

**Effective School Practices  
(ESP) Review Report**

**for**

**Northeast Elementary School**

**Conducted: September 6-10, 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.

## PERFORMANCE BY NORTHEAST ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

<b>EFFECTIVE SCHOOL PROFILE</b>			
SCHOOL NAME: NORTHEAST ELEMENTARY SCHOOL			
DEMOGRAPHICS			
Type of IA School	<b>Targeted Assistance</b>	School Level	<b>Elementary</b>
Geographical Location	<b>Rural</b>	Enrollment (size)	<b>118</b>
Free and Reduced	<b>51.65%</b>	Hispanic	<b>8.47%</b>
English Language Learners	<b>0%</b>	Non-White	<b>11.86%</b>
School IA Allocation	<b>\$13,769.92</b>	Per Pupil Allocation	<b>\$372.16</b>
PERFORMANCE			
The following variables were used in the analyses to determine the top performing schools			
Growth Data		Accountability Data	
Catch Up MGP (3 years - 08-10)	<b>R = 64</b>	<b>M = 65</b>	SPF – Growth Gaps Rating <b>Meets</b>
Free/Reduced Lunch MGP (3 year)	<b>R = 50</b>	<b>M = 62</b>	SPF – Growth Gaps Reading <b>Exceeds</b>
ELL MGP (3 year)	<b>R = N/A</b>	<b>M = N/A</b>	SPF – Growth Gaps Math <b>Meets</b>
CELA 3 year (% Making at least one year of PL growth)	<b>N/A</b>		
CELA MGP 08	<b>N/A</b>		AYP – Overall 08 <b>Yes</b>
CELA MGP 09	<b>N/A</b>		AYP – Overall 09 <b>Yes</b>
CELA MGP 10	<b>N/A</b>		AYP – Overall 10 <b>Yes</b>
CBLA (% Making Progress)	<b>N/A</b>		

## **Overview of the ESP Review Process:**

Number of Interviews: 92\*

*\*Reflects the number of interfaces, not the number of people interviewed.*

- School administrators: 9
- Instructional staff (regular and special program teachers): 32
- Interventionists, specialists, coaches, other: 4
- District administrators: 1
- Parents/Community Members 10
- Classified 3
- Students 35
- Parents 9

Number of Observations:

- Classrooms 63
- Meetings 5
- Professional development 0

### **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
- Comprehensive and Effective Planning.

## **STANDARDS FOR THE EFFECTIVE SCHOOL PRACTICES REVIEW**

**Academic Performance: 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.

**Learning Environment: 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.

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

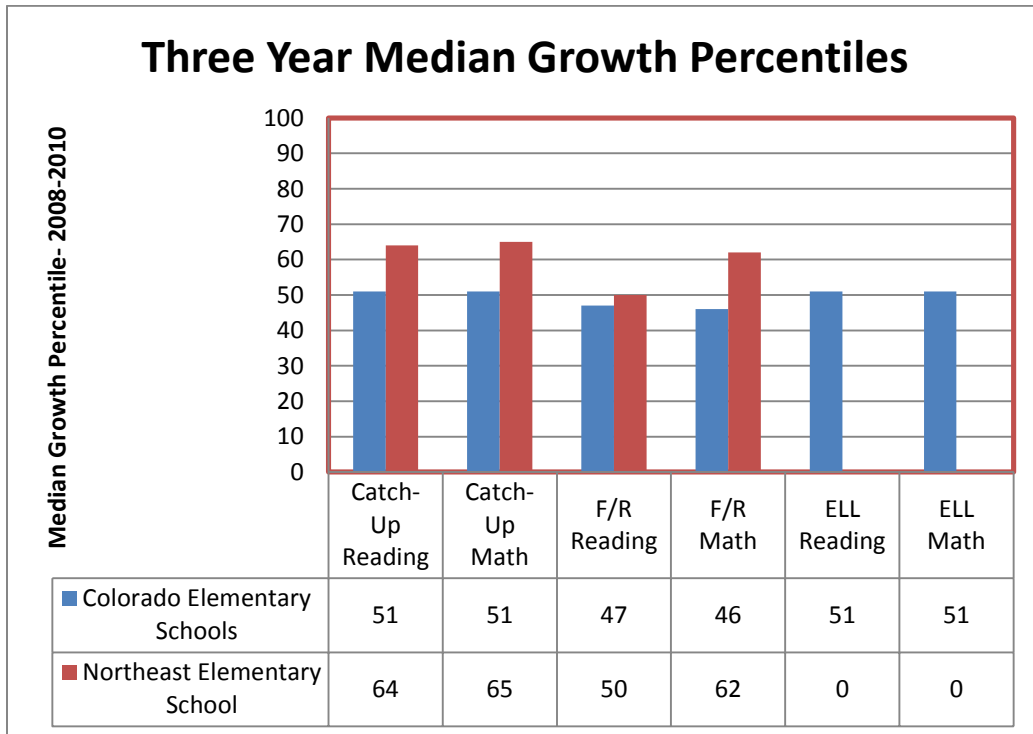
- Standard 7:** School instructional decisions focus on support for teaching and learning, organizational direction, high performance expectations, creation of a learning culture, and development of leadership capacity.
- Standard 8:** The school is organized to maximize use of all available resources 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

Northeast Elementary School is located in rural, northeastern Colorado. It is an integral part of the agricultural community surrounding the small town. Most students are transported by buses, coming in from outlying farms. Average attendance rate has been from 95.8% to 96.1% over the past three years. About 25% of the students attending Northeast Elementary are enrolled from other neighboring districts because of its reputation as being an excellent school. The community, parents, staff and administration are very proud of their schools. Many express a desire that the school district, including Northeast Elementary School, continue its status as a high-performing school.

Northeast Elementary is a PreK-6 school, with one classroom per grade. Class size ranges from eight to twenty students, with a median size of thirteen. Because of the small-sized classes, teachers at Northeast Elementary School are able to provide first-hand, individual support to their students. All instructional personnel are licensed teachers. While there is some staff turnover at the elementary level, most staff members have been in the school for several years, a few for many years. All students are known by adults in the school and feel they are an integral part of a warm, secure, and stable environment. At least 75% of students enrolling in kindergarten graduate from the Northeast school system.

Based on data aggregated from 2008 through 2010, Northeast Elementary School has outperformed the state median growth scores in all categories of student populations, as profiled in the following graph:



However, over the past two years, the school’s growth percentiles have declined, falling below the state median growth expectations:

<b>Median Growth Percentile*</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Writing</b>	<b>Math</b>
<b>2011</b> - All categories of students	<b>44%</b> ile	<b>30%</b> ile	<b>30%</b> ile
<b>2010</b> – All categories of students	54%ile	65%ile	69%ile
<b>2009</b> – All categories of students	61%ile	77%ile	52%ile

2011 CSAP Achievement scores show a decline from 2010, and from the 2008-2010 average:

<b>% Proficient &amp; Advanced –CSAP*</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Writing</b>	<b>Math</b>	<b>Science</b>
<b>2011</b> - All categories of students (rounded)	<b>66.0%</b>	<b>46.0%</b>	<b>53.0%</b>	<b>50.0%</b>
<b>2010</b> - All categories of students	69.2%	54.9%	72.6%	N.A.
<b>3-year average</b> (2008-10) - All categories of students	70.7%	62.9%	76.5%	68.8%

As federal and state expectations continue to be raised, these data serve as a cautionary “heads-up” to the school to take a comprehensive look at all aspects of the educational process and practices to identify “root causes” for this recent decline in both the academic growth rate and achievement performance. Factors outside the school’s control include the remoteness of the school, having a poverty rate of more than fifty percent, and recent cut-backs of personnel, material, and fiscal resources. However, the staff and principal at Northeast Elementary School are competent educators and have attributes that can serve to advance the levels of achievement and academic growth previously enjoyed. These attributes are important to sustain and extend while addressing prioritized actions that can secure high, long-term levels of achievement.

**Key Effective Practices that are Contributing to the Success of Northeast Elementary School:**

- The principal is an instructional leader. The principal is highly respected by staff for her knowledge, work ethic, and supportive behaviors. They recognize her abilities and know she has skills to make the school work efficiently and effectively. The principal continually works with teachers to provide guidance and support, often serving as the “go-to person” for help.
- The school culture is highly effective. The PBIS principles are embedded throughout the school, with few behavioral problems that disrupt the learning environment. Students feel safe and supported in school and are known as persons, not just students. The family-type atmosphere and culture helps students to be clear about expectations for their behavior and learning, and about their responsibilities. Communication is ongoing, timely, and interactive for staff, parents, and the community.
- Student needs are addressed. The Response to Intervention (RtI) process is functioning effectively. Students who have academic needs are identified quickly and provided targeted interventions without delay. Teachers strive to do “whatever they need to do” to meet the needs of the students, often going the extra mile.

# **EFFECTIVE SCHOOL PRACTICES REVIEW NARRATIVE REPORT**

## **SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS**

**Standard 1 - Curriculum:** *The school implements an adopted curriculum that is rigorous and aligned to state and local standards.*

*In Schmoker's (2011) book, Focus, one of the three elements that should be approached with "simplicity and diligence" is the concept of what we teach. In his words, "This simply means a decent, coherent curriculum, with topics and standards collectively selected by a team of teachers from the school or district – that is actually taught." He continues, "The actual curriculum an average child learns, in the same course and in the same school, varies tremendously from teacher to teacher; what you learn depends on what teacher you have."*

- Basic understanding and implementation of "what" to teach (curriculum) varies throughout Northeast Elementary. Even though the new *Colorado Academic Standards* have been introduced to the staff, many teachers continue to refer to the curriculum as a textbook or program or to the older version of the *Colorado Model Content Standards*. Therefore, the curriculum that is implemented is not aligned with the new *Colorado Academic Standards*. Additionally, essential learning targets are inconsistently posted, included in lesson plans, or communicated to students. Essential learning targets that are posted, are teacher-determined, rather than based on a school or district identification process.
- Numerous textbooks and programs are used to deliver instruction and vary considerably throughout the building. Purchase of these texts and programs can be through a district-driven purchase, suggested as a result of attendance at a workshop, found on the internet, or purchased with teachers' personal funds.
- There is not an evident and clear understanding of what it means to be standards-referenced or standards-based. Classroom instruction does not clearly indicate deep knowledge and understanding of the Standards-Based Teaching/Learning Cycle.
- Northeast Elementary School is a small (one round) school which hinders, to some extent, horizontal articulation for the purpose of curricular coherence.
- Even though staff members do occasionally discuss key transition points from grade level to grade level (vertical articulation), teachers do not routinely access curriculum maps or pacing guides to provide a guaranteed and viable curriculum for every student.
- Those staff members who base instruction on the new *Colorado Academic Standards* are more able to effectively and consistently identify essential skills that students need to know and be able to do. They can also address specific links to life and career options. Consequently this instruction provides access to a curriculum that emphasizes a challenging academic core for all students, while those who base instruction on other factors, such as textbooks and programs either provide informal or inconsistent connections.



- Teachers have access to the Education Technology/Information Literacy (ETIL) standards through the district technology plan. These are also embedded in the *Colorado Academic Standards*; however, knowledge and instruction of these standards varies among classrooms.
- Preschool is housed in the Northeast Elementary School and provides direct curricular connections for early age learners to the elementary setting. Vertical articulation is purposeful and consistent. Instruction is based on the Colorado Quality Standards (early childhood state standards) and supported with *Creative Curriculum*.
- The school schedule allows for all students to have equal access to the curriculum, including science, social studies, math, and literacy.

**Standard 2 - 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.*

*“Assessment is a huge topic that encompasses everything from statewide accountability tests to district benchmark or interim tests to everyday classroom tests. In order to grapple with what seems to be an overuse of testing, educators should frame their views of testing as assessment and that assessment is information. The more information we have about students, the clearer the picture we have about achievement or where gaps may occur”* (Garrison & Ehringhaus, 2009).

- Summative assessments used at Northeast Elementary School include:
  - Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) MAPS,
  - AIMSweb,
  - Basic Early Assessment of Reading (BEARS), and
  - Colorado State Assessment Protocol (CSAP).
- Some analysis of summative assessment results are provided to teachers by members of the Response to Intervention (RtI) committee. Teachers are assisted with understanding the results of these assessments on an as-needed, individual basis by the principal, counselor, or special education teacher.
- Colorado Education Data Analysis & Reporting System (CEDAR) is available to support analysis of CSAP data and provide growth trajectories for students, but not readily used.
- Analysis of assessment data usually drives small group instruction; however, teachers do not routinely analyze these data at a level that informs teacher instructional practice.
- Classroom assessments vary throughout the school. These formative assessments can include teacher observation, textbook, or teacher-prepared assessments and may or may not be aligned with the new *Colorado Academic Standards* or the *Colorado Model Content Standards*. Additionally, these assessments may be inconsistent in how they address rigor and higher-order

thinking skills, or how they are responsive to different learning styles. New and existing classroom assessments are rarely reviewed or analyzed to measure how they address student learning by standards or essential learning targets.

- The design or selection of assessment tasks is usually accomplished with little or no collaboration or peer review. Since a school-wide consensus of learning targets has not been determined, the assessments may or may not effectively measure student learning of these targets.
- A body of evidence is used in assessing student needs primarily for referral to the Response to Intervention (RtI) process. This body of evidence may contain:
  - CSAP assessment information,
  - AIMS Web,
  - NWEA MAPS,
  - teacher observation and recommendation
  - classroom assessments, and
  - parent recommendation.

Staff members express a need to more effectively describe what should be in a body of evidence.

- Some teachers have been trained and can analyze student work as well as use the information to gauge student progress and inform instruction. Support is usually provided on an as-needed basis for those teachers needing help with this practice.
- In some classrooms, students have the opportunity to select methods to demonstrate their proficiency. Learning styles of students are sometimes considered.
- Students report the following:
  - They are sometimes told what they will be learning, but this is usually an agenda of activities.
  - They are sometimes shown exemplars of proficient work, but rarely asked to reflect upon their own learning or use rubrics to understand the details of proficiency. Homework is usually just “finishing up” from the day or used to “help us do better.”
  - They also report that teacher feedback to students is often provided either in small group settings or individually and that it is meaningful and helps them “to do better.”
  - They do not see or reflect upon CSAP scores, but do look at NWEA MAPS assessments.
  - Students rarely express an understanding what it means to be proficient and usually refer to teacher judgment as a measure of success or “what their grade is.”
- A school-wide agreement concerning proficiency and performance level descriptions has not been established therefore, these cannot regularly be communicated to students or used to build a continuum of learning.
- Student report cards vary from primary (K-3) to intermediate (4-6). At the primary level student progress is reported as Advanced, Proficient, Partially Proficient, and Unsatisfactory, while at the intermediate level, letter grades (A,B,C,D,F) are used to report progress. In a standards-based

system, letter grades do not accurately reflect the level of learning for students. Staff members have reported a need for consistency in standards-based reporting.

**Standard 3 - Instruction:** *Teachers engage all students by using effective, varied, and research-based practices to improve student academic performance.*

- There are no formal criteria for the selection of supplementary instructional materials. At times, these supplementary materials/programs become the primary instructional tool(s) over the district-adopted core materials. Often, teachers learn of a program through the Northeast BOCES, through attendance at a state conference, or from experience with a program in another district. Teachers come to agreement about what they'd like to use through informal conversations, with a keen belief that what is purchased will help to meet the needs of their students.
- Presently, instructional materials are sufficient throughout the school. However, concern is expressed by the principal and teachers that on-going budget cuts will make it difficult to replace and update current resources. Throughout the school, teachers use a variety of instructional resources, not depending upon one source. Teachers understand the importance of using supplementary materials to support Tier I, universal instruction, as well as to provide Tier II and III interventions. At times, several primary resources are used within a grade level and from one grade level to another for reading and writing instruction, and at times for math. Some teachers express concern about the lack of coherence and articulation in these core content areas.
- A core literacy program was adopted for the school in 2005; however, it is sporadically used, other than the accompanying leveled readers. A quasi balanced literacy approach is more evident. After hearing a presentation at a state literacy conference, teachers held a book study of *The Daily Five* (Boushey & Moser, 2005). *The Daily Five* refers to a series of literacy tasks students should complete each day while the teacher is engaging with a small instructional group or individual students. The intent is to foster student engagement and responsibility for their literacy development. Evidence of embedded implementation of the *Daily Five* across all classrooms is not apparent. Several teachers are embracing guidance from *The CAFE Book: Engaging All Students in Daily Literacy Assessment & Instruction* (2009) by the same authors. Four literacy skills, Comprehension, Accuracy, Fluency and Expand Vocabulary frame a menu of strategies for students to use to build independence and self-reflection in their reading. Most teachers are implementing some aspects of these structures in their literacy blocks.

Last year teachers in grades 3-6 were trained in the use of *Every Child a Reader* (National Literacy Coalition) and are implementing these structures and strategies in varying degrees. Teachers report satisfaction with student results and enjoy the structures provided for building thinking and comprehension skills. Systematic and systemic understanding and implementation of the structures and practices for either of these “philosophical frameworks” for teaching literacy (*The Daily Five* or *Every Child a Reader*) are not evident. Teachers cannot articulate what the school’s overall literacy program is nor can they clearly describe how literacy is taught in the school.

- Teachers report using *Zoo-phonics* (multi-sensory approach) for teaching language arts-spelling, writing, phonics in the primary grades. *Saxon Phonics* is the district-adopted phonics program, but not widely used. *Lightning Phonics* is another program in use. Foundations of Analysis, Synthesis, and Translation (F.A.S.T.) is used by Title I as an intervention.
- In past years, writing instruction had been based on *Six-Traits*, but there are only one or two teachers remaining on staff that had that training. *Step-Up-To Writing* was then used, but is no longer the main thread, as new teachers came into the school and were not trained in its use. *Every Child a Writer* is currently being used to teach writing, with most teachers trained. Implementation varies by teacher, with each adding their own supplementary instruction. There are no articulated, systematic agreements regarding the expectations and performance descriptors for writing. The present instruction is partially determined by referencing the new *Colorado Academic Writing Standards* and also by teacher choice of what is thought to be appropriate.
- In most grades, teachers alternate science and social studies monthly. At grades 5 and 6, both content areas are taught four times a week. Core programs are provided for each of these content areas; however supplementary resources, including internet sources, may supersede use of the adopted core materials. Some teachers intentionally build connections between science and math, social studies and science, or use a few interdisciplinary units in their classroom instruction; others make informal connections across content areas as situations arise.
- Teachers have had initial orientation to the new *Colorado Academic Standards*; however, understanding of the expected knowledge and skills levels, and complexity of thinking outlined in these standards documents is limited. Unpacking of these new standards is anticipated to continue throughout this school year. For those classrooms using the *Every Child a Reader* framework, development of higher-level thinking skills is built into the program, and evidence was observed through students' work in their Reading Response Books and use of comprehension strategies. The development of higher-level thinking skills is teacher-dependent.
- Instructional practice in most classrooms is solid, basic practice. Many teachers strive to use some variety of strategies and learning structures; however, considerable teacher-based instruction is prevalent, especially in math and social studies. Considerable time is spent in teacher Read Alouds for literacy. Several examples of intentional scaffolding of instruction from "I Do" to "We Do" to "You Do" were observed. Rarely are students left "on their own" to figure things out. Some activity-based learning, use of manipulatives and hands-on tools are used. At other times rote learning exercises are evident. Variations in practice are prevalent across the school. Intentional use of high-impact instructional strategies and specific strategies that support learning for high-poverty students is limited. Some teachers incorporate learning opportunities for various learning styles. Often instructional strategies are driven by programs used.
- Teachers are able to manage situations where students are not engaging in the classroom lesson or activity because of the low class size and use of a strong Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) structure.
- A few teachers have students participate in activities that ask them to perform tasks similar to those on the CSAP. A common practice is having students do a planning web or outline before

drafting a writing piece. Some teachers use CSAP released items. Few regularly expect and score constructed-response tasks in reading and math.

- Teachers are asked to plan instruction around the standards and learning targets. In practice, there is variability in how teachers design their lesson plans. Several construct traditional lesson plans that list pages in the manual or workbook, some cite the standard(s) to be addressed in the lesson, and a few construct detailed plans for each instructional group, mostly in literacy. Use of a “backward design” model for lesson planning is not in place nor are unit plans customarily developed. Teachers make their lesson plans in isolation, being a one-round school.
- Teachers are asked to post daily learning targets for their lessons. Typically, teachers list the day’s agenda with topics, such as “Social Studies: Geography.” A few teachers are stating one or two learning targets, but discussion about the learning target(s) is limited. Efforts to state the learning target in “kid-friendly” language are developing. For literacy, some teachers determine learning targets for each instructional group and learning station. Learning targets observed are generally based on the *Colorado Academic Standards* and on what the teacher has determined through data and observation that the group needs to work on.
- A vital Response to Intervention (RtI) process is in place to address concerns and individual needs of students. Teachers bring information about students who are experiencing difficulty in learning or behavior areas to the PreK-12 RtI team for problem-solving. A recognized strength of Northeast Elementary School is the ability to address needs quickly, before learning struggles become deeply embedded. Most concerns are addressed at the Tier I (universal) level through classroom instruction, re-teaching, and supplementary support. If a student continues to not make progress, additional support is added first at the Tier II level through in-class intervention and/or Title I placement. At Tier III, intensive intervention is employed, using specific intervention programs. Intervention support is scheduled in addition to universal instruction in the classroom. Efforts are made to not pull students out of the universal instruction for core content areas. The RtI Team meets monthly, with an average of ten students addressed each year. For serious difficulties, parents are included in the RtI meetings and at Tier III, monitoring meetings are held every six weeks or more often. A body of evidence is used to inform instruction and recommendations for intervention and to monitor student progress. Northeast Elementary School’s RtI process includes use of well-defined protocols and procedures. Support for implementing the RtI process was initiated and provided by Northeast BOCES.
- While data from multiple sources are used to identify students who are not proficient and have need of intervention support (Tiers II and III), less identification of underperforming gifted, and/or advanced students is occurring. Some extended learning opportunities for these students are provided such as in-house math contests, CU-Boulder and Colorado School of Mines science explorer programs, local, regional, and state spelling and geography bees and speech contests. Some one-on-one extended/enrichment learning activities are provided by teachers on staff.
- The school district has a current Educational Technology/Information Literacy Plan. Within the plan is a comprehensive, detailed scope and sequence that incorporates expected technology and information literacy standards and accompanying skills and competencies that students must know and be able to do. Teachers at Northeast Elementary School are unaware of this scope and

sequence, with the result that few teachers are intentionally incorporating the use of technology and teaching of information literacy. An open computer lab is available for classes to use. Teachers determine how this lab is used and what they may teach regarding use of technology for student learning. Teachers share several older Promethean Boards and related software, as well as classroom sets of laptop computers. Each classroom has a few computers available for student use.

- The library/media room is well-stocked. Additional resources are accessed through interlibrary loan and a Book Mobile that is regularly scheduled to come to the school. The librarian uses an electronic source for evaluating the library collection and advice on selection of books and resources to build the collection. Teacher requests for library materials are also considered. Funds have been frozen for purchasing elementary library resources due to budget cuts, and the librarian is now serving both the elementary and secondary libraries.
- There are no formal guidelines for assigning homework. Each teacher determines how homework will be used to support or extend learning. Several teachers set-aside time during the school day for students to do homework in class. Some follow the ten-minute rule, adding ten minutes/day for each year in school, (e.g. first graders-10 minutes, second graders-20 minutes). Some teachers expect students to study their spelling words at home and most teachers provide reading calendars to keep track of at-home reading, using the Book-It program for incentives. Other homework expectations include practicing math facts and sight word flash cards, and to finish work not completed during the school day. A few teachers extend the day's learning through homework. Teachers review or grade homework and afford students another opportunity to re-do unsatisfactory work to satisfactory performance.

**Standard 4 - School Culture:** *The school functions as an effective learning community and supports a climate conducive to performance excellence.*

- Northeast Elementary School is a well-maintained school. The building is clean and the halls have bright interesting posters. The *Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS)* rules are posted in a positive manner. The common spaces (e.g. library and cafeteria) are inviting and attractive. A communication bulletin board is located near the office that has copies of the latest classroom letter from each grade. The purpose for posting weekly classroom letters is so adults who read these communications get an overview of what is occurring throughout the school at the current time.
- There are emergency drill and lock-down procedures for the school that are reviewed and practiced throughout the year with an emphasis at the beginning of the school year. Although, the school's main entrance is the only unlocked door during the school day, this entrance is designed to observe and control traffic entering the school. Few restrictions or controls are in place at this time for anyone entering the school at-will. Additionally, there are no controls for who in the community has keys to the school and through the years many keys have been passed out but not retrieved. Also, no record exists as to who are current key holders.

- Two committees are involved in specific aspects of building operations. A Response to Intervention (RtI) Committee meets regularly to assist students that may need some classroom or school interventions to be more academically successful. The second is the PBIS Committee which focuses on student behavioral expectations at the classroom and school level.
- The PBIS team for Northeast Elementary School is comprised of seven staff members. They meet throughout the school year planning, collecting and reviewing student, classroom, and building behavioral data to determine reward structures and respond to ongoing questions and issues. The PBIS Committee rewards academic effort in addition to behavior expectations. Celebrations include Bingo games for primary students and auctions for intermediate students.
- While the principal may seek informal input before making other building decisions, there is no formal shared-decision making model. The principal relies on one-on-one communication with staff members for getting staff input and for providing instructional feedback to teachers.
- Staff members spend many hours in the school before and after the school day preparing lessons, collaborating informally, or supervising and assisting students.
- Staff members identify ongoing informal collaboration as an area of school strength. Teachers indicate that the school has a culture of constant communication and sharing of ideas about instruction.
- While staff members have participated in PBIS surveys, environment data (e.g., culture/climate surveys or opinion surveys) have not been recently conducted in the community.
- The school uses various means to communicate within the school, with parents, and community members:
  - Email and face-to-face communication are used extensively to communicate among staff. Teachers informally communicate and share information on a regular basis.
  - Phone calls
  - Informal chats between parents and teachers, as parents pick up or drop off children.
  - Parent-teacher conferences
- The principal and staff have committed to developing a communication structure with parents through a “Friday Folder” process. Included in the folder is a weekly classroom newsletter created by the teachers. Besides letting parents know what is occurring instructionally, many of these letters contain suggestions for parent involvement in the child’s learning or an explanation of an instructional concept their child is learning at school. Some teachers routinely add written personal notes to parents and include them in the Friday Folders, with the goal of reaching all parents in a targeted amount of time.
- Along with classroom information, the principal provides information about the school in these newsletters. School information contains a variety of information and listing of upcoming events. The principal proofreads each classroom newsletter for content and tone in order to maintain a level of quality that ensures that the newsletters are informative and interesting.

- The computer-generated report card allows teachers to make comments on student effort and progress in addition to academic grades. Some teachers use the comment areas more extensively than other teachers.
- While formal student-led conferences are not held, parents are encouraged to bring their children to parent-teacher conferences. When children attend conferences, they may be included in the conversations regarding their progress.
- The school maintains a website; and through the parent portal of Infinite Campus, parents can log-on to receive information regarding testing results, classroom activities, and homework assignments.
- Students in the upper intermediate classrooms are often paired as “Kinder Buddies” with kindergarten students to assist in reading activities. Within classrooms, some teachers also provide a rotating job chart for students as a way for them to be involved in the organization of the classroom. There are no formal leadership opportunities (e.g., Student Council) for students at Northeast Elementary School.
- A program matching high school students with elementary students provides support for students needing some additional care and emotional support. This “Big Buddy” program is designed for older students to meet with younger students one-on-one at the school to play games, talk, or assist with academic work.
- Student work is displayed throughout the building. There is a focus on including work from all students rather than displaying and recognizing outstanding work. Examples of outstanding work are not highlighted. In the past, student art has been displayed at the Washington County Fair.
- A student honor roll is used as a method of recognizing academic achievement and starts at the fourth grade.
- Teachers talk to students regularly about high expectations for academic achievement on daily work and homework. There is limited use of exemplars to show students what proficient work looks like.
- The result of poverty is recognized by staff members as limiting some students’ experiences outside the home or the local community. Staff members strive to provide opportunities for students to have field trips (e.g. zoo, museums, etc.). Current budget restrictions have all but eliminated these opportunities at this time.
- There are limited opportunities for appreciation of diversity in the classrooms or in the school. Some teachers do plan social studies units focusing on other cultures. Some teachers do activities during Black History Month and conduct studies of Native Americans.



**Standard 5 - 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.*

- Parents and community members are involved in the school. Volunteers are willing to help in classrooms, lunchrooms, office, library, and at special events. Parents indicate their interest in volunteering through information provided in registration packets.
- Each year the staff hosts a “Parent Academy” that focuses on ways parents can be a part of their child’s learning process. Topics have ranged from an explanation of RtI, to a focus on reading with your child through a Dr. Seuss night and also a summer games evening. Staff members plan this yearly Parent Academy evening and have increased parent participation by including students and making the activities more family-oriented.
- Currently there is no organized parent organization (PTO) but there is some discussion of creating a district-wide PTO by leaders of the High School Booster Club.
- The expectation from most parents is that students will attend two- or four-year colleges after high school graduation.
- The school regularly has recognized the importance of the family and community in various ways. A Grandparents Day celebration brings up to 200 older citizens into the school. Students write personal invitations to former service men and women living in the school district inviting them to Veterans Day celebrations in recognition of their contributions to the country.
- Organized community support, such as the Department of Social Services (DSS), and Northeast Colorado Child Care Resource and Referral (NCCCR&R) is available to schools to provide services to students and families. There are protocols within the school that outline procedures for contacting DSS or law enforcement if the need arises. No local service clubs are available to provide assistance to the school or to families.
- The school maintains an accurate, secure student record system that provides timely information pertinent to the student’s academic and educational development. The administrative assistant monitors and updates records to ensure they are relevant, current, and transferred on a timely basis. Access to records is in hard copy or electronic form.

**Standard 6 - 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.*

- Northeast Elementary School is able to recruit teachers who are capable, dedicated to students, and willing to put forth effort to realize student success. There is limited turnover each year. Some teachers have been on staff over ten years; many have been teaching at Northeast Elementary School three to seven years. Teachers informally support each other when asked by

a colleague, as well as share strategies and resource ideas. New teachers have collegial support from a mentor teacher and the principal provides coaching-type support as needed for any teacher.

- There is no long-term or annual professional development plan, nor a needs assessment conducted. The district schedules three professional development days into the district calendar, with the principal generally determining how those days will be used. A study of data to identify areas of need, classroom observations and conversations with teachers, as well as mandates by the state, such as *Response to Intervention* and implementation of the new *Colorado Academic Standards*, serve to inform what professional development should be conducted. Offerings through Northeast BOCES influence scheduled professional development for Northeast Elementary teachers. This year, the BOCES is providing training by Arlene Mitchell (RMC Research Corporation) in the use of specific math strategies. Last year the BOCES sponsored training in *Every Child a Reader* and before that, *Every Child a Writer*. Teachers chose whether or not to participate in these trainings.
- An ongoing professional development opportunity, highly valued by the teachers, is to attend the annual Colorado Council of International Reading Conference (CCIRA) in Denver. Most teachers attend and share highlights and new ideas at follow-up sessions.
- Additional support and learning opportunities are through teacher-selected book studies, reading of selected articles on specific topics or instructional practice provided by the principal to individual teachers, and training in the use of specific programs and instructional materials. The study of high impact instructional strategies is minimal. While the teachers are interested in learning and seek new ideas, each determines the extent that practices will be implemented in their classroom. Deep, embedded implementation of any professional development is limited as a school, and by a few teachers. Fidelity to implementation of specific instructional programs varies by teacher.
- Finding time for the entire staff to meet, discuss, learn, and reflect together is difficult. Structures for regular collaboration time and working as a professional learning community are rare. Occasionally primary and intermediate teachers have met as a group while being trained in the National Reading Coalition programs (*Every Child ...*).
- Support for teachers to build their leadership capacity is informal. Teachers offer to assume responsibility for a specific task or project, but professional development about teacher leadership is absent.
- The principal regularly observes classrooms and provides feedback to teachers through one-on-one conversations, a quick email note, or a personal note. Intentional monitoring of instructional practice, using specific criteria or a walkthrough protocol is not evident, other than for the professional evaluation cycle. Monitoring and ongoing coaching to embed implementation of practices learned through professional development is informal rather than intentional. Evaluation and follow-up is not conducted to determine the effectiveness of professional development experiences.

- With budget cuts, funding for professional development is greatly impacted. There are no fiscal resources to bring in professional trainers, purchase training materials or books for book studies. District funds, Title I and II funds are integrated to provide some opportunities for teachers to attend an occasional conference or workshop. Most professional development is provided in-house by the principal on an as-need basis.
- The principal uses the district's evaluation processes and procedures with fidelity, including care in providing information to staff about the evaluation process annually. Criteria included in the evaluation document are connected to student learning and designed to support student learning. Teachers report that the evaluation conferences are valuable and supportive in helping them improve instructional practice.
- Teachers construct professional growth plans each year. These are submitted to the principal for approval. Usually the principal and teacher meet to discuss the proposed goals, and at times modify them. Teachers are not asked to include a goal about what they will do to support any of the goals in the school improvement plan. Mid-year monitoring and end-of-year discussions are held between the principal and teacher regarding how well the goals are being met. Teachers write an end-of-year report outlining accomplishments, including any data to support results and impact.
- The principal determines her own professional development. Some avenues for gaining information and insights include attendance at some Colorado Association of School Executives (CASE) conferences, personal reading of the literature, networking with regional principals, and Colorado Department of Education consultants.

**Standard 7 - 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 principal and staff refer to the mission and beliefs statements of the district. These are publicized in school handbooks. The principal states that a process should be conducted for the elementary staff to develop a mission statement for the school.
- The principal has established and sustains a focus on improvement in student learning. Analysis of disaggregated data is an integral part of the school's improvement planning process and is used to identify student needs and goals, and inform programmatic and academic decisions.
- Disaggregated student performance data are presented to the school staff and accountability committee.
- The principal, who is also the professional development coordinator of the district, has conducted some training about the *Colorado Academic Standards* and continues to focus staff on their use to guide instruction. Standards-related information from external professional sources is discussed with staff members.

- The principal provides structure and support for staff members to use instructional time as a resource to maximize student learning. However, the elementary school's master schedule is driven by when specials teachers (who are also classroom teachers at the high school) are available to teach in the elementary school. While dissatisfaction exists with this situation, many factors contribute to the need for it to continue in this very small district.
- The principal and staff work together to provide extended learning time for students demonstrating learning gaps. The Title I teacher, the librarian, and all staff members provide individualized interventions in a timely manner. The principal and the RtI committee continue to ensure that the committee's work results in the meeting of students' needs.
- Staff members report that the principal and the interim superintendent frequently visit their classrooms. The principal gives feedback by email, hand-written notes, and face-to-face conversations.
- Allocation of elementary resources is consistent with the priorities of the school and focused on student learning. The principal provides each teacher an annual allocation for purchasing needed classroom supplies.
- Staff members and students report that the school is a safe, healthy, orderly and equitable place to work and learn.
- School Accountability Committee (SAC) members report that they are well-informed about school achievement data and progress. SAC members have the opportunity to provide input into school goals.
- Staff members report that the principal regularly engages them in conversations focused on student academic performance. This happens in staff meetings and one-on-one conversations.
- Staff members share in leadership through committee participation and by informally sharing ideas and initiatives with the principal and colleagues.
- Staff members report that interactions with the principal are informative and supportive and that she is a "team player." They report that she holds high expectations for all who work and learn at the school. Communication within the school, and with the principal, is perceived as timely, ongoing and satisfactory. Teachers receive information in one-on-one conversations, e-mails and a daily bulletin. They report that she is very visible, approachable, professional, and is viewed as a member of the broader community.
- Staff members report that the principal is very knowledgeable about instruction and offers good suggestions for their professional practice. However, the principal does not continually monitor for the implementation of all aspects of *The Standards-Based Teaching/ Learning Cycle* (Benson, 2008). The principal's leadership has focused more on instruction than on curriculum and assessment.

- The principal has provided literature about best practices to individual teachers, and teachers individually engage in reading professional literature. The professional library of professional resources is very limited. A set of common understandings about the research base for instructional practices has not been developed by the staff and principal.

**Standard 8 - Organization and Allocation of Resources:** *The school is organized to maximize use of all available resources to support high student and staff performance.*

- Resource management procedures are in place. The principal manages the budget and each teacher receives an allocation for classroom needs.
- The elementary school works to maximize resources by using high school students and elementary school parents to mentor, tutor, and read to students. The district's Director of Technology has obtained "retired" computers and other technology from businesses and maintains contacts with Northeast BOCES to pursue grants for technology and purchase internet access at lower prices.
- Instructional assistant positions were eliminated in recent budget cuts. The Title I teacher serves as an interventionist for all students, as needed.
- Staff members and parents report that instructional materials are sufficient to meet student's academic needs at this time.
- The classroom management and organization of some teachers do not ensure that instructional time is maximized.
- The school district is a member of the Northeast BOCES. This partnership provides resources for Northeast Elementary for special education, professional development, teacher preparation, gifted and talented, library media, technology, and cooperative purchasing.
- The master schedule is constructed around the times that specials teachers are available. The specials teachers are classroom teachers at the secondary school and their secondary schedules take priority over the elementary master schedule. This is done in order to provide appropriate course offerings to all high school students and to allow some of the staff to be coaches. This circumstance results in lack of continuous blocks of time for instruction at the elementary school. On days that the elementary students engage in two specials, some can lose instruction time in one of the core academic areas which is not made up.
- Each classroom teacher individually develops a weekly schedule for instruction.
- The elementary master schedule contains times that teachers could meet for formal collaboration. At present, most collaboration is on an informal basis, varies among staff members, and often takes place outside the school day.

- Each staff member operates as a resource to meet any child’s needs.
- A traveling nurse comes to the school on a regular basis to maintain health records.
- Teachers provide weekly lesson plans to the principal who reviews them and comments and/or asks for clarification as deemed necessary.
- Staff members provide tutoring to students after school and at other times on an individual basis. Summer school is provided during June for students who need more instruction and intervention in reading.
- Staff meetings are held about once a month for ninety minutes. During the meeting, time is spent in discussion about curriculum and instruction issues.

**Standard 9 - 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.*

- The mission statement of the school district is: “To empower life-long learners with the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to effectively communicate; to think logically and creatively; to gather and use information; and to adapt to the challenges of our changing global society.” Eleven belief statements serve as a foundation for the mission statement. This mission was developed a number of years ago and the principal has expressed the need to engage in a process for current staff to revisit it and possibly develop one for the elementary school.
- The district asks all students to display behaviors that are aligned with their identity as Northeast Bulldogs. These behaviors are defined in the slogan, “GRR - Greatness, Respect, Responsibility.”
- For 2011-2012, the school district set three goals:
  - Continue working toward exceeding the State’s percentages of “Proficient and above” CSAP scores in grades 3 through 10 in all CSAP tested areas.
  - Establish and maintain programs for the development of ethical and responsible behavior.
  - Continue to enhance communication with students, staff and community.

As in previous years, Northeast Elementary School is developing 2011-2012 building goals and action steps that are aligned with the district’s goals. Staff members are also beginning to discuss the alignment of the building goals with those of the district’s Unified Improvement Plan.

- The elementary school goals for improving student learning that are in the district’s Unified Improvement Plan are clear, concise, defined in measurable terms, and accompanied by benchmarks. They include:

- Reading and mathematics content will be aligned to the Colorado Academic Standards.
  - In response to analysis of student data from CSAP, specific attention will be directed to improving skills in summarizing, supporting answers with details, and
  - stronger phonics instruction in primary grades.
- The principal collects, disaggregates, manages, and analyzes student achievement data which she shares with staff. Students' progress is measured throughout the year by NWEA MAPS and AIMSweb assessments, end-of-unit assessments, and other teacher-made assessments. These benchmark assessments along with CSAP and CELA are used to identify students with unmet learning needs and set goals for addressing those needs. Stakeholder perception surveys are not conducted. Student achievement data are shared with the School Accountability Committee which has opportunity to ask questions and give input.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR “NEXT STEPS” TO CONSIDER**

### **EFFECTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

#### **Introduction:**

Learning Environment involves school culture; student, family, and community support; and professional growth and evaluation. The section on Learning Environment addresses:

- ✓ School culture and how the school functions as an effective learning community and supports a climate conducive to performance excellence. School leadership and staff foster 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.
- ✓ How 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. Schools are supported in their efforts for working with parents and the community.
- ✓ How 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 school 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.

Throughout the ESP Review, the team continually heard staff members, parents, and students express a common trait when referring to Northeast Elementary School, “that it is a family.” Comments range from:

- “We are one big family.”
- “We treat each other like family here.”
- “We lean on each other.”

This reference to family is a vitally important factor to be used as the cornerstone for building a culture of continued success for students at Northeast Elementary School. When looking at the research on successful families, this analogy becomes even more useful for clarifying and building the school's culture.

Research has identified several characteristics possessed by successful families. Families that do well in each of these areas have fewer problems and are able to deal more effectively with problems as they arise.

- Problem-Solving: defined as a family's ability to resolve problems on a level that maintains effective family functioning.
- Communication: Effective family communication depends on several factors, including clear and direct communication between family members. The ability to listen to others and to pay attention to what they say are essential skills for effective family communication.
- Family Roles: Healthy families are able to establish clear, yet flexible, roles that enable them to carry out family functions.
- Affective Responsiveness: Families need to be able to share and experience feelings such as love, tenderness, joy, fear, and anger.
- Affective Involvement: How well the family as a whole shows interest in and values the activities and interests of individual family members.
- Behavior Control: Patterns of behavior that the family adopts for dealing with family situations (Epstein, Bishop, Ryan, Miller, & Keitner, 1993).

If the word family in the above quote was changed to school one would have an accurate description of the culture that exists at Northeast Elementary School. The literature consistently includes focus on the development of an effective learning environment as a key component of the foundation on which student success is built. An effective school works in partnership with families and community groups to remove barriers to learning in an effort to meet the intellectual, social, and developmental needs of all students. One of the greatest strengths of Northeast Elementary School is the close-knit community with a family-like atmosphere of inclusion of each student in the school.

Another theme expressed by staff members at Northeast Elementary, is that teachers talk to each other. The current state of collaboration at Northeast Elementary School is informal – talking together for problem-solving or getting new ideas is done “on the fly” – when professionals run into each other at the beginning or end of the school day or at lunchtime.

Research suggests that for a school to be fully operational, it functions as an effective learning community, and supports a climate conducive to performance excellence. Effective schools also provide structured opportunities for teachers to:

- learn from each other,
- model effective strategies with each other,



- share their motivation and inspiration with each other, and
- discuss teaching artifacts [lesson plans, student work samples] (Blasé and Blasé, 2006).

Ongoing and job-embedded professional development involves teachers in continual guided practice that is application-oriented, resulting in deeper implementation of expected practices. A status report on teacher professional development, in the United States and abroad, outlines the following guidelines to developing effective staff development for schools and school districts. Highly effective professional development is:

- focused on specific curriculum content and pedagogies needed to teach that content effectively;
- offered as a coherent part of a whole-school reform effort with assessments, standards, and professional development seamlessly linked;
- designed to engage teachers in active learning that allows them to make sense of what they learn in meaningful ways;
- presented in an intensive, sustained, and continuous manner over time;
- linked to analysis of teaching and student learning including the formative use of assessment data;
- supported by coaching, modeling, observation, and feedback; and
- connected to teachers' collaborative work in school-based professional learning communities and learning teams. (Wei, R.C., Darling-Hammond, L., Andree, A., Richardson, N., & Orphanos, S. 2009)

No human organization exists in equilibrium. It either advances or declines. The immediate question for leadership, staff, families, and community of Northeast Elementary School is, "How do we achieve the next steps for increasing student achievement to an even higher level?"

**Next Steps to Consider:**

**School Culture; School, Parent and Community Partnerships:**

- Although living in a rural environment is seen as the safest place to be, school safety is an issue for rural schools as well as it is for urban and suburban schools. Investigate ways to tighten security at the entrance of the school. Set up procedures to check visitors at the door and provide some kind of identification that is recognized by everyone. When the front office is not covered for the entire day, think about possibly having trained volunteers occupy the office to be observers and to quickly contact a designated adult if something seems out of the ordinary.
- As another step to prepare students to take on more responsibility for their own learning, provide opportunities to develop leadership skills. Find ways to embed student leadership opportunities into the overall practices of the school. Build on the current practices of the "Kinder Readers," and the rotating assignment of classroom routines to more school-wide leadership opportunities. Develop strategies to identify areas where student leadership can be developed and available on an ongoing basis. Consider developing school-wide involvement of students in the operation of some aspects of the school (e.g., student council).

- Currently, many students at Northeast Elementary School attend parent/teacher conferences, but only as passive observers. A step toward a more active involvement by students in taking ownership for their learning would be to involve them in student-led conferences; having students participate in or lead the discussion at these scheduled parent/teacher conferences.
- Continue to display student work throughout the building. While displaying samples of work from all students is important, be sure to highlight examples of work that meets or exceeds standards. Displaying high-level work is important for students, teachers, and parents to see models of what proficient work looks like.
- The casual collaboration that occurs between teachers is seen as an attribute of the school. Consider ways to develop this informal collaboration structure into an intentional collaborative culture that sees collaboration and distributed leadership as powerful and purposeful tools for growth and change. The current specials schedules would allow for some formal times for groups of teachers to meet.
- Learn more about the positive culture that currently exists in the school community for the purpose of sustaining this positive environment in the future. Take time to formally survey the perceptions of parent and community members within the school's boundary.
- In order to enhance the positive community energy for Northeast Elementary School among parents and community members, consider developing a Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). A more formal structure will help mobilize opportunities in the community to more effectively support the school.
- The school recognizes that expanded opportunities for students of poverty are important to provide experiences for children. As school resources continue to shrink, consider partnering with existing community organizations (i.e., 4-H, community and governmental organizations) to provide additional ways to provide out-of-school opportunities for students and parents.

### **Professional Development:**

Schools that “Beat the Odds” function as a professional community. This means teachers collaborating, receiving professional development, and being encouraged to have influence regarding school matters (Lefkowitz and Woempner, 2006). Collegial, collaborative work together is highly effective in building a culture of continuous improvement (Bryk, 2010). Collective capacity is far more powerful than individual capacity. Specific elements for realizing a culture of collective capacity include:

- working as a professional learning community,
- keeping up with professional literature and research,
- fostering opportunities for teachers to help make important decisions within their purview of responsibility,
- partnering to “inspect what is expected” through use of student achievement data to evaluate decisions, and
- doing what it takes collectively to make sure students learn (Chenowith, 2010).

- Teachers at Northeast Elementary School are a rich resource for each other. Advance from a culture of informal congeniality and sharing toward being intentionally collegial, such as collaboratively sharing effective practices, and problem-solving for solutions. Being a one-round school, it is imperative that barriers to collaboration, such as isolation and autonomy, be addressed.
  - Identify ways in which the staff can collaborate together as a professional learning community and build skills for effective
    - collaboration,
    - active inquiry and reflection,
    - trusting relationships to share a variety of perspectives, and
    - understanding of how consensus-building leads to decision making.
  - Use protocols and processes to bring focus and efficiency of effort to the work.
  - Strengthen collaboration by building time within the school day to allow groups of teachers to work together, and schedule regular whole-staff time for working as a professional learning community.
- Expand staff expectations to mirror expectations of students, “to be continuous learners.” Areas that require ongoing development, and which need to be included in strategic support for teachers are:
  - Improvement of instructional practice based on research-informed methods and strategies,
  - Deepening of content knowledge as subjects change, especially in the sciences, computer technology, social studies, and information literacy.
  - Networking with other schools to expand access to effective practices through school visitations, sharing of exemplars, planning documents, and criteria for proficiency descriptors (Danielson, 2007).
- Develop a long-range professional development plan that is aligned with district and school goals, and that supports teachers by meeting identified needs informed by data.
- When professional learning initiatives are successful in a school, it is because teachers are instructed, encouraged, supported, and held accountable to use the new practices.
  - Monitor and evaluate the quality and effectiveness of professional development activities, and their impact on professional practice and student achievement. Numerous studies show there is a direct link between effective assessment of adult learning processes and improved student learning” (Reeves, 2010).

- Collect data on the extent to which professional development changes instructional practice. Use the findings to make future decisions about professional development next steps.
  - One way to accomplish this is to collaboratively develop walk-through criteria (look-fors) to inform feedback and coaching support.
- Use these collaborative and professional learning community suggestions to carry out the school's work to:
  - Develop a standards-based, guaranteed and viable curriculum.
  - Implement data-driven dialogues,
  - Organize cohesion and coherence for instruction through the use of common, agreed-upon programs and instructional materials.
  - Effectively implement a menu of high-impact, effective instructional practices.
  - Build distributed leadership across the school.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS**

### **Introduction:**

Organizational Effectiveness involves the areas of leadership, the allocation of resources to support high performance, and comprehensive and effective improvement planning.

The strand of Organizational Effectiveness includes an emphasis on:

- ✓ Both administrative and teacher leadership are responsible to guide the work of the school (i.e., the teaching and learning process) by providing direction, high performance expectations, the creation of a positive learning culture and by developing leadership capacity among the staff. Leadership uses data to drive decisions and to develop goals for the improvement plan. There is diligence about guiding the work to meet the needs of a diverse population. Leadership oversees the allocation of resources, provides organizational policies and procedures, and fosters a system-wide, cohesive organization.
- ✓ The organization of the school maximizes use of time and other resources to focus teaching and learning to support high student and staff performance and equitable educational opportunities for all students. The allocation of resources is based on identified needs and supports the goals of the district and school improvement plans. How those resources are used to manager change is part of the district improvement process.
- ✓ A well-developed, implemented, and evaluated comprehensive school improvement plan communicates a clear purpose and actions that focus on teaching and learning. Collaboration and communication are vital to ensuring there is input and feedback regarding the effectiveness of the improvement plan(s) by multiple stakeholders. The school improvement plan reflects learning research and current state and local standards. The goals and activities are determined by analysis of disaggregated data. The district and school improvement plans are aligned for a system of continuous improvement.

Northeast Elementary School currently enrolls 106 PreK-6 students with a teaching staff of nine. The small size of the school fosters communication and collegiality. All staff members take responsibility for the learning needs of each student. The percentage of students who score proficient or advanced on

Colorado's standardized assessments for 2010 reveal that academic achievement is higher than the state average and academic growth well exceeds adequate growth percentiles.

The high academic growth is a result of a focus on using student achievement data to inform and implement targeted interventions for individual students' achievement gaps. For the school to continue to produce even better outcomes, the principal and staff must continue to refine their practices, deepen their understandings, and engage in shared leadership and ownership for results.

*"One of the great secrets of leadership is that before one can command the respect and followership of others, she or he must demonstrate devotion to the organization's purposes and commitment to those in the organization. . . ." (Reeves 2006, p. 34).*

As Greenleaf (1977) points out, people "will freely respond only to individuals who are chosen as leaders because they are proven and trusted as servants" (p.10). Servant leadership describes what it means to be a principal. Principals are responsible for ministering to the needs of schools they serve. These needs are defined by the shared values and purposes of the school's covenants and culture. By experiencing, displaying, modeling, and celebrating what is hoped for and expected, servant leaders are given the necessary legitimacy to lead and are allowed to provide a sense of direction and establish overarching purposes. However, ultimately the success of that leadership is known by the quality of the followership that emerges to develop a purposeful learning community (Sergiovanni, 2007). In a school that operates as a purposeful professional learning community, staff members are less designated as "leaders" and "subordinates" but become "followers" who are responding to ideas and ideals and committed to achieving them. Everyone, formal leaders, teachers, staff, students, and parents find themselves equally "subordinate" to a set of shared commitments. A focus on methods and management becomes a focus on results. For example,

- A school improvement plan becomes school improvement.
- Good teacher evaluations become good teaching.
- Professional development becomes changes in practice.
- Leadership becomes purpose and substance.
- Congeniality becomes collegiality.
- Cooperation becomes commitment.
- Compliance becomes results.
- Teaching becomes learning (Sergiovanni, 2007).

Effective, purposeful learning communities have cultures which bind people together in pursuit of excellence based on their mission. The formal leader in these schools conducts a continuous stream of actions which has the effect of inducing clarity, coherence, consensus, and commitment regarding basic purposes. Distributed leadership, in which all members of the community take appropriate responsibility for leading, is also required. With distributed leadership, staff members collegially and continuously inter-mix roles and responsibilities to achieve what is needed for students.

The culture of Northeast Elementary School affords an environment of cooperation that is based on meeting students' needs. However, the school does not evidence an articulated and implemented understanding and agreements about how to proceed as an institution that transcends the technical requirements needed for the tasks at hand. A school can become this type of institution when all

members can describe all actions as, “This is the way we do things here.” In such an institution, systems for accomplishing all-school purposes and goals are in place and seamlessly functioning.

### **Next Steps to Consider:**

- Northeast Elementary staff should commit to reading and learning about the characteristics of high-functioning learning communities (e.g., the work of DuFour et al.) to build common understandings and agreements about how to proceed.
- For Northeast Elementary to operate more intentionally as a learning community institution in which everyone agrees on purposes and consistently uses them as the guide for all actions, time must be devoted to stepping back from tasks at hand. Rather than working from day-to-day or unit-to-unit, the questions “Where do we want to be in five years?” and “How (in detail) will we get there?” should be answered by developing a long-range plan. This plan would define how the roles and responsibilities of members of the learning community (students, teachers, leaders, and parents) are interdependent and how professional learning, leadership, and accountability for implementation of agreed-upon actions happens. The plan would assist the school in becoming an institution infused with group integrity around distinctive habits and strategies which prevail over ad hoc or individual decisions about curriculum, assessment, instruction, professional development, and use of resources.
- As a long range plan is developed, examine all the practices in the school and how they add to or detract from student achievement and growth. Use a technique such as a Leadership Map (Reeves, 2006) to systematically document and map all teaching and leadership practices to reveal patterns in practices and determine those that have the highest impact.
- As part of long-range planning discussions and decisions, the school community should develop its own mission statement—one that focuses on what the students will know and be able to do. This mission statement would start by saying, “At Northeast Elementary School students will . . .”
- The long-range plan should contain a framework that defines and clarifies the way the school will do the business of teaching and learning, and how professional development will be employed to ensure that all staff members have the knowledge and skills to fully implement the standards-based teaching and learning cycle. The school as an institution should be tightly coupled around mission and purpose, how the work will be done, instructional non-negotiables, and the student as a learner.
- A plan for distributed leadership should be collaboratively written. This plan is not a list of duties, but a documentation of shared leadership responsibilities in which all staff participate to move the educational work of the school forward. Research has shown that the wisdom of a group of people who are working together to solve a problem is in most cases superior to that of one very intelligent and knowledgeable person (Surowiecki, 2004; Reeves, 2006).

- Any decision about strategies, materials, and use of time and resources, should be examined in the context of how the decision will further the goals and actions of the long-range plan of the learning community. For example, collaboratively examine the daily schedules for each grade to determine how time could be more effectively used to maximize instruction throughout the school. Examine the scheduling of K-12 teachers in the district and look for better ways to use the skills and expertise of all teachers to meet all students' learning needs. Examine the district calendar for possible modifications to the allocation of professional meeting time. Determine whether changes could result in more effective and efficient training, and provide more opportunities for staff collaboration to improve all students' achievement.

## **ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE**

### **Introduction:**

Academic Performance includes the areas of curriculum, assessment, and instruction. Key components of Academic Performance include:

- ✓ 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.

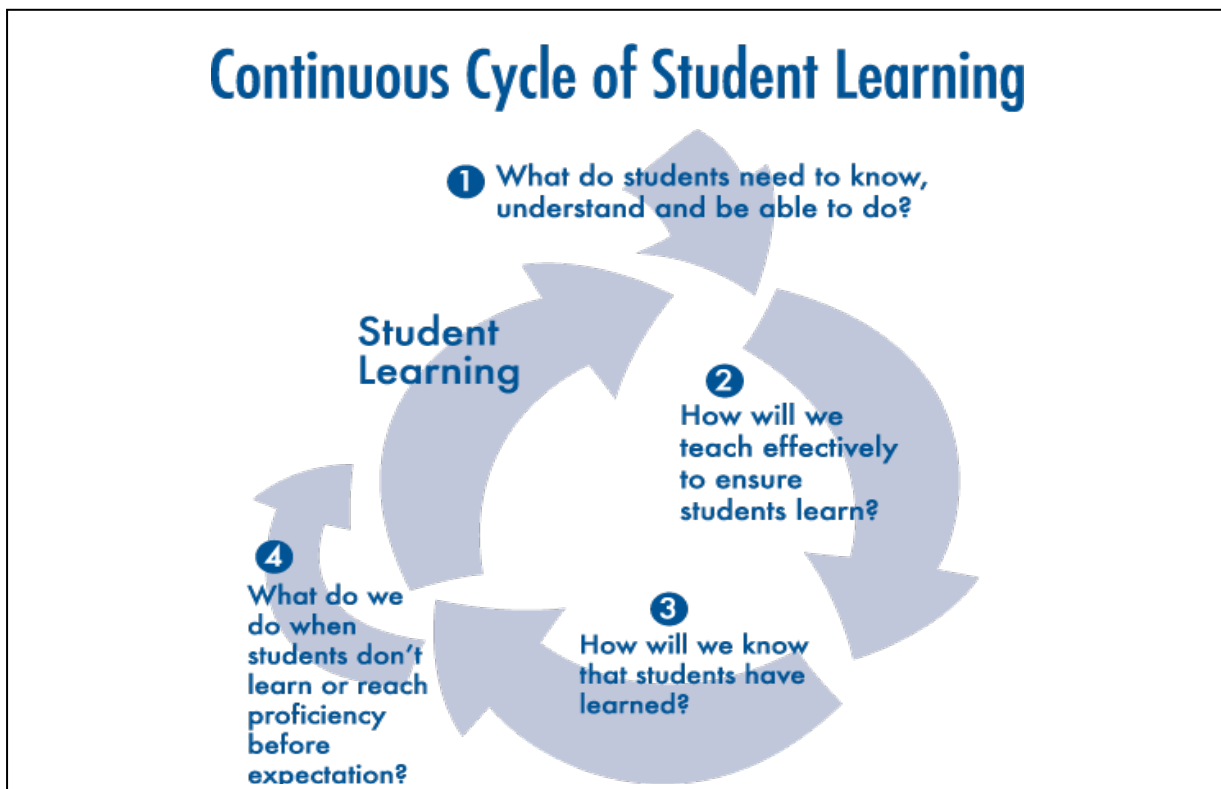
Consistency, rigor, higher-order thinking skills, proficiency, curriculum, assessment, instruction – these can be “just words” unless they are supported by knowledge and understanding, and implemented with fidelity by all staff members. Consistency is an important factor that can assist a successful school to move from good to great – from meeting the educational needs of most students to meeting the needs of all students.

In effective schools there is a strong relationship between adults and students. At Northeast Elementary School, both students and faculty alike, express how much they care about each other. Teachers are willing to “go the extra mile” to help all students. Add to this a calm, positive climate where students are afforded the opportunity to concentrate on thinking and learning. Mix in teacher basic knowledge of instruction, an effective RTI process, and a variety of instructional resources and interventions. This becomes a powerful combination that supports increased student academic achievement and growth.

Effective schools also build strong academic relationships through a standards-based teaching and learning cycle. Northeast Elementary School can enhance its effectiveness by understanding, and using with fidelity, a standards-based teaching/learning cycle. When all teachers are on board with every

element of this cycle, and hold themselves and each other accountable, the school's capacity for being on a trajectory of continuous improvement that leads to exemplary student achievement and growth can be fully realized.

Basic elements of the Colorado Standards-Based Teaching/Learning Cycle foster a continuous cycle of student learning and improvement, as illustrated in the following model:



*(A complete summary of the Colorado Standards-Based Teaching/Learning Cycle is provided as an addendum to this report.)*

Good teachers use all elements of this standards-based teaching/learning cycle, but master teachers excel by pursuing a deep understanding of each and every element, use them to plan and deliver every lesson, and hold themselves, their students, and each other accountable for full implementation.

The following recommended “Next Steps” outline specific actions that are intended to support the principal and staff in realizing academic distinction at Northeast Elementary School. The areas identified are corroborated by the work of Mike Schmoker (2011) who aggressively advocates that, when effectively implemented as priority work of the school, will have an immediate and decisive impact on students’ present and future academic success. Those areas, as described by Schmoker are:

- Create and ensure the implementation of decent, coherent curriculum in every course.
- Massively increase the amount of purposeful reading, writing, and discussion students engage in everyday, across the disciplines.



- Ensure that teachers consistently observe the most fundamental elements of a good lesson – a clear, curriculum-based learning target, multiple segments taught in short cycles of instruction, checking for engagement/understanding by all students before moving on.

### **Next Steps to Consider:**

#### **A Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum:**

In a standards-based curriculum, essential learnings are identified and aligned, and pacing is based upon those learning targets. Teachers can then teach the standards using appropriate planning and instruction tools within the instructional time available. This is called a “guaranteed and viable curriculum” (Marzano, *Schools that Work*, 2003). A “guaranteed and viable curriculum” ensures that every child in the school is afforded the same opportunity to learn, regardless of the teacher. Consequently, to have a “guaranteed and viable curriculum” there needs to be consistent implementation of all curricula throughout the school.

- In order to achieve and maintain high academic achievement, the school must have a standards-based curriculum that meets or exceeds the *Colorado Academic Standards*. A standards-based curriculum that is vertically aligned must be implemented throughout the school with fidelity, to ensure ALL students have access to the essential learning targets outlined in the school’s curriculum.
- Access the tools on the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) website to aid schools in understanding the format and intent of the new standards documents, as well as the CDE transitional assessment frameworks. Collectively unpack these standards documents to provide a foundation for the school’s curriculum development.
- Develop a building-wide, deep understanding of the *Colorado Academic Standards* and create a curriculum that is based on these standards. Include a process that ensures every teacher designs and delivers instruction based on the adopted curriculum. When one teacher chooses to “do his or her own thing” the process will not produce the expected success. Compare the effectiveness of a one-round school with one teacher who isn’t “on board” to a chain with a broken link. Consistency and continuity are crucial.
- Include in the development of the building-wide, standards-based curriculum:
  - identification of essential learning targets and performance descriptors,
  - curriculum mapping and pacing guides,
  - rigor and higher-order thinking skills,
  - Education Technology and Information Literacy Standards,
  - ties to post-secondary skills, and
  - key transition points.
- Determine together how district textbook adoptions and selected supplemental materials and programs can and will support the delivery of a standards-based curriculum. Develop a clear consensus of what resources will be used at Northeast Elementary School. Keep in mind the importance of consistency and coherence, and the impact these have on student learning.

- Use the time that is available in the school schedule for collaboration time to have ongoing, purposeful discussion of data analysis and effective instructional practices to impact student achievement.

### **Use Assessments to Inform Teaching and Learning:**

- Effective data analysis is required to differentiate delivery of curricula and instruction in addressing individual student needs. Effectively gather and organize data in a way that is efficient, easily accessible and timely. Collaborative analysis of data provides a systematic approach to understanding the needs of students and how to teach them so that they reach proficiency on identified essential learning targets. Use growth trajectories to provide a means for determining catch-up, keep-up and stay-up growth data for groups of students and individual students.
- Teachers need support for skillful and knowledgeable analysis of school, grade, and student-level data, using a body of evidence from multiple sources. This support includes professional development, coaching, and monitoring teachers’ ongoing use of data.
- Collaboratively determine which assessments (formative and summative) will be consistently used throughout the school. Carefully review each to assure that they align with state standards, effectively measure progress toward essential learning targets, and provide authentic data that will be useful to students and staff. Include in your newly-developed professional development plan ongoing work to assure every teacher has the knowledge, skills, and tools to analyze data. Use the information gathered from these purposeful assessments to:
  - inform instruction;
  - meet individual needs of students;
  - provide ongoing, monitoring of student progress; and
  - reflect on personal instructional practices.
- Determine what data sources (e.g., assessments, observations, recommendations) are to be included in a body of evidence for validating student learning and making instructional decisions. Discuss the importance and purpose of each source. Think about creating visual representations of student progress (e.g., data walls) using the agreed-upon data sources.
- Proficiency can be very subjective, but coming to agreement on what it means for students at Northeast Elementary School can and will make a difference to student learning. The expected performance levels outlined in the *Colorado Academic Standards* provide the tools, knowledge, and skills for Colorado students to compete in the world. Work together to learn how to analyze student work and determine what “proficient” means. Create or acquire rubrics and exemplars that describe proficiency, use them to assess student work. Be sure to share them with the students as models of performance expectations.
- Engage students in their own learning by teaching them:
  - how to set goals and work toward them,
  - the importance and purpose of homework,
  - how to interpret their own CSAP results and how this information can guide their own learning,

- what it means to be proficient,
- how to become a part of (or lead) student-parent-teacher conferences, and
- how to reflect upon their own learning.

**Ensure Foundations of Highly Effective Instruction:**

- For Northeast Elementary School to have coherence in its instructional design, it is important to articulate the “what” and “how” of instruction. How the school organizes and operates has a major effect on the instructional practices in its classrooms. Put simply, whether classroom learning proceeds depends in large measure on how the school supports teaching. Critical resources that contribute to a coherent school-wide instructional system include:
  - Learning tasks that sustain student engagement and rigor.
  - Assessments that are based on what students actually need to know, and which are used to provide feedback to students and teachers to inform subsequent instruction.
  - Materials, tools, and instructional routines that are aligned across all classrooms to scaffold teaching and learning over time.

Although individual teachers may have some discretion in how they use these resources, recognize that the efficacy of individual teacher efforts depends on the quality of the instructional resources, and the practices of the entire teaching community that are developed around their use and refinement (Bryk, 2010).

**Build coherence and cohesion of primary instructional materials:**

- To ensure that students are able to build connections in their learning from one grade to the next, a common thread across the resources used to support delivery of the curriculum is needed. Collaboratively:
  - Determine which materials will be used as the primary resource(s) for best first (universal) instruction in each content area.
  - Establish criteria that are most critical, especially considering how the material supports delivery of standards-based curriculum, and promotes rigorous, engaging learning opportunities.
  - Profile the attributes of each resource to determine those that are most effective for supporting best first instruction.
  - Designate other resources that can be used for supplementary instruction to support those students who need another avenue for gaining proficiency.
- It is critically important that learning not be fragmented as a result of inconsistency from one grade to another in the programs and materials used. By using agreed-upon instructional resources that build common content vocabulary, as well as cohesive learning structures and processes, a strong scaffold can be built from one year to the next. As a result of this process, students are provided the opportunity to develop a cohesive progression of skills and learning tools.
- Construct a written continuum of the K-6 common instructional resources that all teachers agree to use with competency and fidelity. As new teachers join the staff, ensure that these resources will continue to be used. Ensure teachers are trained in the use of these common priority

materials and supported in their implementation. Hold yourselves and each other accountable for “staying” the course.

### **Effectively select and implement high-impact instructional strategies:**

- Through ongoing collaborative referencing of Hattie’s meta-analysis of the “effect size” of a large collection of instructional strategies and deeper study of Marzano’s work that identifies nine high-impact instructional strategies, construct a menu of strategies that teachers will use to support student learning. Capitalizing on teacher knowledge of the students, the subject matter, and the learning situation, use the menu to judiciously identify the most appropriate strategies for your students (Marzano, 2009).
- Skillfully implement the use of these high-impact strategies to maximize their effect on learning. These common effective strategies can be used throughout the elementary school, with adjustment and increasing complexity from one grade to the next. Again, this provides continuity and scaffolding for students to build their own toolkits for learning over time.

### **Strategically plan instruction:**

To quote Robert Marzano in *The Art and Science of Teaching*: “Arguably the most basic issue a teacher can consider is what he or she will do to (1) establish and communicate learning goals, (2) track student progress, and (3) celebrate success.”

He further explains, “These elements have a fairly straightforward relationship. Establishing and communicating learning goals are the starting place. After all, for learning to be effective, clear targets in terms of information and skill must be established. But establishing and communicating learning goals alone do not suffice to enhance student learning. Rather, once goals have been set, it is necessary to track progress. This assessment does not occur at the end of a unit only, but throughout the unit. Finally, given that each student has made progress in one or more learning goals, the teacher and students can celebrate those successes.”

- Know that strategic planning for instruction is critical. Marzano states, “Everything else being equal, a teacher who competently designs and organizes academic learning tasks will produce better student learning than a teacher who does not.”
  - Collaboratively determine how unit and daily lesson plans will be developed by identifying planning templates/models that include all the necessary elements of an effective instructional plan. Leave nothing to chance, but intentionally develop and use this road map for ensuring that students have the opportunity to access coherent instruction that supports them in becoming proficient or advanced in the essential learning goals and targets for their grade.
  - Well-developed and intentional unit and daily lesson planning includes advance identification of what it is that students must know and be able to do (essential learning goals and learning targets) and ensuring that assessments are aligned to those targets at the appropriate levels of complexity and required application of learning. Teachers and

- students will clearly know what it is that students must learn and know if they have learned it.
- Intentionally structure each lesson to foster the progression of learning from “I Do - We Do -You Do.” Within this, build in multiple opportunities for students to engage in rich, purposeful reading, writing, and discussion.
  - From this, the overall progression of learning opportunities and selection of aligned resources and strategies can be included in the plan. “Planning with the end in mind” is the foundation of Backwards Planning (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) or other similar designs. Ensure that all teachers use the school’s chosen lesson plan model. Thoughtful, coherent planning will support the delivering of a guaranteed and viable curriculum.
- Examine the amount of actual direct instruction that is occurring in K-6 reading and writing. Increase the amount of purposeful, interactive instruction in every classroom. Ensure ample time is planned into the lesson for various ways for students to purposefully read and reflection on their reading through directed dialogues and interactive writing.
  - In addition to direct instruction in writing, incorporate purposeful writing into all content areas. Especially build student capacity to write proficient constructed responses to show their comprehension in reading and to competently explain their thinking and problem-solving in mathematics.
  - Continue strategic use of identified interventions through the RtI process to meet needs of students that have not been met through well-designed and masterfully implemented best first (universal) instruction.

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## ADDENDUM

### *Standards-Based Teaching/Learning Cycle*

In order to meet the expectations for high performance, it is important that all staff understand the principles and practices that support being a successful standards-based school. From this, all classrooms need to systematically and systemically implement the full standards-based teaching and learning cycle. To help understand how the standards-based teaching and learning cycle functions, the following framework outlining critical tenets and needed actions to become fully standards-based is included.

#### What do students need to know and be able to do?

- Identify essential learnings/standards
- Define and illustrate what proficient work needs to look/sound like; ensure articulation PreK-5.
- Utilize curriculum maps and pacing guides; Align curriculum frameworks/instructional guides and adopted materials with power standards in core content areas.
- Articulate and communicate standards to students with purpose and rationale.

#### How will we teach the standards?

- Focused, intense individual and collaborative work to design and implement lessons targeted on standards and essential lesson components.
- Identify common, research-based effective instructional strategies expected throughout the school.
- Develop a common academic vocabulary and language of instruction for each content area.
- Train, coach, monitor to ensure fidelity to implementation of research-based instructional practices.

#### How do we know if students are learning?

- Clarify the difference between summative (assessment OF) and formative assessment (assessment FOR) learning.
- Articulate a continuum of measurements of student learning from “Checking for Understanding” to formal benchmark assessments, using both formative and summative assessment data.
- Understand how and what data is important to guide what work.
- Actively and skillfully measure small, medium, and large chunks of learning regularly.
- Ensure student knowledge of their own results, levels of proficiency and goals for learning.

#### What will we do if students don't learn? If they are already proficient?

- Understand the purpose, context and rationale for the district's Response to Instruction philosophy, framework, protocols and processes.
- Design, structure, and provide multiple opportunities to learn.
- Use classroom differentiation.
- Strategically and systematically use identified interventions.
- Structure the use of research-based intervention models or programs.
- Use a Pyramid of Interventions school-wide, with specific components.