

**National Center for  
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**Just for the Kids, Texas**  
High School Best Practice Study, 2004-05  
*Focus on Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building*

Hidalgo High School, Hidalgo Independent School District  
Richardson High School, Richardson Independent School District  
Tuloso-Midway High School, Tuloso-Midway Independent School District

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## Just for the Kids, Texas

### High School Best Practice Study, 2004-2005 *Focus on Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building*

#### The Study

The Texas 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 Texas, research teams investigated three consistently higher performing and two average-performing high schools to determine the differences in practices between higher and average-performing high schools and build on previous best practice research in the state. 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 NCEA, the 2004-2005 Texas High School Best Practice Study received funding from the Rockefeller Foundation 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 schools in the study. Previous NCEA research in Texas schools provided a basis for a deeper study of district-, school-, and classroom-level practices related to Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building, one of the five themes of NCEA's Best Practice Framework. The Framework's other themes are Curriculum and Academic Goals; 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. This report presents summary findings across the cases. 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 Texas, 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 report<sup>1</sup> written by NCEA researchers. The JFTK Best Practice Framework, developed by NCEA, is used to structure the findings.

<sup>1</sup> Zavadsky, H. B., & Hunt, M. M. (2005). *How do high-performing school systems select staff and build staff capacity? Phase II, Part B — High school: A report prepared for the Rockefeller Foundation*. Retrieved June 23, 2006, from the National Center for Educational Accountability website: [http://www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/files/national/rockefeller/Rockefeller\\_Phase2B\\_Report\\_2004.pdf](http://www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/files/national/rockefeller/Rockefeller_Phase2B_Report_2004.pdf)



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#### 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.

NCEA used publicly available student achievement data from the Texas Education Agency to identify high schools that consistently outperformed other schools with similar demographics in mathematics, reading, English Language Arts, science, and social studies in the 2001-02, 2002-03, and 2003-04 school years.<sup>1</sup> The analysis included data from the tenth-grade Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) in 2001 and 2002 and the ninth-, tenth-, and eleventh-grade Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) in 2003. NCEA had access to longitudinal data from Texas; therefore, schools were evaluated based on students who were continuously enrolled beginning in the ninth grade. Usually, NCEA uses longitudinal data to divide the students into two groups based on their achievement prior to entering high school: those whose eighth-grade TAAS/TAKS scores were below proficiency and those whose eighth-grade scores were proficient and above. Student data are usually 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 prefers to study high schools that demonstrate success with both groups; however, due to the considerable number of changes in the Texas state assessment program (different grades and subjects tested), NCEA did not disaggregate the student data by prior proficiency levels for this analysis. There was no way to equate students' eighth-grade scores with the new subjects tested at the high-school level.

To identify the schools, NCEA conducted a separate analysis for each subject (mathematics, reading, English Language Arts, science, and social studies), year (2001, 2002, 2003), and grade (ninth, tenth, and eleventh) 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 2005 passing standard<sup>2</sup> 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, African American, and Asian students; the size of the school; number of continuously enrolled tested students; the percentage of students tested in the subject and year in question; the low-income percentage of the continuously enrolled tested students; and the average eighth-grade score of the continuously enrolled students in question.

NCEA ranked each school against the high schools in the rest of the state based on the extent to which it outperformed its "predicted" percent of students meeting the 2005 passing standard for each grade, subject, and year. For example, a school that outperformed 96% of the schools in "performance relative to predicted" in tenth-grade mathematics in 2003 would receive a percentile rank of 96 for that subject, grade, and year. These ranks were averaged separately for each subject

<sup>1</sup> Texas first tested English Language Arts, science, and social studies at the high school level in 2002-2003.

<sup>2</sup> The Texas Education Agency established a TAKS passing standard that was phased in over the 2003 and 2004 years. Although the state held schools accountable for a lower 2003 passing standard, the NCEA analysis used this higher standard for 2003. NCEA established a "proficiency" standard for the tenth-grade TAAS, which was also higher than the state's passing rate on the TAAS. The analysis used the proficient standard for 2001 and 2002.



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across the years and grades 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 all tested subjects and also meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements in 2003.

### The Higher Performing Schools Studied

School	District	2003 Enrollment		2003 School-Wide Demographics						
		Grade Span	No. of Students	African American	Hispanic	White	Asian	Other	Low Income	ELL
Hidalgo High School	Hidalgo Independent School District	9-12	728	0.1%	99.4%	0.4%	0.0%	0.1%	97.4%	23.9%
Richardson High School	Richardson Independent School District	10-12	1,421	18.6%	24.8%	50.1%	6.3%	0.2%	42.4%	12.7%
Tuloso-Midway High School	Tuloso-Midway Independent School District	9-12	996	1.5%	49.8%	47.6%	0.9%	0.2%	40.8%	2.2%

Demographic and student enrollment data were taken from the Just for the Kids-Texas 2003 website. Site visits were conducted in Fall 2004.



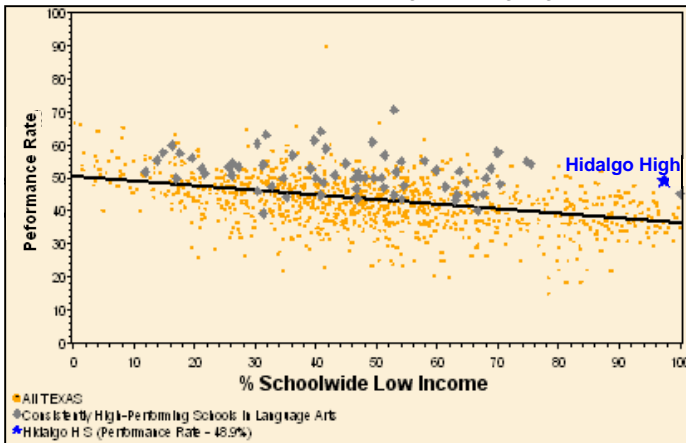
# Hidalgo High School Hidalgo Independent School District

## Just for the Kids, Texas NCEA Executive Summary

### The School

Hidalgo High School, which serves 728 ninth- through twelfth-grade students, is the only high school in Hidalgo Independent School District (3,033 students). Hidalgo's student population is 99.4% Hispanic, 0.4% White, 0.1% African American, and 0.1% other. Within this student population, 23.9% are English Language Learners, and 97.4% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2003 10<sup>th</sup> Grade English Language Arts



### Consistent Higher Performance

Hidalgo High School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics, reading, English Language Arts, science, and social studies. The analysis included ninth- through eleventh-grade achievement data from 2001 to 2003. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analysis for each grade and year, Hidalgo High School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 87.5 in mathematics, 94.6 in reading, 80.2 in English Language Arts, 90.5 in science, and 91.2 in social studies.

Schools were identified for study based on 2001-2003 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 2001 and 2005.

Subject	2001* Percentile Rank	2002* Percentile Rank	2003 Percentile Rank		Overall Avg. Rank** 2001-2003	
Grade	10	10	9	10	11	
Mathematics	74	94	88	96	77	87.5
Reading	80	95	98	N/A	N/A	94.6
English Language Arts	N/A	N/A	N/A	93	64	80.2
Science	N/A	N/A	N/A	98	81	90.5
Social Studies	N/A	N/A	N/A	99	81	91.2

\*Ninth and eleventh grades were not tested in 2001 and 2002. \*\*The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of continuously enrolled tested students in the grade as weights.

### Major Findings

Known as “a treasure on the border,” Hidalgo Independent School District actively hires teachers internationally. The recruitment process focuses on bringing in the best possible candidates who are willing to undertake both personal and professional growth opportunities. New teacher orientation is used as a boot camp to help familiarize new teachers with Hidalgo's student population, state assessments, effective teaching practices, data analysis, and state and national mandates. A comprehensive “grow-your-own leadership model” includes a professional learning incentive feature, which provides monetary rewards for teachers earning a master's degree. Principals attend training sessions with their staff so they can be additional resources and understand the practices and strategies being implemented across the district and/or school. District and school personnel conduct follow-up sessions and visits to cement the professional development experiences and to assist with implementation in each classroom.

The entire case study may be viewed at [http://www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/study\\_framework.cfm?study=Texas](http://www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/study_framework.cfm?study=Texas).



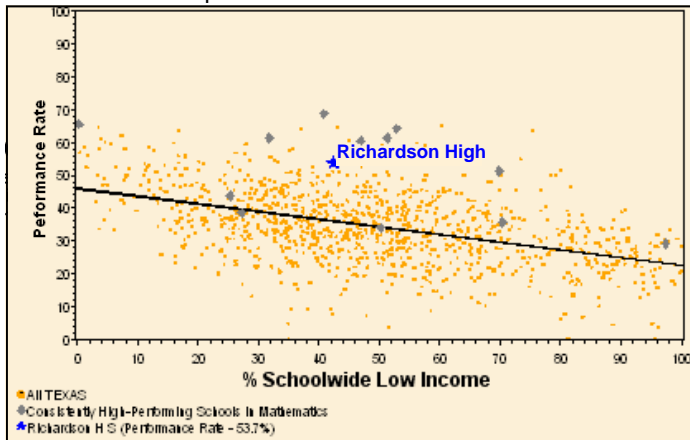
# Richardson High School Richardson Independent School District

## Just for the Kids, Texas NCEA Executive Summary

### The School

Richardson High School, which serves 1,421 tenth- through twelfth-grade students, is one of six high schools in Richardson Independent School District (34,949 students). Richardson's student population is 50.1% White, 24.8% Hispanic, 18.6% African American, 6.3% Asian, and 0.2% other. Within this student population, 12.7% are English Language Learners, and 42.4% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2003 11<sup>th</sup> Grade Mathematics



### Consistent Higher Performance

Richardson High School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics, reading, English Language Arts, science, and social studies. The analysis included tenth- through eleventh-grade achievement data from 2001 to 2003. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analysis for each grade and year, Richardson High School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 85.4 in mathematics, 85.6 in reading, 99.0 in English Language Arts, 98.3 in science, and 89.5 in social studies.

Schools were identified for study based on 2001-2003 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 2001 and 2005.

Subject	2001* Percentile Rank	2002* Percentile Rank	2003 Percentile Rank		Overall Avg. Rank** 2001-2003
Grade	10	10	10	11	
Mathematics	70	48	99	98	85.4
Reading	96	74	N/A	N/A	85.6
English Language Arts	N/A	N/A	99	99	99.0
Science	N/A	N/A	99	97	98.3
Social Studies	N/A	N/A	85	97	89.5

\*Eleventh grade was not tested in 2001 and 2002. \*\*The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of continuously enrolled tested students in the grade as weights.

### Major Findings

Richardson ISD's professional development plan "stems from a cold, hard look at weaknesses highlighted by the data" and focuses on improving the quality of classroom instruction. Horizontal teams develop strategies to address learning needs; vertical teams streamline instruction to better prepare students for the depth of mastery expected at progressively earlier grades. District curriculum directors regularly spend time in schools, talking with teacher groups about student progress and the instructional strategies the teachers will implement in the coming weeks. In addition to recruiting principals from its Leadership Development Academy, Richardson ISD works with a neighboring district and two local universities in an urban collaborative for minority leadership in education. The district benchmarks teacher salaries with eight surrounding districts to provide a competitive salary schedule and benefits package. Consequently, according to the principal, the school has never lost an applicant due to salary issues.

The entire case study may be viewed at [http://www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/study\\_framework.cfm?study=Texas](http://www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/study_framework.cfm?study=Texas).



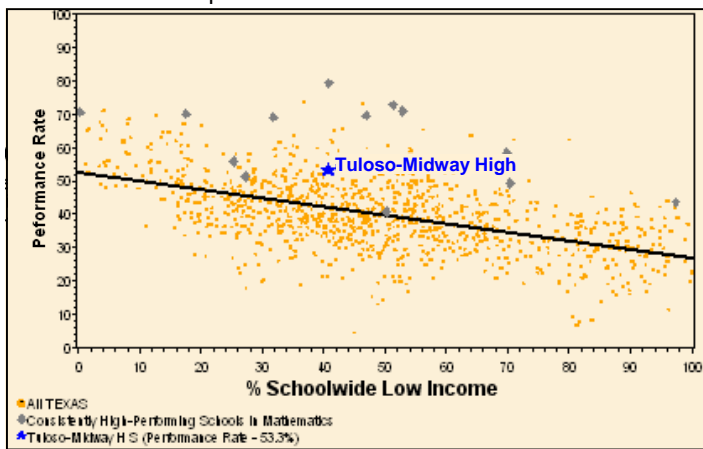
# Tuloso-Midway High School Tuloso-Midway Independent School District

## Just for the Kids, Texas NCEA Executive Summary

### The School

Tuloso-Midway High School, which serves 996 ninth- through twelfth-grade students, is the only high school in Tuloso-Midway Independent School District (3,220 students). Tuloso-Midway's student population is 49.8% Hispanic, 47.6% White, 1.5% African American, 0.9% Asian, and 0.2% other. Within this student population, 2.2% are English Language Learners, and 40.8% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2003 10<sup>th</sup> Grade Mathematics



### Consistent Higher Performance

Tuloso-Midway High School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics, reading, English Language Arts, science, and social studies. The analysis included ninth- through eleventh-grade achievement data from 2001 to 2003. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analysis for each grade and year, Tuloso-Midway High School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 75.3 in mathematics, 73.3 in reading, 80.0 in English Language Arts, 78.7 in science, and 83.2 in social studies.

Schools were identified for study based on 2001-2003 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 2001 and 2005.

Subject	2001*	2002*	2003			Overall Avg. Rank** 2001-2003
	Percentile Rank	Percentile Rank	Percentile Rank			
Grade	10	10	9	10	11	
Mathematics	97	82	40	89	93	75.3
Reading	43	67	87	N/A	N/A	73.3
English Language Arts	N/A	N/A	N/A	83	76	80.0
Science	N/A	N/A	N/A	69	92	78.7
Social Studies	N/A	N/A	N/A	74	96	83.2

\*Ninth and eleventh grades were not tested in 2001 and 2002. \*\*The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of continuously enrolled tested students in the grade as weights.

### Major Findings

Capacity-building activities for principals focus on developing their skills as instructional leaders. To support and provide follow-up training for this development, the district's training model requires district administrators to attend any training prescribed for principals. After a thorough review of the data, the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction works with principals to outline school-level professional development plans for the year. The assistant superintendent approves training only if it is aligned with campus goals. Teachers indicate that staff development opportunities are "focused, data driven, and well-coordinated." Curriculum alignment is the main topic of much of the district-level staff development. The district supplies district-level and school-level mentors for new teachers. Each school-level mentor receives a \$400 stipend for supporting a new teacher. The district provides professional development follow-up activities for all participants to avoid having disconnected "one-shot training." The superintendent asserted, "We make sure all our teachers are familiar with all new learning and have internalized that learning."

The entire case study may be viewed at [http://www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/study\\_framework.cfm?study=Texas](http://www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/study_framework.cfm?study=Texas)



## Texas 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 to summarize the findings of NCEA studies. 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).

The current study builds on four years of prior research in Texas schools. Given this strong base of general research built upon the five themes of the Best Practice Framework, NCEA used the current study to delve more deeply into *one* of the themes—Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building. By focusing only on Theme Two of the Best Practice Framework, this study and these findings provide a more in-depth picture of how higher performing schools—contrasted with average-performing schools—approach the critical tasks of selecting and developing teachers and leaders.

Although this summary focuses only on the practices related to Theme Two of the Best Practice Framework, the findings imply and assume relationships with the other theme areas of curriculum, instruction, performance monitoring, and intervention. Some of these connections are explicit in the following report; others are implied, but they exist in either case. Fully understanding the following findings related to Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building requires monitoring those implied connections with other themes. A review of the full body of previous findings from higher performing schools in Texas may be helpful and can be accessed at [http://www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/study\\_framework.cfm?study=Texas](http://www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/study_framework.cfm?study=Texas).



## 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 Texas Findings: Curriculum and Academic Goals

Please review findings relative to Theme One at [http://www.just4kids.org./bestpractice/study\\_framework.cfm?study=Texas](http://www.just4kids.org./bestpractice/study_framework.cfm?study=Texas).



## 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 Texas Findings: Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building

#### Strong Instructional Leaders

- **Strong Instructional Leaders: Recruitment and Development**

**The district actively develops internal candidates for leadership positions.**

- The district encourages innovative teachers and assistant principals with strong leadership attributes to pursue their mid-management or principal certification. Principals also extend leadership opportunities to potential administrators. As a result, the majority of principal placements come from within the district. (Hidalgo High School, Hidalgo Independent School District)
- One piece of the district's "grow-your-own" model is the professional learning incentive, which provides monetary rewards for educators earning a master's degree. Overall, the district views this model as the most viable option for recruiting leaders who have been trained internally and are familiar with district policies and practices. (Hidalgo High School, Hidalgo Independent School District)
- The majority of the district's recruiting efforts are focused internally. The primary internal recruiting mechanism is the Leadership Development Academy, which has been in place for almost a decade. The Academy takes emerging leaders through a one-year cycle of both experiential learning opportunities, like shadowing high-performing principals, and targeted training within the district. By the end of the Academy, participants have a better idea of the "nuts and bolts" of operating a school and can make an informed decision about the principalship as a career choice. (Richardson High School, Richardson Independent School District)
- In addition to recruiting principals from its Leadership Development Academy, the district works with a neighboring district and two local universities to support an urban

collaborative for developing minority administrative leadership in education. The district funds a class of two to three candidates per year, and eight of the nine graduates are now working in administrative positions throughout the district. Admittance to the program is very competitive. Successful applicants are strong instructional leaders who are committed to the district and have the necessary GRE (Graduate Record Examination) scores and rankings to meet the universities' entrance requirements. (Richardson High School, Richardson Independent School District)

- ***Strong Instructional Leaders: Selection***

**Selection practices ensure that new leaders are well matched to school needs and highly committed to school goals.**

- The principal selection process begins with a preliminary screening of what is needed at a particular campus. This screening is conducted by the district's human resources director and a committee composed of district and teacher leaders skilled in curriculum and instruction. Once selected, candidates are invited to make a thirty-minute presentation on a series of focus questions and to participate in a follow-up question-and-answer session with the committee members. If the candidate passes this screening, the interview process then addresses each candidate's preparation and experience in areas such as commitment to district goals; knowledge of curriculum management and program implementation; capacity to select, develop, and lead staff; and ability to develop and enact goals that will positively affect student learning. (Hidalgo High School, Hidalgo Independent School District)
- The principal selection process involves both school- and district-level committees working together to make the best selection for each school's needs. The process begins in the early spring with a school committee of various stakeholders developing an "ideal-candidate" profile. (Richardson High School, Richardson Independent School District)
- The district hiring committee selects principal candidates based on school needs and district goals. The committee assesses how any individual candidate adds value to the existing campus team. Part of the process also includes seeking teacher input about the kind of leadership the school needs. (Tuloso-Midway High School, Tuloso-Midway Independent School District)

- ***Strong Instructional Leaders: Evaluation<sup>1</sup>***

**District leaders seek opportunities to help principals grow professionally.**

- While the district uses all of the state-mandated formal evaluation components, additional processes enrich the principal evaluation process. Using principal self-evaluation tools, observations from school walkthroughs, and analyses of the school's student performance data, the superintendent determines each principal's overall performance. Struggling principals receive every opportunity to "recover their footing" and to grow as instructional leaders. Should the principal still fail to improve, the superintendent will remove him or her from the principalship. (Hidalgo High School, Hidalgo Independent School District)
- Area superintendents formally evaluate principals annually. The evaluation process begins early in the fall, when principals meet with their area superintendent for a formative evaluation. During this meeting, they look over the data and develop an improvement plan. They revisit the plan in January during the summative evaluation to determine whether the principal is making progress. The summative evaluation process uses a district-developed tool that includes a domain for student performance and growth. The evaluation tool includes 38 indicators, one third of which relate to student performance. (Richardson High School, Richardson Independent School District)

<sup>1</sup>Although the evaluation of principals is typically considered within the theme of Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data, we have chosen to provide some information on this topic within this report, which is otherwise limited to findings under Theme Two: Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building. The information we have included is pertinent to a full understanding of the current theme and points to the interdependence of practices across the themes of the Best Practice Framework.

- Principals set instructional goals for their schools in collaboration with the superintendent. The formal summative conference includes a review of student assessment data. If improvement is necessary, the superintendent helps the principal identify specific needs and develop a growth plan that includes deadlines, expectations, products, and outcomes. (Tuloso-Midway High School, Tuloso-Midway Independent School District)

- ***Strong Instructional Leaders: Retention***

**The district offers incentives and support in order to retain well-qualified leaders who increase student performance.**

- Hidalgo ISD has multiple reward programs, including monetary incentives for outstanding leaders who choose to remain with the district. The most basic program is the service incentive, which awards personnel monies for each five-year increment of continuous service. There is also a performance-based pay plan that provides monetary incentives for principals to improve their schools' accountability ratings. This incentive is part of their evaluation and represents a percentage of their salary. (Hidalgo High School, Hidalgo Independent School District)
- In addition to monetary incentives, the district provides a supportive networking system to retain principals. Principals are part of a learning community in which they can share their concerns and learn from one another. The district wants to ensure that “no principal falls by the wayside.” (Hidalgo High School, Hidalgo Independent School District)
- To remain competitive at attracting and retaining principals, the district benchmarks salaries annually with eight other districts. According to the superintendent, this has become more of a necessity in recent years, due to the rising number of wealthy suburban districts that are recruiting seasoned principals. (Richardson High School, Richardson Independent School District)

## Highly Qualified Teachers

- ***Highly Qualified Teachers: Recruitment and Development***

**Districts and schools attract highly qualified teacher candidates through deliberate recruitment efforts.**

- Hidalgo's primary recruiting tool is its reputation. The district has been called a “treasure on the border.” Word of its success has spread to other districts, and this has increased the number of teachers hoping to transfer to Hidalgo. In addition, teams attend university career fairs and those held by regional service centers across the state. (Hidalgo High School, Hidalgo Independent School District)
- Currently, 75 employees within the district are graduates of the district—approximately half of these are teachers. District personnel encourage former students to apply for teaching positions when they have completed their degrees. In addition, district personnel encourage their graduates who are teaching in other districts to think about coming back. (Hidalgo High School, Hidalgo Independent School District)
- Hidalgo ISD has been a “pioneer” in recruiting and developing teachers from its internal paraprofessional workforce since the early '80s. The district began with on-site classes for paraprofessionals in order to help them become certified. Now, paraprofessionals advance their education through the local community college and universities, with professional learning incentives supplied by the district. The district also offers flexible scheduling to accommodate classes during the day and provides afternoon tutorials for college entrance exam preparation. (Hidalgo High School, Hidalgo Independent School District)
- The district sends representatives to approximately 50 job fairs a year to recruit highly qualified teachers. In addition, the district hosts its own fair. (Richardson High School, Richardson Independent School District)

- Richardson ISD recruits heavily from among its successful student teachers. The district has established strong relationships with two area universities. With one university, the district provides a professional development opportunity for junior- and senior-year college students, who spend two semesters in a school in the district. Students observe during the first semester and student teach during the second semester. Students from a second university spend an entire year in a school as interns. In this program, student teachers get their own class of students and the support and guidance of a mentor teacher throughout the year. (Richardson High School, Richardson Independent School District)
  - Richardson ISD uses every opportunity to recruit outstanding teachers—the website, professional development activities outside the district, summer institutes, etc. The district also noted that it recruits potential teachers by encouraging outstanding students. Several former students are now teaching within the district. (Richardson High School, Richardson Independent School District)
  - Teacher recruitment is an ongoing process in this district. District administrators attribute their ability to maintain an ample supply of quality teaching candidates to their ability to hire teachers earlier than other districts, due to their year-round schedule. The hiring process can start as early as February for a school start in July, when most districts are just beginning the hiring process. The district has also had some success recruiting young teachers, thanks in part to its beginning teacher salaries, which are competitive with surrounding districts. (Tuloso-Midway High School, Tuloso-Midway Independent School District)
- **Highly Qualified Teachers: Selection**

**Teacher selection practices ensure the best possible fit for the school’s particular needs and goals.**

    - The district’s “grow-your-own” model begins with the selection of teacher candidates and assistant principals who share the district’s philosophy of teaching and learning and value the opportunity to grow professionally. The core of this philosophy is an intense focus on making a difference in student achievement. (Hidalgo High School, Hidalgo Independent School District)
    - In order to expand the net for extraordinary talent, Hidalgo ISD recruits internationally. (Hidalgo High School, Hidalgo Independent School District)
    - Principals retain final decision-making authority about new teacher hires. This stems from the belief that principals cannot be held accountable for the academic performance of their schools if they do not have final authority over who is hired. (Hidalgo High School, Hidalgo Independent School District)
    - Teacher selection is a process designed to provide multiple checks and balances, to ensure the selection of a highly qualified teacher. Initial screening interviews include the use of the *Ventures of Excellence* tool. Once candidates have been screened, principals can view all supporting documents for applicants online and also receive copies of the videotaped *Ventures* interviews. (Richardson High School, Richardson Independent School District)
    - An entire team—principal, assistant principal in charge of the subject area, department head, and additional designated staff—interview teacher candidates to determine the best fit for the department and the school at large. The principal emphasized this point: “If you [t]ake the time in the front end to find the best person for the spot, it pays off in the long run. I really believe, as the book *Good to Great* advocates, you have to have the right people on the bus. If not, your school will not function the way it should.” (Richardson High School, Richardson Independent School District)
    - The district screens candidates through the use of the *Gallup Urban Teacher Perceiver* to select each applicant who has the “heart and soul to be a good teacher.” (Tuloso-Midway High School, Tuloso-Midway Independent School District)

- ***Highly Qualified Teachers: Evaluation<sup>2</sup>***

- **School leaders seek opportunities to help teachers grow professionally.**

- Teachers are formally evaluated using the state’s assessment tool—PDAS (Professional Development and Appraisal System). Principals evaluate teachers relative to how they are moving students toward district and school performance goals on the state assessment. In addition to monitoring data, principals frequently monitor instruction to ensure that it matches the learning goal and facilitates higher order thinking skills. (Hidalgo High School, Hidalgo Independent School District)
    - The principal performs regular “reflective walkthroughs” that are designed to provide follow-up opportunities for teachers to reflect on their instructional practices. (Hidalgo High School, Hidalgo Independent School District)
    - In addition to using the state’s formal evaluation instrument (PDAS), administrators and departmental leaders conduct frequent walkthroughs to monitor curriculum delivery and student engagement. Teachers are given feedback concerning areas needing improvement, as well as areas where they excel. Principals may offer opportunities for teachers to observe master teachers. A departmental leader stated, “The more principals and chairpersons [that] are in the room, the quicker we can meet teacher needs and evaluate their progress.” (Richardson High School, Richardson Independent School District)
    - Teachers who are struggling receive assistance from their principal, typically through observation and feedback. Teachers who do not improve with that initial assistance are put on a growth plan. District administrators believe that providing teachers with support and tools is important and, therefore, attempt to address concerns early and in a supportive manner. (Tuloso-Midway High School, Tuloso-Midway Independent School District)

- ***Highly Qualified Teachers: Retention***

- **The district offers incentives in order to retain well-qualified teachers.**

- Teachers receive incentives for pursuing their master's degrees. This provides teachers with incremental monetary rewards for credit hours earned towards their degrees. (Hidalgo High School, Hidalgo Independent School District)
    - Hidalgo ISD has multiple reward programs including monetary incentives for those who choose to remain with the district. The most basic program is the service incentive, which awards district personnel monies for each five-year increment of continuous service. There is also a performance-based pay plan that provides monetary incentives for teachers to improve their schools’ accountability ratings. (Hidalgo High School, Hidalgo Independent School District)
    - Teachers enjoy the same types of incentives offered to principals: a performance-based pay plan and longevity pay for each five-year increment of continuous service. Teachers also receive payment for sick days that they do not use. (Hidalgo High School, Hidalgo Independent School District)
    - As with principal salaries, the district benchmarks teacher salaries with eight surrounding districts to provide a competitive salary schedule and benefits package. Consequently, Richardson High’s principal reports that he has never lost an applicant due to salary, and he appreciates that the board is proactive in staying competitive with surrounding districts. In addition to competitive pay, the district provides stipends for critical-needs areas such as mathematics, science, and special education. (Richardson High School, Richardson Independent School District)

<sup>2</sup>Although the evaluation of principals is typically considered within the theme of Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data, we have chosen to provide some information on this topic within this report, which is otherwise limited to findings under Theme Two: Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building. The information we have included is pertinent to a full understanding of the current theme and points to the interdependence of practices across the themes of the Best Practice Framework.

- When able, the district has provided December bonuses based on years of service. According to a district administrator, not only will they be able to award bonuses this year, but they also have moved the award date to January, so all teachers will be eligible for the bonus. (Richardson High School, Richardson Independent School District)
- The district offers disability insurance for teachers with numerous years of service. (Tuloso-Midway High School, Tuloso-Midway Independent School District)

## Capacity Building: Aligned Professional Development

### ▪ **Capacity Building: Data-Driven**

#### **Data drive the selection of professional development topics at both the district and school levels.**

- Beyond typical principal meetings, principals come together during the summer to review data and determine focus areas for teacher development. Working from these focus areas, they plan each staff development session with the express purpose of improving student achievement. (Hidalgo High School, Hidalgo Independent School District)
- Hidalgo ISD's professional development plan is based strictly on the determination of needs for which the data show some relative gaps in instruction. The district tries to find high-yield instructional strategies to address those gaps. (Hidalgo High School, Hidalgo Independent School District)
- District personnel use campus input and data to determine how to select major initiatives for the following school year. (Hidalgo High School, Hidalgo Independent School District)
- According to a district administrator, professional development "stems from a cold, hard look at weaknesses highlighted by the data" and is focused on elements that will improve the quality of classroom instruction. (Richardson High School, Richardson Independent School District)
- The assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction works with principals to review their performance scores and campus needs assessments, including student and teacher surveys. After a thorough review of the data, they jointly outline school-level professional development for the year and incorporate it into their campus improvement plan. The assistant superintendent approves training only if it is aligned with campus goals. (Tuloso-Midway High School, Tuloso-Midway Independent School District)

### ▪ **Capacity Building: Instructional Leaders**

#### **Districts provide ongoing training for school leaders to develop instructional leadership skills.**

- Laser-focused, intentionally developed capacity-building activities for principals support the internalization of key teaching and learning practices. (Hidalgo High School, Hidalgo Independent School District)
- Principals attend training sessions with their staff so they can understand the practices and strategies being implemented across the various departments. Principals then build on these training opportunities by modeling teaching strategies for teachers, monitoring their implementation, and working one-on-one with their staff to improve instruction. (Hidalgo High School, Hidalgo Independent School District)
- Mentors and new principals talk once a week and meet face-to-face at least twice a month. They also keep logs of their conversations as a way of documenting growth and creating a reference guide for future use. District administrators routinely follow up on training activities to monitor implementation and make adjustments where needed. (Richardson High School, Richardson Independent School District)

- Once the school year has begun, principals and assistant principals participate in monthly district-provided training opportunities focused on instructional issues. (Richardson High School, Richardson Independent School District)
- Richardson High's principal offers a variety of avenues to help teachers develop leadership capabilities. Teachers have the opportunity to lead professional development sessions and to become trainers of trainers, as well as to be involved in action teams that target a variety of needs. (Richardson High School, Richardson Independent School District)
- Capacity-building activities for principals stem from an in-depth analysis of student achievement data. Disaggregated data highlight areas of need by student population, grade level, subject area, and even down to specific academic objectives. The district provides training for principals to address identified needs. (Richardson High School, Richardson Independent School District)
- Capacity-building activities for principals focus on developing their skills as instructional leaders. (Tuloso-Midway High School, Tuloso-Midway Independent School District)
- Tuloso-Midway's training model requires district administrators to attend any training prescribed for principals, so they can conduct follow-up training and provide instructional support. (Tuloso-Midway High School, Tuloso-Midway Independent School District)

▪ **Capacity Building: Collaboration**

**District and school leaders actively encourage vertical and horizontal collaboration among teachers by providing ample meeting time.**

- Teachers have the opportunity to collaborate with their peers during their departmental planning period, as well as their personal conference time. During department meetings, teachers have the opportunity to model and discuss their lessons and share strategies to help each other improve. They also develop benchmark assessments and review pertinent data to help revise pacing and curriculum delivery. (Hidalgo High School, Hidalgo Independent School District)
- Richardson High's principal indicates that teacher capacity building also takes place during horizontal team meetings, in which teachers spend an entire day covering agenda items with their evaluating principal, department chair, and—in many cases—the curriculum director. He adds, "Once those agenda items have been covered, there is usually an opportunity for [teachers] to kind of map out their six-week plans and look over those [benchmark] assessments line by line, to discern problem areas, as well as strategies to address them." (Richardson High School, Richardson Independent School District)
- Richardson High's principal is a proponent of vertical teaming. He believes it is vital for vertical teams to work together to better prepare students at earlier grades for the depth of mastery needed in high school. To this end, Richardson High hosts vertical team meetings and encourages teachers from feeder schools to attend. (Richardson High School, Richardson Independent School District)
- One teacher noted, "I've been a part of several book studies, where I looked at the [professional development] catalog and said, 'This doesn't fit my needs for the year. What if I can get two or three people in the building together, and we read a book or journal?' We have the flexibility to do that. However, the flexibility is not limitless. Our social studies director has to approve it first, and if she does, she typically wants a group studying the book to build in some accountability measures, where we reflect and plan together, using the book as a guide." (Richardson High School, Richardson Independent School District)
- Teachers meet with their peers four times throughout the year during horizontal pull-out days. The school moved to horizontal pull-outs due to the inability to provide a schedule that accommodates shared conference times across departments. With the implementation of horizontal pull-outs, teachers are able to spend an entire day planning with their peers while substitutes cover their classes. During this planning time, teachers work with the

department head and governing assistant principal to review data, discuss problem areas, develop interventions, align their six-weeks plans, write tests and lesson plans, and discuss best practices. (Richardson High School, Richardson Independent School District)

- The district provides vertical team planning time for working on curriculum alignment and scope and sequence development. (Tuloso-Midway High School, Tuloso-Midway Independent School District)

- **Capacity Building: New Teachers**

**New teachers receive training in standards-based curriculum and instruction through induction classes and mentors.**

- New teacher orientation is a “boot camp” to help familiarize new teachers with state assessments, effective teaching practices, data analysis, and state and national mandates. New teachers also learn about the district’s student population and instructional strategies that work well with the students. (Hidalgo High School, Hidalgo Independent School District)
- Mentors meet frequently with new teachers to discuss their performance in terms of successes and suggestions for improvement. Mentors model teaching techniques and strategies to help new teachers relate the curriculum to students’ prior knowledge and everyday lives. After modeling, mentors meet with new teachers to discuss how to implement similar techniques and strategies into their own lessons. Upon development of a plan of action, mentors perform observations to monitor implementation by the new teachers. (Hidalgo High School, Hidalgo Independent School District)
- New teachers meet with their mentors and various instructional specialists to familiarize themselves with the curriculum. The district provides regular updates throughout the year in areas of interest to new teachers, such as lesson design, effective teaching practices, and classroom management. (Richardson High School, Richardson Independent School District)

- **Capacity Building: Practice-Embedded**

**Through ongoing implementation support, district and school leaders help teachers incorporate evidence-based practices into classroom instruction.**

- District and school personnel conduct follow-up sessions to cement the learning and assist with implementation into classroom practices. Follow-up sessions also provide teachers a time to cross-analyze their data to ensure that their learning is being transferred into their practices. Teachers emerge from training well equipped to implement the new learning into their instruction and are more confident, having practiced the skills and made adjustments where necessary. (Hidalgo High School, Hidalgo Independent School District)
- The district pared down professional development offerings so that it could both address identified areas of need and yet still allow time for teachers to collaborate with one another about how to integrate the new practices into their classes. The result is, according to one district administrator, that teachers are more likely to incorporate the new learning into their daily practices. To this end, core area directors routinely visit the schools to monitor implementation of new learning and model best practices for those needing additional follow-up. (Richardson High School, Richardson Independent School District)
- A teacher remarked, “The first in-service you attend might be just the basics of a new program, best practices, or technology being implemented, and then part two might be how to incorporate these programs or ideas into everyday use in your classroom. I think this is more than just a step in the direction of more accountability, but a step toward really making sure that teachers understand what it is they are being asked to do and feel supported while doing that.” (Richardson High School, Richardson Independent School District)
- Teachers receive instructional support from an instructional specialist, the curriculum director, and a cadre of vertical team teachers in the content areas. The instructional staff also helps teachers by supplying additional resources, teaching model lessons, and

providing follow-ups of professional development. (Tuloso-Midway High School, Tuloso-Midway Independent School District)

- **Capacity Building: Continual Learning**

**The district compensates mentors and teachers for the extra time and effort they spend developing professional capacity.**

- The district provides additional monetary incentives for any professional development hours outside of contract time. (Richardson High School, Richardson Independent School District)
- When the district holds additional training in the summer, it allows teachers to choose the date and pays them for their time to encourage attendance. Supplementing summer sessions with follow-up sessions during the year with the same trainer has proven to be a successful professional development model. (Tuloso-Midway High School, Tuloso-Midway Independent School District)
- The district provides evaluation and follow-up of professional development activities to avoid “one-shot training.” (Tuloso-Midway High School, Tuloso-Midway Independent 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 Texas Findings: Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

Please review findings relative to Theme Three at [http://www.just4kids.org./bestpractice/study\\_framework.cfm?study=Texas](http://www.just4kids.org./bestpractice/study_framework.cfm?study=Texas).



## 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 Texas Findings: Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data

Please review findings relative to Theme Four at [http://www.just4kids.org./bestpractice/study\\_framework.cfm?study=Texas](http://www.just4kids.org./bestpractice/study_framework.cfm?study=Texas).



## 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 Texas Findings: Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustment

Please review findings relative to Theme Five at [http://www.just4kids.org./bestpractice/study\\_framework.cfm?study=Texas](http://www.just4kids.org./bestpractice/study_framework.cfm?study=Texas).



## Texas High School Best Practice Study: Conclusion

*Based on the Themes of The JFTK Framework*

Researchers conducted site visits to five high schools in Texas, 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 in the area of Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building are presented below.

### The Findings

#### Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building

##### Strong Instructional Leadership

*Districts actively sought to recruit and develop leaders from within the district. Two of the districts provided formal principal development opportunities for teachers aspiring to the principalship. Principals were monitored and guided by district leaders to continue to grow as professionals. Incentive programs encouraged leaders with demonstrated success in raising student achievement levels to continue to do so in that district.*

##### Highly Qualified Teachers

*Recruitment efforts took various forms, including job fairs, online announcements of openings, and recruitment from among former students, student teachers, paraprofessionals, and teachers in other districts. Each school's reputation served as a recruiting tool, in addition to benchmarked pay schedules and advanced professional support. Effective teachers—that is, those whose students' achievement was measurably improving—enjoyed pay increases and other benefits.*

##### Capacity Building: Aligned Professional Development

*Performance levels of principals and teachers alike were measured both through data interpretation and observations. All development activities were chosen in response to needs indicated in assessment data. District leaders accompanied principals to training events in order to be able to guide principals in the effective implementation of new practices. Likewise, principals participated in professional development activities with their staff for the same reason. Principals' expertise as instructional leaders allowed them to model, coach, and evaluate effective practices in the classroom. Mentors were trained to provide meaningful support to new and struggling teachers, and they were compensated for their efforts. Teachers also received incentives to pursue their master's degrees. In addition to formal professional development activities, teachers collaborated in horizontal and vertical teams during regularly scheduled meeting times.*

## 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-Texas's next step could be continued, targeted study of issues that emerged during the previous work in Texas 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-Texas 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 Texas.*