

Centennial Elementary, Denver, CO

Strong classroom culture supports significant growth in reading proficiency and high-quality student work

District Profile

Centennial Elementary School partnered with EL Education in 2013 with a commitment to implementing the full EL Education model, including character education, challenging academics, and learning expeditions based on EL Education's gold-standard open-source literacy curriculum. Over four years, the school has demonstrated steady growth in EL Education's three dimensions of student achievement:

- » Mastery of Knowledge and Skills
- » Character
- » High-Quality Student Work

Centennial is one of 197 schools in the Denver Public Schools, with more than 400 students in grades PK-5. In 2015-16, the student body was 61% Latino, 33% White, 2.7% multi-racial, 1.2% Asian, 1% Native American, and .7% Black. Sixty percent of students were economically disadvantaged, 11% were English Language Learners, and 15% received special education services.

Implementation of the EL Education Model

With the guidance of EL Education coaches, leaders at Centennial worked to create a culture in which students would love learning and find meaning and purpose in the work they do in school. They changed the daily schedule so that grade level teams shared an 80-minute block of collaborative planning time, provided professional development on strategies for student-engaged assessment, and adopted EL Education's literacy curriculum—first in grades 3-5, and then in all grades (K-5).

The EL Education ELA curriculum teaches students how to collaborate with each other and gives them many opportunities to ask questions and answer them with evidence. “When students, especially English Language



High-quality work from the EL Education ELA second-grade curriculum module: The Secret World of Pollination.

Learners, get grounded in one topic for a long time and learn the vocabulary deeply, it gives them real confidence and develops their social skills so they can talk about it, teach about it, and be an expert,” says K-1 teacher and coach Monica Osborn.

Over time, engagement strategies enabled more students to ask questions, stay on task and contribute to classroom discussion (*see Chart 1*).

“Improving the classroom culture throughout the school and building students' growth mindset really created a foundation for success,” according to Becky Martinez, the school's EL Education coach. Once teachers saw how much students wanted to learn and what they were capable of, they got even more excited about showcasing student work. Then they began to enhance the modules so that student work would benefit a real audience. For example, third grade teachers teaching a module called “Overcoming Learning Challenges Near and Far” invited a professional artist to teach students how to design bookmarks that were both beautiful

and functional. Students added a service component to the product. They sold their bookmarks at a local coffee house, raising funds for books that will be sent to a Denver shelter for homeless women and children. Centennial has begun a digital portfolio of high-quality student work based on the modules, which can be viewed here: bit.ly/HQWCentennial

“EL took the time to help us really change our teaching practices and school structures, first in baby steps and then in great strides.”

Laura Munro, principal

Results

Centennial reports that students are taking greater ownership of their learning and their character, producing high-quality work, and becoming better readers and writers.

In 2014-2015, just 15.9% of students in grades 4 and 5 were meeting or exceeding proficiency expectations (Levels 4 and 5) on the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessment. In 2015-16, reading proficiency rose to more than 33% in grades 4 and 5—a 17.4 percentage point gain. Denver Public Schools scores rose just 3.9 percent, and Colorado scores remained roughly the same in comparison (see Chart 2).

Based on these results, leaders enlarged their implementation of the EL Education ELA curriculum to include all grades (K-5) in 2016-17.

Voluntarily Asking Questions



Working with Materials



Strong Contributions to Classroom Dialogue

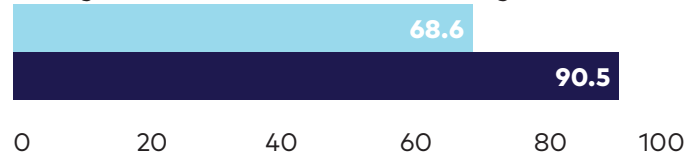


CHART 1: Percentage of Centennial classrooms showing strong student engagement

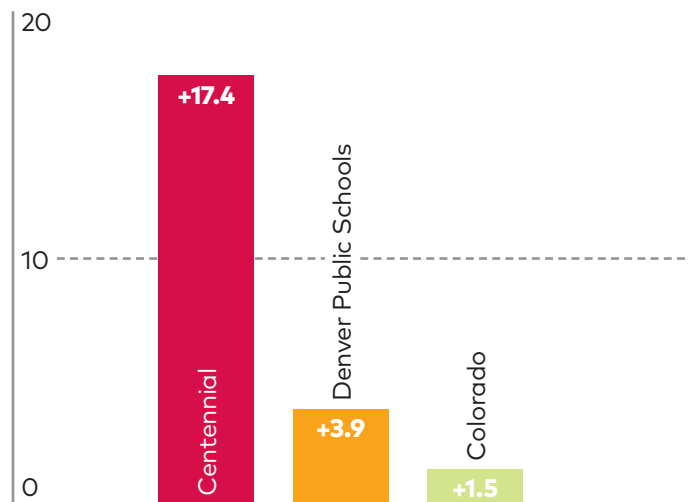


CHART 2: Percentage point gain in students meeting or exceeding proficiency expectations on the PARCC assessment from 2014-2015 to 2015-2016 (grades 4 and 5).