

## **CDE School Support Team Reports**

**Greenlee K-8 School  
Denver Public Schools**

**February 9, 2009 – February 13, 2009**

**Included:  
Executive Summary  
Landscape report  
Detailed Report**

## **The School Support Team Report**

The School Support Team report is an evidence-based report that is written around nine standards or key areas of school functions:

### **Academic Performance**

1. Curriculum
2. Assessment / Evaluation
3. Instruction

### **Learning Environment**

4. School culture
5. Student, family, and community support
6. Professional development and evaluation

### **Organizational Effectiveness**

7. Leadership
8. Organizational structure and resources
9. Comprehensive and effective planning

Each Support Team uses an extensive rubric that identifies indicators for each standard and describes four performance levels. The information gathered from the school review (documents and artifacts, interviews, and observations) is used to complete the report according to the SST rubric.

There are three sections to the School Support Team report.

Section 1 of the SST report is the Executive Summary. This section includes logistical information about the school review, a listing of the nine standards around which the report is written, commendations / areas of note, themes and recommendations, and questions to consider as the school considers how it will follow up on the report.

Section 2, the Detailed Report, describes the team's findings on the indicators for each standard, the sources of evidence used to substantiate the findings, and comments written by the team to clarify their findings. The numbers listed in the performance level column rate the school's overall performance on each indicator of each standard in the rubric.

Section 3 of the report, the Landscape section, provides a "summary at a glance" of the rating results for each indicator. The Performance Level numbers in the Detailed Report are color coded on the Landscape report and indicate the following:

Level 1: Little or no development and implementation (Red on the Landscape section)

Level 2: Limited development or partial implementation (Black on the Landscape section)

Level 3: Fully functioning and operational level of development and implementation (Blue on the Landscape section)

Level 4: Exemplary level of development and implementation (Green on the Landscape section)

# **CDE SCHOOL SUPPORT TEAM REPORT**

## **GREENLEE K-8 SCHOOL**

### **SECTION 1 - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**February 8-13, 2009**

#### **INTRODUCTION:**

The school support team conducted a scholastic review of **Greenlee K-8 School** during the period of **February 8 to February 13, 2009**.

In order to prepare an evidence-based report, the school support team activities included a review of the documents collected for the school portfolio and profile;

Interviews\* with

- School administrator ( 2)
- District administrators (2)
- District specialists (0)
- Classroom teachers (30)
- Advisor (1)
- Instructional and content coaches (2)
- Nurse, psychologist, social worker, OT/PT (4)
- Community partnership coordinators (0)
- Paraprofessionals and tutors (17)
- Secretaries, clerks, records, data (4)
- Food services, custodial staff, bus drivers (2)
- Parents (15)
- Student teachers, Teachers in Residence, substitutes (1)
- Students (70); and
- Classroom walkthroughs and observations\* (124)

**\*Number may represent the number of observations or interviews, not the number of teachers in the school, for example.**

## STANDARDS FOR THE SCHOOL SUPPORT TEAM REPORT

### Academic Performance:

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

**Standard 1:** The school implements a 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 development and personnel 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 development needs of students.

**Standard 6:** The school/district provides research-based 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) organizational structure and 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 the 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.

**AREAS OF RECOGNITION:** The School Support team would like to recognize and commend the following:

- The school staff and students are welcoming.
- Teachers like the students.
- The school is focused on using data.
- The lunchroom is student friendly.
- The school is well staffed with personnel.

- The school leadership is respected by staff.
- Data are posted in hallways and classrooms for students and parents to see.
- The Parent Teacher Association is being reconstituted.
- The school collaborates with numerous community agencies.
- Leadership observes instruction frequently.
- Parents support the school.
- Pre-K parents take advantage of training provided by the Denver Public Schools.
- The front office staff is highly skilled and friendly.
- The school improvement plan is the focus of the school.
- Teachers use rubrics to assess student work.
- Students know what rubrics are and how they are used.
- Students feel safe at Greenlee K-8 School.
- Parents believe their children are safe at school.
- Teachers' goals are aligned with the school improvement plan.
- Professional development is frequently provided to staff.
- Most teachers are involved in after school programming.
- Teachers and paraprofessionals collaborate.
- Students have an adult in the school they can go to when troubled.
- The school uses data to drive classroom instructional decisions.

## **RECOMMENDED STRATEGIC ACTIONS – MAJOR THEMES**

Note: It will be up to the Greenlee K-8 School community to determine which, how many, and in what order the recommendations within these themes will be addressed.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

The School Support Team (SST) is encouraged by the hard work and individual effort of the Greenlee K-8 School staff. The school goals are challenging and current activities focus on improvement of student achievement. This focus includes intensive use of data and a substantial effort toward gaining expert skills through professional development. This work should be sustained. The team believes that the school's focus on learning goals can be enhanced by attending to improving organizational systems that support the instructional program, precise application of research-proven instructional strategies in classrooms, and building a school climate that is supportive of one another while fostering the value of learning among students. The recommendations for Greenlee K-8 School are clustered in the themes of **organization and systems, instruction and school climate**. Due to naturally occurring overlaps, this report includes intentional redundancy in the recommendations posed for the three themes.

## **Definitions of Themes:**

**Organization and Systems:** *Organization and systems* is the label used for the simple notion of *aligning the work* of every member of the staff and associated community toward goals that make the school's vision a reality. Typically, this means thoughtfully designing the structure of the school program, strategically assigning staff, scheduling and coordination of work, collaboration, and threading communication throughout all activities of the organization.

**Instruction:** The theme of instruction includes curriculum, assessment, use of data, classroom teaching, organization of classrooms, student engagement in learning, and classroom supports. In addition, this theme implies embedding research-based strategies into daily instruction with craftsmanship honed by practice and diligent focus on quality.

**School Climate:** A positive school climate sustains the work of high performing schools and contributes to greater achievement for students. Climate includes holding and acting on high expectations, focusing on the success of every student, developing collegial and collaborative working relationships, welcoming and including parents, and building values and attitudes among students that foster learning.

## **Theme 1: ORGANIZATION AND SYSTEMS**

### **INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:**

Schools are complex organizations that work best when there is commitment to a common vision and all parties engage in aligned work to reach intended goals. Using the metaphor of a rowing team, a vision is knowing the location of the finish line. Continuing this metaphor, more water is covered at greater speeds when all oars are pulled in the same direction. This is the essence of systems thinking that guides how effective organizations work.

### **Vision and Systems Thinking**

"Systems thinking" is about gaining insights into the whole by understanding the linkages and interactions between the elements that comprise the whole system (Senge, 1990). "Systems thinking" also builds shared vision. When a faculty has a shared vision, the group and individuals can comprehend and create images of exactly what actions they can take to support achieving school goals.

In schools where systems thinking is prevalent, plans and actions are interlinked, staff maintain a laser-like focus, and all effort aligns with the vision and goals established in the school improvement plan. The various substructures within the school operate in ways contributing to the overall purpose of the whole school. In addition, operating with a shared vision implies using collaborative work practices and communications.

### Communication

When issues unrelated to focus on student achievement are introduced into the culture of the school, a lack of clarity ripples throughout the school creating barriers to its proper work. The importance of the school's work on behalf of students cannot be overstated and requires targeted sustained leadership support and high expectations for staff and students at all times. Effective and comprehensive communication processes and strategies are essential for facilitating the interrelationships and feedback loops that are characteristic of systems thought driven organizations. Without attending to communication, schools are unable to initiate or sustain a shared vision and tend to lose focus on their central purpose. In addition, timely "communication and follow-through refer to the extent to which school leadership establishes strong lines of communication with and between teacher, students, parents and the community. This responsibility seems self-evident – good communication is a critical feature of any endeavor in which people work in close proximity for a common purpose" (Marzano, Waters, McNulty 2005).

### Collaboration

Collaboration is the leverage tool for bringing a shared vision and aligned effort to fruition. The work of the school can not be accomplished if the various elements or individuals within the school operate in total independence. Operating with a shared vision and shared focus contributes to both synergy and momentum in pursuit of school goals. Collaboration is an essential characteristic of high achieving, low-income schools and includes participation of all faculty members, parents and students. Researchers indicate that, without exception, these schools have collaborative cultures and processes (Fullan, 1999).

### Shared Leadership

Effective school organizations practice distributed leadership (Elmore, 2000). Building teacher leadership is a step in the direction of overall improvement in a school that employs systems thinking.

### Internal and External View

Improving schools requires an internal and external view of how effective systems work. An internal view requires an analysis of the various systems and functions within a school followed by making decisions to improve effectiveness and efficiency. Operating from an internal view is important but not sufficient to substantially improve the work of a school organization. Internally, there is a tendency to allow past practice to limit thinking about more effective ways of conducting the work of the organization. An external view of how other similar organizations structure themselves can enhance the effectiveness of a school. Borrowing and adapting practices that are proven to be effective in other schools can accelerate overall improvement.

### ***Recommendations:***

- Collaboratively develop a new vision statement that paints a verbal picture of what you want to become as a school. Communicate the vision frequently and widely throughout the school organization and community. Use the vision of your more effective school to focus the work of the entire staff.

- Engage in a collaborative effort to analyze the organizational structure of the school and take bold actions to align programs, staffing assignments, and processes that focus on achieving goals in the school improvement plan.
- Visit schools within and outside of the Denver Public Schools to learn how the instructional day is used to maximize use of instructional time and integrate the work of all staff toward common goals. Act on what you learn.
- Design and implement procedures for developing teacher leadership. Give individuals in the school opportunities to become the local experts in a number of instructional areas.
- Strengthen collaborative processes by identifying and providing training to staff who can serve as meeting facilitators. In addition, use protocols that streamline meetings for effective use of time, focus on instruction, and problem solving. (These would include processes for SIT, Data, and vertical team meetings.)
- Establish and communicate well defined policies, procedures and practices for budgeting and staffing decisions.
- Develop student, staff and parent handbooks.
- Develop operating procedures for the Collaborative School Committee (by laws, meeting schedule, minutes).
- Establish school-wide student behavior expectations and strategies for reinforcing appropriate behavior.
- Develop a homework policy and expectations.
- Establish a dress code for students.
- Clarify administrative lines of authority and reporting procedures.
- Develop written procedures for school safety (e.g. drills, training of staff and students).
- Develop a communication plan.
- Revisit the school's scheduling strategies and consider the following:
  - Establishing a scheduling process that addresses making maximum use of instructional time and instructional staff resources.
  - Adopting literacy blocks as a scheduling strategy.
  - Making use of the computer lab for instructional interventions, as well as its current uses.
  - Adopting a middle school block schedule.
  - Addressing developmental levels of students when creating a school schedule.
- Address the staffing needs of the school to meet the anticipated change in student enrollment in the short and long term by:
  - Addressing class size in the lower grades.
  - Addressing class size in the middle grades.
  - Developing a building use master plan.
  - Developing a master plan for effective use of support staff in the classroom.

***Questions to consider:***

- How can we make the school vision the focus of our work?
- In what ways can we improve the school schedule to respond to developmental needs of students and meet learning goals?
- How can we maximize instructional time and use of personnel resources?
- How can we establish a tradition of developing teacher leadership?

- How can we go about creating and implementing a number of policies and procedures that will support improving the systems within the school?
- How can we find ways and training to streamline the processes that currently exist in the school?
- How can we address matters related to class size?
- In what ways can the building space be used more effectively?
- How do we develop a clear understanding of how the school will work?
- How can we communicate how the building operates with regard to leadership, processes, and traditions to staff and parents?
- What can we learn from visiting other schools about how to structure programs, schedules, and services?

## **Theme 2: INSTRUCTION**

### **INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:**

“The capstone of any school improvement effort is the quality of teaching, which represents the single most important aspect of any school’s program for ensuring student success” (Danielson, 2002). Perfecting instructional techniques is ongoing in the teaching profession. Research-based strategies become the toolkit for conducting high-involvement lessons. “Only teachers who utilize a variety of instructional models will be successful in maximizing the achievement of all students... Teachers need to “play to” students’ strengths and to mitigate students’ learning weaknesses. This can be done only through the use of instructional variety” (Lasley & Matczynski, 1997).

Data analysis is a guide to making decisions for teaching students. It is important for all staff to understand that the tools to teach not only include curriculum and materials, but also the knowledge of how well student groups and subgroups are learning as indicated by a body of evidence. In the book Classroom Instruction That Works, Marzano, Pickering and Pollack (2001) create a “call to arms”. Their synthesis of research provides nine instructional practices that affect learning. Furthermore, Marzano states, “Arguably the most basic issue a teacher can consider is what he or she will do to establish and communicate learning goals, track student progress, and celebrate success” (Marzano, 2007).

### ***Recommendations:***

- Post exemplars for all types of student work, in classrooms and around the school, in order for students to continually assess their work (e.g. constructed response, writing, projects, art work).
- Make rubrics a continuous part of teaching and learning. Ensure alignment with standards and grade level skills as identified in the curriculum. Clearly delineate the different levels of performance.
- Explore different ways to address student needs through the use of differentiation in instructional strategies, scaffolding, and ways students can show what they know and are able to do (e.g. stations, materials, language, culture, and interest). Develop a pyramid of interventions to meet the range of student needs from underperforming to gifted.

- Make time on task a priority throughout the school (e.g. efficient transitions from activity to activity and class to class, bell to bell instruction, effective classroom management).
- Make learning relevant by connecting with life skills, careers, and age appropriate problem solving. Adjust pacing to the developmental and skill levels of students. Use technology to enhance skill development and hold student interest. This will increase student engagement and reduce off task behavior.
- Disaggregate data by subgroups. Use this disaggregated data to determine changes in instructional strategies, scaffold instruction, and address subgroup needs.
- Use a body of evidence to make decisions about student placement and flexible grouping for the delivery of first instruction and interventions.
- Develop norms for working together in groups and everyday adult-to-adult interaction. Train staff in the use of protocols to analyze data and examine student work.
- Implement school-wide instructional strategies based on the five components of reading (National Reading Panel, 2000) and Marzano's research.

***Questions to Consider:***

- How can collaborative development and use of rubrics and exemplars become an integral part of the school's data team work and a focus for school-wide achievement?
- What strategies and resources can be integrated into our teaching to provide relevance and increase motivation?
- What techniques can be used to establish a culture for learning in our classrooms so students spend more time engaged in the curriculum?
- In what ways can we differentiate to meet student needs?
- How can all staff members work together more effectively to address the goals of the school improvement plan?
- How can we use data disaggregated by subgroups to effectively match instruction to student needs? What body of evidence is needed to place students in flexible groups for instruction and interventions?
- How will teachers implement the five components of reading and Marzano's research-based strategies into instructional practice?

### **Theme 3: SCHOOL CULTURE**

#### **INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:**

Walk into any truly excellent school and you can feel it almost immediately – a calm, orderly atmosphere that hums with an exciting, vibrant sense of purposefulness just under the surface. Students carry themselves with poise and confidence. Teachers talk about their work with intensity and professionalism. And despite the sense of serious business at hand, both teachers and students seem happy and confident rather than stressed. Everyone seems to know who they are and why they are there, and children and staff treat each other with the respect due to full partners in an important enterprise (Jerald, 2006).

Understanding that reculturing is not an easy task, a school must reflect on its current culture to identify all components (e.g. high expectations, student diversity, teacher development, staff trust, parent and community involvement) that contribute to the overall feeling of the school. Students, staff, parents, and community members in effective schools see concrete signs of its culture as addressed by the mission, vision and values.

Hobby of the Hay Group lists five kinds of “reinforcing behaviors” that send strong signals about vision and values.

- Rituals: celebrations and ceremonies, rites of passage, and shared quirks and mannerisms
- Hero Making: role models, hierarchies, public rewards, and mentors
- Storytelling: shared humor, common anecdotes, foundation myths, and both oral and written history
- Symbolic Display: decoration, artwork, trophies, and architecture
- Rules: etiquette, formal rules, taboos, and tacit permissions (Hobby, 2004)

As educators come under greater pressure to achieve better and more equitable student outcomes, they will need to leverage every tool available to them, including organizational culture. The first step is to recognize that having a strong, positive culture is more than just safety and order (Jerald, 2004).

#### ***Recommendations***

- Examine the Stars’ motto and build upon its principles to create a “living” mission and vision statement that will guide decisions throughout all systems of the school.
- Develop a Parent Handbook that includes the school’s mission, vision, and values.
- Consider ways to give existing and potential leaders appropriate leadership roles.
- Build a learning community that understands and demands high expectations for all students.
- Encourage high academic performance by displaying exemplary student work accompanied by a grading rubric.
- Collectively agree on what “parent involvement” means and looks like at Greenlee K-8. Decide how best to include parents in student academic success.

- Consider identifying a person to act as a parent liaison in order to create a culture where parents not only are welcome, but also have purpose within the building.
- Study and adopt a common code of student behavior with common rules, rewards, and consequences (i.e. Positive Behavior Support).
- Find ways to have regular exposure in the local community newspaper(s).
- Send the school newsletter electronically to community and civic leaders and business owners.
- Plan occasions to recognize and celebrate staff.
- Include culturally relevant activities and celebrations within the adopted curriculum.

### ***Questions to Consider***

- How can we craft the Stars' motto to fit the school's mission and vision?
- How can we identify and grow potential teacher leaders?
- What does achieving high expectations look like in practice?
- How can staff promote values and attitudes among students that foster learning?
- How do we hold ourselves, students, and parents accountable for high expectations?
- What are the barriers that keep parents from becoming actively engaged in the school and in their own children's learning? How do we remove those barriers?
- How can we find time and resources to observe a successful Positive Behavior Support (PBS) school?
- How can we communicate to the greater community the positive features of our school?
- How can we recognize and celebrate staff?
- How can we celebrate the wide diversity within our school?

**IN CONCLUSION:** Schools that intend to continue with the school improvement grant process will use prioritized findings in this report as a basis for developing their plans and grant proposals. The School Support Team sincerely hopes that this report assists the Greenlee K-8 School community in the goal of raising academic achievement for all students.

**More resources about the nine standards used in this report are available at the Professional Development and School Support website: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/FedPrograms/PDSSP/index.asp>**