

Laura MacArthur Elementary School

727 North Central Avenue

Duluth, MN 55807

Principal: Nathan Glockle

Highlights

- Laura MacArthur Elementary School was identified as a priority school in 2012 because it performed in the lowest 5 percent in the state of Minnesota.
- The school applied for and received a School Improvement Grant (SIG) in September 2012.
- The principal works closely with his staff members, employing a model of collective leadership to make sure every staff member is engaged in the school improvement process.
- The school receives support from the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) and a regional center called the Northern Center of Excellence.
- The principal and the Leadership Team worked together to identify areas of weakness and form a plan for instructional changes, including a focus on differentiated instruction in mathematics.
- The school has demonstrated dramatic improvement as follows:
 - The percentage of students scoring proficient or above on the state mathematics assessment increased from 11 percent in 2011 to 40 percent in 2013.
 - The school's Multiple Measurements Rating (MMR)¹ increased from 3.5 percent in 2012 to 64.9 percent in 2013.

Introduction

Laura MacArthur Elementary School is a PK–5 school located in Duluth, Minnesota, a small city on the shores of Lake Superior. In 2012, Laura MacArthur was identified as a priority school, indicating persistently low performance. That year, its MMR was 3.5 out of 100. The school principal has aimed to turn the school around and lead it toward its goal to “become

- ◆ Grades PK–5
- ◆ 466 Students
- ◆ 77% White
- ◆ 9% Multiracial
- ◆ 6% Native American/Alaska Native
- ◆ 5% Black
- ◆ 2% Hispanic
- ◆ 1% Asian/Pacific Islander
- ◆ 79% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch
- ◆ Schoolwide Title I

¹ The MMR is a statewide rating in Minnesota that encompasses overall student academic proficiency, average rate of academic growth, and achievement gap reduction.

a Reward School² by 2015 and say we did it together.” To work toward this goal, Principal Nathan Glockle has implemented a practice of collective leadership with all staff members in the building; he also has worked closely with MDE and its external partner, the Northern Center of Excellence.

Collective Leadership

Principal Glockle is committed to engaging every staff member in Laura MacArthur’s improvement process and giving them ownership over solving problems. Principal Glockle employs collective leadership at Laura MacArthur: he asks teachers their opinions about goals and needs and then works with them to accomplish their goals for the school. Teachers follow through by creating plans and acting on them, with the principal’s guidance and support. In summer 2012, the Leadership Team wrote both the SIG application and the school improvement plan. The principal provides guidance and support, but he firmly believes that, in order for transformation to happen, solutions and ideas have to come from the staff. In giving problems and challenges over to the staff rather than telling them what to do, it is never a matter of getting “buy-in” from them. With this strategy of strong collective leadership, Principal Glockle believes Laura MacArthur will meet its goal: “to become a Reward School by 2015 and say we did it together.”

Support from the State, the District, and External Partners

MDE and its regional Centers of Excellence work closely to support principals and schools in Minnesota. Because many MDE personnel have curriculum directors’ backgrounds and less content-area expertise, MDE created three regional Centers of Excellence to provide direct, local content-area support to schools. Thus, the Northern Center, the Central Center, and the Southeast/Metro Center were created. Each provides schools with an advocate who leads a team of content specialists in the areas of mathematics, reading, special education, English learners, and implementation science. MDE believes the best way to support and turn around low-performing schools is to engage with them. Establishing close, collaborative relationships with schools and principals has been key to much of the work of MDE and the Centers of Excellence.

MDE and the Northern Center of Excellence provide support and professional development through regular workshops, on-site coaching, and leadership academies. MDE engages SIG principals in workshops and Principal Academies on topics such as using data to improve instruction. The state also provides professional development to the regional Centers; for example, quarterly meetings are held at MDE for Center advocates to ensure direct lines of communication among the state, the regional Centers, and the schools about the specific needs that advocates have identified in their schools. The Northern Center has held events such as a roundtable focused on schools with large numbers of Native American students, a summer leadership event to talk about implementation science, and an English Language Arts workshop conducted by a reading specialist. The Northern Center’s advocate for Laura MacArthur works with Principal Glockle on a weekly

² MDE recognizes top-performing schools across the state, called Reward Schools, based on MMR. Reward Schools are above the 87th percentile.

basis, in person, over the phone, and by email. Because of the close relationship among the school, its advocate, and the team of specialists, the school receives expert-level coaching, technical assistance, and advice on school improvement efforts and best practices.

The district, Duluth Public Schools, has taken an active role in the improvement process. The Northern Center facilitates quarterly meetings with a team of district administrators and personnel, such as their own reading specialist and mathematics specialist. At these meetings, they discuss such topics as the Northern Center’s progress with the schools, how each school is doing, and what issues the district is addressing. Furthermore, Laura MacArthur invites district administrators to its Leadership Team meetings. In this way, both the regional Center and the school make sure that the district is part of the conversation and the school improvement process.

Behavior Standards

Laura MacArthur’s behavior standards earned the school a quick win through implementation of a simple rubric. The Leadership Team decided to implement a behavior improvement plan prior to school improvement plan components such as mathematics or reading. Members of the team examined data from the prior year and noted nearly 30 suspensions. The Leadership Team then defined a new approach for behavior expectations using three key words: *Focused*, *Appropriate*, and *Cooperative*. Students in each classroom created a rubric that defined these behaviors. Now that these standards are in place, if a student misbehaves, adults simply need to ask him or her, “Are you being cooperative right now?” or “Which behavior standard are you not hitting?” Students know exactly what to do. This simple but purposeful rubric (reinforced by “Focused, Appropriate, Cooperative” t-shirts, which students wear with pride), as well as schoolwide adult modeling of acceptable behavior, has led to a much better behavior record. In 2013, there were just 12 suspensions—less than half the number of discipline incidents from the year before the behavior standards were implemented.

Math Talk

Laura MacArthur’s turnaround process has included a Practice Profile called *Math Talk*. The school’s Leadership Team used formative assessments on student progress and success: they began to use data to track every individual student, and they looked for holes in their curriculum. One area of focus they identified was differentiated instruction in mathematics. The team developed a Practice Profile—a rubric to help teachers understand what their classroom instruction should look like—called *Math Talk*. In addition to differentiated instruction, this Practice Profile included mathematics vocabulary and student leaders. Teachers focus on mathematics vocabulary so their students learn how to speak like mathematicians; student leaders stand in front of the class and explain solutions using math language. The Leadership Team and teachers discussed research that showed that students talking about their thinking in mathematics made a considerable difference in understanding, as well as in helping peers who might not be quite “getting it.” A schoolwide effort employs student leaders in mathematics lessons to stand up with a microphone to present their own problem-solving methods. Incorporating more student talk than teacher talk has been an intentional change at Laura MacArthur. Furthermore, the mathematics specialist at the Northern Center of

Excellence coached Principal Glockle by modeling lessons and helping the teachers develop anchor charts delineating key concepts. These are posted in classrooms throughout the year for students to reference.

Continuous Improvement and Success

Laura MacArthur Elementary is in a constant state of improvement and can demonstrate its successes as a result. Principal Glockle, his Leadership Team, and all of the staff at Laura MacArthur are committed to following a Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) process. They work as a team, examining data and planning important next steps. Then, they follow through on the planned actions. Next, they examine the results to determine what did and did not work. Finally, they act on and apply those strategies. Principal Glockle views this process as successful; both teachers and students work in an environment in which improvement is a daily expectation. Teachers did not use data before; now they do on a regular basis to examine how they need to instruct differently. Teachers know they cannot go back to old methods because they have seen so many successes in following the PDSA process.

Laura MacArthur's success is evidenced by the numbers and by the changes in school strategies. In mathematics, state assessment scores increased from 11 percent of students proficient in 2011 to 40 percent in 2013. Laura MacArthur's MMR rating went from 3.5 out of 100 in 2012 to 64.9 in 2013—a vast improvement, based on student academic proficiency, average rate of growth, and achievement gap reduction. In 2012, the school was in the bottom 5 percent in the state in closing an achievement gap; in 2013, it was in the top 1 percent. Finally, the Focus Rating, which looks at students across the country who traditionally struggle the most in school—students of color and students living in poverty—increased from 7.0 out of 100 in 2012 to 96.5 in 2013.