

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

**For**

**Metro Elementary School 2**

**Conducted: May 2-6, 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 made 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 Metro Elementary School 2

<b>HIGH GROWTH SCHOOL PROFILE</b>				
SCHOOL NAME: METRO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL 2				
DEMOGRAPHICS				
Type of IA School	School-wide	School Level	Elementary	
Geographical Location	Denver Metro	Enrollment (size)	450	
Free and Reduced	93.07%	Hispanic	76.22%	
English Language Learners	62.67%	Non-White	92.00%	
School IA Allocation	\$287,147.00	Per Pupil Allocation	\$889.00	
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)	R = 71	M = 86	SPF – Growth Gaps Rating	Exceeds
Free/Reduced Lunch MGP (3 year)	R = 60	M =80	SPF – Growth Gaps Reading	Exceeds
ELL MGP (3 year)	R = 61	M = 81	SPF – Growth Gaps Math	Exceeds
CELA 3 year (% Making at least one year of PL growth)	65.52%			
CELA MGP 08	68		AYP – Overall 08	YES
CELA MGP 09	55		AYP – Overall 09	YES
CELA MGP 10	67.5		AYP – Overall 10	YES
CBLA (% Making Progress)	3.47%			

## Overview of the ESP Review Process:

Number of Interviews: 153\*

- School administrator 13
- Instructional staff (including regular and special program teachers): 31
- Interventionists, specialists, coaches: 12
- District administrators: 7
- Parents/Community Members 12
- Classified Instructional Staff 2
- Students 70
- Parents 6

\* *Number reflects the number of interfaces with interviewees, not the number of people interviewed.*

Number of Observations:

- Classrooms 94
- Meetings 4
- 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.

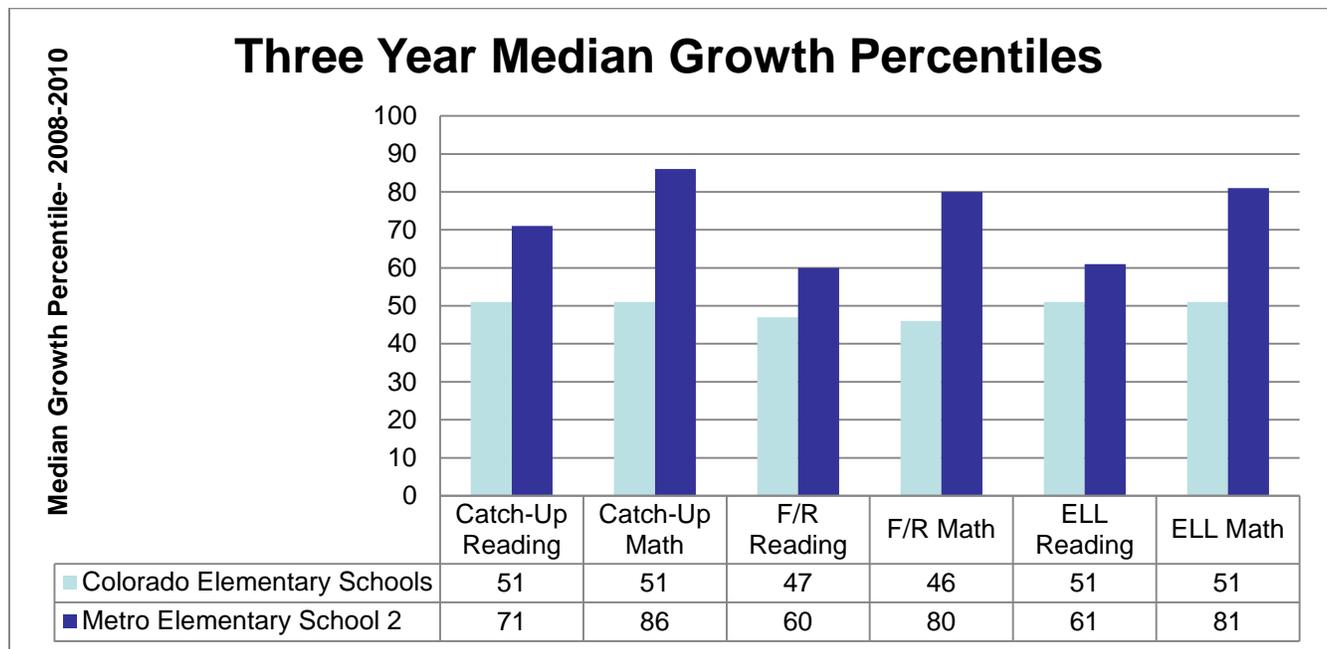
**Organizational Effectiveness: The following Organizational Effectiveness Standards address (7) leadership, (8) organization and allocation of resources, and (9) comprehensive and effective planning.**

- 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

Historically, Metro Elementary School 2 has had a high-minority and low-socioeconomic population, with many students being second-language learners. In the past, the school has been known for its low academic achievement and as a “hard place to work.” By 2011, the demographic profile of the school remains the same; however, the academic achievement of its students is very different. Teacher turnover is minimal and Metro Elementary 2 is known as a desirable place to work. Student attendance rate from 2008 to date is 96.3%, 95.1%, and 95.6%. The school’s stability rate is 82.2% and the mobility rate, 49.7%.

Metro Elementary School 2 has been most effective in accelerating student learning, as profiled in the following graph. In all categories, the school’s growth performance has far exceeded the Colorado state averages.



The dramatic changes at Metro Elementary School 2 have transpired over a ten-year period, originating in 2001 with an innovative and courageous principal. That spirit has continued under the leadership of two subsequent principals and a talented cadre of committed teachers. Today, sustaining the culture of the school transcends any one person. The pervasive beliefs of, “high expectations for all” and “everyone is a learner” are expressed by students and teachers, and are evident in practice. The school’s learning environment is electric with active learning, joy in learning, and intense focus on the work at hand. The students at Metro Elementary School 2 are valued and challenged. The school is rich with strong processes and practices that permeate and sustain the school’s “way of doing its work.”

Key practices that contribute to the school’s high growth performance include:

- A collaborative culture is the norm. The school has a seamless system of teaching and learning. Teacher leaders, classroom teachers, instructional paraprofessionals, teacher candidates, and principal all work together to teach students and each other. There is a high level of trust, respect, and communication among the staff. Relationships between adults and students are

supportive and respectful. There is a common belief that all students can learn and students are confident they will receive help when needed. High-level conversations are focused on the important work and professional learning is embedded, ongoing, and based on identified needs. The school operates as a professional learning community.

- Data team talks are structured and constructive, with a focus on meeting student needs. Weekly meetings are scheduled for data analysis, reflection, and determination of instructional strategies and interventions. Teachers have processes that turn results into re-teaching. There is continuous adjustment and fine tuning of instructional practice. Teachers take responsibility for instructing students and determine what THEY need to do so students can learn.
- Strong and varied instructional practices are pervasive and evident in all classrooms. All classrooms are considered as demonstration classrooms. Instruction is content rich, and is organized around active student learning, including limited teacher talk, high-level questioning, follow-up questioning, peer talk, use of manipulatives and continual writing. Lessons are carefully planned with team mates. Routines and transitions for students are effectively and efficiently managed. Teachers purposefully determine what academic vocabulary will be used and common instructional strategies so they can provide coordinated instruction for students across grade-level classrooms and from one grade to another. First best instruction is endemic and foundational in the belief system of the school. All students have access to the core curriculum through sheltered and scaffolded instructional practices. A culture of “unity” rather than “separate” is nurtured. A high return from first best instruction is realized in pronounced reduction of needed remediation and intervention.
- The development of language is strategic and immersed in all content areas. Intentional expansion of vocabulary, including high-level words, and the structures of language are embedded within instructional practices all day, every day. Both oral and written language development is pervasive.
- Outstanding leadership is provided by teacher leaders, coaches, and the principal. The principal is truly an instructional and organizational leader, always shepherding relationships, the instructional process, the change process, and organizational systems. An intentional building of a culture of no excuses and accountability to each other is shared by all staff members.

## ESP Review Narrative Report

### SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS

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

“Districts and schools need clear policies and procedures as well as accountability to ensure adopted standards and benchmark concepts and skills are taught to proficient levels. While there is flexibility for teachers to design creative and engaging instructional strategies and assessments for their classrooms, a district’s adopted standards and essential benchmarks must be consistently addressed by all faculty. With such policies and expectations, a guaranteed and viable curriculum is more likely ensured.” (Benson, 2008).

- Aurora Public Schools’ (APS) district-adopted curriculum is aligned to Colorado Model Content Standards, grade level expectations, and assessment frameworks and is used to guide instruction for Metro Elementary 2. Pacing guides are provided to guarantee that identified essential learning targets are taught over a defined period of time. The expectation that lessons are planned using these pacing guides is understood by teachers; however, teachers are provided professional freedom to allow extra time for student learning when necessary. Ample resources are available at the school level to supplement the district-adopted textbooks and programs. Professional expertise in knowing what and how to best meet student need is respected by school leadership and teachers are trusted to include appropriate supplemental resources for student instruction. The adopted curriculum is rigorous and challenging for students; however, using high quality, effective instructional skills, teachers are able to enhance the rigor of the curriculum.
- All students have equal access to the curriculum, but this access is more than simply being present in the room during instruction. Access to the curriculum is authentic and guarantees all students can comprehend and learn what is being taught. Teachers use sheltered instruction and scaffolding to assure that students are instructed at a level, and in a manner, that makes the curriculum meaningful to them.
- Vertical and horizontal alignment of curriculum is critical in providing exceptional instruction. Throughout Metro Elementary 2, alignment is guaranteed by professional development activities and purposeful collaboration among all groups, such as regular education teachers, special education (SPED), Aurora’s Gifted and Talented Education (AGATE), English Language Development (ELD) and specials (music, art, technology, physical education).
- Vertical alignment is assured when key transition points are identified for students entering each grade level. To guarantee students have the skills necessary for success, key transition points are identified through the pacing guides. Pre-school teachers attend building-level professional development and collaborate with kindergarten, first and second grade teachers. The intention of pre-school is to create a P-5 continuum. There is limited vertical alignment, other than pacing guides, between the elementary and middle schools.

- Students are made aware of college and career opportunities through standards-based science instruction which includes thinking and problem-solving. Science notebooks are incorporated to help students record thinking about big ideas. Additionally, the students have opportunities to meet health sciences professionals. Good nutrition for a healthy lifestyle is supported through the “Go, Slow, Whoa” program which is integrated in health education during physical education and nutrition in all grades. Many students participate in field trips to the medical center and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students receive a passport to the Denver Museum of Nature and Science: Passport to Health Program. These linkages allow students to become aware of career opportunities that may help them make connections between education and life choices.
- Although all students have access to technology and teachers have 21<sup>st</sup> Century technological resources available to them, information literacy is not integrated into instruction. Students have a regular rotation in the computer lab, but this is an ungraded rotation without defined expectations that are aligned to the information literacy and technology standards.

**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.*

“We assess our effectiveness on the basis of results rather than intentions. Individuals, teams and schools seek relevant data and information and use that information to promote continuous improvement” (Dufour, Dufour, & Eaker, 2002).

- Teachers at Metro 2 systematically **collect, analyze, and use** data to raise student achievement. The building administrator expects that teachers will use multiple data sets to inform effective implementation of the teaching and learning cycle in an ongoing fashion. A culture of assessment and data literacy permeates the daily work of the school.
- A district assessment plan guides mathematics and literacy data collection for elementary schools. The district provides data storage systems that allow administrators and teachers to access historical and current data. Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP), Colorado English Language Acquisition (CELA), DRA2 data, and Mondo data, along with Advanced Learning Plans (ALPs) are entered into Infinite Campus. Other assessment data (e.g., K-5 Mondo, CELA, 3-5 Interim, DRA2) are entered into the *Enrich* data storage system. The *Enrich* data storage system also houses Individual Educational Plan (IEP) data. Individual Educational Plan (IEP) data are currently managed using Clarity, and this will change over to *Enrich* in the future. Teachers generally use the *Enrich* system to access data information. All data scores and ILP, ALP, and IEP information are currently accessible through *Enrich* even though the data may be entered into another data storage system. Teachers access stored data to review learning plans, analyze group and individual trends, and to inform instructional decisions.
- The use of summative and formative assessments is seamlessly embedded within the teaching and learning cycle. Teachers regularly collaborate (e.g., weekly grade-level meetings, monthly math and literacy Coaching and Collaborative Learning [CCL] meetings) to analyze data to inform decision making regarding instructional practices and flexible groupings. Use of interim

assessment analyses is scheduled strategically to allow preparation for state assessment expectations. Many assessment items mirror tasks on state assessments.

Additional findings include the following:

- During weekly grade-level meetings, teachers use formative data for instructional planning.
- During monthly mathematics and literacy CCL meetings, teachers use both formative and summative data to inform instruction and flexible-grouping, and to determine student candidates for extra doses of intervention. Teachers also weave learnings from current professional literature into data dialogues.
- Student work accompanied by content standard connections and proficiency statements are displayed in hallways and classrooms.
- Proficiency statements for student work, informed by district pacing guides, are collaboratively developed by teachers in team and CCL meetings. Teachers share these with students and post them alongside models of proficient writing and reading.
- Models of proficient student writing across the grade levels are displayed in the multipurpose room (MPR) and some models of exemplary student work are used at times by some teachers for explicit instruction.
- School staff display data walls in the MPR that address the following areas:
  - proficient samples of reading response,
  - samples of proficient writing by grade level,
  - interim results,
  - reading and math data walls,
  - literacy data, and
  - teacher kudos for raising student achievement.
- Teachers update student progress toward proficient and advanced status on literacy and math classroom data charts on a quarterly (or in some cases more frequently) basis, based upon a body of evidence (e.g., interim assessment data, samples of student work, unit assessments, K-2 district assessments). These data inform instructional groupings during and after (e.g., Skillbuilders) the school day, as well as, 5<sup>th</sup> Block—a 5-week extended summer learning program.
- Teachers collaborate during grade-level and content CCL meetings to identify learning targets, success criteria, models of proficient work, and instructional strategies to engage learners. The principal actively and collaboratively engages in this work with teachers. Additionally, the principal meets individually with each teacher at the start of the school year to identify strengths and challenges presented by the data for each grade and class. Individual follow-up meetings occur as needed. Data are routinely disaggregated for use in ongoing dialogues (e.g., informal discussions, grade-level meetings, weekly dialogue time, and CCL meetings). Assessments (district and building) are based upon state content standards and frequently mirror tasks students will be asked to complete on interim and state tests.

- Proficiency targets, based upon Colorado content standards, are posted in the hallways and in classrooms along with models of student work. These are used by most teachers before, during, and after lessons.

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

“Effective instruction is what causes students to learn. In standards-based districts and schools, research-based instructional methods and strategies are used to deliver standards-aligned curricula and ensure students have adequate and equitable opportunities to learn.” (Benson, 2008)

- Rigor, focus, and high expectations are infused across all classroom and specials instruction. Teachers and the building administrator expect first best instruction within each classroom and hold each other accountable. Teachers scaffold instruction, infuse lessons with rigor, and press students to think more deeply. A variety of instructional strategies are used by classroom teachers and specials to address higher-order thinking and problem-solving. Consistent evidence of the following was noted:
  - effective teacher questioning that results in higher-order thinking in the responses of students,
  - student use of higher-level language structures and concepts within the oral responses across classrooms and grade levels,
  - varieties of activity-based learning linked to clear and practical purposes,
  - emphasis on drawing relevant connections within literacy, math, and science instruction at all grade levels,
  - opportunities to extend and apply knowledge in new ways, and
  - strategic use of think/pair/share partner work and cooperative learning groups to expand opportunities for student reflection and think time.
- *Mastery requires repetition.* This statement in the mission/vision can be visualized daily in classroom instruction throughout Metro Elementary 2. Across grade levels, instruction emphasizes an essential means for assuring successful learning: **repeated exposure** to skills, vocabulary, strategies, and concepts. Teachers make sure what they want to have students learn is repeated within the lesson, throughout the week, and beyond.
- Structures to accelerate student learning and secure mastery of essential learning targets are always at the forefront of planning and instruction at Metro 2. Students are exposed to a wide variety of interesting activities and texts. School leadership (the principal and teacher leaders) provide regular and extensive professional development focused on a clear mission known to all staff – *helping every child, everyday learn to think and master the skills needed to succeed at Metro 2, in middle school, high school, college and the future.* This clear intention is evident in teacher/student instructional interactions and in conversations with staff and students.
- Authentic engagement is present in the majority of classrooms. Routines and procedures such as bell-to-bell instruction and quick transitions are used consistently throughout the building.

Students are provided clear learning targets as classes begin, frequent opportunities for reflection during instruction, and review of lesson activities at the close of the lesson. Effective structures for using large and small instructional groups and learning stations are in place within all classrooms during reading and math instruction. Most importantly, engaging and accessible text and activities are routinely used.

- Every teacher is an active teacher of language. Teachers consciously weave language supports into instruction throughout the school day. Their rigorous use of vocabulary supports is evident in:
  - posting word walls,
  - modeling for students, and
  - setting expectations for student use of higher level vocabulary in oral and written responses.

These practices support all students in acquiring proficient English language structures and concepts and particularly strengthen the skill of English Language Learners.

- During the district-mandated English Language Development (ELD) block students are grouped by language ability. Teachers employ explicit language development strategies for the acquisition of English. During other instructional settings, all students are immersed in English language.
- Metro 2 teachers, across grade levels, have access to some effective technology tools, (e.g., promethean boards, visualizers [document cameras], and classroom computers). Students are assisted in using multi-media options consistent with grade-level expectations (e.g., Glogster, Microsoft Movie Maker, Kerpoof) within math and literacy activities. Technology supports are available to link these options to student learning targets. Additionally, the district provides opportunities for professional development in the use of technology. However, at this time the school does not have a written technology plan in place and the principal does not evaluate use of technology for instructional purposes.
- Multiple resources are available to teachers to deliver the curriculum. There is an expressed understanding that teachers may incorporate supplemental materials as appropriate. These resources are tightly linked to the learning goals of the school and include the following:
  - a well-organized general book room,
  - a Big Book and chapter book room,
  - math manipulatives and science resources,
  - hallway lockers containing additional science, social studies, literacy, books in Spanish,
  - a teacher resource room where teachers may read and reflect on professional resources,
  - a well-stocked student library, and
  - online resources available on the building website.
- A clearly-defined and well-understood homework policy is in place. Homework is linked to learning targets in literacy and mathematics and is tailored to the needs of the students. Homework assignments are designed to reinforce skills, but do not provide opportunities to extend learning. Students are expected to follow grade-level homework expectations and return completed work on time. Students express an understanding that homework has a purpose and

that returning it on time helps them to learn and understand. Teachers monitor this homework requirement and provide feedback and follow-up instruction as needed.

- A pre-school to post-secondary education (P-20) district-wide initiative was initiated four years ago. At that time, the district began a “formal” approach to pre-school education within the context of the new P-20 focus. Since then, the pre-school population in Aurora has grown from 300 students scattered across the district to almost 2000 students across 23 elementary schools. Last year as a part of the P-20 initiative, a P-2 alignment effort was initiated across the district. Next fall, principal training regarding P-5 alignment will occur.
- At Metro Elementary 2, the pre-school has earned a Qualistar rating of four stars. However, these services are available to a limited number of students. Early childhood education for three and four-year olds is available and accessible for 32 students (two three-hour sessions of 16 students each); but, there is a waiting list for these services of over 200 students. Practices in the pre-school classrooms are consistent with the district initiative. Metro 2 is in the process of working toward an aligned PreK-5 instructional focus. Pre-school staff members are integrated into the professional development opportunities of the school and one teacher serves on the Building Council. And, pre-school practices mirror those of the kindergarten instructional program (e.g., story journals, “write-to’s”, read alouds, classroom routines, and common vocabulary). Conversations are beginning regarding more intentional transition strategies from pre-school to kindergarten to assure appropriate vertical alignment.
- Instruction designed to meet the needs of students and close the learning gaps is embedded within the culture of the building. Identification and monitoring of students is ongoing as team members continually analyze student data. Data walls provide a “living” visual representation of individual student progress. Conversations centered on meeting these students’ needs are a key feature of the school’s culture. A common belief is expressed that first best instruction is guaranteed within the classroom. As a student needs additional support, interventions are provided. A collective team approach is embedded in the culture and teachers express a “no excuses” philosophy that helps promote the idea that students may enter Metro Elementary 2 below grade level, but they don’t stay there. All adults at Metro 2 consider themselves teachers and everyone at the school is a learner.
- A philosophy of “these are all our kids,” permeates the instructional culture of Metro Elementary 2.

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

- The school has an intentional culture of “no excuses” for low levels of student or staff performance. Staff members have little patience with peers who default into the belief that children (having issues of poverty, family problems, etc.) cannot be expected to perform as other children do. The expectation for students at Metro 2 is that every child will be fully prepared for successful life, through high school, college and beyond. Complaints about students are not accepted.

- Instructional time is sacred, and is not compromised by interruptions (bells ringing, announcements, discussions of student issues, etc.). Movement throughout the school by groups of students is orderly, efficient, quiet, and on time.
- The school has a working data room, in which student achievement results are displayed by individual teacher, for all to see, along with individual student achievement results, survey data and various protocols the staff uses with students (e.g., Structured Language Practice). Through continuous data tracking, staff work is directed toward answering data questions such as: "... so what are these results telling us about what must be addressed to cause these students to move ahead?"
- This year's Licensed Staff Climate Survey indicates a 21.5% increase in staff perceptions that decisions are based on student needs. Parent Survey satisfaction results range from a low of 80.3% to a high of 98.2% on various measures of parental experiences with the school.
- Embedded Professional Learning Community (PLC) practices have been in place for many years. Metro 2's instructional practices are supported by each educator's commitment to a PLC culture of high expectations (e.g., *Intentions, School Year 2011-2012* document). The belief system of the school includes:
  - Students enter school below grade level, but they do not stay there.
  - All teachers, regardless of grade level, are accountable for their impacts on CSAP.
  - An agreement that teachers and students lose no time from instruction is lived out daily.
  - Teachers are here to move things forward.
- Through implementation of various collaborative processes, including distributed leadership, the school's teacher leaders and Collaborative Coaching and Learning teams (CCLs) (based on the 90-90-90 studies) focus on follow-through to ensure attention is paid to implementation of success criteria. These practices include both lesson design and observations of one another in the delivery of the newly designed lesson. Teachers are monitored to ensure that they are not only implementing changes in their daily practice, but that they are also making the needed change (increasing achievement) with students in their classrooms.
- Each year, every teacher meets with the principal at the start of the school year to review their own student achievement data from the year prior, and to establish goals and professional development needs for the current year. The principal sets clear expectations for teachers to provide effective first instruction, to make students move ahead, and to provide diligent follow-through every day. Teachers are expected to be onboard with the high level of performance expected of staff. If student data do not show increasing achievement, support is provided to hit the mark. This is the way the school does business.
- All teachers are active participants in teaching language in their content areas. Weekly, no-nonsense dialogue about the work, and the corresponding professional development, is determined by what teachers and the administrator see in front of them in the classroom – the progress of the students. The principal personally interacts about teaching points, language structures, and guiding questions with each teacher each week.

- Staff members have created and sustained a culture of equity. Some articulate that “equity is our work and we do it through instruction.” The school’s equity efforts are framed around all children becoming critical thinkers and learners, preparing for a life that will be guided by critical thinking and problem solving. It is the notion of achieving equity in the creation of a successful life that guides teacher/administrator efforts.
- There is a safe, orderly, and equitable environment at Metro 2. Students are from high-needs backgrounds, yet are accepting and respectful, and experience a happy, predictable environment in which they belong. Routines are in place, and transitions are effective. Teachers make it a point to get to know the background of each student, and they hold themselves accountable for individual student performance. Each child is expected to take ownership of his/her own learning. Students say that people in the school care for them, they feel safe in the school, and like being here; and they articulate that they are at school to learn. However, the physical conditions in some portable classrooms may provide less than a fully supportive learning environment for students.
- Some teachers say that what is different at Metro 2 is that “someone is always watching.” The interview process clearly identifies that if hired, teachers will work in demonstration classrooms, open to help all others learn. Professional learning is a top priority, and extra time beyond the instructional day is required of teachers, without additional compensation. Complaints around these issues are not accepted in the school culture.
- The school discipline policy is variously described as either: “Take care of yourself, take care of others, and take care of the school,” or “Respect yourself, respect others and respect the school.” Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) is implemented (without the tickets and prizes), embedding the understanding that positive behavior is its own reward. Behavior issues are handled through a clear process that is immediate, thus supporting continuous implementation of classroom instruction for all students.
- The culture of the school is characterized by an agreement that teachers do not break their momentum in moving students forward. The building administrator is dedicated to removing barriers to progress, thereby focusing the work in every classroom. Minutiae are diminished, and clarity is created for staff, about what might otherwise become competing priorities. The principal is respectful of district mandates/requirements, and finds ways to honor them while targeting the focus of the staff on the highest priority needs of students.

**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.*

- The school is engaged in efforts to remove barriers to achievement through working with families and community groups. Each grade-level team provides learning opportunities throughout the school year to support parents in their understanding of how to support and reinforce their children’s learning at home.

- Through a district-designed pathway to career development, Metro 2 students are provided awareness about careers in the health sciences; at middle school, they can apply for admission to the Health Sciences Program, and take initial coursework. At high school they have the opportunity to take courses that may be eligible for college credit, perform internships, and look in-depth at career options.
- University of Colorado at Denver (UCD) Anschutz Hospital partners with Metro Elementary 2. Pharmacy students provide instruction about nutrition on Thursdays and provide healthy snacks for students. The hospital also partners to provide flu shots, dental clinic services as needed, and donates books and adopts families for Christmas. A broader focus of this partnership is the introduction of students to health science careers.
- Target stores and Food Bank of the Rockies recently initiated a twice-monthly mobile food pantry at the school. The school goal is to serve 200 families.
- Title I funds are used for a variety of parent involvement activities including monthly parent coffees around the theme of “Healthy Living, Healthy Lifestyle.” Recent topics include: breast cancer awareness, conflict resolution, finance, parenting skills, nutrition, fitness and health and domestic violence awareness. These funds are also used to promote parent engagement in literacy and math, to provide “Family Literacy Night,” and “Coffee and Kleenexes” for parents of first day kindergartners. For parents who have participated in Title I parent offerings eight times in the school year there is a Family Engagement Celebration at year end.
- An office staff member is designated to monitor, maintain, and transfer student records. A system is in place for ensuring records are relevant, current, and transferred on a timely basis.
- Several contexts and structures within the school are used for internal communication among staff members.
  - All staff members attend weekly dialogue sessions to discuss student work and share best instructional practices.
  - Grade- level team meetings occur weekly where teachers plan together.
  - Informally teachers talk with each other daily to communicate and share information. They are in and out of each other’s classrooms on a regular basis.
  - Teacher leaders communicate daily with different teachers to provide support, resources, and share ideas.
  - CCLs for literacy and math occur monthly in which teachers, teacher leaders, and special education staff, and the principal meet to discuss needs of students, collaboratively plan lessons, provide and observe the delivery of a lesson, discuss feedback and make any necessary modifications to the lesson.
  - Faculty meetings occur monthly to share logistical information with staff members.
  - Staff members communicate with each other through participation on committees such as the Instructional Leadership Committee and Building Council.
- Communication occurs regularly between staff and parents through daily/weekly homework assignments and a monthly school newsletter. Communication is provided through email, phone calls, and letters home. Informal communication happens through visits on the playground

when parents pick up and drop off their child, when they meet to plan and organize events with the community liaison, and when parents access the school's website.

- Charts and bulletin boards displayed throughout the school communicate student and teacher achievement data and examples of proficient work.

**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.*

- The school trains, supports, and recruits teachers through its teacher training partnership program with the University of Colorado at Denver's Urban Community Teacher Education Program. Typically there are eight to fourteen teacher candidates participating in the program at Metro 2. The site professor (an employee of UCD), the site coordinator (an employee of Aurora Public Schools), and the principal collaborate to ensure the experiences and learning of each teacher candidate are aligned with the best practices identified by Metro 2 staff and principal. The teacher training program includes a variety of experiences that are conducted for three semesters resulting in teacher candidates completing requirements for an elementary teaching license.
  - Metro Elementary School 2 consistently hires teacher candidates from this program when there are openings for positions. Currently ten of the 19 classroom teachers are graduates of the university partnership program (formerly the Initial Professional Teaching Program). In addition, many of the candidates are hired by other elementary schools in Aurora.
- Annually all teachers at Metro 2 commit to being an active member of the school's culture of collaborative professional learning. In addition, teachers commit to being reflective about their teaching practice, being a positive and productive participant in professional development, continuing to learn and implement improved teaching practices, sharing in leadership and participating in parent involvement events.
- Long-term professional development for individual staff members is embedded in the structure and culture of Metro Elementary School 2. Literacy and mathematics teacher leaders provide coaching, mentoring, and leadership in professional development. All teachers participate in instructional dialogue sessions, CCLs, book studies, grade level planning, and daily collegial conversations.
- All Metro 2 staff participate in a professional development system that includes coaching and mentoring, and updates content knowledge and professional practices with the clear outcome of moving students toward higher levels of learning. The focus of professional development is to provide best initial instruction for all students.
- Student achievement data and teacher instructional needs data are analyzed to determine the content, format and context of professional development.

- Trends and patterns of CSAP data over several years are analyzed to determine professional development needs of staff and determine the focus for a school year. This year vocabulary instruction is the area which staff members are studying in depth and applying in their instructional practice.
- DRA2 data, mathematics assessment data, and student work samples are analyzed to determine what teachers need to know and do better to provide effective instruction that moves all students forward in their reading, mathematics, and writing achievement.
- The principal and teacher leaders also gather data about teacher needs through walkthroughs, conversations with and requests from groups and individual teachers to determine the content and focus of professional development.
- Professional development experiences are research-based, results-oriented, job- embedded and ongoing. The focus for professional development is on developing teachers' knowledge and skills so all are effective instructional decision-makers. A variety of opportunities and approaches are provided.
  - Staff members participate in weekly dialogue sessions for 1 hour and 40 minutes after school. The sessions include an identified inquiry question, professional reading about the question, discussion of the reading and ideas, and team planning related to the identified topic. Teacher leaders provide follow-up coaching as requested.
  - Teachers of literacy participate in monthly three-hour CCL sessions. Substitutes are hired to provide groups of teachers release time to meet together. Teachers of mathematics participate in CCL sessions in one-hour segments during their specials time. There is a defined process for the CCL session with teacher leaders leading the process. They analyze data, develop an inquiry question, and identify professional reading related to the question. During the CCL, grade-level teams plan a lesson using the new learning and identify success criteria. Someone teaches the lesson with teacher leaders and/or peers observing and the group assesses the outcome of the lesson. Teachers reflect by discussing whether the instructional approach/strategy moved students to proficiency, how do they know, and if not, what needs to be done.
  - Voluntary book studies are offered monthly after school for anyone wanting to read a common book whose topic has been identified through data as a student need. Book group members read portions of the book, apply the learning in their classroom instruction, and share the results. Currently about 10 staff members are reading *Word Choices* by Peter Johnston to enhance their learning and practice of vocabulary instruction. Additional books read regarding vocabulary are cited in the school improvement plan.
  - Grade-level team planning occurs on a weekly basis. Teachers collaboratively examine student work, discuss instructional approaches and resources, and plan instruction.

- All professional development sessions have agendas that are emailed to participants prior to the event. The agenda includes what participants need to bring and/or be prepared to share, do and discuss. The expectation is that everyone will be ready to fully participate in the learning and application of all professional development experiences.
- Instructional paraprofessionals are considered partners in classroom teaching. They receive job-embedded professional development by observing the teaching occurring in classrooms, participating in some collaborative planning with classroom teachers, and frequently discussing student needs and best instructional practices to address student needs with the classroom teachers. Some paraprofessionals advance their knowledge and skills through online courses and district classes. The principal meets monthly with instructional paraprofessionals to solicit their input and identify any needs they might have.
- Four teacher leaders provide support to teachers in implementing new practices. A math and a literacy teacher share a primary classroom and another set share an intermediate classroom so that each are available half time to plan, lead, and provide ongoing, in-depth professional development. Teacher leaders provide a variety of professional development opportunities resulting in instructional practices becoming institutionalized within Metro Elementary School 2. Teacher leader tasks include:
  - facilitating the weekly Dialogue sessions;
  - planning and facilitating CCL sessions;
  - coaching and providing feedback for groups or individual teachers;
  - demonstrating teaching/modeling lessons;
  - securing resources including professional reading materials for identified topics;
  - responding to questions; and
  - serving on the Instructional Leadership Team and Grade Level Leadership Team.
- There is a .5 FTE English Language Acquisition (ELA) teacher leader who supports teachers by organizing materials and lessons for the English Language Development (ELD) block. She co-plans the content of the ELD session with some teachers and provides theory and suggestions to individual staff members about effective teaching of language structures. She also works with teachers during after-school dialogue on use of sheltered strategies for instruction.
- It is an expectation and realization that all Metro 2 staff members participate in collaboration, problem-solving, consensus-building, and meeting facilitation. Staff members assume leadership roles in various capacities such as clinical teacher, facilitator of meetings, organizer of book study, coach, mentor, and demonstrator of best instructional practices.
- The effectiveness and implementation of best instructional practices examined in professional development opportunities is consistently monitored by the principal, teacher leaders, and individual teachers themselves.
  - The principal visits each classroom at least weekly. While there, she records strengths of instruction and areas of concern. She emails the notes to the teacher and they may conduct a follow-up conversation especially if an area of concern is identified.

- Teacher leaders in their coaching role support teachers by observing their implementation of instructional practices and facilitating a dialogue to collaboratively reflect on the application of best practices and determine next learning steps.
- Individual teachers reflect on their practices during the weekly dialogue session, CCLs, book study, grade-level planning and informal discussions with colleagues.
- Walkthroughs are conducted periodically to examine use of effective instructional strategies.
- The principal participates in professional development that continues to build her capacity as an instructional leader. Aurora Public Schools targets professional development for principals on their role as an instructional leader.
  - The principal attended intensive, ongoing seminars through the National Institute for School Leadership (NISL) over a two-year period.
  - Parts of monthly principal meetings are devoted to issues related to instructional leadership.
  - Student achievement directors organize learning and sharing sessions (PLCs) for principals based on individual needs and/or requests for building instructional leadership skills.
  - The principal participates in reading all the professional materials and discussions about instructional practices that occur in the building.
  - The principal demonstrates instructional leadership by focusing the work on developing best instructional practices to continually move student achievement forward.
- The staff at Metro 2 collaborates to obtain resources for professional development by writing grants, allocating teacher equivalent (TE or FTE) for teacher leader positions, using district allocated professional development days to provide weekly time, and budgeting federal and district funds for professional development.
- A clearly defined formal and informal evaluation process which is connected to student learning is implemented for all staff members in the school. Formal evaluations are an integral part of the school and contribute to establishing it as a self-renewing learning organization. The principal's weekly classroom visits with feedback, teacher leaders coaching with groups and individuals and the follow-up observations and discussions concerning effectiveness of instructional practices establish an ongoing feedback loop as part of the evaluation system.

**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 mission of the school is clearly understood by all staff members. That mission is to provide the academic work and experiences that produce proficient performance by all students. It is grounded in the shared belief that all students can learn at grade level or higher. High expectations are held for all students' performance and the performance of all teachers. The teachers do what it takes to achieve student success. The principal describes the mission and vision as, "This school is about people working together. I expect teachers to continue to learn and that the students will grow." Teachers who want to work at Metro Elementary 2 sign a commitment each year to work in a professional learning community culture in which they are reflective about their teaching practice and commit to continual learning and the implementation of new strategies that improve that practice.
- All staff members continually participate in analysis of student performance data. The school has a data room that is filled with displays of disaggregated data about student performance on a variety of tests over time. Weekly dialogues about student achievement results and planning for instruction are held after school. Teacher leaders conduct Collaborative Coaching and Learning sessions (CCLs) to assist teachers with literacy and mathematics instruction and how to identify proficient work. From the weekly dialogues and CCLs, students' instructional needs are determined and goals are set for improvement. The principal participates in most of these sessions and also holds individual meetings with teachers about their students' results and plans for improvement. The school's results are benchmarked with other schools that have similar demographics.
- Staff members report that instructional time is maximized and protected from interruptions. They also say that the continual presence of the principal in each classroom (weekly) with immediate feedback is an important factor in keeping the focus on quality instruction. The principal gives feedback to teachers about observed strengths in practice and offers questions to consider for improvement. They report that this continual feedback "keeps them on their toes" and empowers them to do their best work. Suggestions for improvement that are offered by the principal and teacher leaders are welcomed because the regular informal observations are affirming, encouraging, and focused on teacher learning rather than on evaluation.
- Learning from and engaging with diverse groups is ingrained in the educational environment. Students are known as individuals and express that they are cared for, encouraged to do their best, and receive help from a variety of people. Instructional support staff express that they are well integrated into the work of the school and are assisted with training so they know how to hold high expectations for the work they do with students. Support staff members feel their contributions are valued. Teachers and the principal often give them tokens of appreciation.
- The school has effective shared leadership structures, epitomizing a distributive leadership model. An Instructional Leadership Team, composed of the principal and teacher leaders, plans targeted professional development. A Grade-level Leadership Team, composed of a representative from each grade level as well as the principal and teacher leaders, monitors progress on school improvement goals and is beginning to update proficiency exemplars. In addition, an Instructional Support Team (composed of the principal, the community liaison, the ESL teacher leader, specialists and classroom teachers, SPED teachers and SPED support specialists) meet to develop strategies for students in need of more interventions. These

interventions are designed to keep the students in the regular classrooms with more support. Classroom teachers and instructional support personnel provide leadership by setting goals for each student based on performance data.

- Exterior doors of the school are locked during the day and staff members have access with keys. Visitors are required to sign-in at the office. When teachers see someone they do not recognize they stop to ask if they can help or direct them somewhere. Students and parents express that school is a safe and caring place and some have asked to come to the summer session because they want to continue to be with their teachers in the environment they experience during the school year. Students, parents, and staff know that they can go to the community liaison to receive help and that their concerns are quickly addressed. Discipline issues are quickly and competently addressed and the climate is business-like and respectful.
- For the principal and all who serve as leaders, it is not about the position—it's about the work. A climate of trust has been built in which people feel free to receive information and assistance from each other without concern about whether they will be perceived as lacking knowledge or skill. This trust has resulted from past success and from current experience in which the principal operates as a learner herself, often referring to what she is learning from the teachers. The principal is a writer and was nominated for the 2010 Colorado Children's Book Award. She teaches writing skills once or twice a week to a group of students who come to her office to meet with her. Everyone is constantly training and practicing with tenacity and energy in order to collectively become masters of instruction to meet their students' learning needs. They have *behaved* their way into an organizational climate of trust and success.
- Procedures and communication are complete and transparent. Templates for meetings contain information about agendas, attendees, items discussed, objectives, and outcomes. Everyone expects the best from themselves and gives the extra time and energy to ensure successful outcomes. Most teachers and some instructional paraprofessionals participate in after-school teaching (Skillbuilders) to extend students' learning opportunities. The staff members and principal are loyal to each other, take pride in their work, and are excited and happy when the students succeed. They are continually energized for ongoing efforts that realize higher student achievement.
- Staff members and the principal know that working as a highly functioning team is more satisfying and produces better outcomes than working in isolation. They waste no time on blaming or worrying about issues outside their control. They get to work and stay on task to perfect what they do control—their knowledge and skill in operating excellent classrooms, caring for all students and taking responsibility for the whole school to be effective in meeting all students' needs. The principal sets expectations around the work and then empowers people to do it. She makes appropriate decisions and does so decisively, and has the capacity herself to lead capacity building. Staff members report that the principal knows the professional literature and research and chooses professional development activities that are relevant and useful to advancing their work with respect to the improvement goals. A sense of urgency for doing the right work and promoting increased student achievement is pervasive and is modeled by the principal.

- Staff members express that their work environment is invigorating with lots of learning and growth occurring in their practice. The culture is supportive, mentoring, and collaborative. People say when questioned about practices, “It’s just the way we do things here.” Staff members who want to work in isolation or complain are not comfortable in the culture because these behaviors are not accepted by other staff members. Staff turnover is minimal and some teachers who have taught in other places express that they wish they had come to Metro Elementary School 2 earlier in their careers. Many teachers state that they are learning so much about how to refine their craft and enjoy being part of a high- functioning team of educators.
- Students who were interviewed are united in their understanding of why the school works so well and why the students have high achievement. They say,

“She (the principal) knows what is happening in our classrooms and she is always there. She knows us.”

“She (the principal) motivates us and makes us believe we can do it.”

“Our teachers know how to teach and we are getting a good education. We know it because our scores are high.”

“Our teachers and the principal are strict and manage things well, but they care about us. There is no conflict here. This is a happy learning place.”

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

- As part of the budget development process, teacher instructional leaders, grade-level leaders, and specials teachers help determine priority learning needs through a comprehensive review of data. From this, goals for the school improvement plan and budget allocations are determined by the principal and leadership team, which are then reviewed by staff. The accountability committee is advised about the proposed budget and has the opportunity to discuss and raise questions about how the school’s priorities are being supported by the resources.
  - Most of the school’s budget allocations are determined by the district, and are based on student enrollment. Specific staffing allocations such as FTE for special education and specials teachers (art, physical education, music, technology) are district-determined.
  - School leadership is able to decide how teacher-FTEs are distributed. The principal bases staff assignments on student learning needs and adjusts them in response to achievement and growth data.
  - In the past, budget line item allocations were based on historical expenditures, and teachers received a set amount for discretionary classroom use. The art, music, and physical education teachers still receive resources in this manner. For the past several years, resource allocations for other classrooms are based on identified learning needs. For example, intentional teaching of vocabulary is the primary instructional focus in the school improvement plan. Budget allocations to purchase book study materials for

professional development are aligned to this need. Funding that targets professional development has assisted staff to improve and refine their strategies and practices and engage in building collective capacity. If teachers request materials to meet the specific needs of the students in their classes, resources are provided.

- Budget expenditures are monitored monthly by the principal and building secretary. Internal adjustments are made throughout the year to address changing needs, while staying within the over-all “bottom-line” allocations.
- Metro Elementary 2 is a Schoolwide Title I school therefore all categorical funds are integrated with general funds to maximize support for identified needs. Staff and administration report that Title I funds are used predominately for personnel (teachers and instructional paraprofessionals, teacher leaders), professional development and materials, a family liaison, books for students, family involvement activities, and materials for the after-school tutoring program. Categorical funds help support implementation of the school improvement plan. Actions outlined in the school improvement plan are intentionally based on a comprehensive study of best practices and are informed by research, with a purposeful focus on supporting student achievement. Planning is ongoing, extending beyond one year at-a-time.
- The school takes advantage of grant funding and the use of outside resources such as partnerships with businesses and service organizations. The on-site partnership with the University of Colorado at Denver provides teacher candidates who are available to work with students in classrooms. Teachers are supported in their efforts to obtain grants for special projects or equipment. The technology teacher and some classroom teachers have been successful in obtaining equipment and library books to support classroom instruction. The principal also writes grants to supplement the school’s budget. Any consideration for writing a grant and seeking outside resources is filtered through the question, “How would these resources support the work of the school?”
- Grade- level teams are empowered to develop the schedule for their instructional day.
  - District requirements for the number of minutes for literacy, math, and English language development (ELD) instructional blocks are honored.
  - Each grade-level team is provided the schedule for lunch and specials. The team then uses this information to determine how it will structure the instructional day for their students.
  - As a part of this work, grade-level teams also determine how to most effectively use small blocks of undedicated time, often using them to extend learning blocks for literacy, math, or writing, depending on targeted needs of their students.
  - Some grade-level teams propose that a teacher with very strong skills in math instruction partner with a member of the team who is highly skilled in literacy to exchange students for instruction. This configuration is supported by the principal when it optimizes student learning.

- Specials classes are intentionally scheduled opposite the literacy block, (i.e., primary grades have literacy in the morning, with their specials in the afternoon.) This is reversed for intermediate grades.
- Specials teachers provide additional in-class support during literacy and math blocks one day-a-week to help students who have differentiated learning needs.
- Instructional paraprofessionals are scheduled to provide supplementary in-class support for literacy and math.
- The staff makes efficient use of instructional time by having well-defined and implemented classroom management procedures and by teaching and guiding students to make efficient transitions throughout the day. Programs that occur during the instructional day, such as assemblies and field trips, are aligned with instructional content.
- Collaboration time is an effective resource at Metro Elementary 2. This designated time is focused on determining students' learning needs and classroom instruction. Horizontal articulation takes place in grade-level team meetings and vertical articulation takes place during After School Dialog.
- A variety of learning opportunities are available to students beyond the school day. Several examples are:
  - Skillbuilders after-school supplementary instruction is available to address targeted needs for small groups of students.
  - A 5th Block summer school is designed to sustain and extend learning through the vacation time.
  - A two-week integrated science 5th Block is also available for talented and gifted students.
  - Science club is an after-school option.

**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 school's living mission is, **“We help every child, every day, grow and learn to think, and master the skills needed to succeed at Metro 2, in middle school, high school, college and the future.”** Everything the school does is intentionally framed by this universal belief. The school's culture is powerfully infused with actions that demonstrate intentional and strategic efforts to promote and realize proficiency for all students, equity in opportunities to learn, and how all students are treated.
- Planning for the school's improvement plan is generated from ongoing, comprehensive analysis of current and longitudinal data from multiple sources. Study begins by reviewing CSAP trend data for achievement and academic growth in reading, writing, and mathematics. Profiles are generated to study Metro Elementary School 2 data in comparison with similar schools in the district

(demographics) and with state averages. Data are disaggregated by proficiency levels, ESL, special education, and AGATE (Gifted and Talented) students. School profiles that monitor growth in proficiency in English by English Language Learners (ELL) are reflected in Colorado English Language Acquisition (CELA) and Annual Measurable Academic Outcomes (AMAO) data. With a 92.8% poverty rate and a 91.9 minority population, the school's demographics are not disaggregated by these sub-groups; instead the school studies the entire school population. Growth data are profiled using the Colorado Growth Model quadrants and posted in the data room for review and analysis. Achievement results from CSAP and the district interim assessments (fall, winter, spring) are graphed for each class, by teacher, and posted in the data room for analysis. While the practice of publicly displaying each class's data initially created discomfort, it is now an understood expectation that all teachers are accountable for developing learners who achieve to their highest level each year and that this practice fits with the culture of transparency within the school.

- DRA2 and CSAP data are used to identify strengths and needs regarding literacy development. Data are collected for grades K-5.
  - District Interim Assessments and report card grades provide other data points.
  - Climate surveys from staff and parents are analyzed, with specific goals included in the improvement plan to address areas of concern.
- The school sets high targets for its goals and differentiates these targets for each grade level within the core content areas of reading, writing, and mathematics.
    - District leadership expects that academic growth goals be set to at least the 60<sup>th</sup> percentile. For some grade levels and content areas, this target may result in an expected increase in growth by up to 35 percentile points. By content area, grade-level growth goals are set at 3 percentile points above the present rating for those grades that have exceeded the 60<sup>th</sup> percentile growth target.
    - Proficiency achievement goals are included in the school improvement plan, with DRA2 and CSAP assessments and report card grades being the primary data sources. Achievable, yet rigorous goals are differentiated for each grade level, by content area, to address specific needs. Additionally, specific goals to aggressively decrease the percentage of students scoring “unsatisfactory” are written for reading and mathematics at each grade.
    - Targeted goals are set to close identified achievement gaps by 5–10 percentage points for sub-group populations with gaps.
  - Based on results from annual parent and staff climate surveys, the 2010-11 plan has a goal for enhancing parent/school partnerships and reinforcing the practice of basing decisions around the needs of students.
  - Attributes of Metro Elementary School 2's improvement plan (SIP) include evidence of the following:
    - extensive study of current, reliable educational research and literature by the principal and staff. From this ongoing and embedded work, the principal and staff are well-informed when

determining and implementing the SIP's action steps and strategies for strategically meeting the plan's learning goals;

- clear reference in the SIP's goals, action steps, and strategies to Colorado performance expectations for literacy and content comprehension; and
  - intentional narrowing of improvement efforts to support one high-impact focus area. The school staff and principal identified vocabulary development for this year. This decision reflects the principal and staff understanding that improvements in student achievement are more apt to be realized through the use of high-impact practices. The action steps outlined in the school improvement plan reflect an understanding that intentional development of academic vocabulary and building increased understanding and use of richer vocabulary positively impact student academic achievement and growth in reading, writing, and other content areas.
- The design of the school improvement plan includes quarterly review of the school's progress toward accomplishment of the specific action steps and accompanying strategies.
    - Evidence criteria are clearly and concisely described as indicators for "Student Success," "Adult Success," and implementation roles and responsibilities by Professional Learning Communities and the Instructional Leadership Team.
    - Timelines are established to build a progression of teaching and learning to accomplish the end target by fourth quarter.
    - Benchmarking of student development of vocabulary is accomplished through the quarterly common grade-level assessments and evaluation of student work, using evidence sources such as writing, use of effective strategies to know word meaning, and documented increase in reading comprehension.
    - Professional development is tightly aligned to support teachers in their learning and application of targeted, intentional immersion of vocabulary development in all content areas and environments throughout the school.
    - All instructional staff and the principal regularly meet in various team and focus group configurations to conduct status checks, collaboratively determine any needed adjustments to the work, and provide collegial support for "next implementation steps."
  - Shared ownership to accomplish the goals of the school improvement plan is evident. All staff members know and participate in the school-wide focus on vocabulary development and expansion. Evidence is noted in all classrooms that strategies selected through the study of best practices are skillfully applied; exemplars, word walls, and enrichment words are posted; and student application of strategies and use of new words is common. The staff and administrator efforts toward raising student achievement and academic growth are systematic and systemic.

- The accountability committee, comprised of parents, assists with developing and monitoring goals for the school improvement plan. The committee meets several times during the school year to examine student data, and learn about the goals and actions for the school improvement plan. This year, the group learned about and agreed with the school’s focus on vocabulary development in literacy and other content areas.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION**

### **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.

In the *90/90/90 Schools* report by Douglas Reeves, the following five critical characteristics of high achievement schools are defined:

- a laser-like focus on student achievement,
- clear curriculum choices,
- frequent assessment of student progress and multiple opportunities for improvement,
- an emphasis on non-fiction writing, and
- collaborative scoring of student work.

The teachers of Metro Elementary 2 embed these characteristics within the school culture. For all schools, a well-defined curriculum, effectively used assessments, and rigorous instruction are central to the realization of student academic achievement. It is imperative that teachers understand curricular expectations of the district and follow them; however, the impetus of excellent instruction lies not only in “what” is taught, but “how” it is taught. It is crucial that exceptional teachers be trusted to make professional decisions (e.g., pacing, choosing resources) to support acceleration of learning for every student.

In highly effective schools, instruction is purposeful, based on researched best practices, and guided by the use of diagnostic data. This is both an art and a science. *“Though classroom instructional strategies should clearly be based on sound science and research, knowing when to use them and with whom is more of an art”* (Marzano, 2007). Students must be assessed regularly in order to identify gaps and monitor growth. However, assessment is ineffective without action on the results. High performing schools use the information garnered from assessment to make changes in instruction, create effective interventions, and deliver instruction that is designed to move all students forward. Metro Elementary 2 teachers enact these effective practices on a daily basis.

In *Final Report: High-Needs Schools – What Does It Take to Beat the Odds?* ( McRel, 2005), it is apparent that the academic press for achievement stands out as a necessary factor in helping low-achieving students perform to standards. A culture that believes “our students can be successful” and “we are teachers of every student” is what transforms a list of best practices into a highly-functioning system in which learners excel. Trust, respect, and accountability abound. Success breeds success. The actions and words of the principal and teachers at Metro Elementary 2 clearly communicate to students that high expectations are non-negotiable.

Researchers report that the ability to instill in students a belief that they can learn is critical to the success of effective low socio-economic status schools. The underlying components include a sharp, school-wide emphasis on high achievement, clear focus on high expectations for all students, emphasis on all students mastering basic skills, and the use of records to monitor progress (Marzano, 2000). Teachers and students repeatedly communicated that high expectations are embedded within their school. Students state they know they can learn and the teachers are available to help them when they need assistance.

Schools have a multitude of responsibilities and expectations. Navigating through this maze is often difficult. It can be easy to lose sight of the goal, to wander off the path, or to get lost in the minutiae. This can lead to an organization that starts and stops repeatedly, or that realizes slow, if any, progress. Staff members at these schools might feel a sense of being overwhelmed to the extent of paralysis and an inability to move forward. A successful school is one in which all members effectively navigate the maze by prioritizing and focusing on those few high impact concepts and practices that lead to positive, sustained changes that result in higher student achievement. These schools are able to accomplish one or two initiatives well, embed them in daily routines and slowly, over time, add new ideas and skills. The principal at Metro 2 has set structures and systems into place that support teachers in focusing upon the right work, keeping distractions and confusion to a minimum.

Metro Elementary School 2 is a high-performing school, whose staff members focus on one objective: raising student achievement. Although this is the focus, relationships with students are paramount. Overheard throughout the school is the sentiment that we teach students, not standards. The success of the students is the success of the staff.

### **Next Steps:**

When a school, such as Metro 2, is already “good” it takes conscious thought and purposeful decision-making to advance from “good” to “great” status. Making a commitment to the students to bring

excellence into every classroom, every minute, every day can provide additional skills and tools necessary for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. A firm foundation is already established.

With the “good” to “great” inspiration in mind, we respectfully provide the following suggestions as next steps:

- Include information literacy standards in the curriculum to provide students with the necessary tools for secondary and post-secondary work. Access the district’s Information Literacy and Technology Plan and tightly link it to the schools’ learning targets. Include a regular process for evaluating the use of technology for instructional purposes through principal walkthroughs. Include ongoing professional development to support teachers as they learn multiple ways to integrate technology into lesson design and presentation.
- To further enhance student understanding of tasks, increase the use of models of student work for lessons.
- Develop constructive feedback practices that clearly describe what a student has done that is quality work and also that specifically describe what a student can do to improve. This formative feedback is important to do both orally and through written comments.
- Engage students in setting personal learning goals and chart their progress to further invite them as partners on their learning journey.
- Expand upon the practice of using peer and self-assessments in the classroom.
- Although homework provides follow-up and practice for students, consider adding extension opportunities for those students who are capable of advancing at a quicker pace or those students who could go more deeply into the subject matter.
- First best instruction meets the needs of most of the students in the classrooms; however, at times, Tier II (RtI) students need additional support. Although classroom teachers often have the skills necessary to provide some interventions (small groups, additional time, scaffolding) there are times when additional interventions are necessary. To effectively move all students, consider additional methods of providing some Tier III research-based interventions for those students with limiting disabilities.
- Ensure that the many effective instructional practices and structures are sustained in all classrooms.

## **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. 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 are fostered by school leadership and staff.
- ✓ 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.

**High functioning schools operate as effective learning communities and support a climate conducive to performance excellence.** Metro 2’s long-standing foundational work of collaboration as a Professional Learning Community (PLC), the implementation of purpose-driven collaborative teams and After School Dialogue for professional learning time, as well as the authentic inclusion of staff members as partners in problem solving and data analysis, is the right work. Schmoker (2006) observes that a professional learning community is one of the most effective ways to influence real change in schools. “Teachers have to practice change and continually work with others on debugging the problems they encounter” (Linda Darling Hammond, 1997).

**Effective PLC practices are embedded throughout the culture of the school.** Metro Elementary 2 staff and principal continue to push forward, changing and improving professional practices and the corresponding school culture as student results require. “As human beings, we do not have the ability to control the thoughts and beliefs of others, so cultural change requires something more profound. It requires leaders adept at gaining cooperation and skilled in the arts of diplomacy, salesmanship, patience, endurance, and encouragement. It takes knowledge of where a school has been and agreement about where the school should go. It requires an ability to deal with beliefs, policies, and institutions that have been established to buffer educators from change and accountability. It is a tightrope act of major proportion” (A. Muhammad, 2009). Metro Elementary School 2 is actively engaged in the beliefs and practices described above. Leadership demonstrates the skills of gaining cooperation and trust of staff members by engaging them in genuine dialogue about student achievement.

**In effective learning environments, the district and schools work in partnership with families and community groups to remove barriers to learning in an effort to meet the intellectual, social, career, and developmental needs of all students.** The staff and administration of Metro Elementary School 2 acknowledge the challenge of meaningfully engaging parents and the community in this important work and realize there are opportunities for growth.

**Successful schools are committed to professional learning at all levels and provide multiple, meaningful learning opportunities.** They provide coherent learning opportunities for educators. Just as successful schools foster the belief that all children can learn, they also promote the belief that all

adults—including everyone working in the system -can learn and provide opportunities for such learning to occur” (American Institutes for Research, 2005). The district recognizes the value of allowing individual school learning communities (Metro 2) a voice in the choice of professional development that is continuous, iterative, and meets the needs of school staff members where they are.

There is a growing body of research that identifies features common to effective professional development. The research points to the effectiveness of sustained, job-embedded, collaborative teacher learning strategies. Collective research supports professional development that:

- deepens teachers’ knowledge of content and how to teach it to students,
- helps teachers understand how students learn specific content,
- provides opportunities for active, hands-on learning,
- enables teachers to acquire new knowledge, apply it to practice, and reflect on the results with colleagues,
- is part of a school reform effort that links curriculum, assessment, and standards to professional learning,
- is collaborative and collegial,
- is intensive and sustained over time (Darling-Hammond and Richardson, 2009).

Metro Elementary 2’s comprehensive professional development system exemplifies these research-based characteristics.

#### **Next Steps:**

***“The culture of an enterprise plays the dominant role in exemplary performance” (Deal & Peterson, 1999).***

- Sustain the powerful practices described in the Findings Section of this report that support the school’s PLC culture of equity for all learners (both staff and students). Share them with other schools.
- Continue to minimize the impact of external minutiae on classroom instruction.
- Evaluate the physical aspects of the learning environment in the portable classrooms.
- Consider opportunities that could be provided to publicly celebrate student achievement.
- Move forward in the development of the work of the school through authentic collaboration, continuously embedding the purposes, context and rationale for the work at hand, and continuing to ensure alignment with agreed-upon values, beliefs and norms. As staff changes and new roles emerge, consider appropriate re-visiting and articulation of the values, beliefs, and norms upon which the culture is built.

***“We may have our differences, but in times of crisis we pull together” (Deal & Peterson, 1999).***

- In light of staffing changes for next year due to budget cuts from the district, explore ways to sustain the practice of iterative professional development with a different teacher leader configuration.

## 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 processes) 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 manage 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 plans(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.

In the forward to Fullan's book, *All Systems Go*, Peter Senge asks, "Are we ready to get serious?" when he writes that for a quarter century America has been trying to improve its schools. One quick-fix after another has been driven through systems and while all the efforts have had merit, none has resulted in the needed improvement outcomes (2010). Some schools, such as Metro Elementary 2 have gotten serious. The school's organizational practices correspond with results of effectiveness studies by several respected authors of school improvement. The advice of Michael Fullan is mirrored at Metro Elementary 2, "Focus on a small number of ambitious priorities and do them well." Related to focus are simplicity, clarity, and priority. Schmoker states, "For an organization to maintain a focus on its highest priorities, it must simplify and repeatedly clarify them so that everyone in the organization knows implicitly what to do and what not to do" (2011). The principal and teachers at Metro Elementary 2 understand this premise.

"In today's effective schools, the principal is seen as the "lead learner" or "leader of leaders" and realizes that expertise resides in many people, not just one person. School improvement happens in the classrooms, and all staff members are viewed as instructional leaders. The responsibility for leadership in learning belongs to everyone," (Hulley and Dier, 2009). At Metro Elementary School 2, everyone leads and everyone learns. Everyone takes responsibility for student learning. Over the past decade Michael Fullan has clarified that real change is possible, but only by taking a truly systemic approach,

whether in a district or in a school. “Collective capacity generates the emotional commitment and the technical expertise that no amount of individual capacity working alone can come close to matching” (Fullan, 2010). Only broad engagement of teachers working together (collective capacity) and believing that they can improve student performance has produced and sustained increased student achievement.

The Metro Elementary School 2’s improvement plan is aligned with Doug Reeves’s position that, “the essential purpose of planning is to develop a tool to improve student achievement and which focuses on actions that add value and provide consistent monitoring and evaluation. Most important, effective strategies are executed by teachers and leaders who begin the process with confidence that their professional practices influence student achievement” (Reeves, 2009).

The Effective School Practices Review team found that Metro Elementary School 2 has exemplary organizational practices. The school operates as a highly functioning system that is effective in building professional relationships, establishes collaborative processes that ensure continual learning and refinement of practice, and focuses intense energy on clearly defined outcomes for students.

### **Next Steps:**

***Institutional improvement is driven by changes in people, resulting from their new understandings, new skills, and new ways of coordinating their work (Redding & Walberg, 2008).***

- Continue the practices of weekly observations and providing timely feedback for teachers to assist them in sustaining high performance and expectations. Consider aggregating patterns of excellent instructional practices for discussion and display results in the MPR (data) room.
- Determine ways to share the school’s adopted budget with staff in the spirit of the school’s culture of transparency. Consider posting the budget in the teachers’ lounge or on an electronic bulletin board. Provide quarterly status reports in the same manner.
- Continue to sustain the school’s ongoing budgeting process whereby the principal and staff look beyond one year to anticipate and plan for the next year or two on how to best maximize the school’s declining resources. This proactive practice supports stability within the school that, if missing, could generate undue disequilibrium among staff regarding, “How can we do what we need to do without resources we’ve had in the past?”
- Continue to embrace the school’s exemplary culture for maximizing instructional time for students as a highly valued resource.
- Ensure that students with large learning gaps are matched with the most highly qualified teachers and that all instructional support paraprofessionals have the necessary knowledge and training to meet the learning needs of students.
- Publicly celebrate the collective value of all the external resources that are obtained through grants, foundations, and service groups. Express how each resource is strategically aligned to the work of the school, and that all acquisition of external resources is filtered through the lens

of, “How will this support our work?” Recognize the laudable efforts by the principal and teachers for their hard work to seek additional support for Metro Elementary School 2.

- Use the school’s processes and skills that have been developed for data analysis and improvement planning as a foundation for transitioning into the Unified School Improvement Planning process. Root cause analysis is a critical component in the Unified School Improvement Plan. Capitalize on this structured analysis to identify root causes for the high-level of success by the school as well as to identify root causes for areas that are impeding higher levels of achievement. Continue to intentionally embrace and sustain those practices that are identified as factors contributing to the school’s success.
- As changes occur in the teacher leader positions and the designated time for reflection and planning is diminished, ensure that student data continue to be deeply mined to guide the development and implementation monitoring of the school improvement plan goals, action steps, and strategies.
- Intentionally progress monitor achievement and growth development of the identified achievement gap students throughout the year (male students in reading and writing, Hispanic students in reading, African-American and Caucasian students in writing, and African American students in math) to ensure that there is acceleration of their learning to reach proficiency through strategic support in all classrooms and through additional time and opportunities, if data show that need. Include specific implementation and monitoring action steps and strategies for closing the achievement gaps in the 2011-12 Unified School Improvement Plan.
- Continue efforts to recruit parents and community members to be part of the Metro 2 Accountability Committee. Consider finding a means to have staff members on the building accountability committee so it is more representative of all stakeholders. Engage members in authentic accountability committee work as much as possible.

## REFERENCES

- Benson, David. (2008). *The Standards-Based Teaching/Learning Cycle: A Guide to Standards-Based Practices for Districts and Schools in Colorado*. Denver, CO: The Colorado Coalition for Standards-Based Education.
- Collins, J. (2001). *From Good to Great*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.
- Darling-Hammond, L. & Richardson, N. (2009). Teacher learning: What matters? *Educational Leadership*, February (46-53).
- Deal, Terrance & Peterson, Kent. (1999). *Shaping School Culture: The Heart of Leadership (1, 105)*. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass Education.
- DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R. (2008). *Revisiting Professional Learning Communities that Work: New Insights for Improving Schools*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.
- Fullan, M. (2010). *All Systems Go: The Change Imperative for Whole System Reform*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Fullan, Michael. Leadership Development: The Larger Context. *Educational Leadership*. (October, 2009). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Hulley, Wayne and Linda Dier. (2009) *Getting By or Getting Better: Applying Effective Schools Research to Today's Issues*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.
- Marzano, Robert J. (2007). *The Art and Science of Teaching*. Alexandria, VA. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Muhammad, Anthony. (2009). *Transforming School Culture: How to Overcome Staff Division*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.
- Redding, S. & Walberg, H. (Eds). (2008). *Handbook on Statewide Systems of Support*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.
- Reeves, Douglas B. (2009). *Leading Change in Your School*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Reeves, Douglas B. (2006). *The Learning Leader: How to Focus School Improvement for Better Results*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Schmoker, Mike. (2011). *Focus: Elevating the Essentials to Radically Improve Student Learning*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Schmoker, Mike. (2006). *Results Now*. Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

## **ADDENDUM**

### **University of Colorado at Denver: Urban Community Teacher Education Program**

The University of Colorado at Denver's Urban Community Teacher Education Program is an ongoing, job-embedded, and hands-on training program for teacher candidates. Students spend three semesters at Metro Elementary School 2 working with students in the classroom under the guidance of the university site professor, classroom clinical teacher, and school's literacy and math teacher leaders. Teacher candidates learn about best teaching practices, apply them as they teach students, and receive feedback to help them hone their instructional skills throughout their training period.

- Semester 1 and 2: Teacher candidates (university students) work in the classroom of a clinical teacher (Metro 2 staff member) two days per week observing, supporting students, and practicing instructional skills. In addition, candidates participate in site seminars which are full days of intensive instruction built around the constructs that guide Metro 2's work. These conceptual frameworks which include conditions for learning, reading and writing process, supports and challenges in text, gradual release of responsibility, and a teaching/learning cycle in mathematics form the basis of concepts students are learning, observing, reflecting, and practicing.
- Semester 3: Teacher candidates are at Metro 2 and in a classroom three days per week the first quarter and five days weekly the last quarter, spending half the time in a primary classroom and half the time in an intermediate classroom. During this semester, the teacher candidate completes requirements for student teaching by being the solo teacher of a classroom for three weeks.
- Teacher candidates participate in professional development with Metro 2 staff members including weekly instructional dialogue sessions and literacy and mathematics Collaborative Coaching and Learning (CCL) sessions.
- The site professor observes each teacher candidate at least once weekly. During the last two semesters teacher candidates are observed teaching a lesson 10-15 times each semester and engage in tiered dialogue about the lesson with the site professor and clinical teacher.
- Teacher candidates receive consistent coaching and mentoring from their clinical teacher, math and literacy teacher leaders, and the site professor. They plan lessons together and receive feedback which includes strengths and areas to work on.