

Name: Jennie Schmaltz
Grade/s taught: 3rd Grade and Teaching Partner
School: Elkhart Elementary School
District: Aurora Public Schools
City, State: Aurora, CO

When Elkhart Elementary School needed a new instructional coach for literacy, Jennie Schmaltz stepped up to the challenge. Elkhart, a K-5 International Baccalaureate (IB) World School serving a high-minority, high-poverty community, needed to boost student achievement and lower its staff turnover rate. Schmaltz, who was then teaching first grade at Elkhart, used her classroom as a lab to test new instructional methodologies before sharing them with fellow teachers.

A data-driven leader now splitting her time between teaching third grade and serving as the school's Teacher Partner, providing instructional coaching for colleagues, Schmaltz has delivered on both of Elkhart's objectives. Student achievement is up. The majority of the teachers she supports saw a classroom growth average in the 65th percentile or above in aimsweb assessments. This is despite multiple challenges, including parent deaths, learning disabilities, and a high number of English Language Learners. Schmaltz is also credited with raising Elkhart's teacher retention rate. In a recent survey, 90% of staff members said they were pleased with the professional development Schmaltz leads and felt it has had a significant impact on their practice. During Schmaltz's tenure, Elkhart has moved from a low rating on the State's School Performance Framework to meeting or exceeding statewide attainment (top status).

Schmaltz's students respect her and put in maximum effort in the classroom, where students grow as readers, writers, mathematicians and human beings. Schmaltz helps students believe in themselves and take educational risks. She also builds strong relationships with families—both parents and students know that when they come to her with questions or concerns, she will advocate for them without hesitation. For one student, whose medical condition rendered him nonverbal, Schmaltz secured a type-to-talk device that let him ask questions and add to classroom discussion for the first time.

Schmaltz serves on Elkhart's instructional leadership team and as the school's IB coordinator; she also heads literacy professional development for the district. She employs both video and side-by-side coaching, often recording her own lessons and soliciting critiques and suggestions from other teachers. She is known as a highly effective coach who bases her counsel on sound, current and thorough educational research. Schmaltz treats all teacher questions as valid and relevant, and colleagues respect her ability to provide direct and truthful feedback. Her coaching helps teachers at all levels: She accelerates the progress of new teachers and refines the practice of those with more experience. Teachers struggling with a new technique or a challenge with a student know Schmaltz will know how to help—and if she doesn't know the answer, she will do whatever research is necessary to find a solution.

Schmaltz received a Bachelor of Arts in psychology from University of Colorado Boulder in 2003 and a Master of Arts in curriculum and instruction, with a focus on literacy, from the University of Denver in 2009.