

## UVA Partner Spotlight: Boulder Valley School District

Boulder Valley School District, Colorado began partnering with UVA-PLE in 2019. A current partner, the District continues to achieve strong results. This past year, BVSD posted the highest overall growth in the Denver Metro area and leads all peers in English Language Arts performance. ELA proficiency (grades 3–8) climbed to 65.7% and Math proficiency reached 55.1%, both above pre-pandemic levels. In a recent cohort focused on middle schools (2023-2025), two partner schools achieved significant gains: Broomfield Heights Middle increased math and ELA proficiency an average of 13.5 points and Angevine Middle increased math and ELA proficiency an average of 11.5 points. The focus on middle schools contributed to system-wide growth in middle schools of 3.8 points during 2025-26. Boulder Valley also experienced historic growth for students who are eligible for free and reduced lunch.

In this Q&A, **Deputy Superintendent Dr. Lora de la Cruz** talks about the strong results and shares how Boulder Valley educators and students have benefited from the Partnership.

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*Q: To start, tell us a little about Boulder Valley School District - your community and the students you serve.*

Boulder Valley School District (BVSD) in Colorado serves approximately 28,000 students across 56 schools in the communities of Boulder, Lafayette, Louisville, Erie, Superior, Broomfield, Nederland, Jamestown, and Gold Hill. The student population is 65.6% White, 20.4% Hispanic/Latino, 5.8% Asian, 6.6% students of two or more races, 1% Black, 0.3% American Indian/Alaska Native, and 0.1% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. In addition, 26.9% of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, and 15% have IEPs.

*Q: Before partnering with UVA-PLE, what challenges was the district facing and what goals were you hoping to achieve?*

Historically, BVSD faced longstanding disparities in outcomes for particular student groups. The district had been a “site-based” system for as long as anyone could remember, meaning each school determined its own curricular and instructional approaches. This led to year-over-year differences in achievement and growth.

While BVSD has consistently outperformed state averages, achievement gaps have persisted between white students and students of color, multilingual learners, and students from low-income backgrounds. These gaps appeared in literacy, math, and advanced coursework, revealing inequities that our overall success often obscured. That overall success stifled both receptiveness and urgency for change. Our goals were to move from a system of schools to a true school system,

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aligning best practices, reducing disparities, and ensuring that all students in every school experience academic success.

*Q: How did your district first learn about UVA-PLE, and what drew you to the partnership?*

When Dr. Anderson became superintendent at BVSD in 2018, he had already been deeply involved in UVA-PLE work in his previous districts. After reviewing the data and seeing persistent disparities – especially in several particular schools within BVSD – Dr. Anderson chose to re-engage in the partnership to support these schools.

*Q: Working with UVA-PLE, what have been the key priorities or “big rocks” you’ve focused on addressing?*

We began our work with UVA-PLE several years ago with “big rocks” focused on foundational elements, including creating and communicating an instructional infrastructure, strengthening professional learning for leaders, providing differentiated support and accountability, and implementing standards-based instruction. We have stayed consistent with this foundation and continued to build on it, with standards-based instruction serving as an enduring priority. Over the years, we have consistently mapped all of our work back to these foundational priorities.

*Q: What steps have you taken to move from vision to implementation?*

A lot! Over the last five years, we have made the following bold moves to move from vision to implementation:

- ✓ Streamlined the *BVSD All Together for All Students* strategic plan
- ✓ Aligned systems to the strategic plan and instructional infrastructure
- ✓ Created tight, flexible expectations that have now become consistent K-12 instructional expectations
- ✓ Developed an Instructional Playbook with extensive teaching and learning resources
- ✓ Aligned teacher and leader professional learning to UVA-PLE best practices, including 90-Day Plans, MTSS, DDI, and standards-based instruction
- ✓ Created and implemented leadership look-fors that align to instructional expectations
- ✓ Implemented differentiated funding, support, and accountability
- ✓ Ensured that principal supervision is closely aligned with 90-day plans

*Q: What does the data show since you began your partnership? Where have you seen the most improvement in educational outcomes?*

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We have completed two UVA-PLE cohorts and are currently engaged with a third. Across these cohorts, we have seen significant improvements in school performance and student outcomes. Highlights include:

In **Cohort 1**, Alicia Sanchez, Kohl, and Columbine Elementary Schools all made dramatic improvements, moving from the state watch list to the highest state rating of Performance. Alicia Sanchez and Kohl Elementary Schools have maintained their Performance status since then. (Columbine's data dipped back to the state watch during leadership transitions but is now improving again.)

In **Cohort 2**: Broomfield Heights, Angevine, and Casey Middle Schools also demonstrated substantial gains, earning the highest state rating of Performance. Broomfield Heights Middle increased math and ELA proficiency an average of 13.5 points and Angevine Middle increased math and ELA proficiency an average of 11.5 points. The focus on middle schools contributed to system-wide growth in middle schools of 3.8 points during 2025-26. (Casey's data later dipped back to the state watch but is working toward improvement again.)

In **Cohort 3**, the three dual language elementary schools - Escuela Bilingüe Pioneer, Columbine, and University Hill - are in year one of the partnership and are already demonstrating progress in the form of increasing data driven instruction, aligning instructional practices, monitoring progress and centering their 90-Day Plans.

District-wide, we are very proud of the achievement and growth, including among students who are eligible for free and reduced lunch.



*Cohort 2 Learning Lab principals Rhianna Burroughs (left) and Bryant Shaw (right) discuss student outcomes and action plans with Deputy Superintendent Dr. Lora de la Cruz (center)*

**Q: As you look ahead, what are your current areas of focus in continuing this work with UVA-PLE?**

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Our plan moving forward is to continue to anchor the evidence-based practices we've developed through the UVA-PLE partnership: 90-Day Plans, DDI, standards-based instruction, and MTSS. Our goal is to build long-term stability in these practices so they become part of the district's - and each school's - operating system. We are also maintaining a sharp focus on student groups, with the goal of ensuring that every group achieves and grows proportionately.

*Q: How have you leveraged the learning and support from UVA-PLE to address the needs of your learning lab schools? And how are you applying those lessons more broadly across the district?*

We have leveraged the learning and support from UVA-PLE to provide differentiated support and resources to our learning lab schools, ensuring they could fully implement and stabilize evidence-based practices such as 90-Day Plans, DDI, and standards-based instruction. The success of these strategies in the lab schools has motivated us to scale them across the entire district.

Over the past several years, we have incrementally established expectations for these practices to be in place in all schools. This approach has allowed us to deepen the knowledge and understanding of school and district leaders and to build their capacity so they are ready to lead this work effectively in their own schools. We have maintained focus on a small number of high-leverage strategies, consistently working to "keep the main thing the main thing" and avoid distractions that could pull us off course.

We are so pleased that these practices are helping all schools shrink gaps and increase achievement and growth for every student group. We have truly transformed from being a system of schools to a school system, and we are excited to continue this journey and see what's possible for each and every student.

*Q: Finally, what advice would you offer to other district leaders who are considering working with UVA-PLE?*

The advice I'd give to other district leaders considering working with UVA-PLE is to go in as a learner and soak up the excellent executive leadership learning. I would also emphasize the importance of balancing bold action with thoughtful change management.

By bold action, I mean that district leaders must create the conditions for schools to succeed - ensuring they have the resources, principal supervision, and differentiated support necessary for success. By wise change management, I mean that for change to stick, leaders need to make incremental changes, provide the learning and support teachers and leaders need to succeed, and celebrate successes early and often. It is the combination of these bold and wise actions that lead to change that sticks.

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**GO DEEPER:** Rhianna Burroughs, Principal of Angevine Middle School



*Q: How has participating in UVA-PLE influenced your approach to school leadership? Can you share an example of a change you've made as a result?*

My experience with UVA-PLE has pushed me to think more intentionally and effectively about how I lead a building and implement change. While there is always much to learn about content and instruction, I've learned from UVA-PLE how to lead for systemic change within our school community. UVA-PLE has provided tools, strategies, and practice for clearly identifying our school priorities, planning the actions needed to achieve our goals, and overcoming the challenges that come with change.

One example of a change we've made as a result of our work with UVA-PLE is how we structure our daily schedule to create consistent, dedicated time for teachers to collaborate and review student data. We shifted our content and grade-level team meetings to prioritize weekly, data-driven conversations that directly inform instructional practices. Creating this schedule was only the first step; we have also developed and continue to strengthen a system that facilitates meaningful data discussions to drive future instruction.

*Q: What has been the most valuable lesson or insight you've gained through UVA-PLE?*

The most valuable lesson I have learned through UVA-PLE is the power and impact of developing and consistently revisiting our 90-Day Plan. Establishing our priority improvement strategies has allowed us to maintain a clear focus that is shared with both teachers and the broader school community. As we monitor our progress, we are able to maintain clarity on our vision for the year and make adjustments in our actions when needed. The clarity, consistency, and simplicity of using a 90-Day Plan has had a deep impact on how we approach our work.