

ELPA Excellence Award Evaluation Synthesis Report   
  
Lessons Learned from 2016-2017 Awardees: Charter Schools  
  
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**Introduction**

In 2014, Colorado legislators re-enacted the English Language Proficiency Act (ELPA). ELPA funds Colorado districts to provide supports and services to English learners (ELs). As part of the re-enacted legislation, funding was earmarked for identifying and awarding high performing local education providers (LEPs) with evidence-based English language development (ELD) programs and a demonstrated record of effectiveness. Specifically, high performing districts and charter schools were identified based on the language and academic performance of ELs based on three equally-weighted criteria:

* ***Linguistic growth*** of ELs in program as measured by growth on the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs assessment;
* ***Academic growth*** of ELs in program as measured by growth on CMAS English language arts (ELA) and math state assessments; and
* ***Academic achievement*** of ELs that have exited the ELD program as measured by the percent who scored in the top two performance levels of the CMAS ELA and math assessments.

In 2016-2017, these legislated criteria were used to identify 10 districts and 10 charter schools for ELPA Excellence Awardees (See Table 1 below for charter school awardees; for district awardees please visit: [ELPA Excellence Award](https://www.cde.state.co.us/cde_english/elpaexcellenceaward)).

*Table 1. The 2016-2017 ELPA Excellence Awardee Charter Schools*

| **Organization (Local Education Providers)** |
| --- |
| DSST Cole High School |
| DSST Conservatory Green Middle School |
| DSST Green Valley Ranch Middle School |
| DSST Green Valley Ranch High School |
| DSST Stapleton Middle School |
| DSST Stapleton High School |
| KIPP Sunshine Peak Academy |
| Stargate Charter School |
| STRIVE Prep-Federal |
| STRIVE Prep-Montbello |

The legislation also required the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) to conduct an evaluation to identify the factors contributing to the success of the awardees and disseminate the effective practices implemented by the awardees. This report summarizes the common practices and procedures across the awarded charter schools and highlights the practices noted within the awarded schools. A companion report delineates the findings for the awarded districts (see 2016-2017 ELPA District Evaluation Report).

**Study Methodology**

CDE gathered information by conducting onsite visits, which followed protocols used in previous effectiveness studies and included interviews with key stakeholders and observations. The one-day visits included interviews with personnel such as school leaders, principals, assistant principals, ELD and content teachers, instructional coaches, and interventionists. Interviews typically lasted one hour and followed a structured question protocol. Classroom observations lasted 30-60 minutes and a structured template was utilized. Onsite visits were intended to provide enough information for CDE to identify the effective ELD practices.

**Factors Contributing to Effectiveness of Awardees’ ELD Programs**

# Approach to Serving All Students

A unifying mission and vision statement, high expectations, and a collective sense of responsibility for all students contributed to the success of English Language Proficiency Act (ELPA) Excellence Awardees. It was apparent that these practices were couched within a systemic approach to serving all students. A mission and vision that all students will be college-ready reflect high expectations and require all staff members to collaborate. Each of these practices builds upon another to systemically meet the needs of English learners attending these ELPA Excellence Award charter schools.

**Mission/Vision**

The mission and vision statements of the ELPA Excellence Charter School Awardees communicated a common goal of preparing all students to be college-ready and attain success beyond high school. For example, DSST Green Valley Ranch Middle School explained that they want every child ready for the 21st Century and to graduate high school prepared to overcome life challenges and excel at whichever pathway they choose. The school leader further expressed that students should be able to make any choices they want regarding their academic futures.

STRIVE Prep-Montbello leaders shared that they promise all families that they are going to prepare their children for college, by making sure that students attain academic requirements necessary to make college an option. The philosophy that all students will get accepted to a college was a goal clearly articulated by many school leaders and educators and that shared belief appeared to unify the school’s efforts toward that objective.

The ELPA Excellence schools generally had the same mission and vision for all students, but varied in the supports offered to English learners to realize these aspirations. The mission statements valued educational equity and access to opportunities as important commitments that guided their work. DSST Cole High School shared that staff members deeply care that all students have access to instruction at the highest levels and this mission is true for any demographic.

**High Expectations**

Many ELPA Excellence Award charter schools do not stop with their vision and mission statements, but also convey high expectations through their instructional practices and expectations of teachers to believe in all students’ ability to learn and grow. They have high expectations for all students and provide the necessary scaffolds to ensure that all students meet these expectations. For example, DSST Stapleton will not accept excuse-making because of the belief that all students have the ability to rise to the occasion. School leaders and personnel expressed having intensive expectations across the board and the bar is set high. One shared that they help students meet high expectations by providing supports based on student need and holding themselves, each other, and students accountable for meeting those expectations.

DSST Green Valley Ranch High School vets their final exams against college entry assessments, which supports teachers in backward planning to vertically align curriculum. In so doing, they set exemplars at rigorous academic levels, and then scaffold up, rather than lowering the standard. They also attribute much of students’ success meeting high expectations to each student having a strong relationship with at least one adult in the building. For example, DSST schools have advisors who support students across their years at the school.

Additionally, structures that support students in meeting expectations are in place across the charter schools, including tutoring, after-school college prep sessions, homework support, and advisors who monitor overall student progress. Furthermore, the use of common language and frequent references to being college-ready demonstrate their high expectations that all students will pursue higher education.

**Collective Responsibility**

The commitment to supporting success for everyone, teachers and students alike, was apparent. Staff and school leaders across ELPA Excellence Award charter schools expressed and demonstrated a collective sense of responsibility for all students to meet high expectations. This requires all staff members to collectively believe in, engage in, and share the responsibility for offering these supports.

KIPP Sunshine Peak Academy exemplifies this “doing whatever it takes to support students” philosophy with teachers regularly collaborating to analyze student data and then designing high quality “reteach” lessons for areas of need. These “reteach” lessons take a different approach than the original lesson to make sure students understand the content before moving on. Additionally, teachers offer support through college prep and tutoring sessions.

In numerous schools, advisors play a critical role in identifying supports best suited to students’ needs. They know their students very well and monitor their attendance and performance. Advisors attend collaborative meetings with grade level and content teachers to share their depth of knowledge of the students’ needs, background, and home life to help identify the needed supports. The team focuses discussions on strategies and interventions to support those students based on their collective understanding and knowledge of the students.

Instructional coaches and school leadership teams share collective responsibility for their teams’ performance. DSST Conservatory Green Middle School expressed that they care deeply about people and developing their growth. This also came through in the way that DSST Green Valley Ranch Middle School personnel talked about the role of instructional coaches and their relationships with teachers. They said that coaching relationships, which were held sacred, were a driving force in their success. Coaches see the success of their teachers as an integral part of their jobs and it is the coach’s responsibility to guide them through the year.

# School Culture

The schools work hard to maintain strong school cultures through relationships and consistent practices. Relationships fostered with ELs and their families supported ELD programs success, while the implementation of consistent practices across the schools maximized instructional time and clearly outlined the expectations for students. Both relationships and strong management systems were foundational to a school culture that supported the success of ELs.

**Relationships**

Strong relationships among all stakeholders also contributed to the success of the schools. Relationships among educators and students, staff members, families, and the community were vital to creating a supportive environment for everyone. One school operated on the principle of love for both teachers and students. Teachers worked to really know their students, not just academically. This was evident when passing through the hallways and overhearing teachers ask students about their families, make comments regarding their lives beyond school, and greet them with genuine enthusiasm.

Morning meetings and advisory classes are opportunities to strengthen relationships. Morning meetings provide space for students to converse and connect with each other and help to foster a sense of community for students and teachers. The advisor serves as a point person by overseeing students’ grades and emotional health. Advisors develop relationships with students’ families through frequent communication and engaging families as partners in student success.

Many schools had strong relationships with the community and the community felt valued by the school. At KIPP Sunshine Peak Academy, teachers took extra steps to know their families by conducting home visits and trying to learn Spanish. School events were opportunities to connect with families and provide resources. Frequent school-to-home communications and updates supported students and forged relationships with parents or guardians.

School leaders prioritize their relationships with staff. Many schools had structures to provide systemic support for teachers through instructional coaching. In some schools, every teacher had a coach, who visited classrooms frequently, knew what happened in classrooms, and believed that developing teachers was a fundamental component of their job. One school leader described it as “loving hard and pushing on each other.”

The school culture for both teachers and students is built upon support, trust, and a love of learning. Establishing and fostering strong relationships is a core value and is prioritized as part of the school’s culture.

**Consistency in Practices and Schoolwide Approaches**

Mission and vision statements supported the alignment of practices across the school and established goals toward which staff was consistently working. Resources and instructional mechanisms to realize school visions were applied schoolwide and systematically to accomplish this joint effort.

Consistent practices related to behavior management were noted. Students clearly knew the behavior expectations. The schools’ core values were implemented at a high level and consistently embedded in the work of staff and students. High behavior expectations resulted in firm classroom management and effective use of class time, and students engaged more meaningfully in instructional tasks.

Some schools devoted several weeks in the summer, or prior to beginning the school year, to establishing a strong culture by developing consistent practices for educators and students. One example in the DSST network was the practice of a “do now” that set clear expectations for what students should do when they enter a classroom. These consistent classroom practices and expectations maximize instructional time because students begin work as soon as they enter classroom, while the teacher checks attendance and prepares to instruct. KIPP Sunshine Peak created a school culture handbook that supported developing consistent practices. In schools wherein clear routines and procedures were established and behavior expectations were consistent, students were able to focus on content upon entry into the classroom without delay. Consistent practices across the school protect instructional time because ELs do not have to learn and adapt to new processes for each classroom.

# Continuous Improvement

A drive to continually improve outcomes for ELs and foster personal growth of staff members was common among many ELPA Excellence Award schools. This push to support the success of all students was strengthened by constantly diving into and analyzing student data. Schools used the data to adjust programs and instruction. Stronger instruction and professional growth for staff was supported through professional learning situated within strong coaching systems.

**Continuous Use of Data/Systems in Place for Data Management and Use**

Using data was another common practice among ELPA Excellence Awardees. The charter school network organizational structures supported regular data analysis and comparisons across the network within each school. Days are scheduled at the end of each quarter or trimester to review data and identify gaps or bright spots. Interim data is used to identify and compare EL trends across the network.

Constant analyses of student data was integral to how the schools functioned. Systems in place often used online platforms such as Sibme, Engrade, Polaris, or Whetstone to collect, track, and use data to inform instruction. Some systems allowed teachers to disaggregate data, track observations, and identify performance gaps. These systems made data easily accessible and improved the ability to identify student needs and adjust instruction. Leadership was aware of data that showed whether ELs were accessing the content. Schools understood their data and were able to assess their needs. Some schools developed partnerships with outside organizations, such as the University of Colorado, to support their use of school data.

Instructional coaches regularly looked at, and helped teachers analyze, classroom data. They conducted weekly grade book audits to find patterns, and held regular conversations with teachers about using student data to support the growth of ELs. Schools described strong data cultures that valued data-based feedback. Teachers were accountable for student data and instructional coaches supported utilizing data to improve instruction. Administrators, teachers, and students shared a mindset of growth and development through the use of data.

Teachers used formative data regularly to understand what skills students had acquired each week and to adjust instruction in response. Student work, mastery checks, exit slips, and other assessment data were studied regularly, often at weekly meetings. Teachers also were supporting students’ efforts to understand their own data.

**Professional Learning**

Many ELPA Excellence Awardees had strong coaching systems in place. Some provided an instructional coach for each teacher; many teachers had weekly coaching sessions. One-on-one coaching helped teachers reflect on how their instruction impacts ELs and encouraged them to check for student understanding. These sessions helped teachers grow and fostered stronger instructional capacity.

Many schools also offered professional development related to language development and strategies for sheltered instruction. This professional development was differentiated based on teachers’ prioritized needs and specifically designed to enhance and strengthen current practices.

# **Conclusion**

A number of practices contributed to the success of ELPA Excellence Award recipients. These practices were built into systems that supported school leaders and educators to collectively meet the needs of ELs. Strong vision and mission statements aligned the work, fostered consistency in practices, and helped all stakeholders strive to meet high expectations. Deep and meaningful relationships produced school cultures that fostered academic and linguistic growth through trust, care, and connection. Assigning instructional coaches to every teacher was one of the valuable strategies for increasing instructional capacity and analyzing EL data to adjust instruction. These practices worked in combination to create responsive learning environments for ELs and contributed to the overall success of the programs.