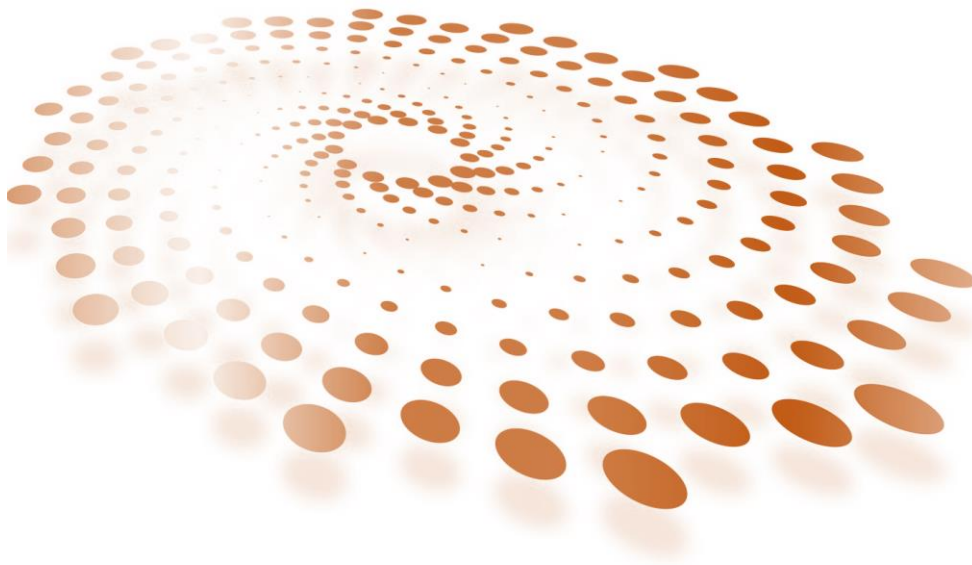




● **School District Convening and Reflection**

Promoting Best Practice through Assembly and Analysis of Practitioner Responses



Research Summary

Compiled by Pinellas County Schools

Office of Assessment, Accountability, and Research





Introduction

Pinellas County Schools continues to monitor and learn from its most effective educators and school leaders in keeping with its long-standing commitment to best practice and continuous improvement. The school district on Florida's west coast is the 8th largest in Florida (among 67 in total) and the 27th largest in the nation (among 16,000 plus in the United States). The district had a total enrollment in 2017-18 of 101,824. It employs more than 7,000 teachers across 140 school sites.

In the fall of 2018-19, the district conducted a study and corresponding analysis designed to gather the professional insights from a sampling of its most effective teachers and schools specific to actions that positively impacted student growth. The purpose of the study was to increase understanding and relay summary findings to district leadership in support of the following outcomes:

- **Identifying model processes and exemplary teaching methods.**
- **Identifying reliable school improvement actions that may be scalable.**
- **Affirming best practices in support of district strategic planning decisions.**
- **Isolating areas for district growth and further study in support of continuous improvement.**

Determining which teachers and schools are impacting student growth the most is quite difficult and not without debate. As with other school districts, the success of teachers and schools across the district varies and quantifying growth and achievement is complicated and ever-evolving. To narrow the focus, the research team used metrics common to most districts in identifying a sampling of teachers and schools whose students showed improvement in their reading and math scores.

Specifically, the team compiled its sampling from among those teachers who saw improvement in student proficiency and-or learning gains on the state's Florida Standards Assessment (FSA) across three school years (2015-16 to 2017-18). The team also identified schools who showed consistent gains in student proficiency and-or reductions in achievement gaps. Only the results from the state's English-Language Arts (ELA) and Math assessments were used. Growth in student scores on state science and social studies assessments were not used but may be examined separately at a later time.

Best Practices Convening

The district gathered responses from the identified participants in December 2018 at a Best Practices Convening hosted by the district's Teaching and Learning Division and Office of Assessment, Accountability, and





Research. Sixty four participants attend the convening in providing feedback via a self-reflection tool, responsive Gallery Walk, and focus groups. Additionally, all teachers in the study were asked to complete a follow-up survey with questions specific to their perceptions of best practice. Thirty two teachers responded to the survey.

Summary Findings

- **Both teachers and school leaders showed a strong commitment to teacher collaboration and leadership for learning.** The solutions mentioned went beyond common planning to include things like shared accountability and shared decision-making. Teachers teamed for the purpose of moving the needle. This was a notable driver of student growth in that it led to a more intensive focus on data connected to standards and greater ownership of those outcomes.
 - **Sample quote:** “When you talk about growth mindset, it was the teachers really saying, ‘We’ve got to get together and do this. And we empowered them to make that happen. We gave them the time and the resources.’”
- **Teachers focused heavily on student ownership of their data / data-chatting, goal-setting, etc.** The sources of data varied widely, from teacher-developed tests to district assessments. It did not seem to matter what type of data was used, or how often it was used, as long as the students could measure their progress and set aspirational goals. Teachers used these data points to celebrate student growth, inspire competition, etc. This appeared to be a motivator for students across skill levels, including motivating the unmotivated.
 - **Sample quote:** “Having those quick checks like that is really beneficial...My kids know where they are and where they need to be.”
- **Teachers used a spiraled instructional model and flexible pacing to ensure that all students reached mastery.** This included re-teaching of key skills and content, chunking content to meet the needs of individual learners, daily review of previously taught content, and parallel assessment as needed. The teachers showed a strong commitment to content mastery over content coverage. The teachers had a deep understanding of their content standards and were fully aware of where their students needed to be at the end of the year.
 - **Sample quote:** “If they don’t have this thing down yet, we clearly need to spend more time on it.”
- **The teachers had exceedingly high expectations for their students.** Classroom lessons and activities were organized to get all students to mastery and to minimize down time or wasted time. Every minute mattered. Teachers were purposeful in creating safe spaces for students to struggle, ask questions, and support their peers. It was common to see students celebrating each other’s successes, especially when students met growth targets and corrected their own mistakes.





- **Sample quote:** “This is a doing class. No, you’re not going to just take notes. They make copy machines for notes.”
- **Teachers were committed to building classroom community as a driver of learning, including key aspects of culturally relevant instruction.** The teachers were intentional in getting to know their students’ interests and passions, their family backgrounds, and personal histories. The teachers were intent on being highly approachable and non-judgmental. This was key in building acceptance and trust. In many cases, teachers were purposeful in connecting personal examples from students’ lives to the content they were teaching. This appeared to be a driver of student engagement.
 - **Sample quote:** “I use some of what they wrote to contextualize the lesson. It’s really making connection with everything about themselves to the lesson.”
- **The schools were heavily invested in extending student learning beyond the school day, including creative solutions that brought teachers and tutors into local neighborhoods.** There appeared to be alignment of student learning to targeted tutoring sessions both in the evenings and on Saturdays, especially among marginalized subgroups. In many cases, teachers worked with their own students and that may be a model worth exploring.
 - **Sample quote:** “They (the Saturday ELP group) were motivated by a growth mindset. It was a small learning community for kids. Even during Homecoming Week we were going to cancel ELP, but the kids were upset so we still had it.”
- **The schools were highly attuned to proper testing conditions as a method for increasing the opportunities for student success.** The selection of which rooms to test in, who was best to serve as proctors, and how the proctors were trained were highly orchestrated in many cases. Teachers were intentional in helping their students to be mentally prepared to do well. Teachers were not just aware of their content standards, but also savvy in how those standards were going to be tested.
 - **Sample quote:** “So with all the practices that they do, when they get to the real thing, they are like. ‘Alright. I’ve been here before. I’ve done this. Now it’s time to really get to work.’”

Methodology

This exploratory study focused on the instructional practices utilized by highly effective teachers and schools whose student outcome data evidenced learning gains and/or reduced achievement gaps over time. The study aimed to answer the following research questions:

- **What are the most frequently cited best practices used by highly effective teachers in the district?**
- **Do highly effective teachers identify specific curriculum materials, programs, or assessments as crucial to supporting student success?**





- Do highly effective teachers identify any specific beliefs/core values as being critical to impacting student learning?
- Do leaders within schools that have shown consistent academic improvement cite similar best practices related to instructional strategies or operational tactics?

Methodology / Study Sample

TEACHERS

- 45 teachers across were identified to participate in the study.
- 11 of the 45 teachers taught in Title 1 schools (24% of the participants).
 - 19 teachers were from ES.
 - 13 teachers were from MS.
 - 13 teachers were from HS.

Each teacher selected received an overall appraisal rating of Highly Effective in 2017-18 per the district's evaluation model (eg. Marzano); each was rated as Highly Effective for the Instructional Practice portion of the evaluation model; and each had an aggregate, 3-year state VAM rating of Highly Effective. All were veteran teachers with a range of experience from 4 to 37 years. Both the mean and median years of experience were 16.

- **Of the 19 ES teachers in the study**, their aggregate VAM scores ranged from 0.201 to 0.693. This can be interpreted as follows: Over the past three years, the students in these classrooms scored, on average, between 20% and 69% higher on state ELA and/or Math assessments when compared to students of similar characteristics across the state. The median aggregate VAM score for these teachers was 0.446. The number of students assigned to any one teacher ranged from a low of 31 students to a high of 265 over three years. The median number of students assigned to a teacher over three years was 93.
- **Of the 13 MS teachers in the study**, their aggregate VAM scores ranged from 0.266 to 2.841. This can be interpreted as follows: Over the past three years, the students in these classrooms scored, on average, from 27% higher on state ELA and/or Math assessments to more than double the expected growth when compared to students of similar characteristics across the state. The median aggregate VAM score was 0.407. The number of students assigned to any one teacher in the study ranged from a low of 171 students to a high of 362 over three years. The median number of students assigned to a teacher over three years was 318.
- **Of the 13 HS teachers in the study**, 11 were teachers of ELA and were selected based upon their ELA VAM scores ranging from 0.235 to 0.961. This can be interpreted as follows: Over the past three years, the students in these classrooms scored, on average, between 24% and 96% higher on the state FSA ELA assessment when compared to students of similar characteristics across the state. The median ELA VAM score for these teachers was 0.636. Among the high school teachers, 2 were selected based upon their Algebra VAM scores. Both of these teachers had a VAM above 6.0 and the percent of students meeting expectation was 85% or higher. Among the 13 teachers, the number of students assigned to any one





teacher ranged from a low of 160 students to a high of 401 over three years. The median number of students assigned to a teacher over three years was 300.

- 32 Teachers responded to the best practices survey.
- 23 Teachers attended the district best practices convening. Each participant provided feedback via a written reflection, a facilitated Gallery Walk, and one of three focus groups.

PRINCIPALS

- 25 principals were identified to participate in the study.
- 15 of the 21 schools were Title 1 schools (71% of the participants).
 - 16 principals were from ES.
 - 3 principals were from MS.
 - 6 principals were from HS.

Each school selected showed consistent and substantive increases in ELA and/or Math proficiency scores or gains on the state FSA ELA, Math, or Algebra assessments over 3 years (2015-16 to 2017-18), and-or consistent and substantive increases in proficiency among black learners at the school (and a subsequent narrowing of the school's achievement gap).

- **Of the 25 schools in the study**, 14 saw notable improvement schoolwide in ELA, Math, or Algebra performance, 6 saw improvement among black learners, and 5 saw strong increases in both areas. In most cases, scores increased by double-digits over a 3-year period.
- 21 Principals attended the district best practices convening.
- 20 Additional school personnel attended along with his or her principal.
- Each participant provided feedback via a written reflection, a facilitated Gallery Walk, and one of three focus group sessions.

Methodology / Data Collection

Data on teacher perceptions about best practices were obtained from a variety of sources including a survey instrument, focus group protocol, and responsive Gallery Walk discussion. Both quantitative descriptive analyses and qualitative analyses were utilized to analyze the results.

The Best Practices Survey contained 10 items, including five open-ended questions. Respondents were asked to identify which district-provided curriculum they relied on most to support student learning and if they amended or supplemented district materials to positively influence learning. Additional questions asked respondents to identify the level of impact certain instructional strategies/best practices, and professional traits have on student learning. Teachers were also asked which data they rely on most for planning and to describe





any specific strategies used to best prepare students for state assessments. Other items asked respondents to identify any professional development trainings they found strongly impacted their teaching ability and what suggestions that might have for the district in regard to professional development for new teachers. Finally, respondents were asked to share how their students might describe them as a teacher.

Both quantitative descriptive analyses and qualitative analyses were utilized to analyze the survey results. Each qualitative survey question was summarized according to main themes, for the open-ended questions, a “cut-and-paste” method was used. This method classifies themes by each question using a color code; coded material may be phrases, sentences, or longer sections of each response provided for each open-ended question; the coded material is cut and sorted according to topics – this provides the basis for developing a summary report describing the main themes around each qualitative survey item.

The Best Practices Focus Group Protocol consisted of five questions asking participants to identify key strategies around instructional practice, data analysis, school structures, training, and engagement. Facilitators created three teacher cohorts and three leadership cohorts of approximately 10 members each, divided by unique achievement area (ELA achievement, Math achievement, and Achievement Gap improvement). Each group was asked a series of questions relevant to their role as teacher or administrator.

The responses were transcribed and three members of the research and evaluation division created analytic memos to identify collective concepts and patterns that emerged from the data and to summarize major findings according to categories and themes. The three study investigators then met to discuss their reflective commentary and to come to consensus regarding thematic and conceptual coding.

The responsive Gallery Walk discussion was facilitated and timed so as to align with best practice. Facilitators directed the six cohorts to different charts or “stations” and each group provided feedback by writing comments for the question posed at each station. Those questions were:

- *Do you employ specific strategies or activities that you believe are key to challenging all students in meeting state standards?*
- *Do you employ specific methods to differentiate support for students who are behind or ahead in your classes?*
- *What methods do you employ in providing feedback to students as to their learning, growth, and mastery?*
- *Do you have specific methods you employ for checking for understanding during the lesson?*
- *Do you employ any effective methods for extending student learning beyond the school day?*





As cohorts rotated as directed, each group was encouraged to expand on the comments left by previous groups. The qualitative analysis for this measure followed the same method as the survey analysis and responses were coded by thematic category.

Study Limitations

Study investigators explored teacher and leadership perceptions on best practices as a means to identify the specific actions of exemplary teachers and schools, not necessarily to establish a set of generalizable findings. However, findings should support the district's efforts to build capacity and influence professional practice.





DATA / RESULTS

Best Practices Convening

At the Best Practices Convening, a total of 64 participants responded to prompts via the self-reflection tool, responsive Gallery Walk, and focus groups related to variations of the five topics below. Additionally, 32 of the teacher participants took part in a follow-up survey that was completed in the days following the convening. Those results will follow.

- **Classroom Culture / Environment**
- **Instructional Strategies**
- **Monitoring Student Learning / Data**
- **Extension of Learning / Intervention**
- **Professional Development / PLCs**

Themes from Study Investigators / Based Upon Analytic Memos / Thematic and Conceptual Coding

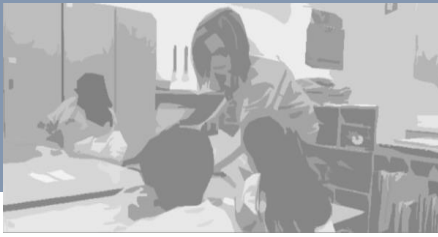
Specific feedback / themes from Teachers:

- High Expectations / Building Relationships / Trust
- Student Ownership of Data / Data-chatting
- Timely Feedback to Students / Monitoring with Feedback / Goal-setting
- Student-Centered Learning / Students Teaching Students
- Community-Centered Classrooms / Verbal Praise / Celebrating Student Success

Specific feedback / themes from Principals:

- Focus on Rigor / Standards-Based Instruction
- Data-Based Decision Making / Matching Teachers to their Strongest Subjects, Grade levels
- Professional Learning Communities / Teacher Collaboration via Common Planning / Data-focused
- Extended Learning Opportunities / Saturday School / Tutoring
- Culturally Relevant Materials and Practices
- Optimal Testing Conditions





TEACHER SURVEY RESULTS / (32 Respondents)

The survey was sent to all teachers identified per the sampling of highly effective teachers described above. The principals in the study were not included in the survey.

CURRICULUM MATERIALS

Teachers were asked:

- Q1. What district-provided curriculum resources do you rely on most in supporting student learning?

While specific resources were noted when prompted (see below), respondents did not highlight curriculum materials as the key drivers to learning during the participant convening.

Answers to this survey question varied and appeared to be unique to each teacher's preferences. As such, no consistent responses were noted and no notables themes emerged. One possible explanation is that the materials were not seen as critical to student success as much as the teacher actions were in their use of the materials.

Survey Excerpts / Q1:

- *I use the middle school math resource page however I pull from multiple resources for my math curriculum.*
- *The math department does a great job with all the resources they suggest and share with us.*
- *PCS eLearn for Middle School Mathematics; The Common Core Mathematics Companion.*
- *I use the math textbook we are assigned. I also use the digital Imagine Math program with my Intensive Math students.*
- *I use ST Math and ST Math test drive for visual learning. I also use the GO Math book to help with standards and sample questions, but I do not use the book to teach the lessons per say. I LOVE having the consumable workbook. I hope the district continues that next year with the new adoption because it allows for practice and spiral review every day.*
- *District provided pacing guides to plan out my year.*
- *Florida Collections, Vocabulary Power Plus published by Prestwick House, Improving Vocabulary Skills by Townsend Press, Daily Oral Grammar by Holt Reinhart Winston.*
- *I use the pacing guide for ELA, as well as the suggested materials as often as possible. For English, I tend to venture out more often with the texts I use -- matching them year to year to the interests of the kids I happen to have that particular year. In Reading, I use Reading Plus.*
- *In writing I use a lot of Core Connection writing material. For reading I use many of the module material and pull additional articles for different reading levels from read works.*
- *iReady is a fantastic tool I use, but it requires teachers to intervene when students are not having success even at their own instructional level. Newsela is recommended by Secondary Reading, but I think it should be pushed harder and district-wide implementation should be looked at.*
- *Rich mathematical tasks. I loosely use the district ELA modules - as a guide as to the standards to be taught. I adjust the lessons for the needs of my students.*





SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS

Teachers were asked:

- *Q2. How do you amend or supplement the district curriculum materials in a manner that you believe positively impacts student learning?*

The answers to this question varied, but student-centered learning was most cited and appeared to cluster around two related best practices: high engagement and high expectations. This is consistent with the findings from the participant convening in supporting the summary findings provided.

Survey Excerpts / Q2:

Student-Centered Learning: High Engagement / Relevancy

- *More student centered literature made available to students. Interest level is a key predictor of student engagement which leads to better comprehension and interactions with text.*
- *My students thrive on student centered activities which requires more planning from multiple resources however the payoff is certainly worth it. Versa Tiles are a great success which provide students quick feedback on the activity.*
- *Some lessons/units simply need the addition of another perhaps more current articles, poems, etc. Note that the district's curriculum pacing guide for language arts is "suggested," and among other things, it lists additional resources to enable teachers to fit the curriculum to the student's needs. This prevents a very lock-step and one-size-fits-all mentality that stymies creativity and kills students' interests.*
- *I try to provide the Just Right level of challenge that will push my students forward rather than shut them down. Sometimes I have to adjust the suggested lesson plans to make them more "user friendly" for my students.*
- *Integrating real-world situations that correlate to the math concepts. I recently used the Pythagorean Theorem to determine the amount of Christmas lights I would need instead of having to climb on the roof to measure. Also, when making assessments/resources for the students, using their names and activities they are interested in. I also try to incorporate relevant hands on activities. (i.e. activity where they determine the volume of a pyramid by using a cube and pyramid that have the same base and height - filling with water).*
- *I try to find topics of high interest or current issues in the media for argumentative writing topics. I look for articles, a combination of rigorous and basic/ simple (for lower level) and build a unit of topic from there. I also do a lot of collaboration with other teachers and bounce ideas for prompts and topics off of them. For explanatory I typically use pieces of literature (short stories or poems) that are rigorous and engaging, and we find common themes, symbolic references, etc. Common Lit is a great source.*
- *Contemporary articles from sources like Newsweek. High interest with reading and writing strategies attached. Grammar bell-work from web sources.*





Student-Centered Learning: High Expectations / Focusing on Standards / Differentiation

- *I'll pick and choose what is in the module to fit in the time frame to get material fully taught to the standard. Sometimes the module moves too fast, or grazes over the standard and moves on, or packs too much in one day. I would rather use one or two articles and teach the concept deeply so that students truly understand then stay on pace and teach all that is in the module. I make sure the standards that need to be taught are each module.*
- *ELA Modules - need to be supported with mini-lessons to fill in the gaps in student knowledge and larger text resources need to be chunked into digestible bites with appropriate scaffolding. Math - daily fluency to help students connect old material to new material. Science - word boxes for written tasks in the SLAGS, videos and engaging nonfiction texts to build background, vocabulary practice/fluency activities and hands-on centers. Use of questioning strategies, peer review, discussion and collaborative tasks in all subject areas.*
- *I supplement ELA with Core Connections work, Readworks and Ready Florida. I also use Ready Florida to supplement math. Ready Florida provides standards based explicit reading and math instruction. The guided and independent practice is rigorous.*
- *I create my own unit tests to reflect the types of questions students will have for FSA assessments. I spiral in difficult concepts throughout the year so they are having continual interaction with them. My focus is on using math vocabulary correctly and I have figured out which strategies work best for most students (fortunate enough to teach 4th grade for many years so have had lots of time to deeply understand standards).*
- *Warm Ups daily, self-prepared notes, and whiteboard problems.*
- *As stated above, iReady is a great tool but I know that there is the temptation for teachers to simply reset the domain when a student fails the same lesson twice. (A student gets two opportunities to pass a lesson and then the lesson shuts off until a teacher turns it back on.) When I see a student has failed a lesson once, I have the student slow down by sitting with me or a partner to go through the lesson and discuss their thinking. If there are many who are struggling and I can't reach all of them, I have them take notes and submit them to me before they can take the quiz. This helps me examine faulty reasoning and see what it is they are missing in the lesson...If they are only doing remedial work, then they will never be prepared for what they see on the grade-level FSA!*
- *I believe my kids need me. That's the bottom line. They need someone to care enough to actually teach them the material. So I teach, from bell to bell, every day. My kids work with me the entire period.*





Q3-5. Please select the level of impact that the following professional traits you possess have on student learning in your classroom.

Reponses	Knowledge / expertise in my content area.	Knowledge / expertise in my curriculum standards.	Ability to build positive relationships with my students.	Ability to establish strong classroom structures, routines.	Ability to challenge students by engaging them in rigorous tasks.
Teacher 1	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact
Teacher 2	High Impact	Moderate Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact
Teacher 3	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact
Teacher 4	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact
Teacher 5	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact
Teacher 6	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact
Teacher 7	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact
Teacher 8	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact
Teacher 9	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact
Teacher 10	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact
Teacher 11	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact
Teacher 12	High Impact	Moderate Impact	High Impact	Moderate Impact	High Impact
Teacher 13	High Impact	Moderate Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact
Teacher 14	Moderate Impact	Moderate Impact	High Impact	High Impact	Moderate Impact
Teacher 15	High Impact	Slight Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact
Teacher 16	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact
Teacher 17	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact
Teacher 18	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact
Teacher 19	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact
Teacher 20	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact
Teacher 21	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact
Teacher 22	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact
Teacher 23	High Impact	Slight Impact	High Impact	Slight Impact	Moderate Impact
Teacher 24	High Impact	Moderate Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact
Teacher 24	High Impact	Moderate Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact
Teacher 26	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	Moderate Impact
Teacher 27	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact
Teacher 28	High Impact	Moderate Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact
Teacher 29	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact
Teacher 30	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact
Teacher 31	High Impact	Moderate Impact	Moderate Impact	High Impact	High Impact
Teacher 32	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact	High Impact





ASSESSMENT / DATA

Teachers were asked:

- *Q6: Teachers use all kinds of information (i.e., data) to help them plan for instruction that meets student learning needs. Which of the following do you rely on the most?*
 - **81.25%** said they use their own classroom assessments most often.
 - **59.38%** said they use data from the FSA results
 - **34.38%** said they use computer-based intervention assessments (iStation, STMath, Reading Plus, etc.)
 - A variety of other responses were provided, including MAP, Write Score, and district Cycle Assessments.

Survey Excerpts / Q6:

- *I use my own assignments to assess their ability/learning.*
- *Exit slips, Ticket Out The Door, other non-formal assessments, verbal assessments*
- *Constant short formative assessments in various modes.*
- *My observations and formative assessments.*
- *My observations during our math circle and during math groups. I also use formative assessments after the lessons to see what specific needs individuals have.*

FSA PREP

Teachers were asked:

- *Q7: Do you have any specific materials and/or strategies that you think best prepares your students to do well on state assessments (FSA, EOCs)?*
 - **15.63%** said they use FSA practice tests
 - **15.63%** said they teach test-taking strategies
 - **12.50%** said they review test-taking formats
 - A variety of other responses were selected, including mimicking test-taking conditions and reducing student stress (mindfulness, circles, etc.)

Survey Excerpts / Q7:

- *Constant spiraling of all material throughout the year, including pre-teaching during warm ups.*
- *Focus on reading as a preparation for writing and writing as the expected evaluation of the reading.*
- *I don't like strategies that are "tricks." It doesn't replace authentic learning - which should be the goal.*
- *I teach test-taking strategies, test-taking formats, test-taking conditions, engaging test prep activities, and circles.*
- *Math: Use FSA test item specs to create practice tests, Reading: FL Ready*
- *Increasing student awareness of how the FSA test impacts their future.*
- *Delayed testing (no pump and dump), continually covering old material along with the new, giving students feedback on tests and quizzes and allowing them to correct their mistakes, collegiate sharing...allowing them to discuss things they did wrong with their peers, teaching for mastery...*





PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

While specific trainings were named when prompted (see below), respondents did not highlight professional development during the participant convening. This was notable but may be related to the limitations of the study in assembling only highly skilled, veteran teachers who have a longer history of training that is wide and varied. When prompted via the survey, the responses were as follows:

Teachers were asked:

- *Q8: What specific professional development training have you participated in that you believe has strongly impacted your teaching ability?*

The three most common responses among survey respondents:

- ECET2 / Elevating and Celebrating Effective Teaching and Teachers
- Core Connections
- PEAK Learning Systems

Teachers were asked:

- *Q9: What type of professional development or specific training would you suggest the district adopt to best support newer teachers to improve student learning outcomes?*

Survey Excerpts / Q9:

- *New teachers should be required to observe multiple times each semester teachers that "move the needle," whether the teacher is their mentor or not. The accountability piece could be that they are required to reflect on their observations with their mentor and apply them to their own teaching.*
- *Vertical teaming, cooperative learning, sharing of activities that WORK in the classroom (by subject area), and building relationships trainings.*
- *Newer teachers would benefit with a strong team of English teachers around them, particularly at the school site. Time is a scarce resource, so meaningful, productive trainings are necessary. Train the new employee at the school site with his or her team captain, if you will. This promotes horizontal and vertical teaming.*
- *I feel like a training similar to ECET2 would be highly beneficial to newer teachers. This way new teachers would have the opportunity to pick a training that would be beneficial for them specifically. Breakout sessions are a good idea.*
- *Training on how to change your planning / lessons mid-stroke based on assessment data.*
- *Learning from their peers, teacher walks.*
- *We have had some professional development on "unpacking the standards" but newer teachers need to really know what each of the standards are demanding. This should include analyzing sample questions for each standard, writing questions aligned to the standards, and looking at how students will be asked these questions on the FSA. Too many teachers are not quite hitting the standard at all.*





- *I think a master teacher should be given an extra period off to do nothing more than observe and/or answer questions from a newbie. Vertical teaming with SPC and/or USF on what we are looking for...I think a Professional Ed day like we used to do...teachers giving teachers ideas on what works in the classroom. Fun stuff, activities, etc. We need to hear from the teachers that are actually in the classroom facing these kids every day.*

Teachers were asked:

- Q10. *In a few sentences, please share how your students would describe you as a teacher.*

Teachers were asked via an open-response item to relay how their students would describe them as a teacher. A word frequency query was used to analyze and theme the responses. Of the 1,265 words expressed across all responses, the following five words were most commonly used:

- Expectations
- Fair
- Fun
- Think or Thinking
- Care or Caring

Figure 1 / Word Frequency Map





Detailed Findings from Best Practices Convening / Teacher and Principal Participants

Observations Noted by Study Investigators via Analytic Memo

Data on teacher and principal perceptions about best practices were obtained from a variety of sources including a self-reflection tool, focus group protocol, and responsive Gallery Walk discussion. The responses were transcribed and three members of the research and evaluation division created analytic memos to identify collective concepts and patterns that emerged from the data and to summarize major findings according to categories and themes. The three study investigators then met to discuss their reflective commentary and to come to consensus regarding thematic and conceptual coding.

Emerging Themes

Professional Learning Communities / Teacher collaboration / Teaming / Common planning / Use of exemplars / Teachers examining student data and student work products

NOTES:

- Common planning. Pulling L25 students during common planning. Re-teaching of skills that students are lacking. The teachers rotated to the children in need.
- Vertical PLCs. Articulation meetings. Looking at the next grade level's standards.
- Data shared via PLCs. Reviewed by complexity of standard.

Excerpts from Focus Group Respondents:

- *Teachers would meet as a group. And that was the powerful piece, I think, was meeting with your other teammates to see if one teacher struggled with a certain standard and your counterpart didn't. What did we do differently? Re-taught the standard.*
- *So it wasn't rogues going out there teaching.*
- *When you talk about growth mindset, it was the teachers really saying, 'We've got to get together and do this.' And we empowered them to make that happen. We gave them the time and the resources.*
- *We said, 'This is what we need you to accomplish and we gave them the autonomy to accomplish it.'*
- *It created a lot of strength within the reading team and department, and they would crawl over broken glass for each other.*





Student Ownership of Data / Data-Analysis / Data chatting / Goal-setting with students, specific to each student's weakness

NOTES:

- When asked about data, teachers reported a variety of sources, from the NWEA MAP assessment to those data generated by computer-based interventions.
- Data sources varied widely, from teacher-made tests to district-created assessments (bi-weeklies) to normed assessments (MAP). It was the teacher's ability to use the test data to set goals for students. The source of data seemed to be less important than the use of data as a motivator for children.
- Example: Daily data chats with one or two students each day.
- Student ownership of their scores.
- School administrators did grade level data chats with classes. Allowed the teacher to step out of classroom. Administrators went in and chatted with classes using MAP results. Set goals with kids. Celebrated growth. Incentives. Getting them excited.
- Student-led conference night. Students had to share their data and goals with the parents.
- Others said they also do celebrations of various sorts around student growth. Competition is huge. Motivating the unmotivated.

Excerpts from Focus Group Respondents:

- *I don't use any particular (data) source. Just something to provide them, that they are showing success. It motivates them.*
- *Example: MAP. Bi-weeklies. Having those quick checks like that is really beneficial. The kids have a data folder. My kids know where they are and where they need to be.*

Spiraled Curriculum / Flexibility / Pacing

NOTES:

- Daily warm-ups every day. Can't teach one thing and then move on.
- I teach for mastery. Tests are cumulative, like an exam. Covers all content covered to date.
- Parallel assessment.
- Flexibility with pacing. Don't have to follow the pacing guides exactly.

Excerpts from Focus Group Respondents:

- *If they don't have this thing down yet, we clearly need to spend more time on it.*





- *I know where I need to be at the end of the year. Modules are sometimes too fast-paced. I know my students. Example: Chunking it. Deciding what is most important. Instead of reading a novel, I might pick something shorter and less intimidating.*
- *For me, pacing is not so much about where we are in a book but along the way to meeting the standard.*

Extended Learning Opportunities

NOTES:

- Teachers working with their own students was a key theme.
- Creative transportation solutions. Bring ELP to the neighborhoods where kids live.
- Saturdays too.

Optimal Testing Conditions / Getting students mentality prepared to do well

NOTES:

- Teachers testing their own kids. Teachers felt empowered.
- Teachers not just knowing the standards but knowing how the standards was going to be tested. Knowing the test specifications.
- Guidance (dept.) takes the lead. Kids tested in same room for all tests, all year. Same room. Same test.

Excerpts from Focus Group Respondents:

- *We put kids with teacher leaders who have high expectations. We put the same test administrators group.*
- *I would say creating a schedule that is not convenient for the teachers but that is best practice for the students.*
- *So with all the practices that they do, when they get to the real thing, they are like. 'Alright. I've been here before. I've done this. Now it's time to really get to work.'*

Community-Centered Classrooms / Classroom Culture

NOTES:

- Teachers were intentional in building relationships, community, and trust. Student collaboration and voice were critical components identified as well.
- The use of exemplars or models to help students reach mastery and the inclusion of student culture connected to content were highlighted. Example: Peer marking of essays. Note: Teachers did not immediately associate those strategies as being culturally responsive until prompted.
- Strategies specific to both Culturally Relevant Teaching and Restorative Practices were clearly evident, though the terms were rarely used by participants until prompted. May be related to the newness of these initiatives in the district.





- High expectations from the teacher.
- Pairing students who know the standards with kids who don't. Students teaching students was a consistent finding.
- Safe space for children. Okay to make mistakes. Risk-free. Teacher is approachable.
- High degrees of trust between teacher and students / honesty.

Excerpts from Focus Group Respondents:

- *This is a doing class. No, you're not going to just take notes. They make copy machines for notes. Be a problem-solver.*
- *For 46 minutes, you will work. There is no sitting and not doing.*
- *Example: Daily white boards. To me, it's imperative...Using white boards to see who has got it. Ok, you got it. You teach her. Ok, you got it. You teach him.*
- *I really think that kids learn best when they are talking with each other and interacting with each other.*
- *We celebrate correcting my own mistakes. Celebrate how brave that is.*
- *Everybody is there to support each other. Everybody is there to celebrate each other.*
- *It lets them know that I am there for them. I am their advocate.*
- *Hammer, hammer, hug. If you have a disruptive student or one that you've had to get on them, before they leave, or the next day, say something positive to them. It's a new day every day. They need a compliment. I am here to help them learn.*
- *Using personal examples from student lives to contextualize and personalize the content. Even as simple as changing out the names in a word problem. I use some of what they wrote to contextualize the lesson. It's really making connection with everything about themselves to the lesson.*
- *Another example: If I know you're a swimmer, I will say 'So and so swims so many laps.' It shows the kids that I know them. They look for their name. They can't wait for their name to be in the word problem.'*

Related Findings:

Among the findings noted were several innovations that worked for some schools and may be applicable to others. A sampling of those is provided below.

Creative Solutions Offered by Participants

- **Instructional differentiation.** Some teachers did not always start with whole-group instruction. Some moved right into differentiation. If some students were doing well, they let them work alone and self-monitor so as to focus more time on students who needed support.
- **Pull out support.** One school pulled students out of an elective and they worked on Khan Academy or another program related to a particular domain. They sent a note home and got parent support. They used a co-teacher for that "pull out" intervention.





- **Shared note-taking:** When taking notes, students switched notes or switched roles. This created accountability between students in taking better notes and staying focused.
- **Grouping students in “alike” groups:** When providing more complex tasks / questions, one teacher scaffolded her approach by giving some groups all the questions at once and some groups only one or two questions. In this way, she had one group solve just one or two questions initially and, once they got those right, she moved them onto the others.
- **Flipping homerooms:** A couple of teachers moved homeroom to different times during the day in support of ELA, MATH intervention.
- **Data Day or Standards Day for teachers:** A grade level or subject team of teachers was provided TDEs and substitutes. They spent a day focused on data review or standards review.
- **Shared trainings:** A school brought in a national trainer and shared the cost with another school. The trainer was an expert teacher. She taught the classes when she was here. The other teachers watched and learned.

Reporting the Findings

Study investigators prepared this document as a way of summarizing key findings and providing a sampling of the data collected. This document was shared with study participants in thanking them for their time and professional insights. The findings were also shared with school district leadership via a presentation at the Superintendent’s Executive Leadership Team meeting and with all principals at their monthly meeting in February of 2019. The Teaching and Learning Division continues to review the data in support of improved processes and training related to the conclusions expressed. It is hoped that the study supports the district’s efforts to build capacity and influence professional practice moving forward.

