

## ADAMS 12 FIVE STAR SCHOOL DISTRICT Thornton, CO WRITING

### Introduction

With the goal of improving literacy for all students, the Adams12 Five Star School District in Colorado, just outside urban Denver, began district-wide implementation of a robust professional development initiative featuring the research-based principles and practices upon which national literacy expert Regie Routman grounds her years of work.

A large, diverse, and expanding district, Adams12 is growing under the thoughtful leadership of Superintendent Mike Paskewicz and Executive Director of Elementary Schools Marilyn Jerde. They began three years ago after carefully reviewing patterns in district-wide data. They decided their focus should be on *Writing for Audience and Purpose*. They instituted facilitator training for the leadership teams who would support the initiative. District elementary schools were divided into cohorts. The first cohort began the pilot year in the 2005-06 school year with three elementary schools. In the second year, they added additional schools. A third group was added in the 2007-08 school year. That group included one middle school. The work continues. One important feature, perhaps the most important, is schools receive Marilyn's support. As a former elementary principal, she is aware of the challenges as she meets with school leaders to build leadership capacity, support their campus professional development, promote networking, and apply the optimal learning model, which ensures that like students, adult learners receive the same modeling and support necessary for success.

### Student Performance Data

The data from schools in all three cohorts show strong, positive trends even as expectations increase. For example, reviewing data for teachers with the highest student performance, the following trends were present in teachers in the top quartile. The percentages reflect the number of teachers whose students who were part of the professional development initiative and whose students were among those who were in the highest performing group.

| Kinder | First | Second | Third | Fourth |
|--------|-------|--------|-------|--------|
| 64%    | 72%   | 67%    | 84%   | 68%    |

While some of the teachers were part of the professional development for only one year, the data reflect positive performance patterns.

### Lessons Learned

District leaders continue to reflect on their progress and share the following insights from their experience to date.

- The leadership team is crucial to the overall success.
- Principal support is the most important key to successful implementation and sustainability.
- While it is easy to be distracted, it is important to maintain focus and stay the course.
- Collaboration with others through regular professional conversations about student learning is key.
- Connect teachers to a partner for planning, sharing, and implementing.
- Provide professional development in literacy for principals.
- Create a vision, shared language and beliefs, and an implementation plan, offering support as needed to ensure success and sustainability.

### Testimonials

**Superintendent, Mike Paskewicz:** *The initial focus of the real-world writing project in Adams12, which was spearheaded by nationally acclaimed teacher and author, Regie Routman, was to help teachers improve their instruction. But it soon took on meaning beyond the classroom. In the end, the adults discovered they had much to learn from students.*

**Executive Director of Elementary Education, Marilyn Jerde:** *We have been able to create learning environments where students perform at higher levels and teachers find renewed enjoyment in their teaching.*