

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

**for**

**Southwest Elementary School**

**Conducted: May 16-20, 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 Southwest Elementary School

<b>Effective School Profile</b>			
<b>School name: Southwest Elementary School</b>			
<b>Demographics</b>			
Type of IA School	<b>Targeted Assistance</b>	School Level	<b>Elementary</b>
Geographical Location	<b>Outlying City</b>	Enrollment (size)	<b>156</b>
Free and Reduced	<b>41.86%</b>	Hispanic	<b>16.67%</b>
English Language Learners	<b>1.28%</b>	Non-White	<b>18.59%</b>
School IA Allocation	<b>\$51,000.00</b>	Per Pupil Allocation	<b>\$1,000.00</b>
<b>Performance</b>			
The following variables were used in the analyses to determine the top performing schools			
<b>Growth Data</b>		<b>Accountability Data</b>	
Catch Up MGP (3 years - 08-10)	<b>R = 50</b>	<b>M = 52</b>	SPF – Growth Gaps Rating <b>Meets</b>
Free/Reduced Lunch MGP (3 year)	<b>R = 49</b>	<b>M =37</b>	SPF – Growth Gaps Reading <b>Meets</b>
ELL MGP (3 year)	<b>R = NA</b>	<b>M = NA</b>	SPF – Growth Gaps Math <b>Approaching</b>
CELA 3 year (% Making at least one year of PL growth)	<b>50.00%</b>		
CELA MGP 08	<b>28</b>	AYP – Overall 08	<b>YES</b>
CELA MGP 09	<b>NA</b>	AYP – Overall 09	<b>YES</b>
CELA MGP 10	<b>90</b>	AYP – Overall 10	<b>YES</b>
CBLA (% Making Progress)	<b>70.20%</b>		

## Overview of the ESP Review Process:

Number of Interviews: 169\*

\* Reflects the number of interfaces/interviews, not the number of interviewees.

- School administrator: 14
- Instructional staff (regular and special program teachers): 45
- Interventionists, specialists, coaches: 6
- District administrators: 7
- Parents/Community Members 15
- Classified/Classified Instructional Staff 5
- Students 77

Number of Observations:

- Classrooms 106
- Meetings 10
- 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.

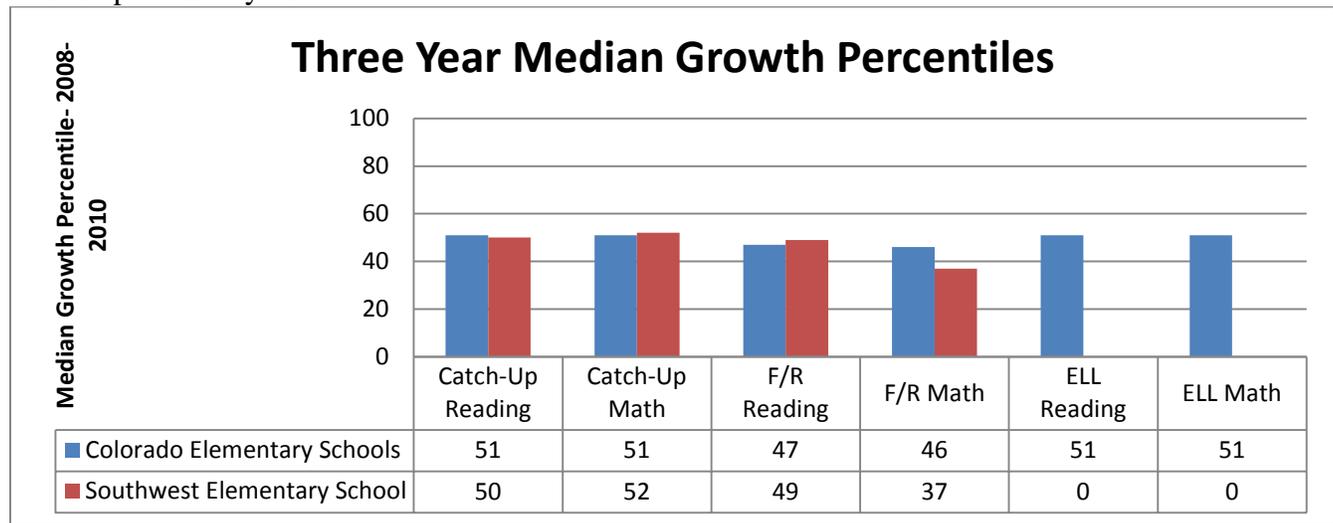
- Standard 7:** School instructional decisions focus on support for teaching and learning, organizational direction, high performance expectations, creation of a learning culture, and development of leadership capacity.
- Standard 8:** The school is organized to maximize use of all available resources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

Southwest Elementary School is a small school, and has become known as a successful school that over many years is demonstrating high achievement. It is becoming a prized “school of choice” and its student population is growing each year. Southwest’s environment is clearly filled with a “no excuses” culture, with high expectations for students and staff alike. A significant long-term goal of the school is to maintain high achievement and to not have any unsatisfactory students on the CSAP. Southwest Elementary School has not had any unsatisfactory students in Reading for the past eight years. There have not been any unsatisfactory math and science scores since 2005, nor has the school had any unsatisfactory scores in writing since first being assessed by CSAP. Southwest Elementary is a kid-focused school. All students are blended into the school’s diverse culture, whether a child of poverty or means, a minority child, an English Language Learner, gifted and talented or with disabilities or a student with behavior problems. Each child is valued and given individual attention through multiple endeavors, and all adults in the school strive to provide support so that every child can succeed. Teachers look to themselves when a child is not succeeding rather than blaming outside factors over which they have no control.

Class size varies year by year, ranging from small (14) to large (29), depending on the number of students enrolled at each grade level. Adjustments with staffing are made when a class becomes too large and when necessary, splitting into another section to preserve reasonable student/teacher ratios.

**Using a 3-year trend of CSAP performance, compared to other schools in Colorado, Southwest Elementary is in the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile in Reading, in the 93<sup>rd</sup> percentile in Math and Writing, and in the 97<sup>th</sup> percentile in Science.** Following is a profile of Southwest Elementary School’s median growth over the past three years:



Southwest Elementary School continues its quest for outstandingly high achievement and to not have any child “fall through the cracks.” Key practices that contribute to the school’s high achievement and strong growth performance include:

- Use of an exceptionally fine standards-based curriculum. Teachers purposefully use the district’s curriculum, using it to plan instruction around the standards. Resource materials, especially common math and literacy programs, are used as tools to teach the learning targets.
- Exemplary use of data to know the status of the school and students. Data-driven dialogues are regularly conducted through collaborative professional learning communities (PLCs). Teachers understand various data sources and use a body of evidence to make timely decisions about their students. Data are strategically used to effectively adjust instruction and determine interventions.
- Focus on teaching. Southwest staff members are specific and intentional about what they do in their classrooms. The principal and teachers continue to study exemplary practices and strive to refine their craft. High-impact practices are adopted and implemented, with teachers applying multiple strategies to teach their students through engaging and active learning experiences.
- Exceptional leadership. The principal at Southwest Elementary School is highly skilled in interpersonal skills, knows the literature and research regarding best practices, and empowers teachers to share in the decision-making of the school.
- Parents and community members are involved in the life of the school. Southwest Elementary School is the center of the rural community in which it is located. The school is open and welcoming. Communication with parents is ongoing and informative. The School Accountability Committee and PTA are involved and active, sharing in the work of the school.
- The Unified Improvement Plan is focused. Two major action steps outline the focused work of the school to support student academic achievement and growth in writing and mathematics. All strategies aligned to these goals are focused and action-driven. Their implementation is regularly monitored. The needs of students, rather than structures and past practices drive decisions.

Following are statements from several Southwest Elementary School students that richly describe awareness of their learning experiences:

- How do you know you are learning?
  - We know we are learning by our pre and post tests. We can see the growth in the scores.
  - We get better in everything all year. The work is getting way too easy. We are ready for more and harder work.
  - Teachers set deadlines and goals. We work hard to get there, to make the goals.
- What helps you learn?
  - Teachers help us know what the lesson is before we do it. They help us to understand.
  - We learn strategies to solve problems. They don’t tell us straight up.
  - Teachers challenge us. They help us figure stuff out.
  - The work is not boring. Teachers don’t give us sheets; they allow us to actively learn it. We can work in groups.
- What makes Southwest Elementary School a good place for you?
  - Teachers inspire me. They don’t yell a lot and are understanding.
  - We learn skills about being the best and how to handle things socially. We learn strategies to solve problems, in class and socially.
  - We learn to focus and watch what is going on. “We are living it.”

## ESP Review Narrative Report

### SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS

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

- District philosophy of curriculum is reflected on the district website in the following quotation: “We will design and deliver district-wide curriculum and assessment, based on *standards of excellence* that integrate 21st century skills across disciplines.” This strategy provided guidance for the school district and community to create curriculum during the 2008-2009 school year. The curriculum was collaboratively created with a Pre-K-12 vertical team and surpasses state expectations.
- “Rigor, diversity, authenticity, and thought” are the identified lenses through which curriculum, instruction, and assessment were developed. District teams referenced the following questions as curriculum documents were created:
  - **Rigor:** Are all students engaged in content that is rigorous, complex, ambiguous, and/or personally or emotionally challenging?
  - **Diversity:** Are students using rich and varied curricular resources that tap into their unique learning styles, interests, talents and cultural/gender-related perspectives?
  - **Authenticity:** Are students making meaningful and relevant connections between academic knowledge and the global community?
  - **Thought:** Are students engaged in higher-level thinking, reasoning, and inquiry?
- Language arts, math, and health curricula (based on the Colorado Model Content Standards) are available to teachers in dashboard format via the district website. The dashboard includes the following information:
  - standards addressed at each grade level,
  - description of what students should know and understand in reference to each standard,
  - learning targets for each standard, and
  - specific evidence outcomes.
- Southwest Elementary staff members follow the school district’s curriculum in all content areas. Adhering to the district curriculum, rigorous, standards-based instruction is delivered to students and provides a focused, strong foundation for high student achievement.
- In addition to the dashboard resources, teachers receive district-designed curriculum notebooks for math and language arts that include:
  - 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills and readiness competencies in the subject;
  - thinking skills integrated across subjects and disciplines;
  - monthly calendars containing text, focus skill, strategy, supporting components; comprehension tool kit, and Thoughtful Education Strategies; and
  - pacing guides and resource alignment.

- Teachers use a standards-based, district-adopted curriculum for science and social studies. Although dashboards are being created and will be ready for use in the fall of 2011, the current science and social studies curriculum is based on Colorado Model Content Standards. In addition to the curriculum, resources are identified and provided to establish a uniform delivery of identified targets. Connections to other disciplines are identified in the science and social studies curriculum.
- Information Literacy dashboards will be available in the fall; however, classroom teachers, interventionists, and the library media teacher collaborate to purposefully instruct students in literacy skills and standards which are currently embedded in math and language arts curriculum dashboards. Additional curriculum dashboards have been created for other disciplines (art, music, physical education, etc.). Professional development has been provided to help teachers understand and effectively use these curricular documents in order to provide a district-wide, standards-based system.
- Preschool curriculum is intentionally aligned with K-12. In addition to using *Creative Curriculum Gold*, preschool instruction is also based on district-designed dashboards.
- Articulation for key transition points occurs on a regular basis between pre-school and kindergarten. Pre-school teachers often attend building Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).
- To meet the needs of all learners, including English Language Learners (ELL), Special Education (SPED), and Gifted and Talented (G/T), each dashboard contains a description of essential targets necessary for mastery by grade level. Those students who do not master learning targets that are “essential to know” are identified and provided the necessary interventions to support mastery. The learning targets are color-coded for ease of understanding:
  - What is essential for students to know (red)
    - Mastery for all students
  - What is important to know (green)
    - Most students should know and master
  - What is nice to know (blue)
    - Mastery by advanced students.
- Regular PLC meetings are configured to address curriculum articulation needs (vertical and horizontal) at both the building and district level.
- All students have equal access to a common, challenging academic core curriculum as interventions and/or pull-outs do not occur during core instruction time. As student data are reviewed, students who need additional support are quickly provided the scaffolding that is needed, thus creating equal access, not only in the amount of time in core instruction, but in the opportunity to understand the concepts that are presented.
- Teachers demonstrate an understanding of what it means to be standards-based and data-driven. They also state an awareness that the curriculum is based on standards and not upon a textbook or program, although these resources are available to staff to deliver the curriculum to students.

The dashboard documents are referenced by teachers in their instructional planning and analysis of assessments.

- Staff members are focused on delivering the most up-to-date curriculum and demonstrate a willingness to join the district to guarantee that the curriculum is based upon the most recent standards. Their willingness to do “whatever it takes” is expressed by their positive attitude toward reviewing and realigning standards several times over the past few years.

**Classroom Assessment/Evaluation:** *The school uses multiple evaluation and assessment strategies to continually inform and modify instruction to meet student needs and promote proficient student work.*

“In the effective school, student academic progress is measured frequently using a variety of assessment procedures. The results of the assessments are used to improve individual student performance and to improve the overall instructional program” (Lezotte & McKee, 2002).

- Southwest Elementary School student achievement data demonstrate that staff members know what they are doing and why. The school has a laser-like focus on the business of improving student achievement through the use of student data. Teachers collect, analyze, and use multiple evaluation and assessment strategies to continuously inform and modify instruction to meet student needs. They have created a seamless instruction/intervention model to ensure that students receive the correct prescriptive instruction/intervention to ensure their success. Progress monitoring and benchmarking are integral components to assess effectiveness of instructional practices and student attainment. Being data-driven and child-centered are core strengths of the school. The Southwest staff functions at an exemplary level in their use and understanding of data to guide their instructional decisions. They demonstrate a true core value that ***ALL children can learn and become successful.***
- Teachers have daily informal discussions about student progress and the Professional Learning Community (PLC) is the formal setting for additional collaborative conversations. PLCs have been in place for many years and are deeply embedded in the school environment. This provides a formal/scheduled setting for teachers to analyze data to inform decision-making regarding instructional practices, student achievement, and flexible groupings. This school is focused on a deep and relentless analysis of what is or is not working. Data also provide direction for the Response to Intervention (RtI) and Child Study processes in the prescription of Tier II and Tier III interventions.
- The district’s dashboard work began with the identification of “Standards of Excellence Look-For Questions”. This provided the grounding for the dashboards’ development and continues to be a touchstone for building and classroom assessments best practices.

Assessment Look for Questions:

- Does assessment provide an accurate measure of each student’s understanding of rigorous content?
- Do the tools and strategies used to assess students’ understanding ensure that they have an equal opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned?

- Do formative and summative assessments provide opportunities for students to demonstrate understanding of both academic and real world content?
- Are assessments designed to produce clear demonstrations of essential knowledge, higher-order thinking and 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills?
- Assessments at the district and building level include:
  - CSAP, CSAPA, Lectura, Escritura,
  - NWEA benchmark - 3 times a year in reading and math,
  - DIBELS Next – 3 times a year,
  - District Writing Sample – 3 times per year,
  - Everyday Math unit tests, midyear and end of year assessments,
  - classroom progress monitoring in reading and writing, and
  - pre and post-test for each intervention strategy.
- The Alpine Achievement Management System is the district’s data warehouse and is accessible to all teachers. A variety of data configurations and graphics can be obtained for grade, class, and individual student profiles. Southwest’s English Language Learner students’ CELA data is also available in Alpine. World-class Instructional Design & Assessment (WIDA) is used to progress monitor the ELL students. The Student Management System (SMS) contains information on students’ attendance, behavior, health, report cards, includes a grade-book component, and a parent portal (Parent Connect).
- Classroom assessments are frequent, rigorous, aligned with standards, responsive to diverse learners, and multi-modal. Assessment drives instruction through data analysis and the use of rubrics and exemplars. Teachers develop a body of evidence from the assessment data to inform in the areas of student learning, effectiveness of instruction and interventions, and achievement gaps.
- Performance standards and rubrics are clearly defined on the district dashboards. These are communicated and evident in some classrooms. Students have a variety of opportunities to demonstrate proficiency (e.g., written biographies, biography posters, and oral and power point presentations) and receive meaningful feedback on their learning.
- The building has an on-line folder, *Teacher Access* that contains all PLC notes, assessment and data dig information, literacy information, body of evidence spreadsheets (with correlations to CSAP), curriculum, Educational Technology and Information Literacy (ETIL), Gifted and Talented (G/T), and library information. This is available to all staff and provides another collaborative component for the school staff.

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

- Instructional time at Southwest Elementary is rich and engaging for students. Comprehension and thinking strategies are embedded in all content areas. Teachers vary grouping sizes (e.g., whole, small, partner, individual to maximize learning). Technology is infused into daily

teaching - *Smartboards* and document cameras are widely-used. Vocabulary and language models are infused into many lessons. Students are enthusiastic about their school, teachers, and learning. They share that teachers at Southwest make learning “interesting and fun.”

- The principal and teachers hold high expectations for every student and will do whatever it takes to assist students in realizing academic success, even if it means readjusting intervention service delivery. Resources are differentiated according to student need. For example:
  - target instruction groups are flexible,
  - students returning from multi-week vacations are immediately reintroduced to learning in a one-on-one intervention, and
  - teachers reorganize existing intervention structures to support new-to-the-school students not meeting reading proficiencies.
- Teachers readjust interventions and groupings if progress-monitoring tools indicate an intervention is not effective.
- A district Response to Intervention (RtI) process is described in parent-friendly language on the district website. The school’s RtI model is embedded within ongoing PLC dialogues and, when needed, a Child Study team is available for additional support.
- Intermediate teachers (grades 3, 4, 5) invite students to participate in after-school tutoring sessions (reading, writing, and/or math). Topic selection and length of sessions vary according to student need and at times advanced groups are offered. The Bulldog Club (after-school care) is staffed by a certified teacher and provides homework help.
- Teachers implement carefully-researched instructional strategies. During vertical and horizontal Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), instructional strategies (among other topics) are studied and shared for specific lesson effectiveness. These strategies include, but are not limited to, the following:
  - Harvey and Goudvis’ comprehension strategies from the Primary Toolkit and the Comprehension Toolkit;
  - Harvey Silver’s Thoughtful Education Strategies; and
  - Marzano’s effective instructional strategies.

Two teachers from Southwest are currently being trained in Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) strategies. These strategies are shared school-wide and are also connected to the Harvey Silver strategies (which are familiar to teachers). Additionally, PLCs develop and share *task rotation centers* for specific lessons to honor individual learning and interest styles.

- While CSAP preparation focus is embedded throughout the year in day-to-day lessons, an additional focus occurs about three times weekly during the school-day immediately preceding the state test. The structure for this varies among classrooms and the design is the result of collaboration among teachers and interventionists. This short-term CSAP preparation is in addition to regularly-scheduled targeted instruction.
- Some teachers extend summer learning opportunities for students by sending home learning packets and reading ideas. This summer, school-provided tutoring will be available on

Wednesdays for all students. Additionally, the public library system sponsors a summer reading incentive program during the regularly-scheduled Monday through Thursday hours.

- Gifted and Talented (G/T) services are provided for students during targeted instruction time. Additional opportunities for G/T students include *Destination Imagination* and *Lego League*.
- A detailed and comprehensive Educational Technology and Information Literacy Plan (ETIL) is accessible by the school community on the district website. Teachers are expected to complete an ETIL competency checklist which is monitored by the ETIL mentor (media specialist). District principals formally evaluate teachers every three years on their ETIL competencies (this is embedded within the district formal evaluation). The plan also lists student competencies and expectations by grade level. Evidence of educational technology and information literacy standards in student work includes the following:
  - power point research projects and presentations,
  - use of web-based programs,
  - use of computer for electronic data-base research, and
  - electronic books.
- All students have access to the grade-level curriculum. During mathematics and literacy time, teachers address grade-level concepts and strategies to the whole class. Additional time is designated for target learning groups which meet unique needs of students. During this time students are matched with instructional staff who will best meet their needs. Target learning groups are flexible and responsive to students' needs.
- School resources are adequate to support the curriculum; however, they are not equitable with other district schools that have higher student populations.
- A high level of collaboration (within PLCs and informally throughout the day) exists and the focus of these collaborative dialogues is summative and formative data, identified learning targets, and precise planning for instruction to meet needs of every student.
- Specials teachers integrate grade-level content into their specific disciplines to provide learning coherence and connections for students.
- Writing is a current focus of the Unified Improvement Plan (UIP). Students are engaged in writing across the grade levels and across the curriculum. Each grade level has worked on identifying writing prompts and grade level assessment rubrics which are used to score and analyze writing samples three times yearly.
- Teachers continue to focus on implementing *Everyday Math* (EDM) with fidelity (targeted in the UIP). They have scrutinized the match between what is taught in EDM against the intended curriculum and have identified graphs and charting areas as needing more support. Within the 90-minute mathematics instructional block, 60 minutes is devoted to EDM instruction. The remaining 30 minutes are spent in targeted instructional groups (small group, explicit instruction).

- Inconsistency of bell-to-bell instruction and orderly transition time exists. Levels of efficiency vary.
- While a formal school-wide homework policy does not exist, teachers at every grade level assign homework and provide feedback to students. Homework is relevant, doable, and valued.
- The school media center is open to the community beyond the school day. It is staffed by a publicly-funded media specialist during the community access time (Monday through Thursday from two until seven p.m.). All students in the community will be invited to participate in a summer reading incentive program sponsored by the public library system.
- Students who are academically motivated may participate in a district-provided enrichment summer academy for a nominal fee. Classes run for one and two-week sessions.

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

“Culture is generally thought of as the normative glue that holds a particular school together. With shared visions, values, and beliefs at its heart, culture serves as a compass setting, steering people in a common direction. It provides norms that govern the way people interact with each other. It provides a framework for deciding what does or does not make sense” (Sergiovanni, 2007).

- The school provides a safe, orderly, and equitable learning environment for students. A high priority of the principal and staff is to ensure that the school and classroom environment is focused on high levels of learning for all students.
- Any incident of potential bullying is addressed immediately. If name-calling occurs, this issue is confronted immediately as well. The rationale is that undeterred name-calling leads to further and often more intensive bullying. The School Accountability Committee (SAC) receives regular reports at monthly meetings regarding numbers of warnings (white slips) that are given to students for this behavior and other misconducts.
- The staff holds high expectations for themselves and students. The belief that student success is dependent on actions of the staff is often mentioned as a responsibility of all staff members and the administration at Southwest Elementary School. There are no excuses for low achievement such as home environment, second language or poverty given as reasons students cannot be successful.
- The staff members see themselves as highly collaborative and empowered, and an effective part of the decision-making process in the school.
- Southwest has had a rich history of collaboration since the establishment of the school when there were only three multi-grade classrooms. The staff has always shared expertise and worked

together consistently through the years. This foundation of collaboration has reached new heights with the current focus on the use of data to make sound instructional decisions.

- 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, and
  - dedication exhibited by staff members focused on students and their success.
- Many students are aware of what skills they are pursuing and what steps they will need to take to ensure learning. Staff members inspire students' best efforts by:
  - having high expectations for all students,
  - scaffolding instruction to ensure all students are able to reach high levels of learning,
  - instilling confidence in students and encouraging the belief that they can achieve at high levels,
  - providing a safety net with support to encourage risk-taking when attempting to learn high-level and complex tasks and,
  - displaying student work.
- Parent and community volunteers are viewed as an important part of the learning process and are welcomed as participants in the classrooms by directly assisting students or helping with classroom tasks.
- There is a recognizable positive synergy in the school. Staff members continuously talk about successes occurring in the school, and student work is visible throughout the school in hallways and classrooms. Students are addressed by name in the hallways, lunchroom, and on playgrounds by all staff. These practices lead to more success for students and contribute to positive energy for staff.
- Academic celebrations are an important component in the fabric of the school. For example, all students in grades 2-5 have the opportunity of a "school sleep-over" by spending time reading beyond the school day.
- Individual teachers develop an appreciation of diversity in their own classrooms. While school-wide projects, such as "World Day" (a celebration of different world cultures) have been done in the past; time constraints and a focus on literacy and mathematics have displaced such projects.
- The school counselor delivers affective curriculum to each class weekly throughout the school year. This instruction is focused on topics such as bully-proofing, conflict resolution, global and cultural awareness, and the social/emotional components of the health curriculum. The School Resource Officer also teaches a nine-week curriculum entitled "Teaching Responsibility and Choices to Kids" (T.R.A.C.K.) to fifth grade students as well as a Media Literacy unit to fourth grade students each year.

- Broad opportunities for student leadership existed in the past through a student council which worked on school projects, such as “spirit days”. At this time student leadership opportunities are limited to running the school-recycling project. There is no student leadership program in the school due to the lack of an available staff member to volunteer to take on the sponsor role.

**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.*

"A collaborative culture can be a powerful tool in raising student achievement if collective capacity is built by providing the time, support, parameters, resources and clarity that are crucial to the success of teams" (DuFour, 2011).

- The School Accountability Committee (SAC) is fully functioning with all of the appropriate constituents participating (parent, staff, non-parent, etc.).
- The section entitled, “School Climate” in the 2010-11 District Accountability Community parent survey indicates that 95% of the parents feel “encouraged to participate in the activities of the school”. Also 93% of parents responded positively to the statement, “The school has a positive and welcoming atmosphere.”
- Southwest Elementary School is a neighborhood hub for children, parents, and community members. A branch of the Public Library is housed in the school and is open year-round. The school facilities are used for 4-H clubs, scouting activities, and family basketball sponsored by the Southwest Independent Parent Teacher Association (SIPTA). The two fund- raising events SIPTA sponsors each year are viewed as public neighborhood events.
- The Bulldog Club is an after-school program designed to assist parents in providing childcare when extended day programming is needed. This program is run by a licensed staff member and offers extended learning opportunities for students which go beyond childcare. The schedule includes homework help, a focused group learning or craft activity, as well as play and supervision. In the past the district funded this program, but this support has been curtailed due to budget constraints. The Southwest Independent Parent Teacher Association (SIPTA) has stepped in to support the program by providing funding which reduces the daily cost of the services for lower-income families.
- The school maintains an accurate, secure student record system that provides timely information pertinent to the student’s academic and educational development. The administrative assistant maintains, updates, and provides access to the records that are both in paper and electronic form.
- Multiple communication strategies and contexts are used to disseminate information to staff, parents, and the community.

Staff:

- The principal sends a weekly email to staff concerning upcoming events and information.

- A daily logbook is maintained by the staff mailboxes to record any messages or announcements from staff to one another.
- A calendar is posted on the wall outside the office for staff to record activities and events occurring each day.
- Before- and after-school conversations occur on a regular basis.
- The PLC time provides a vehicle for staff to share student data, discuss instructional strategies, and share information about student progress.

Parents:

- Parents receive a monthly school newsletter.
- Teachers send weekly classroom letters home, which include students' learning topics, activities coming up, and any permission requests which need a signature.
- Some parent/teacher communication occurs with a signature on a daily planner, indication of homework completion, and/or individual student behavior journals.
- As needed, parents and teachers communicate through phone calls, face-to-face conversations before or after school, email, and notes.

Community:

- The school maintains an attractive, informative and updated website about the staff, students, programs, and events.
- Training sessions for parents to learn how to work with their child are provided through Title I funds throughout the year:
  - Kindergarten parents learn how to support their child's learning at home.
  - Math and literacy parent sessions are provided for parents to learn techniques for supporting their child's reading, writing, and mathematics learning.
  - Some sessions are provided to help parents understand student achievement results.
  - Title I parent meetings are periodically scheduled.

**Professional Growth, Development and Support:** *The school/district provides research-based, results-driven professional development opportunities for staff and implements performance evaluation procedures in order to improve teaching and learning.*

- The district has a large pool of highly-qualified teacher applicants for any open position. Staff members cite the collaborative, caring, and supportive environment of Southwest Elementary School as reasons people want to come to and remain at the school. New staff members are supported by all members of the faculty as they become an integral part of the collaborative organization.
- Professional Learning Community (PLC) activities occur every Friday afternoon during the district's two-hour, early-release time. This is the vehicle the school uses to provide a school-wide, ongoing, job-embedded professional development program to examine data, update content knowledge, and explore effective instructional practices. Although the allocation of early release time for PLCs is relatively new, Southwest staff members have been meeting collaboratively to discuss, reflect, and process new learning for several years. Staff members attended PLC professional development opportunities, read professional material, and observed

PLCs in other school districts as part of a district initiative. Southwest took the information, operationalized it, and through the years developed their skills and practices resulting in a high performing professional learning community.

- Through the PLC structure, long-term professional development for all staff members is embedded in the culture of the school. The content of the PLCs is driven by an analysis of a variety of student data and what teachers need to learn and be able to do to promote student achievement. In addition, the work of the PLCs is aligned with professional growth goals of staff members, as well as the goals of the Unified Improvement Plan.
- Professional development experiences are varied and based on selected best practices (e.g., DuFour, Marzano, Silver). Staff members participate in book studies, district and BOCES classes and workshops (e.g., SIOP and cognitive coaching), and online classes.
- The district funds a part-time instructional coaching position. At Southwest the instructional coach functions mostly in the consult mode where she accesses resources, provides targeted professional reading material, and collaborates with individuals and teams of teachers in examining student data and discussing best practices. Peer coaching occurs regularly among all staff members.
- Classified staff members acquire and develop their skills by working collaboratively with all staff. Instructional aides receive ongoing, job-embedded training as they team with a classroom teacher. Classified staff participate in district training sessions that are offered.
- As part of the PLC process teachers implement and evaluate the effectiveness of instructional strategies. After using a strategy, teachers gather and analyze student work, and use this data to determine the effectiveness of the strategy on student learning. Time for colleagues to reflect, discuss, and process new learning is routinely a part of the PLC structure.
- All principals in the district are in the middle of an eighteen-month program from the National Institute for School Leadership (NISL) provided by BOCES and the district to increase their ability to provide instructional leadership. The Southwest principal continually builds her capacity as an instructional leader by participating in district/BOCES-sponsored professional development opportunities and reading professional literature with her staff. She collaboratively plans, facilitates, and participates in the weekly PLC sessions.
- The effectiveness of professional development is routinely evaluated by all staff members as they openly share the success and challenges of their instructional practices with colleagues. The expectation and practice during a PLC is for all to learn and ask for help when needed. Staff members report they trust each other and readily ask colleagues for assistance.
- The principal conducts walkthroughs to gather data about use of strategies and their impact on student learning. She provides feedback to all staff members either through an email or an informal conversation. Staff members report that the feedback is valued because it is positive, highlights strengths, and provides ideas upon which to reflect. The principal reports her goal is to conduct walkthroughs on a more frequent basis throughout the next school year.

- Although fiscal resources are limited, those available are maximized to provide support for professional development.
- A clearly-defined evaluation process is implemented at Southwest Elementary School. The process is connected to student learning and goals in the Unified Improvement Plan. In addition, the evaluation process is used to improve staff proficiency. Three formal observations are conducted during a staff member's summative evaluation year. At least one formal observation is conducted each year for all staff members. Feedback related to effective instructional practices is provided after each formal observation. Staff members report the evaluation process is valued as a route to professional proficiency.
- All staff members collaboratively complete annual goal sheets with the principal. They identify professional learning goals for the ensuing year and the action steps and supports they need to complete the goals.

**Leadership:** *School instructional decisions focus on support for teaching and learning, organizational direction, high performance expectations, creation of a learning culture, and development of leadership capacity.*

According to Richard Elmore (2000) organizational effectiveness is best served when leadership is distributed in such a way that the dimensions of leadership are supported by the whole team. “Messy” leadership—the practice of reviewing data, making midcourse corrections, and focusing decision making on the greatest points of leverage—is superior to “neat” leadership in which planning, processes, and procedures take precedence over achievement (Reeves, 2006). Both of these statements describe the leadership of Southwest Elementary.

- The mission and vision of the school is lived by the entire school staff. All staff members provide the academic work and targeted interventions that allow each student to achieve proficiency, or above, as quickly as possible. The principal and staff skillfully use student data to understand each student's achievement in detail and diagnose what instruction is needed. No time is wasted in determining and providing the instruction and interventions that will allow each student to progress.
- The staff and the principal hold themselves accountable for results. They make no excuses or rationalizations for low achievement. They get to work on individualized plans for students and hold high expectations for students' learning. They do whatever it takes to accomplish the desired results. Staff members continue to learn and become more adept in their practice. The principal conducts walkthrough observations and provides encouragement for best practices and suggestions to consider for improvement. Staff members say they value this feedback. The principal has a next step goal for establishing a structure to provide more peer observations.
- Everyone at Southwest Elementary recognizes that high student performance cannot be achieved by a few heroes or the leadership of one person. Staff members assist one another to produce the best outcomes by continually learning and coaching each other, giving extra time (even on weekends), and caring for the achievement of all students. Their roles shift as required to meet

students' learning needs. They conduct their work with a sense of urgency for improved performance. The principal and the staff understand the power of shared responsibility. They do not engage in behaviors that put the burden of responsibility on others or on one person as the leader. For example, the K-2 teachers do their part to ensure the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students will do well on CSAP. For the past eight years, no 3<sup>rd</sup> grade student has had an "unsatisfactory" score.

- Students and parents express that the school is a safe and caring place. The students report that the rules are, "Be Kind, Be Safe, and Be Responsible." The exterior doors, other than the front door, are locked. Visitors are asked to sign in and guests and volunteers wear badges. The location and small size of the school, and the sense of community that surrounds it, fosters a perception of safety and lessened vigilance about screening people who might enter; however, some staff and parents express a desire for tightened security.
- Staff members and parents express satisfaction with the procedures and quality of communication within the school and from school to home. Staff members communicate with families at least weekly.
- The principal models excellent leadership by being visionary, honest and open, listening to others' ideas, using others' input, collaborating on strategies, and basing decisions on research and best practices. The trust that is engendered from these behaviors promotes staff participation in authentic distributed leadership.
- While many staff members have worked collaboratively at the school for a number of years, changes in enrollment, curriculum, assessment, and working environment continually occur. The current principal is skilled in leading staff through change and moving the school forward with increasingly high performance. She demonstrates the five characteristics for leadership in a culture of change described by Michael Fullan (2001):
  - Understands the change process. (Staff say that while they are always working toward higher performance the school climate is not stressful, but purposeful and happy.)
  - Shares and builds knowledge. (Staff say that "she really knows her stuff" especially in reading and special education and she helps them in their own learning. She guides teachers as they use data and plan instruction, and carefully informs the accountability committee about progress so they can set realistic goals. Parents say the school is very welcoming and the principal is very available to explain issues and practices to them.)
  - Builds and sustains good relationships. (The staff says she is very supportive and encouraging, respects their expertise, and helps them do their best work. Parents say they trust her to give them good information and for the care of their children. Students say she knows them and helps them succeed.)
  - Operates from a moral purpose. (The staff say she really cares about the students and their achievement. It is the focus of the work for everyone at Southwest.)

- Builds coherence throughout the school. (Staff members say that she sees the big picture and manages the system in a manner that keeps them focused on the most important priorities. While she has her own defined role as principal she also participates in the work that everyone else is doing, (e.g., teaches a targeted reading group, thus fostering a team approach to obtaining results).

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

- Each grade level has a specially designed schedule that best supports the grade-level literacy and math needs and optimizes the use of resources. The design is unique in that the schedule is not framed around specials first.
  - For primary grades, a priority is to schedule literacy instruction in the morning, with specials in the afternoon.
  - The staggered literacy and mathematics blocks afford intentional flexibility across all grades for interventionists to provide push-in and pull-out support (when necessary) for each grade level throughout the day.
    - The 90-minute literacy block is divided into 45 minutes for core, whole-class instruction to ensure all students have access to grade-level curriculum. The remaining 45 minutes in literacy are used for in-class targeted instruction. There is a thirty-minute overlap from one grade to another for flexibility in moving students.
    - Similarly, the mathematics block affords time for whole-class instruction and a scheduled block for differentiated math.
  - Flooding and flexible grouping, organized by identified student needs, are based on “data digs” through weekly progress monitoring by grade-level teams and by the entire staff each trimester.
    - Interventionists, special education and classroom teachers, and instructional paraprofessionals flood the targeted literacy instructional blocks.
  - Writing, science, and social studies are scheduled daily, completing scheduled opportunities for students to access all core content areas.
  - Students have rotating specials classes (art, physical education, music, and computer).
  - A new schedule, by grade level, is constructed each year to base the instructional blocks and staff allocations around student needs.
- Teachers are expected to honor the scheduled instructional blocks. However, the time scheduled for science and social studies may occasionally be used for other purposes, such as extending time for an activity-based lesson. A concern is the loss of instructional time due to casual transitions or lack of routines within some classrooms as activities change within a learning block, or when one learning block is completed and another is started.

- Some extended learning opportunities are offered.
  - A school-wide reading campaign to promote year-long reading outside of school used the theme “Rocket Through the Solar System” this year.
  - Homework is designed to provide students additional practice of what is taught in class.
  - Identified students are invited to participate in after-school tutoring from January through March for CSAP preparation.
  - The Bulldog Club (after-school child care) supports students with homework help and a special learning project in science or other content area.
  - Individual teachers often volunteer to tutor students who have been out of school for an extended period, whether the student is advanced or low performing. Missed daily instruction is rapidly “caught up” with the intent that all students need to continue to grow and learn.
  - Summer school was not held last summer, nor is scheduled this year. However, the school is partnering with the community library to sponsor a weekly Summer Reading Program. Additionally, throughout the summer, students may access computer-based reading programs at the school/community library and may enroll in several one and two-week special interest learning sessions.
  
- Most of the school’s budget allocations are determined by the district and based on student enrollment. Therefore, as a small school, and as a result of reductions in state funding, the school has limited discretionary resources. Over the past four years, the school’s discretionary funds have dropped from \$80,000 to \$24,000 in the FY 2011 budget. Few funds are available for supplies, making photocopies, technology, professional development, and advancing 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning. Few funds are directly allocated to each teacher to support unique classroom needs. However, staff report they have adequate resources to deliver the curriculum, including materials for active learning. The school’s zero-based budget has been completely expended prior to the end of this fiscal year.
  
- While the school has limited funds to meet identified needs, the principal and staff are very resourceful in making things work by maximizing other resources such as time, personnel, and volunteers to accomplish many of their goals and intentions. Teachers report the Friday early-release time is a valued resource that provides time for teachers to refine their practice and determine and adjust interventions for students.
  
- Members of the staff and School Accountability Committee (SAC) have input into budget decisions, helping to determine allocations for achieving the goals of the Unified Improvement Plan (UIP). Budget updates are provided to the SAC at scheduled meetings. Budget information and monthly status reports are transparent and available to parents and staff.
  
- Purchase of supplementary materials and funding for professional development is limited to those that have demonstrated a high-level of effectiveness. The school relies on what the literature and research report when making these determinations. Another criterion is that specific, identified needs of students will be met through the material/resource or training. Priorities for budget allocations are based on meeting student needs and advancing student achievement for all students.

- School leadership is able to decide how staff allocations (FTEs) are distributed. The principal bases staff assignments on student learning needs. The school district is fortunate to have a large pool of highly-qualified applicants to fill positions, including instructional aides. Southwest Elementary School is able to be selective when hiring, intentionally employing high-quality teachers.
- A few outside grants are written by the school staff; however, district procedures for obtaining authorization to write a grant are reported to be restraining and time-consuming. Therefore, the school's daily and long-term attention to teaching students takes precedence over grant writing. The Southwest Independent Parent Teacher Association (SIPTA) provides resources for a variety of needs including classroom technology, playground equipment, landscaping, and donations to the library. The Foundation for Educational Excellence (DFEE) has purchased *Read Naturally* books and materials; a solar grant supports *Weather Bug*. An area oil and gas company provides occasional assistance to the school.
- The limited Title I funds allocated to Southwest Elementary are used to pay for a part-time interventionist. The school's Title I status will change from targeted assistance to school-wide next year. Through this design, all categorical funds and services will be integrated to optimally provide the differentiated support for Tier II and Tier III interventions. Some Title I funds are used for parent involvement activities, support for homeless students, and professional development (in conjunction with other Title funds).

**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.*

- Two years ago the district developed its current mission statement through a comprehensive strategic planning process. Southwest Elementary has adopted this as its mission statement as well. Additionally, the school staff and members of the School Accountability Committee agreed upon the school's vision statement, **"We, the learning community envision an educational environment, where all participants strive for excellence through continuous learning, self-development, collaboration, and perseverance. It is our job as teachers and parents to create those connections that develop a sense of community, character and life-long learning. Southwest will be a model school with a caring and accepting climate where students excel academically, socially and culturally."** While this vision statement is included in the staff handbook, in reality the school's vision is intrinsic in the minds and hearts of the principal and staff, is evident in daily practice, and as frequently articulated by the principal and staff, "defines who we are through our work."
- The goals and action steps in the school's Unified Improvement Plan (UIP) support the district's strategic plan and the school's mission and vision statements. The SAC and school staff determined the goals in the UIP after comprehensive analysis of multiple data sources, including CSAP achievement and growth data, parent and staff climate surveys, and school disciplinary actions.

- The school compares its CSAP performance with the performance of the district’s other elementary schools by each grade and overall percent of unsatisfactory, partially proficient, proficient, and advanced students.
  - Comparisons are also made with the Colorado state profiles by grade and content area.
  - Data are mined down to analyze each standard and sub-standard to know where to target strategic action steps and strategies.
  - Teachers view the assessment results as a reflection of their instruction.
- The goal targets in the UIP are intentionally set to exceed district and state expectations. The school is persistent in its efforts to realize the ultimate goal of having 100% of its students be proficient and advanced over a sustained period of time in reading, writing, mathematics, and science. The following table displays the goals in the current Unified Improvement Plan:

<b>CSAP Academic Achievement- Percent Proficient &amp; Advanced</b>							
2010-11				2011-12			
Reading	Math	Writing	Science	Reading	Math	Writing	Science
94%	91%	82%	89%	95%	95%	85%	90%
No unsatisfactory scores				No unsatisfactory scores			
2010-11		<b>AYP</b>		2011-12			
Reading	Math			Reading	Math		
94.23%	94.23%			94.23%	94.23%		
<b>Academic Growth and Growth Gaps Median Student Growth Percentile</b>							
2010-11				2011-12			
Reading	Math	Writing		Reading	Math	Writing	
52	49	52		54	52	54	

- Small student numbers make it difficult to have reliable disaggregated data by subgroup populations; however, data indicate there is little difference between results for subgroups and the general student population. Three-year achievement and growth profiles are used to offer more reliability. With the school’s high performance, growth by lower performing students is higher than proficient and advanced students.
- Parent and staff climate surveys are conducted annually by the district, therefore providing the school with pre/post data. This year staff participated in Colorado’s Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning (TELL) survey although results have not yet been accessed after their spring release by the state. All climate survey results will be reviewed in the fall for planning of the 2011-12 revisions to the Unified Improvement Plan.

- The action steps and strategies of the UIP reflect the school’s conscientious effort to use best practices. In addition to comprehensive analysis of multiple data sources, the principal and staff access other resources to inform their identification of effective best practices, such as:
  - review of present school practices,
  - voracious study of relevant research best-practices literature,
  - study of exemplary practices of other highly successful schools, and
  - consideration of how they support the district’s learning targets outlined in the curriculum (dashboard) documents.
  
- The goals, action steps and strategies outlined in the 2010-11 Unified Improvement Plan are focused on two target areas:
  - #1) implementation of a structured writing curriculum that aligns with state standards, in the regular classroom and through interventions; and
  - #2) fidelity to the implementation of the Everyday Math (EDM) program, including differentiated support to ensure development of basic skills and conceptual understandings.
  
- Clear benchmark and progress monitoring tools and practices, using specific assessment data sources, are outlined in the UIP. Staff and members of the School Accountability Committee regularly monitor both the implementation of the plan’s components and student academic progress (achievement and growth) at specific benchmark points. Interim data points are not identified in the plan. The goals, action steps, and strategies clearly support the school’s vision of meeting the needs of all students and doing “whatever it takes” to support students to become proficient and advanced. Fidelity to implementation of these expectations is evident in all classrooms. Teachers and the principal knowledgeably discuss the school’s intended work. Shared ownership in realization of the UIP goals is detailed in the plan and evident in daily practice. Teachers are “working the plan,” embracing the common, laser-like focus of the school’s intentional work. The principal sustains conscious awareness of the school’s work and continually communicates this to staff, students, and parents.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION**

### **ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE**

#### **Introduction:**

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

- ✓ Implementation of an adopted curriculum that is rigorous and aligned to state and local standards and that the school provides access to a curriculum that emphasizes a challenging academic core for all students.
  
- ✓ The school uses multiple evaluation and assessment strategies to continuously inform and modify instruction to meet student needs and promote proficient student work. Assessments are

frequent, rigorous, and aligned with district and state content standards. Students can articulate the academic expectations in each class and know what is required to be proficient.

- ✓ Teachers engage all students by using effective, varied, and research-based practices to improve student academic performance. Instructional strategies, practices, and programs are planned, delivered, and monitored to meet the changing needs of a diverse student population. Instructional services are provided to students to address individual needs and to close the learning gaps.

Southwest Elementary staff members have created a culture of academic achievement for all students. Every member of the Southwest community expresses the belief that all students can learn at high levels. This belief manifests in successful practices throughout the school. Within this rich academic culture, continued student growth has resulted in ongoing high academic achievement.

Having attained recognized achievement is not enough for this high performing school. Sustaining and raising exceptional academic growth is an expectation as staff members seek additional research-based strategies to increasingly promote excellence in a climate of educational change.

There are eight effective concepts that result in high academic achievement which are embedded in the academic culture of Southwest Elementary School. The determination of Southwest Elementary staff members to meet the needs of every student has transferred to the students, resulting in confident, eager learners who believe in themselves.

In her book, *Sustaining Extraordinary Student Achievement*, author Linda Reksten says that an important part of maintaining a school's high-achieving culture is a set of seven essential elements that were identified through a study of successful Title I schools. An important concept that is noted is that these elements do not stand alone, but are integrated throughout the school. They may have varying degrees of importance, but all must be present. She lists these elements as:

- high expectations for all students,
- shared leadership,
- empowering teachers to become leaders,
- commitment to work collaboratively,
- good first instruction,
- use of student data, and
- strategic intervention for students.

(Reksten, 2009)

Additionally, a well-designed district **curriculum** has been identified by the Effective Schools Project Team as a crucial eighth element.

Understanding what these powerful elements clearly mean to a high performing school is an important step that can lead to embedding them into continued practice.

### **High Expectations for All Students**

Successful schools are filled with adults and students who have high expectations for themselves and for each other. They approach teaching with dogged determination. They guarantee that every student has

access to the curriculum, as opposed to merely being exposed to it. Teachers who hold high expectations do not tolerate excuses. They meet challenges head-on (almost defiantly) to problem-solve collaboratively, ensuring success for every learner.

### **Shared Leadership**

The role of the principal has changed dramatically over the past few years transforming from primary decision-maker to academic leader. Teachers must now assume a shared role in collaborative decision-making. The result of accepting this shared leadership is taking the responsibility for the success or failure of the school resulting in schools that achieve and maintain higher levels of student success.

### **Empowering Teachers to Become Leaders**

Empowering teachers to become leaders who assume leadership roles in order to focus on student achievement is a priority at schools with extraordinary student achievement. Effective schools do not have one leader at the top; they have many leaders throughout the organization that stimulate change and initiate new ideas.

### **Commitment to Work Collaboratively Together**

Commitment to work collaboratively together creates a learning environment that takes a school far above what would normally be accomplished. The focus for these groups is the examination of the latest student data and a comparison with essential skills students should know and be able to do as they progress through the year. Urgency concerning student learning propels professional dialogue to a whole new level.

### **Good First Instruction**

Everyone learns! Successful classroom teachers intentionally plan and deliver rigorous lessons that ensure each student will meet, or exceed, learning targets. Teachers do whatever it takes to ensure this happens. Students partner with teachers and learn how to monitor their own progress. Teachers are watchful and adjust instruction for students needing different pathways to reach proficiency. Good first teaching sets the stage for successful interventions.

### **Use of Student Data**

Use of student data is a critical factor for extraordinary student achievement. This begins with disaggregation of state data to identify strengths and weaknesses in the instructional program and set priorities for the school year. Benchmark data collected across the year is another key factor that provides assessment of the effectiveness of instruction and/or interventions as well as documenting the progression of student's achievement. However, it is one thing to collect data and quite another to effectively analyze it to determine next steps for students. Effective schools have teachers who are experts at data analysis, as well as masters at knowing just the right adjustment to make for each student's needs.

### **Strategic Intervention for Students**

Effective interventions are evidence-based and provide students with instructional opportunities that accelerate learning and close individual gaps in learning. Successful interventionists analyze student data to inform intervention selection and expected duration of that intervention. Student needs are matched with teacher strengths. The importance of high quality classroom instruction is critical to the

success of interventions and extensions. Coordination among interventionists and classroom teachers promotes coherence for students.

### **Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum**

Marzano (2003) identifies a guaranteed and viable curriculum as one that ensures all students receive an effective education based on adopted curriculum standards and benchmarks, regardless of who is teaching the class. It is further viable when there is sufficient time, materials and instructional tools for teachers to teach the curriculum so students learn that content and perform at a proficient level.

Acknowledging achievements of Southwest Elementary, the Effective Schools Practice Team respectfully proposes the following next steps.

### **Next Steps:**

- To engage students in their learning it is important to make purposeful connections between the essential targets and practical applications, including real-world skills and ideas. Additionally, explicit connections between subjects help students understand that these disciplines do not exist in isolation, but are interrelated and prepare a path to the real-world, college, and/or careers. To move instruction to a higher level, expand the learning culture to include purposeful connections between subjects within the school and to necessary life skills and career choices.
- Plan for growth and evaluate how effective assessment/data practices will be managed and maintained with the projected larger school population.
- When students have knowledge of their learning results, engagement in learning and motivation to improve can be enhanced (Benson 2008). Teach students how to set learning goals and track their achievement to aid in creating depth of ownership and release of responsibility for learning to the students.
- Ensure that students have a clear understanding of what proficient and advanced work looks like on a consistent basis, thus providing a clearer identification of the daily learning targets (lesson objectives).
- Strengthen the practice of using models of student work (proficient & advanced and unsatisfactory & partially proficient). Develop school-wide pre-K-5<sup>th</sup> grade writing exemplars.
- Continue to embed best practices within the instructional day. For example, identify specific lesson learning targets for daily classes. Ensure that learning targets are clearly introduced at the beginning of the lesson, developed and scaffolded throughout the lesson, and that the teacher and students have an opportunity at the end of the lesson to reflect on what was learned and to check for mastery. Use of intentional planning tools such as those outlined in *Understanding by Design* frame this work (Wiggins & McTigh, 2005).
- Increase the frequency of student self-assessment (particularly the use of rubrics). Model, train, and reinforce this practice with students, showing them how self-assessment connects to daily lesson learning targets and goals.

- Monitor time-on-task, tightening bell-to-bell instruction. Strengthen transition routines to minimize disruptions and maximize time for learning.

## **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.

Southwest Elementary School has a long history of implementing strategies of success that are consistent with indicators identified in the research literature about successful schools. The literature consistently includes focus on the development of an effective learning environment as a key component of the foundation on which student success is built.

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. A highly effective school is one that provides a foundation in which:

- administration proactively and systematically removes barriers,
- effective teachers deliver high quality instruction,
- students take responsibility for their learning, and
- all stakeholders, including the community, businesses and parents, support these collective efforts.

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 accountable (Reeves, 2004) and the entire organization develops a culture of self-directed responsibility. Through the foundations of trust, communication, and collaboration, the basis for creating a culture of shared responsibility for student learning is developed.

Research studies identify common strategies which successful leaders need to use and suggestions are provided about what leaders need to become in order to be more effective in schools today. Some common strategies successful leaders use:

- norms of collegiality are related to collaborative planning and effective decision-making,
- cultures with a strong dedication to improvement are more likely to implement complex, new instructional strategies, and
- schools improve best when small successes are recognized and celebrated through shared ceremonies commemorating both individual and group contributions. (Deal and Peterson, 2009)

The main features of professional development associated with school effectiveness include:

- Content focus – Activities focus on content and how students learn the content.
- Active learning – Teachers are involved in the learning by examining, modeling, and demonstrating.
- Coherence – Content of different professional development sessions is consistent with beliefs, policies and practices.
- Duration – Professional development activities are conducted over a period of time.
- Collective participation – Groups of teachers from the same grade, subject, or school participate together to build a learning community (Desimone, 2011).

The referenced components identified in the professional literature and educational research for effective schools are embedded at Southwest Elementary School and noted in classrooms, conversations, and hallways throughout the school. The effective professional development experiences provided through the PLC are research-based, results-driven, and result in a culture of shared responsibility for student learning.

### **Next Steps:**

- Expand ways to embed student leadership opportunities into the overall practices of the school. Currently, student leadership opportunities are dependent on a staff member volunteering to take on these responsibilities. Develop strategies to identify areas where student leadership can be developed and available on an ongoing basis. Divide these responsibilities among a number of staff members in order to make the load more manageable.
- Consider expanding students' knowledge and understanding of cultures beyond the rural setting in which they live. Rather than making a "World Day" activity a stand-alone project that takes time away from the instructional day, consider weaving cultural studies into interdisciplinary units of study.

- As additional families choose to attend Southwest Elementary School through open enrollment opportunities, consider ways to connect these families to the school so that the close-knit atmosphere is not lost.
- Continue to conduct walkthroughs to provide feedback to staff on use of effective instructional strategies. Consider expanding the use of walkthroughs to collect data for the purpose of identifying trends across classrooms and use the information to determine content of some PLC sessions and/or evaluate the effectiveness of strategies, interventions, or learning tasks.
- Continue to deepen knowledge and use of instructional strategies that promote comprehension and higher-level thinking to foster even higher-level student learning.
- Sustain the powerful PLC practices and share them with other schools.

## **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.

*“Collective capacity generates the emotional commitment and the technical expertise that no amount of individual capacity working alone can come close to matching” (Fullan, 2010, p.xiii).*

Southwest Elementary has always been a small school starting with three multi-grade classrooms. Currently, the enrollment is at 165 students. From the beginning, the staff has worked collaboratively and over the past 20 years has maintained an organizational culture of collective capacity. Within this culture the increasingly effective use of student performance data to plan targeted instruction has produced high student achievement.

For an organization to continue to produce even better outcomes it must continue to learn, be laced with leaders, and have the capacity to adapt to new realities. Relentless consistency must be blended with openness to the changes needed to suit the circumstances (Fullan, 2008). As the size of an organization grows, the capacity to think and learn systemically becomes even more crucial for success (Senge, 1990).

### **Next Steps:**

- In the commendable words and efforts of Southwest’s principal and staff, “We make things happen with resources that do not always cost a lot of money, such as time, use of personnel, and volunteers,” it is evident that the school is highly resourceful in meeting the needs of students. However, the long-term effect of fewer resources can impact student learning opportunities and achievement. In the reality of diminishing resources, and limited evidence that funding for Colorado schools will increase in the near future, it is important that the school continues to explore ways to access additional resources.
  - Work with the district to help problem-solve ways to streamline procedures for obtaining district approval for making grant applications.
  - Additionally, advocate for support in the development of grant applications from district personnel.
  - Continue to ensure that the school will seek only grants that align with and advance the work of the school, (e.g. technology and computer-based learning tools, additional books for students and classroom libraries, professional learning opportunities).
  - Continue to advocate for equity of technological resources, such as *Capstone Interactive Media* that other schools in the district already have.
  - With district support, and collaboration with other Title I schools in the district, explore possible funding for extended learning opportunities, especially summer school to sustain retention of student learning.
- Studies have shown that up to 50% of the school day may be spent on non-instructional activities. If time available for instruction is not intentionally managed to maximize learning opportunities, precious school time is lost forever. A positive correlation exists between increased time-on-task/student engagement and achievement (*Handbook on Effective Implementation of School Improvement Grants*, 2009). Strategic efforts by staff to provide

engaging learning experiences (time students participate in learning activities) and academic learning time (time when true learning occurs) are visible throughout Southwest Elementary. However, there is room to increase student engagement and academic learning time by recapturing time lost due to casual routines and structures during transitions in several classrooms.

- It is suggested that Southwest Elementary administration and staff establish common understandings and practices for in-class transitions throughout the day.
- Model the classroom practices within the school that have established effective routines and classroom management systems that seamlessly transition students from one learning event to another to gain an additional edge in impacting achievement.
- Consider including baseline, mid, and end-of-year data points in the UIP for benchmarking progress, using NWEA data. With NWEA used as a predictor of CSAP performance, these pre-determined data points can formalize the school's monitoring of the achievement/growth trajectory of students on key learning targets before the end of the year. Another useful monitoring tool is the individual student growth trajectory housed on Alpine Achievement. Teachers can access this information for each student, whether low or high-performing, to inform the degree of acceleration it will take to achieve a year's growth or more within a year's time.
- Consider working with district personnel to address increased safety and monitoring for how people enter the building, both during the school day and when the public library is open.
- Southwest Elementary School has established a strong organizational infrastructure that has carried the school through changes resulting in sustained high academic performance. As school enrollment increases, the impact of additional staff and changing demographics could cause disruptions to the school's structures and systems.
  - Be vigilant to continue nurturing and reinforcing those practices that are effectively impacting student achievement. A primary conclusion of the Effective Schools Study states, "intentional focus on the key components of school success **and** the building of interconnections among these key components results in systemic effort."
  - Sustain the successful practices at Southwest Elementary, many of which are identified in *Schools that Beat the Odds*, through systematic and systemic work.
  - Continue to intentionally acculturate new staff and students into the practices of this successful school while modifying and adjusting the school's organizational infrastructure to support a culture of continuous improvement. "High-performing schools are never satisfied with "good enough," but are constantly looking for ways to improve (McRel, 2006).

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