

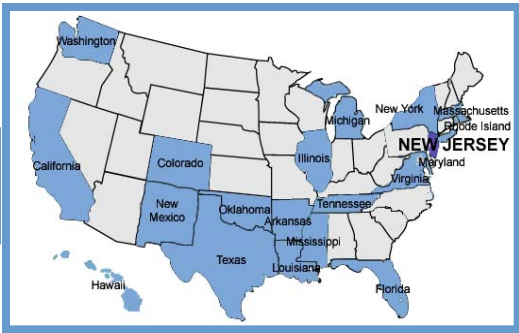
**National Center for
Educational
Accountability**

national sponsor of Just for the Kids

Just for the Kids, New Jersey Elementary School Best Practice Study, 2004-05

Ann Street Elementary, Newark Public Schools
Lillian M. Dunfee Elementary, Barnegat Township School District
Moorestown Upper Elementary, Moorestown Township Public Schools
Mount Vernon Elementary, Newark Public Schools
Mullica Township Primary, Mullica Township School District
Osage Elementary, Voorhees Township Public Schools
Robert Treat Academy Charter School
Roberto Clemente Elementary, Paterson Public Schools
Watchung Elementary, Montclair Public Schools
Woodrow Wilson Elementary, Union City School District

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Just for the Kids, New Jersey

Elementary School Best Practice Study, 2004-2005

The Study

The New Jersey Elementary 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 New Jersey, research teams investigated 10 consistently higher performing and five average-performing elementary schools to determine the differences in practices between higher and average-performing elementary 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.

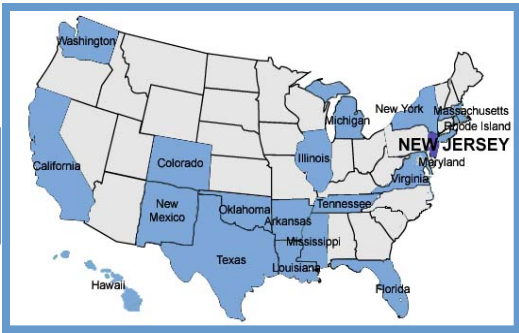
Conducted by researchers at the Graduate School of Education at Rutgers University, the 2004-2005 New Jersey Elementary School Best Practice Study was sponsored by Just for the Kids-New Jersey affiliate (JFTK-NJ) and received funding from the Business Coalition for Educational Excellence—with the support of Prudential Financial and the Public Service Electric and Gas Company—and The Broad Foundation. JFTK-NJ is a collaboration of the Business Coalition for Educational Excellence at the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce and the National Center for Educational Accountability.

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 in 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 studied 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 New Jersey follows with examples from higher performing schools.

This report is a synthesis of findings including direct quotes and summary information drawn from case studies written by researchers at Rutgers University and Just for the Kids-NJ. The JFTK Best Practice Framework, developed by NCEA, is used to structure the findings. Information from the Rutgers University case studies that does not relate to any of the five themes of the JFTK Best Practice Framework is not represented in this report. **Boldfaced** 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 Rutgers University researchers.



Just for the Kids, New Jersey

Elementary School Best Practice Study, 2004-2005

The School Identification Process

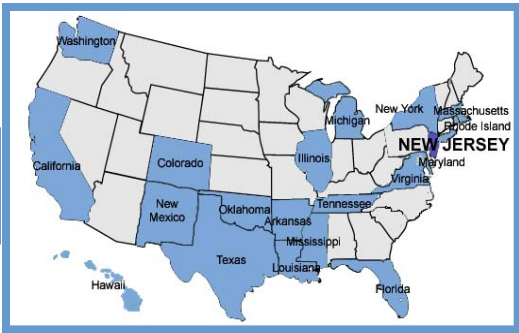
To study the practices of consistently higher performing schools, one must first identify those schools and compare their practices with those in a group of average-performing schools with similar demographics. The contrast between the practices in the two groups of schools is the focus of this study.¹

NCEA used publicly available student achievement data from the New Jersey Department of Education to identify schools that consistently outperformed other schools with similar demographics in mathematics and language arts in the 2001-02, 2002-03, and 2003-04 school years. The analysis included data from the fourth-grade New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK), as that was the only elementary grade that was tested statewide in those three years.

To identify the schools, NCEA conducted a separate analysis for each subject (mathematics and language arts) and year (2002, 2003, and 2004) to learn which schools outperformed their demographic peers on the percentage of students meeting the “Advanced” standard on the mathematics and the “Proficient” standard on the language arts state exam. NCEA used a Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analysis to compare each school’s percent of students meeting the standard with the percent that would be “predicted” or “typical” for a school in the state with the same demographics. The demographic and other variables used in this analysis were each school’s percentage of low-income, English Language Learners (ELL), African American, Hispanic, and Asian students; the size of the school; and the percentage of students tested in the subject and year in question. Normally, NCEA also prefers to take students’ prior year test scores and length of enrollment in the same school into account, but that longitudinal information was not available in New Jersey.

NCEA ranked each school against the elementary schools in the rest of the state based on the extent to which it outperformed its “predicted” percent of students meeting the “Advanced” or “Proficient” standard. For example, a school that outperformed 98% of the schools in “performance relative to predicted” in fourth-grade mathematics in 2004 would receive a percentile rank of 98 for that subject and year. These ranks were averaged separately for mathematics and language arts across the three years 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 85 in all tested subjects.

¹ New Jersey-based researchers did not identify any substantive differences between higher performing and average-performing elementary schools in New Jersey. They speculated that the highly regulated environment in New Jersey caused both sets of schools to function similarly. The research protocol was not sensitive enough to detect nuanced differences between the two sets of schools in that sort of policy environment.



Just for the Kids, New Jersey

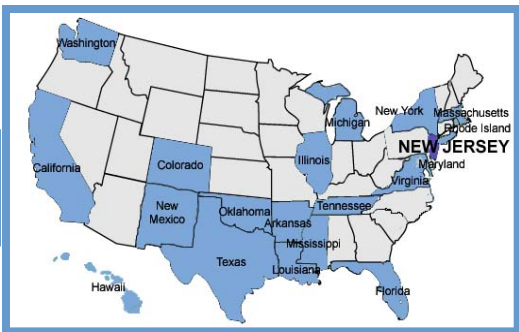
Elementary School Best Practice Study, 2004-2005

The Higher Performing Schools Studied

School	District	2004 Enrollment		2004 School-Wide Demographics					
		Grade Span*	No. of Students	African American	Hispanic	White	Other	Low Income	ELL
Ann Street Elementary School	Newark Public Schools	K-8	1,067	1.8%	27.4%	69.9%	0.9%	55.0%	28.9%
Lillian M. Dunfee Elementary School	Barnegat Township School District	K-5	367	7.9%	8.4%	81.2%	2.5%	39.2%	0.3%
Moorestown Upper Elementary School	Moorestown Township Public Schools	4-6	982	7.0%	1.6%	85.2%	6.2%	6.4%	0.3%
Mount Vernon Elementary School	Newark Public Schools	K-7	959	66.0%	15.2%	8.8%	10.0%	67.3%	16.2%
Mullica Township Primary School	Mullica Township School District	K-4	328	10.1%	25.9%	62.8%	1.2%	36.9%	5.0%
Osage Elementary School	Voorhees Township Public Schools	PK-5	625	16.5%	4.6%	58.4%	20.5%	9.4%	3.4%
Robert Treat Academy	Charter School	K-7	400	18.0%	76.3%	4.3%	1.4%	65.0%	1.4%
Roberto Clemente Elementary School	Paterson Public Schools	1-4	326	21.5%	77.3%	1.2%	0.0%	77.3%	32.7%
Watchung Elementary School	Montclair Public Schools	K-5	422	29.9%	4.3%	57.1%	8.7%	10.9%	0.0%
Woodrow Wilson Elementary School	Union City School District	1-8	355	1.1%	89.9%	5.9%	3.1%	84.5%	3.1%

* Although some schools listed include middle grades, they were identified as higher performing based on performance in fourth grade. Mount Vernon Elementary and Robert Treat Academy converted to pre-K-8 schools for the 2004-2005 school year.

Student enrollment and demographic data are taken from the Just for the Kids-NJ 2004 website. Site visits were conducted in Spring and Fall 2005.



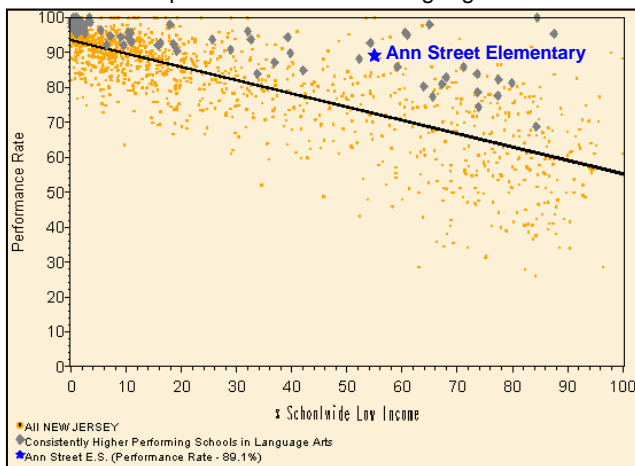
Ann Street Elementary School Newark Public Schools

Just for the Kids, New Jersey NCEA Executive Summary

The School

Ann Street Elementary School, which serves 1,067 kindergarten through eighth-grade students, is 1 of 56 elementary schools in Newark Public Schools (42,031 students). Ann Street's student population is 69.9% White, 27.4% Hispanic, 1.8% African American, and 0.9% other. Within this student population, 28.9% are English Language Learners, and 55.0% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2004 4th Grade Language Arts



Consistent Higher Performance

Ann Street Elementary School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics and language arts in an analysis that included all fourth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Ann Street Elementary School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 96.8 in mathematics and 96.4 in language arts.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data, with site visits occurring during Spring and Fall 2005. 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.

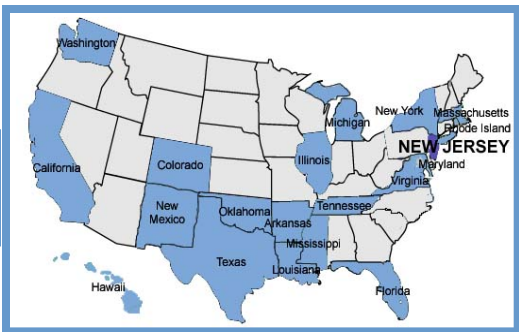
Subject	2002 Percentile Rank	2003 Percentile Rank	2004 Percentile Rank	Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
Grade	4	4	4	
Mathematics	95	97	98	96.8
Language Arts	97	94	98	96.4

*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

In order to ensure uniform implementation of the curriculum, teams of administrators from within the district conduct on-site audits in selected schools. The district conducts two “grow-your-own” leadership development programs for potential administrators. Relative to instructional practices, an administrator noted, “Some may say a lot of the pedagogy is a little too traditional, but it works—and it works well.” One traditional aspect is an emphasis on memorization. “The principal or vice-principal go into every grade and test, twice a year. Grade 2 needs to know addition and subtraction facts, grade 3 multiplication tables, ... and 8th grade is the preamble to the Constitution. Every year a big memorization project for each grade.” The school's daily schedule includes 100 minutes of literacy and math—both uninterrupted—and 50 minutes of science and social studies. The school's schedule provides a common prep period every week, for every grade and for ESL teachers. Principals, teachers, parents, and central office staff have access to hard-copy files in which the school maintains assessment data and samples of student work. Students at Ann Street may be recognized with classroom student-of-the-week awards, school-wide student-of-the-month awards, most-improved-student awards, honor roll, or reader awards, or have their work displayed.

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



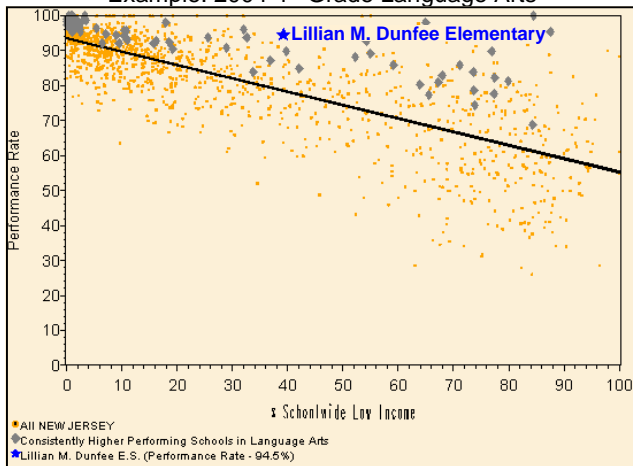
Lillian M. Dunfee Elementary School Barnegat Township School District

Just for the Kids, New Jersey NCEA Executive Summary

The School

Lillian M. Dunfee Elementary School, which serves 367 kindergarten through fifth-grade students, is one of three elementary schools in Barnegat Township School District (2,513 students). Dunfee's student population is 81.2% White, 8.4% Hispanic, 7.9% African American, and 2.5% other. Within this student population, 0.3% are English Language Learners, and 39.2% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2004 4th Grade Language Arts



Consistent Higher Performance

Lillian M. Dunfee Elementary School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics and language arts in an analysis that included all fourth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Lillian M. Dunfee Elementary School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 86.4 in mathematics and 87.0 in language arts.

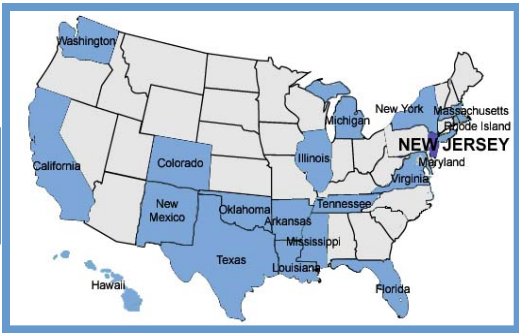
Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data, with site visits occurring during Spring and Fall 2005. Differences between the demographics reported in this case study and the values shown on the scatter plot reveal demographic changes in the school between 2002 and 2005.

Subject	2002 Percentile Rank	2003 Percentile Rank	2004 Percentile Rank	Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
Grade	4	4	4	
Mathematics	96	79	81	86.4
Language Arts	84	79	97	87.0

*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 district recognizes that “there isn’t a one-size-fits-all curriculum that will fill the needs of the district,” so it relies on vertical teams to identify needs that are not being met and on the Curriculum Council to determine the steps to be taken. Teachers collaborate in monthly, formal grade-level meetings; in daily, informal discussions during their 40-minute common preparation periods; at lunch, before school, and after school; and in monthly discussion groups with the principal. The school’s daily schedule includes 120 minutes of language arts/literacy and 90 minutes of mathematics, five days a week. Dunfee’s teachers examine district analyses of assessment data in grade-level articulation meetings, in which teachers evaluate student strengths and weaknesses. The primary intervention for struggling teachers is usually provided by supervisors who make frequent, non-threatening visits to the classroom, assess strengths and weaknesses, demonstrate model lessons, and offer constructive suggestions. The school tries to head off problems early by assigning struggling kindergarten and first-grade students to extra programs in language arts and math to “bring them up to speed.”



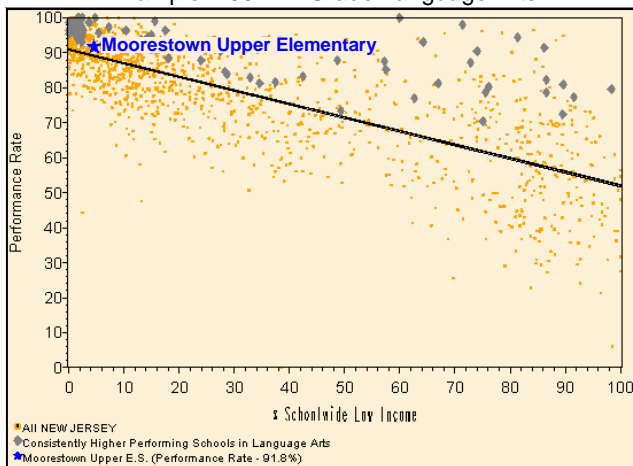
Moorestown Upper Elementary School Moorestown Township Public Schools

Just for the Kids, New Jersey NCEA Executive Summary

The School

Moorestown Upper Elementary School, which serves 982 fourth- through sixth-grade students, is the only “upper elementary” school in the Moorestown Township Public Schools (4,242 students). Moorestown Upper Elementary’s student population is 85.2% White, 7.0% African American, 1.6% Hispanic, and 6.2% other. Within this student population, 0.3% are English Language Learners, and 6.4% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2002 4th Grade Language Arts



Consistent Higher Performance

Moorestown Upper Elementary School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics and language arts in an analysis that included all fourth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Moorestown Upper Elementary School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 95.0 in mathematics and 88.3 in language arts.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data, with site visits occurring during Spring and Fall 2005. 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.

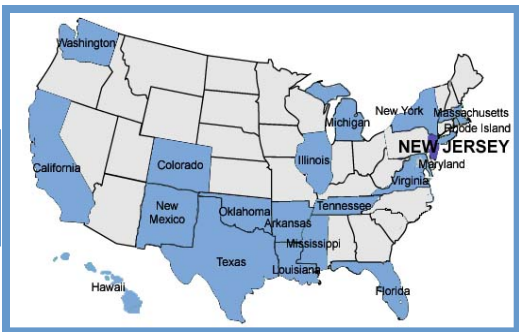
Subject	2002 Percentile Rank	2003 Percentile Rank	2004 Percentile Rank	Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
Grade	4	4	4	
Mathematics	87	99	99	95.0
Language Arts	86	89	90	88.3

*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

Moorestown Upper Elementary School (MUES) has management guides for mathematics that include a scope and sequence for each grade level, a pacing guide for each of those units, big ideas for each grade level aligned with specific standards, and suggested instructional activities. A district administrator explained, “We define ‘management guide’ as a written document that is copied and given to each teacher that has topical organization for the big ideas; it has a section on the scope and sequence. That scope and sequence [section] addresses the New Jersey standards, with specific standards aligned with every big idea.” A district administrator prefers hiring teacher applicants who actually attended school in Moorestown “because they are the best candidates.” Staff say that the district strongly encourages differentiated instruction, Grant Wiggins’s *Understanding by Design* framework, and the Madeline Hunter lesson plan model. Citing the variety of data gathered, a teacher said, “We use labs, projects, [and] reports; there needs to be a wide range of testing, not just paper and pencil.” To identify students in need of help, MUES staff developed in-house mathematics assessments to predict success for the next year and to identify how well the student has met the grade-level expectations.

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



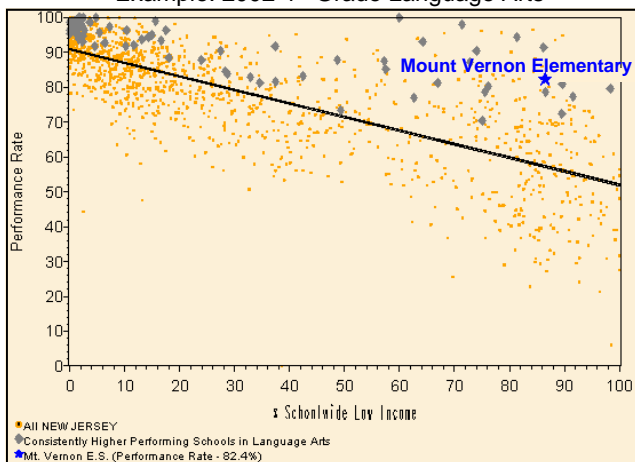
Mount Vernon Elementary School Newark Public Schools

Just for the Kids, New Jersey NCEA Executive Summary

The School

Mount Vernon Elementary School, which serves 959 kindergarten through seventh-grade students, is 1 of 56 elementary schools in Newark Public Schools (42,031 students). Mount Vernon's student population is 66.0% African American, 15.2% Hispanic, 8.8% White, and 10.0% other. Within this student population, 16.2% are English Language Learners, and 67.3% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2002 4th Grade Language Arts



Consistent Higher Performance

Mount Vernon Elementary School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics and language arts in an analysis that included all fourth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Mount Vernon Elementary School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 93.2 in mathematics and 95.0 in language arts.

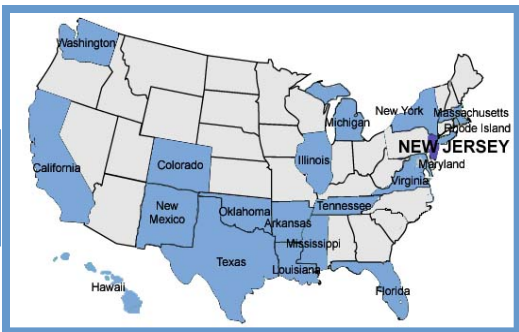
Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data, with site visits occurring during Spring and Fall 2005. Differences between the demographics reported in this case study and the values shown on the scatter plot reveal demographic changes in the school between 2002 and 2005.

Subject	2002 Percentile Rank	2003 Percentile Rank	2004 Percentile Rank	Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
Grade	4	4	4	
Mathematics	90	94	96	93.2
Language Arts	99	92	94	95.0

*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

Mount Vernon Elementary School's communications to parents state that the school is following a Comprehensive School Action Plan that includes the following key steps: development of individual item-analysis charts, development of curriculum overviews, infusion of core curriculum content standards, use of criterion-referenced testing, use of data for decision-making, participation in weekly instructional grade-level meetings, and use of technology in daily instruction. The number one goal of the district and the school is to improve student achievement. Teachers liked having a school resource for on-site capacity building, a literacy facilitator who "is truly good at what she does and passes that on in a simple form." After some initial resistance, teachers at Mount Vernon embraced looping, an instructional arrangement in which they follow their students to the next grade level. Teachers monitor student progress through monthly writing samples, mathematics portfolios, anecdotal records, and actual student work. Administrators and teachers use assessments, classroom observations, and collegial discussions to determine when adjustments are needed to improve curriculum or instruction.



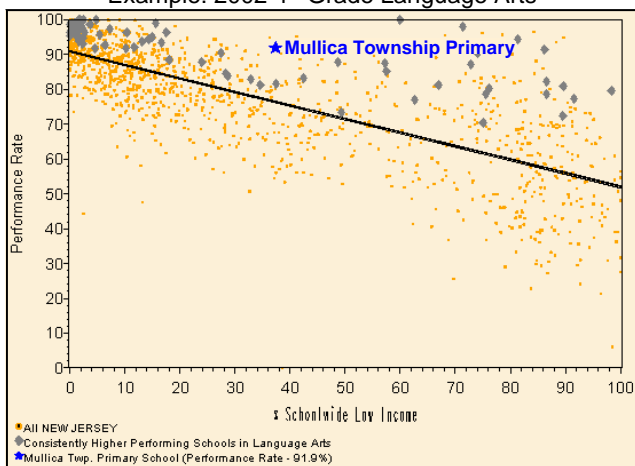
Mullica Township Primary School Mullica Township School District

Just for the Kids, New Jersey NCEA Executive Summary

The School

Mullica Township Primary School, which serves 328 kindergarten through fourth-grade students, is the only elementary school in Mullica Township School District (859 students). Mullica's student population is 62.8% White, 25.9% Hispanic, 10.1% African American, and 1.2% other. Within this student population, 5.0% are English Language Learners, and 36.9% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2002 4th Grade Language Arts



Consistent Higher Performance

Mullica Township Primary School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics and language arts in an analysis that included all fourth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Mullica Township Primary School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 90.0 in mathematics and 86.6 in language arts.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data, with site visits occurring during Spring and Fall 2005. 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.

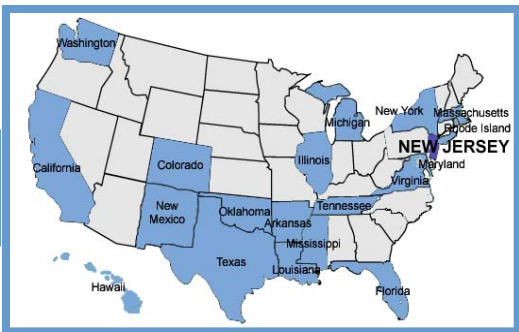
Subject	2002 Percentile Rank	2003 Percentile Rank	2004 Percentile Rank	Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
Grade	4	4	4	
Mathematics	98	76	96	90.0
Language Arts	98	85	74	86.6

*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 curriculum committee sets goals for each subject and grade level and includes them in the teachers' curriculum guides. The principal described the district's curriculum by stating that "it operationalizes the state standards and how we're going to get there." The curriculum includes pacing guides, instructional resources, and benchmark assessments. New curriculum is typically piloted at one grade level before full implementation. The district is careful to ensure teachers receive adequate professional development prior to the implementation of new curricula. The district mandates a program called *Second Step*, a classroom-based social skills program that is designed to reduce impulsive, high-risk, and aggressive behaviors. Immersing students in reading and writing is a strong priority for the school. One teacher stated, "We are constantly reading to kids, to instill a love of books and of being in school." Another teacher stated, "This is a writing environment. We write to each other via the school 'post office.'" The school has a postbox, just like those on street corners, near the principal's office; student mail is picked up and delivered several times a day." The school offers an after-school tutoring program in reading and writing for 10 to 15 students per grade level who need extra instructional support.

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



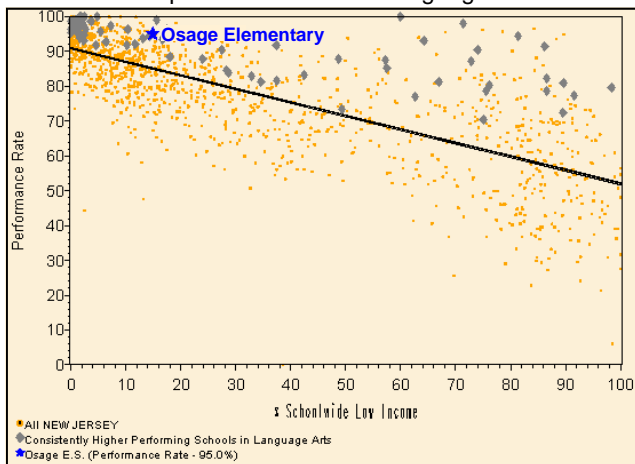
Osage Elementary School Voorhees Township Public Schools

Just for the Kids, New Jersey NCEA Executive Summary

The School

Osage Elementary School, which serves 625 pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade students, is one of four elementary schools in Voorhees Township Public Schools (3,436 students). Osage's student population is 58.4% White, 16.5% African American, 4.6% Hispanic, and 20.5% other. Within this student population, 3.4% are English Language Learners, and 9.4% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2002 4th Grade Language Arts



Consistent Higher Performance

Osage Elementary School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics and language arts in an analysis that included all fourth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Osage Elementary School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 86.1 in mathematics and 89.7 in language arts.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data, with site visits occurring during Spring and Fall 2005. 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.

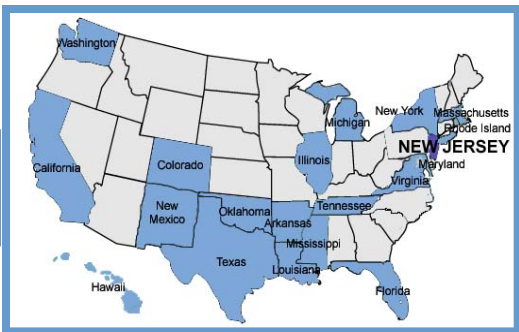
Subject	2002 Percentile Rank	2003 Percentile Rank	2004 Percentile Rank	Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
Grade	4	4	4	
Mathematics	83	93	82	86.1
Language Arts	97	96	77	89.7

*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

Osage Elementary School's principal stated, "We use the state standards as general guidelines, and the teachers consider them in all of their planning, but Osage goes above and beyond." Curriculum materials include pacing guides, curriculum maps, model lessons, instructional resources, and benchmark assessments that are based on state standards. Academic goals typically detail what percentage of the students will score at a certain level and the attainment of a goal results in the setting of a higher goal. When setting these goals, the staff also studies the achievement of other schools for benchmarking purposes. The district seeks to fill principal vacancies from within. The Osage principal believes that the district tends to retain effective principals partly because of the collaborative work environment among the administrative team: "All the administrators have been in the district for a long time and are very supportive on each other. There is lots of communication and strong relationships." There are never more than 30 students in a class and often fewer than 20. Every observer in the district uses the same evaluation form, which includes a narrative summary. The school does not emphasize awards for younger students; for older students, "we try to get as many different kids to win awards as we can," according to an administrator.

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



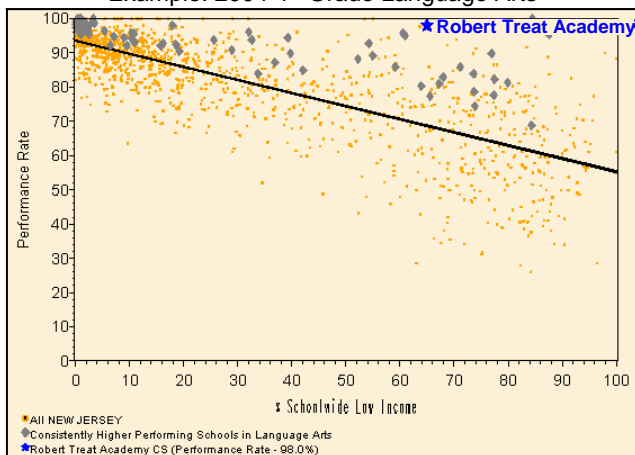
Robert Treat Academy Charter School

Just for the Kids, New Jersey NCEA Executive Summary

The School

Robert Treat Academy, which serves 400 kindergarten through seventh-grade students, is a charter school in Newark. Robert Treat’s student population is 76.3% Hispanic, 18.0% African American, 4.3% White, and 1.4% other. Within this student population, 1.4% are English Language Learners, and 65.0% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2004 4th Grade Language Arts



Consistent Higher Performance

Robert Treat Academy is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics and language arts in an analysis that included all fourth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Robert Treat Academy demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 88.7 in mathematics and 94.0 in language arts.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data, with site visits occurring during Spring and Fall 2005. 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.

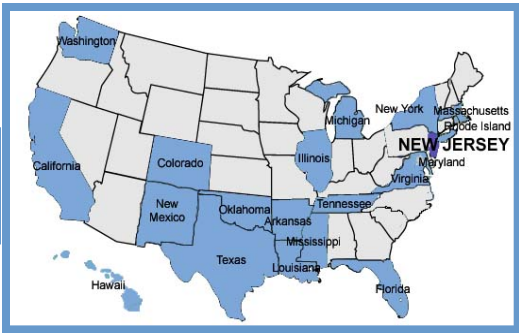
Subject	2002 Percentile Rank	2003 Percentile Rank	2004 Percentile Rank	Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
Grade	4	4	4	
Mathematics	84	91	91	88.7
Language Arts	90	96	96	94.0

*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

Teachers meet regularly to discuss and refine the curriculum, look for ways to improve it, and inform the administration. For example, teachers reported problems with the middle-grades math curriculum: “not enough continuity” and “certain skills were not up to par.” Teachers defined the problems in grade-level meetings, and the most experienced math teacher reported the problems to the administration. Teachers in each grade level then met to determine whether adjusting alignment or using supplemental materials would provide a remedy. In this case, the school adopted a new instructional program for the middle-grade level. Teachers have an appropriate second teacher in the same classroom—a master teacher for someone new to the field, or an expert in behavior management for a teacher who needs help in that area. About 60 to 70 percent of the school’s students stay after school for required remedial programs or voluntary enrichment programs from 3:30 PM to 5:30 PM, which ensures that students are never pulled from regular classes for such interventions. Monitoring younger students’ progress is facilitated by student use of the *SuccessMaker* computer-based program. Morning assemblies provide a platform for student recognition through student acting, singing, or reading, with the entire student body applauding each effort.

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



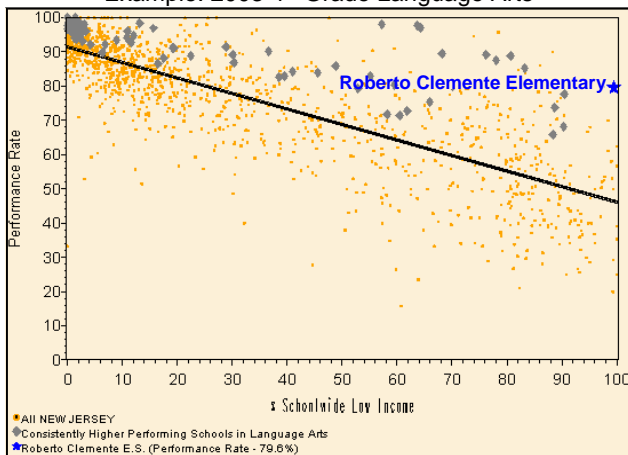
Roberto Clemente Elementary School Paterson Public Schools

Just for the Kids, New Jersey NCEA Executive Summary

The School

Roberto Clemente Elementary School, which serves 326 first- through fourth-grade students, is 1 of 10 elementary schools in Paterson Public Schools (26,000 students). Roberto Clemente’s student population is 77.3% Hispanic, 21.5% African American, and 1.2% White. Within this student population, 32.7% are English Language Learners, and 77.3% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2003 4th Grade Language Arts



Consistent Higher Performance

Roberto Clemente Elementary School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics and language arts in an analysis that included all fourth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Roberto Clemente Elementary School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 91.4 in mathematics and 88.5 in language arts.

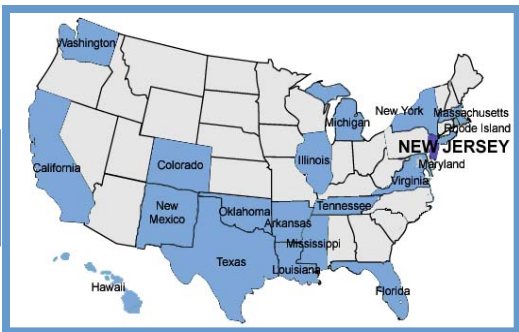
Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data, with site visits occurring during Spring and Fall 2005. Differences between the demographics reported in this case study and the values shown on the scatter plot reveal demographic changes in the school between 2002 and 2005.

Subject	2002 Percentile Rank	2003 Percentile Rank	2004 Percentile Rank	Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
Grade	4	4	4	
Mathematics	93	96	85	91.4
Language Arts	90	94	81	88.5

*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 district and each of its schools base their operations on three-year plans that are revised every year. A district administrator explained, “Many of our schools develop school-based goals and grade-level goals, based on the district goals and the school data. For example, a goal could be for every child in second grade to meet the testing level in a certain area.” Roberto Clemente’s curriculum is based on the state’s Core Curriculum Content Standards and Paterson’s aligned standards and scope and sequence, geared to the grade level. A teacher stated, “It is all lined out by month for you. You can vary a little from that.” The open-classroom arrangement, in which a number of classes take place in one large room divided by partitions, facilitates collegial support. The staff at the school embrace the *Success for All* program, which they use with a number of alterations they have developed over the years. Teachers say the principal looks at all the unit tests for all students and knows every student’s scores. One teacher said, “You name a child, she can tell you their scores.” The school has academic support teachers who visit the classroom during a 90-minute block to work with small groups who need scaffolding.



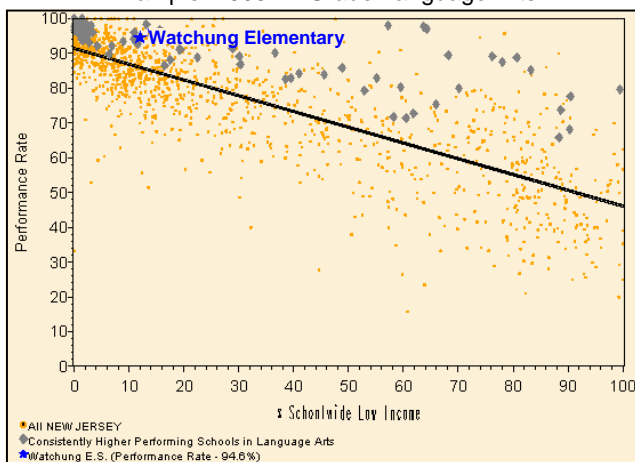
Watchung Elementary School Montclair Public Schools

Just for the Kids, New Jersey NCEA Executive Summary

The School

Watchung Elementary School, which serves 422 kindergarten through fifth-grade students, is one of seven elementary schools in Montclair Public Schools (6,393 students). Serving students, Watchung's student population is 57.1% White, 29.9% African American, 4.3% Hispanic, and 8.7% other. Within this student population, there are no English Language Learners, and 10.9% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2003 4th Grade Language Arts



Consistent Higher Performance

Watchung Elementary School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics and language arts in an analysis that included all fourth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Watchung Elementary School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 92.8 in mathematics and 95.0 in language arts.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data, with site visits occurring during Spring and Fall 2005. 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.

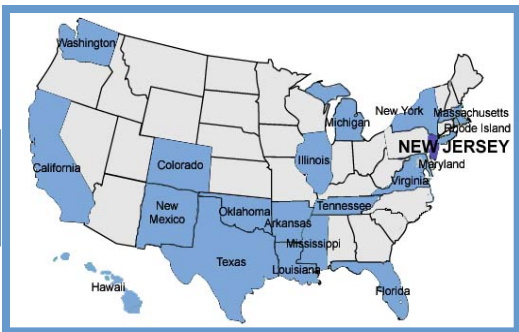
Subject	2002 Percentile Rank	2003 Percentile Rank	2004 Percentile Rank	Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
Grade	4	4	4	
Mathematics	95	92	92	92.8
Language Arts	95	98	92	95.0

*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

Watchung Elementary School's curriculum is aligned with state standards and emphasizes science and technology, the school's focus within the district's system of magnet schools. The curriculum includes pacing guides, model lessons, supplemental instructional resources, suggested activities, and benchmark assessments. The district encourages teachers to get their master's degrees in supervision so there is a pool of candidates for open leadership positions. Relative to instructional approaches, a teacher stressed, "We don't look at the textbook as our curriculum. We are constantly pulling from all different sources. ... We use a lot of manipulatives, trying to hit each kid's learning style." Teachers also cite the usefulness of district-developed mid-year assessments in mathematics, mid-year and end-of-year subject tests, and assessments included in textbook packages to inform instruction and to monitor students' acquisition of skills. The principal visits "every classroom every day, even if it's just for a second." The after-school tutoring program, utilizing "an army" of Montclair State University education majors, employs tutoring sites throughout the community so that students who are bussed can be tutored in their neighborhoods. One teacher described the district's support for struggling students: "We have a very rich support. I talk to teachers in other districts, and their jaw drops."

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



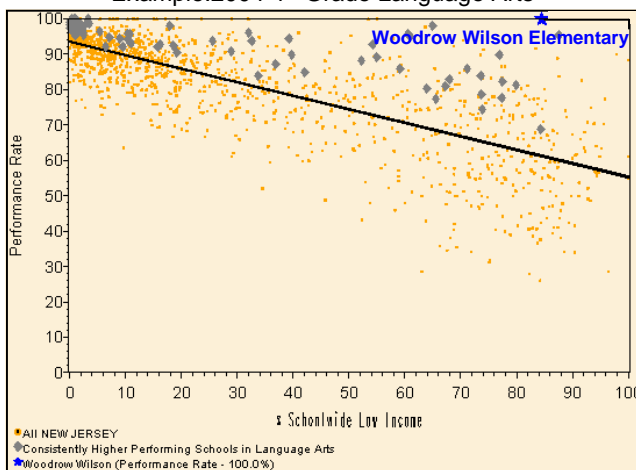
Woodrow Wilson Elementary School Union City School District

Just for the Kids, New Jersey NCEA Executive Summary

The School

Woodrow Wilson Elementary School, which serves 355 first- through eighth-grade students, is one of nine elementary schools in Union City School District (10,150 students). Woodrow Wilson's student population is 89.9% Hispanic, 5.9% White, 1.1% African American, and 3.1% other. Within this student population, 3.1% are English Language Learners, and 84.5% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example:2004 4th Grade Language Arts



Consistent Higher Performance

Woodrow Wilson Elementary School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics and language arts in an analysis that included all fourth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Woodrow Wilson Elementary School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 97.3 in mathematics and 92.9 in language arts.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data, with site visits occurring during Spring and Fall 2005. 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.

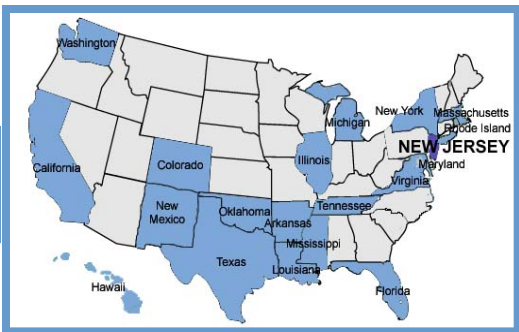
Subject	2002 Percentile Rank	2003 Percentile Rank	2004 Percentile Rank	Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
Grade	4	4	4	
Mathematics	97	98	97	97.3
Language Arts	91	92	96	92.9

*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

A teacher explained that one of the school's goals is that "all students should be proficient." A committee of teachers experienced in curriculum development meets for up to 100 hours in the summer to develop the curriculum under review, ensuring that it covers all applicable state standards. Because the school is an arts-integrated, gifted and talented magnet, it goes beyond district requirements with additional curriculum. The "above-and-beyond" experiences include the creative arts, performing arts, and artistic discipline. The district does not hire principals from outside the district, and, as a result, provides several programs to develop future principals. The district pays 80% of the expenses for anyone who wants to get a master's degree in an area of administration and/or supervision. The school has certified support teachers who work with students with special needs within the regular classroom. A teacher explained, "We analyze each individual student's test scores and put together an analysis of each student's strengths and weaknesses." The teacher further explained, "We implement plans to address cluster weaknesses. For example, one girl's math measurement skills are weak, so when we get to that, I pull her out and work one-on-one." The school provides time for homework, enrichment, and recreation from 3:00 PM to 6:00 PM.

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



New Jersey Elementary 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 when 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 New Jersey Findings: Curriculum and Academic Goals

- **Schools use a written curriculum that is more detailed and rigorous than state standards.**
 - According to an administrator, "When the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards came out, there was a lot of nervousness: 'Oh, there are these new standards. Are we on track?' We sat down in the summer and aligned what we were teaching—our benchmarks and standards—to the state standards, and we said, 'You know, we're okay; we're asking

more than they're asking for, so we're fine.” (Moorestown Upper, Moorestown Township Public Schools)

- According to the principal, “We use the state standards as general guidelines, and the teachers consider them in their planning, but Osage goes above and beyond.” (Osage, Voorhees Township Public Schools)
- The school’s fundamental and consistent goal, as expressed in its charter, is that every class will have average test scores at least one year above grade level on the Stanford Achievement Test, Ninth Edition (SAT-9) series of assessments. As one teacher put it, “This drives everything, not [state] testing.” The principal reports that the school reaches this goal every year. (Robert Treat Academy Charter School)
- Because the school is an arts-integrated, gifted and talented magnet, it goes beyond district requirements. Its curricula address different enhancements at different grade levels. First- through third-grade students have a creative arts curriculum in addition to the state’s core curriculum. Fourth- and fifth-graders have a performing arts focus beyond the core curriculum, and sixth- through eighth-graders have a student-chosen artistic discipline curriculum beyond the core curriculum. (Woodrow Wilson, Union City School District)

▪ **Teachers take ownership of the curriculum and align accordingly.**

- According to the principal, “At grade-level meetings, the teachers share their concerns [about problems with the curriculum] with subject area supervisors, who say, ‘Okay, we need to make adjustments. We’ll try to get a share of the summer curriculum money to work on this problem.’ The supervisor reaches out to their content people to get volunteers.” (Moorestown Upper, Moorestown Township Public Schools)
- Teachers meet regularly to discuss and refine the curriculum, look for ways to improve it, and inform the administration. For instance, teachers reported problems with the mathematics curriculum for the middle grades: “[There was] not enough continuity,” and “certain skills were not up to par, so we needed to change the textbooks; there were gaps in the textbook.” (Robert Treat Academy Charter School)
- Adjustments to the curriculum are likely to start with comments and complaints from individual teachers. If their colleagues agree that a change is needed, a teacher reported, “we go right to the principal. ... She will bring it up in a faculty meeting, see if anyone else has an issue.” If school staff decide that a change is required, they are likely to conduct necessary research and propose a solution to the district. (Watchung, Montclair Public Schools)

▪ **Clarity of district curriculum is supported by documents such as course outlines, benchmark assessments, aligned instructional resources, and pacing guides.**

- The curriculum includes pacing guides, curriculum maps, model lessons, instructional resources, and benchmark assessments. One supervisor said of the pacing guide, “It tells teachers where they should be, so that kids are adequately prepared, etc. It helps teachers to self-monitor and to know when to give the quarterly. It helps teachers to stay together and gives everyone some structure and boundaries, but with leeway.” (Dunfee, Barnegat Township School District)
- A district administrator explained, “With math, we have management guides that have a scope and sequence for each grade level, along with a pacing guide for each of those units, with big ideas for each grade level and suggested activities.” (Moorestown Upper, Moorestown Township Public Schools)
- The curriculum includes pacing guides, instructional resources, and benchmark assessments. Material support includes at least two science kits per grade and a math cart with games, activities, kits, and manipulatives. (Mount Vernon, Newark Public Schools)

- Curricular materials available to RTA teachers include pacing guides, curriculum maps, model lessons, benchmark assessments, software programs, additional phonics programs, and visual aids. (Robert Treat Academy Charter School)
- Curricular materials supplied by the district include pacing guides, curriculum maps, sample lessons, lists of instructional resources, and benchmark assessments. (Roberto Clemente, Paterson Public Schools)
- Components of Union City’s curriculum include pacing guides, curriculum maps, model lessons, lists of instructional resources, and benchmark assessments. A district administrator stated, “We try to ensure that all the standards are being met throughout the pacing of the curriculum throughout the year. We try to do it by marking period so that teachers are accountable for introducing certain standards at certain periods.” (Woodrow Wilson, Union City School District)



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 New Jersey Findings: Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building

- **Districts seek principal candidates from within the organization and sometimes actively develop internal candidates for leadership.**
 - Newark advertises principal vacancies outside the district, but seeks to recruit from within wherever possible and conducts two “grow-your-own” programs (one with Seton Hall University and one with ETS) to ensure that there is an adequate supply of qualified candidates. Both programs pay most of the tuition and associated costs of the necessary graduate coursework. Once candidates are certified, they apply for admission to the district’s pool of potential principals and vice principals, a process that includes an interview and submission of a portfolio. A district administrator stated, “The district chooses very close to 100% of its principals and vice principals from this internal pool.” (Ann Street, Newark Public Schools)
 - The district seeks to fill principal vacancies by promoting from within. (Osage, Voorhees Township Public Schools)
 - The district prefers to fill principal vacancies from within, though it always advertises positions outside the school district as well. There are several programs designed for developing principal candidates from within the district, including graduate classes at nearby Kean University and internships for “Teachers on Special Assignment.” (Watchung, Montclair Public Schools)
 - The district does not hire principals from outside the district, and, as a result, provides several programs to develop future principals. The district pays 80% of the expenses for anyone who wants to get a master’s degree in an area of administration and/or supervision. (Woodrow Wilson, Union City School District)

- **Professional development activities supplement those provided by the district and address individual educators' needs or needs based on specific student populations.**
 - Professional development for Dunfee teachers includes internal school-wide professional development based on a review of student strengths and weaknesses as revealed by performance on quarterlies. (Dunfee, Barnegat Township School District)
 - A district administrator stated, "Every month we have 50 minutes of professional development time [in addition to regular teacher-in-service days]; most of what happens in that time is collaboration. Every Wednesday there is something going on, different workshops together within a building. This is after school, added as part of the contract. Another type of professional development would be grade-level meetings." These professional development activities tend to concentrate on curricular initiatives. (Moorestown Upper, Moorestown Township Public Schools)
 - The principal is a strong believer in the benefits of teacher familiarity with education research. For example, Professional Improvement Plans require mathematics teachers to read two National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) research articles and present them at faculty meetings or grade-level meetings. The principal also includes notes about recent research articles (sometimes recommended by teachers) in his daily bulletins to staff. (Mullica, Mullica Township School District)
 - A district leader remarked, "We also encourage every school to identify areas in which teachers might need direction or training. They can do that during grade-level meetings for half an hour or an hour. They could have a master teacher come in and talk to them—an outside expert." (Woodrow Wilson, Union City School District)

- **Schools value and encourage teacher collaboration.**
 - The school's schedule provides a common preparation period every week, for every grade and for ESL teachers. Teachers said that weekly grade-level meetings and monthly Focus on Student Work meetings were keys to successful collaboration, "to keep everyone in the loop, knowing what's going on in the classroom." Teachers also collaborate in planning cross-content instructional units. (Ann Street, Newark Public Schools)
 - Teachers in first grade and above share a preparation period and lunch every day and attend a grade-level meeting every other week. Though kindergarten teachers have no common planning time, they meet with the principal before school once a week to discuss assessment results. (Mullica, Mullica Township School District)
 - Teachers share a common planning time with other teachers on their grade level. The principal leads grade-level meetings that provide opportunities for teachers to exchange views, discuss concerns about individual students, and talk about what works in their classrooms. (Osage, Voorhees Township Public Schools)
 - Much collaboration arises out of monthly grade-level meetings and common planning time for teachers in a grade level. One teacher noted that collaboration was a natural outgrowth of the open classroom arrangement. (Roberto Clemente, Paterson Public Schools)
 - Teacher comments suggest a high level of staff collaboration. Teachers tend to collaborate during their common planning times, or before or after school. One teacher said, "This faculty is phenomenal for helping each other." (Watchung, Montclair Public Schools)
 - One day a week, common planning time is devoted to a grade-level meeting. During the other four days, teachers can meet with their colleagues as they wish. In practice, a teacher said, "We have common prep time three or four times a week." (Woodrow Wilson, Union City School District)



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 New Jersey Findings: Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

- **Selected instructional programs and resources are research-based, tightly aligned with the academic objectives of the curriculum, and appropriate for the needs of the school's population.**
 - In order to meet long-range writing goals, the school has adopted a vertical, cumulative approach to writing development. Students start writing in journals in kindergarten and first grade. According to a teacher, "When they go on to third or fourth grade, it's not a big deal to write, because they have been writing. It's just a common thing that every day they write." The school has a student "post office," and students are encouraged to "mail" letters to each other. The principal leads collegial discussions of student writing by showing teachers anonymous examples on an overhead projector and leading a discussion evaluating the writing. According to a teacher, that skill is passed down to the students themselves, as the staff teach the children to evaluate their own writing. (Mullica, Mullica Township School District)
 - The school chose to use the *Open Court* mathematics and language arts series. Upon finding gaps in the mathematics texts at the middle-grade level, the administration appointed a teacher committee that screened several other curricula and recommended the purchase of *Glencoe* (McGraw-Hill) texts. (Robert Treat Academy Charter School)
 - The staff at the school have embraced the *Success for All* model, which they use with a number of alterations they've developed over the years. (Roberto Clemente, Paterson Public Schools)
 - Every classroom has its own library to facilitate greater exposure to literature. The curriculum is literature-based, which helps teachers to use a thematic approach to instruction. (Woodrow Wilson, Union City School District)
- **Teachers are provided with instructional aides, materials, and supplemental assistance as needed.**
 - The district supports all teachers with an extensive network of professionals at the district, SLT, and school levels. Ann Street has a literacy coach and a lead science teacher to aid teachers; additional math expertise is provided by a school administrator who was a math teacher. Master math, language arts, and early childhood teachers, called Resource Teacher Coordinators, are attached to the SLT and are available to assist teachers and coaches and to ensure that they have sufficient resources to help teachers. (Ann Street, Newark Public Schools)
 - A culture of support permeates the school. The principal said that he and the supervisors are "hyper-aware of what is happening in the classrooms and where the teachers are at, in order to evaluate if additional instructional support is needed." (Dunfee, Barnegat Township School District)

- MUES teachers receive support from colleagues and school and district administrators. Moorestown doesn't have a lead-teacher structure, but district-level content supervisors are readily available to work with teachers, observe their lessons, or teach model lessons. (Moorestown Upper, Moorestown Township Public Schools)
 - All Osage teachers receive support from their grade-level team, the principal, technology and media specialists, and district staff. The media specialist gathers background information on topics for teachers and brings it to the classroom for use. The district reading specialist models lessons for teachers. The district enrichment specialist serves as a resource for teachers, providing them with materials and demonstrating enrichment and inquiry methods. (Osage, Voorhees Township Public Schools)
 - The school has a wide array of supports, including the School Improvement Coordinator, two Basic Skills teachers (one for upper and one for lower grades), a full-time technology facilitator with a part-time assistant, a social worker, a speech therapist, a part-time learning disabilities teacher consultant, and district-level content specialists. "And then," a teacher added, "we have each other." (Woodrow Wilson, Union City School District)
- **Given district guidelines, instructional time is used flexibly (with a concentration on core subject areas) to meet individual student learning needs.**
- The school's daily schedule includes 100 uninterrupted minutes of literacy and mathematics and 50 minutes of science and social studies. (Ann Street, Newark Public Schools)
 - The school's daily schedule includes 120 minutes of language arts/literacy and 90 minutes of mathematics, five days a week. The district encourages teachers to integrate social studies with language arts and science with mathematics. (Dunfee, Barnegat Township School District)
 - The school tries to maintain flexibility in its schedule. A former first-grade teacher said that kindergarten and first-grade teachers can structure the whole morning as they wish, while in the afternoon they need "to schedule around specials." Second through fourth grades are more structured, she said, but still offer some flexibility in language arts and mathematics: "You don't need to end math at 10:29." (Mullica, Mullica Township School District)
 - The school operates on an extended daily, weekly, and yearly schedule. Students attend classes for six and a half hours, Monday through Friday, with additional classes on some Saturdays. About 60 to 70 percent of the students then stay after school for required remedial programs or voluntary enrichment programs from 3:30 PM to 5:30 PM. This schedule ensures that students are never pulled from regular classes for such interventions. The school operates 11 months of the year, taking July off. (Robert Treat Academy Charter School)
 - The school's daily schedule is designed to minimize disruption. Mornings are an uninterrupted block of time for mathematics and language arts instruction, with no pullouts. Teachers can use their judgment about how to apportion the time. All other classes are offered in the afternoon. (Robert Treat Academy Charter School)
 - The principal noted that the daily schedule included 90 minutes for language arts and 80 minutes for mathematics. "Otherwise," she said, "there is flexibility for a primary school like us. When you get into the middle grades, it's more specific. ... After the 90 minutes of language arts, I try to have the next 40 minutes as writing." (Roberto Clemente, Paterson Public Schools)
 - According to one teacher, "The block periods help us. With the longer periods, we can incorporate the arts and do the creative things we do within the classroom." Another

teacher added, “The school does not require that language arts and mathematics be taught first thing in the morning or at any particular time. Teachers are pretty much on their own with that.” (Woodrow Wilson, Union City School District)

- “What I try to lock into the schedule,” said the principal, “is, every Friday at 10:00, we call that a peer period that gives students an opportunity to work with each other [across grade levels, on projects].” (Woodrow Wilson, Union City School District)



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 New Jersey Findings: Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data

- **Principals study and evaluate data in order to inform decision-making.**
 - An administrator said, “We need [findings from state assessment data]. I’ve done it by hand, pulling things into spreadsheets and analyzing through statistical software and then sharing that.” (Moorestown Upper, Moorestown Township Public Schools)
 - A district administrator marveled at the principal’s ability to keep track of every student’s progress: “He knows which kids are good at writing, oral learners, [etc.]. He can tell us a lot about each child. It’s unbelievable.” (Mullica, Mullica Township School District)
 - Teachers say that the principal looks at all the unit tests for each student and knows every student’s scores. “She reviews...[a list of scores] and passes it on to the coaches. We’ll receive a note from her of suggestions of things to try. She’ll send the computer teacher in to look at programs. She also pulls children out and gives them a class before school.” (Roberto Clemente, Paterson Public Schools)
- **The principal sets the tone for the administration of assessments and use of assessment data in the school. District benchmark assessments as well as state and standardized testing and results are integral and powerful parts of the teaching and learning process.**
 - The school leaders monitor teachers and students through the “Focus on Student Work” process, in which teachers gather monthly to analyze their students’ work in literacy and math and plan how to address students’ difficulties. These meetings provide opportunities to discuss “what works,” needs of particular students, how to better serve those students, and how staff can assist one another in the process. (Ann Street, Newark Public Schools)
 - District analyses of test data are examined in Dunfee’s grade-level articulation meetings, where teachers evaluate student strengths and weaknesses and develop lists of needs. On another level, individual teachers constantly examine test results, identify areas of weakness, and modify their lessons accordingly. One teacher said that she relies on quarterlies to determine general student needs and shortcomings, and then re-teaches the missing skills or supplements with additional materials. Another teacher described this use of data as a process of “constant revision, adjustment, or correction made immediately as needed.” The principal stated, “We are never satisfied; we are constantly looking at data.” (Dunfee, Barnegat Township School District)

- Vertical collaboration takes place at the beginning of the school year, when previous teachers convey information about students to their new teachers. The school also maintains a portfolio of student writing samples from every grade, which is passed to the students' new teachers at the beginning of each year. (Mullica, Mullica Township School District)
- Teachers were specific in praising communication among grades. One said, "We give an idea to higher[-grade] teachers of where children will start, give them a heads-up about where weaknesses are." Teachers may use *SuccessMaker* records to familiarize themselves with a new class of students or to examine a specific student's performance over his or her career at the school. Social data are maintained in a separate file. (Robert Treat Academy Charter School)
- **Educators receive timely and ongoing feedback from district assessment programs, and they are trained to use that feedback effectively.**
 - On the classroom level, teachers constantly examine test results and discuss any problems with their peers and the principal. (Osage, Voorhees Township Public Schools)
 - Administrators and teachers discuss *SAT-9* test data at grade-level meetings, consider possible causes of weaknesses, and set goals to improve performance in problem areas. (Robert Treat Academy Charter School)
 - Assessment data are provided to the principals and then go to the teachers. At the building level, they are using the data to inform instruction. (Watchung, Montclair Public Schools)
 - State and local assessment data are maintained in an extensive data warehouse system that is district-developed. A district leader noted, "A teacher can look at any part of this, but would need someone to sit with [him or her] and explain what all this means. We just had a training for administrators that was like a *Cliffs Notes* for assessments. They, in turn, share that with their staff." (Woodrow Wilson, Union City School District)
- **Principals observe teachers frequently to monitor instructional practice and curriculum delivery.**
 - School and district administrators monitor teacher performance largely through classroom observations and review of assessment data. A teacher said, "The principal is constantly taking the pulse at grade-level meetings, etc.; he's in our rooms two or three times a week." (Mullica, Mullica Township School District)
 - In addition to formal observations, administrators make frequent informal visits to observe or participate in the classroom, and teachers often invite administrators to observe lessons. (Osage, Voorhees Township Public Schools)
 - Formal teacher evaluation visits are scheduled in advance, preceded by a pre-observation—to discuss the plans for the lesson—and followed by a post-observation conference. The principal said, "I'm looking for good practices. I like to use the district check-off. Under 'comments,' I like to put positive things and recommendations. This is tied to the teacher's PIP [Professional Improvement Plan] and future professional development." (Roberto Clemente, Paterson Public Schools)
 - The principal visits "every classroom, every day, even if it's just for a second. Once a week, I am in the lunchroom for a full lunch period. I'll spend hours in the science lab just hanging out, both to see how that is going and to support the teacher and validate their jobs." (Watchung, Montclair Public Schools)

- **Schools use additional norm-referenced and criterion-referenced tests to supplement state criterion-referenced tests.**
 - According to the principal, “We needed something to identify students in need of help, [so] we developed in-house mathematics assessments ... to predict for the next year, and identify how well the student has met the grade-level expectations.” (Moorestown Upper, Moorestown Township Public Schools)
 - In addition to state assessments, the district uses a variety of means to assess student progress. A district administrator explained, “We collect a lot of pre- and post-data in literacy, math, and science. Those help us to see student success as well as school [success]. There are a number of ways you can slice it and dice it—grade level, content area, ‘is a school having difficulty?’ Typically, the district data doesn’t identify [an] individual kid, but the school data let us identify trends and patterns.” (Mount Vernon, Newark Public Schools)
 - The school’s primary means for monitoring student progress is the analysis of results of SAT-9 tests given in every grade, from kindergarten to seventh grade. (Robert Treat Academy Charter School)
 - Teachers cited the usefulness of district-developed mid-year assessments in mathematics, mid-year and end-of-year subject tests, and assessments included in textbook packages. (Watchung, Montclair Public Schools)



Theme Five: Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustment

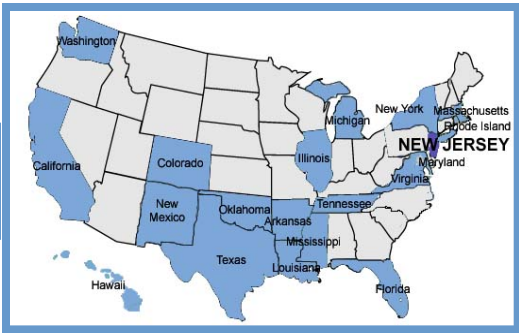
"Ensuring All Children Learn"

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 New Jersey Findings: Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustment

- **Districts and schools recognize a wide range of student academic achievements.**
 - Dunfee offers many opportunities for students to gain recognition for academic excellence—awards assemblies at the end of each marking period, prizes associated with the *Reading for Excellence* program, improvement awards, etc. (Dunfee, Barnegat Township School District)
 - Students are taught to applaud when other students read stories in front of the classroom. Student work is displayed in virtually every classroom and hallway space in the school. One teacher summed up by saying, “Every kid is recognized.” (Mullica, Mullica Township School District)
 - Community members provide recognition for students. A Newark law firm sponsors an annual essay-writing contest, based on the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* Supreme Court decision. The winning student receives \$2,500 in scholarship aid, and the runner-up receives \$1,000 in scholarship aid. (Robert Treat Academy Charter School)

- **Schools adjust instruction to student learning styles by reviewing deficiencies, adding programs, and increasing tutorial opportunities.**
 - The school offers an after-school tutoring program in reading and writing for 10 to 15 students per grade level who need extra instructional support. This includes both those who are eligible for the school's *Basic Skills* intervention program and those who are not. (Mullica, Mullica Township School District)
 - Supports for struggling students include differentiated instruction, work with the reading specialist, assignment to the early morning *Basic Skills* program, pullout *Basic Skills* sessions, after-school clubs for writing and mathematics, homework helper assistance (provided by volunteers), and summer sessions. Assignment to *Basic Skills* is determined by test scores (the bottom 5 to 10 percent) and teacher recommendation. (Osage, Voorhees Township Public Schools)
 - The school also has a peer helper program, in which fifth-grade students visit lower-grade classrooms to help younger students get organized or complete assignments. (Osage, Voorhees Township Public Schools)
 - According to one teacher, "If I have an advanced student, I will move him up to another grade level's activities in some cases. I had some fourth-graders work on the seventh-grade newsletter. I use a lot of peer tutoring—fifth-graders served as peer tutors for fourth-grade remediation." (Robert Treat Academy Charter School)
 - According to a district administrator, "In the past, we have had issues with writing. Test data caused us to notice [the problem]." The district responded with staff development for teachers of grades in which writing was a concern. The development focused on writing as a process and how to engage students in a variety of reading and writing activities. "Once we pulled the teachers [and] did the staff development, we would go back into the schools and see if it was working." The district worked to replicate parts of the strategy that proved effective in improving student writing. (Roberto Clemente, Paterson Public Schools)
 - The principal said, "We have lots of programming for at-risk kids. We have the *STAR* program; all of [kindergarten through fourth-grade] math and language arts teachers have a full-time teaching assistant in the classroom for those lessons. ... Anyone who is enrolled in *STAR* can take advantage of after-school tutoring for two hours, two afternoons a week." (Watchung, Montclair Public Schools)
 - Help for struggling students takes the form of lunch-time tutoring, after-school classes, homework assistance, and test preparation classes for students at risk for failing state assessments. A teacher added, "If a child is really struggling, I strongly recommend that the child take summer school." (Woodrow Wilson, Union City School District)



New Jersey Elementary School Best Practice Study: Conclusion

Based on the Themes of The JFTK Framework

Researchers conducted site visits to 15 elementary schools in New Jersey, identified through the NCEA analysis. Summaries of those practices that appeared in consistently higher performing elementary schools are presented below by theme.

The Findings

Curriculum and Academic Goals

School leaders and teachers demonstrated a deep understanding of the state standards, but also indicated they went “beyond” those standards and were more focused on learning objectives than state tests. They noted that they clearly expected their students to be able to demonstrate mastery on the test nonetheless. Teachers were actively engaged in the development and continual revision of the written curriculum. The clarity of the district curriculum was supported by documents such as course outlines, benchmark assessments, aligned instructional resources, pacing guides, and model instructional lessons. One teacher noted that these documents provided strong structure and boundaries with “leeway to address individual needs.”

Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building

Many districts consciously sought principal candidates from among their staff and offered development programs to develop those potential leaders. The proximity of these higher performing schools to universities offered training opportunities both for general pedagogical training for teachers and for administrative coursework for leadership candidates. All of the schools indicated that time for collaboration was available within their schools’ schedules, either during common planning times or lunch times. Teachers noted that the collaborative time was used to study curricular objectives, analyze instructional strategies, and survey student work.

Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

One school mentioned the voluntary use of looping as a means for informing teachers of skills students needed to possess upon arrival to the next grade level. One school had a year-round schedule that extended instructional time to 5:30 PM each day, classes on some Saturdays, and only one month off in the summer. Teachers reported having ample support for their work in the classrooms. Literacy coaches, lead science facilitators, resource teacher coordinators, technology and media specialists, and Basic Skills teachers were some of the support staff named by teachers. In addition, most schools identified their principals as strong instructional leaders. Specific instructional programs mentioned included Success for All, Glencoe (McGraw-Hill) for math, and Open Court for both mathematics and language arts.

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data

Data from the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK) were clearly analyzed through all school system levels—district, school, and classroom. However, teachers and principals described additional rich collaboration around the review of student work, as well as many additional instruments and means for monitoring student progress—benchmarks, program-provided assessments, and computer-based assessments. At least one school had the SuccessMaker computer-based program—used by students themselves—to track student progress. Teachers noted that while all state-required evaluation measures were in place, principals monitored the delivery of instruction far more often than required. One teacher noted that the principal visited “every classroom, every day.”

Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustment

Recognition events were fairly traditional, although teachers noted a slightly sharper focus on academic achievement recognition for a broader number of students. At the same time, at least two principals noted they preferred not to have school-level recognition events that, one stated, “divide the children.” All schools reported numerous interventions for struggling students, including before-school and after-school tutoring opportunities, school-day tutoring with education majors from nearby colleges, computer-based interventions, classroom intervention programs, and peer tutoring.

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 schools, JFTK-New Jersey’s next step will be to build upon these findings at the elementary level by conducting the study of 15 consistently higher performing and average-performing middle 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–New Jersey Elementary 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 New Jersey.