



TEXAS Higher Performing Schools

NCEA | ACT[®]

Identify. Inform. Improve.

How can this list help your district?

By studying and emulating the practices of higher performing schools, your schools stand to benefit in the areas that need the most help. The List of Higher Performing Schools can serve as an initial tool of investigation into further development and improvement of your district and school practices.

1. Where should we start?

Begin by investigating your school's achievement on state tests as it relates to **College and Career Readiness (CCR)**. This information is available free to Texas schools at http://www.nc4ea.org/index.cfm/e/higher_performing_schools_ccr_charts.

Examine your data for grades and subjects in which your school is not performing as desired. We suggest investigating the practices of higher performing schools that are excelling in those same subjects, and doing a comparison to identify what might be lacking in your school's practices.

For an in-depth look at your data, NCEA has developed the **CoreWork Performance Reports (CWPR)**, which emphasize state-specific College and Career Readiness (CCR) targets. Useful reference materials (tutorials, reference guides and activities) are included to help you benchmark your performance.

2. What other things should we investigate?

- Does your district's written curriculum clearly describe and prioritize what students should know and be able to do in each grade and subject—including grades and subjects not covered on state assessments?
- Is your district's written curriculum used to plan all instruction?
- Is collaboration the primary means for improving instruction?
- Are you promoting strategies, instructional routines and schedules that support academic rigor?
- Does your district have student assessment and data management systems to monitor student learning, including grades and subjects not covered by state assessments?

These are all important questions to answer in order to benchmark the practices in your system. The practices found in higher performing schools across the nation have been organized by NCEA into the **Core Practice Framework (CPF)**. The CPF is a free tool, as mentioned in the next question.

3. What tools are available to assist in this work?

- **NCEA Core Practice Framework**

Available free: http://www.nc4ea.org/index.cfm/e/core_practice_framework

The **Core Practice Framework** outlines the best practices of consistently higher performing schools and the school systems that support them. Five organizing themes provide the primary structure for studying the practices of consistently higher performing schools:

1. Curriculum & Academic Goals
2. Staff Selection, Leadership, & Capacity Building
3. Instructional Tools: Programs & Strategies
4. Monitoring Performance & Progress
5. Intervention & Adjustment

The three levels of every school system—district, school and classroom—provide a second organizational dimension to the Framework. The CPF addresses practices classified under the five themes at each of the three levels.

- **NCEA Core Practice Audit (CPA)**

The Core Practice Audit is an objective evaluation of your district's current core practices, i.e., those practices most connected to teaching and learning. It provides a blueprint for future district improvement strategies. The CPA can help district leaders validate their current initiatives or realign their efforts to ensure all students are college and career ready.

A Core Practice Audit might be an appropriate solution for a school district in the following situations.¹

- To serve as a needs assessment for a new superintendent when there is a change in leadership.
- When the district is beginning a new strategic planning cycle, and a picture is needed of where a school system has been and where it is at the time of the audit.
- When objectivity is necessary, and an outside review can bring validation to making the reorganization or restructuring necessary.
- When expertise is required in the teaching and learning areas of school operations.
- When the "stakes are high", and the status quo is not acceptable.
- When public confidence and trust must be reestablished or retained.

- **NCEA CoreWork® Diagnostics**

CoreWork Diagnostics (CWD) is a school improvement tool based on the research behind the Core Practice Framework. It is designed to help district and school leaders prioritize their initiatives and identify concrete strategies to increase student learning. The online tool brings together more than 10 years of research on higher performing schools and provides leaders with actionable steps and recommendations for system-wide improvement.

CoreWork Diagnostics might be an appropriate solution for a district or school in the following situations.

- When school-level or classroom-level practices (as opposed to district-level practices) are the focus of attention.
- When self-diagnosis is sufficient, and external, objective expertise is not necessary.
- When online, anytime/anywhere access to a repeatable self-diagnostic process is desirable.
- When additional online resources such as examples from higher performing schools would be useful for district and school leaders.

¹This list was adapted from the dissertation by Eliu Misael Hinojosa (2001) entitled *Superintendents' Perceptions of Curriculum Management Audits* (p. 187). The author cites Fenwick English, *Curriculum Auditing* (1988).

4. What research is available that addresses these issues?

Two excellent places to start your research include:

Dougherty, C., & Rutherford, J. *The NCEA Core Practice Framework: An organizing guide to sustained school improvement*. National Center for Educational Achievement, Austin, TX, 2008.

The Forgotten Middle: Ensuring that all students are on target for college and career readiness before high school. ACT, Inc., Iowa City, IA, 2008.

Learn more:

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