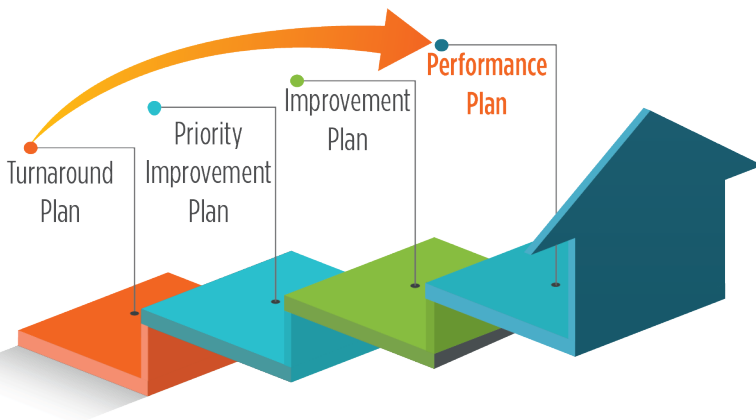







SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT | SUCCESS STORY

“Turnaround” school in Colorado actually turns around... with help from Classroom Instruction That Works

School Performance Framework Plan Types



Services McREL provided to Gilcrest Elementary School:

-  Professional learning in Classroom Instruction That Works
-  Monthly in-school, all-staff refreshers
-  Data analysis designed to directly influence classroom practice

Results: School Performance Soars at Gilcrest Elementary

- School moved from **Turnaround** status to **Performance** status
- **Increased leadership practices** that positively impact student achievement
- Put new **leadership knowledge into action**, using appropriate tools and activities to effectively manage change
- Increased focus on **implementing and sustaining research-based initiatives**

“McREL has enabled us to focus on best practice in instruction. When I came to this school there were a lot of good intentions and a lot of expertise, but a lack of consistency. That’s what the Classroom Instruction That Works model is all about: bringing consistency and best practice to your instruction.”

— Tad McDonald, principal, Gilcrest Elementary School



Rural school surges in state ratings after embracing Classroom Instruction That Works



The Challenge

Rocketing from “turnaround plan” to “performance plan” in Colorado’s School Performance Framework means beating a lot of odds. But that’s what McREL International and Gilcrest Elementary School, located in Colorado’s rural Weld County School District RE-1, accomplished in a partnership that began in 2012.

Forget what John Denver and the X Games have taught you: Gilcrest is in farm country, not ski country, and serves an ethnically mixed student body, 63 percent of whom qualify for subsidized lunches. The faculty’s energy and dedication were never in doubt, yet the school’s standing in the first several state performance releases was grim.

“From 2010 on the state said: You have five years to stop being turnaround, and after that we’re going to do these drastic things to your school—replace the staff, replace the principal, reconstitute the school, turn it into a charter, close it altogether,” said Tad McDonald, principal.

“There were some dire consequences they were using to try and motivate us to do better. Most turnaround schools stay in that status; even with state-level threats they’re unable to make meaningful changes because of all the factors that got them there in the first place. So we’ve broken the mold of the expectations for a turnaround school,” he said.

Strategic Solution

McREL consultant Dr. Bj Stone began visiting Gilcrest monthly to help the staff focus on two pivotal areas: using McREL’s *Classroom Instruction That Works* and related instructional strategies to deliver the state content standards, and tightening up their data analysis.

“The biggest thing that has changed as a result of McREL’s involvement is our teachers’ knowledge of the content standards, because the teachers weren’t sure what exactly they were supposed to teach and to what level. The wording of the standards doesn’t provide descriptions and doesn’t provide examples of what success for students would look like,” said Jennifer Dunlap, the school’s instructional coach.

In addition, McREL’s experience with data analysis helped the staff understand that for classroom interventions to succeed, the timing must be just right.

“Before, when we were analyzing our data, we were waiting until the end of the unit to do a re-teach if the kids didn’t get it. When we were working with Dr. Stone, we said, ‘That’s too late, we need to check in with kids throughout the unit.’ She helped us develop quick checks, a way for teachers to see where kids were in meeting the standards and success criteria. The objectives from Classroom Instruction That Works align to the success criteria,” Dunlap added.

Results

The August 2017 reports revealed Gilcrest’s students attained the highest level of achievement in their history. While the state’s expectation for the top level of performance is 53 percent, Gilcrest Elementary School scored 75.9 percent.

“We have been systematic and conscientious in each of our schools about identifying and teaching the essential standards. The principals are strong instructional leaders focused on developing and sustaining professional learning teams in their schools. I am, indeed, very happy with the growth and results at Gilcrest Elementary School. In fact, the results are incredible,” said Don Rangel, district superintendent.

Especially heartening to instructional coach Dunlap: the biggest gains were clustered in the academic growth measures—a strong indication that the momentum will continue.

“Our achievement scores aren’t as high as we would like them to be yet. The amount of growth that kids are having is what’s pulling our scores up. If the students continue to grow, achievement will continue to improve as well,” she said.

Next Steps

Having already surpassed many “turnaround” schools by ranking high in academic growth several years running, faculty at Gilcrest Elementary now believe top achievement scores are within reach. They plan to continue honing the instructional consistency that Classroom Instruction That Works teaches, as well as the disciplined data analysis taught to them by their McREL consultant.

