



Best Practices in High Growth Schools

Fiscal Year 2016

Report

To the

Legislature

As required by

Minnesota Statutes,

section 120B.35, Subdivision 4

COMMISSIONER:

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Best Practices in High Growth Schools

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Cost of Report Preparation

The total cost for the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) to prepare this report was approximately \$1399.80. Most of these costs involved staff time in analyzing data from surveys and preparing the written report. Incidental costs include paper, copying and other office supplies.

Estimated costs are provided in accordance with Minnesota Statutes 2015, section 3.197, which requires that at the beginning of a report to the Legislature, the cost of preparing the report must be provided.

Introduction

This report provides the public and the Legislature the practices that may have contributed to the high growth of students in these schools; however, it is important to note that a conclusive causation between the identified implementation of best practices and high student growth cannot be made. The research-based practices implemented in such schools and outlined in this report may inform improvement efforts in other Minnesota schools as well as give the public and the legislature a solid understanding of where resources may need to be targeted.

Legislative Charge

This report is consistent with the requirements of Minnesota Statutes section 120B.35, subdivision 4, which states, “Consistent with the requirements of this section, beginning June 20, 2012, the commissioner is to report the best practices implemented in those schools that demonstrate high growth compared to the state growth target.”

Analysis

Based on definitions in Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.299, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) identified schools that demonstrated high student growth between the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years. These definitions in statute, more commonly used to categorize the growth of students, were translated to the school level to fulfill the requirements of this report. Within each school classification (elementary, middle or high school), the statewide mean and standard deviation of school z-score growth averages were calculated. Schools whose average growth z-score was one-half standard deviation or more below the state mean were labeled “Low Growth”. Medium growth schools had an average growth z-score within one-half standard deviation above or below the state mean. Lastly, high growth schools had an average growth z-score of one-half standard deviation or more above the state mean.

Using the above definitions, MDE identified from across the state 273 elementary schools, 76 middle schools, and 131 high schools exhibiting high growth. For a list of the schools that were identified as high growth, please see each tab in [2014-15 Best Practices Survey Recipients](#). A 16-question survey was sent to the principals of these schools, and MDE received a total of 160 completed surveys by the established deadline. The 33 percent response rate out of such a large pool of schools gives the public and the Legislature a substantial, albeit incomplete, indication of the best practices being implemented in high growth Minnesota schools.

The survey covered a wide variety of student and school success indicators of evidence-based practices that are grounded in research and address the following key areas:

- Principal leadership.
- Organizational leadership teams.
- Professional learning teams.
- Teacher induction and mentoring.

- Strong classroom instruction.
- Use of data for improvement and instruction.

MDE selected indicators encompassing the above areas to be used in the survey and gave schools the opportunity to report on each area.

Minnesota schools exhibiting high student growth used the 16 survey questions to report on best practices. The tables below provide the survey questions and the school responses.

Were you the principal during the 2014-15 school year?

Answer Options	Response Percent
Yes	81.9%
No	18.1%

Did an organizational leadership team exist at your school during the 2014-15 school year?

Answer Options	Response Percent
Yes	90.6%
No	9.4%

For those with an organizational leadership team: Who was on your organizational leadership team during the 2014-15 school year? Check all that apply.

Answer Options	Response Percent
Principal	98.6%
Teachers	95.9%
Support staff	39.0%
Parents	15.1%
Community members	6.8%

For those with an organizational leadership team: How frequently did the leadership team meet? Check only one.

Answer Options	Response Percent
Twice a month or more	40.0%
Once a month	51.0%
Less than once a month	9.0%

For those with an organizational leadership team: Generally, for how long did the leadership team typically meet? Check only one.

Answer Options	Response Percent
More than one hour	23.3%
One hour	51.4%
Less than one hour	25.3%

For those with an organizational leadership team: When the organizational leadership team met, in which of the following activities did they participate? Check all that apply.

Answer Options	Response Percent
Reviewed school performance data	88.4%
Answer Options	Response Percent

Reviewed performance data by student groups	64.4%
Reviewed student behavior data	53.4%
Reviewed student attendance data	32.2%
Reviewed instructional strategies	73.3%
Used student/staff performance data to make decisions about school performance plans	74.0%
Used student/staff performance data to make decisions about professional development plans	63.7%

For those who were the school's principal in 2014-15: About what percentage of your time, as the principal, was spent working directly with teachers to improve instruction during the 2014-15 school year? Check only one.

Answer Options	Response Percent
0-24%	36.0%
25-49%	44.1%
50-74%	18.4%
75-100%	1.5%

For those who were the school's principal in 2014-15: How often did the instructional feedback you provided to teachers focus on communicating learning targets and content effectively?

Never | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | Almost Always

Answer Options	Response Percent
1 (Never)	0.7%
2	3.0%
3	13.4%
4	19.4%
5	23.1%
6	28.4%
7 (Almost Always)	11.9%

For those who were the school's principal in 2014-15: How often did the instructional feedback you provided to teachers focus on how best to facilitate activities and discussions that promote high cognitive engagement? (This could include strategies to engage students, questioning/discussion techniques, pacing and structure, etc.)

Never | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | Almost Always

Answer Options	Response Percent
1 (Never)	0.0%
2	4.5%
3	9.7%
4	17.9%
5	33.6%
6	25.4%
7 (Almost Always)	9.0%

For those who were the school's principal in 2014-15: How often did the instructional feedback you provided to teachers focus on using varied assessment techniques to advance student

learning? (This could include using formative assessments to improve instruction, providing feedback to students to advance learning, promoting student self-assessment, etc.)

Never | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | Almost Always

Answer Options	Response Percent
1 (Never)	0.0%
2	6.7%
3	14.9%
4	20.9%
5	27.6%
6	20.9%
7 (Almost Always)	9.0%

Did teachers at your school meet in teacher learning teams [e.g. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)] during the 2014-15 school year?

Answer Options	Response Percent
Yes	94.4%
No	5.6%

For those with teacher learning teams: How frequently did your school's teacher learning teams (such as PLCs) meet during the 2014-15 school year? Check only one.

Answer Options	Response Percent
Twice a month or more	77.6%
Once a month	15.8%
Less than once a month	6.6%

For those with teacher learning teams: For about how long did the teacher learning teams (such as PLCs) typically meet during the 2014-15 school year? Check only one.

Answer Options	Response Percent
More than one hour	20.4%
One hour	46.7%
Less than one hour	32.9%

For those with teacher learning teams: In which of the following activities did the teacher learning teams (such as PLCs) participate during the 2014-15 school year? Check all that apply.

Answer Options	Response Percent
Refining units of instruction	85.5%
Aligning instructional strategies with academic standards	90.1%
Analyzing instructional plans based on student learning data	82.2%
Implementing instructional plans based on student learning data	76.3%

During the 2014-15 school year, which of the following supports did your school offer teachers who were in their first three years of teaching? Check all that apply.

Answer Options	Response Percent
Mentoring	89.9%

Peer review	65.8%
Reduced teaching load	7.0%
Professional development	93.0%
Classroom observations	97.5%
Instructional coaching	64.6%
Induction program	43.0%
The school did not offer support to teachers in their first three years of teaching	0.6%
No teachers at the school were in their first three years of teaching	0.6%

During the 2014-15 school year, which of the following statements were true for teachers in your school at least 75 percent of the time? Check all that apply.

Answer Options	Response Percent
Minnesota academic standards were reflected in curriculum	95.0%
Minnesota academic standards were reflected in instruction	93.8%
Minnesota academic standards were reflected in classroom assessments	86.3%
Teachers clearly stated learning objectives to students daily	76.3%
Teachers clearly stated behavior expectations to students	83.1%
Teachers enforced behavior expectations in their classrooms	86.9%
Teachers actively encouraged student engagement	89.4%
Teachers understood community cultures, customs, and values	69.4%

Conclusion

This survey demonstrated several consistent practices across many or most of the high-growth schools that responded, while also finding greater variation in other practices. While again noting that a conclusive causation between the identified implementation of best practices and high student growth cannot be made, these survey results may be useful to members of the public, the Legislature, MDE or schools and districts in identifying practices for further investigation and proliferation.