPED teachers, and specials teachers. Although special educators are deeply involved, the program is not viewed as a special education initiative.

The school's RtI process operates school-wide with all instructional staff taking responsibility for students' achievement, which includes participating in the problem-solving and interventions for struggling students.

Protocols for RtI meetings are concise and well-established. Multiple sources of data are reviewed to provide a historical perspective, as well as recent concerns. Intervention plans are routinely revisited and evaluated. Staff members adhere to the practice of providing interventions designed to meet all student needs and use the RtI tiered system illustrated in the pyramid below.



Most instructional interventions occur within the context of the general education classroom using a push-in model. Early interventions, delivered through flexible grouping, flooding and push-in support during the literacy blocks, help ensure that few students need intensive intervention over extended periods of time. Teacher collaboration is the cornerstone of this work, with the whole staff problem-solving and taking responsibility for student learning. Although some students with intensive needs in literacy and math are provided small group pullout services, only about one percent of the students in the school receive these intensive services.

For literacy instruction, students are placed in well-defined, flexible groups (intensive, strategic, and benchmark) within the classroom. All students receive reading support from at least two adults during guided reading in the benchmark groups while intensive groups utilize three adults. Instruction is provided by classroom teachers, interventionists, special education teachers, and instructional paraprofessionals. Students with the highest need receive intensive guided instruction with minimal or no independent work time. Special education instruction is integrated into literacy blocks during the scheduled guided reading time. Special education teachers typically work with rotating groups and focus on the five components of reading.

For math instruction, students are grouped heterogeneously. Math interventions are provided in the general education classroom setting through co-teaching and small group instruction. Instructional focal points are determined by the identified instructional emphases from the Investigations Math Program and from the monthly data team meetings, Acuity meetings, and district CAP resources.

Opportunities are available for extended learning, including before-and after-school tutoring. Teachers are paid from Title I funds to implement reading clubs, intensive classes (CSAP preparation), and literature circles. Compensation is also provided to teachers for after-school math tutoring (Do the Math) for identified students. Summer school and an open library, through Title I, are available to support continued learning.

Leadership

Shared leadership opportunities are embedded in the work of the school. A Building Leadership Team meets monthly, or more often as needed, to review a variety of issues within the school. The Leadership Team takes information from the meetings back to grade-level teachers for input and suggestions before decisions are made. Communication among staff and with administration takes place daily through email messages and common lunch times for grade levels. Weekly staff meetings and regular data meetings enhance the flow of communication. The back-and-forth communication between grade-level teachers, the Leadership Team, and administration is ongoing and results in a level of trust about the decisions that are eventually made by a few people.

Staff members believe in the principal as the ultimate decision-maker. The principal keeps the focus on high impact practices that promote student achievement by asserting and reinforcing the non-negotiables for everyone's work. Instructional time is protected from interruptions. She is the one who provides the pressure to "stay the course."

Five years ago the principal initiated a reading strategies block of time for the highest-needs students and changed interventions to a push-in model. Now all first through fifth grade students have at least two blocks of time during the day for literacy. The regular use of the Scott Foresman reading anthology (Reading Street with the companion program My Sidewalk) enhances reading performance, helps to align instructional practices horizontally and vertically, and provides a consistent means of addressing vocabulary deficits.

Teachers and school leaders consistently identify use of this anthology as pivotal in the student performance gains made by students. The related resources in Spanish support access to common literacy-development practices across all classrooms.

The school has a support staff that includes three instructional coaches and seven interventionists. Coaches support teachers in improving the quality of instruction in the classroom, embedding professional development into teacher practice, and implementing the curriculum effectively. Interventionists provide classroom support on a rotating basis in literacy, math, and ESL/Dual language.

Leadership uses the evaluation process to monitor and support effective use of data, implementation of the curriculum and professional development strategies, instructional practice, student academic growth, and growth toward professional goals.

The principal and instructional coaches keep the staff focused on achieving common literacy goals for students so they have the language skills to achieve in all content areas.

Leadership comes from everyone on staff.

Effective Planning and Use of Resources

School leadership led the development of the Unified School Improvement Plan (UIP) that included participation of all classroom teachers, instructional coaches, and staff from the Jefferson County School District assessment department. Writing was identified as a focus for school improvement.

Ongoing work in this area includes the development of rubrics for scoring writing and the development of multiple writing prompts to provide choice for students. Teachers collect writing samples three times per year and score them in teams using rubrics. Teachers work in collaborative teams to examine and score student work in order to be sure expectations are aligned and there is inter-rater reliability in the use of rubrics within and across grades.

Teachers know the focus of the school's UIP, and grade-level team goals and plans align with the UIP goals. The UIP goals are monitored frequently at multiple levels including the PTO/School Improvement Team, Building Leadership Team, and grade level data team meetings. The goals are updated periodically during the school year. The school is committed to continuous improvement as demonstrated by frequent use of data to analyze and focus on learning needs of groups and individual students. In addition, professional development aligns with the focus of the improvement plan and is carried out as identified in the UIP.

Planning at Metro Elementary School 3 extends beyond development and monitoring the UIP. Plans, procedures, and schedules are developed for a number of functions (e.g., meeting processes, data analysis protocols, meeting schedules) within the organizational structures that facilitate operational effectiveness. Thirty minutes have been added to the school day at Metro Elementary 3. This additional time has been strictly designated for instruction, and the school's schedule reflects this and defines the number of minutes allocated for each content area.

The school's Title I resources are used by the principal to provide a flooding of adults to work with students who need intensive support. These positions include teachers, reading interventionists, instructional paraprofessionals, and tutors. Resources are used to provide time for teachers to meet together for half or full days to set instructional goals that meet needs revealed in student performance data.