

Effective Practices School Profile: Southwest 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

A small school, Southwest Elementary has become known as a successful school that over many years is demonstrating high achievement. It is becoming a prized "school of choice" and its student population is growing each year.

Demographics		Performance				
		Growth Data (3 years - 08-10)		Accountability Data		
IA Program	Targeted	Catch Up MGP	R = 50	M = 52	SPF – Growth Gaps Rating	Meets
Enrollment	156	F/R Lunch MGP	R = 49	M = 37	SPF – Growth Gaps Reading	Meets
F/R Lunch	41.86%	ELL MGP	R = NA	M = NA	SPF – Growth Gaps Math	Approaching
ELLs	1.28%	CELA (% making at least 1 yr. PL growth)		50%		
Hispanic	16.67%	CELA MGP 08		28	AYP – Overall 08	Yes
Non-White	18.59%	CELA MGP 09		NA	AYP – Overall 09	Yes
PPA	1000	CELA MGP 10		90	AYP – Overall 10	Yes
IA Allocation	\$51,000	CBLA (% making progress)		70.2%		

As evidenced in Figure 2 below, Southwest has had very high academic achievement in the last three years. In fact, the school has not had any students score unsatisfactory on the reading CSAP for the past eight years and no unsatisfactory scores on CSAP math or science since 2005. Southwest is in the 95th percentile in reading achievement and in the 93rd percentile in math and writing compared to other schools in Colorado.

Figure 1

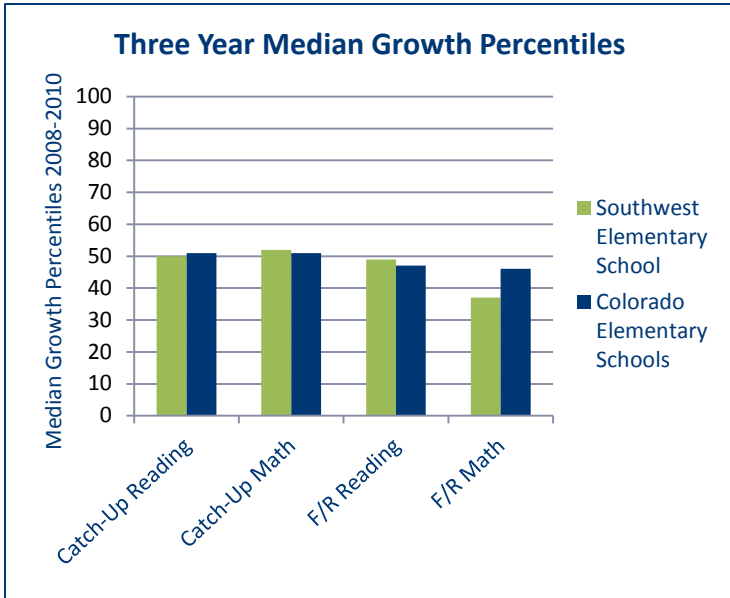
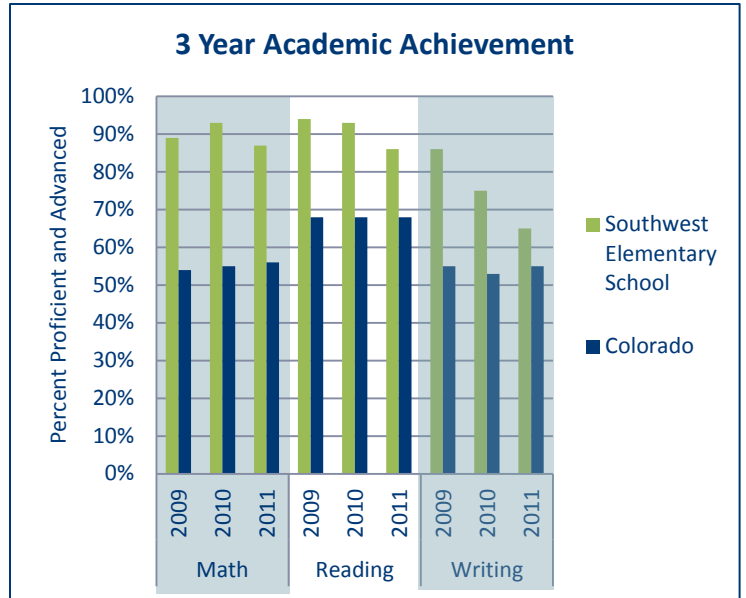


Figure 2



Key practices that contribute to the school’s high achievement and strong growth performance include: 1) Strong Curriculum and Instructional Practices, 2) Use of Data to Drive Instruction, 3) Positive School Culture, and 4) Exceptional Leadership. More detail on the specific practices identified in each of these categories is outlined below.

Curriculum and Instruction

Southwest Elementary implements a strong, standards-based curriculum. Teachers plan instruction around the standards and the school maintains a clear focus on teaching. Staff members are specific and intentional about what they do in their classrooms. High-impact practices are adopted and implemented, with teachers applying multiple strategies to teach their students.

Southwest Elementary follows the Durango School District's curriculum in all content areas. The district curriculum ensures rigorous, standards-based instruction and provides a focused, strong foundation for high student achievement. The curriculum was collaboratively created during the 2008-2009 school year with a focus on the following questions:

- **Rigor:** Are all students engaged in content that is rigorous, complex, ambiguous, and/or personally or emotionally challenging?
- **Diversity:** Are students using rich and varied curricular resources that tap into their unique learning styles, interests, talents and cultural/gender-related perspectives?
- **Authenticity:** Are students making meaningful and relevant connections between academic knowledge and the global community?
- **Thought:** Are students engaged in higher-level thinking, reasoning, and inquiry?

Curricula are available to teachers in dashboard format via the district website. The dashboard includes: 1) standards addressed at each grade level, 2) description of what students should know and understand in reference to each standard, 3) learning targets for each standard, and 4) specific evidence outcomes. Professional development has been provided to help teachers understand and effectively use these curricular documents in order to provide a district-wide, standards-based system.

Instructional time at Southwest Elementary is rich and engaging for students. Students are enthusiastic about their school, teachers, and learning. They share that teachers at Southwest make learning "interesting and fun."

Each grade level has a specially designed schedule that best supports the grade-level literacy and math needs and optimizes the use of resources. All students have equal access to the common, challenging academic core curriculum. The staggered literacy and mathematics blocks afford intentional flexibility across all grades for interventionists to provide push-in and pull-out support (when necessary) for each grade level throughout the day.

"Teachers set deadlines and goals. We work hard to get there, to make the goals."

"Teachers challenge us. They help us figure stuff out."

"Teachers help us know what the lesson is before we do it. They help us to understand."

~ Southwest Students

The 90-minute literacy block is divided into 45 minutes for core, whole-class instruction to ensure all students have access to grade-level curriculum. The remaining 45 minutes in literacy are used for in-class targeted instruction. There is a thirty-minute overlap from one grade to another for flexibility in moving students. Similarly, the mathematics block affords time for whole-class instruction and a scheduled block for differentiated math.

Use of Data

In the effective school, student academic progress is measured frequently using a variety of assessment procedures. The results of the assessments are used to improve individual student performance and to improve the overall instructional program.

-Lezotte & McKee, 2002

The Southwest staff functions at an exemplary level in their use and understanding of data to guide instruction. The school has a laser-like focus on using student data to improve student achievement. Classroom assessments are frequent, rigorous, and aligned with standards. The school has created a seamless instruction/intervention model to ensure that students get what they need to succeed.

The Professional Learning Community (PLC) process provides a formal/scheduled setting for teachers to analyze data to inform decision-making regarding instructional practices, student achievement, and flexible groupings. The principal and staff skillfully use student data to understand each student's achievement in detail and diagnose what instruction is needed. Teachers understand various data sources and use a body of evidence to make timely decisions about their students. Data are strategically used to effectively adjust instruction and determine interventions.

We know we are learning by our pre and post tests. We can see the growth in the scores.

~Southwest Student

Progress monitoring and benchmarking are integral components in this system. Teachers readjust interventions and groupings if progress-monitoring tools indicate an intervention is not effective. Staff members provide the academic work and targeted interventions that allow each student to achieve proficiency, or above, as quickly as possible.

The goals and action steps in the school's Unified Improvement Plan (UIP) were determined after comprehensive analysis of multiple data sources, including CSAP achievement and growth data, parent and staff climate surveys, and school disciplinary actions. The goal targets in the

UIP are intentionally set to exceed district and state expectations. The school is persistent in its efforts to realize the ultimate goal of having 100% of its students be proficient and advanced over a sustained period of time in reading, writing, mathematics, and science.

Clear benchmark and progress monitoring tools and practices, using specific assessment data sources, are outlined in the UIP. Staff and members of the School Accountability Committee regularly monitor both the implementation of the plan's components and student academic progress (achievement and growth) at specific benchmark points.

The school is focused on a deep and relentless analysis of what is or is not working. In addition to comprehensive analysis of multiple data sources, the principal and staff access other resources to inform their identification of effective best practices, such as:

- review of present school practices,
- study of relevant research literature, and
- study of exemplary practices at other highly successful schools.

School Culture

Southwest Elementary staff members have created a culture of academic achievement for all students. Every member of the Southwest community expresses the belief that all students can learn at high levels. This belief manifests in successful practices throughout the school.

We, the learning community envision an educational environment, where all participants strive for excellence through continuous learning, self-development, collaboration, and perseverance. It is our job as teachers and parents to create those connections that develop a sense of community, character and life-long learning. Southwest will be a model school with a caring and accepting climate where students excel academically, socially and culturally.

~ School's Vision Statement

The school's vision is intrinsic in the minds and hearts of the principal and staff and is evident in daily practice.

A high level of collaboration exists in the school. Staff maintain an organizational culture of collective capacity. Within this culture, the increasingly effective use of student performance data to plan targeted instruction has produced high student achievement.

Professional Learning Communities (PLC) have been in place for many years and are deeply embedded in the school environment. PLC activities occur every Friday afternoon during the district's two-hour, early-release time. Through the PLC structure, long-term professional development for all staff members is embedded in the culture of the school. The content of the PLCs is driven by an analysis of a variety of student data and what teachers need to learn and be able to do to promote student achievement. The effective professional development experiences provided through the PLC are research-based, results-driven, and result in a culture of shared responsibility for student learning.

As part of the PLC process, teachers implement and evaluate the effectiveness of instructional strategies. Teachers gather and analyze student work and use this data to determine the effectiveness of the strategy on student learning. Time for colleagues to reflect, discuss, and process new learning is routinely a part of the PLC structure. The expectation and practice during a PLC is for all to learn and ask for help when needed. Staff members report they trust each other and readily ask colleagues for assistance.

The staff and the principal hold themselves accountable for results and reiterate the belief that student success is dependent upon, and the responsibility of, *all staff members* at the school. School staff hold high expectations for students' learning, and they do whatever it takes to accomplish the desired results.

There is a recognizable positive synergy in the school. Staff members continuously talk about successes occurring in the school, and student work is visible throughout the school in hallways and classrooms. Students are addressed by name in the hallways, lunchroom, and on playgrounds by all staff. These practices lead to more success for students and contribute to positive energy for staff.

"Teachers inspire me. They don't yell a lot and are understanding."

"We learn skills about being the best and how to handle things socially. We learn strategies to solve problems, in class and socially."

"We learn to focus and watch what is going on. "We are living it."

~ Southwest Students

Leadership

Everyone at Southwest Elementary recognizes that high student performance cannot be achieved by a few heroes or the leadership of one person. The principal and the staff understand the power of shared responsibility. They do not engage in behaviors that put the burden of responsibility on others or on one person as the leader. Staff members see themselves as highly collaborative and empowered, and an effective part of the decision-making process in the school. Their roles shift as required to meet students' learning needs. Staff members say that while they are always working toward higher performance the school climate is not stressful, but purposeful and happy.

Collective capacity is essential because it produces many more quality teachers who operate in concert.

~ Fullan, 2010

The principal models excellent leadership by being visionary, honest and open, listening to others' ideas, using others' input, collaborating on strategies, and basing decisions on research and best practices. The trust that is engendered from these behaviors promotes staff participation in authentic distributed leadership.

The principal conducts walkthroughs to gather data about use of strategies and their impact on student learning. She provides feedback to all staff members either through an email or an informal conversation. Staff members report that the feedback is valued because it is positive, highlights strengths, and provides ideas upon which to reflect.

A clearly-defined evaluation process is implemented at Southwest Elementary School. The process is connected to student learning and goals in the Unified Improvement Plan. In addition, the evaluation process is used to improve staff proficiency. Three formal observations are conducted during a staff member's summative evaluation year. At least one formal observation is conducted each year for all staff members. Feedback related to effective instructional practices is provided after each formal observation. Staff members report the evaluation process is valued as a route to professional proficiency.

Staff say that "she really knows her stuff" and she helps them in their own learning. She guides teachers as they use data and plan instruction, and participates in the work that everyone else is doing, including teaching a targeted reading group. Staff members report that the principal sees the big picture and manages the system in a manner that keeps them focused on the most important priorities.

*"We make things happen with resources that do not always cost a lot of money, such as time, use of personnel, and volunteers."
~ Southwest Principal*

The principal sustains conscious awareness of the school's work and continually communicates this to staff, students, and parents. Shared ownership in realization of the UIP goals is detailed in the plan and evident in daily practice. Teachers are "working the plan," embracing the common focus of the school's work.