

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

for

Metro Elementary School 3

Conducted: May 9-13, 2011

Introduction

There are a number of high-performing schools in Colorado that have, up to this point, had little opportunity to share their practices that are producing results year after year with their students. There are other under-performing schools that have yet to realize the kinds of successes these aforementioned schools have experienced. The premise for this project is that there are some highly effective practices that must be in place for some, but not all of our Colorado schools. Therefore, the Colorado Department of Education is making available, to a select number of the schools, an opportunity to engage in a process to identify those practices through the Effective School Practices (ESP) review.

The following criteria were used to determine the selection of schools as participants in the ESP reviews:

- The school must have been a designated Title I school for at least 4 years.
- The top 34 schools were determined based on performance data including:
 - Catch -up median growth percentiles; and
 - Colorado English Language Acquisition (CELA) growth.
- This narrowed the group to the top 15 schools in which additional performance data, listed below, were used:
 - Reading and Math achievement (3 year);
 - School Performance Frameworks (SPF) rating and specific "Growth Gaps" rating (3 year);
 - AYP results;
 - Colorado Basic Literacy Act (CBLA) data (for elementary schools); and
 - Graduation Rate (for high schools).
- This narrowed the list to 11 schools, which were looked at 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 3

EFFECTIVE SCHOOL PROFILE				
SCHOOL NAME: METRO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL 3				
DEMOGRAPHICS				
Type of IA School	Schoolwide		School Level	Elementary
Geographical Location	Denver Metro		Enrollment (size)	763
Free and Reduced	90.70%		Hispanic	78.90%
English Language Learners	46.92%		Non-White	85.58%
School IA Allocation	\$582,500.00		Per Pupil Allocation	\$1250.00
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 = 70	M = 69	SPF – Growth Gaps Rating	Meets
Free/Reduced Lunch MGP (3 year)	R = 59	M = 65	SPF – Growth Gaps Reading	Meets
ELL MGP (3 year)	R = 62	M = 67	SPF – Growth Gaps Math	Meets
CELA 3 year (% Making at least one year of PL growth)	55.67%			
CELA MGP 08	57		AYP – Overall 08	No
CELA MGP 09	58		AYP – Overall 09	YES
CELA MGP 10	53		AYP – Overall 10	YES
CBLA (% Making Progress)	43.30%			

Overview of the ESP Review Process:

Number of Interviews: 204*

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

- School administrators: 18
- Instructional staff (regular and special program teachers): 37
- Interventionists, specialists, coaches: 17
- District administrators: 9
- Parents/Community Members 2
- Classified/ Classified Instructional Staff 5
- Students 58

Number of Observations:

- Classrooms 167
- Meetings 32
- Professional development 8

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

Metro Elementary School 3 is the third largest elementary school in the district. Although enrollment continues to increase, the nearly sixty-year-old structure is located on a plot that has little room for expansion. Twelve mobile units are housed on the grounds, decreasing playground and open-space for students. Multiple classrooms are located in these mobile units. Within the school itself, there are no available spaces for meetings, small-group conference rooms, or additional classrooms. In spite of the physical limitations of the environment and a high percentage of student at-risk factors, Metro Elementary School 3 has demonstrated remarkable results regarding student achievement and academic growth over the past five years.

Student attendance is high. Attendance average in 2008-09 was 94.22%, in 2009-2010 it was 93.96%, and the current average is 93.97%. Average class size for each grade is outlined in the following table:

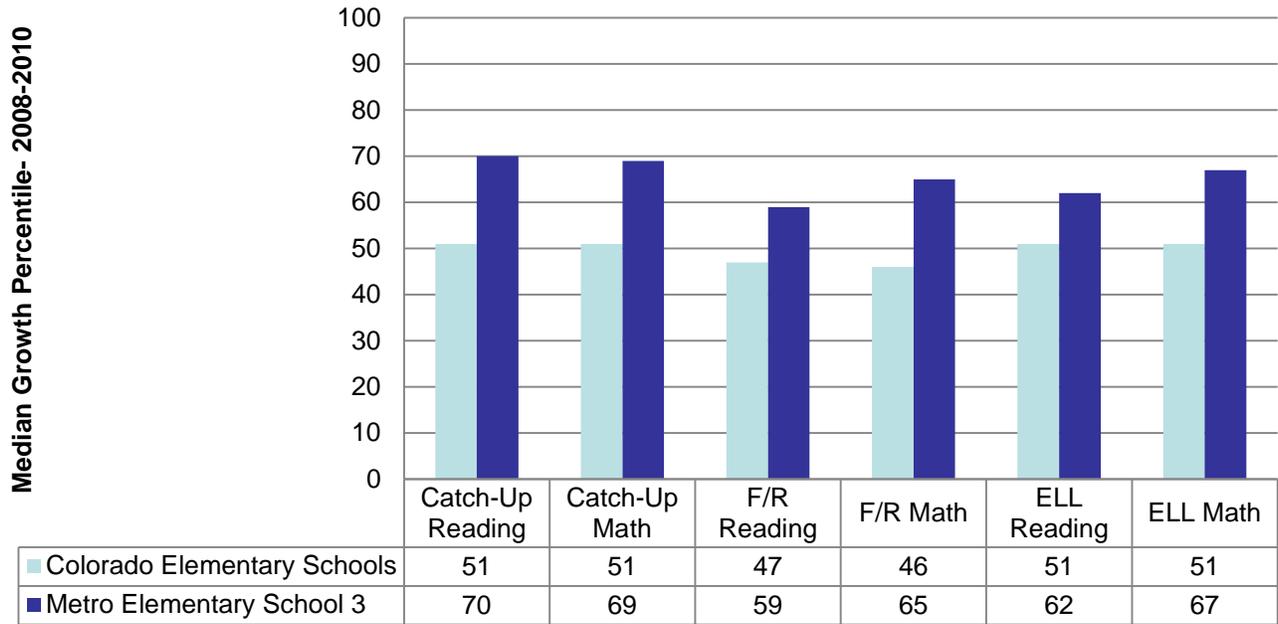
Kindergarten	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth	Sixth
22	20	19	19	25	26	29

With 51% of Metro 3 students currently classified as English Language Learners, the school strives to meet the diverse needs of its student population. Each grade level has at least one mainstream classroom and an English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom taught by an ESL endorsed teacher. Each grade level also has a One-Way Dual Language classroom for monolingual Spanish speakers. This past year, Two-Way Dual Language classrooms were offered at kindergarten and grade 2. Plans are to offer Two-Way Dual Language at all grade levels by 2014. Sixth grade is implementing a Middle Years International Baccalaureate Programme (MYP). The school has an extended instructional block, adding thirty minutes to the school day in an effort to ensure all students have access to additional instruction.

The school is realizing a much higher academic growth rate than the state average and academic achievement has been on an upward trajectory for the past four years. This positive performance is the result of focused, targeted work. This year's school improvement plan is very focused on writing. Although writing CSAP scores have improved each year in grades 4-6, overall CSAP proficient and advanced scores are at 49.8%. Through the study of disaggregated summative assessment results, the Leadership Team determined that students were showing difficulty with constructed responses in both reading and math. It is the school's intent that by improving students' ability to effectively write constructed responses, performance in those content areas will improve as well. Additionally, Standard 3 (conventions) is identified as an area of concern. Lastly, the school is intentionally striving to close the gender gap between males and females in writing through several strategic actions. The entire school staff is focused on implementing the work outlined in the improvement plan, and staff members are knowledgeable about what is expected to improve student performance.

Following is a profile of Metro Elementary School 3's growth profile over the past three years:

Three Year Median Growth Percentiles



Several areas of effective practices stand out among the many efforts that are contributing to Metro Elementary School 3's success. Descriptions of these practices will be expanded throughout the following ESP Narrative Report.

- **A solid literacy program** that is articulated both vertically and horizontally to systematically teach the five components of literacy (phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension). All students have access to common resources, in both English and Spanish.
- **Regularly scheduled data-driven dialogues**, with teachers meeting to analyze student data and determine next steps to best meet student needs. Data are used to inform decisions and set goals for individual students, classrooms, grade levels, and the school.
- **The RtI process is well-designed and effectively implemented**. Early interventions, delivered through flexible grouping, flooding and push-in support during the literacy blocks help ensure that few students need intensive intervention over extended periods of time. Teacher collaboration is the cornerstone of this work, with the whole staff problem-solving and taking responsibility for student learning.
- **Strong principal leadership** provides clear guidance, sets high expectations, and a culture of success for teachers and students. Shared leadership opportunities are embedded in the work of the school. The school stays focused on the important work at hand, and all staff know what is expected of them.
- **The school culture is constructive**, with everyone contributing to the well-being of the students. Teachers take responsibility for student learning. Parents are encouraged to be part of the school

and are supported in learning how to help their children succeed. The diverse needs of students are embraced in a climate of positive effort with the belief that all students can learn.

ESP Review Narrative Report

SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS

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

- District-adopted curricula are fully aligned to the Colorado Model Content Standards and include a pacing guide and resources for teacher use. Curriculum Articulation Project (CAP) documents are currently being revised to align with the new Colorado Academic Standards and Core Content Standards. While Jefferson County Public Schools (JeffCo) provides curriculum resources, teachers at Metro Elementary 3 often refer to a series, text, or program as the curriculum.
- The articulation cluster of five elementary schools {Including Metro 3}, one middle school and one high school formed a collaborative group five years ago to address low reading performance. Through this project, funding was provided to purchase the Scott-Foresman anthology (*Reading Street*) with the companion program (*My Sidewalk*). This program was chosen because it included the five components of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension) and provided a wealth of leveled books aligned to each unit's theme for supplementary instruction. A parallel anthology and related resources in Spanish supports access to common literacy-development practices across all classrooms. Fidelity to the use of this anthology has created both a horizontal and vertical alignment of literacy instruction at Metro Elementary School 3. Teachers and school leaders consistently identify use of this anthology as pivotal in the student performance gains made by students.
- Although K-12 vertical alignment is fostered through the collaborative group, linkages between preschool and elementary school are currently not in place.
- Writing is the major area of focus in Metro Elementary School 3's Unified School Improvement Plan this year. To provide resources for addressing this goal, *Writing Connections from Oral Language to Written Text* and several other tools by Nancy Fetzer have been adopted, including materials for working with students in Spanish. Staff members express that the instructional strategies and templates from these resources have proven successful, not only in writing, but in other subjects, as well. In addition, the writing resources support improved vertical articulation of writing curriculum and instruction. These resources are in both English and Spanish.
- The school district produces CAP documents for the delivery of science and social studies. Although time is allocated daily for instruction in these subjects, it appears that occasionally this time is consumed by other subjects.

- Articulation of curriculum standards across all levels and programs within the school is facilitated in a variety of ways, including:
 - horizontal data meetings (weekly),
 - Acuity (grades 3-6) data meetings (one to two grade levels meet together),
 - BEAR (K-2) data meetings,
 - vertical meetings for reading, writing, and math (monthly), and
 - grade level meetings (varies).
 - These meetings may or may not include all team members depending upon the grade. Some configurations include all teachers in a grade level, or may separate by dual-language, bilingual, and/or mainstream groups.
- Students are rarely pulled from direct instruction of core content, thus affording them the opportunity for equal access to the curriculum. Depending upon the expertise of the teacher, some students receive a more rigorous and challenging curriculum or appropriate scaffolding for understanding the curriculum than others.
- At this time, Information Literacy (IL) is not a focus for Metro Elementary School 3. Even though there are district pacing guides that address these standards, some staff members are only at an awareness level of the IL standards.
- Connections are made to real world experiences through the district curriculum documents (e.g. as connecting math to real life situations such as balancing checkbooks) but connections to post-secondary education or career options are not as evident. As the district aligns its curricula to the New Colorado Academic Standards, the CAP documents for 2011-2012 will include these connections.

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.*

- Students are routinely assessed at Metro Elementary 3 using a combination of state, district, and school-selected assessments.
- Instructional staff administer the following assessments to primary students (K-2) in addition to informal teacher-selected assessments:
 - Basic Early Assessment of Reading (BEAR) - spring,
 - Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) - ongoing,
 - DRA2/EDL (Dual Language Classes) - ongoing,
 - The Math Screener - three times per year,
 - Colorado English Language Acquisition (CELA) - once yearly,
 - Scott Foresman *Reading Street* weekly and unit reading assessments - ongoing,
 - Investigations (math resource) unit and chapter assessments - ongoing, and
 - Writing Sample analysis using a rubric - three times per year.
- Instructional staff administer the following assessments to intermediate students (grades 3-6) in addition to informal teacher-selected assessments:
 - Acuity (reading, writing, and mathematics) - fall, winter, spring,

- Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) (math, reading, writing and science-grade 5 only),
 - Colorado English Language Acquisition (CELA) - once yearly,
 - weekly and unit reading program (Reading Street) assessments - ongoing,
 - unit and chapter math program (Investigations) assessments - ongoing,
 - Writing Sample analysis using a rubric - three times per year, and
 - DIBELS - as needed.
- Formative and summative assessments are currently aligned with Colorado Model Content Standards. Acuity assessment data are used as a predictor of student performance on CSAP.
 - Some teachers question the validity of Acuity testing due to the limited (sometimes one or two) number of items that determine performance levels.
 - Assessment data are stored and accessed in the Student Online Assessment Reporting System (SOARS).
 - Scott Foresman unit reading program assessment data are required to be recorded on a specific form that is submitted to the principal for review and possible follow-up discussion. Data on the form include the number of students mastering concepts and planned next steps for instruction (extension, intervention, next teaching points). Teachers use this information in their monthly grade-level data meetings and for instructional planning.
 - Administrators and teachers at Metro Elementary 3 routinely engage in data dialogues to inform instruction. Data analysis meetings to inform instruction are embedded within the daily, weekly, and monthly work of instructional staff. It is clear that staff understand the demands of the curriculum and the importance of assessment data within the teaching and learning cycle. It is the unwavering belief of the principal, assistant principal, and instructional staff that collaborative data analysis to inform instruction is key to successful student learning. The principal states, “We are data-driven.” Use of the following practices are embedded within the data analysis meeting structures of Metro Elementary 3:
 - Acuity data meetings are held three times yearly to analyze the results of the Acuity assessments in reading, writing, and mathematics. Agendas are provided for each meeting. These data dialogues are led by instructional coaches and attended by teachers and both administrators. Meetings are mostly grade-level specific with some meetings spanning two grades (e.g., 3-4, 5-6). Teachers look at and comment upon color-coded (to indicate proficiency levels) data reports. They share feedback on their successes and challenges, identify strategies and ideas, and craft next steps for instruction. Comments and reflections are captured electronically and projected for all to review during the meeting. Meeting notes are sent electronically to participants.
 - Weekly horizontal grade level (K-6) team meetings are designated times for grade levels to use math, writing, and/or reading data to set goals, plan for instruction, and adjust groupings when warranted. Data are at the center of these weekly dialogues. The content focus of these meetings rotates weekly among the following topics: (a) reading,

- (b) writing, (c) mathematics, and (d) other pertinent topics (e.g., CELA data). Teachers use *Data Team Discussion Protocols* as a working tool before, during, and after these meetings. The meetings occur during common planning time and include teachers, coaches, and instructional para-educators (Para-educators are released from their support role on this day).
- The Metro 3 Leadership team identified writing as a focus for school improvement after reviewing CSAP writing data in the fall of 2010. The team noted that while most grade level scores have improved, school-wide CSAP data indicated that just under 50% (49.8%) of third through sixth graders scored proficient or advanced. The following root causes were identified:
 - Teachers do not consistently implement effective strategies using the gradual release of responsibility model (I do, We do, You do together, You do alone) to provide systematic, direct, and explicit writing instruction.
 - Data analysis structures are in place, but data are not systematically used to guide writing instruction.
 - Systematic, effective, and direct instruction of grammar, usage, and mechanics is lacking.
 - Research-based strategies are not implemented to address the specific needs of males in writing.
 - Failure to provide enough intentional practice around analyzing questions, figurative language, and academic vocabulary has adversely impacted Acuity constructed response scores.
 - As a result of the identified focus on writing, a professional development day on October 15, 2010 was designed to analyze writing data as a staff, relook at root causes and craft a plan of action. Ongoing work in this area includes the development of rubrics for scoring writing and the development of multiple writing prompts to provide choice for students. Teachers collect writing samples three times per year and score them in teams using rubrics. Staff members are working toward inter-rater reliability and the identification of exemplars for K-6 writing which will contribute to vertical and horizontal alignment in writing.

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

- Teachers and principals at Metro Elementary 3 state that they believe all students can learn and they demonstrate this in a variety of ways. They have organized systems and human resources to meet varying and unique needs of learners. Teachers use data to flexibly group students throughout the instructional day with the intent of providing best first instruction and effective interventions. Students are grouped homogeneously for literacy instruction and heterogeneously for other content instruction. The instructional schedule identifies time and blocks for literacy (designated whole group, guided reading, and reading strategies times), mathematics (designated math block and math facts block), and science/social studies (alternate days).
- The regular use of the Scott Foresman reading anthology within the extended reading block enhances reading performance, helps to align instructional practices horizontally and vertically,

and provides a consistent means of addressing vocabulary deficits. Total minutes scheduled daily for reading, as reflected on the master schedule are:

- kindergarten -160 minutes,
 - first through third grades – 140 minutes,
 - fourth and fifth grades– 125 minutes,
 - sixth grade - 105 minutes.
- For mathematics instruction, students are grouped heterogeneously. Limited coaching and intervention support is available. Instructional focal points are determined by the following factors:
 - identified instructional emphases from the Investigations Math Program,
 - identified instructional emphases from the monthly mathematics data team meetings,
 - Acuity meetings, and
 - district CAP resources.
 - Writing instruction is a current Unified Improvement Plan (UIP) focus. Primary grades each have a daily 55 minute writing block. Intermediate grades have increased daily time scheduled for writing (4th- 65 minutes, 5th- 75 minutes, 6th- 60 minutes). Instructional staff members repeatedly refer to the value of the Nancy Fetzer writing resources, stating that it provides them with instructional strategies, vertical articulation, and common instructional language. Staff members focus on implementing strategies from these writing resources and follow-up professional development is ongoing. During the monthly literacy meetings and other professional development time, teachers meet to continually refine their instructional craft for teaching writing.
 - The systematic collection and analysis of student writing samples is new this year. Working in collaboration, teachers use rubrics to score samples and are in the process of identifying exemplary writing samples for each grade level to aid horizontal and vertical articulation for performance expectations. Additionally, teachers have collaboratively created rubrics for scoring student writing samples. Rubrics are also used, at times, for the scoring of constructed reading responses. Little use of rubrics outside of the realm of literacy was reported.
 - Thirty minutes have been added to the school day at Metro Elementary 3. This additional time has been strictly designated for instruction. The school’s instructional schedule reflects this and defines the number of minutes allocated for each content area. In an attempt to honor instructional time, field trips, assemblies, and announcements are kept to a minimum. In actual practice, however, bell-to-bell instruction is not the norm in many classrooms. While some teachers’ instructional practices are well-paced and maximize available time, this is not the case across the school. Lengthy (up to 6 or more minutes) and disorganized transitions, coupled with a lack of student engagement, were noted in many instances.
 - In many classrooms, teachers at Metro Elementary 3 use effective, varied, and research-based instructional strategies in a consistent manner. Some of these strategies include the following:
 - think-pair-share and think-pair-write-share,
 - use of visuals,
 - graphic organizers,

- oral rehearsal before writing,
- vocabulary mnemonics and strategies for recall,
- goal setting,
- student self-assessment, and
- student use of rubrics and checklists.

Even though many research –based strategies are used, consistent and exemplary instructional practice is not the norm throughout the school. While some teachers engage students in rigorous and higher-level thinking lessons, others do not. While some teachers identify learning targets at the beginning of lessons and revisit them during lesson closure, others do not. Student engagement varies widely throughout the school.

- Interviews and documents confirmed that goal-setting and linking instruction to learning targets is a value held by many; however, classroom practice does not consistently reflect this value. Students’ involvement in their own learning varies within and across classrooms. Limited student goal-setting occurs.
- Ongoing monitoring of instructional practices needed to meet the diverse needs of Metro Elementary School 3’s student population varies across classrooms and grade levels in terms of frequency of informal visits and feedback provided. Walkthrough feedback from external and building level coaches was cited by teachers.
- Most staff report that they have sufficient access to materials and supplies, with the exception of technology, to effectively deliver the curriculum. Available resources are linked to the learning goals of the school. Additional needs are typically granted by the building’s principal and instructional leaders based on individual requests, if the supplies and materials can be tied directly to student need. Most staff express that the coaches are responsible for researching and ordering these materials. Due to limited room in the school, most additional building resources are distributed to classrooms.
- Homework norms are established. Most teachers assign homework that adheres to the policy of ten minutes for each grade level (e.g., 10 minutes for first grade up to 60 minutes for 6th grade). Assigned homework is to be independent practice. Some homework extension activities are available for higher-ability students. Most teachers and students report that homework is monitored and feedback is given.
- The incorporation of technology in teaching and learning across all classrooms is in the beginning stages. Evidence of the following was noted:
 - Some teachers at Metro Elementary 3 are using technology tools (e.g., document cameras, linkages to internet, Smartboards, and classroom computers) effectively within their classrooms to enhance student learning (e.g., slide shows related to essential learning teaching points, vocabulary emphasis, student publications).

- While all sixth graders must design a power point presentation as part of their International Baccalaureate requirements, the use of technology tools for learning are not yet evidenced across all K-6 classrooms.
- Some technology tools (e.g., the mobile carts containing laptops) are inaccessible for classroom use during certain testing periods.
- The district provides coursework in the use of technology tools; those teachers who have taken specific courses are able to make use of these tools within their classrooms. A staff member is designated to provide supports to teachers in their use of technology.
- At this time, few teachers report using the information literacy and technology standards to enhance learning.
- A well-organized Response to Intervention/Instruction (RtI) process is implemented at Metro Elementary 3. Response to Intervention/Instruction (RtI) procedures and strategies started at Metro Elementary 3 approximately five years ago. The school began with an RtI team, then went to two teams, and now has evolved into using the RtI philosophy of early intervention and problem solving by grade-level teams. The school's RtI process operates school-wide with all instructional staff taking responsibility for students' achievement which includes participating in the problem-solving and interventions for struggling students. Student data are reviewed by grade level, with participation from all appropriate staff and may include classroom teachers, interventionists, SPED teachers, and specials teachers. Although special educators are deeply involved, the program is not viewed as a special education initiative. The RtI process includes use of protocols and forms to document decisions, actions, and responsibilities. Multiple sources of data are reviewed to provide a historical perspective, as well as recent concerns. After review of data, suggestions are given, and goals and timelines are established for implementation and further review. Using this design, at least 14 students can be reviewed during meeting time. Intervention plans are routinely revisited and evaluated. Suggestions for interventions are provided by teachers within the building; external resources (experts, research-based activities and programs) for interventions are seldom referenced.
- Protocols for RtI meetings are concise and well-established. Staff members adhere to the practice of providing interventions designed to meet all student needs and use the following RtI tiered system:
 - Tier 1 – Universal (Benchmark)
 - ALL students receive Core instruction
 - At least two adults are with this instructional group
 - Tier II – Targeted (Strategic)
 - More significant academic and/or behavioral concerns; underachieving
 - Explicit, systematic instruction aligned with Core
 - Tier III – Intensive (Intensive)
 - Significant/chronic deficits or significant underachievement
 - Require most intensive services available

- Most instructional interventions occur within the context of the general education classroom using a push-in model. Students are placed in well-defined, flexible groups (intensive, strategic, and benchmark) within the classroom. Those students having the highest need receive services from the most qualified instructors. These students receive intensive guided instruction with minimal or no independent work time; additionally, they often receive a “triple-dose” of reading instruction.
- Much of the special education instruction is integrated into literacy blocks during the scheduled guided reading time. Special education teachers typically work with rotating groups and focus on the five components of reading with targeted emphasis on emerging and delayed reading skills including phonemic awareness and word attack skills, fluency and some comprehension. For Tier II literacy intervention, many of the needs are addressed through use of the Scott Foresman intervention materials, *My Sidewalk*, and leveled reading books. For some students, special education teachers use components of supplementary materials from *Foundations* for kindergarten and *Wilson Reading* and the *Boost and Blitz* programs for students in higher grades. In addition, the web-based literacy program *Lexia* is used to work with students needing support in basic reading skills. Mathematics interventions are provided in the general education classroom setting through co-teaching and small group instruction using the adopted materials and programs. There is no adopted special intensive math intervention program at the present time.
- Some students with intensive needs in literacy and math are provided small group pullout services. Approximately one percent of the students in the school receive these intensive services, whereas needs of most other students with IEP goals are adequately addressed through the push-in model. Tier III instruction is delivered through the *Boosts and Blitz* program (Louisa Moats). This program is phonics-based and provides specific, targeted activities to help intensive students develop basic reading skills. Additionally, *Wilson* intervention is available and used.
- Special education support for dual language programs and support for twice exceptional students is reported to be a challenge.
- All students receive reading support from at least two adults during guided reading in the benchmark groups while intensive groups have three. Instruction is provided by classroom teachers, interventionists, special education teachers, the math coach, and instructional paraprofessionals. Many of the interventionists, coaching, and instructional paraprofessional positions are funded by Title I.
- Gifted and talented (GT) identification process and procedures are in place. Students in grade two are given the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT) test and those identified (academic, performing arts, etc.) are placed on an Academic Learning Plan (ALP) with goals and timelines developed by the classroom teacher and GT liaison. Those students who are borderline GT (using the {CogAT}) are placed on a Watch list. The building liaison provides support and resources to classroom teachers to help them aid students in meeting their goals. Currently, there are six students receiving GT services.

- Although higher-order-thinking skills are embedded within the curriculum, some teachers report a concern that underachieving gifted or high ability students' needs may "fall through the cracks". They further report that the time and effort required to address the intensive needs of the student population is all consuming. Little focus is provided for the additional supports for higher ability students.
- Opportunities are available for extended learning, including before-and after-school tutoring. Teachers are paid from Title I funds to implement reading clubs, intensive classes (CSAP preparation), and literature circles. Compensation is also provided to teachers for after-school math tutoring (*Do the Math*) for identified students. Additional opportunities are provided by teachers with no expectation of compensation. During the summer, PTO and Title I funds furnish eight books for every student to read at home. Additionally, summer school and an open library, through Title I, are available to support continued learning.

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

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

- Through an intentional effort, Metro Elementary School 3 aspires to a culture of high expectations for staff and students. The staff members are focused on "getting the work done", they know that "good is not good enough", and believe that EVERY child deserves a quality education. A pivotal factor that has positively impacted student achievement is the strong belief that students can and will learn, and the staff will do all they can to help them. This laser-like focus began five years ago when the administrators developed a Literacy Plan. The genesis of this plan was the recognition that reading strategies being employed were not impacting student achievement as desired. The Scott Foresman Reading series was adopted, providing a research-based scope and sequence and included an intervention component. Additionally, the school moved to a "push-in" model with multiple teachers and/or paraprofessionals in each classroom during the literacy block.
- The majority of teachers at Metro 3 have one Master's degree and 65% of the staff have earned a Linguistically Diverse (ESL) endorsement. The staff is characterized as dedicated, extremely hard working, collaborative, focused on the task, having a "whatever it takes" mentality. Metro 3 is a "no excuses, no blame" zone. They are also noted for their caring, nurturing relationships with students that go beyond instruction. In some classrooms there is modeling of metacognitive strategies and other life skills. As an indication of the staff's commitment to the students, parents, and school, Metro 3 has enjoyed a low turnover of teachers during the past few years.
- The positive culture of Metro Elementary 3 is evident in the data collected from three surveys done in the past two years. Questions addressed critical factors germane to a positive learning environment and results indicate that students, staff, and parents perceive the school to have a positive and welcoming environment, and a strong academic culture.

- The Student survey (2009-10) revealed the following:
 - I am learning to become a better reader. - 95%
 - I am learning to become a better writer. - 93%
 - I am growing to better understand and use math. - 89%
 - My teacher makes sure that I understand what we are learning and why. - 93%
 - I am learning to respect people who are different from me. - 91%
 - The teachers at my school believe I can learn. - 98%
 - I feel safe in my school. - 84%
 - It is important for me to graduate from high school. - 97%

(All responses were in the strongly agree/agree category.)

- The Staff Survey (2009-10) revealed the following:
 - In our school, we use assessments to plan instruction for all students. - 85%
 - In our school, we promote a sense of community and cooperation among all stakeholders. - 85%
 - In our school, we involve all stakeholders as appropriate in the design, implementation and communication of decisions. - 69%

(All responses were in the strongly agree/agree category.)

- The Parent Survey (2010-11) results state:
 - I feel welcome at my child's school. - 95%
 - Communication between my family and the school is effective. - 94%
 - My child's academic needs are being met. - 97%

(All responses were in the strongly agree/agree category.)

- Metro Elementary School 3 is an older facility and is currently at 138% of student capacity. Staff members manage as best as they can to work under these conditions. However, there are concerns regarding congestion, a lack of adequate space, and the negative effect this has on the learning environment. Additional concerns regarding the main building and the numerous portable classrooms raise questions about a safe, healthy, orderly, and equitable learning environment.

- Metro 3 staff members demonstrate a commitment to student achievement by offering a variety of pathways to success for diverse learners. With a high percentage of English Language Learners and Hispanic student population, the school offers a menu of instructional options to develop bilingual and bi-literate students. There is a minimum of one mainstream classroom, a designated ESL classroom with an ESL endorsed teacher, as well as a One-Way Dual Language classroom at every grade level. This year, the school also implemented a Two-Way Dual Language program in kindergarten and 2nd grade.

- The school leadership and staff focus on student academic expectations through the Acuity and BEAR data team meetings held periodically throughout the year. There are also monthly grade-level team meetings to analyze data (CSAP, Acuity, writing samples, anthology unit tests) and plan for instruction. Teachers understand the importance of using data to inform instructional practice.

- ROSE/ROSA - Respect, Others, Self, Environment is the school motto and is displayed throughout the school. The “Second Step” program has been in place for many years, is embedded in the school culture, and addresses issues of empathy, problem-solving, and anger management. In addition staff members use “Eagle Awards” to recognize appropriate behavior and academic achievement. The award certificates are entered into a weekly classroom drawing for a reward and if chosen, students have their picture posted on the bulletin board outside the school office.
- Students from all disaggregated groups have the opportunity to participate in learning and enrichment activities outside of the school day. Some of the activities provided include: reading and math tutoring before and after school, gardening, art, drama, cooking, yearbook, service clubs, cup stacking, and intramurals. Through the Metro 3 Student Council students are taught the value of hard work, responsibility and respect for themselves, others, and their environment.

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’s efforts to welcome parents, create a circle of caring, and remove barriers to achievement include the following:
 - curriculum night at the beginning of the school year,
 - parent conferences twice a year,
 - dual language parent meetings,
 - PTO and School Improvement Team,
 - Honor Roll assemblies,
 - Donuts for Dads Program,
 - Muffins for Moms Program,
 - author celebrations in May,
 - concert in May, and
 - awards assemblies after each trimester.

The school is proud of the 95% parent participation in report card conferences.

- The parent group Comité de Padres serves the needs of the Spanish-speaking parents at the school. This group meets after the PTO meeting. The purpose of the group is to encourage Spanish-speaking parents to become involved in the education of their children, to meet other parents, and to support the school.
- Communication between the school and home occurs through monthly newsletters from the school and individual teachers, homework assignments, teacher phone calls home, casual meetings with parents before and after school during delivery and pick up of students, and the school website that includes archived school newsletters in both English and Spanish.
- Many local agencies support the school and its children with gift cards, clothing, food baskets, books for home, and other student supplies.

- At the end of this school year, each student will receive eight books provided by the PTO and Title I funds to read over the summer, in an effort to sustain the literacy focus. Parents are being invited to an informational meeting to learn what they can do to monitor their child's reading progress and support reading skills as they read the books over the summer.
- The Kids' Clinic is an on-site pediatric health clinic that provides services to children under the age of 18. Services provided include: well-child care, minor illness care, immunizations, vision, dental, and mental health care.

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.*

- Professional development is provided during district professional development days, staff meetings, and early-release days. The district also provides voluntary professional development in literacy for teachers. The current focus is on using Nancy Fetzer's Writing Connections Resources. Fetzer provided on-site professional development in the area of writing both last year and during the 2010-2011 school year. The area's literacy coordinator works with staff to deepen teachers' knowledge in the use of these resources as well as specific training so the practices can be sustained over time. She also provides support for implementation of the Scott Foresman reading program, *Reading Street* and *My Sidewalks*. Classroom walkthrough data from the area literacy coordinator, the instructional coaches, and principals provide necessary feedback regarding the quality of implementation in the classroom and the need for further training.
- Major improvement strategies this year are focused on two areas of writing. First, in order to address inconsistent implementation of the gradual release of responsibilities model, teachers are directed to use rubrics and goal-setting to improve student writing specific to Standards 2 and 3. Secondly, to address the writing skills of male students, the school is providing professional development around effective, empirical writing strategies. Through student interviews during the ESP review, numerous boys reported they like writing and felt they were good writers. When asked how they became writers, a common response was, "Our teachers teach us how to write and make it easy to understand."
- The school has a supportive culture where teachers meet in grade-level teams on a weekly and monthly basis to analyze data. The meetings include classroom teachers, instructional coaches, interventionists, and usually an administrator. Teachers reap great benefits from the feedback and assistance of their peers. Data are analyzed to determine the math and literacy skills in which students are most successful and those in which students are deficient. Assessment data analysis includes CSAP, Acuity tests, unit tests BEAR, DRA, DIBELS, and writing samples.
- The school has a support staff that includes three instructional coaches and seven interventionists. Coaches support teachers in 1) improving the quality of instruction in the classroom, 2) embedding the school professional development into teacher practice, and 3)

implementing the grade-level curriculum effectively. Interventionists provide classroom support on a rotating basis in literacy, math, and ESL/Dual language.

- Teachers work in collaborative teams to examine and score student work in order to be sure expectations are aligned and there is inter-rater reliability in the use of rubrics within and across grades.
- Leadership uses the evaluation process to monitor and support effective use of data, implementation of the curriculum and professional development strategies, instructional practice, student academic growth, and growth toward professional goals.

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 was developed eight years ago as part of a mandate from the district for schools to evaluate their status and develop a school-wide design plan. Teachers, staff, and parents collaboratively developed the mission statement which is displayed on the school's web site. It says, *"We know our students can successfully master the challenging academic material they need to function as life-long learners in a diverse, democratic society. As Educators, we will provide the environment and instruction necessary to produce this achievement. At Metro 3, we will always work openly with students, parents and the community at large toward this purpose."* The current principal and staff can clearly articulate in their own words the mission of Metro Elementary School 3 which they say is ". . . to provide a quality education for all students." Interview responses and classroom observations reveal that this mission is lived by staff members.
- In this school, good is not good enough. The principal and staff members work to increase all students' achievement each year. A sense of urgency and commitment to improved achievement is apparent in a number of classrooms.
- Leadership comes from everyone on staff through the following,
 - sharing strategies and expertise,
 - using collaborative time to work as teams,
 - using data to make decisions,
 - coaching by peers,
 - volunteering time to extend learning for students,
 - committing to improving knowledge and implementation of best instructional strategies,
 - celebrating student learning.

Overall, teachers are focused on the intensive work of building students' basic skills, and while they have opportunities to participate in building-level leadership, they report that they are not typically concerned with doing so, trusting the collaboration and communication structures within the school.

- A Building Leadership Team includes members from intermediate and primary grades, dual language, special education, specials, instructional coaches, a teacher who represents the Jefferson County Education Association, the assistant principal and principal. They meet monthly, or more as needed, to review a variety of issues within the school. The Leadership Team takes information from the meetings to the grade-level teachers for input and suggestions before decisions are made. The back-and-forth communication between grade-level teachers, the Leadership Team, and administration is ongoing and results in a level of trust about the decisions that are eventually made by a few people. Structures that are implemented and the decisions and advocacy skills of the principal result in student success; therefore, staff members believe in the principal as the ultimate decision-maker.
- Communication among staff and with administration takes place daily through email messages and common lunch times for grade levels. Weekly staff meetings and regular data meetings enhance the flow of communication.
- Staff members take appropriate responsibility for students' learning. No excuses or rationalizing are heard. They hold themselves accountable for results and hold high expectations of themselves and the students. Expectations are consistent and non-negotiable. The principal and staff find ways to work around barriers and changes in resources. They describe themselves as change adept. Teachers who are hired for Metro Elementary 3 are well informed about the high expectations for how staff members work at the school with the focus on results, not on the number of minutes in the work day.
- The principal and instructional coaches keep the staff focused on achieving common literacy goals for students so they have the language skills to achieve in all content areas. This strategy is significant for accelerating the achievement of children of poverty (Barr & Parrett, 2007). Five years ago the principal initiated a reading strategies block of time for the highest-needs students and changed interventions to a push-in model. Now all first through fifth grade students have at least two blocks of time during the day for literacy. Tutors are employed for after-school extended learning.
- When the principal observes in classrooms she looks for the following,
 - that programs are implemented with fidelity,
 - whether students' time in centers is addressing the components of reading, and
 - whether students can explain what they are doing and are engaged in the work.
- The principal keeps the focus on high impact practices that promote student achievement by asserting and reinforcing the non-negotiables for everyone's work. Instructional time is protected from interruptions. She is the one who provides the pressure to "stay the course."
- The principal, who is bilingual, sets high expectations for the families to be sure the students attend regularly and are on time. Students express that they feel safe and cared for at the school and many want to be there even during breaks.
- For the past five years the principal has participated with six other principals in the area and the Articulation Superintendent to implement the Literacy Plan. These elementary, middle, and high

school principals realized that solid literacy instruction would increase student achievement throughout the grade levels. They are using Budgeting for Results grant money from the district to fund literacy efforts. The leadership in the schools of this area has been sustained over time and they work together as a team. Along with district personnel, including a literacy specialist, they review student data and plan next steps.

- The principal supports a number of approaches to learning that meet a variety of students' needs such as dual language and ESL curricula as well as the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program (MYP) for all 6th grade students.

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

- The school's Title I resources are used by the principal to provide a flooding of adults to work with students who need intensive support. These positions include teachers, reading interventionists, instructional paraprofessionals, and tutors.
- Resources are used to provide time for teachers to meet together for half or full days to set instructional goals that meet needs revealed in student performance data.
- The budget is developed by the principal and the finance (principal's) secretary. Teachers are provided classroom supplies from a central source. Instructional coaches also provide materials. Teachers express that they have enough resources except for technology. Technology resources are reported to be far below those of many other district schools. Program materials are supplied by the district. The budget is reviewed by the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO)/ School Improvement Team (SIT). Categorical funds (e.g., Title I, Title II, SPED) are used to fund intervention staff, paraprofessional staff, tutors, parent services, and some materials.
- Resources are used to provide enough specials teachers to ensure that grade level teams can meet together each week.
- Metro Elementary 3 will receive funds for next year from the federal Teacher Incentive Fund grant that provides strategic compensation for licensed staff in high-needs schools.
- The age of the facility and the overcrowding of its capacity results in a less than optimal learning environment for students and causes instructional challenges for teachers.
- The school schedule provides time to address the priority needs and goals of the school. A literacy block of 100 minutes is provided for reading instruction plus an additional session of 25 minutes for literacy instruction each day. Writing instruction ranges from 50 to 65 minutes per day and increases for upper grades. Mathematics instruction is scheduled for 60 minutes per day, but not always used as scheduled. Students continue to receive instruction in art, music, and physical education. Science and social studies are on a rotating schedule. The Metro 3 school day is 30 minutes longer than the typical day across the district. Classroom observations reveal

that instructional time is not always maximized as indicated by long transitions between and within classes.

- Teachers report needing more time to work together for planning instruction and to meet in vertical teams. Two grade level teams (e.g., 3&4, 5&6) meet to examine and evaluate data from the *Acuity Formative Assessment*.
- Teachers report having adequate resources to achieve the goals of the school and resources are aligned to accomplish the school and grade level team goals. Some dual language teachers would like to have more Spanish language books in the areas of social studies and science.
- The school allocates resources to provide extended school day opportunities for students including tutoring for students needing interventions, enrichment activities, and on-site day care. Additional support is provided during a summer reading program.
- The school actively acquires external resources and supports teachers who seek resources for their classrooms. Grants received include awards from the Center for Excellence, Anschutz Foundation, and the Title I Distinguished Schools program. Cooperative community connections are established with the Smile Big program that provides dental exams, Family Voices, Interfaith Association, JeffCo Action Center, the Fire Department, and other community organizations.

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.*

- School leadership led the development of the Unified School Improvement Plan (UIP) that included participation of all classroom teachers in grades two through six, instructional coaches, and staff from the Jefferson County School District assessment department. This group examined multiple forms of relevant student achievement data and perceptions collected from staff and parents to identify priority needs, determine root causes, and establish priority goals. Drafts of goals and strategies were presented to the entire faculty for feedback and input. Next, the plan was presented to the PTO/School Improvement Team where feedback and input were received related to a school culture goal. Interview data reveal that there is broad-based commitment to the UIP goals and strategies.
- Teachers know the focus of the school's UIP which is to improve writing skills and achievement. Grade-level team goals and plans align with the UIP goals, as does the work of the teachers. The school adopted the Nancy Fetzer's *Writing Connection* resources including hiring the author to perform professional development four times during the year.
- Planning at Metro Elementary School 3 extends beyond development and monitoring the UIP. Plans, procedures, and schedules are developed for a number of functions (e.g., meeting processes, data analysis protocols, and meeting schedules for the trimester) within the organizational structures that facilitate operational effectiveness.

- Although the school population is nearly homogeneous with 90% receiving free or reduced lunch and approximately 80% Hispanic, the school attends to and follows the progress of disaggregated groups including students in the dual language, English as a second language, and English-only categories. In addition, the school attends to gender differences with regard to achievement.
- The school improvement plan development team used several forms of data to inform the focus of the UIP including the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP), Colorado English Language Assessment (CELA), *Acuity Formative Assessment*, *Basic Early Assessment of Reading* (BEAR), and *Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills* (DIBELS), staff, student, and parent surveys. Root causes were determined and are stated in the plan. The UIP narrative is not clear in how it verified the statements of root cause.
- Research-informed practices are embedded in the actions specified in the UIP.
- The UIP goals are monitored frequently at multiple levels including the PTO/School Improvement Team, Building Leadership Team, and grade level data team meetings. Grade-level teams have goals that align with the school plan and these goals are monitored and updated periodically during the school year at data team meetings.
- The school is committed to continuous improvement as demonstrated by frequent use of data to analyze and focus on learning needs of groups and individual students. In addition, professional development aligns with the focus of the improvement plan and is carried out as identified in the UIP.

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.

Transforming into a standards-based system involves learning new teacher behaviors that focus attention on students as learners as outlined by DuFour and Eaker (1998, 2002) who pose the following four questions:

1. What do students need to know, understand and be able to do? *Curriculum*
2. How do we teach effectively to ensure students learn? *Instruction*
3. How do we know what students have learned? *Assessment*
4. What do we do when students don't learn or reach proficiency before expectation?
Interventions/Enrichment

As instructional staff at Metro Elementary 3 explore the relationship between curriculum, assessment, and instruction and how it is planned, implemented and monitored, it is critical to remember the powerful impact a successfully-delivered robust curriculum, and an academic press for achievement (rigor) can and will have on student achievement. In high-performing classrooms evidence of rigor is visible. It is obvious that teachers in these classrooms set clear academic goals which students understand and *own*. Students are engaged in their work and are very clear on what learning targets have been established for them and what they need to do in order to achieve and/or exceed expectations.

“Take your students to a place where they no longer need you to tell them whether they have done well—to a place where they know in their minds and hearts how they have performed because they know the meaning of success” (2001).

Next Steps:

At 211 degrees, water is hot. At 212 degrees, it boils. And with boiling water, comes steam. And with steam, one can power a train. Applying one extra degree of temperature means the difference between something that is simply very hot and something that generates enough force to power a machine. Metro 3 is poised to move from “hot” to “boiling” creating additional steam to power the “Metro 3 Student Achievement Train” to any destination desired.

With this analogy in mind, we respectfully provide the following suggestions as next steps to attain enough steam to raise student achievement and continue to accelerate student learning.

- Metro Elementary 3 students are experiencing academic growth. However, to sustain long-term continuous improvement of achievement and academic growth, it now becomes necessary for staff to move forward into a deeper understanding of standards-based practices (the teaching/learning cycle). It is critical that ALL teachers understand and secure the knowledge and skills for effective implementation of all four components in order to truly impact sustained gains.
- Develop a school-wide understanding of what it means to be standards-based. This may include guidelines for explicit lesson planning, instruction, assessment, and discussions around the differences between curriculum and programs.
- Realize that additional gains in student achievement require a next step in ratcheting up the effectiveness and consistency of instructional strategies. Develop a plan for how these strategies can be clarified, modeled, adjusted, and practiced across grade levels and classrooms. Include provisions for ongoing monitoring and feedback directly related to the walkthrough process plus lesson studies and encouragement within focused discussions at regular team meetings. Some suggestions from which to select a focus for instructional refinement:
 - providing orderly and efficient transitions,
 - assuring time on task (bell-to-bell),
 - building intentional progression and pacing of the lesson,
 - providing wait/think time before student responses,
 - using Think/Pair/Share to directly influence deeper thinking,
 - becoming more consistent in use of the gradual release of responsibility to the student (e.g., I do, We do, You do together, You do alone),
 - assuring effective teacher/student talk time ratios,
 - using exemplars with performance descriptors within all content areas (models of student work to set standard for performance), and
 - providing regular use of hands-on, activity-based learning to increase active engagement.
 - accessing and studying the meta-analysis studies conducted by Marzano and Hattie to ensure that selected strategies are
 - those that have demonstrated the greatest effect size (impact) on student learning,
 - used appropriately for specific tasks.
- Expand coaching on the implementation of research-based best instructional practices that will lead to improved student achievement. Once strategies have been selected and training

provided, monitor their implementation, collect and analyze data to determine their effectiveness.

- Students need to be active participants in their own learning. To increase student engagement during instruction, examine research-based engagement strategies that will support active participation. Provide instruction and practice for students to develop well-defined, long-term individual goals, which include benchmarks, timelines for review and revision, as well as, determination of actions the student(s) will take to achieve them. Celebrate student success!
- At-risk students seldom have access to technology in their homes and to have limited access in school, as well, greatly inhibits their choices in life. Students must acquire necessary technology and information literacy skills, included in necessary 21st Century skills, to enable them to successfully compete in college and/or career choices. To support Metro 3 students, the school staff, in collaboration with the district, must collectively explore creative methods of acquiring, and appropriately using, technological resources. Fully understand the Information Literacy standards incorporated in Colorado's New Academic Standards and intentionally integrate them into content lessons and learning opportunities.
- Staff members of Metro Elementary 3 have identified a lack of student listening skills as an area of concern. They recognize that without improved listening habits and skills, student academic growth and achievement can be hindered. Utilize a variety of effective and age appropriate strategies to deeply embed active listening habits in students. Be watchful to focus on a few research-based strategies, ensuring deep implementation into daily instruction. Set specific goals, establish timelines for review, adjust as necessary, and include intentional plans into content lesson plans.
- Develop more precise routines for establishing and showcasing essential learning goals or targets at the beginning of class periods, reflecting on those goals during instruction, and closing the instructional session with a review of accomplishments related to the goals. Assure systematic structures across grade levels for use of these precise routines.
- Build and model metacognitive strategies that will support students in fully accessing the curriculum across content areas by using the following:
 - Refine classroom strategies for developing mental models.
 - Use questioning that adds rigor to the expectation for student responses.
 - Use multiple ways for students to demonstrate proficiency.
 - Model strategies for deconstructing text and reading for a variety of purposes.
 - Go more deeply into the essential concepts (learnings) within each content area.
 - Provide job-embedded professional development with ongoing coaching and follow-up to support teachers' development of these strategies.
- Intentionally embed formative assessment into daily work. Consider the following steps:
 - Embed the use of writing rubrics by both teachers and learners.
 - Extend ratings into descriptions of higher-level skills and performance.
 - Apply the meaning of the ratings to improve student writing craft through exemplars and anchor papers.

- Reflect with students about their work, using specific and targeted feedback.
 - Use student reflections and think-alouds for identifying where students are “missing the mark” and when they have “made the mark”.
 - Create other formats, such as use of student white boards, exit slips, short quizzes, and “cups up and down” that will provide formative data to inform teachers about lesson pacing, including extensions and re-teaching.
- Successful schools that continue to grow, develop a well-rounded academic routine. Staff members realize that all subjects in school have value. Metro Elementary 3 staff members have placed great focus and emphasis on literacy and are gaining success every year. Without losing the momentum of this success, vigilantly apply newly developed processes and procedures outlined in the Next Steps to extend successful strategies to all subjects (e.g., literacy, math, social studies, and science). Carefully monitor these to ensure that they are deeply embedded within practice, routinely monitored, revised, and consistently implemented in all classes, all subjects, everyday. Be vigilant so that as more emphasis is placed on additional content areas, focus is not lost on the successes that have been established.

Learning Environment

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.

In order to effectively close the achievement gap, educational research confirms that it is imperative to attend to the variety of components that comprise a safe, orderly, equitable learning environment that is based on a belief that all children can learn at high levels.

“Methods that demand higher educational standards without a similar emphasis on the social-emotional needs of early adolescents will not result in much success, efforts to improve the

social-emotional needs of disadvantaged students without a comparable application of instructional and curricular methods to attain academic excellence will be similarly ineffective” (Becker and Luthar, 2002).

Metro Elementary 3 staff members understand this imperative and have attended to the needs of their students in multiple formats, (e.g., social, emotional, health, and education needs). The positive impact of attending to the whole child is documented in many ways, but is found objectively in the school’s outstanding student achievement data. The synergy that this focus has created is palpable and validates the adage, “success breeds success.”

Analysts consistently document that children from poor homes . . . are more likely than their peers to attend schools with inadequate and substandard facilities (Gandara et al., 2003; Hakuta, 2002; Spradlin et al., 2005) . . . [and] all of these factors that define unhealthy learning climates are negatively related to student achievement (Barton, 2000). Against all odds and in spite of the less than optimal facilities that house this school, the Metro 3 staff members have managed to raise student academic growth to an extraordinary level. This challenge has not stood in the way of the school’s laser-like focus on providing an equitable education for their students.

Reaching out to wary parents is a powerful tool for urban Title I schools. “Strategies for enhancing parent involvement include: removing language barriers between the parents and the school, addressing economic obstacles that hinder parent involvement, scheduling activities to make transportation easier for parents, empowering and motivating parents to get involved, promoting teacher-parent relations, and acknowledging and empowering parental aspirations” (Susan Zimmerman-Orozco 2011). Metro Elementary 3 teachers and administrators work diligently to make parents feel welcome and continually seek ways to develop parent support in raising student achievement. There is consistent communication between home and school. A pediatric clinic provides health and dental care for children less than eighteen years of age.

“Professional development that focuses on student learning and helps teachers develop the pedagogical skills to teach specific kinds of content has strong positive effects on practice” (Blank, de las Alas, & Smith, 2007; Wenglinsky, 2000). It is important to not only identify through data analysis the skills in which students’ are deficient but to address these skills through focused and intentional instruction. Active learning opportunities allow teachers to transform their teaching and not simply layer new strategies on top of old (Snow-Renner & Lauer, 2005). These opportunities often involve modeling new strategies and constructing opportunities for teachers to practice and reflect on them (Garet et al., 2001; Saxe et al., 2001; Supovitz et al., 2000). The focus for professional development at Metro Elementary 3 this year is to address student writing specific to Standards 2 and 3 and male interest in writing. Vertical Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) developed grade level rubrics for writing. Teachers engage in monthly grade level team meetings to analyze data and plan for instruction. Students are given choices with their writing prompts. The three instructional coaches support teachers in improving the quality of instruction, embedding professional development, and effectively implementing the curriculum.

Next Steps:

- School leaders and teachers state they have high expectations and believe all students can learn, but a sense of urgency and instructional rigor is not pervasive throughout the learning environment. While there are numerous in-school factors that can help narrow achievement gaps, quality engaging instruction and curricular rigor are especially powerful interventions (Murphy, 2010). Thompson states, “There is considerable evidence that different strategies . . . work best in different settings”. Singham further says, “The impact of the teacher is far greater for minority students. “Teacher expertise account[s] for more variation in student achievement than any other factor. (Lewis, 2008). Through a collaborative process, continually use research and professional development to increase teachers’ capacity to deal effectively with specific student challenges and increase achievement for all. Factors to investigate include cognitively demanding, engaging instructional strategies that are based on best-practices research. Also include identifying classroom routines and management that create an effective classroom (Murphy, 2010); (Lemov, 2010).
- Expand on the concept of releasing educational responsibility to students by:
 - providing a clear vision of what students must know and be able to do;
 - providing strategies and exemplars that translate the vision into actions that result in high quality work;
 - leading students to express a standard or learning objective in their own words;
 - inviting students to contribute to the choice of assessment tasks;
 - asking students to apply the criteria to their work and get feedback about their success;
 - allowing students to self-correct (learn from their mistakes) promoting students’ personal control in the learning context; and
 - providing reflective activities, e.g., post-performance reflections and goal-setting activities (Bruce, 2001).
- A safe, healthy, orderly, and equitable learning environment is paramount to providing educational equity for students at Metro Elementary 3. Explore ways to address improving the physical environment at Metro Elementary 3. This includes:
 - having experts (e.g., local police, district specialists) review the building crisis plan, as well as evaluate the overall vulnerability of the building/grounds to intruders;
 - addressing the overall sense of clutter and lack of organization throughout the building which creates cognitive dissonance and sensory overload for students, as well as a negative first impression of the school;
 - re-visiting the school-wide discipline plan to ensure a common understanding, equity of application of behavior standards, and an orderly environment. This should also include a study of student management strategies for certified and classified staff in order to enlarge the staff’s capacity to deal with a variety of behavioral issues.
- Provide a kiosk and/or family resource center within the school for parents to access Infinite Campus, gather information regarding community resources, seek volunteer opportunities and find parent education or trainings. A volunteer parent knowledgeable in information about school goals and learning strategies could provide parents with support for working with their children at home.

- Beyond analyzing assessment data, it is important for teachers to look at the instructional concerns they face in order to help students conquer challenging skills in literacy and mathematics. Coaches and teachers need to determine what effective instruction will look like in order for students to master core learning as well as deficit skills. Intentional use of specific, focused and targeted instructional strategies must occur in all settings, with follow-up assessment to check for mastery.
- Professional development has concentrated on literacy in a planned manner. Applying this same model to mathematics may bring similar results.
- Programs used with fidelity provide teachers with a practical structure for delivery of skills and/or content. The adoption of the standards-based teaching/learning cycle would support consistent delivery of instruction in any content area and any grade level and a process for evaluating instructional effectiveness.
- Colorado’s description of 21st century skills is a synthesis of essential abilities students must apply in a fast changing world. Truly embedding 21st century skills in the classroom requires a shift in teaching and learning. Professional development is needed for teachers to address these essential skills:
 - **critical thinking and reasoning**, (e.g., problem solving, analysis, logic, cause/effect),
 - **information literacy**, (e.g., knowledge acquisition, source discernment, systems management),
 - **collaboration**, (e.g., synergy, team resourcing, social skills, leadership),
 - **self-direction**, (e.g., adaptability, initiative, personal responsibility, work ethics, self-advocacy), and
 - **invention**, (e.g., creativity, innovation, integration of ideas).

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 plan(s) by multiple stakeholders. The school improvement plan reflects learning research and current state and local standards. The goals and activities are determined by analysis of disaggregated data. The district and school improvement plans are aligned for a system of continuous improvement.

In many ways, Metro Elementary School 3 is an organization where leadership and staff engage in systems thinking as exemplified by existence of a clear purpose, aligned effort, good communication, and collaboration that results in an admirable degree of effectiveness in raising student achievement. The question remains, “What should we be adding to our systems-thinking and practices that will result in higher student achievement?” The many initiatives and practices that Metro Elementary School 3 leadership and staff put into place are the **right things to do**. The school appears ready to emphasize and focus on **doing the right things well**, and thus fulfilling their intent to have all students attain high levels of academic achievement.

Schools are complex organizations that work best when there is commitment to a common vision and all parties engage in aligned work to reach intended goals. When a staff has a shared vision, the group and individuals can better create actions that support achievement of school goals.

Systems-thinking is about gaining insights into the whole by understanding the linkages and the interactions between the elements that comprise the system (Senge, 1990). In schools where systems-thinking is prevalent, plans and actions are interlinked, staff members maintain a laser-like focus, and all efforts align with the vision and goals established in the school improvement plan. In addition, operating with a shared vision implies using collaborative work practices and communications.

Collaboration is an essential characteristic of high-achieving, low-income schools and includes participation of all faculty members, parents, and students. Researchers indicate that, without exception, these schools have collaborative cultures and processes (Fullan, 1999). In addition, good communication among all stakeholders is a critical feature of any endeavor in which people work in close proximity for a common purpose (Marzano, Waters & McNulty 2005).

In today’s effective schools, the principal is seen as a “leader of leaders” who realizes that expertise resides in many people. School improvement continues to happen when everyone refines their knowledge, skills, and practices to ensure high levels of student learning beyond the attainment of basic skills. In order to continue to embrace excellence, the following next steps are offered.

Next Steps:

- From a leadership and organizational-effectiveness perspective, next steps in the school improvement effort are to complement the strategic focus with a tactical emphasis on quality processes, including extensive use of process data (Grayson, 2010). Student data typically inform **what** needs to be done. Process data can inform **how** to become highly effective. Collection and analysis of process data are as important as the student achievement data for informing the system of **why** various procedures and practices may or may not be effective. In addition, process data are what informs determination of root causes within a system. A comprehensive framework for quality instruction is one way to establish criteria to evaluate processes. The framework may include areas of emphasis such as how:
 - student group work is structured and monitored,
 - direct and explicit instruction is delivered,
 - students are provided feedback,
 - higher-order thinking is facilitated, and
 - transitions are planned and executed.

Consider engaging in a study of various instructional frameworks, lesson designs, and lesson planning strategies for the purpose of guiding instructional practice throughout the school. Such a framework will require professional development on highly-effective, research-based strategies that improve student achievement, which should be monitored for use and fidelity. Various forms of process information can include data collected using walkthrough protocols, teacher self-evaluations, peer observation based on a framework for effective instruction, and other observational sources.

- Consider increasing the frequency of classroom walkthroughs by school administration and providing timely feedback about practices that are working well, along with suggestions for improvement. In addition, aggregate data from the walkthroughs, share with staff, and facilitate goal setting to improve instructional practices.
- Identify and share strategies for reducing the length of between-class and in-class transitions to ensure that instructional time is maximized.
- Consider having a classified person on the Building Leadership Team to ensure that all perspectives are represented in decision-making.

REFERENCES

- Allen, JoBeth, (2007). *Creating welcoming schools: A practical guide to home-school partnerships with diverse families*. New York, NY: Teacher's College Press.
- Becker, B.E., & Luthar, S.S. (2002). Social-emotional factors affecting achievement outcomes among disadvantaged students: Closing the achievement gap. *Educational Psychologist*, 37 (4).
- 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.
- Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (1998). Inside the black box: Raising standards through classroom assessment [Electronic version]. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 80, 139-148.
- Blank, R.K., de las, N., & Smith, C. (2007). *Analysis of the quality of professional development programs for mathematics and science teachers*, Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers.
- Brookhart, Susan M. (2008). *How to give effective feedback to your students*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Brookhart, Susan M. (2007). *Assessment and grading in classrooms*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Bruce, Linda B. (2001). Student self-assessment. *Classroom Leadership*, Vol. 5 No. 1.
- DuFour, R. & Eaker, R. (1998). *Professional learning communities at work: Best practices for enhancing student achievement*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Eaker, R, DuFour, R. & DuFour, R. (2002). *Getting started: Re-culturing schools to become professional learning communities*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.
- Fullan, R. (1999). *Change forces: The sequel*. Abington, UK: Routledge.
- Gale Group (2004). Creating effective school districts: Lessons from practice, research, and national reports.
- Gandara, P., et al. (2003). English learners in California schools: Unequal resources, unequal outcomes. *Educational Policy Analysis Archives*, 11. Retrieved October 19, 2007, from <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v11n36>.
- Garet, M., Porter, A., Desimone, L., Birman, B., Yoon, K. (2001). What makes professional development effective? Results from a national sample of teachers. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(4), 915-945.

Grayson, C.J. (2010, September 22). Why this could be the best of times for education: And four ways to make it so. *Education Week*, pp. 23, 25.

Hakuta, K. (2002). *English language learner access to basic educational necessities in California? An analysis of inequities*. Retrieved October 19, 2007, <http://www.mofo.com/decent-schools/expert-reports/hakuta-report.pdf>.

Hobby, R. (March, 2004). *A Culture for Learning: An Investigation into the Values and Beliefs Associated with Effective Schools*. London: Hay Group Management.

Lemov, Doug. (2010). *Teach like a Champion*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Marzano, R. J. (2003). *What works in schools: Translating research into action*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Scheurich, J. J. & Skria, L. (2003). *Leadership for equity and excellence*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Saxe, G., Gearhart, M., & Nasir, S. (2001). Enhancing students' understanding of mathematics: A study of three contrasting approaches to professional support. *Journal of Mathematics Teacher Education*, 4, 55-79.

Spradlin, T.E., et al. (2005). *Is the achievement gap in Indiana narrowing? Special report*. Bloomington, IN: Center for Evaluation and Education Policy.

Senge, P. (1990). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*. New York, NY: Doubleday Currency.

Supovitz, J.A., & Turner, H.M. (2000) The effects of professional development on science teaching practices and classroom culture. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*. 37(9),963-980.

Stiggins, R.L. (2001). *Student-involved classroom assessment*. Upper Saddle River, N.J: Prentice Hall.

Thompson, C.L. (2002). *Research-based review of reports on closing achievement gaps: Report to the education cabinet and the joint legislative oversight committee*. Chapel Hill: North Carolina Education Research Council.

Wenglinsky, H. (2000) *How teaching matters: Bringing the classroom back into discussion of teacher quality*. Princeton, NY Milken Family foundation and Educational Testing Service

Yoon, K.S., Duncan, T., Lee, S.S.Y., Scarloss, B., & Shapley, K. (2007). *Reviewing the evidence on how teacher professional development affects student achievement* (Issues and Answers Report, REL2007 No.0333). Washington, DC: US Department of Education, Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest.

Zimmerman-Orozco, Susan (2011). A Circle of Caring. *Educational Leadership*, 68 (8), 64-68.