

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

**For**

**North Central Elementary School**

**Conducted: August 28-September 2, 2011**

## Introduction

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

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

- The school must have been a designated Title I school for at least 4 years.
- The top 34 schools were determined based on performance data including:
  - Catch-up median growth percentiles; and
  - Colorado English Language Acquisition (CELA) growth
- This narrowed the group to the top 15 schools in which additional performance data, listed below, were used:
  - Reading and Math achievement (3 year);
  - School Performance Frameworks (SPF) rating and specific "Growth Gaps" rating (3 year);
  - AYP results;
  - Colorado Basic Literacy Act (CBLA) data (for elementary schools); and
  - Graduation Rate (for high schools).
- This narrowed the list to 11 schools using the following demographics data.
  - Poverty rates;
  - Size of school based on enrollment;
  - Percent of students that are ELL and minority;
  - Location of school (rural, urban, etc.); and
  - Title I allocation and per pupil allocation.

As a result of this project, it is hoped that the highly-effective practices, identified through the ESP review process, will be revealed, triangulated with the research, and shared (in multiple ways) in order to support struggling schools in their journey to achieving high levels of student success for all.

## Performance by North Central Elementary School

EFFECTIVE SCHOOL PROFILE			
SCHOOL NAME: NORTH CENTRAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL			
DEMOGRAPHICS			
Type of IA School	Targeted Assistance	School Level	Elementary
Geographical Location	Outlying Town	Enrollment (size)	146
Free and Reduced	43.28%	Hispanic	26.03%
English Language Learners	20.55%	Non-White	28.08%
School IA Allocation	\$42,900.00	Per Pupil Allocation	\$975.00
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 = 73.5 M = 72.5	SPF – Growth Gaps Rating	Exceeds
Free/Reduced Lunch MGP (3 year)	R = 74 M = 82	SPF – Growth Gaps Reading	Exceeds
ELL MGP (3 year)	R = 75 M = 78	SPF – Growth Gaps Math	Exceeds
CELA 3 year (% Making at least one year of PL growth)	50.0 %		
CELA MGP 08	**	AYP – Overall 08	Yes
CELA MGP 09	**	AYP – Overall 09	Yes
CELA MGP 10	**	AYP – Overall 10	Yes
CBLA (% Making Progress)	80.39%		

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

Number of Interviews: 150\*

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

- School administrators 16
- Instructional staff (regular and special program teachers) 36
- District administrators 6
- Parents/Community Members 7
- Classified Instructional Staff 6
- Students 73
- Other 6

Number of Observations:

- Classrooms 106
- Meetings 1
- Professional development 0

### **Purpose of the ESP Review:**

The purpose of the ESP review is for an external team to gather information about an effective school's systems and processes. The information gathered will be provided to the school for both affirmation as well as possible next steps in their continuous improvement efforts. The intention of the Colorado Department of Education is to use this work to inform practitioners and other schools about the practices that are working for high-performing Title I schools in the state of Colorado.

The ESP review is conducted by assessing the school in nine areas of school effectiveness, consistently identified as research-based practices, relative to:

- Curriculum
- Classroom Assessment and Evaluation
- Instruction
- School Culture
- Student, Family and Community Support
- Professional Growth, Development and Evaluation
- Leadership
- Organization and Allocation of Resources
- Comprehensive and Effective Planning.

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

**Academic Performance:** The following Academic Performance Standards address (1) curriculum, (2) classroom assessment and evaluation, and (3) instruction.

- Standard 1:** The school implements an adopted curriculum that is rigorous and aligned to state and local standards.
- Standard 2:** The school uses multiple evaluation and assessment strategies to continuously inform and modify instruction to meet student needs and promote proficient student work.
- Standard 3:** Teachers engage all students by using effective, varied, and research-based practices to improve student academic performance.

**Learning Environment:** The following Learning Environment Standards address (4) school culture, (5) student, family, and community support, and (6) professional growth, development and evaluation.

- Standard 4:** The school/district functions as an effective learning community and supports a climate conducive to performance excellence.
- Standard 5:** The school works with families and community groups to remove barriers to learning in an effort to meet the intellectual, social, career, and developmental needs of students.
- Standard 6:** The school/district provides research-based, results-driven professional development opportunities for staff and implements performance evaluation procedures in order to improve teaching and learning.

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

- Standard 7:** School instructional decisions focus on support for teaching and learning, organizational direction, high performance expectations, creation of a learning culture, and development of leadership capacity.
- Standard 8:** The school is organized to maximize use of all available resources to support high student and staff performance.
- Standard 9:** The school develops, implements, and evaluates a comprehensive school improvement plan that communicates a clear purpose, direction, and action plan focused on teaching and learning.

## DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE and OVERVIEW OF THE SCHOOL

North Central Elementary School is located in rural Colorado. The student population is stable, with many enrolling in kindergarten and continuing at North Central Elementary through fifth grade after which they attend middle school in the area. Families are predominately long-term owners of large agricultural operations, and employees and laborers of these farms. Owners and employees of related agricultural businesses also comprise the North Central community. North Central Elementary School is a central gathering place, with parents, extended family and community members attending school events. The North Central community is proud of its school and considers it to be an excellent place for students. Attendance rates hold at 96% or above. The students at North Central Elementary School are safe, both physically and emotionally. The following comments by students represent an overall sentiment about North Central Elementary:

“Nothing bad happens here.”

“We know we have great teachers that help and support us.”

“We practice being safe.”

“The principal cares about us and worries about us.”

“Teachers help us know what is right and wrong.”

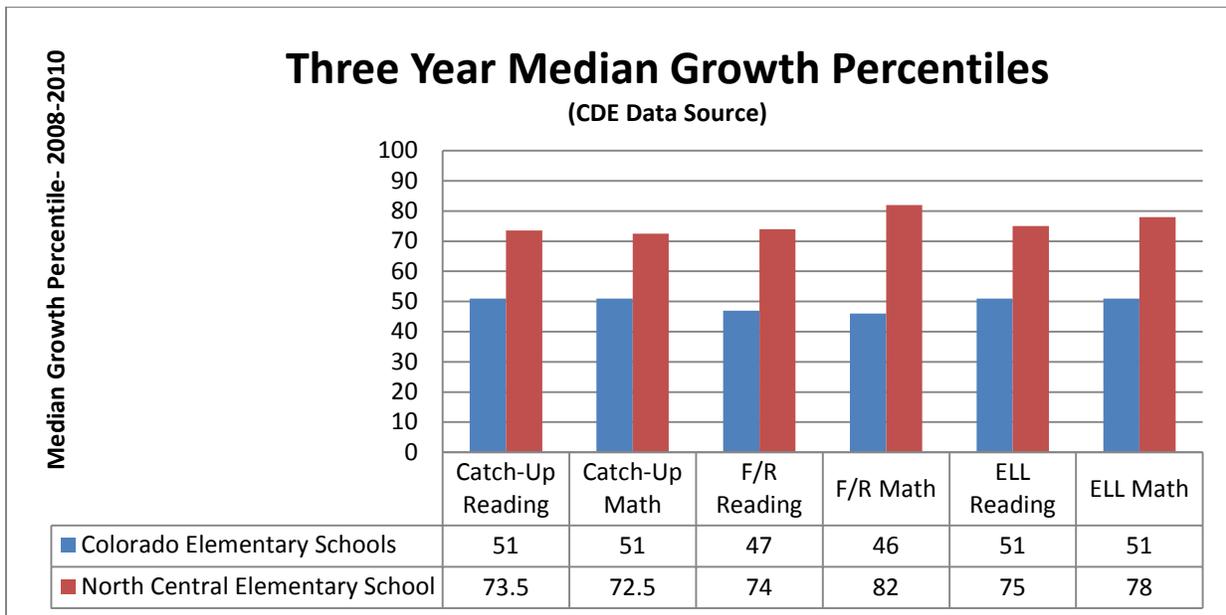
Five years ago the principal and staff embarked on an intense effort to bring 100% of its students to proficiency in reading. This entailed a change in how literacy instruction “had always been done,” from general literacy instruction to strategically matching below proficient students with interventions for additional instruction outside of the regular literacy block. Over the past five years, the school’s menu of carefully selected literacy interventions to meet a variety of needs and levels of intensity has grown into a rich resource bank. For the past two years, similar intervention measures are developing in mathematics. These efforts have served to raise student achievement. The staff and administration are hard-working, proud of the results their students have been realizing, and have the capabilities to achieve their initial goal of having 100% of their students proficient in reading and to raise academic growth in all core areas to a greater degree. The principal and teachers are keenly aware that to sustain students’ trajectory of continuous improvement, there is additional work to be done and express in multiple ways, “We are all learners at North Central.”

<b>% Proficient &amp; Advanced –CSAP*</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Writing</b>	<b>Math</b>	<b>Science</b>
<b>2011</b> - All categories of students	81%	64%	84%	54%
<b>2007</b> - All categories of students	62%	51%	60%	32%

English Language Learners are successful in moving toward being proficient & advanced in English:

<b>CELA –Overall Scores*</b>	<b>(1) Beginning</b>	<b>(2) Early Intermediate</b>	<b>(3) Intermediate</b>	<b>(4) Proficient</b>	<b>(5) Advanced</b>
<b>2010-11</b>	0%	16%	24%	36%	24%
<b>2009-10</b>	17%	17%	26%	30%	9%
<b>2008-09</b>	29%	29%	7%	36%	0%

\*Data obtained from North Central Elementary School



While the Median Growth Percentiles from 2007-2009 rose appreciably, they dropped in 2010 and dropped further in 2011. These data raise a flag that the need for the next tier of work is on the horizon for the school. The principal and staff are in a position of strength to use their prior work as a springboard into the next level of producing results.

Median Growth Percentile*	Reading	Writing	Math
2011 - All categories of students	44%ile	29%ile	41%ile
2010 – All categories of students	51%ile	52%ile	71%ile
2009 – All categories of students	77%ile	83%ile	86%ile
2008 – All categories of students	67.5%ile	72%ile	64%ile
2007 - All categories of students	40%ile	59%ile	52%ile

\*Data obtained from North Central Elementary School

North Central Elementary School has demonstrated success through hard work, based on research-based practices. Following are three key practices that contribute to the school's success:

- **Strong Relational Trust:** The school culture is supportive and caring, within and outside the school. Parents, principal, and teachers are supportive of the school and what it does for students. The principal and staff work together collaboratively, with each other, and with parents. The staff members are caring and loving about the students. Teachers support each other by asking for and receiving ideas and resources for more effective instruction. Staff expertise is shared. The North Central staff work together as a team.
- **Strong Principal Leadership:** The principal of seven years is an organizational and instructional leader. She is strong in building relationships and trust with staff, students, parents and the community. The principal models high expectations in classrooms and in how she conducts all school business. She possesses high levels of expertise in

instruction, data analysis, and technology. Teachers value her guidance, knowing it is carefully thought-out and informed by well-founded literature and research.

- **Intentional Use of Interventions and Support:** A well-developed RtI process frames the school's understanding of Tier II and Tier III intervention and fosters use of multiple programs and resources to move students to proficiency in reading. Data are used to match appropriate intervention with each student, and to monitor and adjust as needed. Additionally, multiple ways are employed to ensure that students have extended time to read text – in the classroom, during flooding groups, silent AR time, and at home to meet reading calendar expectations.

In summary, the principal and teachers at North Central Elementary School are committed to their students. To quote the principal, “We don’t believe in failing a student. We will spend an incredible amount of time to provide the support to help a child ‘get there’ by re-teaching and providing supplementary help. When a child fails, so does the teacher and parent. We can’t control the parents, but we can manage what we do at school.”

## **EFFECTIVE SCHOOL PRACTICES REVIEW NARRATIVE REPORT**

### **SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS**

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

- Instruction at North Central Elementary School primarily relies on sources such as textbooks and programs and is only minimally based upon the district curriculum. These multiple sources provide the direction and pacing of instruction throughout the building.
- The district curriculum is reviewed on a six-year-cycle. This review is conducted by a district-wide committee composed of representatives from each school, grade-level and/or subject area. In addition to the charge of reviewing the curriculum, the committee chooses a text to support instruction and develops units using the Understanding by Design template. Content areas reviewed prior to 2010 were based on the Colorado Model Content Standards. Those reviewed in 2010 and forward are based on the Colorado Academic Standards. Essential learning targets, purposeful interdisciplinary connections, or ties to post-secondary skills have not been identified. Information literacy standards are not embedded within all curriculum documents. Teachers at North Central Elementary School are expected to develop their own pacing guides to accompany the district curriculum.
- Recent school district adopted textbooks for curriculum support include:
  - Reading: Macmillan/McGraw-Hill, *Reading*
  - Math: Pearson, *enVisions Math: Common Core*
  - Science: Foss and Delta Kits

- Social Studies: Macmillan/McGraw-Hill, *People and Places*

In addition to these district-adopted resources North Central teachers have multiple supplemental materials and programs, (e.g., *Simple Solutions* for science) to augment curriculum delivery. The North Central Elementary staff members have chosen *Empowering Writers* for writing instruction.

- Staff members report a “loose” interpretation of curriculum expectations. Many state that they just “know” what standards should be taught and often refer to the textbook as the curriculum. Staff members do not routinely refer to standards when teaching or identify them in their plans. They express that a lot of teacher discretion and flexibility in instruction exist.
- Expectations (standards that are to be taught, amount of time for each subject, what resources should be used) are often verbal and subject to individual interpretation and decision-making.
- Even though decisions for interventions are data-driven, classroom instruction (Tier I - First Best Instruction) is not consistently or intentionally standards-based or data-driven. Learning targets are not identified in the written curriculum and therefore, unavailable to teachers for reference during planning, instruction delivery, or visible in the classroom for students.
- North Central Elementary School is a one-track school in a small school district. Horizontal and vertical articulation is limited in both the building and district; however, within North Central Elementary School, horizontal articulation is supported this year with time being provided one day a month for coordination by classroom and flooding teachers. Vertical articulation and discussions of key transition points happens either during staff meetings or district collaboration days. The building principal supports these collaborative efforts within the building by providing time and expertise for the staff. Additionally, at the district level, the principal participates in collaborative efforts by providing her expertise in writing and technology.
- All students do not have equal access to a challenging academic curriculum. Through textbooks and supplemental materials some rigor and higher-order thinking skills are part of daily instruction; however, not all students have equal access to all core subjects due to scheduling of interventions, lack of identified Learning Targets, and the inconsistency of understanding and implementation of the Standards-based Teaching/Learning Cycle by all staff.

**Standard 2 – Assessment:** *The school uses multiple evaluation and assessment strategies to continually inform and modify instruction to meet student needs and promote proficient student work.*

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

- North Central Elementary School staff members participate in some analysis of CSAP, benchmark, and progress monitoring data at the school level to inform certain school and classroom decisions, including the following:
  - identify school improvement goals;
  - identify professional development goals for North Central Elementary School staff members;
  - group and regroup students for instruction and intervention;
  - identify strategic instruction for specific students within literacy intervention groups; and
  - monitor reading progress of individual students.
- District assessments for content areas (informed by state content standards) have been developed by curriculum committees. Science and writing assessments are administered in the fall and spring. Math and reading assessments are administered three times per year. District assessment data are analyzed for patterns and trends. Some disaggregation and root cause analyses occur.
- North Central Elementary School staff members have created an assessment plan that lists benchmark and progress monitoring tools and timelines that guide teachers in selecting appropriate assessments (e.g., Scantron, DIBELS, STAR Reading, math, and early literacy). Flowcharts for both mathematics and reading instruction clearly outline procedures for assessing and meeting specific instructional needs of students assigned to mathematics and literacy intervention groups by listing interventions that support specific and varied areas of need.
- Teachers are beginning to integrate the collection, analysis, and use of data for formative purposes. For example, the new mathematics program identifies *quick check* questions for each lesson that teachers will be able to use daily to inform instructional decisions (e.g., the need to re-teach, regroup, or extend the lesson).
- Teachers are beginning to create systems around the practice of looking at student work (e.g., writing samples, science notebooks) to inform responsive instruction.
- Some teachers, at times, analyze CSAP-released items and integrate CSAP-like tasks into daily work.
- Accelerated Reading (AR) goals are set by teachers and shared with students. They are quantifiable (not specific to skill or strategy) and reflect students’ time interacting with text including competency in answering comprehension questions.

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

“The quality of instruction is a function of teachers’ understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their students. The depth of that understanding, in turn hinges on the quality of teachers’ assessments of student achievement. Thus, sound instruction requires the sound classroom-level assessment of student achievement.” (Stiggins, 1992)

- While some exemplary examples of best first instructional strategies exist, this is not the norm across the building. Some teachers, at times, use a variety of research-based instructional strategies. In an ideal classroom students are engaged in the work with the teachers guiding that progress. At present teachers are doing the *heavy lifting* and at times are taking on the *sage on the stage* role.
- An emphasis on increasing the amount of time students read text is promoted at North Central Elementary School. *Accelerated Reading* (AR) is one vehicle used to achieve this. AR point goals are identified and shared with students who read both at school and home to reach these goals. The AR goals are quantitative (expressed numerically) and not strategy or skill referenced. All students who achieve AR goals are invited to participate in a special field trip.
- The principal encourages and supports teachers to increase instructional effectiveness. Classrooms are routinely monitored, feedback shared as deemed appropriate, and professional learning opportunities are available to support teachers’ growth areas.
- While some appropriate pacing of lessons was observed, this is not the norm.
- Teachers frequently give immediate and helpful feedback to students during lessons and activities; however, this feedback is not specific to identified learning targets nor is it associated with assessment rubrics or checklists.
- Aside from flooding groups and interventions, most instruction is whole class and many procedural-type activities were observed. Scripted reading by teachers of lesson text was frequently observed.
- Materials and supplies are plentiful at North Central Elementary School. Teachers have access to various sources of supplemental academic materials for classroom and intervention instruction. These are chosen after a thorough review of data to determine effectiveness. Also available is a well-stocked, organized, and well-maintained bookroom. Currently, resources in the bookroom are being reorganized to denote AR levels.
- The building library has many titles organized for ease of location by the Dewey Decimal System, AR designations, and pictures for young readers. The bookroom and library are supported by building funds and PTO fund-raisers. Both teacher and student input are solicited as new purchases are made.

- In addition to supplemental programs, bookroom, and library resources, technology is readily available to all teachers and students and is equitably distributed throughout the building. Each classroom teacher has a document camera for use in instruction and classroom sets of *NEO2s* (mini-computers) are in each room for student use. These mini-computers can be used in multiple ways, such as *Accelerated Reader* assessments or student response checks. New *iPod Touch* devices have been purchased through Title I funds and will be incorporated in instruction throughout the year. Furthermore, each classroom has a few computers designated for student use. Teachers are expected to incorporate available technology in instruction and are evaluated on their use of it.
- The principal teaches technology classes in the computer lab and incorporates Educational Technology and Information Literacy (ETIL) standards. Although staff members express sufficient access to resources, they often state a need for additional professional development in the use of technology as an instructional resource.
- There is an informal homework policy of 10 minutes per grade level (e.g., 20 minutes for grade 2 and 30 minutes for grade 3, etc.) plus reading homework for flooding groups. At this time, homework is monitored for completion by requiring parent signatures but is not being evaluated for connections to standards and/or level of difficulty.
- “We teach reading” is the mantra that has guided instruction at North Central Elementary School. This philosophy has helped to meet individual student needs and to close learning gaps. The Response to Intervention (RtI) Process is designed around this philosophy and continues to guide decisions that promote students’ ability to be proficient in reading as well as providing appropriate interventions for other areas, including behavior.
- The RtI Process begins with benchmark assessments that are given and analyzed at the beginning of the school year. Those students who are below proficiency are identified and placed in appropriate interventions (time and programs). At mid-term (approximately every six weeks) students are progress-monitored using Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) testing. After analysis of results, a decision is made as to whether to maintain current interventions or to refer the student to the Student Intervention Team (SIT). This team further analyzes the students’ needs using the MAP assessments for reading and math. Additional intervention suggestions are made and the frequency of monitoring is increased as the process continues.
- Interventions are provided by multiple staff members, including para-professionals, some specials and other teachers. Professional development is provided to those staff members assigned to use specific intervention programs. North Central Elementary School has a wealth of intervention programs designated to meet the varying needs of students. They include for reading:
  - *FUNdations, Horizons, Phonics for Reading, Barton* (phonics);
  - *Read Naturally, Reading Plus, 6 Minute Solution* (comprehension, fluency and vocabulary);
  - *Corrective Reading,*

- *Reading Plus*, and
- *X/Brain Gym*.

For math intervention, students are instructed using *Number Worlds* and *Math Force*. *Carousel of IDEAS* is used for students who require intervention for English Language Acquisition (ELA), instruction.

As the need arises, additional programs are selected and purchased. However, enrichment materials for students who are proficient or advanced are limited.

- Staff members report that interventions (Tiers II and III) directly contribute to the success of North Central Elementary School students. This academic success is visible through growth data. However, intentional examination of the school's Tier I Best First Instruction (universal classroom instruction) has not been intentionally examined for its effectiveness as a viable and important part of the learning process. Clear understanding of the role best first instruction plays in being an essential pro-active pre-requisite before assigning students into interventions is not pervasive among all teachers.
- Extended academic learning opportunities (beyond the school day and year) are minimal for students and may include after school tutoring (some provided by older students) and limited summer opportunities.

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

- The school provides a safe, orderly, and equitable learning environment for students. A priority of the administration and staff is to ensure that an effective school and classroom environment is created to provide high levels of learning for all students. The staff members speak of all students in the school as “our students”.
- Students and staff feel safe at North Central Elementary School. Behavior charts entitled: P.R.I.D.E. {(P)ositive attitude; (R)espect; (I)ntegrity; (D)etermination; (E)xcellence every day} are found throughout the building and in classrooms. The plans are designed with detailed description about what appropriate behavior “looks like” and “sounds like.”
- Learning environment data (e.g., culture/climate surveys or opinion surveys) have not been recently conducted in the community.
- Teachers indicate that they have high academic expectations for students. However, teachers do not have exemplars available to show students what proficient looks like in the academic content areas. As a result, descriptions of high quality grade-level work are not available.
- Academic successes for students that have met established goals are celebrated with school-wide field trips, classroom parties, and recognitions at end-of-year all-student

assemblies. Many of these celebrations are geared to provide students with a variety of opportunities for new experiences (i.e., trips to the mountains).

- Formal student leadership opportunities (e.g., student council, class officers) are not currently available at North Central Elementary School.
- Non-teaching personnel express they feel included and respected as staff members at North Central Elementary School. They receive the building communications and have professional development opportunities directed specifically to support their job responsibilities.
- Parents and staff members mention that the high level of student academic success is dependent on the following factors:
  - collaboration between staff members and families,
  - a supportive and knowledgeable principal as a resource for staff and families,
  - a knowledgeable staff,
  - dedication exhibited by staff members, who
  - focus on students and their success.
- There is a recognizable positive synergy in the school. Staff members continuously talk about successes occurring in the school. Students are addressed by name in the hallways, lunchroom, and on playgrounds by all staff. Staff report these practices contribute to the positive energy among staff. One of the students interviewed summed up the atmosphere of the school with the comment, “This is a happy place.”
- The principal values positive professional and personal relationship building among staff members. For example, each day the teachers have time together at lunch because the principal, along with the Building and Grounds Technician, supervise the lunchroom.
- Teachers guide and teach students goal-setting skills tied to results on Accelerated Reader (AR) assessments. Students are held accountable to meet those goals. Students who reach their goals receive building-wide rewards of field trips and other recognition. Students are provided opportunities to see their growth charts in academic areas as a result of testing occurring throughout the school year. This furthers students’ responsibility for their own learning.
- While formal student-led conferences are not conducted, parents are encouraged to bring their children to parent-teacher conferences. When children attend conferences, they are included in the conversations regarding their progress.
- Student work is displayed throughout the building. Examples of outstanding work are not highlighted.
- Students indicate that they are proud of their school. They know that the teachers at North Central Elementary School care about them and want them to succeed.

- Staff communicates student success to parents in the following ways:
  - personal contact,
  - school and classroom newsletters, and
  - activities such as dinners for students and their families.
- While parent involvement in school-offered training opportunities (e.g., parent education) appears to be low, overall pride in the school by the community is high.
- While there are no planned opportunities for recognizing diversity, student diversity is celebrated in many classrooms and ethnic foods, representative of community demographics, are prepared for some parent/school events.

**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.*

- North Central Elementary School has a strong sense of community both internally and externally.
- The Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) is the vehicle for parent and community participation in the school. The PTO assists the school by finding and providing volunteer services for the school and classrooms and raising funds for various school needs. A goal of the organization is to find additional ways to involve the Hispanic parents in the school.
- Parents and community members are comfortable coming into the school. Many parents and grandparents come into the building to have lunch with their children/grandchildren or to volunteer.
- The Boys and Girls Club of Greeley partners with the school. Opportunity for after-school care is available daily from 3:30-6:30 p.m. for a nominal fee. Supervision and structured programming for students to read and complete homework is conducted in a session entitled, “Power Hour” in addition to providing other activities.
- Other before- and after-school activities include tutoring by teachers and students. Students have the opportunity to participate in the North Central Gold Select Choir, conducted by the school’s music teachers. Any student is eligible to participate, with attendance and behavioral expectations for continued participation.
- The school maintains an accurate, secure student record system that provides timely information pertinent to the student’s academic and educational development. The administrative assistant monitors and updates records to ensure they are relevant, current, and transferred on a timely basis. Access to records is in hard copy or electronic form.

- The school uses various vehicles to communicate within the school, with parents, and with community members:
  - Email and face-to-face communication are used extensively to communicate among staff. Staff members and the principal operate with an open-door policy. Teachers informally communicate and share information on a regular basis during the common lunch time for all.
  - Staff meetings occur twice a month during which ideas are shared and issues are discussed. Designated staff members share information from the staff meetings with paraprofessionals who do not attend the meeting.
  - Collaboration time is provided on Fridays for paraprofessionals and teachers to discuss their flooding groups.
  - The principal provides a staff bulletin every two weeks which includes upcoming events and information.
  - A newsletter is provided for staff and parents at least once a month containing a variety of information and listing of upcoming events.
  - The school maintains a website and through the parent portal of Infinite Campus, parents are informed of testing results, classroom activities, and homework assignments.
  - Phone calls, notes on the reading logs and in the Friday Folders, and chats when coming to pick up or drop off children are used by parents and staff to communicate with each other.
  - A paraprofessional serves as a translator, interpreter and communicator for Spanish-speaking parents.

**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.*

- Since the district has a large pool of applicants for teaching positions, there is limited need to recruit teachers. The principal is able to hire and retain highly qualified personnel. At least half of the teaching staff has a masters degree. New staff members are assigned an experienced teacher who collaborates with them regularly as a mentor.
- Professional development is provided through district collaborative days, school staff meetings, district class offerings, book studies, collegial mentoring, and attendance at conferences, workshops and seminars.

- Teachers are given one professional day each year and some funds to attend a conference, workshop, class, or seminar which would fulfill their individual professional development needs. The district regularly communicates the availability of different professional development opportunities to staff.
- Professional development opportunities are selected based on an analysis of a variety of data. Information from reading, math, writing and science assessment data, principal walkthroughs, *Colorado Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning* (TELL) Survey data, as well as teacher-identified needs are considered in planning for and providing professional development.
- Professional development opportunities are aligned with the school’s learning goals and the professional goals of teachers. For example, writing is a learning focus for the school and teachers are requesting more professional development and support with teaching writing. Thus, two days of classes on using *Empowering Writers* is being offered for the staff. The study of the science notebooking practice supports the school’s goal of improving students’ science proficiency.
- Staff members participate in professional development opportunities offered at the district and school. Some of these opportunities focus on updating content knowledge and instructional skills such as the series of math sessions on effective practices provided at the district level and science notebooking at the district and school level. Other professional development opportunities are training sessions on how to use adopted/purchased programs such as *enVisions Math, Accelerated Math/Reading, Simple Solutions*, and various intervention programs. Few professional development opportunities focus on increasing staff members’ ability to implement high impact instructional strategies in planning and instruction.
- Follow up and monitoring of implementation of professional development is informal and mostly at the request of individual teachers. To provide follow up, the principal will model and coach upon request. Staff members informally provide assistance to one another through collegial support. Sometimes the principal uses walkthroughs to monitor implementation of a professional development focus.
- Training for paraprofessionals occurs once a month to support them in their instruction of flooding and intervention groups. Classified staff members are welcome to attend any or all of the professional development opportunities in the building and some do participate in topics that are relevant to their role. The district offers training for classified staff as a need arises across the district.
- Most of the principal’s professional development is self-initiated. The district initiates some opportunities such as staff development on “lesson study” and provides funds so an administrator can attend select conferences, seminars, and workshops. Currently most of the principal’s professional development comes from her own professional reading.

- A clearly defined evaluation process is implemented in the school. Staff members understand the process and view it as a route to improving their professional proficiency. Staff report receiving necessary resources, support, and guidance to address evaluation feedback.
- Each staff member annually develops professional growth goals in collaboration with the principal. Together they have a “goal-setting conference” at the beginning of the school year and a “review-of-progress conference” at the end of the school year. The principal informally checks on progress of teachers’ goals throughout the year and includes the information in the formal evaluation process of any teacher who is on review.

**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 role of the leader . . . is one of orchestrator . . . taking what can be developed in the way of action and shaping it into lasting commitment to a new strategic direction. The leader makes meaning and develops commitment to a new moral purpose.” (Sergiovanni, 2007)

- Five years ago the current principal of North Central Elementary School determined that in order to improve the percentage of students who performed on grade level for reading, a system of individualized interventions should be developed and implemented with the intent that increased growth would occur in several content areas. Students who were not reading on grade level were provided intensive and targeted interventions to meet their reading needs. Students were also engaged in flooding practices with grouped reading levels that were conducted outside of the sixty-minute reading core. These efforts produced an increase in the percentage of students with proficient and advanced CSAP reading scores. Last year individualized interventions were implemented for mathematics as a continuation of targeted support for students who are not proficient.
- These intervention efforts also began to produce a stronger all-school learning community. Teachers became more committed to the achievement of all students and more concerned about what they need to learn to better meet all students’ needs and improve the school as a whole.
- Relational trust is apparent in the school. Staff members report that they regard each other as skilled, credible, and able to do the right work together. The principal and teachers provide support to each other to become a stronger community of learning and effective practice.
- The spring 2001 *TELL* survey results for North Central Elementary (based on an 86.6% response rate of a very small staff) reveal that teachers have concern for becoming an even more intentional learning community. Teachers reported that they would like to have more collaborative time, more professional development, more access to student data, and more shared influence in decision-making and the continued development of a

shared vision. Interviews with North Central teachers corroborate these data, while at the same time reveal satisfaction with the current leadership. The principal is also concerned about how the school can take the next steps that will institutionalize best practices in shared leadership and meeting all students' academic needs.

- While the principal persists in promoting the intervention actions put in place to improve student achievement, she is also viewed as collaborative and approachable. Communication between staff and the principal is open, input is received and acted upon, and rationale for all actions is explained and discussed.
- The principal demonstrates a variety of skills and depth of knowledge that are respected by staff and give credibility to her role as an instructional leader. She knows the students and their achievement data well and is deeply engaged in work that will help them achieve at higher levels. She is not just an “idea” person, but follows up with consistent actions, dedicating the time and effort needed to produce results. Her efforts and the one-on-one relationships she has developed provide an environment in which the school can function with collegiality, commitment, and determination.
- Most teachers know about the *Colorado Model Content Standards*, reference them when analyzing CSAP results, and have been provided copies of them. However, the state standards historically are not intentionally used to inform school-wide decision-making for practices beyond CSAP achievement results. Teachers have been introduced to the new *Colorado Academic Standards* (2009 edition), although a complete unpacking of the official *Colorado Academic Standards* (adopted 2010) has not been conducted, other than for science through the district-level curriculum work.
- The School Accountability Committee and the Parent Teacher Organization are one and the same. The principal regularly reports to this group about progress toward achieving the goals of the school improvement plan and members have the opportunity to ask questions and give input. Parents who are on this committee express high satisfaction with the information they receive, the opportunity to give input, and the results the students are achieving.
- Staff members express confidence in the leadership of the principal. They feel supported to do their best work with students. They say she is personable, flexible, and approachable and they can speak their minds and offer input without concern because her focus is on the work and meeting the needs of students. She is viewed as a member of the team engaging in the work rather than being “above” it.
- Staff members report that the principal regularly conducts classroom observations and provides meaningful feedback to enhance their practice. However, while instructional time is allocated and protected to maximize instruction, students are often observed to be waiting for others to finish a whole group task, pacing is often slow, and tasks are not always rigorous.

- Parents express great confidence in the principal and the teachers to provide an excellent education and nurturing environment for their children. Those interviewed had no concerns about the operation of the school or their communication and interactions with the school.
- Students say the principal is serious about students doing their work well, but that she is also fun and knows each one of them as an individual. They say, “She keeps us safe and learning.” They also report that they see her every day and they feel that everyone at the school - students, teachers, staff and the principal - are “family.”
- Because the school is so small, many processes and procedures are conducted informally and little all-school attention to how and why decisions are made has occurred. Rather, when differences of opinion arise, they are commonly settled one-on-one instead of as a community. This practice can fragment initiatives, foster a piecemeal approach to next steps, and could lead to a feeling of staff being overwhelmed with competing priorities.

**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 master schedule is planned around specials classes (music, art, physical education, computer) and the “flooding” schedule. The district has established minimum time allocations for literacy, 60 minutes (includes writing), and for mathematics, 60 minutes. Social studies and science are to be alternated for a 30-45 minute block. Within these parameters, each teacher has flexibility to determine the classroom schedule. However, there is variation across classrooms in how much time is actually dedicated to each of these areas. Teachers have considerable autonomy in how they structure the instructional day and the materials used in addition to the district-adopted program(s). Inconsistencies are observed during the literacy block regarding
  - the extent that the basal literacy program is taught,
  - the amount of time that students are involved in the *Accelerated Reader* (AR) program,
  - the amount of time dedicated to *FUNdations* in grades K-3, and
  - the amount of time writing is intentionally taught and that students have for actual writing.

Additionally, there is variability in the amount of time dedicated to teaching science and social studies.

- A 30-minute flooding (clustered reading groups) session is scheduled each day in addition to the core literacy block. Interventions are scheduled for an additional 30 or more minutes per day for those students needing additional intensive support. The major focus of the school is to dedicate enough time and support for every student in the school to accelerate their literacy development to perform at grade level. There is a laser-like school-wide focus on the effort. In mathematics, two intervention options are now available, with targeted students receiving additional instruction beyond their core mathematics block.

- In addition to teachers providing extra individual academic support to students during the school day, the school provides several after-school learning experiences. These include a 30-minute “Reading Buddies” session for selected students who are unable to complete their daily home reading log and “Summer Bridge Books” for students to complete at home to support retention of skills throughout the summer. After-school tutoring and participation in various clubs (drama, choir, science) is impeded for some students by transportation constraints. The Boys and Girls Club, through a regional foundation, provides an hour of after-school academic support as well as a variety of field trips and other activities. Parents pay a nominal fee for their child to participate.
- The daily schedule and a supportive staff afford some opportunities for resource sharing, mentoring, and collaboration. Teachers often informally share lessons and instructional strategies among themselves. Some adjustments to the master schedule have afforded time for “flooding group” teachers and instructional assistants to meet once a week for coordination. Creative ways to carve opportunities for small groups of teachers to conduct lesson studies without disruption to instruction have been worked out.
- A wealth of instructional materials, leveled books, library books, and core content programs are in good condition and updated on a planned schedule. Building the school’s technology resources is a priority. Sets of NEO2s are in all classrooms and are used for individualized AR work and as a writing tool. Each classroom has a document camera and LCD projector, and a slate/tablet. For formative assessments, teachers have the 2-know toolbar for acquiring a quick class profile on student learning during a lesson. Overall, teachers report having adequate materials for their classrooms.
- Most of the school’s budget is dedicated to meeting standard operational needs. Each teacher receives \$200/year to purchase consumable supplies and some special materials of their choice. Music and PE receive \$300 to purchase equipment and other materials. Each teacher has an allocation of \$150 for professional development. New teachers and those who are on a growth plan may be provided additional professional development funds to support specific needs. Over the past five years, the staff and principal have targeted the purchase of reading and math intervention programs as a priority to support identified student learning needs. The principal conducts extensive review of the effectiveness of each intervention prior to selection to ensure that only those that have demonstrated to be highly effective for addressing the targeted learning need will be worthy of purchasing.
- To determine budget reductions, the principal outlines the pros and cons of various options then asks for input from the staff to help in the prioritization of what to fund and what to consider cutting. Some efforts are made to obtain grants to augment the general fund, such as a grant to support summer tutoring for at-risk students. The very active PTO helps support the AR program by purchasing assessment upgrades and books, funding field trips and special school activities, buying playground equipment, and awarding mini-grants to classroom teachers for specific needs.

- The school integrates revenues from multiple sources, such as Title I, ESEA, and general funds to maximize support for strong student achievement. Title I funds are used to hire three instructional assistants to help deliver interventions under the supervision of the Title I/ESL teacher, purchase licenses, books, and assessments for the AR program, purchase multiple copies of leveled books for use during the flooding sessions, and support rewards for students that meet their trimester literacy goals.

**Comprehensive and Effective Planning:** *The school develops, implements, and evaluates a comprehensive school improvement plan that communicates a clear purpose, direction, and action plan focused on teaching and learning.*

- The school’s mission statement is featured on the school website and states, “North Central Elementary develops life-long learners through the sense of community, a variety of experiences, and high expectations using best practices of methodology. Members of the school community strive to nurture a healthy, positive self concept in children, enabling them to feel successful academically, personally, and socially.” This mission statement was developed many years ago, and current teachers were not involved in its development. Last year the principal initiated review of the mission statement, with agreement by staff that it was still relevant and expressed what North Central Elementary School was about. In the words of the principal, “The mission says who we are.” Further revision was not exercised, nor a priority of present staff. While the mission statement is internalized by staff and administration, there is little intentionality in using it to guide decisions for the school improvement plan or other decisions. However, the contents of the school improvement plan, budget decisions, and the culture of the school exemplifies the intent of the school’s mission.
- For school improvement planning, North Central Elementary staff and administration use the district’s data management tools (spreadsheets) to provide them with various profiles of benchmark, CELA, CSAP, and AYP data. For all school-wide progress monitoring and benchmark discussions, the principal serves as the assessment coordinator. In addition to achievement data, considerable attention is focused on the school and grade-level growth data down to individual student trajectories to know what is needed to catch up, keep up, and move up each child. Analysis of data at North Central is an ongoing process, with strategic determination of what is needed to meet each student’s needs. Trend data is part of the school’s data analysis process, with the principal keeping a watchful eye on longitudinal profiles and looking toward next steps for meeting the needs of all students in all content areas. Multiple data sources are included in the determination of the school improvement plan goals, including informal perception and school processes information. No formal parent or student climate survey data are used to inform school improvement planning.
- Goals in the school improvement plan (SIP) are clearly stated, intended to take the school’s achievement and academic growth to higher levels, and establish proficiency criteria. A body of evidence is outlined that describes the interim/benchmark and progress monitoring sources that will be used to determine student progress two-three

times a year in reading, mathematics, writing, and science. The focus areas identified in the improvement plan (science and mathematics) correspond to those of the school district. Science is also a target area for North Central Elementary and the use of math interventions is a specific focus area for the school.

- The SIP action steps describe specific research-informed strategies and materials that will advance the overall effectiveness of the school in science and mathematics. They extend work that was initiated in the 2010-11 school year to help embed the expected practices over multiple years. Strategies for monitoring their implementation are built into the school improvement plan. Timelines and persons responsible outline the intended progression of implementation.
- The building principal constructs the draft of the school improvement plan after comprehensive analysis of data. The plan is then reviewed by staff for feedback and presented to the accountability committee before its finalization. During fall orientation, the principal again discusses the work outlined in the plan with the staff. The work outlined in the school improvement plan is generally understood by teachers.
- Systematic analysis of implementation data is not evident. While analysis of interim and progress monitoring achievement data is monitored throughout the year as part of the school improvement process, no formal process is conducted for monitoring and evaluating implementation of the improvement plan action steps and strategies. The principal informally obtains information regarding implementation practices through multiple conversations with teachers and by observing classroom practices.

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

### **EFFECTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

#### **Introduction:**

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

- ✓ School culture and how the school functions as an effective learning community and supports a climate conducive to performance excellence. School leadership and staff foster factors such as a safe, orderly and equitable learning environment, an appreciation for diversity, and the belief that all children can learn at high levels.
- ✓ How the school partners with families and community groups to remove barriers to learning in an effort to meet the intellectual, social, career and developmental needs of students. Communication efforts are varied and effective. Schools are supported in their efforts for working with parents and the community.
- ✓ How the school provides research-based, results-driven professional development for staff and implements performance evaluation procedures in order to improve teaching and learning. There is a comprehensive,

collaboratively developed school professional development plan. Data are used to determine professional development priorities. Educators have professional growth plans to improve performance. Professional development efforts are evaluated for their impact on student achievement.

Literature consistently includes focus on the development of an effective learning environment as a key component of the foundation on which student success is built. An effective school works in partnership with families and community groups to remove barriers to learning in an effort to meet the intellectual, social, and developmental needs of all students. One of the greatest strengths of North Central Elementary School is the close-knit community with a family-like atmosphere of inclusion of each student in the school.

North Central Elementary School has a rich history as a cornerstone of the community for over 100 years. The pride of the school extends to multiple generations of families in the area and beyond. This rich heritage provides a unique opportunity for North Central Elementary School into the future.

“All schools have histories . . . To the extent that memories are revisited from time to time, the founding nucleus of beliefs and values remains stable and the accumulation of key experiences around the core story is communal . . . Without a well-known historical map the school loses its way.” (Deal and Peterson, 2009, p. 45)

Staff members indicate that they are aware that this school is successful, but they also talk about what needs to be done to become even a stronger school – what they can do to move to the next level. As North Central Elementary School moves forward to the future, the question becomes how to build on the heritage of the past of what was onto the current knowledge of knowing what is and planning for the future of what is possible.

It takes courage to bring about the best in everyone and to allow individuals to make necessary changes in practice that result in moving forward. It also takes courage to take a close and personal look at what is done in the classroom in the area of instruction to make learning for students stronger. Looking at instruction becomes personal – it is what the individual does in the classroom every day. “Effective visions help individuals understand that they are part of a larger world and also reassure them of their individual importance to the organization” (Reeves, 2006). Critical to this work is building on the multiple strengths that already exist in the district from the community to central office to individual teachers and empowering each of these to contribute in ways that collectively benefit the students and their achievement.

Research indicates that for a school to be fully operational, it functions as an effective learning community and supports a climate conducive to performance excellence. An effective school works in partnership with families and community groups to remove barriers to learning in an effort to meet the intellectual, social, and developmental needs of all students. Effective schools also provide research-based, results-driven professional development opportunities.

In highly effective schools accountability is pervasive throughout the entire organization. Accountability is both an attitude and a set of processes. Accountability is evident when professional staff members hold themselves individually accountable (Reeves, 2002) and the

entire organization develops a culture of self-directed responsibility. Trust, communication, and collaboration, are the foundation for creating a culture of shared responsibility in which student learning is developed.

A body of studies about professional development points to the effectiveness of sustained, job-embedded, collaborative teacher learning strategies (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). Ongoing and job-embedded professional development involves teachers in continual guided practice that is application-oriented resulting in deeper understanding, more skill with the practice, and more implementation of the practice in the classroom.

Research by Joyce and Showers (1995) reveals that an important tenant of professional development is guided practice with what is being learned. They found that when teachers are exposed to continual and supported practice that is oriented to applying learning, they demonstrate deeper understanding, increased skill, and more effective implementation in their classroom setting. Gusky (2009) suggests “when professional learning initiatives are successful in a school, it is because teachers are instructed, encouraged, supported and held accountable to use the new practices.”

Research supports the belief that teachers teach children, not programs. Thus, the focus of professional development must be to continually provide opportunities for teachers to develop their understandings about teaching and learning. Peter Senge (2000) asserts that personal growth begins when individuals work to develop a deep understanding of their own thinking. Professional development can cultivate powerful teaching at North Central Elementary School because of the passion and purpose that staff members exhibit with their ongoing commitment to students and learning.

### **Next Steps:**

#### **School Culture and Student, Family and Community Support**

- Currently, limited examples of proficient and exemplary work are available to students and teachers. Develop exemplars and descriptions of performance levels to demonstrate proficient and advanced for all content areas. The availability of descriptions and examples of high quality grade-level work are important for staff, students, and parents to know what proficiency looks like. Continue to display high quality student work in hallways and classrooms.
- Find ways to embed student leadership opportunities into the overall practices of the school. Build on the current practices of the “Buddy Readers” and the rotating assignment of classroom routines to more school-wide leadership opportunities. Identify areas where student leadership opportunities are available and develop strategies for making them possible.
- As the staff members at North Central Elementary School prepare to move to an even higher level of performance, continue to foster principal and staff collaboration. It is important for the principal and staff members to assist one another to produce the best

outcomes by continually learning and coaching each other as they experience the power of shared responsibility.

- Students at North Central Elementary School need to move from passively having teachers set goals for them to taking responsibility for their own learning and articulating the steps needed to accomplish goals. Consider setting up parent/teacher conference with students taking the lead in discussing their work and their goals for the future. When children attend conferences, they are encouraged to become active partners in the conversations regarding their progress (i.e., student-led conferencing).
- Survey the perceptions of parent and community members within the school's boundary to learn more about positive culture that currently exists in the school community as well as other perspectives about the school. The results from this inquiry would be useful for identifying areas for improving and sustaining this North Central Elementary School's positive environment in the future.

### Professional Development

- Develop a plan for ongoing, job-embedded professional development that is focused on advancing teachers' understandings of effective instructional practices.
  - Continue using student achievement data to inform and focus the school's professional development.
  - Use the Teaching/Learning Cycle as a framework for designing professional development to further develop staff members' knowledge about and skills in providing effective instruction. Use of the teaching/learning framework for professional development would include:
    - identifying learning targets,
    - determining instructional needs (using formative and summative assessment data),
    - planning instruction (including selection of instructional strategies and resources), and
    - evaluating and impact of the instruction on student learning.
  - Include follow-up training designed to support teachers' implementation of the knowledge and skills learned. The modeling and observing already conducted by the principal and staff can be expanded, more intentional, and delineated in the professional development plan.
  - Evaluate the impact of professional development on instruction. Use walkthroughs and observations to monitor the quality of the implementation of new learning. Gather data that focus on specific instructional practice; compile and analyze it for trends and patterns. Disseminate the results to staff for discussion and use the data to evaluate the effectiveness of professional

development. Involve teachers in these walkthroughs as a means of building shared leadership and collegial support.

- Include more training on integrating technology in teaching and learning as part of the development of effective instructional practices.
- Study, collect, and develop exemplars so teachers, students, and parents can identify proficient work.
- Provide professional development that helps teachers know and understand content and effective instructional practices at a deep level in order use programs as tools to support teaching and learning, and to make necessary adjustments based on identified learning targets and strengths, and needs of students.
- Include an annual professional goal for teachers that teachers set one that specifically relates to the implementation of effective instructional practices learned in the school's and district professional development programs.

## **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.

North Central Elementary has always been a small school and currently enrolls 147 students in grades K-5 with a teaching staff of seven. While the small size of the school fosters communication and collegiality, the principal has intentionally promoted a collaborative organization by focusing staff on the use of student growth and achievement data to plan and implement targeted interventions that have produced higher student achievement.

For the school to continue to produce even better outcomes, the principal and staff must continue to refine their practices, deepen their understandings, and engage in authentic shared leadership and ownership for results.

### **Next Steps:**

The current principal has built processes and a culture that have led to increased student growth and achievement in reading and mathematics, but a question remains about how to produce and sustain an even better future. According to Glickman (2007) and many educational leadership scholars, it is not the principal of a school who sustains a good school, but institutional behaviors that allow followers and leaders to intermix roles and responsibilities to achieve what is needed for students.

- The community of people who work and learn in North Central Elementary School, and the family members who have children in the school, (and /or who have attended the school), share common values, beliefs, and desires for students' education. This circumstance provides strong consensus about the purposes and meaning of the school and makes it an institution of significance in their lives. In other words, the North Central community has in place a "lifeworld" (Habermas, 1987) –very well defined and shared cultural agreements. This lifeworld is a precious and rare commodity which offers a powerful opportunity for the school to develop a high functioning "systemsworld" (Habermas, 1987) that frames all practice. In such a systemsworld the school takes steps to intentionally become an institution infused with group integrity around distinctive habits and unified commitments to increase student achievement (Sergiovanni, 2007).
- The overall questions to be answered in the development of a systemsworld framework are, "Where do we want to be in five years?" and "How (in detail) will we get there?" To answer these questions and the detailed ones that follow, all-school, in-depth discussions and shared decisions should take place to develop a long-range plan. Included in the long-range plan would be steps for how the roles and responsibilities of members of the learning community (students, teachers, leaders and parents) will be intermixed and how professional learning, leadership, and accountability for implementation of agreed-upon actions will happen. In this systemsworld, agreed-upon habits and strategies would prevail over ad hoc or discreet decisions about curriculum, assessment, instruction, professional development, and use of resources.
- Leadership should begin to be distributed, not as an exercise in participatory democracy, but because no single leader can possess all the knowledge, skills, talent and energy to achieve the demands of consistently meeting the needs of all students at all times (Reeves, 2006). Shared leadership also promotes teacher efficacy as members of a

professional learning community and ensures that all members of the community share ownership for results.

- As part of the long-range planning discussions and decisions, the school community should develop its own mission statement—one that moves its focus from what the staff will do to precise statements about what the students will know and be able to do. This type of mission statement would start by saying, “At North Central Elementary School students will . . . .”
- Ensure that all teachers have ready access to the official *Colorado Academic Standards*. Conduct intensive unpacking of the purposes and content of the standards using the many tools and processes provided through the Colorado Department of Education. Clearly understand the elevated rigor and higher levels of thinking incorporated in the new standards and align them with a detailed determination of what North Central Elementary students will know and be able to do as the basis for developing “students” into “learners.” Ensure opportunities for differentiated learning so that a diverse and rigorous educational environment based on individualized academic needs exists.
- As situations arise, any decision should be examined in the context of how the decision would further the mission of North Central Elementary School, the goals and actions of the school’s long-range plan and annual school improvement plan(s).
- North Central Elementary School is poised to move its focus of work from the initial “triage” phase, (the use of intensive interventions to rapidly accelerate student academic growth and achievement) to long-range work that is strategic, systematic, systemic, and sustainable. It is crucial to now build a framework that defines and clarifies the way the school will do the business of teaching and learning in the future.

This framework should incorporate curriculum, instruction, assessment, planning, and other standards-based practices along with collaboration structures, such as professional learning communities (PLCs), that support teaching and learning. The purpose is to create common ground among all staff in understandings, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors about the core work of the school and the way it will be accomplished.

- Construct an overall master plan for the school’s “next steps” in such a way that staff, administration, and parents understand the purpose, rationale and connections of everything the school will be doing over the next several years in order to sustain and advance its high level of academic performance.
- Use the contents of this Effective Schools Practices Report, literature and research sources, and expectations outlined by the Colorado Department of Education to develop a long-range plan of prioritized essential work.
- Design a visual graphic that portrays this overall framework for North Central Elementary School.

- Ensure this work is accomplished through collective communication and collaborative processes to build meaning, engagement, and ownership by all staff and other stakeholders.
- From the school’s long-range plan of prioritized work, the annual Unified School Improvement Plan can be developed to outline the specific annual goals and actions steps to advance the school’s work.
- Doug Reeves (2009) states, “Schools must determine if the essential purpose of planning is to develop a tool to improve student achievement – actions that add value – or if the planning process is an end in itself.” A long-range plan for North Central Elementary School can serve to reduce the risk of doing “chopped bits of work” each year and to increase the ability of the school to stay on the course of continuous improvement through scaffolded and connected efforts.
- Cawelti advises, “Plans alone are seldom effective in raising student achievement. To make them viable, leadership must be vigilant in monitoring implementation, marshalling resources, making corrective adjustments based on data, and evaluating the effectiveness of the plan.”
  - Monitoring of programs and interventions needs to be strengthened. Develop specific processes and procedures to continually and consistently monitor the fidelity, efficacy, and impact of the implementation of priority initiatives.
  - Intentionally monitor the ongoing progress of the school improvement plan (SIP) throughout the school year. Evaluate what work is supporting progress and what is not. Make adjustments that support positive realization of the SIP goals and action steps.
    - Doug Reeves (2006) suggests the use of a Leadership Map to determine the effectiveness of initiatives and actions, as well as the effectiveness of adults by relating the work to student results. The Leadership Map is a useful tool in generating introspection, reflection and evaluation.
- As part of the school’s continuous improvement work, and integral to the school improvement planning process, it is important to consider possible unintended consequences. Ask, “To what extent are we creating gaps in student learning as a result of another initiative?” Consider including in your next steps an evaluation of the impact on students’ opportunity to access essential learnings in all core content areas when they are pulled from some for interventions to have a quantified examination of possible unintended consequences.
  - Intentionally monitor the extent students’ time is fragmented during the school day and throughout the week as a result of being scheduled into interventions. Construct personal time maps for these students and consider the positive and negative consequences on their overall academic success in relation to what each

student is “missing” and the long-term subsequent impact on their ability to be successful in all core content areas, especially in science and social studies.

- Monitor the length of time students remain with an intervention and explore factors contributing to why the student is or is not progressing. Additionally, monitor the length of time (weeks, months, years) a student has been receiving interventions.
- Conduct an implementation study to determine actual amounts and types of instructional time spent for literacy instruction during the universal literacy block (first best instruction). Profile not only the overall time and activities spent each day and week for the class, but also for those students identified as performing below proficiency.
- Document the actual instructional time spent daily and weekly in writing, social studies and science.
- As a staff, collaboratively use these data to evaluate the degree to which general classroom instruction for each of the core content areas may be indirectly impacted by possible over-reliance on having interventions “do the job.” This is a pro-active consideration to strengthen time and intensity for all learning as the future reliance on interventions should lessen as more North Central students become and remain proficient and advanced.

## **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.

Academic performance at North Central Elementary School has shown steady growth over the last five years. Contributing to this success was a determined effort to assure that all students will read at proficient levels. To this end, the Response to Intervention (RtI) model was used to

provide a means to deliver interventions. Students who were not yet proficient were provided interventions regularly through a variety of programs. Progress was analyzed, changes made, and student success was evident. At this point, most students are at or near proficient levels in reading. This success is to be applauded! Students and staff are excelling, but now is the time to make a decision to move forward. Staff can now begin to look at the next level of work – that of moving students, not only to proficient, but to advanced. If growth is to continue, examination of practices must happen and it must happen now. Since Tiers II and III (interventions) through RtI was the first step, it is only logical that the next step would be an examination of Tier I (first best instruction) and what it means to be truly standards-based and data-driven.

In *The Standards-based Teaching/Learning Cycle: A Guide to Standards-based Practices for Districts and Schools in Colorado*, (2008), Benson states, “Being standards-based in practice is much more than knowing there are standards to teach, posting objectives in the classroom, or teaching district ‘aligned with standards’ curricula. Being truly standards-based means that in all classrooms and instructional settings there is relentless engagement in a continuous cycle of teaching and learning that defines success as objectively demonstrated student performance on numerous measurements, from short classroom checks for understanding to the yearly CSAP. Being truly standards-based takes dogged determination to not simply cover a curriculum or complete activities, but to ensure students actually have learned each and every essential learning (priority learning) identified for each standard in all content areas.” He continues, “The Standards Based Teaching/Learning Cycle identifies and describes those practices that have been consistently found in research, literature and successful schools to be essential in providing a comprehensive standards-based education and ensuring that all students are afforded the best possible opportunities to learn and achieve at high levels.”

In the Response to Intervention (RtI) model, Tier I refers to best first instruction. This is instruction that is commonly presented within the classroom to all students. The premise of the tiered intervention model is that if Tier I instruction is successful, there will be fewer students who need or depend upon interventions. In order to have highly successful Tier I instruction the elements of the teaching/learning cycle should be examined. Even those schools that are already “good”, such as North Central Elementary School, can benefit by implementing with fidelity the standards-based teaching/learning cycle. Dedication to the teaching/learning cycle by North Central Elementary staff members can and will help the students move to greater academic growth and achievement.

A clear and concise understanding of each of the four basic principles of the teaching/learning cycle is imperative if a school is to move to high levels of achievement and academic growth.

Question #1, “*What do students need to know, understand and be able to do?*” refers to the curriculum of a school. It is important that all instructors know and understand that the curriculum is not a program or text, but instead a clear understanding of the knowledge, concepts, and skills students need to know. These concepts and skills are aligned with Colorado state standards. They are evidenced in clearly-stated essential learning targets.

Question #2, “*How will we teach effectively to ensure students learn?*” considers all the elements for successful instruction, including high levels of effective and engaging instructional strategies by teachers, a clear understanding of backwards design (beginning with the end in mind), a

clearly defined method for assessment which is used to inform instruction, ongoing training to ensure effectiveness in teaching, and the effective selection and use of resources to support teaching and learning.

The backward design process of Wiggins & McTighe begins with the end in mind:

“One starts with the end - the desired results (goals or standards) - and then derives the curriculum from the evidence of learning (performances) called for by the standard and the teaching needed to equip students to perform. The design process involves teachers planning in 3 stages, each with a focusing question:

- Stage 1 - What is worthy and requiring of understanding? [Curriculum]
- Stage 2- What is evidence of understanding? [Assessment]
- Stage 3- What learning experiences and teaching promote understanding, interest and excellence? [Instruction] “ (Wiggins and McTighe, 2000, page 8)

Question #3, “*How will we know that students have learned?*” ensures that assessments (summative and formative) measure proficient student performance, are tightly aligned with standards, curricula and instruction, are analyzed to determine student growth and understanding, and are used to inform instruction.

Question #4, “*What do we do when students don’t learn or reach proficiency before expectation?*” is the re-teaching, intervention portion of the Response to Intervention (RtI) process. The North Central staff began here and currently have explored this concept and have proven success for Tiers II and III.

To guarantee all students have access to rigorous instruction, based on the teaching/learning cycle, specific elements must be in place. These elements are described with an emphasis on suggestions for the next steps North Central Elementary staff must take in order to move from good teachers to master teachers.

### **Next Steps:**

#### **Curriculum**

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

- To move student achievement forward, it is necessary to prioritize what is being taught and to be sure that these concepts are the most important, powerful ideas that students need to know and be able to do. The new *Colorado Academic Standards* makes this task possible. If North Central Elementary School staff wishes to move student achievement from good to great, it will be necessary to begin with this task. To do this the staff should collectively review, prioritize, internalize, and present academic instruction based upon

the identified Essential Learning Targets. A direct correlation between the written (intended), taught, and tested curriculum should exist.

- When accessing and unpacking the *Colorado Academic Standards*, refer to the Colorado Department of Education website and pay careful attention to the tools that are found there. Determine how these tools can best be used to support curriculum delivery at North Central Elementary School.
- In highly effective schools, teachers understand when to be autonomous and when to be connected with each other. Even though autonomy as an instructor is highly valued by many, it is often imperative to work together to determine practices that guarantee all students have equal access to a rigorous curriculum. As an instructional team, collaboratively answer the following questions and hold yourselves and each other accountable for adhering to the collectively determined answers.
  - Which subjects students will miss to attend interventions?
  - What is rigor and how do we guarantee it?
  - What does it mean to teach higher order thinking skills?
  - How much time is devoted to each subject and is it consistent?
- Although students have received information literacy instruction primarily in the computer lab, it is now time to take the next step. When examining the *Colorado Academic Standards*, note how the information literacy standards are integrated into the content areas. No longer are these standards “stand alone”, every teacher in every classroom must “own” these standards as well as the content they are teaching. As a staff, work together to understand how these standards can and will be taught within every classroom. Monitor and support each other in this new endeavor.
- Review existing technology that is available at North Central Elementary School and how its use might be expanded. Determine how staff members will learn and implement new and effective ways to expand usage as effective instructional tools.

### Assessment

Teacher use of formative assessments that measure student progress toward mastering explicit learning targets, coupled with instruction promoting higher order thinking contribute to instructional rigor. Menken (2000) states, “for assessments to be effective and useful for educators in instructional practice, they must be deeply entwined with the classroom teaching and learning driven by the standards.” Timely teacher feedback is a critical component of this process. The systematic practice of embedded formative assessments provides rich information for teachers to use in making instructional decisions that are responsive to the needs of students.

- Create a comprehensive assessment plan (using the existing assessment plan as a foundation) and support the attainment of this plan with ongoing, job-embedded professional learning. A comprehensive assessment plan is a critical component for creating a culture of data-users and will provide coherence to the assessment area of the

standards-based teaching and learning cycle. Include the following components in the comprehensive assessment plan:

- bank of assessments,
  - assessment timelines,
  - purposes of assessments,
  - expectations for analyses and application of summative and formative assessments, and
  - professional development needed to achieve the plan's goals.
- Continue to build a school-wide culture of data analyses through data-driven dialogues by increasing staff expertise in the collaborative analysis of state, district, and school-wide data. Identify critical areas upon which to focus this work to ensure positive impact on student achievement.

### Instruction

The importance of high quality classroom instruction is well documented in the literature as having a significant impact upon increased student achievement (Allington, 2006). "For too long we have ignored this fundamental aspect of schooling. We have added more support programs, more instructional aides, more specialist teachers, and more computers and software programs, while ignoring the powerful evidence on the importance of high-quality classroom teaching" (Allington, 2006). Best first instruction is the cornerstone of an effective RtI model.

- As a staff, review the standards-based teaching/learning cycle to determine which concepts are already in place and create a plan to implement those which are missing. Collaboratively review which elements need to be reinforced in the classroom setting. Define how they will be addressed (e.g., book study, workshop, mentoring). Keep in mind that although academic gains have been made with successful interventions, it is now time to move forward. Collectively discuss and plan for how to integrate those factors that will directly impact student achievement and create a renewed dedication to best first instruction to guarantee equal access to a rigorous, academic environment for all students.
- Increase rigor in all content areas by paying attention to the following:
  - Communicate learning targets to students on a daily basis. Determine what proficiency looks like.
  - Incorporate the daily use of formative assessment into practice. "If you can both listen to children and accept their answers not as things to just be judged right or wrong but as pieces of information which may reveal what the child is thinking, you will have taken a giant step toward becoming a master teacher, rather than merely a disseminator of information." (Easley & Zwoyer, 1975)

- Transform the quality and content of supportive, timely feedback that teachers already provide for students into feedback that specifically addresses progress towards proficiency on identified learning targets.
- Engage students as allies in the mastery of their learning targets by teaching them to self-assess and monitor their progress toward attaining proficiency of identified learning targets, using rubrics, checklists, models of student work. Ensure that every student can articulate what they are learning and what proficiency looks like in relation to that learning target. Students already do this as they strive to reach their AR goal number---transcend that practice (already in place) to address mastery of identified specific skills and strategies.
- Transform homework into extensions of learning to assist in accelerating the mastery of learning targets.
- Continue to monitor and offer support to teachers as they embrace implementation of the standards-based teaching and learning cycle. Support the bright and capable teachers at North Central Elementary School with immediate and specific feedback in relation to the quality of their instruction (i.e., transcending compliance monitoring) as they transform into master teachers. Support teachers in owning elegant implementation of the standards-based teaching and learning cycle.
- Define what proficiency looks like for each learning target. Develop and incorporate models of student work into lessons to communicate to students what proficient work looks like.
- Use the upcoming training on lesson study to monitor the implementation of a standards-based teaching and learning cycle.
- Self- and peer-evaluate pacing of lessons to meet varying needs of students and hold their attention within the classroom.

## **REFERENCES**

- Allington, R.L. (2006). *What Really Matters for Struggling Readers: Designing Research-based Programs* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon
- 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.
- Brookhart, Susan M. (2008). *How to Give Effective Feedback to Your Students*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Deal, Terrance & Peterson, Kent. (2009). *Shaping School Culture: Pitfalls, Paradoxes, & Promises*. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass Education.
- Darling-Hammond, L., & Richardson, N. (2009, February). Teacher learning: What matters? *Educational Leadership*, 66(5), 41-53.
- Desimone, L. (2011). A primer on effective professional development. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 92(6), 68-71.
- DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R. (2008). *Revisiting Professional Learning Communities at Work: New Insights for Improving Schools*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.
- Easley, J.A. and Zwoyer, R. 1975. Teaching by Listening. *Contemporary Education*. 57 (1): 19-25.
- Elmore, R. (2003). *Knowing the Right Thing To Do: School Improvement and Performance-Based Accountability*. Washington, DC: NGA Center for Best Practices.
- Glickman, C. (2007). *Rethinking Leadership: A Collection of Articles*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., T. J. Sergiovanni. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Gusky, T.R. (2000). *Evaluating Professional Development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Gusky, T.R. (2002). Does it make a difference? Evaluating professional development. *Educational Leadership*, 59(6), 45-51.
- Habermas, J. (1987). *The Theory of Communicative Action*. Vol 2. *Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functional Reason* ( T. McCarthy, trans.). Boston: Beacon Press.
- Joyce, B. & Showers, B (1995). *Student Achievement Through Staff Development: Fundamentals of School Renewal*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: Longman.
- Marzano, R. (2011, February). Making the most of instructional rounds. *Educational Leadership*, 80-81.
- Menken, K. (2000). *What are the critical issues in wide-scale assessment of English language learners?* (Issue Brief No. 6). Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education. Retrieved November 4, 2002, from <http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/ncbepubs/issuebriefs/ib6.htm>
- Moss, Connie & Brookhart, Susan. (2009). *Advancing Formative Assessment in Every Classroom: A Guide for Instructional Leaders*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Reeves, Douglas B. (2002). *The Daily Discipline of Leadership: How to Improve Student Achievement, Staff Motivation, and Personal Organization*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Reeves, Douglas B. ((2006). *The Learning Leader: How to Focus School Improvement for Better Results*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Reeves, Douglas B. (2009). *Leading Change in Your School*. Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Schmoker, Mike. (2011). *Focus: Elevating the Essentials to Radically Improve Student Learning*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Senge, P.M. (2000). *Schools that Learn*. New York: Doubleday.

Sergiovanni, T. J. (2007). *Rethinking Leadership: A Collection of Articles*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Stiggins, 2002. High Quality Classroom Assessment: What does it really mean? (Retrieved August 30, 2011 from <http://www.ncme.org/pubs/items.cfm>)

Wiggins, G. P. and McTighe, J. (2005-2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). *Understanding by Design*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.