

Dear families,

Each fall presents a new opportunity for each school in Boulder Valley to take time to examine what's working and to identify some areas for improvement. At Douglass Elementary, there are many areas of our work together to celebrate, and there is also a path that our teachers have committed to that will make a difference in the academic success of all 423 students.

Each school in Boulder Valley follows a process known as TIES – Tools of Inquiry in Equitable Schools – evaluate student assessment information, set measurable goals, and determine the best way to meet those goals. We have a TIES committee comprised of seven teachers, a parent, and the principal. First, we looked at areas of celebration:

Douglass Elementary is one of eight schools in Boulder to make the State of Colorado's top schools for growth this year. Douglass has consistently been rated an "Excellent" school, and we are now being noted for the growth that our children are demonstrating as a result of the hard work of your teachers and the commitment of our parents to their children's education.

After reflecting on those successes, we moved to some other observations about the data - not just one year's test data, but what the data was showing over a period of a few years. It was clear from this data that we have an opportunity to renew our school's emphasis on effective reading and writing instruction for boys and girls. We noticed that over the past few years, boys have achieved and grown at lower rates than girls at Douglass Elementary School in reading and writing.

Douglass Elementary received nationwide attention about five years ago for its efforts at reducing the achievement gap between boys and girls. Teachers learned together about recent brain research that showed how differently boys and girls receive information and how best to teach to meet the needs of all students. As a result of this work, the achievement of boys improved markedly.

We spent several hours determining our TIES goals for this year, and worked with the greater staff to fine-tune and ensure that these goals are strategic, measurable, attainable, and realistic to achieve this year. We also presented these goals to the School Improvement Team for their feedback prior to submission to the district.

We will focus our professional development work this year using a book called *Strategies for Teaching Boys and Girls*. This book distills what worked well at Douglass a few years ago, and what other schools do to make their teaching as engaging and relevant for all students. In future newsletters, I will also share with you some of the strategies, based on scientific research, that have proven results here at Douglass and elsewhere.

Of particular note: this work will meet the needs of all students, both boys and girls. We seek to raise the achievement levels of all students – not set a goal for one group of kids at the expense of others. We believe that all students will benefit from this renewed focus on how to consistently engage all learners in the classroom.

Look for the goals themselves in this newsletter, as well as on Douglass' web site. I'll also attach my presentation to the SIT for you to review the process we followed. Of course, feel free to speak to your teachers or to me about the goals that will drive our work this year at Douglass Elementary School.

Your principal,

Jon Wolfer