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Just for the Kids, Florida

High School Best Practice Study, 2004-05

Astronaut Senior High School, Brevard Public Schools
Bayside Senior High School, Brevard Public Schools
Design & Architectural Senior High School, Miami-Dade County Public Schools
Dr. Michael M. Krop Senior High School, Miami-Dade County Public Schools
Fort Walton Beach High School, Okaloosa County School District
New Smyrna Beach High School, Volusia County Schools
Niceville Senior High School, Okaloosa County School District
Palm Bay Senior High School, Brevard Public Schools
Paxon School for Advanced Studies, Duval County Public Schools
Pompano Beach High School Institute, Broward County Public Schools

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Just for the Kids, Florida

High School Best Practice Study, 2004-2005

The Study

The Florida High School Best Practice Study was part of a larger national research study to investigate the practices of schools that consistently outperform their peers. Research teams studied schools in 20 states to identify key practices of consistently higher performing schools in a variety of policy contexts.

In Florida, research teams investigated 10 consistently higher performing and five average-performing high schools to determine the differences in practices between higher and average-performing high schools. Schools were identified through an in-depth analysis of academic achievement developed by the National Center for Educational Accountability (NCEA) using data publicly available from the state.

Conducted by the Council for Educational Change, the 2004-2005 Florida High School Best Practice Study received funding from The Education Trust and The Broad Foundation.

Researchers used site-based interviews and observations, as well as the analysis of supportive documentation, to investigate the practices of each of the 15 schools in the study. District-, school-, and classroom-level practices were studied using the five themes of NCEA's Best Practice Framework: Curriculum and Academic Goals; Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building; Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements; Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data; and Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustment.

The Summary

Research teams wrote individual case studies about each school. Summary findings across the cases are presented in this report. Major findings from each case are presented first to provide a brief picture of each higher performing school studied. The composite picture of Best Practice Findings in Florida, based on differences detected between higher and average-performing schools, follows with examples from individual schools.

This report is a synthesis of findings including direct quotes and summary information drawn from case studies and a cross-case report¹ written by researchers at Florida's Council for Educational Change. The JFTK Best Practice Framework, developed by NCEA, provides the structure for the findings. Information from the Council for Educational Change (CEC) case studies that does not relate to any of the five themes of the JFTK Best Practice Framework is not represented in this report. **Bold-faced** attributes listed in the "Findings" section of this report represent inferences made by NCEA researchers during the evaluation of the case studies. Those attributes may not necessarily coincide with those inferred by CEC researchers.

¹ Council for Educational Change and the National Center for Educational Accountability. 2005. *High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools. A Report to The Education Trust.*



Just for the Kids, Florida

High School Best Practice Study, 2004-2005

The School Identification Process

To study the practices of consistently higher performing schools, one must first identify those schools and compare their practices compared with those in a group of average-performing schools with similar demographics. The contrast between the practices in the two groups of schools is the focus of this study.

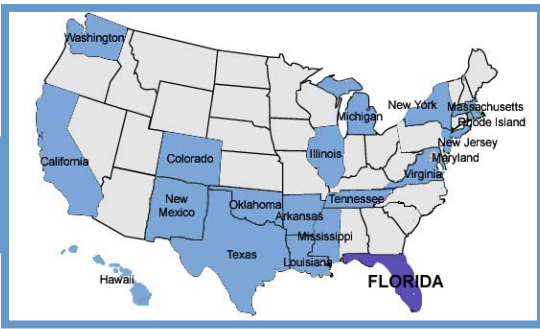
NCEA used publicly available student achievement data from the Florida Department of Education to identify high schools that consistently outperformed other schools with similar demographics in reading or mathematics in the 2001-02, 2002-03, and 2003-04 school years. The analysis included data from the ninth- and tenth-grade Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). NCEA had access to longitudinal data from Florida, and, therefore, schools were evaluated based on students who were continuously enrolled beginning in the ninth grade. The data also allowed NCEA to divide the students into two groups based on their achievement prior to entering high school: those whose eighth-grade FCAT scores were below Level 3 (the state's proficiency standard) and those whose eighth-grade scores met or exceeded Level 3.¹ Student data were disaggregated in this way because addressing the needs of poorly-prepared students presents a different challenge than does educating those who are well-prepared; NCEA wanted to study high schools that were demonstrating success with both groups.

To identify the schools, NCEA conducted a separate analysis for each subject (reading and mathematics), year (2002, 2003, and 2004), grade (ninth and tenth), and prior-achievement group ("below" and "at or above" Level 3 in eighth grade) to learn which schools outperformed their demographic peers. NCEA used a Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analysis to compare each school's percent of students meeting the standard in each prior-achievement group with the percent that would be "predicted" or "typical" for a school in the state with the same demographics.² The demographic and other variables used in this analysis were each school's percentage of low-income, African American, Hispanic, and Asian students; the size of the school; the percentage of students tested in the subject and year in question; the average eighth-grade score of the student group in question; and the percent of all students in each of the prior-achievement groups ("below" and "at or above" Level 3).

NCEA ranked each school against the high schools in the rest of the state for each grade, subject, year, and prior-achievement group. For example, a school whose previously "below Level 3" students had a "performance relative to predicted" higher than their counterparts in 95% of the schools in tenth-grade reading in 2004 would receive a percentile rank of 95 for that subject grade, year, and prior-achievement group. These ranks were averaged separately for reading and mathematics across the three years, two grades, and two prior-achievement groups to produce an overall average performance rank by subject. To be selected as higher performing for the purposes of this study, schools had to have overall average percentile ranks above 66.6 (that is, be in the top third of schools in the state) in either reading or mathematics.

¹ Ninth-grade scores were substituted for high schools whose lowest grade was tenth grade.

² The standard selected for the analysis for students previously "below Level 3" was performing "at or above Level 2", while the standard for students previously "at or above Level 3" was continuing to perform "at or above Level 3."



Just for the Kids, Florida

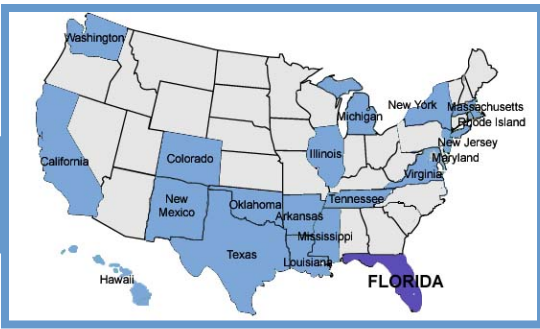
High School Best Practice Study, 2004-2005

The Higher Performing Schools Studied

| School | District | 2004 Enrollment | | 2004 School-Wide Demographics | | | | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|----------|-------|-------|-------|-------------|------|
| | | Grade Span | No. of Students | African American | Hispanic | White | Asian | Other | Low Income* | ELL |
| Astronaut Senior High School | Brevard County Public Schools | 9-12 | 1,604 | 17.4% | 1.8% | 77.8% | 1.3% | 1.7% | 9.3% | 0.1% |
| Bayside Senior High School | Brevard County Public Schools | 9-12 | 2,061 | 15.8% | 9.5% | 71.2% | 1.4% | 2.1% | 13.4% | 1.4% |
| Design & Architectural Senior High School | Miami-Dade County Public Schools | 9-12 | 453 | 13.7% | 50.6% | 29.6% | 3.9% | 2.2% | 42.2% | 0.7% |
| Dr. Michael M. Krop Senior High School | Miami-Dade County Public Schools | 8-12 | 3,564 | 25.2% | 40.1% | 31.0% | 2.5% | 1.2% | 22.6% | 9.9% |
| Fort Walton Beach High School | Okaloosa County School District | 9-12 | 1,915 | 11.8% | 2.8% | 77.2% | 4.6% | 3.6% | 14.0% | 0.2% |
| New Smyrna Beach High School | Volusia County Schools | 9-12 | 1,887 | 8.2% | 1.8% | 88.7% | 0.7% | 0.6% | 17.9% | 0.5% |
| Niceville Senior High School | Okaloosa County School District | 9-12 | 2,251 | 4.9% | 4.3% | 84.7% | 3.1% | 3.0% | 8.1% | 0.0% |
| Palm Bay Senior High School | Brevard County Public Schools | 9-12 | 2,300 | 22.0% | 9.9% | 63.2% | 2.0% | 2.9% | 14.6% | 2.5% |
| Paxon School for Advanced Studies | Duval County Public Schools | 9-12 | 1,516 | 27.2% | 3.6% | 56.0% | 11.4% | 1.8% | 12.3% | 0.6% |
| Pompano Beach High School Institute | Broward County Public Schools | 9-12 | 819 | 26.5% | 14.9% | 56.0% | 1.3% | 1.3% | 24.8% | 4.2% |

* NCEA calculated 2004 school-wide low-income values from a state spring 2004 student-level dataset. In 2005, NCEA applied a new algorithm for calculating the school-wide low-income value since low-income status is often underreported for high school students. The subsequent analysis, which adjusted 2004 student-level data to reflect if a student had been eligible for free or reduced-price lunch in middle school (not only if they were identified in high school), resulted in higher school-wide percentages for 2004. Considering prior participation in these programs provides a better approximation of the student population's level of poverty. The adjusted low-income percentages are noted on the following individual school pages.

Demographic and student enrollment data were taken from the Just for the Kids-Florida 2004 website. Site visits were conducted in Spring 2005 by Council of Educational Change researchers.



Astronaut Senior High School Brevard Public Schools

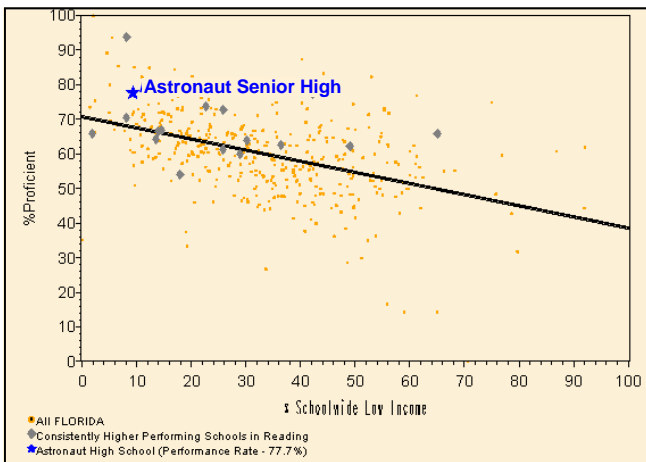
Just for the Kids, Florida NCEA Executive Summary

The School

Astronaut Senior High School, which serves 1,604 ninth- through twelfth-grade students, is 1 of 14 high schools in the Brevard Public Schools (73,121 students). Astronaut's student population is 77.8% White, 17.4% African American, 1.8% Hispanic, 1.3% Asian, and 1.7% other. Within this student population, 0.1% are English Language Learners, and 9.3% receive free or reduced lunch services.*

* In a subsequent analysis including students' prior participation in these programs, the 2004 school-wide percentage of students eligible for free or reduced lunch services was 23.9%.

Example: 2004 10th Grade Reading
Students with previous FCAT score "at or above Level 3"



Consistent Higher Performance

Astronaut Senior High School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in reading. The analysis included all ninth- and tenth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. In addition, Astronaut's data were separated into two groups based on prior performance: those students who were "at or above Level 3" in eighth grade and those who were "below Level 3" in eighth grade. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade, year, and prior performance group, Astronaut Senior High School demonstrated an overall average performance rank of 78.9 in reading.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data with site visits occurring during the 2004-2005 school year. Differences between the demographics reported in this case study and the values shown on the scatter plot reveal demographic changes in the school between 2002 and 2005.

| Subject | | 2002 | | 2003 | | 2004 | | Overall Avg. Rank** 2002-2004 |
|---------|-------------|-----------------|----|-----------------|----|-----------------|----|----------------------------------|
| | | Percentile Rank | | Percentile Rank | | Percentile Rank | | |
| Grade | | 9 | 10 | 9 | 10 | 9 | 10 | |
| Reading | At or Above | 91 | 90 | 69 | 48 | 69 | 91 | 78.9 |
| | Below | 86 | 82 | 88 | 97 | 55 | 90 | |

**The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of tested students in the grade as weights.

Major Findings

While providing curriculum guides called "Teacher Notes" to ensure the curriculum is focused on common learning standards, the district also encourages the school to engage students in coursework that is more challenging than the Sunshine State Standards, such as the College Board's Advanced Placement program. The school provides teachers with documents called vertical planners, which are subject lesson planners showing skills from preceding grade levels and subsequent grade levels. Throughout the school, reading and writing are incorporated into other subjects, maximizing students' practice with essential literacy skills. To deepen teachers' appreciation of state assessments, the principal has teachers take the state practice tests. Mathematics teachers often struggle with language arts items, and English teachers struggle with mathematics items, reminding them that "what you don't use, you lose." The exercise deepens their interest in integrating skill sets across subjects, in using data to pinpoint curricular and instructional needs, and in providing additional assistance for struggling students.

The entire case study may be viewed at http://www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/study_framework.cfm?study=Florida.



Bayside Senior High School Brevard Public Schools

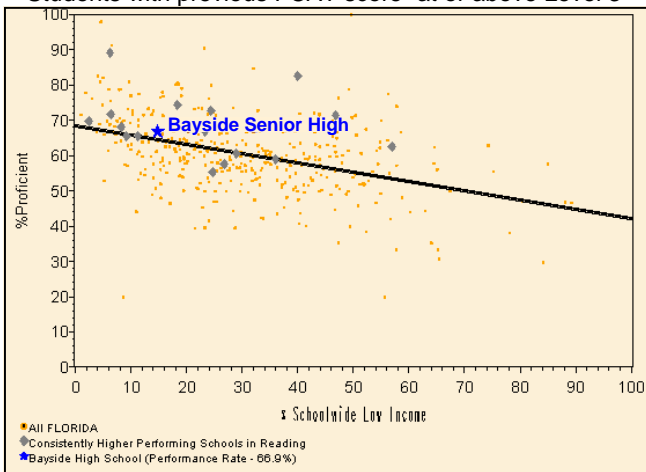
Just for the Kids, Florida NCEA Executive Summary

The School

Bayside Senior High School, which serves 2,061 ninth- through twelfth-grade students, is 1 of 14 high schools in the Brevard Public Schools (73,121 students). Bayside's student population is 71.2% White, 15.8% African American, 9.5% Hispanic, 1.4% Asian, and 2.1% other. Within this student population, 1.4% are English Language Learners, and 13.4% receive free or reduced lunch services.*

* In a subsequent analysis including students' prior participation in these programs, the 2004 school-wide percentage of students eligible for free or reduced lunch services was 33.3%.

Example: 2002 9th Grade Reading
Students with previous FCAT score "at or above Level 3"



Consistent Higher Performance

Bayside Senior High School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in reading. The analysis included all ninth- and tenth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. In addition, Bayside's data were separated into two groups based on prior performance: those students who were "at or above Level 3" in eighth grade, and those who were "below Level 3" in eighth grade. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade, year, and prior performance group, Bayside Senior High School demonstrated an overall average performance rank of 69.5 in reading.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data with site visits occurring during the 2004-2005 school year. Differences between the demographics reported in this case study and the values shown on the scatter plot reveal demographic changes in the school between 2002 and 2005.

| Subject | | 2002 Percentile Rank | | 2003 Percentile Rank | | 2004 Percentile Rank | | Overall Avg. Rank** 2002-2004 |
|---------|-------------|----------------------|----|----------------------|----|----------------------|----|----------------------------------|
| Grade | | 9 | 10 | 9 | 10 | 9 | 10 | |
| Reading | At or Above | 93 | 77 | 48 | 69 | 56 | 51 | 69.5 |
| | Below | 89 | 75 | 72 | 85 | 92 | 56 | |

**The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of tested students in the grade as weights.

Major Findings

Teacher collaboration is an essential factor in the development of curriculum maps. In addition to planned departmental meetings, lunches are coordinated to allow teachers within the same department to share additional time together. Collaboration extends outside the department also as teachers from different departments create and deliver lessons together. The school provides ongoing instructional support to teachers particularly relative to reading instruction and to applying information derived from data. Respecting the time demands on classroom teachers, the district provides disaggregated data in forms that allow the teachers to extrapolate information quickly. The school has special programs to address the needs of all students, such as the Compass Lab, where students can use computer-based remediation activities to replace prior unsatisfactory work. Students may also enroll in a program coordinated with Brevard Community College that allows students who will be first-time attendees of college in their family to receive both a high school diploma and an Associate's Degree on graduation day.

The entire case study may be viewed at http://www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/study_framework.cfm?study=Florida.



Design & Architectural Senior High School Miami-Dade County Public Schools

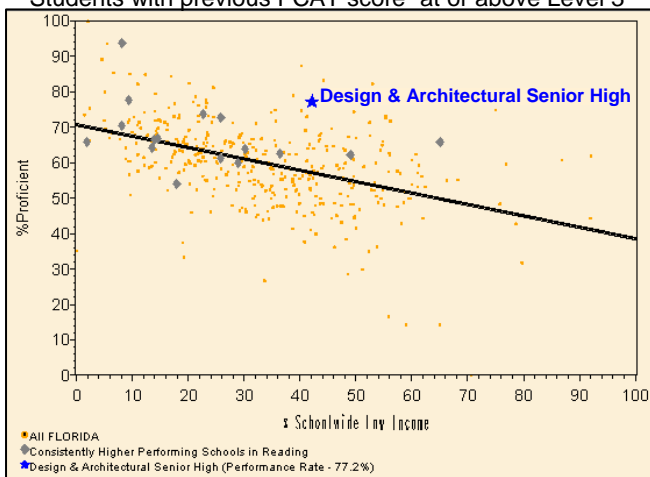
Just for the Kids, Florida NCEA Executive Summary

The School

Design & Architectural Senior High School, which serves 453 ninth- through twelfth-grade students, is 1 of 47 high schools in the Miami-Dade County Schools (368,410 students). Design & Architectural's student population is 50.6% Hispanic, 29.6% White, 13.7% African American, 3.9% Asian, and 2.2% other. Within this student population, 0.7% are English Language Learners, and 42.2% receive free or reduced lunch services.*

* In a subsequent analysis including students' prior participation in these programs, the 2004 school-wide percentage of students eligible for free or reduced lunch services was 47.1%.

Example: 2004 10th Grade Reading
Students with previous FCAT score "at or above Level 3"



Consistent Higher Performance

Design & Architectural Senior High School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in both reading and mathematics. The analysis included all ninth- and tenth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. In addition, Design & Architectural's data were separated into two groups based on prior performance: those students who were "at or above Level 3" in eighth grade, and those who were "below Level 3" in eighth grade. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade, year, and prior performance group, Design & Architectural Senior High School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 78.1 in reading and 81.0 in mathematics.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data with site visits occurring during the 2004-2005 school year. Differences between the demographics reported in this case study and the values shown on the scatter plot reveal demographic changes in the school between 2002 and 2005.

| Subject | | 2002 | | 2003 | | 2004 | | Overall Avg. Rank** 2002-2004 |
|-------------|-------------|-----------------|----|-----------------|----|-----------------|-----|----------------------------------|
| | | Percentile Rank | | Percentile Rank | | Percentile Rank | | |
| Grade | | 9 | 10 | 9 | 10 | 9 | 10 | |
| Reading | At or Above | 91 | 92 | 63 | 87 | 60 | 56 | 78.1 |
| | Below | 98 | 96 | 88 | 83 | 75 | 95 | |
| Mathematics | At or Above | 86 | 93 | 56 | 89 | 87 | 73 | 81.0 |
| | Below | 90 | 86 | *** | 92 | 82 | *** | |

**The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of tested students in the grade as weights.

***Data were available for fewer than 10 students, and, therefore, results are not shown.

Major Findings

Many of the faculty at Design & Architectural are current or former practitioners in the design field. This orientation requires district-supported training to advance faculty mastery of the state standards and the instructional methods to teach them. Teachers know the curriculum and monitor the effectiveness and actual implementation of the curriculum guides throughout the year. To emphasize her role as instructional leader, the principal teaches a course. She uses the opportunity both to model desired practices and to maintain contact with students' learning needs. Teachers at this school use data to implement courses for specific student needs. Close study of available data, according to the principal, has a positive result. "There is no child that has not graduated because they have not passed the FCAT, and that is not by accident. We will 'one-on-one' tutor a child until we are sure he/she will pass."

The entire case study may be viewed at http://www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/study_framework.cfm?study=Florida



Dr. Michael M. Krop Senior High School Miami-Dade County Public Schools

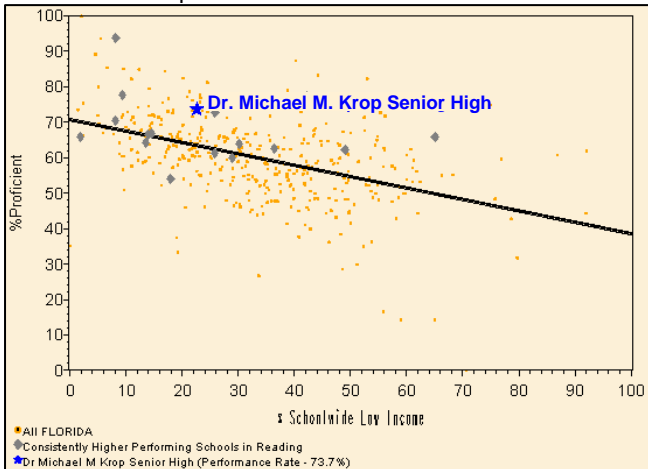
Just for the Kids, Florida NCEA Executive Summary

The School

Dr. Michael M. Krop Senior High School, which serves 3,564 ninth- through twelfth-grade students, is 1 of 47 high schools in the Miami-Dade County Schools (368,410 students). Krop's student population is 40.1% Hispanic, 31.0% White, 25.2% African American, 2.5% Asian, and 1.2% other. Within this student population, 9.9% are English Language Learners, and 22.6% receive free or reduced lunch services.*

* In a subsequent analysis including students' prior participation in these programs, the 2004 school-wide percentage of students eligible for free or reduced lunch services was 37.9%.

Example: 2004 10th Grade Reading
Students with previous FCAT score "at or above Level 3"



Consistent Higher Performance

Dr. Michael M. Krop Senior High School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in reading. The analysis included all ninth- and tenth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. In addition, Krop's data were separated into two groups based on prior performance: those students who were "at or above Level 3" in eighth grade, and those who were "below Level 3" in eighth grade. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade, year, and prior performance group, Dr. Michael M. Krop Senior High School demonstrated an overall average performance rank of 91.0 in reading.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data with site visits occurring during the 2004-2005 school year. Differences between the demographics reported in this case study and the values shown on the scatter plot reveal demographic changes in the school between 2002 and 2005.

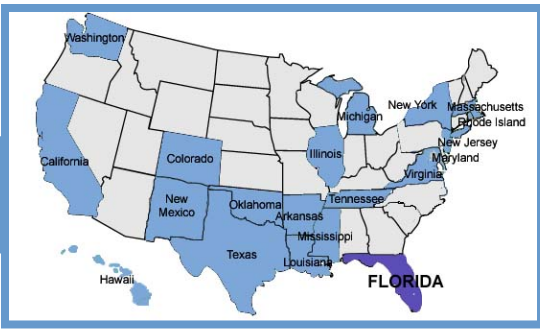
| Subject | | 2002 Percentile Rank | | 2003 Percentile Rank | | 2004 Percentile Rank | | Overall Avg. Rank** 2002-2004 |
|---------|-------------|----------------------|----|----------------------|----|----------------------|----|----------------------------------|
| Grade | | 9 | 10 | 9 | 10 | 9 | 10 | |
| Reading | At or Above | 98 | 67 | 98 | 93 | 84 | 98 | 91.0 |
| | Below | 98 | 85 | 94 | 97 | 87 | 87 | |

**The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of tested students in the grade as weights.

Major Findings

Vertical teams extend into the middle schools, effectively laying the groundwork to prepare students to be successful high school students when they arrive at Krop. Upon arrival, high academic expectations are made clear through teacher-developed scope and sequence documents for every course in the curriculum. Teachers demonstrate the belief that students can master challenging content and that, in fact, students' futures depend on their doing so. The school offers honors, Advanced Placement, and International Baccalaureate programs, but educators stress they are interested in "competencies" not "credits." While differences in student aptitude are appreciated, an overarching belief in the school is that students do best in challenging situations. To support this belief, there are strong support systems in place for students. Teachers experienced with advanced academic courses also teach courses for struggling students. An additional support, the *Parent Internet Viewer*, provides parents with online access to information regarding the academic progress and class attendance of their children; students also use the Viewer to monitor their individual performance.

The entire case study may be viewed at http://www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/study_framework.cfm?study=Florida



Fort Walton Beach High School Okaloosa County School District

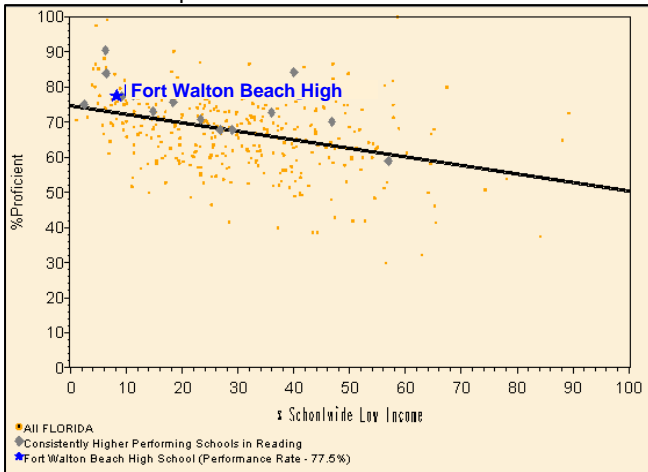
Just for the Kids, Florida NCEA Executive Summary

The School

Fort Walton Beach High School, which serves 1,915 ninth- through twelfth-grade students, is one of eight high schools in the Okaloosa County School District (31,144 students). Fort Walton Beach's student population is 77.2% White, 11.8% African American, 4.6% Asian, 2.8% Hispanic, and 3.6% other. Within this student population, 0.2% are English Language Learners, and 14.0% receive free or reduced lunch services.*

* In a subsequent analysis including students' prior participation in these programs, the 2004 school-wide percentage of students eligible for free or reduced lunch services was 21.0%.

Example: 2002 10th Grade Reading
Students with previous FCAT score "at or above Level 3"



Consistent Higher Performance

Fort Walton Beach High School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in reading. The analysis included all ninth- and tenth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. In addition, Fort Walton Beach's data were separated into two groups based on prior performance: those students who were "at or above Level 3" in eighth grade, and those who were "below Level 3" in eighth grade. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analysis for each grade, year, and prior performance group, Fort Walton Beach High School demonstrated an overall average performance rank of 73.0 in reading.

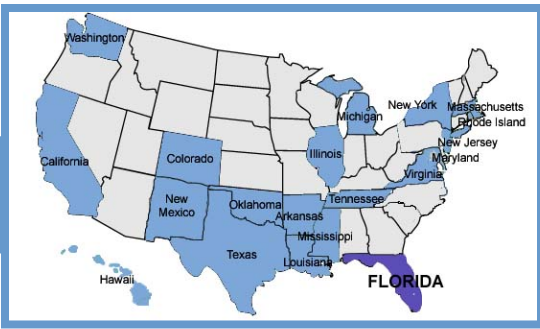
Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data with site visits occurring during the 2004-2005 school year. Differences between the demographics reported in this case study and the values shown on the scatter plot reveal demographic changes in the school between 2002 and 2005.

| Subject | | 2002 | | 2003 | | 2004 | | Overall Avg. Rank** 2002-2004 |
|---------|-------------|-----------------|----|-----------------|----|-----------------|----|----------------------------------|
| | | Percentile Rank | | Percentile Rank | | Percentile Rank | | |
| Grade | | 9 | 10 | 9 | 10 | 9 | 10 | 73.0 |
| Reading | At or Above | 94 | 87 | 60 | 93 | 47 | 47 | |
| | Below | 75 | 89 | 91 | 81 | 43 | 90 | |

**The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of tested students in the grade as weights.

Major Findings

The Okaloosa County School District plays an active role in ensuring teachers understand the state expectations and where those expectations will be addressed in the school's curriculum. Attention to these expectations is seen not as a digression from the "real" curriculum, but as a very important component of it. School-wide academic improvement projects are developed based on patterns of student performance on standardized tests; for example, all students work on summarization skills across the curriculum. The school offers a broad range of Advanced Placement and honors courses, and extensive tutoring opportunities are available in core academics to support these offerings. An evening program of high school credit courses, which is based largely on online learning processes, is also provided as an alternative for students struggling with regular high school learning approaches.



New Smyrna Beach High School Volusia County Schools

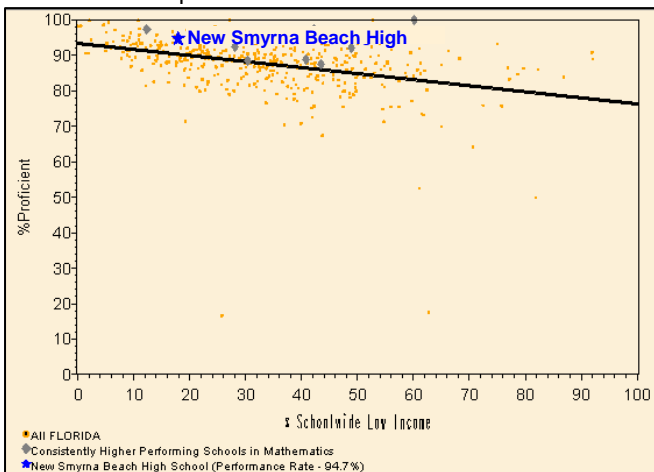
Just for the Kids, Florida NCEA Executive Summary

The School

New Smyrna Beach High School, which serves 1,887 ninth- through twelfth-grade students, is one of nine high schools in the Volusia County Schools (63,360 students). New Smyrna Beach's student population is 88.7% White, 8.2% African American, 1.8% Hispanic, 0.7% Asian, and 0.6% other. Within this student population, 0.5% are English Language Learners, and 17.9% receive free or reduced lunch services.*

* In a subsequent analysis including students' prior participation in these programs, the 2004 school-wide percentage of students eligible for free or reduced lunch services was 29.0%.

Example: 2004 9th Grade Mathematics
Students with previous FCAT score "at or above Level 3"



Consistent Higher Performance

New Smyrna Beach High School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics. The analysis included all ninth- and tenth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. In addition, New Smyrna Beach's data were separated into two groups based on prior performance: those students who were "at or above Level 3" in eighth grade, and those who were "below Level 3" in eighth grade. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade, year, and prior performance group, New Smyrna Beach High School demonstrated an overall average performance rank of 88.9 in mathematics.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data with site visits occurring during the 2004-2005 school year. Differences between the demographics reported in this case study and the values shown on the scatter plot reveal demographic changes in the school between 2002 and 2005.

| Subject | | 2002 | | 2003 | | 2004 | | Overall Avg. Rank** 2002-2004 |
|-------------|-------------|-----------------|----|-----------------|----|-----------------|----|----------------------------------|
| | | Percentile Rank | | Percentile Rank | | Percentile Rank | | |
| Grade | | 9 | 10 | 9 | 10 | 9 | 10 | 88.9 |
| Mathematics | At or Above | 88 | 89 | 84 | 95 | 99 | 96 | |
| | Below | 42 | 96 | 87 | 90 | 98 | 94 | |

**The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of tested students in the grade as weights.

Major Findings

"It is very important to have an umbrella set of standards [Sunshine State Standards], but here it is a matter of philosophy that we exceed the content, the stipulated elements of the courses," according to a teacher at New Smyrna Beach High School. District-developed curriculum maps are "fleshed out" at the school to add this type of enriched content. Vertical teams ensure a coherent, connected, and rigorous learning experience for students. The Deputy Superintendent states that the district "has a fairly aggressive vertical team approach to curriculum and staff development in terms of teacher training." New Smyrna Beach is being restructured into "smaller learning communities through career-focused academies." The goals in choosing to do so have been to close the achievement gap by providing rigor and relevance to all students through career academies and to create a more focused and supportive learning climate. Continuously improving achievement levels for all students (with decreasing achievement gaps) on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test will be the evidence that the goals are being achieved.

The entire case study may be viewed at http://www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/study_framework.cfm?study=Florida



Niceville Senior High School Okaloosa County School District

Just for the Kids, Florida NCEA Executive Summary

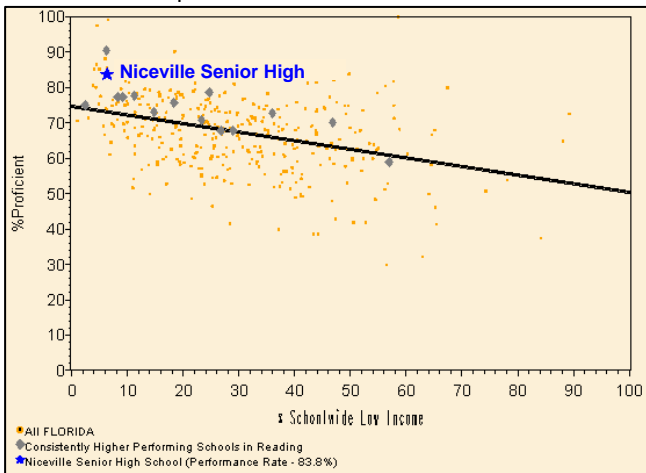
The School

Niceville Senior High School, which serves 2,251 ninth- through twelfth-grade students, is one of eight high schools in the Okaloosa County School District (31,144 students). Niceville’s student population is 84.7% White, 4.9% African American, 4.3% Hispanic, 3.1% Asian, and 3.0% other. Within this student population, there are no English Language Learners, and 8.1% receive free or reduced lunch services.*

* In a subsequent analysis including students’ prior participation in these programs, the 2004 school-wide percentage of students eligible for free or reduced lunch services was 12.6%.

Example: 2002 10th Grade Reading

Students with previous FCAT score “at or above Level 3”



Consistent Higher Performance

Niceville Senior High School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in reading. The analysis included all ninth- and tenth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. In addition, Niceville’s data were separated into two groups based on prior performance: those students who were “at or above Level 3” in eighth grade, and those who were “below Level 3” in eighth grade. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade, year, and prior performance group, Niceville Senior High School demonstrated an overall average performance rank 74.1 in reading.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data with site visits occurring during the 2004-2005 school year. Differences between the demographics reported in this case study and the values shown on the scatter plot reveal demographic changes in the school between 2002 and 2005.

| Subject | 2002 Percentile Rank | | 2003 Percentile Rank | | 2004 Percentile Rank | | Overall Avg. Rank** 2002-2004 | |
|---------|----------------------|----|----------------------|----|----------------------|----|----------------------------------|------|
| | 9 | 10 | 9 | 10 | 9 | 10 | | |
| Grade | 9 | 10 | 9 | 10 | 9 | 10 | | |
| Reading | At or Above | 71 | 98 | 86 | 44 | 75 | 85 | 74.1 |
| | Below | 72 | 46 | 93 | 84 | 65 | 63 | |

**The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of tested students in the grade as weights.

Major Findings

The academic programs at Niceville are continually reviewed and adjusted to meet the changing needs of the students. A constant part of the curriculum, however, is that reading and writing are teaching obligations of all faculty members. The concept of a “community of learners” pervades the school culture. For instance, peer observation of other teachers’ classrooms is a valued aspect of teacher capacity building. In order to provide a focus on reading skills, Niceville links reading to social studies in the tenth and twelfth grades, while reading and the sciences are linked in the eleventh grade. Broad-based dissemination of school performance data to stakeholders is an integral part of the school’s relationship with the community. The Eagles Institute provides an alternative program in which students can study in the evening through online, computer-based, performance-based courses.



Palm Bay Senior High School Brevard Public Schools

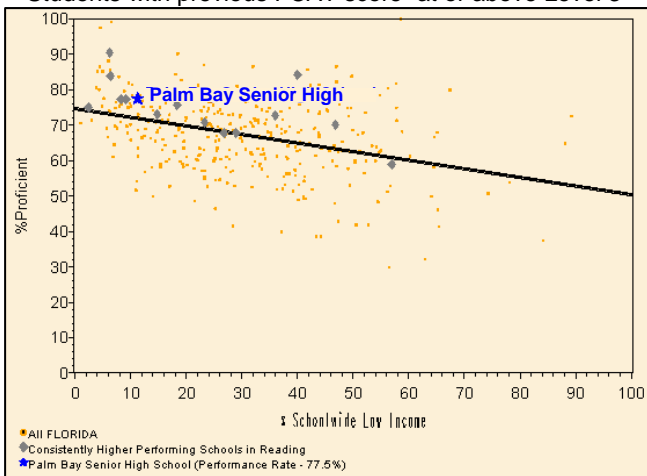
Just for the Kids, Florida NCEA Executive Summary

The School

Palm Bay Senior High School, which serves 2,300 ninth- through twelfth-grade students, is 1 of 14 high schools in the Brevard Public Schools (73,121 students). Palm Bay's student population is 63.2% White, 22.0% African American, 9.9% Hispanic, 2.0% Asian, and 2.9% other. Within this student population, 2.5% are English Language Learners, and 14.6% receive free or reduced lunch services.*

* In a subsequent analysis including students' prior participation in these programs, the 2004 school-wide percentage of students eligible for free or reduced lunch services was 32.7%.

Example: 2002 10th Grade Reading
Students with previous FCAT score "at or above Level 3"



Consistent Higher Performance

Palm Bay Senior High School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in reading. The analysis included all ninth- and tenth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. In addition, Palm Bay's data were separated into two groups based on prior performance: those students who were "at or above Level 3" in eighth grade, and those who were "below Level 3" in eighth grade. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade, year, and prior performance group, Palm Bay Senior High School demonstrated an overall average performance rank of 87.2 in reading.

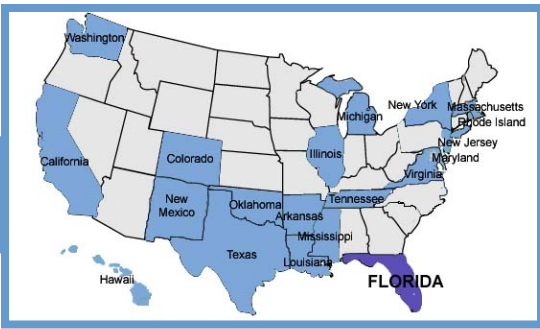
Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data with site visits occurring during the 2004-2005 school year. Differences between the demographics reported in this case study and the values shown on the scatter plot reveal demographic changes in the school between 2002 and 2005.

| Subject | | 2002 | | 2003 | | 2004 | | Overall Avg. Rank** 2002-2004 |
|---------|-------------|-----------------|----|-----------------|----|-----------------|----|----------------------------------|
| | | Percentile Rank | | Percentile Rank | | Percentile Rank | | |
| Grade | | 9 | 10 | 9 | 10 | 9 | 10 | |
| Reading | At or Above | 78 | 91 | 88 | 73 | 91 | 86 | 87.2 |
| | Below | 94 | 96 | 98 | 87 | 93 | 68 | |

**The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of tested students in the grade as weights.

Major Findings

Curriculum guides and benchmarks direct the instructional focus at Palm Bay Senior High School. A well-established process of curricular revision based on a review of teacher feedback and student performance data is established. The school trains teachers to use the database system called TERMS, a comprehensive student information system, as well as the *By the Numbers* program through which teachers are able to view individual student's progress. Teachers are constantly "reteaching and reevaluating instructional plans" based on student data. For college-bound students who are experiencing academic difficulties, the school has implemented the *Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID)* program through which students are provided "assistance in organizational skills, tutoring within the class, counseling, outside mentors, community service projects, and extra writing and mathematics assignments in order to raise their achievement levels." In addition, business partners provide professionals to mentor students in mathematics and science.



Paxon School for Advanced Studies Duval County Public Schools

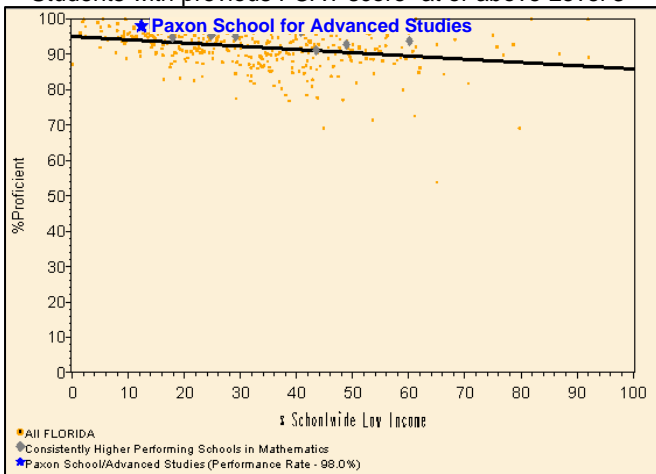
Just for the Kids, Florida NCEA Executive Summary

The School

Paxon School for Advanced Studies, which serves 1,516 ninth- through twelfth-grade students, is 1 of 19 high schools in the Duval County Public Schools (127,053 students). Paxon's student population is 56.0% White, 27.2% African American, 11.4% Asian, 3.6% Hispanic, and 1.8% other. Within this student population, 0.6% are English Language Learners, and 12.3% receive free or reduced lunch services.*

* In a subsequent analysis including students' prior participation in these programs, the 2004 school-wide percentage of students eligible for free or reduced lunch services was 17.6%.

Example: 2004 10th Grade Mathematics
Students with previous FCAT score "at or above Level 3"



Consistent Higher Performance

Paxon School for Advanced Studies is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics. The analysis included all ninth- and tenth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. In addition, Paxon's data were separated into two groups based on prior performance: those students who were "at or above Level 3" in eighth grade, and those who were "below Level 3" in eighth grade. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade, year, and prior performance group, Paxon School for Advanced Studies demonstrated an overall average performance rank of 82.5 in mathematics.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data with site visits occurring during the 2004-2005 school year. Differences between the demographics reported in this case study and the values shown on the scatter plot reveal demographic changes in the school between 2002 and 2005.

| Subject | | 2002 | | 2003 | | 2004 | | Overall Avg. Rank** 2002-2004 |
|-------------|-------------|-----------------|----|-----------------|----|-----------------|----|----------------------------------|
| | | Percentile Rank | | Percentile Rank | | Percentile Rank | | |
| Grade | | 9 | 10 | 9 | 10 | 9 | 10 | |
| Mathematics | At or Above | 66 | 95 | 87 | 89 | 94 | 73 | 82.5 |
| | Below | 61 | 58 | 63 | 95 | 54 | 92 | |

**The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of tested students in the grade as weights.

Major Findings

Paxon School for Advanced Studies is marked by a strong standards-based approach to teaching and learning. Even before the state's movement to a standards-based approach, Paxon was focused on standards. The principal noted that administrators conduct frequent "snapshot visits" to classes where they ask students "What standard are you learning?" and "How do you know what constitutes 'good enough' on that standard in this class?" Faculty meetings are designed to be "teaching and learning workshops" and the school encourages teachers to seek National Board certification as another aspect of staff capacity building. According to one teacher, high-quality instruction involves a "student's conceptual understanding of what they are doing, why they are doing it, and to what skill level they should be doing it." "Bad news" relative to student performance data is "shared, not hidden" and seen as the impetus to come together and solve problems. That problem solving leads to curricular or instructional adjustments designed to improve student performance.



Pompano Beach High School Institute Broward County Public Schools

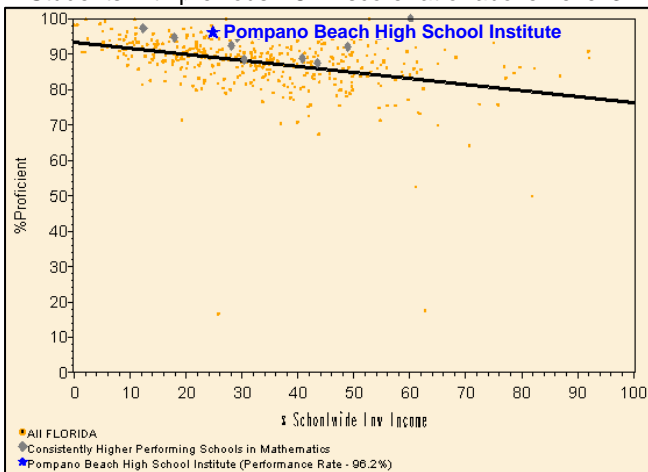
Just for the Kids, Florida NCEA Executive Summary

The School

Pompano Beach High School Institute, which serves 819 ninth- through twelfth-grade students, is 1 of 28 high schools in the Broward County Public Schools (270,302 students). Pompano Beach’s student population is 56.0% White, 26.5% African American, 14.9% Hispanic, 1.3% Asian, and 1.3% other. Within this student population, 4.2% are English Language Learners, and 24.8% receive free or reduced lunch services.*

* In a subsequent analysis including students’ prior participation in these programs, the 2004 school-wide percentage of students who were eligible for free or reduced lunch services was 36.7%.

Example: 2004 9th Grade Mathematics
Students with previous FCAT score “at or above Level 3”



Consistent Higher Performance

Pompano Beach High School Institute is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics. The analysis included all ninth- and tenth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. In addition, Pompano Beach’s data were separated into two groups based on prior performance: those students who were “at or above Level 3” in eighth grade, and those who were “below Level 3” in eighth grade. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade, year, and prior performance group, Pompano Beach High School Institute demonstrated an overall average performance rank of 70.0 in mathematics.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data with site visits occurring during the 2004-2005 school year. Differences between the demographics reported in this case study and the values shown on the scatter plot reveal demographic changes in the school between 2002 and 2005.

| Subject | | 2002 Percentile Rank | | 2003 Percentile Rank | | 2004 Percentile Rank | | Overall Avg. Rank** 2002-2004 |
|-------------|-------------|----------------------|----|----------------------|----|----------------------|----|----------------------------------|
| Grade | | 9 | 10 | 9 | 10 | 9 | 10 | |
| Mathematics | At or Above | 82 | 94 | 50 | 50 | 85 | 61 | 70.0 |
| | Below | 74 | 90 | 42 | 60 | 78 | 72 | |

**The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of tested students in the grade as weights.

Major Findings

“We define success through rigorous academic coursework emphasizing honors, Advanced Placement, and dual-enrollment opportunities,” according to a Pompano Beach administrator. Teachers are instructed in the practical use of a wide array of instructional technology in the school’s Digital Education Teacher Academy. New teachers are provided mentors through the school’s New Educator Support System (NESS). As one teacher said, “A teacher cannot lecture for two hours. Teachers have to use multiple techniques, as well as different forms of evaluation. Also, techniques have to change every day. ... Teachers do more projects. ... We all use the instructional focus, guided practice, and modeling.” There are frequent principal walkabouts, the results of which are reported back to the teacher within 24 hours, and teachers can also expect at least four department chair classroom visits per year. Teachers administer bi-weekly Instructional Focus Assessments; data from these assessments are used to determine what instructional adjustments or remediation are necessary.

The entire case study may be viewed at http://www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/study_framework.cfm?study=Florida



Florida High School Best Practice Study: Findings

Based on the Themes of The JFTK Framework

Five organizing themes provided the structure for studying the practices of consistently higher performing schools. The themes are listed below.

1. Curriculum and Academic Goals
2. Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building
3. Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements
4. Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data
5. Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustment

These themes are used below to summarize the findings of this study. The themes represent the broad topics that connect best practices across different school system levels—district, school, and classroom. Together, these themes capture the primary instructional activities undertaken by school systems and represent the major content areas in which practices of higher performing school systems differ from their average-performing counterparts.

The first theme described in The JFTK Best Practice Framework forms the foundation of The Framework. Each of the other four themes rests upon the assumption that there is absolute clarity about what is to be taught and learned by grade level—pre-K-12. Therefore, Curriculum and Academic Goals forms the base of The Framework. Building upon that base, higher performing schools are deliberate about selecting and developing their human resources (Theme Two: Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building) and equipping all staff with evidence-based tools and strategies to deliver the curriculum (Theme Three: Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements). With people, tools, and strategies in place, higher performing schools regularly monitor student progress (Theme Four: Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data). Finally, higher performing schools are quick to respond to student achievement data—recognizing success and intervening or adjusting whenever necessary to ensure all students reach the stated standards (Theme Five: Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustment).



Theme One: Curriculum and Academic Goals

"What is Taught and Learned"

This theme focuses on the learning target. What is it that we expect all students to know and be able to do by grade and subject? Consistently higher performing school systems have clear academic targets from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Principals and teachers understand the learning goals and understand that these goals are for all students and are non-negotiable.

Specific Florida Findings: Curriculum and Academic Goals

- **Higher performing schools develop and operate from a written curriculum with stronger academic goals and expectations than the state standards.**
 - The Sunshine State Standards forge the foundation of the curricula for both higher and average-performing schools. In higher performing schools, however, mastering the standards is seen as a starting rather than a finishing line. Higher performing schools look toward more rigorous goals such as graduation rates, college entrance rates, and dual-

enrollment and Advanced Placement course participation. Some of the higher performing schools require every student to take at least one Advanced Placement course during their high school experience. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)

- In higher performing schools, the culture of the school seems to be focused on developing a curriculum that will equip students to do whatever they wish after graduation. In average-performing schools, the focus of the school is on ensuring that students acquire the credits needed to obtain a high school diploma—a “survive-the-system” mindset. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
- Teachers in both higher and average-performing schools see themselves as part of a family, or a group with a common goal. In higher performing schools, however, the goal is high and academic in nature—to prepare their students for successful post-secondary experiences. In average-performing schools, goals tend to center on “making it” to graduation. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
- Higher performing schools focus on the higher end of the curriculum, trying to add to honors and Advanced Placement course offerings, knowing that the level of rigor expected by those courses will aid their students in other areas of their academic and working life in the future. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
- One higher performing school eradicated lower level mathematics classes (often called technical mathematics). In addition, different levels of algebra were eliminated and now all students are expected to pass a rigorous algebra course. In discussing the changes, the faculty cite the research that reveals when expectations are raised, the majority of the students will rise to the challenge. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
- The district’s Competency-Based Curriculum, the state’s Sunshine State Standards, as well as the Advanced Placement curriculum are foundations for the academic program at the school. The industry standards for the various design fields targeted by special school programs provide additional content and performance skills. (Design & Architectural, Miami-Dade County Public Schools)
- “The faculty is a highly educated staff with very high understanding of state standards. We do a lot of peer mentoring and staff development to understand the student outcomes.” (Fort Walton Beach, Okaloosa County School District)
- “It’s important that you have an umbrella set of standards, but here it’s a matter of philosophy that we exceed the content, the stipulated elements of the courses.” (New Smyrna Beach, Volusia County Schools)
- While being acutely attuned to the expectations of the state to have schools meet state standards, the Brevard County School District supports school efforts to deliver an even more rigorous curriculum to all students. (Palm Bay, Brevard Public Schools)

▪ **Higher performing schools have higher expectations for their students’ academic performance and apply those high expectations across the full student body—not just a talented elite sub-population.**

- Higher performing schools pursue rigor in course content across a broader range of academic levels than do average-performing schools. This is expressed by higher expectations for regular and remedial students, by more aggressive efforts to enroll borderline students in advanced classes, and by providing regular students more frequent access to the school’s top teachers. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
- Teachers at higher performing schools seem to feel that a student is better off struggling in a high-level class than excelling in an average class. Average-performing schools seem to

make less effort to recruit students into challenging advanced classes and are more conservative or cautious about which students they place in such courses. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)

- Academically, the schools that perform at the higher levels set very high standards for all of their students. There is no self-delusion. They acknowledge that not ALL students will be able to perform well in classes as rigorous as the Advanced Placement level, but there is a pervasive belief that all students are capable of performing at higher levels than they are currently performing. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
- Higher performing schools do not divide students into “those who can” and “those who can’t.” There is a single culture focused on academic success. Faculty at average-performing schools expressed lower levels of confidence that struggling students can achieve at higher levels. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
- Teachers and counselors at higher performing schools spend extensive time making sure students are in the right course based on their knowledge of what students need and what content specific courses offer. The emphasis is on getting students into the most challenging course possible. In average-performing schools, the emphasis is on getting needed credits rather than acquiring maximum learning. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
- “Staff capacity to relate to students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds has been a key factor in raising achievement at all academic levels—not just with high-achieving students.” (Astronaut, Brevard Public Schools)
- The school culture of high expectations is applied to students at all performance levels, not just the academically advanced. Students in all academic courses expect homework assignments in each class that require approximately two hours of time each day to complete. (Dr. Michael M. Krop, Miami-Dade County Public Schools)

▪ **Competencies measured on the state’s assessment test are not seen as a digression from the “real” curriculum but as a very important component of it.**

- State and school curriculum goals are deeply connected. Educators in higher performing schools respect and deeply understand the student competencies measured on the state’s assessments. At average-performing schools, a significant portion of the faculty seem to view the attention needed to address state-assessed competencies as a regrettable diversion from the traditional priorities of the school’s past. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
- The state’s policy decisions on the criteria for accountability appear to be a driving force for higher performing schools’ development and implementation of school policies and practices. Average-performing schools struggle to retain traditional practices while adding processes to meet new expectations. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
- In higher performing schools, while there is some faculty and administrator discomfort about the attention being given to student performance on high-stakes tests, they see the content of those tests as a valid and significant body of knowledge that is important for students to master. In average-performing schools, there is a mild form of grieving by some faculty for the traditional school processes of their past—which are seen as being lost by current efforts to meet accountability expectations. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
- Higher performing schools are focused on helping all students master the competencies needed for college and the world of work (and do not see any significant differences between the two) and feel that these competencies should be measured. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)

- **Teachers and administrators know exactly what is to be taught and learned by grade and subject as well as how academic objectives are connected across subjects.**
 - Higher performing schools focus significant attention on understanding the curriculum. Weekly meetings, from administrative meetings to meetings with curricular leaders, center on discussions of curricular issues. Meetings at average-performing schools center less on curricular issues. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
 - In higher performing schools, the faculty has a well articulated, shared view of the curriculum that the school intends to impart to students. The faculty understand Florida's Sunshine State Standards and those aspects of the standards that the FCAT assesses. They have a clear understanding of how and where those standards and FCAT priorities are integrated into the overall curriculum of the school. In average-performing schools, faculty do not seem to have such a well-defined or integrated understanding of the overall curriculum. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
 - In higher performing schools, teachers take the time to explore the standards in depth and to incorporate the standards into and across the curriculum rather than treating them as separate entities. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
 - Active vertical planning teams are common in higher performing schools. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
 - While all teachers now feel the responsibility of preparing students for the FCAT, in higher performing schools, the most affected departments (language arts and mathematics) engage the full faculty in student preparation much more effectively. Teachers in non-tested departments receive both formal and informal direction regarding how to integrate reading, writing, and mathematics strategies into their planning. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
 - Teachers in both types of schools are well-versed in the language of the state standards, but teachers at higher performing schools do more work on internalizing the standards and manifesting them into their curriculum rather than creating "FCAT lessons." (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
 - Districts with higher proportions of higher performing high schools are more focused than other districts on enabling school leaders to understand the state's standards-based curriculum and the FCAT assessment model. Training is provided relative to the state's school improvement agenda. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
 - One key school reform has been to incorporate reading and writing across the curriculum. (Astronaut, Brevard Public Schools)
 - "The district provides curricular materials, as well as a lead teacher for every subject [whom] we can contact via phone or email for guidance," stated one teacher. (Bayside, Brevard Public Schools)
 - A mathematics teacher stated, "I have ninth graders, and I think about, 'What do they need [in order] to be ready for calculus?'" (New Smyrna Beach, Volusia County Schools)
 - The whole school took on the goal of training everyone across the curriculum in writing. (New Smyrna Beach, Volusia County Schools)

- **School culture is defined in terms of academic issues.**
 - Teachers in higher performing schools identified academics as their school's primary focus, and listed academic issues as their primary challenge, whereas average-performing schools often listed factors such as cleanliness and safety as more pressing issues than academic ones. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)

- A sense of family is evident in higher performing schools and that family sees its connection as providing curriculum and instruction services to students, not just social and support services for adults. Average-performing schools also perceive themselves as family, but their family focus is on social relationships, supporting each other in pursuit of difficult—perhaps unfair—outside expectations. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
- Although both higher performing and average-performing faculty see themselves as part of a bonded group, faculty from average-performing schools feel they are united by a desire for “survival,” whereas the higher performers are united by a common desire for success and achievement. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
- In higher performing schools, the goals and vision set forth by the administration focus on academic achievement at all levels; in average-performing schools, the focus tends to be on safety and attendance. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
- “Student achievement—I will fire coaches if they don’t remember the first word in the term ‘student athlete,’” stated the principal. (Dr. Michael M. Krop, Miami-Dade County Public Schools)



Theme Two: Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building

“Selecting and Developing Leaders and Teachers”

This second theme focuses on the selection and development of a school system's most precious commodity—people. Once the academic goals of the system are clear, the leaders and teachers are selected and given professional development opportunities to make these goals a reality for every learner in the system.

Specific Florida Findings: Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building

- **Professional development activities focus on a deep understanding of the curriculum and the strategies needed to deliver it.**
 - Professional development in higher performing schools is systemic and focused on curriculum and instruction. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
 - In higher performing schools, teachers’ schedules tend to promote opportunities for dialogue on curriculum and instruction, not just routines. In average-performing schools, teachers appear to expend less effort to ensure time to talk about instruction. Instead, they seem to spend more time on school routines, rule compliance, and safety issues. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
 - The quantities of materials in higher performing schools are similar to those in the average-performing schools studied. However, higher performing schools make a significant effort to train the faculty in the productive use of the materials acquired. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
 - Efforts to improve teachers’ mastery of the skills needed for effective instruction in mathematics and language arts seem more intense and focused in higher performing schools. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
 - There are regular department meetings in each subject area, and curriculum is the focus of discussion. In addition, departments eat lunch together and discuss, among other things, curriculum. (Dr. Michael M. Krop, Miami-Dade County Public Schools)

- Professional development is carefully planned for and designed to meet instructional needs based on data and analysis. One teacher stated, “Probably 95 percent of staff development activities are curriculum related.” (New Smyrna Beach, Volusia County Schools)
- The district requires assistant principals to complete a three-year training program. As part of that program, each assistant principal completes a special project based on his or her campus’s school improvement plan. (Pompano Beach, Broward County Public Schools)
- **School-level professional development activities supplement those provided by the district and focus on the needs of individual teacher or needs based on specific student populations.**
 - Principals in higher performing schools are perceived as highly encouraging and supportive of continued teacher professional development. Those principals expect such professional development to occur and are likely to recruit participants as opportunities are identified. In average-performing schools, the principals are seen as willing to support professional development opportunities, but the burden to pursue them is placed more on the teachers. These principals are also more accepting when such efforts are not made by faculty members. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
 - “There is a sense of family at the school, but it is a family with high expectations for their own performance. In many schools, the family tends to be forgiving of mediocre performance or will choose not to address it. In this school, consistently poor effort or performance by a teacher or administrator will generate some form of response and intervention by other faculty members.” (Design & Architectural, Miami-Dade County Public Schools)
 - Initial responses to struggling teachers tend to be positive with private collegial offers of advice and assistance, followed by referral to a specific mentoring activity. Teachers persistently working in manners adverse to student needs are likely to find their issue addressed in department meetings or administrative interventions will be recommended. The approach to family focuses on providing direction and ongoing support, but problems are definitely addressed, not ignored. (Dr. Michael M. Krop, Miami-Dade County Public Schools)
 - “I have a new job called reading coach and one of the things I’ve been trying to do is visit every classroom that meets either first or fourth period. So three, four, or five times a week, two times a day, I’m visiting someone’s classroom to see how the students are doing with their reading progress and what needs they have that I can help the teachers with either directly or indirectly.” (New Smyrna Beach, Volusia County Schools)
- **New teachers are paired with mentors who are selected based on proven student achievement, not tenure. Mentoring activities focus on curriculum and instruction, rather than school policies or procedures.**
 - At the school site, new teachers go through training sessions with department chairs, administrators, and mentors where information about the curriculum is discussed and disseminated. (Bayside, Brevard Public Schools)
 - “The school district has a TIP [teacher induction program] in which a principal must observe a teacher within the initial 45 days of their working here. They [the teachers] are also assigned a mentor,” stated the principal. “I sit with the mentor, the PDF [professional development facilitator], [and] the teacher, and we develop a professional development plan.” (Paxon School for Advanced Studies, Duval County Public Schools)
 - The New Educator Support System (NESS) is a mentoring program developed by the district. A new teacher is assigned a NESS coach, and the coach is compensated for working with the new teacher. Additionally, department chairs feel that it is their responsibility to mentor new teachers, and the school also has an in-house mentoring

program through which the new teacher gets to pick his or her own coach. (Pompano Beach, Broward County Public Schools)

▪ **Teacher collaboration, centered on discussions about student learning, is powerfully structured and supported.**

- In higher performing schools, the faculty and administration perceive themselves as learners, and the concept of a “learning community” is evident. Average-performing schools seem to put more emphasis on getting students through the year than on raising levels of adult performance. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
- Higher performing schools appear to have more of the characteristics of a learning organization (as defined in Peter Senge’s works) than do average-performing schools. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
- Teachers in higher performing schools find it normal and expect other teachers to visit their classes and to engage in dialogue about what is and is not working in terms of instruction. In average-performing schools, peer observation is not common. Teacher dialogue tends to center on school issues other than curriculum and instruction. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
- One of the main differences between the higher performing and average-performing schools is the level of support teachers provide for one another. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
- Many higher performing schools make peer observation part of the school culture, regardless of whether it is mandated by the district’s teacher evaluation policies. Teachers perceive other teachers as resources, not threats, and share ideas, ask for help, or observe others engaged in productive instruction to help validate or improve their own processes. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
- Collegial processes of team learning and developing shared visions are typical in higher performing schools. In average-performing schools, there is less evidence of team learning, and divergent views about the vision for the students’ futures seem common. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
- For new teachers, according to a mathematics teacher, “It really puts their minds at ease if they are coming into the math department, and they’ve got 12 other math people right there. So if they need immediate feedback on an issue, they’ve got it.” (Astronaut, Brevard Public Schools)
- Teacher collaboration is essential at Bayside High School. In addition to department and staff meetings, lunches are coordinated so teachers within the same department have lunch together. (Bayside, Brevard Public Schools)
- “Collegial processes are used to guide faculty inquiries into school improvement efforts.” (Design & Architectural, Miami-Dade County Public Schools)
- One teacher stated, “Teachers with common students are like a learning community [that] gets together and discusses student needs, upcoming events, [and] coordinating.” Peer observation is a common activity and a valued part of the school culture. (Fort Walton Beach, Okaloosa County School District)
- According to a teacher, “By going to this [block] schedule, we were able to decrease the amount of time to change classes, and we were able to group that time together for teachers, not only for individual planning, but also for collaborative planning.” (New Smyrna Beach, Volusia County Schools)
- Opportunities for frequent meetings are provided so teachers can discuss the data and make meaning from them. (Pompano Beach, Broward County Public Schools)



Theme Three: Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

"The Right Stuff—Time and Tools"

This theme focuses on the "things" that higher performing school systems use—the arrangement of time, the instructional resources and materials, technology, etc. Strong instructional leaders and highly qualified teachers need evidence-based tools and resources to reach high standards with every learner.

Specific Florida Findings: Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

- **The master schedule is created so that all levels of students have access to the most experienced and successful teachers.**
 - In higher performing schools, many teachers in the mathematics and language arts departments teach at least one entry level and one advanced course in an effort to enhance coherence within the continuum of skills. The mixed-level schedules seem to promote teachers' personal commitments to improving programs for struggling students, generate credibility for new strategies designed to increase expectations and active learning, and raise students' sense of worth when they see the school's best teachers in classrooms with them. In average-performing schools, it is more common for senior teachers with the best credentials to have a sense of entitlement to the higher level classes and that entitlement is honored by the school's administration. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
 - Students have equitable access to elite teachers. It is common for elite teachers in mathematics and language arts, those who traditionally would teach the higher grades and the most advanced students, to also have classes on their schedule for entry-level struggling students. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
 - In the higher performing schools, not only are the more experienced and better skilled teachers (as perceived by their peers and administration) given the high-level courses such as Advanced Placement to teach, they are also increasingly taking lower level courses on to their schedule. Higher performing schools seem to be shifting away from the mentality of "better teachers get better students" that prevails in average-performing schools. The results of this shift seem to be beneficial with regard to test scores, and often, student motivation. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
 - In higher performing schools, teachers who have a good deal of expertise in their subject areas are often teaching ninth- and tenth-grade courses because of the heightened need for improved student performance in those grades. In average-performing schools, the best-trained teachers tend to work with the eleventh- and twelfth-grade students. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
 - In higher performing schools, there is a shift from the notion that "good" teachers should only teach the "good" kids. More often than in average-performing schools, there is a noticeable rise in the number of Advanced Placement teachers who are also teaching sections of foundation-level or remedial-level courses. While originally this may have been an administrative decision, the teachers have embraced it as a necessary step to help all students succeed. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
- **Selected instructional programs and resources are tightly aligned with the academic objectives of the curriculum and are supplemented as needed.**
 - "When deciding on appropriate texts," said one teacher, "we look at the questions at the back of the books to make sure they align to the FCAT [Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test] with a higher-order thinking skills focus." (Bayside, Brevard Public Schools)

- Of a recent program adoption, one school's committee reviewed the product's sequencing, comprehensiveness, scope, alignment with Sunshine State Standards, and alignment with areas of specific need to the community's students. (New Smyrna Beach, Volusia County Schools)
 - "I think one of the things we try to do as effectively as we can given the limited resources is to let the data and the feedback from the schools drive our decisions. For instance, last year we saw a great need for more support at the high schools in ninth- and tenth-grade reading. Our principals were indicating they needed an additional resource and our data certainly prompted that. So we always prioritize new programs based on the need and the demand," stated a district administrator. (New Smyrna Beach, Volusia County Schools)
- **Instructional time is guarded to work on core academic objectives.**
 - Students' schedules in higher performing schools provide additional time for students who need to work on curriculum targets. Typically, students who demonstrate the need are provided extra classes in reading and/or mathematics. Double blocks and use of elective class time are typical approaches to accomplishing this. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
 - The majority of the higher performing schools use some type of block scheduling, but a number of schools also use traditional schedules. The common element, regardless of schedule configuration, is providing added classes targeted to priority issues such as mathematics or reading. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
 - Teachers take an active role in structuring courses for struggling students in mathematics and language arts so that maximum time is spent on learning priorities. (Astronaut, Brevard Public Schools)
 - Though adhering to "a traditional, 57-minute, one through six [periods] daily schedule," the school designates "a block of two periods for students in an innovative, intensive reading/English course." (Bayside, Brevard Public Schools)
 - "We do a 90-minute block for students struggling in literacy—in reading—with many different strategies employed," said the principal. "For ninth, tenth, and twelfth graders, we link the reading and their social studies class, ... and link reading and sciences for the eleventh graders." (Niceville, Okaloosa County School District)
 - **Instructional materials and resources, such as technological tools, are used effectively to reach high standards with every learner.**
 - The quantities of instructional materials in higher performing schools are similar to those in the average-performing schools studied. However, higher performing schools make a significant effort to ensure that teachers are trained in the productive use of materials acquired. Average-performing schools seem to devote less attention to ensuring mastery of proper use of materials and instructional programs. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
 - Change is the norm in higher performing schools. Change that improves curriculum or instruction is embraced rather than feared. Teachers are willing to adopt new practices and styles, as well as assimilate technology into their classrooms, if there is evidence that it will help their students achieve mastery of the necessary skills. They understand that the 21st Century is changing the way information is managed and are adapting their teaching practices to promote this kind of learning. In average-performing schools, some teachers expressed a longing for priorities of the past that they felt were being cast aside in pursuit of less worthy priorities. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
 - Computer software and other support materials seem to be pouring into reading and mathematics departments. In higher performing schools, teachers know how to use the

new technology and resources. In average-performing schools, there is still a sense of experimentation as the faculty search for “a program” that might lift the school from average- to higher performing. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)

- In higher performing schools, students often use computer-based programs such as *Fast Forward* and *Read 180*. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
- Teachers at higher performing schools typically have the same access to technology and ancillary materials as teachers at average-performing schools, but they streamline the process of incorporating new resources into their instructional planning. New programs and resources exist in average-performing schools, but many teachers are unaware of them or uninformed about their capabilities. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
- The Compass Lab has been designed so that students can have a place to use computers to work on remediation or course recovery—replacing prior unsatisfactory work. (Bayside, Brevard Public Schools)
- Students have recurring opportunities to use technology as a learning tool, including access to such programs as the *Microsoft Certification Program*. (Fort Walton Beach, Okaloosa County School District)
- “High-quality instruction is hands-on, relevant, individualized learning which inspires confidence and curiosity—varying teaching styles and making use of technology in a classroom that has mutual respect between teachers and students.” (Dr. Michael M. Krop, Miami-Dade County Public Schools)



Theme Four: Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data

“Knowing the Learners and the Numbers”

After clearly identifying what is to be taught and learned by grade and subject and ensuring that the schools are equipped with the staff and the tools to successfully deliver the curriculum, the school system then asks and answers an important question: “How are we going to know if students learned what we said they would learn?”

Specific Florida Findings: Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data

- **Educators receive timely and ongoing feedback from district assessment programs. Assessment data are disaggregated by school, teacher, gender, ethnicity, or any other grouping significant to the student population of the district. Data provide enough information to trigger and direct any needed instructional interventions.**
 - Prior student data are used frequently to anticipate learning needs of students in higher performing schools. School and district leaders make assessment data available to teachers in disaggregated form, organized by learning issues, and arranged by the students in their current classes. In average-performing schools, data are less often disaggregated and are usually organized by last year’s classes. In addition, teachers tend to use the data only to look back in time at how students did in terms of passing. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
 - “Our county gets [assessment results] to us very quickly.” (Astronaut, Brevard Public Schools)
 - “All teachers can access [student performance data] and see information from the test scores broken down by area, to see where their students’ weaknesses are,” said one teacher. (Dr. Michael M. Krop, Miami-Dade County Public Schools)

- Teachers focus on sub-test scores looking for patterns of strength and weakness in student learning. They work collegially to assess what the test scores indicate about needed curricular or instructional adjustments. (Dr. Michael M. Krop, Miami-Dade County Public Schools)
 - “The minute data tapes arrive from our Department of Education or the minute we finish any assessments of our own, we roll the data on our test history file to provide access to teachers.” (New Smyrna Beach, Volusia County Schools)
 - Teachers are able to view the growth of an individual student’s progress. Teachers are constantly reteaching and reevaluating based on the data. Teachers have direct access to the district’s database system called TERMS. This system, according to one teacher, “provides each individual teacher access [in order] to monitor attendance, student grades, test scores, family information, and student schedules. It is real-time data which is updated constantly.” (Palm Bay, Brevard Public Schools)
- **District staff ensure that principals and teachers have the necessary skills to use assessment data.**
 - Higher performing schools are more likely to train their faculty members to keep their own databases or spreadsheets with downloaded state assessment data that can be manipulated for their own instructional needs. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
 - “The faculty is a highly educated staff ... with very high understanding of the [state standards],” observed one teacher. “We do a lot of peer mentoring and staff development to understand the [student] outcomes.” (Fort Walton Beach, Okaloosa County School District)
 - Data-driven decision making is supported in a variety of ways. For example, the school monitors its goals by training teachers to use the *By the Numbers* program. (Palm Bay, Brevard Public Schools)
 - Teachers receive training—both formally and informally—in order to make maximum use of the data tools provided, as through the district’s *Virtual Counselor* student information system. (Pompano Beach, Broward County Public Schools)
 - **School instructional leaders (e.g., principal, instructional specialists, and master teachers) frequently observe teachers to monitor and provide feedback relative to instructional practice and curriculum delivery.**
 - Many administrators in higher performing schools feel confident that they can identify high-quality instruction when they walk into a classroom. They mentioned observing active learning, with students frequently demonstrating the skills being taught. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
 - Administrative walkabouts are common in higher performing schools and focus on the observation of patterns of instructional behavior. Administrative visits to classrooms in average-performing schools are more often related to classroom management issues. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
 - A principal remarked, “We go through all classrooms two to three times a week now, making sure the standards are being met.” (Astronaut, Brevard Public Schools)
 - “When you take enough snapshots, you develop a full album of a classroom.” (Bayside, Brevard Public Schools)
 - Campus leaders evaluate instruction through observations, following a “five-by-five” guideline (over the course of five days, they visit five different classes). “I like to see if learning is going on [during walkabouts], and if there is motivation,” says one principal. (Palm Bay, Brevard Public Schools)

- According to a principal, “I will walk down the hall and say, ‘Let me see what [so-and-so] is doing.’ Or I will hear students engaged and just slip into a seat, and might get involved in the discussion.” (Paxon School for Advanced Studies, Duval County Public Schools)
- Administrators receive training to use a six-step Classroom Walk-Through (CWT) model that includes the following: 1) a snapshot on learning, including written objectives and use of Bloom’s Taxonomy; 2) identified instructional strategies, including observable, high-yield strategies; 3) evidence of student engagement; 4) a survey of the learning environment, including the teacher’s desk and room; 5) an after-the-walkthrough analysis; and 6) reflection with the teacher. (Pompano Beach, Broward County Public Schools)
- **Teachers share specific student progress with the principal and parents in writing, by phone, and in conferences.**
 - The *Parent Internet Viewer* provides parents with online access to information regarding the academic progress and class attendance of their children. Students also use the *Viewer* to monitor their individual performance in their courses. (Dr. Michael M. Krop, Miami-Dade County Public Schools)
 - The principal stated, “Our number one goal is to make parents aware of what is going on in the school. Palm Bay makes active use of email to parents, open house, monthly newsletters, orientation for incoming ninth graders, voice mail, and an auto-calling system to each home on all important dates.” (Palm Bay, Brevard Public Schools)
 - Administrators, teachers, students, and parents have access to data through the *Virtual Counselor* program. In addition to showing test scores, this program also shows daily attendance rates and grades. Educators use data collected from the *Virtual Counselor* for student placement in reading and mathematics courses. (Pompano Beach, Broward County Public Schools)



Theme Five: Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustment

“Ensuring All Children Learn”

The most important question of all follows the monitoring of student performance: “What are we going to do if students do not learn the knowledge and skills we said they would learn?” Higher performing school systems have *pyramids of intervention* that provide immediate and intense intervention at multiple levels when learning is interrupted.

Specific Florida Findings: Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustment

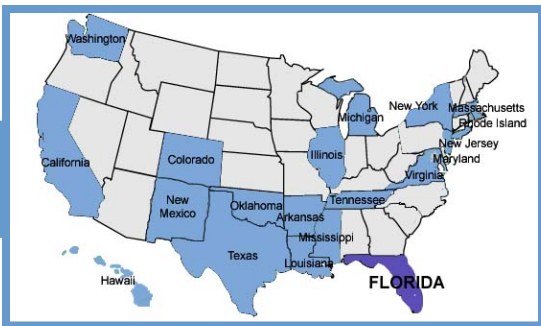
- **Student performance data, supported by direct classroom observations, are used to recognize teacher and student success.**
 - As one principal put it, “Recognition activities—for teachers *and* students—need to be specific as to what we are recognizing.” (Astronaut, Brevard Public Schools)
 - The honor roll and other student achievements are published in the school newsletter, as well as in the televised morning announcements. (Bayside, Brevard Public Schools)
 - A teacher reported, “We give academic letters—like the athletic letters—for academic success.” (Fort Walton Beach, Okaloosa County School District)
 - The teachers reported that they send postcards home to parents recognizing students’ academic accomplishments, and one teacher noted, “The students go wild when you send one.” (New Smyrna Beach, Volusia County Schools)

- A principal noted, “We celebrate teacher achievements—put their pictures up for a variety of things, usually for academic things. We start every faculty meeting with a celebration.” (New Smyrna Beach, Volusia County Schools)
- **Rather than lowering the academic expectation for some students, educators adjust their use of resources, time, and strategies to ensure that all students learn the stated academic objectives.**
 - One teacher reported, “The *Pacesetter* program opened our minds to alternative ways of instruction to better integrate standards and make learning accessible to all students.” (Astronaut, Brevard Public Schools)
 - “We define high-quality instruction as being targeted to meet the needs of all students,” one teacher said. “We vary the type of instruction to hit upon all the learning needs, using small group, lectures, and projects.” (Bayside, Brevard Public Schools)
 - One school in the district provides an evening program of high school credit courses based largely on online learning processes. This is an alternative for students struggling with regular high school learning approaches. As one teacher said, “They deserve [a chance to succeed] just as much as any other kid.” (Fort Walton Beach, Okaloosa County School District)
 - A teacher stated that quality instruction encompasses “varying teaching styles, including discussion, cooperative learning, [and] utilization of technology in a classroom that has mutual respect between teachers and students.” (Dr. Michael M. Krop, Miami-Dade County Public Schools)
 - The Eagles Institute provides an alternative program where students can study in the evening using online computer-based, performance-based courses. (Niceville, Okaloosa County School District)
 - One teacher remarked that “with the block schedule, a teacher cannot lecture for two hours. Teachers have to use multiple techniques, as well as different forms of evaluation. Also, techniques have to change every day. ... Teachers do more projects. ... We all use the instructional focus, guided practice, and modeling.” (Pompano Beach, Broward County Public Schools)
- **Proven, practical intervention programs and practices are identified and developed to supplement those provided at the classroom level. School-level interventions provide a second level of intervention that is more immediate and individualized than district-level interventions.**
 - A striking difference between the average-performing and the higher performing schools with regard to student support is that the higher performing schools have more systems in place to assist struggling high-achieving students. Because teachers and leaders in higher performing schools believe it is better for a student to struggle in a higher level class than breeze through an average-level class, schools have supports in place. One school created an after-school voluntary elective to provide academic and emotional support particularly for minority students who wanted to enroll in higher level or Advanced Placement course work. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
 - Teachers in higher performing schools provide students with access to tutorial programs so that struggling students in all classes as well as those students choosing the challenge of high-level work are continuously supported. Average-performing schools tend to have tutorials in place for struggling students only. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)
 - In higher performing schools, teachers plan recurring instructional interventions to promote student mastery of the state’s tested academic objectives across the entire student

population. Students at all levels are expected both to demonstrate and retain mastery over time. (*High School Best Practice Study: Florida Public High Schools*)

- “We have created a course specifically to help struggling gifted and honors kids,” one teacher stated. (Dr. Michael M. Krop, Miami-Dade County Public Schools)
 - The school has a program—the *Quest* program—devised to redirect potential dropouts toward school success. (New Smyrna Beach, Volusia County Schools)
 - “We try to hand-schedule students whose test scores are at the bottom, to help those students get the [most appropriate] classes,” stated one teacher. (Niceville, Okaloosa County School District)
 - For college-bound students who are experiencing academic difficulties, the school has implemented the *Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID)* program. Through AVID, students are provided “assistance in organizational skills, tutoring within the class, counseling, outside mentors, community service projects, and extra writing and math assignments in order to raise their achievement levels,” according to a teacher. “Upon completion of the program, students are eligible for four-year scholarships. There is also mandated parental involvement, and students must be enrolled in at least one honors class.” (Palm Bay, Brevard Public Schools)
 - There are different sources of support available to students who are struggling. Both teachers and peers are available to help. (Paxon School for Advanced Studies, Duval County Public Schools)
- **Extended opportunities are available for students who demonstrate early mastery of the objectives. Interventions and extensions are continually reviewed by collaborative planning teams.**
 - For high achievers, the school has a Gifted Advanced Placement Preparation and Advanced Placement program (GAPP/AP). (Bayside, Brevard Public Schools)
 - An Advanced Placement Institute is provided to assist advanced students to accelerate their academic progress. (Fort Walton Beach, Okaloosa County School District)
 - As one teacher said, “We’ve looked at all those scores for each student: ‘Which ones do we need to help? Which ones do we need to encourage? Which ones do we need to push up to that next level?’” (New Smyrna Beach, Volusia County Schools)
 - “[Our school] has a strong Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate program, and it’s still developing,” according to the principal. (Paxon School for Advanced Studies, Duval County Public Schools)
 - **School-selected instructional programs, practices, and arrangements are continually evaluated and adjusted based on student achievement results.**
 - “Data are used to reset our goals for the following year,” the principal said. (Astronaut, Brevard Public Schools)
 - “All practices within our A+ plan,” according to one teacher, “are based on a data-driven decision making process.” (Bayside, Brevard Public Schools)
 - “We all meet as departments,” a teacher said, “and we reflect on scope and sequence to see what works and what doesn’t work, to reevaluate and reflect on what we did and didn’t do. To get ready for next year, we share with each other.” (Design & Architectural, Miami-Dade County Public Schools)
 - The principal at one school pointed out, “We look at where our students struggle [on standardized tests] and set next-year goals to address those problems.” (Fort Walton Beach, Okaloosa County School District)

- “We’re doing more data analysis than ever before,” a teacher said. “We look at test scores every year and break them down to show the faculty where we are, where we’ve been, and where we’d like to go. ... We now have quarterly assessments in the tested area.” (Dr. Michael M. Krop, Miami-Dade County Public Schools)
- “We monitor our goals through FCAT scores and norm-referenced tests,” stated one teacher. (Pompano Beach, Broward County Public Schools)



Florida High School Best Practice Study: Conclusion

Based on the Themes of The JFTK Framework

Researchers conducted site visits to 15 high schools in Florida, which were identified through the NCEA analysis. Summaries of the findings of those practices that appeared to distinguish consistently higher performing high schools from average-performing ones are presented below by theme.

The Findings

Curriculum and Academic Goals

Equipped with excellent state standards and district guidance, teachers in the 10 higher performing schools carefully studied, further detailed, and effectively implemented those standards using tools such as curriculum maps, pacing guides, aligned instructional programs and materials, and formative benchmark assessments. The district curriculum used by higher performing schools deeply integrated the state standards, and educators did not see those standards as a digression from the real curriculum, but as a very important component of it. With a focus on core learning skills, grade-level and vertical teams continually reviewed and revised the curriculum. That curriculum communicated high expectations for all students, not just the academically advanced.

Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building

While the selection and development of strong instructional leaders, both administrative and teacher leaders, continued to be seen as critical to increased student achievement, the primary development within this theme in consistently higher performing schools was in the area of teacher collaboration. Through the support of skilled coaches and given the time to collaborate, a “radical” shift in culture began to emerge. Rather than dialogue centered on subject matter, teachers stated that they were beginning to center dialogue on student learning. As a further example of this cultural shift, teachers expected and found it normal for other teachers to visit their classes and to engage in dialogue about what was and was not working in terms of instruction. Systemic and focused professional development activities supported the new culture and ensured that teachers and leaders developed a deep understanding of the curriculum and the strategies needed to deliver it.

Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

Teachers across all consistently higher performing high schools noted that while departmental structures were very strong, new cross-departmental structures were forming. Teachers saw this new development as directly related to the advent of standards. By focusing on the learning objectives rather than their own subject matter, educators in higher performing schools began forming real, rather than spurious, cross-departmental structures. Master schedules gave all levels of students access to the most experienced and successful teachers and all teachers had experience teaching struggling students. Teachers used carefully selected instructional strategies and practices—primarily instructional differentiation and effective use of technology—to ensure that instruction was not watered down even as increasing numbers of students were encouraged to take advantage of the Advanced Placement curriculum.

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data

A concerted effort to maximize instructional efficacy by determining the appropriate roles and responsibilities of educators across system levels (district, school, and classroom) marked the culture of higher performing high schools. Educators determined the most effective use of scarce resources by collecting, disaggregating, and interpreting student achievement data. Monitoring of student achievement was varied and ongoing, and personnel at all levels of the system viewed frequent assessments as integral to improved performance. Data were organized and available, and teachers were both highly dependent on and skilled at using data to make informed decisions about teaching and learning.

Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustment

Recognition of students and teachers was specific and substantial. Students and teachers understood the specific behaviors or accomplishments for which they were being recognized—and those behaviors or accomplishments centered on academics. An example of a substantial recognition in one school was the awarding of academic letters, the intellectual equivalent of an athletic letter. The most significant difference in student support noted was the development of layers of support to assist struggling high-achieving students or students who were “stretching” to take more rigorous coursework.

Next Steps

NCEA's state-study protocol assumes that the state framework of best practices will be built based on a three-year study of consistently higher performing and average-performing schools at the elementary-school level (Year One), middle-school level (Year Two), and high-school level (Year Three). Having completed studies of elementary, middle, and high schools, JFTK-Florida's next step could be continued, targeted study of issues that emerged during the previous work in Florida schools.

One of the dangers of studying consistently higher performing schools is drawing conclusions based on a single school example. To avoid this danger, the conclusions for the JFTK-Florida High School Best Practice Study, 2004-05, focus on a description of the practices that are most consistent across the higher performing schools in this study and that can be distinguished in quantity or quality from the same practices in average-performing schools of the study. While any individual case study may cite different factors or practices than those noted above, we highlight those practices that are found to be systematically different between the higher performing schools as a group and the average-performing schools as a group. Finally, the practices highlighted in the conclusion of this study have also been informed by the findings from a much larger body of schools studied (300+ across five years and 20 states) to help determine meaning in the context of Florida.