CASE is fortunate to serve an impressive and diverse group of public school administrators who are dedicated to ensuring the learning and success of students. In Communication Matters, we’ll be highlighting the good work that is occurring in schools and districts across the state, and also sharing other news and opportunities of interest to members. If you have a suggestion about a school, district, or CASE member that we should feature in this standing communication, please email CASE Communications Specialist, Elisa Wiseman at ewiseman@co-case.org. For a complete list of former Spotlight Stories, click here.

Spotlight On: Aragon Elementary School’s Cultural Shift and Responsive Classroom Implementation

Aragon Elementary School in Fountain Fort Carson is a pretty different school today than it was even just a year ago—it isn’t just that behavior issues are down; students are coming in more engaged and ready to be a part of their community than ever before. And Principal Tracey Landrum credits Responsive Classroom, a teaching model she implemented this year, with a lot of the positive atmosphere she’s seeing so far.

“Responsive Classroom is every good training I’ve been to wrapped up in one bow,” she said.

Landrum, who’s been at Aragon Elementary for nine years—seven as principal—was first introduced to Responsive Classroom 12 years ago, when she taught in District 49. She wanted to introduce it at Aragon to try and keep students engaged and to reduce necessary disciplinary measures in the building.
“Last year, we hit a cap of behavior [issues] and interruptions. Students were not really buying into the idea of being in their classrooms,” she said. “The building has a great community with the adults but kids just weren’t digging it. So, I asked my boss if my assistant principal and I could go to the Responsive Classroom training two years ago, the summer of 2017, and we did a four-day course.”

The Responsive Classroom Course for Elementary Educators is taught by The Center for Responsive Schools. The program focuses on greater teacher effectiveness, improved school climate, engaging academics and developmentally responsive teaching. Those goals are catalyzed every morning, with each classroom running a Morning Meeting, comprised of four parts.

They start off with a greeting. Students sit in a circle, and through some sort of game, they greet one another. One classroom, for example, played a game where everybody looked at the floor, and on the count of three, tried to make eye contact with somebody else in the circle. If they were successful, those who made eye contact run to the middle of the circle, high five, and the game starts over again.

Next, every kid shares something with their peers. It could be something they learned the previous day in school, or something they’re looking forward to. Maybe one day they share what they ate for breakfast, or their favorite movies.

“It’s part of building that community and learning about each other,” Landrum said. “Kids are starting to feel more comfortable, plus, we’re learning things about families that might need more support.”

After sharing, they’ll partake in some sort of game or activity. It could be tied to academics, and whatever they’re learning at the moment, or it could be a game—either way, Landrum
said, the goal is to keep it interactive and fun, but also build perseverance among students.

The final component is a morning message from the teacher. Written on chart paper, the morning message will set a sort of mission for the day, and helps tie academics and community together, trying to proactively address any discipline problems. They'll shout out birthdays, make any schedule changes clear to the group, and challenge students to think about whatever they're currently learning in new and different ways.

Morning meetings and Responsive Classroom methods aren't just for the students. Landrum said she runs her staff meetings now according to Responsive Classroom guidelines, so her staff can experience that process just like their students.

“We’re a Title I school with 80 percent free and reduced lunch. Our behavior support calls last year, we were probably at 300-plus in the first quarter. We’re down to less than 100 per quarter now because kids are wanting to stay in their classrooms, or we’re able to respond faster and help process faster to get them back in class,” she said. “We really believe in it, and the culture change for students has been a 180.”

**Participate in the READ Plan Survey**

Earlier last month, CDE launched a READ plan survey to get feedback on the implementation experiences of educators, school and district leaders, and parents. The results of the survey will help inform the READ Plan Working Group’s recommendations. They are charged with reviewing the creation and use of READ plans under the READ Act, and will make recommendations for improvement to the State Board of Education and the education committees of the House of Representatives and the Senate in 2020.

The survey will be open until February 8, 2019. Please click here to participate.

If you have any questions, please reach out to Melissa Colsman, Associate Commissioner of Student Learning, at 303-866-6737, or colsman_m@cde.state.co.us.

**Recent NCES data: Colorado and U.S. average graduation rate – Colorado is below the U.S. average in all categories**

A recent National Center for Education Statistics report using U.S. Census data indicated that Colorado’s four-year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (the percentage of public high school freshmen who graduate with a regular diploma within 4 years of starting 9th grade) for 2015-16 is below the U.S. average in all categories.

The Colorado School Finance Project created a chart illustrating the graduation gaps between Colorado and the U.S. average. Click here to view it.
CSFP also passed along two recent articles of interest that dive deeper into this data:

Does money matter for schools? Why one researcher says the question is ‘essentially settled’ (Chalkbeat, December 2018)

The school improvement gains nobody’s talking about (Future Ed, December 2018)

The CASE 2019 Winter Leadership Conference is next week!

The 2019 CASE Winter Leadership Conference is next week from Wednesday, February 6 to Friday, February 8 in Westminster, Colorado. We’re so looking forward to what should be a great event, full of effective professional learning, strong networking and key legislative and policy updates.

CASE was pleased to share earlier this week that Governor Jared Polis will be joining us in Westminster on Friday during our Legislative and Policy Issues session to share with our attendees his vision and priorities for public education in Colorado.

If you haven’t yet registered but would like to attend, there are a limited number of spots still available. Please click here to register today.

Please note that the CASE office will be closed during that time. If you need to reach a CASE staff member, we encourage you to email that person directly, or email the CASE inbox at case@co-case.org.