



COLORADO DEPARTMENT *of* EDUCATION

High Growth Title I Schools Study: Summary Report

By:

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Introduction

The central objective of Title I, Part A is to ensure that all children reach challenging academic content standards, specifically in reading and math. The program provides supplemental resources to schools and students who have furthest to go in achieving these standards. Over the years, many researchers have analyzed the effectiveness of Title IA on improving student academic performance. The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) has been conducting its own evaluation of Title IA programs in the state.

In 2009-2010, CDE in collaboration with an external evaluation firm, OMNI Institute, studied the relationship between the amount of Title I funds distributed to schools and student performance. Title I per pupil allocation amounts were compared against the schools' median growth percentile, a metric that represents the academic growth of students on the state assessments in comparison to students' academic peers (students with similar performance histories on the state assessment). Although the study supported that on average schools with higher amounts of per pupil allocation tended to have higher median growth percentiles, there were also some schools with high growth percentiles with low per pupil amounts and vice versa (low growth schools with high per pupil allocations).

As a follow up study, CDE initiated a related analysis of Title I schools in Colorado that had achieved high growth with their lowest performing students in 2010-2011, regardless of Title I funding amounts in prior years. The common themes, practices, and strategies used in these schools were analyzed and studied. The purpose of this report is to summarize the commonalities found across these high growth schools.

Methods

School Selection Process

Title I schools that had operated as Title I schools at least 4 years were ranked based on catch-up median growth percentiles (MGP) on reading and math. *Catch-up* students are defined as those that scored non-proficient on the state assessment in the prior year. The 34 schools with the highest catch-up MGP were compared to each other on other relevant data including: (1) Colorado English Language Assessment (CELA), (2) Colorado Basic Literacy Act (CBLA) Assessments (DRA2, DIBELS, or PALS), (3) reading and math achievement based on state assessments, (4) Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under the No Child Left Behind Act), and (5) Colorado School Performance Framework (SPF) rating and growth gaps rating. Demographic data were also reviewed to ensure that there was adequate representation of diverse student populations. Using these analyses, eleven schools were identified as having the highest growth. These schools were invited to participate in a comprehensive school review project.

Demographics of Participating Schools

Of the eleven Title I schools initially identified as exhibiting high growth, nine schools agreed to participate in CDE's study. Table 1 below provides additional information about these schools. Total enrollment of the participating schools ranged from 88 students to 763 students, with a weighted average of 339 students across the schools. All the schools in the study had high percentages of free and reduced lunch students, ranging from 39% to 93%, with a weighted average of 78.18% across the schools. Many of the schools had a high percentage of minority students, ranging from 12% to 98%, with a weighted average of 76.40% across the schools. The number of English Language Learners also varied widely, ranging from 0% - 63%, with a weighted average of 46.37% across the schools (See Table 1).

Table 1: Demographics, School Setting, and Title I Status of Each High Growth School

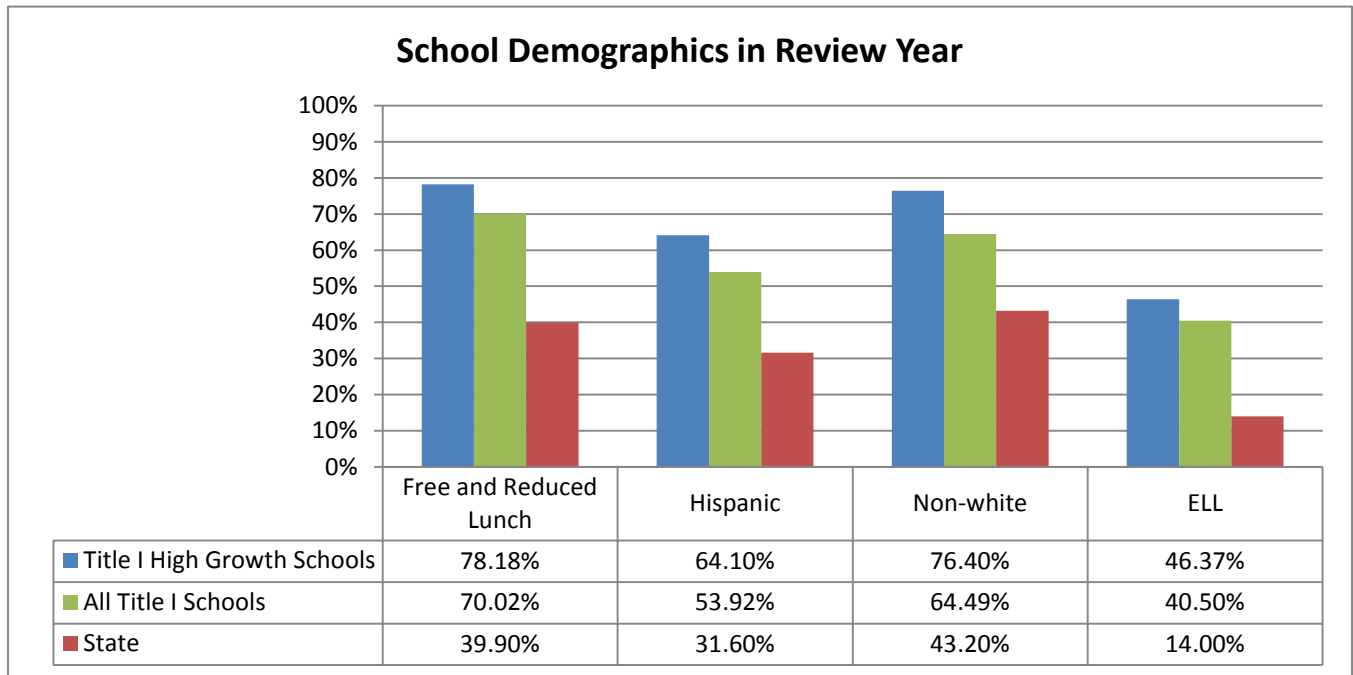
School	Grade Level	Title I Status (2010-2011)	Setting	2010-2011 (Selection Year)									Approximate Annual School Title I Allocation*	Approximate Annual Per Pupil Allocation to School*
				N Free and Reduced Lunch [PK-12]	Percent Free and Reduced Lunch	N Hispanic	Percent Hispanic	N Non-white	Percent Non-white	N English Language Learners	Percent ELL	Total Student Enrollment [PK-12]		
Metro Elementary 1	E	SW	Denver Metro	556	87%	286	45%	521	81%	320	50%	641	\$162,400	\$400
Metro Elementary 2	E	SW	Denver Metro	400	89%	343	76%	414	92%	282	63%	450	\$287,147	\$889
Metro Elementary 3	E	SW	Denver Metro	639	84%	602	79%	653	86%	358	47%	763	\$582,500	\$1,250
Metro Middle School	M	SW	Denver Metro	299	93%	311	97%	314	98%	202	63%	322	\$70,800	\$400
North Central Elementary	E	TA	Outlying Town	70	48%	38	26%	41	28%	30	21%	146	\$42,900	\$975
North Western Elementary	E	SW	Outlying Town	233	64%	258	71%	262	72%	213	59%	363	\$53,725	\$311
Northeast Elementary	E	TA	Rural	56	47%	10	8%	14	12%	0	0%	118	\$13,770	\$372
South Central High	H	SW	Rural	68	77%	79	90%	80	91%	6	7%	88	\$27,748	\$496
Southwest Elementary	E	TA	Outlying City	61	39%	26	17%	29	19%	2	1%	156	\$51,000	\$1,000
Totals for Schools				2,382		1,953		2,328		1,413		3,047	\$1,291,990	\$6,092
Weighted Averages for Schools				265	78%	217	64%	259	76%	157	46%	339	\$143,554	\$677
Totals for All Title I Schools				167,656	70%	129,091	54%	156,799	65%	72,260	30%	239,432		
State Totals				336,443	40%	266,098	32%	363,989	43%	117,369	14%	843,316		

*Dollar amounts are based on 2008-2009 allocations so that American Recovery and Reinvestment Dollars do not inflate the approximate annual amounts

Seven elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school participated in the study. Of these, six operated Title I Schoolwide (SW) programs, and three schools operated Targeted Assistance (TA) programs. In terms of setting, four schools are in an urban setting; two schools are considered rural; and three schools fit into the outlying city/town classification. In the 2010-2011 school year, the schools, as a group, had a teacher retention rate of 77%, (meaning that more than three fourths of teachers returned for the 10-11 school year). The total Title I allocation to the schools ranged from \$13,769 to \$582,500 , with an average of \$143,554. Finally, Title I per pupil funding ranged from a low of \$310 to a high of \$1250 per pupil, with an average of \$676.

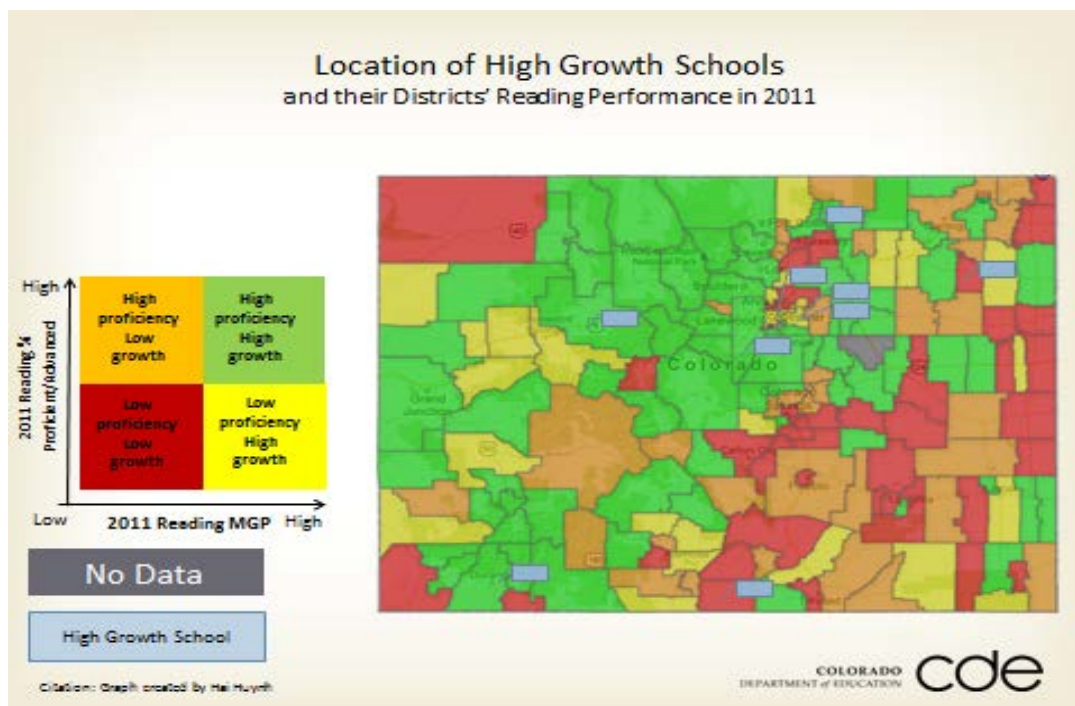
Figure 1 provides demographic data for the High Growth schools, as well as for all Title I schools and all Colorado schools. The nine schools had higher percentages of students who qualified for Free and Reduced Lunch (a proxy for poverty), non-white and Hispanic students, and English Language Learners than the state and Title I school percentages for these groups. The high growth schools had nearly twice as many students in the groups most at risk of not meeting state standards as did the state as a whole.

Figure 1. Combined Demographics of High Growth Schools (2010-2011)



In the interest of ensuring representation from around the state, the locations of the nine identified schools (depicted on the map with a blue box) were graphed on a map of the districts in the state based on district performance (See Figure 2). The nine schools are located in various regions of the state: four schools are in the metro area; two schools are in the southwest region; one school is in the northwest; one school is in the north central region; and one school is in the northeast region.

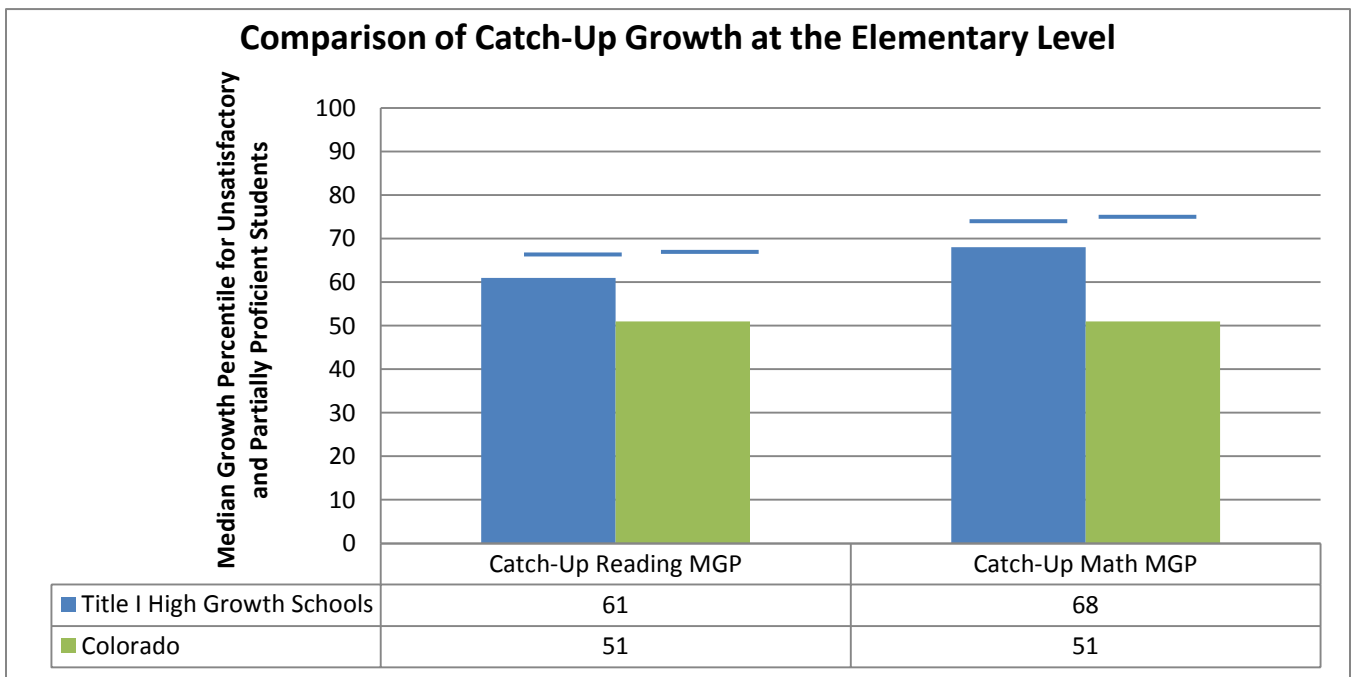
Figure 2. Location of High Growth Schools on the Map of Colorado School District Regions



Growth Scores for the Participating Schools

The 2010-2011 median growth percentiles of the High Growth Title I Schools were compared to the state’s median growth percentile for both elementary and middle schools. The next graph illustrates that the median growth percentiles for the elementary High Growth Schools is closer to the Adequate Growth Percentile (growth needed for non-proficient students to reach proficiency) than the state (See Figure 3).

Figure 3. Median Growth Percentile of Elementary High Growth Schools Compared to all Colorado Elementary Schools (2010-2011)



*Blue lines represent Adequate Growth Percentile – the growth needed for non-proficient students to reach proficiency.

Comprehensive Review of the Participating Schools

After identifying these high growth Title I schools, CDE conducted a project to ascertain some of the key practices that are contributing to each school’s success. Selected schools were provided the opportunity to participate in an Effective School Practices (ESP) review - an external, qualitative review of the school focused on nine standards: (1) Curriculum; (2) Classroom Evaluation/Assessment; (3) Instruction; (4) School Culture; (5) Professional Growth, Development, and Evaluation; (6) Student, Family, and Community Support; (7) Leadership; (8) Organizational Structure and Resources; and (9) Comprehensive and Effective Planning. The first three standards represent academic performance within a school. Standards four through six reflect the learning environment and the last three standards the organizational effectiveness of the school.

The ESP review followed the same protocols and structure as School Support Team (SST) reviews, which are conducted in Title I schools identified for Improvement. The review team of 5-7 skilled educators rated the schools on each of the nine standards using a four level scale: Level 4 – exemplary level of development and implementation; Level 3 – fully functioning and operational level of development and implementation; Level 2 – limited development or partial implementation; and Level 1 – little or no development and implementation. (See

Appendix A for the itemization of the standards and the indicators used for rating each). However, in the ESP reviews, the team specifically focused on those practices responsible for the high achievement and growth of students.

Although the nine Title I schools had variability across multiple factors, some salient common practices and themes emerged from this study. To reiterate, then, the purpose of this report is to share some of the highly effective practices identified through the ESP review.

Results

Common Themes

In analyzing the results from the ESP reviews, several key areas of effective practices stand out among the many efforts that are contributing to the successes in these nine schools. The practices can be categorized into three main areas: leadership, school culture, and best first instruction. On most of the indicators for each of these standards, the High Growth Schools were rated above 3 (fully functioning and operational level of development and implementation), with some being rated as 4 (exemplary). The ratings for the indicators within each standard were then averaged to obtain a standard score. The averaged standard score for the High Growth Schools on the leadership standard was 3.25 out of 4.0 while the school culture standard was 3.29 out of 4.0. As a comparison, schools that had a SST review (Title I Schools on Improvement) in the year prior to this study received average scores of 2.15 and 2.12, respectively, on leadership and school culture.

Leadership

Across all nine schools, the ratings for the Leadership standard were high. However, five of the schools stood out for their remarkably strong leadership. Leadership at these schools did not merely reside in the school principal but was purposefully distributed across teams - teachers were very much a part of the decision-making process. This support for and value of distributed leadership is reflected in the overall vision and mission of each school.

According to the reports generated by the ESP reviews, the following were the highest ranked indicators in the Leadership standard:

- Leadership allocates and monitors the use of resources
- Leadership protects instructional time
- Leadership develops and sustains a shared mission and vision
- School leadership incorporates information from disaggregated data into the school improvement plan
- School leadership promotes and supports a diverse educational environment

Implementation Strategies

In the five schools with the strongest leadership, teachers reported that the principal is regularly in their classrooms - sometimes only for a brief walkthrough, while at other times for a longer visit. Teachers reported that the principals often left them a note or emailed precise and personal feedback following the visit. Informal reports also occurred during cluster or grade level meetings. Although the method for providing feedback varied, all of the schools had processes in place for providing teachers with timely, frequent feedback from the principal's visits.

Instructional leadership was an important factor observed at all of the schools. Principals demonstrated instructional leadership by focusing the work on developing best instructional practices to continually move student achievement forward. They set expectations around the work and then empowered people to do it. Staff members stated that the principals knew the professional literature and research and chose professional development activities that were relevant and useful to advancing their work with respect to the improvement goals.

Leadership was effectively distributed across individuals and groups at most of the schools. School leadership gained the cooperation and trust of staff members by engaging them in genuine dialogue about student achievement. An instructional leadership team composed of the principal and teacher leaders planned targeted professional development, while grade-level leadership teams monitored progress on school improvement goals. In addition, an instructional support team was common in order to develop strategies for students in need of more interventions.

The core mission and beliefs of the school leadership permeated school cultures. School leaders valued and prioritized building relationships and establishing rapport with teachers, parents, and students. Leadership provided explicit expectations of staff regarding understanding and supporting the vision and mission of the school. Recruiting and maintaining school staff that shared and valued the school's mission and vision was a priority for schools, even if that meant eliminating staff that were not a good fit for the school or could not buy-into the school's mission.

Finally, most of the schools sustained a commitment to continuous improvement. This commitment could be seen through the use of data and resources that were devoted to improvement priorities. School leaders devoted staff time and resources to using data in the development of improvement plans and to drive instructional decisions for teachers and learning decisions for students. There was also a commitment by staff to implement the collaboratively developed improvement plans.

School Culture

Research strongly reinforces the importance of a positive school culture in support of student academic achievement. In particular, teacher efficacy (ERIC doc ED379216 by Ross, J.A., 1994) and high expectations for students (Reeves, 2009, <http://www.teachersofcolor.com/2009/04/uncovering-the-secrets-of-high-poverty-high-success-schools/>) are critical elements that provide the foundation of a supportive learning environment.

All of the nine schools were intently focused on student achievement. The belief that all students can and will learn at high levels was evident. Most of the schools displayed a sense of urgency and agreement that one year of growth in one year's time is not good enough for the majority of students at the school. Staff took ownership of the learning for all students, not just those in individual classrooms. According to the reports generated by the ESP reviews, the following were the highest ranked School Culture indicators among all nine schools:

- Teachers regularly communicate with families about each student's progress
- Teachers and staff care about students and inspire their best efforts
- Teachers and nonteaching staff are involved in formal and informal decision-making regarding teaching and learning
- The school and classroom environments are culturally responsive
- All school staff members actively support the school's equity efforts

These indicators align with the research on school culture and support the idea that the belief structures of staff do and can impact student achievement. Other visible beliefs that permeated the school cultures included the teachers' beliefs that they have an impact on student successes and failures, and students' beliefs that they also were responsible for their own learning. The combined beliefs of teachers and students yielded measurable results in student academic performance.

Implementation Strategies

Relationships were key for most of the schools. Principals spoke about the importance of not only relationships among adults in the building but also with students and parents. Open communication was very important, yet structure existed to provide scaffolding for staff. As articulated by one principal: "This school is about people working together. I expect teachers to continue to learn and that the students will grow."

One principal described this as being a "tight/loose" ship, implying that the expectations for classroom instruction were generally strict, but when students were meeting or exceeding academic expectations, the principal was more lenient. Although there are formal processes in place for information gathering and dissemination, the principals often rely on informal communications with key staff members as a part of the decision-making process. Administrators reported being personally invested in the success of all their teachers and students.

In these schools, transitions were made from a student-focused culture of excuse-making (e.g., "if only the students could..." or "if only the parents would...") to a teacher-efficacy focus (believing that the teachers can and do impact student learning). If students are not learning at the targeted rate, instead of providing explanations of what the students or parents should do differently, the teachers and principals at these schools look introspectively at their own actions to determine what they can and will do differently to increase student performance. They take ownership of student performance.

Principals understand the diversity and challenges within their schools. Although they recognize the reality of the challenges facing many of their students, they communicate with candor their expectations for the teachers and the teachers' roles in increasing performance in spite of the challenges of the school. The principals at these schools understand that not all teachers are a strong fit for schools with higher needs and challenges. Therefore, teacher retention efforts are directed at the teachers who believe that they can make a difference on student performance. The principals set the tone for high expectations for all students and over time build a school staff that possesses the same values, beliefs, and attitudes.

These principals hold the same high standards and expectations for students and families. There is an expectation to attend school and to be on time. Parents/guardians are expected to reduce the amount of time students miss from school. Principals have open and honest communications with students and the community about the schools' performance data. They use performance and achievement gap data to communicate the needs for students to engage in school and encourage families to engage in increasing students' successes in school. For example, one principal explained that parent involvement meetings evolved from social gatherings to more focused trainings on how to provide homework assistance and guidance on succeeding in school.

Best First Instruction

While the need for best first instruction is well understood in the field, it is not necessarily in place at our highest need schools. Instead, practitioners often look to interventions as the solution for students that are below proficient. In fact, it takes best first instruction and appropriate, aligned interventions in order to ensure that students *catch-up* and *keep-up*, (as noted in the state's accountability system). Both of these areas must be in place if educators are to make a difference with at-risk students.

According to the reports generated by the ESP reviews, the following were the highest ranked Instruction standard indicators among all schools:

- The schedule is designed to provide quality instructional time
- Instructional strategies 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 learning gaps
- Teachers analyze student work as well as test results to assess student progress and achievement, identify achievement gaps, and make changes to instruction
- Classroom assessments are frequent, rigorous, and aligned with standards

Implementation Strategies

These schools prioritized best first instruction, clearly defining goals for student learning and ensuring schedule designs that enable sufficient quality instructional time. This was such a priority for most of the schools that staff spoke about the need to protect instructional time at all costs. This meant that assemblies and other activities were strategically scheduled to reduce any intrusion on instructional time. This does not mean that the schools didn't celebrate learning or other occasions; rather, these were intentionally scheduled instead of occurring haphazardly. For example, the day before a holiday break was used for celebrations at some schools, since the quality of learning was already compromised.

First best instruction was a foundational and widespread belief system in most schools. Teachers expected first best instruction within each classroom and held each other accountable. All students had access to the core curriculum through sheltered and scaffolded instructional practices. If a student needed additional support, interventions were provided. However, a high return from first best instruction resulted in pronounced reduction of needed remediation and intervention. All of the schools were familiar with, and implemented, Response to Intervention (RTI) as a structure for meeting the needs of all students.

In the schools with high percentages of English learners, the development of language was strategic and immersed in all content areas. Every teacher was considered an active teacher of language. Teachers consciously wove language supports into instruction throughout the school day. These practices support all students in acquiring proficient English language structures and concepts and particularly strengthen the skill of English learners. Intentional expansion of vocabulary, including high-level words, and the structures of language were embedded within instructional practices all day, every day. Both oral and written language development was pervasive.

Lastly, consistent use of a body of evidence to identify students' needs was prevalent among the schools. The use of summative and formative assessments was seamlessly embedded within the teaching and learning cycle. Teachers regularly collaborated to analyze data to inform decision making regarding instructional practices and flexible groupings. There was a systematic process to collect, analyze, and use data to inform and guide

instructional strategies. The expectation by building administrators was that teachers use multiple data sets to inform effective implementation of the teaching and learning cycle in an ongoing fashion.

Conclusion

This study has made clear that student demographics do not need to be predictors of achievement. High growth and achievement are possible for all students. In order to reach this goal, educators need to recognize the importance of focusing and adjusting the factors that are within a school's staff control. Schools can use the information from this study to begin to reassess what is important for accelerated student growth, particularly for our most at-risk students.

For many of the schools in this study, the high growth did not cease with this study. Of note, three of the schools had even higher growth in 2011-2012 across multiple subjects and disaggregated groups. One school had a 91 median growth percentile in math (indicating that their median student had higher growth than 91% of all students with similar performance histories in the state), while another had 73% of their students proficient or advanced in reading.

Distributed leadership, a school culture of high expectations for all, and a clear focus on best first instruction are important factors in school improvement that a staff can control. The nine high growth Title I schools invested resources, including time and people, in these three areas to maximize academic outcomes for students.

This study provides a starting point for building the capacity of all our Title I schools to reach ambitious growth and achievement targets for all students, especially those furthest from meeting the standards. Individual school briefs are available for each of the nine high growth schools. The individual school briefs provide insight into the effective strategies and processes that were used within each of the schools. Schools ready to begin the work of improving academic outcomes for all students can start by reviewing these briefs. A companion piece for this work is the revised School – Level Standards and Indicators for Continuous Improvement ([URL when posted](#)). In tandem, these tools will help to schools to ensure that all students have the opportunity to reach high standards.