



Best Practices in High-Performing Schools

Fiscal Year 2017

Report to the Legislature

**As required by Minnesota Statutes,
section 120B.35, subdivision 4**

COMMISSIONER:

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Cost of Report Preparation

The total cost for the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) to prepare this report was approximately \$609.17. 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.

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 must annually report to the public and the legislature best practices implemented in those schools that are identified as high performing under federal expectations.”

Introduction

This report provides the public and the Legislature the practices that may have contributed to the high performance 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 performance 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.

Analysis

Based on the school designation categories established under Minnesota’s ESEA flexibility waiver, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) identified schools granted the Reward designation in 2016 that had been granted the Reward designation at least five times. A total of 28 schools met these criteria, including 22 elementary schools, two middle schools, and four high schools.

A 16-question survey was sent to the principals of these schools, and MDE received a total of 10 completed surveys by the established deadline. The 36 percent response rate gives the public and the Legislature an indication, albeit an incomplete one, of the best practices being implemented in high-performing 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.

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

The responding schools used 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 2015-16 school year?

Answer Options	Response Percent
Yes	90.0%
No	10.0%

Did an organizational leadership team exist at your school during the 2015-16 school year?

Answer Options	Response Percent
Yes	90.0%
No	10.0%

For those with an organizational leadership team: Who was on your organizational leadership team during the 2015-16 school year? Check all that apply.

Answer Options	Response Percent
Principal	100.0%
Teachers	100.0%
Support staff	44.4%
Parents	55.6%
Community members	11.1%

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	33.3%
Once a month	55.6%
Less than once a month	11.1%

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	11.1%
One hour	44.4%
Less than one hour	44.4%

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	100%
Reviewed performance data by student groups	66.7%
Reviewed student behavior data	55.6%
Reviewed student attendance data	22.2%
Reviewed instructional strategies	55.6%
Used student/staff performance data to make decisions about school performance plans	77.8%
Used student/staff performance data to make decisions about professional development plans	66.7%

For those who were the school's principal in 2015-16: 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%	66.7%
25-49%	22.2%
50-74%	11.1%
75-100%	0.0%

For those who were the school's principal in 2015-16: 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)	0.0%
2	0.0%
3	11.1%
4	11.1%
5	11.1%
6	44.4%
7 (Almost Always)	22.2%

For those who were the school's principal in 2015-16: 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	0.0%
3	11.1%
4	22.2%
5	33.3%
6	22.2%
7 (Almost Always)	11.1%

For those who were the school's principal in 2015-16: 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	11.1%
3	11.1%

Answer Options	Response Percent
4	33.3%
5	22.2%
6	11.1%
7 (Almost Always)	11.1%

Did teachers at your school meet in teacher learning teams [e.g., Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)] during the 2015-16 school year?

Answer Options	Response Percent
Yes	100.0%
No	0.0%

For those with teacher learning teams: How frequently did your school's teacher learning teams (such as PLCs) meet during the 2015-16 school year? Check only one.

Answer Options	Response Percent
Twice a month or more	90.0%
Once a month	0.0%
Less than once a month	10.0%

For those with teacher learning teams: For about how long did the teacher learning teams (such as PLCs) typically meet during the 2015-16 school year? Check only one.

Answer Options	Response Percent
More than one hour	10.0%
One hour	60.0%
Less than one hour	30.0%

For those with teacher learning teams: In which of the following activities did the teacher learning teams (such as PLCs) participate during the 2015-16 school year? Check all that apply.

Answer Options	Response Percent
Refining units of instruction	80.0%
Aligning instructional strategies with academic standards	90.0%
Analyzing instructional plans based on student learning data	90.0%
Implementing instructional plans based on student learning data	90.0%

During the 2015-16 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	100.0%
Peer review	50.0%
Reduced teaching load	0.0%
Professional development	90.0%
Classroom observations	100.0%
Instructional coaching	80.0%
Induction program	50.0%

Answer Options	Response Percent
The school did not offer support to teachers in their first three years of teaching	0.0%
No teachers at the school were in their first three years of teaching	0.0%

During the 2015-16 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	100.0%
Minnesota academic standards were reflected in instruction	100.0%
Minnesota academic standards were reflected in classroom assessments	90.0%
Teachers clearly stated learning objectives to students daily	90.0%
Teachers clearly stated behavior expectations to students	90.0%
Teachers enforced behavior expectations in their classrooms	100.0%
Teachers actively encouraged student engagement	100.0%
Teachers understood community cultures, customs, and values	80.0%

Conclusion

This survey demonstrated several consistent practices across many or most of the Reward 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 performance 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.