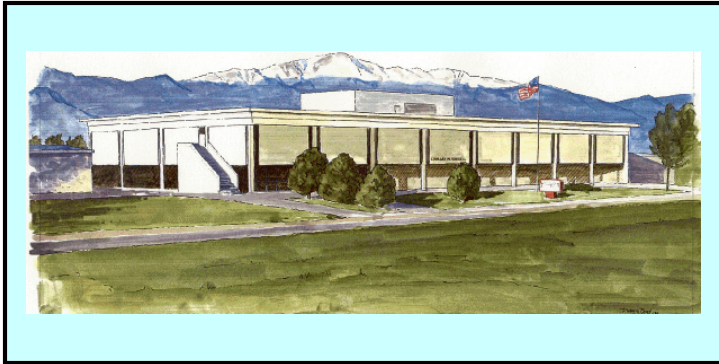


COLORADO TRAILBLAZER SCHOOL TO WATCH



Charles M. Russell Middle School *Of the Performing Arts and Science*



Designated in 2008

Charles M. Russell Middle School
of the Performing Arts & Science
Colorado Springs School District #11
El Paso County, Colorado
Jeanice Kerr Swift, Principal
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2005-07 School Statistics

(Source: District enrollment data and Colorado Department of Education)

Community: Located in the city of Colorado Springs with an urban population of diverse students

Enrollment: 830 students

Grade Levels: 6th, 7th, & 8th

School Schedule: Traditional schedule

Student Demographics

19% Hispanic
67% White
10% African American
2% American Indian
2% Asian

38% Free/Reduced Lunch
5% English Learners

2005 AYP: Met 35 of 36 achievement targets
(Missed one indicator in reading)

2006 AYP: Met 34 of 36 achievement targets
(Missed one indicator in reading)

2007 AYP: Met 40 of 40 achievement targets

School Characteristics and Replicable Practices

Academic Excellence

- **School Performing Arts and Science Focus** - As a school of performing arts and science, we are deeply committed to the exploration of art and science as complimentary opportunities for students to engage in rich, meaningful, hands-on learning across all content areas. We strive to examine everything in our curriculum through both an art (creative) and a science (inquiring) lens, understanding that this framework elevates the quality of all our learning.

- **Enrichment/Intervention Classes** - The enrichment/intervention hour, the fifth CORE class of the day, is an additional time leveraged to support students in meeting rigorous academic standards; flexible scheduling allows students to participate in intervention math or reading support, *Advanced Performance by Design*, enrichment reading, or advanced reading in order to match individual needs with students' particular learning profile.
- **Student Portfolios** -Students develop and maintain a personal student portfolio; this serves as a collection of their best work, an indicator of growth over time, and as a data folder showcasing their personal achievement data.
- **RMS Common Writing Rubric** -Students assess their own and others' written work in content and exploratory classes; in particular, students become proficient in using the RMS common writing rubric to evaluate their own and others' extended writing pieces.
- **Performing Arts and Exploratory Classes** - Across the performing arts and exploratory classrooms, students dive into their learning through a variety of "hands-on" activities. Whether building a race car in *Gateway*, learning ballet in our beautiful dance studio, composing original music in the piano lab, or developing a duet comedy in drama class, students are excited about their learning at Russell Middle.
- **Performing Arts Connection** - As a school of the performing arts, RMS offers a rich, arts-infused, middle school learning experience designed to create and feed a lifelong passion for learning and the arts. The arts teach self-discipline, reinforce self-esteem, and foster the thinking skills and creativity so valued in the workplace.
- **RACE Short-Constructed Response Format** -In all content-area classrooms, students utilize a common instructional format for short-constructed written responses - **RACE** - as well as a common extended written response rubric. Through this common instructional approach around written language across all contents, students practice, master, and showcase high levels of written performance and all content- area teachers use the same vocabulary.
(Continued)
- **Advanced Performance by Design** -In RMS *Advanced Performance by Design* classes, students are given "guiding questions to explore" and then receive a menu that includes approximately 150 different ways to demonstrate their knowledge of the question. Students explore their learning and develop a product in the way they feel they can best express what they have learned.
- **Study Island** -An additional tool for providing time to meet rigorous standards is *Study Island*, an online program that provides additional practice and reinforcement with standards in an interactive, online format; in particular, this tool helps students prepare for standardized testing. Students may access this tool at home or at school and teachers receive data reports to better understand how students are progressing.

- **Gateway to Technology** - *Gateway to Technology* is a cutting-edge pre-engineering program that provides project-based learning, addressing the interests and energy of our middle school students while incorporating national standards in math, science, and technology.
- **Response to Intervention** - Teams monitor student progress regularly through an imbedded *Response to Intervention* process; teaching teams provide real-time problem-solving protocol including "root cause" analysis to ensure that all students have the supports they need to meet or exceed academic standards.
- **Comprehensive Interventions** - RMS has a comprehensive three-tiered intervention school-wide program. Students who are not yet scoring proficient in reading and/or math, have additional daily research-based intervention classes. These classes focus on practice, review, and enrichment. This additional class features research-based methods and strategies such as SuccessMaker math, *LANGUAGE!*, Jamestown Reading, or READ XL. Data is collected and reported on these students weekly.

Developmental Responsiveness

- **Russell ROCKS! Positive Behavior Support Initiative** - Russell Middle School has implemented a Positive Behavior Supports acronym to embrace our CORE values; all students and staff know and use the *Russell ROCKS* theme daily to reinforce the positive values of Respect, Ownership, Choice, Knowledge, and Safety. Daily morning Raider Reflection announcements reinforce these themes as well. The ROCKS focus provides a vehicle for all of RMS students and staff to use the same vocabulary for positive behavior.
- **Creativity and Inquiry** - As a performing arts and science school, our teachers focus learning around dual perspectives of deep understanding - creativity and inquiry. Whether a student is investigating a math concept, composing a song on piano, or designing a project in technology class, these "two doors" into understanding provide deep and powerful connections for all our learning together at RMS.
- **Performing Arts Electives Program** - At RMS, our rich performing arts electives motivate students to develop their own interests, discover their unique identity, and learn what they are good at. When students pursue their love of dance, choir, instrumental music, percussion or forensics, they naturally challenge themselves and clearly set high goals for their individual and collective performance.
- **Gifted and Talented Programming** - Advanced Performance By Design (APXD), our RMS Gifted and Talented program, fosters curiosity, exploration, and creativity at high levels for students identified as gifted and talented; students pursue their learning around global themes such as: Change, Conflict, Courage, and so on.

- **BIO Support** -The Behavior Intervention Opportunity (BIO) room is a place where students with difficulties can get immediate help; students are coached in self-monitoring strategies. They are provided with time-out opportunities and behavior instruction by a trained, experienced behaviorist. Students may self-select or be referred by a teacher to the BIO room for assistance.
- **WhyTry Program** consists of visual analogies with solutions and questions written around each picture to help our students gain insight into how to deal with daily challenges. The goal of the WhyTry Program helps youth answer the question, "Why Try in Life?" The program teaches that trying hard in life and putting effort into challenges at home, at school, and with peers is worth the effort. Making good decisions can be difficult, doing so results in more opportunity, freedom, and self-respect. This program is facilitated by the RMS Counseling Team, particularly through the Social Work/Counselor to students who are recommended for this group.
- **Student-Led Portfolio Conferences** - All RMS students are trained to facilitate their own parent/teacher conference, showcasing their personal portfolio, discussing achievement, and setting short and long term goals for learning.
- **"Take 10 With the Principal"** -Parents are invited and encouraged to participate in a monthly drop-in forum with the principal; parents may bring questions, comments, ideas, and concerns to the table in an informal setting.
- **Co-Curricular Activities** - Russell offers a wide variety of age-appropriate co-curricular activities including: *Art Club, Battle of the Books, Cup-Stacking Club, Elite Repertory Dance, Forensics, Honor Choir, LEGO League, MESA (Mathematics, Engineering, Science, and Achievement), National Junior Honor Society, REACH (Reaching for Excellence in Academics, Cooperation, and Honors), Student Council, and Young Astronauts.*
- **Intramurals** -Students have a range of intramural opportunities to choose from throughout the school year including 3-on-3 basketball, badminton, floor hockey, and weight lifting.
- **Athletics** - Russell students enjoy age-appropriate sports activities such as: *Boys' and Girls' Track, Boys' and Girls' Basketball, Wrestling, Club and Interscholastic Volleyball.*
- **Exploratory and Performing Arts** - Rich opportunities for exploratory, elective and performing arts learning include: *Visual Art, Band, Choir, Computers, Dance, Drama, Forensics/Speech, Gateway to Technology, Industrial Technology, Music Appreciation, Orchestra, Percussion, Piano Lab/Theory, Physical Education, Spanish, SuccessMaker Math, and Yearbook.* Arts classes are performance grouped (across grade levels) to provide for enhanced skill progression.

Social Equity

- **Russell R.O.C.K.S.** - Russell R.O.C.K.S., our schoolwide positive behavior supports program, emphasizes and rewards the values of **R**espect, **O**wnership, **P**ositive **C**hoices, **K**nowledge, and **S**afety; students earn ROCKS tickets throughout each school day for contributing positively to the school in a variety of ways. Students may "cash in" the ROCKS tickets for a variety of bonuses throughout their school day.
- **Response to Intervention and Problem-Solving Process** - At RMS, we do not use a "wait-to-fail" approach. Our *Response to Intervention* is a systemic approach to ensure that students have academic and behavioral supports as soon as they need them; each small team, with the support of administrators and counselors, facilitate problem-solving processes when students show signs of underperformance. Problem-solving teams develop interventions, collect data, and refine student plans for success in a proactive process.
- **Comprehensive Intervention Classes** - All students not yet scoring proficient participate in math and/or reading intervention classes to support their growth toward grade-level proficiency; students continue to participate in their grade-level math and language arts classes as well. Real-time student data is reported to the teacher and principal on intervention students weekly. Data is collected so that students may move in and out of the intervention help as their individual learning needs dictate.
- **RMS Three-tiered Response to Instructional Model** - CORE instruction is organized into a three-tier RtI model - featuring Universal, Strategic, and Intensive tiers to meet student learning needs; achievement data is used to move students across tiers when needed based on their response to instruction over time.
- **Performing Arts Groups** - The RMS daily schedule is designed so that students in 6th, 7th, & 8th grade may be grouped by performance level into their performing arts and exploratory classes; highly talented students may participate in top performing groups over the full school year in their areas of concentration - band, orchestra, voice, dance, drama, visual art, or forensics.
- **Russell V.I.P. Honor Card** - At RMS, students are recognized for their good citizenship and grades; students maintaining an A/B average with strong citizenship are awarded the "V.I.P." status; this designation entitles students to a variety of "perks" during the school day including early entrance to school in the morning, priority dismissal for lunch, and other bonuses each day.

- **Russell "Rockin' Raider Café" Award Lunches** - A monthly reward luncheon is offered to a variety of students from each grade level team; students are selected for the "Rockin' Luncheon" by their teaching team for their top performance, significant improvement, or just simply their hard work. Students winning the luncheon are allowed to invite a friend and they receive table service from the Assistant Principals, teachers, and Principal. As they sip sparkling cider from plastic champagne glasses and have their lunch served by teachers and administrators, we all celebrate their success.
- **REACH Program** - "Your Name in Lights" - An important piece of RMS culture is the REACH Assembly program where students are honored for their academic and behavioral achievement. The REACH committee of kids designs an assembly around a theme and uses this format to honor students for their participation in extra-curricular activities as well as academic and behavioral success.
- **Academic Awards Ceremonies** - Spring academic awards ceremonies are a wonderful culmination to the school year; students achieving a 3.5 or above are awarded with Olympic-style academic medals. Many students have the goal of collecting the set of "all three years" of these coveted awards.
- **Behavior Intervention Opportunity (BIO)** - Students may self-select or be directed by a staff member to receive additional behavior support through the BIO room. This time-out and redirection facility is a place where students may experience real-time support with behavior difficulties and regroup in order to reenter classes as quickly as possible.
- **Progressive Discipline Model** - Teachers, counselors, and administrators use a progressive discipline model featuring ongoing contact with parents to leverage the discipline process toward behavioral success. There is emphasis on the "teachable moment" in the discipline interaction.

Organizational Support

- **Team Leadership Group** - The team leaders group at RMS functions "out front" in the change process to move the school forward; they communicate with their teams and bring issues to the table. The posture of this group is one of ongoing communication, problem-solving, and continuous improvement.
- **Teacher Leadership** - Leadership capacity is distributed widely within the RMS organization. Many teachers participate in a variety of leadership roles and the staff has remained stable over the years. Teams function at high levels so that energy is directed toward school improvement.

- **Content Goal Teams** - In content goal teams, teachers go deep into their subject-related professional growth; they regularly examine data together, adapt new teaching techniques, and share in their ideas for "turning kids on" to learning in their respective content areas. A dynamic synergy exists in these teams who work together in common content endeavors.
- **Team Leadership** - By working in effective teaching teams, there exists a collective leadership force in the building with a critical mass of energy for school improvement. On RMS teams, every voice is heard and together, we work through problems, create and plan for student success.
- **Math and Reading Interventionists** -Reading and Math intervention specialists (housed on each grade level team at RMS) play a unique role in their ability to identify learning gaps and actively nurture academic growth. Their results in significantly improved reading and math achievement demonstrate their collective will to persevere and overcome learning obstacles.
- **Common Learning Expectations** - In order to facilitate parent engagement in our students' meeting learning goals, RMS has implemented "common learning expectations" in literacy and math. Parents come to understand simple school wide guidelines such as: *all students carry a novel to every class every day and are expected to read at least 30 minutes per school evening or all students will complete the Math Mates spiraling curriculum activity once per week every week.* These common expectations help us "wrap parents into" the process of meeting student achievement goals.
- **Data, Data, Data** -Russell Middle School operates as a data-rich environment. Much like looking into a mirror, we regularly view our collective data together. Whether we are celebrating improvement or examining what we call our "Russell Realities," analyzing data in a non-threatening setting is our ongoing practice. Examples of data we see often include weekly and quarterly reports from intervention classes, MAP and CSAP data.
- **Principal** - It is the principal's job to hold the school-improvement enterprise together; through day-to-day interactions in the building and weekly sit-down meetings with every team, communication is open and school improvement efforts move forward.
- **Content Team Retreats** - Content teams learn together throughout the year; annually they spend a day together in retreat. Developing in-depth connections around subject-specific learning proves a valuable experience for these teams.
- **Second Planning Each Day** - Teachers have a team planning time each day as a fixed space for interaction with team mates, reflection on practice, and learning from each other.