

COLORADO TRAILBLAZER SCHOOL TO WATCH



La Junta Middle School



Designated in 2009

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2008-09 School Statistics

(Source: Colorado Department of Education end of year report.)

Community: rural community of 7,500
Enrollment: 285
Grade Levels: 6, 7, 8
School Schedule: traditional

Student Demographics

53%	Hispanic
43%	White
2%	African American
2%	Asian
65%	Free/Reduced Lunch
1%	English Learners

2006 AYP: 29 of 30 targets met
2007 AYP: 29 of 30 targets met
2008 AYP: 29 of 30 targets met

School Characteristics and Replicable Practices

Academic Excellence

- We have a split reading/writing curriculum with one class period devoted to each subject. Explicit reading instruction is focused on four components: guided reading, shared reading, read-aloud, and independent reading. Writing uses the Writer's Workshop format to teach units of study that build from the exploration of professional work in a given genre to student publishing of their own work in that genre.
- A newly implemented split math curriculum allows spiraling of concepts for those who need that support. This is coupled with an extra class period of targeted instruction that is closely collaborated with the universal classroom for those who need that extra level of support.
- In the areas of reading and math we use a body of evidence to place students into three tiers of classes; universal, targeted, and intensive. Our class placements are fluid and with progress monitoring, changes to student schedules occur as they experience success. We are currently planning the implementation of targeted science classes for next year. Placement in all of these classes is based on student assessment data, not labels.
- We have vertical collaboration through departmental PLC meetings which are held weekly.
- Over the last two years LJMS staff have been involved in training on best practices, curriculum development and alignment, cultural studies, and pacing guide development.

Developmental Responsiveness

- Our students participate in a daily Advisor/Advisee program.
- Each grade level team implements at least one interdisciplinary unit each year.
- We have horizontal collaboration through grade level PLC meetings held every week.
- LJMS has a full selection of enrichment classes, clubs, and sports programs.
- Families are involved in academic and behavior decisions about their student.
- We have a full time counselor who is actively involved with the grade level PLC meetings. These SST (student support team) meetings focus on ideas for interventions with struggling students. True to the Rtl model, approximately 80% of these issues can be solved in the SST without involving the school's problem solving team (PST).
- We strive to use engaging best practices as much as possible. Our desire is to have active, busy-sounding classrooms, not quiet ones.

Social Equity

- Highly integrated paraprofessionals allow special needs students to have greater access to the universal classroom setting.
- All classrooms are equipped with teaching technology such as LCD projectors, optical document readers, and smartboards. We have a mobile laptop lab, a general use computer lab, and a computer lab dedicated to teaching technology classes for all 3 grade levels.
- Our Mariachi Band and Drum Circle classes have exploded with participation, bringing musical opportunities and cultural insights to many students.
- Our gifted learners are identified and have ALPs (advanced learning plans) designed to support their learning needs.
- Student support teams meet weekly to discuss ways of supporting all students with either academic or behavior challenges.
- During parent/teacher conferences the community is invited to a free dinner and babysitting is provided to help make the event accessible to all. The county health department also attends to provide family support information and health information to parents.
- We have five staff members who can interpret Spanish for those parents who need the assistance.
- The staff is completing a book study on understanding poverty which gives us insights into the generational poverty that is prevalent in our area.
- Participation in intervention classes is based on student skill levels, not on labels. These classes serve any student that needs the support.

Organizational Support

- The building leadership team, department teams, and grade level teams all have scheduled time with administrators to focus on various barriers and solutions to student achievement. These teams have a voice in whether to add, delete, or modify the programs and practices of the school.
- La Junta Middle School seeks out and connects with other high quality schools to spur on our own growth.
- Administration supports and encourages teachers to engage their students, including all the productive noise and messiness that results from students who are excited about learning.
- Grade level teams have flexibility with their budgets and can work together on their priorities. The entire building is often quite frugal and remaining budget monies are spent on building-wide needs that the staff also has a hand in identifying.
- With the opportunities in PLC to review student achievement data, teachers have begun to "own their data" and their personal investment in their students has increased.
- La Junta Middle School has a close relationship with our BOCES (board of cooperative educational services) and we use their knowledge, abilities, and staff to help us grow and provide for our students.
- We have a School Resource Officer in our building halftime and he assists with teaching students about the law and consequences along with handling referrals to law enforcement.
- The district has early release Wednesdays which allow time for staff development at a district and building level.