

North Star Elementary School ADAMS 12 FIVE STAR SCHOOL DISTRICT Thornton, CO WRITING

Introduction

North Star Elementary School is part of Adams 12 Five Star Schools, a large, diverse, and expanding district, just outside urban Denver. Almost 90% of North Star's students participate in either the free or reduced lunch program and over 60% are second language learners. Barbara Stallings' leadership as principal, along with a supportive and involved staff, has been key to the school's progress as she continues to provide strong leadership and support for the ongoing professional development work. One noteworthy change in North Star Elementary has been increased dedication to high expectations for all students.

Student Performance Data

The staff saw substantial gains in students' performance at the close of the 2006-07 school year. The school participated that school year in a *Writing for Audience and Purpose* residency with Regie Routman, which focused on increasing expectations for students and provided professional support for the staff.

Using the Colorado Growth Model, which provides a way to measure students' CSAP performance from one year to the next, students made remarkable, double-digit gains in both reading and writing. 100% of the 5th graders made a year's growth in writing. Of all the Title I schools, North Star made the most growth in writing.

Reading		Gain	Writing		Gain
2006	2007		2006	2007	
47	56.5	+10	43	58.5	+16

Lessons Learned

- The leadership team is crucial to the overall success.
- Expectations must be set high and be specific for all students.
- The principal's *frequent* presence in the classroom is a crucial key in implementation and sustainability.
- Consistent, focused professional development, which includes looking at student data, examining student work, collaborating with colleagues, and providing time for quality planning is critical.
- Celebrating accomplishments with the staff is crucial for maintaining energy and enthusiasm.
- When students write for authentic audiences and purposes, they are invested in their learning and achievement follows.
- Making students responsible for conventions in writing is crucial and occurs when purposefully embedded in the writing process.
- Create a vision, shared language and beliefs, and an implementation plan, offering support as needed to ensure success.

Testimonials

Principal, Barbara Stallings: *There is joy in teaching and in learning at North Star. This change is significant and makes my role as principal rewarding and fulfilling.*

5th Grade Teacher, Jessica Grojean: *I am now passionate about teaching writing, and that passion has moved on to my students. They see that writing has a purpose beyond a grade in my grade book. They now write for their friends, parents, and members of society. I have a renewed love as a teacher of writing, and it is by far the favorite part of my day.*

Literacy Coach, Nancy McLean: *Students and teachers understand the purpose and audience for writing, and children are now embracing writing across the curriculum. Kindergartners are publishing their own stories and joyfully sharing them. Collaboration, risk taking, and knowledge of how to effectively teach writing have all greatly increased. Writing has come to life for students and teachers; it is no longer just an isolated time block.*