

COLORADO TRAILBLAZER SCHOOL TO WATCH



Polaris Expeditionary Learning School



Designated in 2016;

Polaris Expeditionary Learning School • Poudre School District • Larimer County • Colorado • Principal Joe Gawronski • 1905 Orchard Pl • Fort Collins • Phone (970)488-8260
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2015 School Statistics

(Source: Colorado Dept. of Education)

Community: Suburb
Enrollment: 382
Grade Levels: K-12: 100% School of Choice Program
School Schedule: Varies by grade levels

Student Demographics

87% White
9% Hispanic
1% African American
3% Two or More

36% Free/Reduced Lunch
0% English Learners
13% Mobility Rate

CDE Performance Indicators	% of Targets Met
Academic Achievement	79.2% --- Meets
Academic Growth	83.3% --- Meets
Academic Growth Gaps	78.1% --- Meets
PWR	91.7% --- Exceeds

School Characteristics and Replicable Practices

Academic Excellence / Polaris ELS

- Teachers use high quality work exemplars to have students identify success criteria for learning targets.
- Students are given the opportunity to master material through Standards Based Teaching, Learning and Reporting Framework.
- Students are given the opportunity to revise assignments to reach a desired score.
- Students write academic goals in core areas and monitor these goals related to learning targets and answering essential questions.
- Student Led Conferences are held twice a year, with a focus on establishing short-term and long-term academic performance goals involving parents, students, and teachers.
- Students participate in Celebrations of Learning each semester, where community members, mentors and parents are invited to see students share their work.

- All students participate in experiential learning day-long Field Work opportunities out in the community every semester, these are designed to give students a hands-on experience.
- Students have the opportunity to advance in math by attending geometry, algebra, or trigonometry in our high school wing.
- Cross-curricular projects are common: examples include a GIS carbon footprint survey coupled with a research paper about an environmental concern, as well as the study of colonization and its implications matched with a reading of *The Martian Chronicles*.
- Curricular concepts are showcased each year in our digital portfolio process as well as our 8th grade Presentations of Learning, where each student shares with a committee of community members, teachers, and parents.
- Students engage in peer critique sessions frequently in order to share their own understanding of a target.
- Students are consistently asked to engage in creating success criteria and related rubrics in relation to the learning target.
- Teachers use differentiation strategies on a regular basis to help scaffold as well as provide extensions.
- Celebrations of Learning allow students to experience an authentic presentations and assessment experience as they explain their growth over time to committee panelists.
- Students use Portfolios to drive their Presentations of Learning. Each student must select at least five of our nine Global Learning Targets in which they have collected evidence. Students can identify a tenth Global Learning Target of their choosing if none of the other nine meet their Portfolio needs.
- Student Led Conferences are held twice a year and are focused around a portfolio of student selected work, goal setting and reflection.
- Students use a Problem Solving Process wherein they have the opportunity to problem-solve with the teacher and re-enter the classroom as quickly as possible. Because of this, our office referral rate is very low.
- Social skills groups, Speak Up, Gifted & Talented, and other groups meet regularly during lunch or CREW to ensure students' needs are met while still allowing them to be involved in their academics.
- Students can meet with their teacher by appointment during lunch.
- Students have the opportunity to dialogue with their teachers through Google classroom and get quick feedback.
- Our resource teacher, as well as two interns from CSU, push into classes on a daily basis to provide targeted support to students.
- Our CREW structure provides two periods weekly focused on students getting academic support.
- Students have the elective option of a Study Skills class that meets daily.
- The entire middle school team meets weekly to discuss learning as well as supports for particular students through our MTSS process.
- As a whole, teachers in Polaris participate each semester in Instructional Rounds, where they have the opportunity to visit a colleague's classroom- this is done with a partner so the two teachers can debrief and discuss application of learnings.

Developmental Responsiveness / Polaris ELS

- Students in grades 6 – 8 are assigned to a CREW class. When they enter into 6th grade their CREW teacher is assigned and they stay with that instructor for the remainder of middle school.
- Polaris has a full time counselor for 230 K-8 students. With the counselor's assistance they begin their ICAP process in 6th grade.
- In the second week of each school year the middle school students participate in a school-wide Fieldwork Day that's meant to address team-work, communication skills and "ice-breaker" activities.

- All students entering the 6th grade are required to take Discovery in the first semester as an elective. In Discovery the content focuses on communication skills, conflict resolution, team-building and school-wide behavioral expectations.
- Problem Solving Reflection Forms are used to help students understand and take ownership for their actions. These are reviewed and discussed with the teacher that required the form to be completed. Teachers use tech tools like Edulastic and Google Classroom to engage students in the process of identifying their own strengths and weakness so they can better identify personal goals for themselves.
- To support our middle school students' inquiry into the Middle East conflict investigation they have visited CSU's Islamic Center and the associated Mosque during Fieldwork this year.
- To support CDE's Language Arts standards middle school students have gone to an assisted living complex to interview the elderly. They captured the interviews on audio and then take that information to write edited versions of their personal histories. These will be shared with the families of those being interviewed and the students will also present at our Celebration of Learning.
- Students often tackle real-life problems at the middle school level through their own STEM Symposium focus areas.
- Gifted and Talented students are provided opportunities to participate in a variety of career exploration mini units which include hands on demonstrations and field trips out in the community.
- During first quarter of this year our Polaris students interacted with over 50 community organizations and/or field experts both in and out of the school setting (this encompasses K-12 data).
- Projects and research are designed to be shared with a wider audience with the intention of creating change in the community or world.
- These curricular concepts are showcased each year in our digital portfolio process as well as our 8th grade Presentations of Learning, where each student shares with a committee of community members, teachers, and parents.
- During Intensive Weeks students select their top four choices from 12-14 options each Intensive Week (please refer to the data portion of this application for more insights into their options).
- STEM Symposium topics are all student driven.
- Students in Social Studies are allowed to choose a social issue of their choice to do a thorough investigation and report on.
- Students reflect upon their personal and academic learning experiences through the digital Portfolio process.
- Students pose many questions as they engage in peer critique feedback sessions where they are asked to make comments that are kind, specific, and helpful.
- Students don't participate in parent-teacher conferences, they take the lead in their Student-Led Conferences.
- Our focus area is currently on Student-Engaged Assessment Practices, which includes, but is not limited to, students creating various rubrics across content areas.
- In first quarter of this year we had over 65 parent volunteers contribute in one form or another across our K-12 community.
- Students in the Music Ambassador Intensive were made up of a wide background of musical ability, nonetheless, all were able to perform at Denver Children's Hospital at the end of the week.
- The students who get top priority for Intensive selections are those who meet the parameters set forth by the "Good Attendance Incentive" policy. Those with excellent attendance get their top choice.

Social Equity / Polaris ELS

- Polaris has no "honors/PreAP" courses nor do we have any remedial tracks. Students and families can request our Study Skills class if they would like extra support.
- Our Professional Learning Community (PLC), grade level teams and RtI all provide students support in a proactive manner, for example, our Student Success Team meetings and use of the Levels of Support data to impact/drive instruction.

- Social skills groups, Speak Up, Gifted & Talented, and other groups meet regularly during lunch or CREW to ensure students' needs are met while still allowing them to be involved in their academics.
- Our resource teacher, as well as two interns from CSU, push into classes on a daily basis to provide targeted support to students.
- Our CREW structure provides two periods weekly focused on students getting academic support. Standards based grading allows all students to demonstrate competence and mastery of standards.
- Expeditionary Learning techniques are used school-wide. Currently we're the second highest performing EL school in the state of Colorado as determined by the School Performance Framework results from the state.
- Student Led Conferences celebrate the learning happening in our school community.
- Grade book computations will NEVER include such designations as "70% of grade is tests and quizzes/30% is homework." Data driven interventions i.e., math skills, writing skills, Algebra support, and science skills provides students with individual interventions.
- Polaris does not use textbooks to teach the state standards, the teachers create and re-create curriculum each year. This process allows us to teach the standards through compelling topics that are currently present in the community and the world.
- A few years ago we moved all the elective periods to the end of the day as opposed to first period. This decision was driven by the need to teach the core subjects at the most opportune time of day.
- All students have access to challenging classes because that is all we offer. There are no classes that delineate students into "tracks."
- Our IEP students are included in all general education classrooms; we have 100% inclusion.
- Students are continually looking at primary source documents and research articles because we typically don't use textbooks outside of math and foreign language.
- The students' main focus is on currently occurring issues that need resolution. For example, a solar company last year asked our middle schoolers to help with a design so that solar power could be used to generate steam power.
- During our Travel the World Intensive several parent volunteers who have lived overseas came and presented to our students about their homeland.
- For our Middle East Conflict Expedition various guest speakers were invited to share their personal stories with our middle school students.
- Students who have interviewed elderly in their Language Arts class have had their eyes opened to all the wisdom these community members about their local and global community.
- We have had 100% parent participation in our Student Led Conferences for four years in a row.
- In our last Parent Satisfaction Survey we had 97% favorable responses to the question that asks "I attend most school events offered to parents such as conferences and Open House."
- In the same survey we had a 97% favorable response rate to the question "I feel welcome at my child's school."
- Having a very small staff requires us to have a pretty "flat" hierarchical structure, as a result we don't have a single staff member acting as a parent liaison. Instead, individual teachers reach out to parents on an as-needed basis and the parents respond consistently.
- We offer a space for our PTA to host "coffee chats" for families every Wednesday morning. Administrator staff join these informal meetings on a regular basis.