

BOSTON K-8

INSTRUCTIONAL AUDIT

PREPARED FOR:
AURORA PUBLIC SCHOOLS
15751 E. 1ST AVENUE
AURORA, CO 80011

DECEMBER 2014



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PREPARED BY:

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INTRODUCTION

Boston K-8 School is located in northwest Aurora, serving approximately 474 students. The student population is very diverse: approximately 3% are White; 16% are Black or African American; 65% are Hispanic; 15% are of Asian descent; 2% Native American, Middle Eastern, or Pacific Island descent and 2% are two or more races. About 84% of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch and 69% qualify as English language learners. Over 20% of the student population is composed of students from refugee families.

Boston K-8 has 23 classroom teachers on staff, along with the principal, assistant principal, teacher on special assignment (TOSA) who serves as dean, two teaching partners who also serve as interventionists, three special education teachers, four specials teachers, two Community Corps members, six para-educators, a family liaison, office staff, nurse, social worker, counselor, psychologist, speech language therapist, and cafeteria and custodial workers.

The school was identified as a priority improvement school entering year 4 on July 1, 2014 and a Title I focus school. As such, Boston K-8 is required to adopt and implement an improvement plan that calls for urgent change for all students and for particular subgroups of students. For the 2013-2014 school year, the school scored “Does Not Meet” for its overall academic achievement and “Approaching” for its overall rating for academic growth. Boston K-8 also scored “Approaching” for its growth gaps. Over the past 3 years, the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced has decreased over time in most grades, though increases were seen last year in Grades 3, 4, 7, and 8 in reading/language arts and Grades 3, 5, and 7 in mathematics. Scores on English language proficiency have shown strong increases but Developmental Reading Assessments (DRA2) scores for kindergarten through second grade students have consistently fallen short of the target except for one year and one grade level (kindergarten in 2011-2012.) Median growth percentiles in 2014 ranged from 34 in English language proficiency to 52 for mathematics, Grades 6-8. The school has not met the 50th percentile target for median growth in reading, Grades 3-5; mathematics, Grades 3-5; writing, Grades 3-5; and English language proficiency, Grades 3-5. Over time, because of its improvement status and the concomitant choice status afforded to parents, the school’s enrollment has declined. The school has also experienced substantial turnover in the staff.

Over the past year, substantial changes were made at the school. More administrators and coaches were added, one of the teachers became dean of students, and the school hired 15 new teachers, two Community Corps members, and additional staff. Having additional administrators has eased the burden on the principal and the new staff have brought renewed energy and optimism to the school. The principal chose to stop departmentalization at the elementary level to enhance consistency for students and collaboration for staff. All staff at the school, administrators, teachers, and other staff alike, are dedicated to the students and are both motivated and exerting effort to improve academic performance.

There are still a number of issues that linger from the past. While teachers are very supportive of each other, they are not consistently supportive of administrators and their decisions. They are not sure the right decisions are being made to improve achievement, feeling that there are too many initiatives and some of them are too superficial. In many cases, faculty feels mistrusted and disrespected, and this

affects the climate of the school. Leaders are aware of the issues and are taking steps to address the climate by having multiple administrators facilitate professional development and work with staff. The principal is also working with an executive coach. For many, though, current strategies toward addressing climate issues appear not to be working and concern is being expressed at nearly every level and by stakeholder groups, including parents. Nonetheless, the staff complies with instructional and other requirements and continues to strive to provide effective instruction. The school is singularly focused on improving performance and administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, and other staff are all exerting effort to help students to do well.

To assist Boston K-8 improve its student achievement, the Aurora Public Schools (APS) contracted with RMC Research Corporation to conduct an instructional audit. The audit provides staff with information on the alignment of instructional and school support practices with practices identified in the research literature as being associated with high academic performance and achievement gap closure. This review includes 28 indicators, which are rated on a series of approximately three rubrics each. In all, the school is rated on 81 elements. The external review is expected to help leaders and staff focus in on changing those practices with high effect sizes.

The instructional review is designed to provide a snapshot of school practices illuminating patterns across the school. The review does not reflect the specific practices of any given individual. However, the data are well-triangulated. Researchers observe every classroom for approximately 30 to 40 minutes. In-depth interviews are conducted with the principal, assistant principal, and teacher partner who serves as an instructional coach in the building. All other adults in the building, including all teachers and staff, are interviewed as well, though their interviews are shorter. Focus groups are held with teachers, paraprofessionals, students, and parents (selected by the school). Data are compared and any inconsistencies are discussed and resolved. This report provides a summary of key themes that emerged during the site visit, followed by a summary of rubric scores and a detailed presentation of evidence for the ratings.

KEY THEMES

STRENGTHS:

- All instructional staff align their instruction to the Colorado State Standards and use aligned materials.
- All instructional staff administer a variety of formative assessments or progress monitoring tools and use results for instructional improvement.
- Instructional staff have strong expertise in specific content areas and are willing to learn and adopt effective practices in reading, writing, and mathematics.
- Teachers consistently state or post learning targets in student-friendly language to help students understand expectations and form mental models of proficiency.
- Nearly all instructional staff communicate clearly and accurately in the learning environment.
- Instructional staff routinely engage in grade-level communities of practice, most of which deeply analyze standards, data, and instructional strategies that work and are less effective.
- Many staff help students develop responsibility for their own learning by providing gradual release, moving from modeling to guided and independent practice.
- Instructional staff use interim/benchmark and summative assessment results to plan and guide instruction, to some extent.

- School leadership allocates the resources necessary to increase student achievement.
- School leadership ensures the effective use of instructional time.
- School leadership ensures that all professional development is focused on improving student achievement.
- The school leadership team, teachers, and other instructional staff actively engage families and the community as partners in the school and classrooms.
- Administrators, most teachers, and other instructional staff provide parents with easy and regular access to information about the school and their children’s progress and achievement, though parents would like to receive more information on how they can help their children to improve.
- Many instructional staff routinely group students in reading and differentiate English/language arts instruction.

CHALLENGES:

- The climate and culture of the school urgently needs to be improved. There is distrust between administrators and teachers and many teachers feel disrespected. While there is strong awareness of the issue and steps have been taken to address concerns, many feel that the current strategies to improve climate are not working.
- Several classrooms are not well managed and teachers are not making efficient use of instructional time.
- Some classrooms are slow-paced and have too few academically engaging activities. Technology is not being used effectively for engagement and students often opt out of instruction since some teachers do not consistently use techniques that require all students to respond.
- Some instructional staff do not appear to have high academic expectations for students.
- Too few instructional staff provide specialized instruction to support individual student growth.
- Few instructional staff have created a culturally responsive environment in the classroom.
- Too few staff are routinely differentiating their instruction particularly in mathematics, science, and social studies. Many lack the time and skill to do differentiate, and as a result, many accelerated students do not receive stretch assignments and some struggling students are not able to master material.
- Too few staff are providing instruction designed to help students apply their learning outside the classroom.
- The school has too few strategies associated with the creation of a college-going culture. Staff do not do enough to increase student aspirations and help them view themselves as scholars. For the most part, staff do not teach students skills associated with success, such as time management, self-regulation, and note-taking. All staff should strongly focus on helping students to persist or persevere in difficult academic situations and teach the value of tenacity and grit.
- Too few staff provide specific, timely, and constructive feedback to students to help them understand how to improve.
- There is little vertical articulation and some teachers are not familiar with standards at adjacent grade levels.
- The school has a bullying problem and needs to address the challenge more aggressively, reinstating anti-bullying procedures and programs, and immediately providing consequences for negative behaviors.
- School leaders have not been effective enough at developing and communicating a clear, shared vision and mission. Some instructional staff are concerned that the wrong decisions for improvement are being made and/or that the focus for improvement is in the wrong place.

- School leadership needs to provide more useful feedback on teachers' instructional strengths and challenges based on multiple sources of data.
- School leadership needs to differentiate teacher professional development.

The research literature and experience of other high-poverty schools can be used to identify multiple effective strategies for addressing these challenges. The literature suggests that leadership needs to take a different approach to become more effective at change management. Stronger instructional engagement activities, implementation of no-opt out techniques, and stronger interventions for struggling and accelerated students will have the highest yield in terms of improving instruction. In addition, a few of the smaller initiatives need to be revisited and more focus is needed to reach the desired depth of knowledge and changes in practice. The school has done many things right, especially in focusing on instruction improvement and singularly emphasizing school improvement. Everyone at the school is dedicated to making the effort and from the audit, it is clear that the school has the will and skill needed to make improvements. At this point, the school needs to revisit relationships between administrators and teachers again, and agree to have a more cohesive and focused approach to drive changes in instructional practices and accelerate improvement in academic outcomes.

RUBRIC SUMMARY

BOSTON K-8 SCHOOL
DECEMBER 9-11, 2014

INSTRUCTION	NOT EVIDENT	DEVELOPING	PROFICIENT	EXEMPLARY
I-1. Instructional staff know and understand the content of the subject taught.			X	
I-2. Instructional staff clearly communicate content standards, essential questions, and/or lesson objectives to students in student-friendly language to help them understand specific learning goals and expectations for demonstrating proficiency.			X	
I-3. Instructional staff communicate clearly and accurately in the learning environment.			X	
I-4. Instructional staff use effective classroom management strategies to make efficient use of instructional time and to promote students' active engagement in learning.		X		
I-5. Instructional staff create a culturally responsive learning community in the classroom.		X		
I-6. Instructional staff routinely implement elements of differentiated instruction to meet the learning needs of all students.			Approaching	
I-7. Instructional staff have high academic expectations for all students.		X		
I-8. Instructional staff provide instruction designed to help students apply their learning outside the classroom.		X		
I-9. Instructional staff provide specialized instruction to support individual growth for all students.		X		
I-10. Instructional staff engage in horizontal articulation within grade/subject configurations.			X	

INSTRUCTION	NOT EVIDENT	DEVELOPING	PROFICIENT	EXEMPLARY
I-11. Instructional staff engage in vertical articulation for adjacent grade levels or course sequences.	X			
I-12. Instructional staff align instruction to the Colorado Academic Standards and use aligned materials.				Approaching
I-13. Instructional staff promote a school culture characterized by collaboration and shared responsibility for student learning.		X		
I-14. Instructional staff use interim/benchmark and summative assessment results to plan and guide instruction.			Approaching	
I-15. Instructional staff administer a variety of formative assessments or progress monitoring tools and use results to guide instruction.			X	
I-16. Instructional staff actively promote college-and/or career-readiness.	X			
I-17. Instructional staff provide specific and timely feedback to students on an ongoing basis and help students use the feedback to improve their performance.		X		
1-18. Instructional staff help students develop responsibility for their own learning by providing gradual release, moving from modeling and structured practice to guided and independent practice.			X	

SUPPORT FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING		NOT EVIDENT	DEVELOPING	PROFICIENT	EXEMPLARY
S-1.	School leadership develops and communicates a clear, shared vision and mission.		X		
S-2.	School leadership focuses the entire school community on school improvement.		X		
S-3.	School leadership focuses on improving and supporting effective instruction.			Approaching	
S-4.	School leadership provides teachers with clear feedback on their instructional strengths and challenges, based on multiple sources of data.		X		
S-5.	School leadership allocates the resources necessary to increase student achievement.			X	
S-6.	School leadership ensures the effective use of instructional time.			X	
S-7.	School leadership ensures that all professional development is focused on improving student achievement.			X	
S-8.	The school leadership team, teachers, and other instructional staff actively engage families as partners in the school and classrooms.			X	
S-9.	Administrators, teachers, and other instructional staff provide parents with easy and regular access to information about the school and their children’s achievement and progress and provide suggestions for how to help their children increase their achievement.			Approaching	
S-10.	Instructional staff actively promote safety and security in the school.		X		

RUBRIC RATINGS, EVIDENCE, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

INSTRUCTION

I-1. Instructional staff know and understand the content of the subject taught.

Rating: Proficient

Content vocabulary. Teachers appeared to know their subject matter well. Most observed teachers used academic vocabulary appropriate to the content being taught. However, content vocabulary was not taught in a way that leads to retention. Rather, teachers typically provided a description, explanation, or example of the use of a new term, though they did not consistently check for understanding. In nearly all cases, students were not asked to use the vocabulary in any way other than to repeat the word. They were not asked to restate the description in their own words nor were they asked to construct a picture, symbol, or graphic representation of the term or phrase. They did not discuss terms with each other and were not provided with opportunities to expand their acquisition of new vocabulary on their own.

Accuracy. Nearly all teachers were accurate in the content they taught. Those who were not accurate generally made errors of carelessness (e.g., using two verbs in their target sentence in a way that did not make sense) rather than inaccuracy of content. Students were not provided with opportunities to check and ensure their own accuracy through the use of additional resources. This skill is critical for those conducting Internet research, for example, since some sources of research are not accurate and students need to learn how to tell fact from fiction.

To increase ratings in this area, teachers should ask students to restate the definitions for new vocabulary in their own words and engage in activities to scaffold vocabulary better. Activities could include constructing a picture, symbol, or graphic representing the term or phrase; asking students to discuss the term with one another; engaging students in games using the terms; and/or helping students to use vocabulary notebooks in constructing answers to questions that encourage higher order thinking.

I-2. Instructional staff clearly communicate content standards, essential questions, and/or lesson objectives to students in student-friendly language to help them understand specific learning goals and expectations for demonstrating proficiency.

Rating: Proficient

Content standard, essential question, and/or lesson objective. Boston K-8 has spent a good deal of time and effort in ensuring that all teachers list learning targets for all content areas being taught, and refer to the targets during their instruction. Icons are used for the targets and even parents are familiar with the idea of listing a goal for student learning. All of the targets observed were written in student-friendly language. However, observers noted that while all teachers started lessons by referring to the targets, they were not consistently used during the class or as a summary for the lesson. Further, some

teachers do not believe that listing the targets has affected student learning in any way and only do so as a matter of compliance. Students were familiar with the learning targets and confirmed that all teachers start lessons by referring to the targets that are listed.

Student understanding of expectations for demonstrating proficiency. Most teachers were observed telling students what they needed to do to demonstrate proficiency or mastery of the standard. Most students were able to articulate what they needed to do and reported that some teachers provide exemplary student work for them to review. Some teachers demonstrate how to solve various problems and show students their expectations for the length and content of writing. Many use sentence frames, rubrics, and checklists. A few teachers ask students to work toward specific goals such as how many Fountas and Pinnell reading levels they want to reach, but this was not a common practice.

To increase this rating, all teachers should refer to the written learning targets both during instruction and when summarizing the lesson. Teachers should ensure that students understand how to demonstrate that they have met the requirements for the lesson objectives. In writing, all teachers should provide examples of advanced student work and anchors should be shown and reviewed with the students. Teachers should also help students to set goals for demonstrating their progress.

I-3. Instructional staff communicate clearly and accurately in the learning environment.

Rating: Proficient

Oral communications. Nearly all instructional staff's spoken language was grammatically correct and expressive. However, verbal communications did not always address the needs of diverse students in the class. Some teachers did not check to ensure their instructions were understood. Most teachers did not explain information in more than one way or ensure that instructions were both written and verbal. This practice is particularly important given that so many of the students in the school are English language learners and refugees.

Written communications. Nearly all instructional staff wrote clearly and legibly so that students could see and understand their writing. Written communication was verbalized in some, but not all, classrooms. Once again, some teachers did not check to ensure their written instructions were understood.

Developmentally appropriate language. All teachers used developmentally appropriate language, though some simplified instructions to the point that students were not being exposed to appropriate vocabulary for instruction. For example, when teachers wanted students to summarize what they read or heard, they did not use the word "summarize" but rather just asked them to write what they heard. This may limit the students' knowledge of words that commonly appear on tests.

The school will increase its ratings in this area when all teachers ensure that spoken and written language is understood. Teachers should check for understanding and ensure they address the needs of diverse students. In addition, teachers should be consistent in their use of developmentally appropriate language, especially those verbs that are likely to appear on assessments.

I-4. Instructional staff use effective classroom management strategies to make efficient use of instructional time and to promote students' active engagement in learning.

Rating: *Developing*

Behavioral expectations. Nearly all classes posted the school rules of “Be Safe, Be a Learner, Be Responsible.” Observers noted that some teachers had additional posted rules in their classrooms while some did not. Students reported that some teachers allowed the students to develop the rules but that most teachers simply told them what the classroom behavioral rules were. As part of the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Bear Paws dollars/incentives can be earned by those students who follow the rules. By nearly all accounts, behavior was much better managed this year than in the past. However, students reported that rules, such as cell phone use and consequences for infractions, were inconsistently applied, especially at the middle school level.

Behavioral procedures. All teachers had established behavioral procedures in their classrooms for tasks such as sharpening pencils and using the restroom. Most classrooms were well-managed, with most teachers able to refocus students who were off-task using positive cueing. Some students, however, did not respond to positive cues and continued their off-task behavior without consequence. Most experienced teachers reported that they tend to classroom management and disciplinary tasks on their own without calling administrators for help. Some newer teachers said that they refer the unruly students to the dean. Observers noted that students who were sent to the dean typically conversed with the dean about appropriate behavior and were given a “time-out” to consider the adjustments they needed to make. This appeared to be effective with the younger students. Older students, however, were not consistently responsive to teachers’ or the dean’s admonishments. Older students were observed using inappropriate language and in a few cases, displaying physically aggressive behavior toward each other (tripping each other, hitting each other) without consequence.

Behavioral transitions. All teachers had established behavioral transitions in their classrooms. Classroom start-ups were efficient and effective, with many teachers using a warm-up activity that either reinforced or scaffolded learning. Most of the time, the transitions between activities were smooth, with students moving reasonably quickly to the next instructional activity or lining up to go to the cafeteria, recess, or specials. There were a few instances where a significant amount of time was spent in transitions, though, which resulted in a lot of missed instructional time. In addition, there were several instances where teaching ended much earlier than necessary, with students engaging in no instructional activity before they were dismissed. Some students reported that because the time for lunch was so short, students ran to the lunchroom or pushed people in line so that they could get more time outside.

Cueing. Most teachers used positive cues to redirect and maintain student behavior based on previously established expectations. Common cues included count-downs, clapping, and other forms of refocusing the students. Few teachers used physical presence as a positive cue, choosing instead to stay at the front of the room. Some teachers shouted over the students who continued to chat and stay off-task. Some teachers occasionally used the term “disrespectful” in reminding the students that the culture of the school is to be responsible for one’s own behavior. Most students responded to the cues. Some teachers, however, spent a large amount of time in classroom control, losing valuable time in instruction. Students reported that most of the time, students respond to a teacher’s warning but that quiet students can “get away” with misbehavior.

This rating will increase when all instructional staff consistently develop and enforce classroom rules and when common rules are consistently enforced. Teachers should consistently use positive cueing to redirect students and should consider the use of timers, high-interest activities, and other devices to pick up the pace and keep the students engaged in their work since some of the management appeared to be linked to a lack of student engagement.

I-5. Instructional staff create a culturally responsive learning community in the classroom.

Rating: Developing

Cultural understanding. Boston K-8 has a very diverse student population and has taken some steps to help students of many cultural backgrounds feel at ease. For example, cafeteria workers have learned to make some Nepalese dishes, the school has sponsored culture nights, and specific holidays, like Cinco de Mayo, are celebrated. Some teachers ask students about their cultures and/or to bring cultural artifacts so other students can learn about various ethnicities. Translators are provided during parent events for parents who speak Nepalese and Spanish, and some front office staff speak Spanish. Most respondents believe that cultural diversity is a clear strength of the school and work to provide a culturally inviting environment. Some teachers have provided writing prompts and other activities to ask students to describe who they are and their origins. However, culturally responsive instruction was not observed in any classroom and many teachers are unclear as to what culturally responsive instruction entails. Further, many respondents expressed a strong need for a newcomer's center since many of the new students are unfamiliar with American culture and need instruction for nearly all aspects of schooling, such as how classrooms run and when/how to use the restrooms.

Multiple perspectives. Observations showed that very few teachers ask students to analyze issues from multiple perspectives. Instructional staff were not observed embedding multiple cultural and ethnic perspectives into the curriculum. Teachers reported that multiple perspectives were sometimes part of a standard but they do not specifically or intentionally call for multiple perspectives in their instruction, with the possible exception of some social studies lessons or units.

Strategies for English language learners (as applicable). Some instructional staff were observed using strategies known for their effectiveness with English language learners. Some teachers used choral repetition, visuals, vocabulary front loading, sentence frames, picture books, and/or buddy talks. Some used small group time to work with students needing more help with reading and writing skills. However, the practice was not routine or consistent across teachers. Some reported that the Community Corps members were specifically working in this area to help students talk with each other and become more fluent in English. Some teachers reported that EL Achieve was being used in the school, but that the approach is very time-consuming to plan and implement. Many pointed out that the program is not as effective as it needs to be, especially for those who have few English language skills. Some respondents reported that English language fluency is not a focus of the school and too little time is devoted to helping students with fluency. Students and parents also reported that more English language instruction is needed since some students entered the school speaking no English at all. Many suggested that the newcomer's program should be re-instituted.

Ratings in this area will increase when instructional staff consistently demonstrate understanding of cultural influences on students' behavioral and academic success and regularly incorporate that knowledge into the design of classroom strategies. Instructional staff should consistently embed multiple perspectives, including cultural and ethnic perspectives, into lessons and engage students in analyzing

issues from multiple perspectives. Instructional staff should embed strategies for teaching English language learners such as explicitly teaching academic vocabulary into their daily instruction.

I-6. Instructional staff routinely implement elements of differentiated instruction to meet the learning needs of all students.

Rating: Approaching Proficient

Flexible grouping. By nearly all accounts, there has been an emphasis this year on differentiating instruction and improving the Response to Intervention (RtI) system to help struggling students (see below for RtI description). Teachers reported that they grouped students daily in their literacy blocks, typically based on the Fountas and Pinnell Leveled Literacy approach, with students identified as high, middle, or low. Some teachers said that they regroup students as often as every 4 weeks, based on the most recent test they have taken. Grouping was observed during some guided and independent practice time in English/language arts, particularly for the younger children who were learning phonemic awareness and phonics. Grouping in mathematics was observed in a few classrooms and teachers reported that the groups were based on the Kathy Richardson assessments. No grouping was apparent in other content areas. Observations showed that grouping was more common in elementary grades than middle school grades.

Content. Some instructional staff were observed adjusting content to students' academic needs by varying the pace, intensity, and time for instruction. They maintained a relatively brisk pace, with students moving to new lessons after guided or independent practice. Others were not as skilled in adjusting pace and intensity: they often waited for the slowest student, which meant that there was virtually no instruction for students who were ready to move on. Some staff asked students to indicate if they were ready to move on with "thumbs up or thumbs down." Some students reported that the pace was too slow. As a result, some students reported they were bored in some of their classes and were not provided with additional activities once they completed their assignments. Others said that they were given challenge assignments when they finished their other work or could engage in independent reading.

Differentiated assignments. Some teachers provided differentiated assignments in their classrooms, particularly during literacy instruction. Most, though, gave the same assignment to all students even during centers' time. Differentiation in assignment occurred most often when students were pulled to work with the teacher or paraprofessional. Teachers reported that they understood the need for differentiation but were overwhelmed with lesson planning and other areas of foci and had little time to work specifically on differentiated assignments.

Ratings on these indicators will increase when all teachers routinely group and regroup students by academic level, interest, or social need and vary grouping during the academic day and year to meet student needs. Nearly all students should demonstrate active participation and self-direction during flexible grouping activities. All instructional staff should employ relatively brisk pacing, and vary pacing by slowing down only when nearly all students are confused. Otherwise, differentiation or heterogeneous groups, buddy talks, or other techniques should be used for reteaching. All instructional staff should adjust their student assignments to academic need based on ongoing formative assessment.

I-7. Instructional staff have high academic expectations for all students.

Rating: *Developing*

High academic expectations. Teachers consistently post grade-level learning targets for their lessons and typically introduce their lessons on-grade level. Student work is examined to set appropriate goals. However, some teachers do not give assignments that reflect appropriate academic expectations, lowering the level of the assignments to what they perceive to be appropriate for student skills. Observers noted a lot of “teacher talk” and too little student expression and dialogue: this meant that at least some teachers could not unpack student thinking to determine the appropriate level for instruction. While many students appeared to have difficulty accessing content due to language constraints, it was not clear that they were incapable of doing the work, given the right explanations. Higher grade-level students were often provided with instruction below grade level.

Cognitive demand. Nearly all teachers started with instruction at the appropriate level of cognitive demand indicated in the standards but then, as previously described, lowered the learning expectations sometimes by stripping tasks of the deeper content. Observations showed that about 75% of questions or directions were on level one of Webb’s Depths of Knowledge. A few teachers provided more prompts on levels two and three. Some teachers were comfortable understanding rigor in the classroom while others were not.

Extension of learning. According to respondents, some students who are ahead of the rest of the class are allowed to work on Moby Max on the computer to extend their learning. Some were asked to get books at the next level to extend their learning. Some students and parents, though, believe that there are too few opportunities for accelerated learners to have their needs met.

Ratings in this area will increase when all instructional staff implement classroom practices that demonstrate high expectations for all children. All instructional staff should consistently deliver instruction that reflects the cognitive demand indicated in the standards and primarily pose questions on Webb’s Depth of Knowledge levels two and three. All instructional staff should routinely assign and help individual students to extend their learning.

I-8. Instructional staff provide instruction designed to help students apply their learning outside the classroom.

Rating: *Developing*

Relevance. Some teachers were adept at providing “real-world” illustrations or problems in their classrooms, reporting the importance of doing so to help students scaffold their knowledge and deepen their understandings. Other teachers were not observed providing these types of illustrations or examples. When teachers used relevant examples, they most often did so in writing with personal narratives, in mathematics through story problems such as determining the dimensions of a garden, and in physical education with issues pertaining to health. Elementary students reported that their teachers occasionally give them “real-life” examples of mathematics being used (such as in the grocery store) or stimulate background knowledge from their lives for writing assignments. Middle school students reported that teachers do not often connect to “real life” except in social studies where they have discussed immigration.

Application. No teachers were observed providing opportunities to students to apply their learning outside the classroom environment. Teachers reported that they gave homework assignments that helped students to do so, but students could not name any assignments of this sort. Some teachers did not believe students had the requisite background knowledge to be able to apply their learning.

To increase scores in this area, all instructional staff should routinely provide real-world problems and experiences in their content areas and provide multiple opportunities for students to apply their learning outside the classroom environment.

I-9. Instructional staff provide specialized instruction to support individual growth for all students.

Rating: Developing

Identification of students using the MTSS. Boston K-8 teachers were provided with two workshops on the RtI process this year to familiarize them with the RtI and MTSS processes. A committee that meets three times per month oversees the activities in this area. Students are identified for assistance using available data such as the DRA2, Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS), measures of academic progress (MAPS), the 95 percent group assessment, and Kathy Richardson assessments. Teachers enter their data in Enrich and the data are used to determine the RtI level. Most teachers find Enrich difficult to use. Progress monitoring for students that receive special education services is conducted using Dynamic Indicator of Basic Early Learning Skills (DIBELS) or the comprehension maze. Gifted students are not provided with extra services.

Intervention for struggling students. By most accounts, Tier I and Tier II interventions are not yet at the level of depth needed to accelerate student progress, often because English language learner students need the most help. Respondents are unsure that the system is working for students new to the country. However, by most accounts, this year's approach is much better than the "Save Our School" approach used in the past. Within the system, individual teachers are asked to examine root cause to determine the source of the academic challenge and to address the challenge initially through best first instruction. Some experienced teachers are adept with this while some of the new teachers are still learning how to differentiate in this way. Some students are provided with assistance from a paraprofessional during center time or independent practice. In addition, a part-time interventionist pulls students from every grade level into small groups for assistance for reading typically using the 95 Percent Group approach or Boost. One group, for example, is typically focused on phonemic awareness. K-3 students with challenges in mathematics are also pulled out of class for small group instruction. No mathematics interventions are available for older students, though the mathematics teacher partner works with teachers of struggling students to give them information on strategies to address the students' challenges. Some students receive free tutoring after school. Respondents reported that there is not enough help available for Tier II instruction.

Services for students with IEPs. Boston K-8 has three special education teachers, one full-time and two part-time. There are also other services available from the speech pathologist, psychologist, and social worker to students in need. Students are pulled from class for special education services. There are about 30 students with individualized education plans (IEPs) which dictate the services they will receive. Respondents reported that special education teachers work primarily with students from Grades 4 through 8. Most students receive academic services, though a few are identified as intellectually

disabled. Most respondents reported satisfaction with special education services though they believe that there is not enough of a connection between general education and special education.

Ratings in this area will increase when the school is able to serve all of the students identified as struggling or low performing in each content area at all grade levels. More paraprofessionals and/or interventionists are needed, and specialized services may need to be designed for English language learners. This is an area that should be addressed immediately so that students that are several grade levels behind can accelerate their progress. The school should consider increasing the use of technology, offering more tutoring, and more aggressively pursuing Tier II instruction.

I-10. Instructional staff engage in horizontal articulation within grade/subject configurations.

Rating: Proficient

Coordination. Boston K-8 implements a community of practice approach where grade-level teams convene on Wednesdays to discuss standards, data, and student needs. Each community of practice uses a common format, where power standards are listed, along with learning targets and success criteria. Teachers work together to determine the results they want to see on the power standards; build and administer common formative assessments; analyze strengths/obstacles and collect/chart data; set goals with clear learning targets; select research-based instructional strategies and then assess effectiveness, starting the cycle again. Documentation in the conference room shows that teams are at various levels of expertise in the process, but that most have set and met goals using a percentage of students who had mastered material at the pre- and post-test level, with goals of 55-75% mastery. The room showed community of practice expectations that included coming prepared with student data; having a growth mindset; developing protocols for reaching goals; and focusing on student learning. Guiding questions also included identifying which student subgroups performed well, examination of why strategies worked/did not work; jointly deciding next steps; and discussing rigor and deepening understanding for students that have achieved mastery. Respondents reported that all grade-level teachers engage in the Community of Practices, which are typically facilitated by the teacher partner and/or an administrator.

Planning. By most accounts, the community of practices are helpful and lead to effective grade-level planning. The community of practices are consistently data-driven and focused on a particular standard and have served to help new teachers in particular to plan more rigorous approaches to instruction. However, some respondents noted that the community of practices are not customized as much as they should be since different teams have different needs. Teachers would like more teacher-driven and facilitated conversation rather than being facilitated by administrators. Some respondents believe that there has been too much emphasis on target-setting and not enough time spent on instructional strategies that work. Nearly all agree, though, that the ability to meet for at least 90 minutes for each grade-level team has helped them to focus their instruction though the data review and goal-setting approach being used.

Support for literacy and mathematics. “Specials” teachers such as those who teach physical education and music are not involved in the communities of practice or grade-level meetings and thus do not specifically engage in practices to support literacy and mathematics. Instead, they address standards in their own content areas.

To increase ratings in this area, all instructional staff should consistently discuss what is working and what is not working well when teaching a particular content area. Specials teachers should have opportunities to coordinate with classroom teachers to reinforce reading, writing, and mathematics concepts. All coordination activities should be evaluated for effectiveness and refined as needed.

I-11. *Instructional staff engage in vertical articulation for adjacent grade levels or course sequences.*

Rating: **Not Evident**

Vertical articulation. According to respondents, there is no formal opportunity for engaging in vertical articulation. Some teachers are familiar with what is being taught in adjacent grades because they taught in those grades, but no systematic sharing has occurred.

Planning. Collaboration time is generally not used to review current levels of achievement for students in adjacent grade levels or course sequences for instructional purposes. Teachers have the power standards for all grade levels but most do not have formal discussions about articulating the standards vertically.

Transitions within and between schools. Rising eighth-grade students visit Aurora Central High School or Hinckley High School and occasionally high school students will visit Boston K-8 to tell rising students what to expect in high school. No other transition activities were reported.

To increase ratings in this area, all instructional staff should be able to articulate learning expectations in adjacent grades so that they can be more effective at differentiating instruction. To the extent possible, staff should reach out to ninth-grade teachers to ensure that transitions are systematically addressed. Assigned instructional staff in transitional grade levels should collaborate within feeder networks to review current levels of achievement and share information. Additional supports such as a buddy system and discussion about middle and high school expectations should be put into place to support rising students.

I-12. *Instructional staff align instruction to the Colorado Academic Standards and use aligned materials.*

Rating: **Approaching Exemplary**

Alignment with standards. Observations showed that all teachers aligned their instruction to the Colorado Academic Standards. Respondents reported that all lesson plans were driven by standards and all lessons were accompanied by specification of the learning targets associated with the standards. A few teachers mentioned that they use the district pacing guide as their main source for planning, but have to work hard to supplement instructional materials given by the district since the materials are not consistently well-aligned to Colorado Academic Standards. Examples were provided to show a lack of consistent alignment in reading and social studies.

Utilization of appropriate resources. Most teachers use the pacing guide as the source for initial planning, but do not use basal textbooks for reading. Rather, they use leveled books and supplemental materials, and ask the students to use their Chromebooks, laptops, or other technology to conduct activities such as research, independent reading, and finding information to use as the basis for writing

assignments. The use of technology varies by teachers, with some using technology every day for instruction while others use the technology “occasionally.” Observations showed extensive use of technology in some classes and no use in others. Promethean boards were used appropriately in some classrooms and as screens for document cameras in others. Some teachers use novels as the basis for comprehension activities. Some teachers also use the Readers and Writers Workshop approaches. Several teachers reported that they use Tumble Books online program for fluency and Moby Max for mathematics and literature. Most teachers reported that they use the Lucy Calkins approach for writing and most base their mathematics instruction on the Investigations materials. FOSS kits are used for science and EL Achieve is used for English language development. A new social studies textbook by Pearson was adopted this year. Teachers felt that they have sufficient amounts of materials except for leveled books. Teachers have access to student response systems (clickers) and sound systems, but these pieces of technology are currently rarely in use.

To improve this rating to Exemplary, all teachers should use technology extensively for interventions and instruction, and should maximize the use of Promethean boards. This will help engage students and provide customized instruction.

I-13. Instructional staff promote a school culture characterized by collaboration and shared responsibility for student learning.

Rating: Developing

Collaboration. Most instructional staff reported that they have strong positive relationships with each other and collaborate relatively well. The faculty has a deep understanding of the need for improvement and collectively works hard to improve instruction and student performance. However, there is a strong rift between the instructional staff and administrators, particularly between teachers and the principal. (This is discussed in greater detail in the section on support for instruction.) Teachers feel they have too little autonomy and that their professionalism is not respected. As a result of a sense of disrespect and mistrust between instructional staff and administrators, many staff expressed dissatisfaction with the school and concern about school climate. Emotions run high in this area: many respondents mentioned that turnover is based on the poor relationship between the administrators and teachers and that some teachers lack optimism about the future given the working conditions they believe are in place. There is a lot of discussion about relationships among staff and this negative feeling clearly affects performance. Many of the areas of conflict have been identified and are being addressed, but most staff believe they are not being addressed effectively. Some said they are afraid to tell the truth on the climate survey because there will be individual repercussions and some feel that the way the climate survey is worded, makes it hard to rate one administrator positively and another less so. Thus, collaboration at the school is bifurcated, with strong horizontal collaboration and weak vertical collaboration, though teachers comply with whatever they are asked to do.

Shared responsibility. While administrators have taken steps to include more staff in decision making, many staff feel that the invitation is just an exercise and that they do not truly have a voice. Many respondents noted that they are often asked what they think, but only some ideas are given credence while others are dismissed without discussion. Once again, staff do comply with decisions but because they feel disenfranchised, their compliance is sometimes superficial rather than heartfelt. These feelings do not typically carry over into the classroom, though, and both teachers and administrators clearly share responsibility for student learning, continuing to make strong efforts to improve performance.

By most accounts, climate and culture are the largest concern in the school and the steps being undertaken to address the issue are as yet ineffective. Urgent intervention is needed in this area for sustained improvement to occur. The communication, trust, and respect issues are impacting teacher emotions, which in turn take attention away from the urgent improvement needed.

I-14. Instructional staff use interim/benchmark and summative assessment results to plan and guide instruction.

Rating: Approaching Proficient

Analysis of interim/benchmarks assessments. The staff administered MAPS for the first time this year and have not yet received the data to analyze. In the past, some time was spent analyzing Acuity data for trends, but most staff did not find the analysis to be useful. Mondo assessments are reviewed every 10 weeks and DRA2 assessments are reviewed as soon as data are available.

Adjustment of instruction using interim/benchmarks assessments. Since MAPS data were not available, no adjustment to instruction could be based on the data. DRA2 data are used to determine reading groups. According to respondents, interim assessments are not as useful as formative assessments for adjusting instruction, though all of the data are reviewed for trends.

Adjustment of instruction using summative assessments. Transition Colorado Assessment Program (TCAP) data are reviewed at the beginning of the year and were reviewed for trends. The staff do not feel that they learned a lot by examining trends since there are so many new teachers in the building and because the high-stakes test is changing to PARCC.

Ratings in this area will improve when all instructional staff analyze interim/benchmark results to determine patterns of proficiency for the classroom and content area and when results are used to reteach and/or extend any concepts that are not understood by the students. Teachers should conduct deep data dives to understand misconceptions and error patterns. Teachers should collaborate to understand what types of teaching practices are most closely associated with effectiveness and share strategies. Teachers should ensure that interventions are designed to address any skill area of deficiency for individual students. All staff should analyze summative data longitudinally to examine trends for the school and each grade level. Staff should monitor the effects of changes in instruction to ensure that the modifications have produced anticipated outcomes. Students should also be encouraged to track their performance on the tests and set personal goals.

I-15. Instructional staff administer a variety of formative assessments or progress monitoring tools and use results to guide instruction.

Rating: Proficient

Routine use. Nearly all teachers in the school routinely administer formative assessments and use progress monitoring tools. Most teachers check for understanding after each lesson and many use exit tickets, write daily monitoring notes, or otherwise track student progress in literacy. Student work in writing is routinely examined in Community of Practices. The use of formative assessments is somewhat less typical in mathematics, science, and social studies, though teachers mention that in mathematics, they monitor by checking students' homework or classwork. Staff do not consistently review assessments at the misconception level.

Instructional guidance. In the areas in which the Community of Practice is working, goals are set for student performance and teachers carefully adjust their instruction based on formative assessments or progress monitoring results. In these areas, teachers discuss common student errors to understand patterns of proficiency and discuss implications for the use of various instructional strategies. Because the effort is so time-consuming, they are not able to do this for every content area, but report that they are well-versed in the process. Observations showed that teachers used the Community of Practice discussions to guide their instruction and documentation showed positive results.

Variety of additional assessments. Many instructional staff routinely administer a variety of formative assessments to address different learning modalities. For example, students have many choices for their writing and can demonstrate their problem solving using a variety of techniques. The practice is not universal, though, with some of the newer teachers still working on the best ways to assess students and use the data for instructional improvement.

To increase this rating, all instructional staff should use the results of formative assessments or progress monitoring to guide instruction. Common errors and reasons for misconceptions should be analyzed deeply in all content areas and used to improve instruction.

I-16. Instructional staff actively promote college- and/or career-readiness.

Rating: Not Evident

Promotion of college- and career aspirations. Teachers post college banners on their doors or in their classrooms. Observers noted that few teachers actively promoted students' aspirations for college and/or career. Most respondents reported that the counselors are responsible for discussing options rather than teachers. The counselor provides a workforce readiness program for seventh- and eighth-grade students, but students could not recall any information about the program.

Perseverance. Few instructional staff were observed to actively promote student perseverance and a sense of responsibility to help them develop a "can-do" attitude. Some teachers reported that they ask students to engage in goal-setting around literacy levels to help them develop efficacy. Students could not recall any teacher providing language around tenacity, grit, determination, or other efforts to promote perseverance.

Productivity and teamwork skills. The school has a Student Council that promotes some forms of student leadership, and the council decides winners of some of the competitions, such as the door decorating contest. However, while students did engage in teamwork and clearly had some instruction in becoming a good team member, no student could recall instruction in this area and observers saw no explicit teaching of note-taking, organization skills, time management, or leadership skills.

To increase this rating, instructional staff should systematically and intentionally promote aspirations for college/career and provide information about multiple career pathways for students as young as preschool. The school should help parents to understand what they can do to promote aspirations. All instructional staff should help students develop persistence and a "can-do" attitude toward solving problems or overcoming barriers to learning. Teachers should help students to become resourceful, figuring out where to go when they do not know what to do. Finally, all instructional staff should explicitly help students acquire time management, organization skills, note-taking, and other skills associated with productivity and teamwork.

I-17. *Instructional staff provide specific and timely feedback to students on an ongoing basis and help students use the feedback to improve their performance.*

Rating: *Developing*

Specific and timely feedback. According to teachers and students, most teachers provide feedback from assessments in a timely manner, generally right after an assessment or assignment is given or within a week of a written assignment. Observations showed that teachers were inconsistent in their provision of student feedback during guided and independent practice. Some teachers provided positive and specific feedback, with teachers providing constructive comments to help the students learn how to improve their work or learn how to solve specific problems. Other teachers provided feedback that was less specific or constructive (“That’s not right. Try again.”). Observations showed that teachers were not consistently able to check on each student, though many tried to do so. Checking was least prevalent during independent reading time, when some teachers did not check on students at all, except for those with whom they were working.

Help students use feedback. Teachers were inconsistent in helping students use feedback. Some teachers used questioning techniques and approximations as teachable moments. Others provided some feedback and then did not check to see if students used the feedback. Students validated this during focus groups where they noted that some teachers help, some teachers provide no feedback, and some teachers provide feedback that students did not understand and did not clarify when asked.

Consistency of grading. Grading in the school is relatively consistent within some grade levels but not in others. Some teachers use standards-based grading processes while others take effort and other factors into account. Most teachers use the short constructed response rubric to score writing. However, by all accounts, there is not common grading across grade levels.

To increase this rating, all instructional staff should provide specific and constructive feedback to each student after each assignment or task, bringing them up to the desk to discuss. Teachers in the same content area/grade level should use the same definitions of high quality work in all content areas. All instructional staff should help students use feedback to improve their work. All teachers should base grades on common definitions of proficiency established for each grade level/content area. In addition, teachers should check to ensure that proficiency in grades is correlated with scores on summative state assessments and other accountability measures.

I-18. *Instructional staff help students develop responsibility for their own learning by providing gradual release, moving from modeling and structured practice to guided and independent practice.*

Rating: *Proficient*

Modeling. Teachers use the gradual release model, giving students increasing responsibilities for their learning as the lesson proceeds. Teachers at the school have been taught to use a six-part model for structured lesson plans, including (1) planned from the standard; (2) pacing/planning guide used; (3) include clear learning targets; (4) include language supports; (5) include grade level look-fors/monitoring; and (6) include differentiation based on student needs. Teachers are clear that these six steps are to be in place and will be monitored by administrators. Observations showed that these steps were being implemented during the site visit. Teachers were observed modeling and giving at

least one example of the task for the content area being observed. Students reported that teachers model what they are to learn and teachers affirmed this, with most respondents characterizing modeling as a clear instructional strength of teachers in the building.

Skillful questioning. Teachers were observed providing multiple questions to students. However, about 75% of the questions were on level one of Webb’s Depths of Knowledge. Only a few teachers were observed providing open-ended questions and most questions were directed to asking students to summarize, recall information, or respond to factual questions. In a few cases, however, teachers were very adept at prompting deeper thinking or looking for multiple ways to solve a problem, predict the plot, or ask for character analysis.

Structured/guided practice. All teachers provided time for guided and independent reading. Most also provided time for guided mathematics. However, observations showed that in some classes, too much time was allocated to some of these activities, with most students having completed their work and engaged in quiet or noisy off-task talk with each other while waiting for everyone to finish. Many of those late to finishing were slow because they did not start their tasks on time and felt no urgency for completion.

To improve ratings in this area, all instructional staff should model, demonstrate, and provide multiple examples to help students acquire knowledge and skills. All teachers should pose skillful and purposeful questions to help students deepen and revise their thinking. They should ask more level two and three questions from the Webb’s Depth of Knowledge wheel. In addition, teachers should increase the pace of the time being used for independent practice.

SUPPORT FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

S-1. *School leadership develops and communicates a clear, shared vision and mission.*

Rating: *Developing*

Communication. According to the school website, the vision of Boston K-8 is “to ensure that every student can perform at grade-level proficiency or above in reading, writing, and mathematics.” The website does not list a mission. The tag line, “Where we accelerate learning for every APS student, every day,” needs revision since the school does not serve every APS student. School leadership consistently communicates the need to focus on student learning. While respondents could not identify the precise mission and vision, all respondents knew that their work is to raise student achievement, close achievement gaps, and ensure a safe and welcoming environment. These three goals are reflected in the school’s Unified Improvement Plan (UIP) and posted in the professional development room. Community members and parents were not sure what the school’s vision is but knew that the school was working hard to retain teachers and students and to improve academic performance. During the visit, some concerns were expressed by both instructional staff and parents about whether the school should be a K-8 school. Some liked the combination of grades, pointing out that the combination led to older students becoming less likely to engage in negative adolescent behaviors. Others thought that the older students were not a good influence on the younger students or that the older students were not given the appropriate preparation needed to be effective in high school. Administrators are aware of the split opinions about the grade span. While they support the K-8 structure, they are considering whether changes are needed to address concerns.

Implementation. The goals, rather than the vision and mission, drive activities in the school. While all of the respondents reported that the goals were clear, some said that there was not a shared vision about how to reach goals. Respondents were unified in knowing that they were expected to develop strong lesson planning skills, implement the standards-based teaching/learning cycle to teach, monitor and assess students, differentiate instruction, and increase student engagement. They did not mention the strategies for developing understanding of language acquisition, utilizing strategies for language learners, providing specific, timely, and meaningful feedback, or increasing community engagement as areas of focus for the vision and mission of the school, though these strategies were posted as the “how” for achieving the goals in the UIP.

Revision. The vision and mission have not been revised for a number of years. One document reported that there has been no revision since the school became a K-8 school several years ago.

To improve ratings in this area, leadership should ensure that the school’s mission and vision are shared, including the strategies to be used to achieve the mission and vision. The mission and vision should be updated. Administrators should use the mission/vision as a systematic litmus test for effectiveness of decisions and ensure that internal and external stakeholders have a say in developing and evaluating the effectiveness of the mission and vision.

S-2. School leadership focuses the entire school community on school improvement.

Rating: Developing

Leadership. Boston K-8’s Unified Improvement Planning Team consists of representatives from the primary, intermediate, and secondary grade levels, as well as the building instructional mathematics and literacy coaches, English language acquisition teacher leader, principal, assistant principal, dean, and family liaison. Some grade levels are not represented on the team, though teachers reported that communication about the UIP was good and all teachers were aware of the contents of the UIP. The improvement team meets every other Wednesday for 90 minutes and formulated the UIP based on data analysis, reflection of strategies that worked in the past, and research. Staff and community members were invited to provide input and/or feedback on the UIP. However, some teachers reported that their feedback was never used and that they are unsure whether the strategies reflect the real needs of the school. Respondents reported that administrators are not very visible in the school, spending more time in their offices or in meetings than in classrooms. Respondents noted that it is rare for administrators to provide models of effective instruction, though teacher partners provide modeling if asked. However, respondents also said that administrators are consistent in the messages they communicate about improvement strategies and instructional expectations and follow through in the way that they monitor and evaluate teachers. Parents expressed some concerns about leadership, too, reporting that they believed that there was not enough genuine concern about the students and their performance and that the problems with the school are not being addressed strongly enough.

Planning. To develop the UIP, the team reviewed 3 or 4 years of data related to academic performance trends using TCAP results, TCAP growth data, TCAP growth gap data, benchmark assessments, and DRA2. The instructional leadership team (ILT) conducted a root cause analysis and developed three main strategies for improvement, based on advice from an outside consultant to have no more than three main areas of activity. The strategies are: (1) planning for delivering instruction based on the Colorado Academic Standards; (2) monitoring and analyzing formative data to adjust instructional practice; and

(3) developing processes and procedures for implementing a multi-tiered system of support that will ensure differentiated instruction and interventions. The planning stemmed from the data analysis and is clearly focused on student learning. The plan used a variety of assessments to determine student need. As previously mentioned, teachers expressed a desire to have more input into the plan. While they were provided opportunities, they did not feel that their input was welcomed. Many feel that there are too many areas of focus in the plan and that it is impossible to meet all expectations in an effective way. Some believe that practices are too harsh and that there is too little concern for individuals at the schools and their health and welfare.

Implementation and monitoring. All of the strategies within the UIP are being implemented and a clear division of labor among leaders and those who support teachers has been established. A six-part lesson planning approach is required of all teachers and is being consistently used to plan all lessons. All lessons are driven by grade-level standards. Teachers are still somewhat unclear about the vertical progressions within standards and reported that there is more of a focus on the six-part planning than understanding the progressions. Data are consistently collected and reviewed and student rubrics have been developed and implemented for writing. Teachers reported that they have a clear understanding of how to use formative assessments in daily planning, though they also reported that using the Enrich system is difficult. Most teachers have a good general understanding of the MTSS system. However, the school has not yet implemented a strategy for consistent sharing of student data between interventionists, special education teachers, classroom teachers, and classified staff. There is not yet consistent high-quality planning for small groups and interventions for high and low performing students requiring additional instructional and/or behavior support. Respondents reported that administrators monitor closely for lesson planning segments and particularly to ensure that teachers post learning targets for all content areas. Some believe that there is an overemphasis on this part of the UIP, saying that it sometimes feels that it is more important to ensure that the room looks right than to meet the needs of the students through high-quality instruction. The school has had sessions to discuss elements of the plan and individual responsibilities for success, but because of the mistrust, some respondents reported that the sessions are not as candid as they need to be and some of the uncertainties about strategies in the plan have not been raised.

Sustained support. Respondents report that training in the school is plentiful and sometimes overabundant with too little time to implement what was learned. This year, additional personnel were added to serve as resources for teachers and by all accounts, the additional help is widely appreciated and has helped the school to become more effective. Respondents still wish for more paraprofessionals but clearly value the teaching partners, Community Corps members, dean, and others that serve as resources. They also believe that having an assistant principal in addition to the principal has eased the burden on the principal and has allowed them to address many pressing needs, such as the redevelopment and implementation of the RtI and MTSS approaches. Teachers and educational assistants also value having more administrators to evaluate them, reporting that they have been visited more often than in the past. Teachers can also request time for classroom visits: for example, some teachers took a half a day to visit Crawford Elementary to see the 95 Percent program. However, some new teachers reported that there is too much support in the sense that they are constantly attending workshops and meetings and have too little time for planning instruction and processing the information they receive.

Recognition. Boston K-8 celebrates student successes through recognition ceremonies for students and through individual shout-outs in classrooms. The school has taken some steps to recognize teachers by highlighting some of the effective strategies being used in classrooms. However, teachers more

generally feel underappreciated and unrecognized for the efforts they exert on behalf of the school. Many mentioned that there is an unrealistic expectation for the number of hours that teachers are expected to spend in the school and that being sick is a cause for criticism by administrators. Teachers reported that they understand the need to devote a significant amount of time to planning, but believe that too much time is spent on formatting lesson plans and making sure that bulletin boards and the classroom environment look a particular way. They wish to be recognized for their work in a meaningful way and not in ways that they believe has led to elevating some at the expense of others.

To improve ratings in this area, leadership needs to be more visible and develop more trust among staff. Input from staff needs to be more seriously considered. The UIP should be assessed for its effectiveness. The plan may need to be focused more precisely so that improvement strategies can be mastered and appropriate time developed to reach the depth of knowledge that the strategies require. Improvement in this area appears to be tied to the need for improvement in the school climate, and particularly the need to re-establish a sense of mutual respect and trust.

S-3. School leadership focuses on improving and supporting effective instruction.

Rating: Approaching Proficient

Expectations. All respondents reported that school leaders clearly communicated their expectations for effective standards-based instruction. As noted, teachers are expected to use the six-part lesson planning format and are given copies of “look-fors” that administrators use when visiting their classrooms. Respondents noted that high effect size instructional strategies have been shared. All teachers use sentence frames and the gradual release approach. Teachers are exposed to photographs and other artifacts of high-quality instruction. Community of Practices discuss data and instructional strategies. The issue for most respondents was not the clarity of the expectations but rather whether the way the expectations were conveyed and how they were being monitored. Once again, respondents believed they were not being treated respectfully. An example offered by several was the way in which the learning targets during the professional development sessions were conveyed and the fact that they were being asked to complete exit tickets after sessions. Teachers felt that they were being treated like children. While they could see that the approach was meant to model classroom expectations, they thought their professionalism was being undermined. They also believed that some expectations were unrealistic and that too much stress was being placed on lesson planning rather than seeing whether the lessons worked.

Policies and procedures. School policies and procedures clearly emphasize and outline expectations for effective instruction. Leadership consistently follows the policies and procedures. Policies and procedures are routinely reviewed: some respondents reported they were “overly” reviewed and wished for more differentiated professional development (discussed below). Some respondents also believed that communication was inconsistent. Many disliked the long staff bulletins and said that there was so much information in them, and they could not meaningfully digest the contents.

Assignment. During the past year, the principal made strategic grade level assignments to ensure that cohesive teams could be established and ongoing work supported. K-3 teams were basically left intact to continue work started last year. Grades 4-6 teams were rebalanced given the cessation of departmentalization and the need to establish cohesive teams. Many of the middle school teachers are new so teams were built based on combinations of experienced and new teachers and perceived skill/interest/personality match. Most teachers were relatively satisfied with their assignments, though

some believe that departmentalization was a better choice for Grades 4 through 6 than the current configuration of every teacher instructing in every content area.

To improve ratings in this area, the school should evaluate its school improvement initiatives to ensure each is effective. Some staff believe there are too many initiatives so this belief should be investigated and addressed. The school should evaluate decisions about departmentalization at the end of the year to ensure the decisions meet the needs of the students. Some practices, such as the length of the school bulletin, need to be evaluated for effectiveness and potentially revised based on feedback. This process will also help to build trust in the idea that feedback is heard and valued.

S-4. School leadership provides teachers with clear feedback on their instructional strengths and challenges, based on multiple sources of data.

Rating: Developing

Expectations. By all accounts, school leadership provides and regularly discusses expectations for instructional effectiveness. Leaders provide multiple examples of effective practice to ensure expectations are clear. Teachers are strongly encouraged to visit classrooms of teachers that employ exemplary practices. However, teachers are not in agreement about the expectations and their relationship to achievement, with many expressing concern that too much focus is placed on lesson planning and not enough on instructional practices.

Feedback. Feedback on look-fors is provided to teachers immediately after informal and formal observations. Teachers often receive “bite-sized” feedback after informal observations and teachers are expected to respond within 24 hours stating how they will use the feedback they received. Respondents reported that some teachers are given some leeway in the amount of time needed to improve while others were not. By all accounts, administrators revisit classrooms to ensure that the feedback is being utilized. Occasionally, administrators provide pictures to document their feedback. Sometimes coaches are asked to help any teacher struggling to implement the feedback. Teachers had mixed reactions to the feedback they have been given. All teachers appreciate the exemplars. However, some teachers reported that their supervisors have no experience in some content areas and give them feedback that is not useful in improving their instruction. Several teachers desired more precise feedback to help them become more expert at their craft, reporting that some of the feedback was either too general or was not focused on instruction but rather on classroom environment.

Fair and accurate. Most teachers felt that the evaluations they receive are fair and accurate though once again, some teachers question the fairness given the perceived lack of content area expertise of their evaluators.

Ratings in this area will improve when all teachers perceive that their evaluations are useful for improving practice and when teachers consistently perceive their evaluations are fair and accurate.

S-5. School leadership allocates the resources necessary to increase student achievement.

Rating: Proficient

Budget development. The budget for the school is allocated based on student needs. Parents and teachers are aware of the budget but are not familiar with how it was developed and reported they had no input.

Resource allocation. School leaders have a formal process for ensuring that budgetary and resource allocation decisions align directly to student achievement goals. Funds were put into place, for example, to allocate paraprofessional time to teachers most in need and to ask coaches to work with those teachers who ask for assistance and those who are struggling. Some teachers questioned whether the huge expenditure on technology was worth the amount of money involved, reporting that they wished instead for more leveled books and other materials. Other teachers were satisfied with the one-to-one device decisions.

Resource acquisition. Some effort has been expended to procure additional funds, especially for technology and PBIS/Bear Paws rewards.

Ratings in this area will increase when school leadership has a comprehensive budgeting process that includes staff and parents or community members in the allocation of resources and when a formal process is in place to ensure that resource allocation decisions align with student achievement goals for all students and subgroups.

S-6. School leadership ensures the effective use of instructional time.

Rating: Proficient

Protection of instructional time. Leaders spent considerable time in developing the block scheduling at the school. Because Wednesdays are late start days, two calendars were created. Lunch was shortened to ensure students received enough minutes of instruction. Passing periods were also reduced to 2 minutes. Minutes were added for mathematics and specials were rearranged to accommodate teacher and student needs. For example, specials were provided first thing in the morning for middle school students to increase attendance and English language development was switched to the end of the day. Teachers were asked to provide input into the schedule and parents reported that they were informed why Wednesday was a late start day and the benefits to their children for having the type of schedule they have. Announcements are streamlined and all field trips have a strictly academic purpose. Breakfast is served in the classroom to enhance efficiency. Most teachers teach bell-to-bell. However, some instructional time is wasted on lengthy transitions and slow-paced instruction.

Monitoring. Instructional time is monitored closely: agendas for classrooms are posted and provided to administrators in advance. Leaders monitor for bell-to-bell instruction.

Improvement in this area will be realized when teachers pace their instruction faster and spend less time on behavior management (which in turn will improve with more engaging activities); and when all teachers teach bell-to-bell with crisp transitions between activities.

S-7. School leadership ensures that all professional development is focused on improving student achievement.

Rating: Proficient

Focus. The focus for professional development this year has been on lesson planning and RtI. Focus areas were selected based on a root cause analysis conducted to address why academic performance goals were not being met. New teachers also receive indepth information about instructional strategies, lesson planning, working with English language learners, and classroom management during a New Teacher Institute. Teachers also attend district workshops once a month, which many do not find useful.

Differentiated. Boston K-8 does not provide differentiated professional development except for new teachers every 6 weeks. Experienced teachers reported that more differentiated training would be helpful since some of their training, especially around learning targets, is very repetitive.

Varied opportunities. Teachers and leaders are provided with multiple opportunities to engage in professional development, including Community of Practice meetings, staff meetings, book study, and classroom visitations. Professional development activities are evaluated using exit tickets and feedback is used to improve the training. For example, teachers requested that a variety of individuals provide professional development so now the assistant principal, principal, and teacher partners facilitate rather than having the principal facilitate all training.

Additional supports. Coaching support is offered in literacy and mathematics. Coaching support has not been evaluated.

Practice in this area will improve when professional development is more highly differentiated based on teacher needs, student achievement data, and educator evaluation data. Professional development should be routinely evaluated for effectiveness in terms of its impact on teacher practice and student achievement.

S-8. *The school leadership team, teachers, and other instructional staff actively engage families as partners in the school and classrooms.*

Rating: *Proficient*

Removal of barriers. Boston K-8 hosts monthly coffee meetings for parents and has changed the focus this year from centering on complaints to emphasizing parent learning. For example, parents were taught about learning targets and why they are used in the classroom. The school also hosts literacy, mathematics, and technology nights and has sponsored a family fitness and fun run. They have had back-to-school events, field days, and a multi-cultural night. This year, the school had a barbeque for parents of children in the middle school to promote family engagement. During the site visit, a Polar Express night was held that was well-attended by students and their families. To encourage family involvement, day care is provided and classes to learn English and how to cook are sponsored. The school has a family liaison this year that is familiar with the families served by the school since she used to be the health paraprofessional. She provides multiple outreach efforts and tries to help parents feel welcome in the school. Before school opened this year, teachers conducted home visits and walked through the communities they serve. This event was considered an eye-opener for some who knew that the students lacked resources, but were unaware of the actual circumstances under which the students live. Parents reported that there has been significant outreach over the past few years and that they appreciate efforts that the school makes to provide translators and to host a multitude of events.

Parent volunteers. The school has about 30 to 60 parent volunteers. Most of the parents volunteer for field trips, though some are regulars and help with crosswalks and the playground. Many parents do not volunteer because they do not want to go through the fingerprinting process at the district.

Parents feel welcome. Parents had mixed reactions to questions about whether they feel welcome at the school. Most parents reported that the office staff is friendlier this year and offers more assistance to them than had been the case in the past. Some parents reported that they do not feel welcome, saying that the principal was not very friendly and did not know their children's names or care very much about the families in the area. These parents reported that they almost never saw the principal and were rarely greeted except by teachers and front office staff when they visit the school.

To improve ratings in this area, the school should continue to work on removing barriers to parent involvement, increase the numbers of parents who are involved as volunteers in the school, and ensure that all parents feel welcome. Parents should be surveyed regarding best times for meetings and events. The school may want to explore non-traditional methods of parent involvement given the high transiency rate and for families who are homeless.

S-9. Administrators, teachers, and other instructional staff provide parents with easy and regular access to information about the school and their children's achievement and progress and provide suggestions for how to help their children increase achievement.

Rating: Approaching Proficient

Access to information. The school provides parents with monthly newsletters available in English and Spanish. There are plans in place to translate the newsletter into Nepalese and Burmese. A new brochure was created to help explain Title I to parents, and telephone communications are made for emergencies and announcements. The school has a website that has parent information and signage outside that advertises events. Teachers send student work home every Friday, with one side of the folder devoted to work samples and the other side to items that require parent signature. Teachers are available to speak with parents as needed, and most parents reported that teachers are accessible. However, parents reported that it was difficult to get an appointment to talk with the principal since she was often too busy. They also said that they do not receive any information on how to help their children to improve, other than to finish their homework. They would like to receive more individualized strategies being sent home.

Reports. Parents receive Friday folders each week and report cards on the district schedule. Parents reported that they can call teachers if they need more information. Most parents were satisfied with the amount of information that they received on their children's progress.

Ratings in this area will improve when all instructional staff let parents know how they can specifically help their children become more successful. Communication should occur in multiple languages.

S-10. Instructional staff actively promote safety and security in the school.

Rating: Developing

Social-emotional supports. The school has implemented PBIS as one form of positive social-emotional support and students enjoy the Bear Paws incentives. Students can receive social-emotional supports

from specialists such as the psychologist and social worker or from Aurora mental health professionals who come to the school twice per week. The school adopted the Caring School Community approach, but by most accounts, the initiative is not being implemented with fidelity. Respondents have concerns about schoolwide discipline. While they believe that discipline has been improved from the past, they noted that disciplinary measures were inconsistently applied, especially in middle school, and no specific programs have been implemented to help students with conflict resolution, suicide prevention, and self-regulation. There are plans to initiate the Signs of Suicide program in the near future. Some respondents reported drug issues in the school: no anti-drug programs are currently in place.

Anti-bullying. Respondents reported that there is widespread bullying at the school and that Boston K-8 does not implement an anti-bullying program though Playworks has been instituted on the playground to address some of the playground issues. Some parents expressed deep concerns about bullying, showing pictures of the bruises that their children had received as a result of bullying on the playground. There have been instances of students physically attacking teachers with little repercussion. Some female students reported inappropriate touching by fellow students. Respondents reported variability in action when bullying is reported.

Abide by safety procedures and rules. The school is vigilant about safety and security procedures, ensuring that visitors sign in and are identified; keeping outside doors locked; and practicing a variety of drills. However, virtually no attention is paid to students running up and down the stairways during passing periods and at the beginning and end of the school day.

To improve in this area, all staff should promote and reinforce schoolwide behavioral expectations and provide positive corrective feedback for students who display negative behavior. Students should be encouraged to model positive behaviors for their peers. More social-emotional supports should be put into place, particularly in the areas of conflict management, drug and alcohol prevention, and suicide prevention. All staff should proactively promote anti-bullying behavior and immediately intervene in bullying situations. The school should consider adopting and immediately implementing an anti-bullying curriculum. Hallways and stairways should be monitored to control student running during passing periods and at the beginning and end of the day.