

Core Practice Audit

Excerpts from Sample Report



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Sample School District Core Practice Audit Report

Benchmarking Your Practices to Higher Performing School Systems

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Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Research Base	3
Audit Process.....	8
Document Collection and Review	8
Site Visit	8
Analysis and Benchmarking	8
Overview	10
Review and Rating of Core Practices	12
Established Practices.....	15
Developing Practices.....	25
Leverage Points.....	27
Critical Action #1 Recommendation.....	34
Critical Action #2 Recommendation.....	40
Critical Action #3 Recommendation.....	46
Critical Action #4 Recommendation.....	50
Critical Action #5 Recommendation.....	54
Critical Action #6 Recommendation.....	60
Critical Action #7 Recommendation.....	66
Critical Action #8 Recommendation.....	70
Appendices	71
Appendix A. List of District Documents Requested and Submitted	71
Appendix B. Site Visit Schedule.....	77
Appendix C. NCEA Core Practice Framework Graphic.....	79
Appendix D. Recommendations	80

Using Research and Data to Guide Improvement

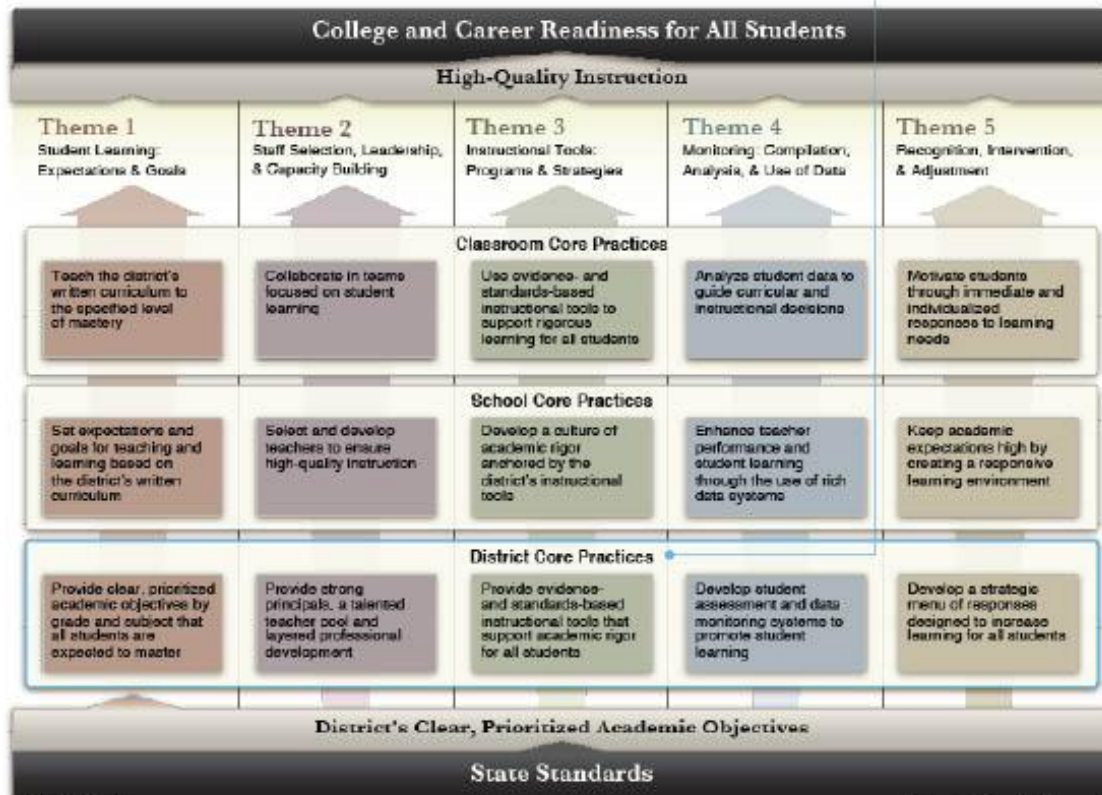
The Core Practice Audit provides you with a review of your district practices against the practice of consistently higher performing schools and school systems as found in the Core Practice Framework.

Introduction

This report presents the findings and recommendations of a Core Practice Audit conducted by the National Center for Educational Achievement (NCEA) for the Sample School District (WRSD) during the first semester of the 2010-11 school year. The audit focused on the fundamental principles of teaching and learning as identified from the study of consistently higher performing school systems and represented in the NCEA Core Practice Framework.

While the Framework presents the practices of higher performing school systems at three organizational levels—district, school and classroom—the Sample School District audit focused on a study of the practices at the district level only.

The Core Practice Framework



Research Base

Five organizing themes within the Framework provided the primary structure for the audit of the practices of the Sample School District. Built upon NCEA's study of more than 550 schools, these themes capture the primary curricular and instructional activities undertaken by school systems and represent the major content areas in which practices of higher performing school systems differed from their average-performing counterparts.

Understanding How Your School System Works

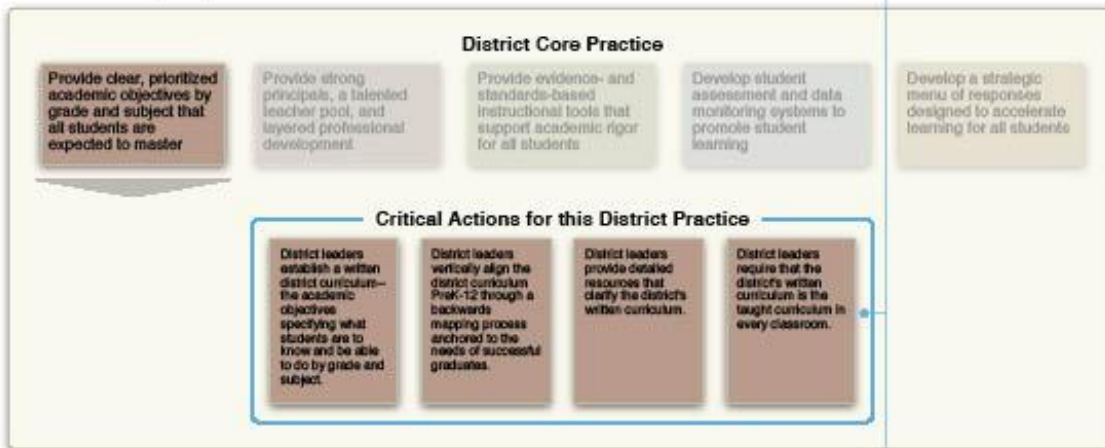
We dive into each critical action, the key steps that ensure each core practice is implemented successfully, at the district-level across all five themes to give you a holistic view of your practices.

The actions taken by educators at the three organizational levels—district, school and classroom—are summarized in the Framework by five practices at each of these levels, one in each theme. Each of the five practices for each organizational level is further detailed by specific Critical Actions describing each practice.

There are 20 Critical Actions describing the five district-level practices of higher performing school systems. The graphics below and on pages 6-7 list the 20 district-level Critical Actions by theme and practice.

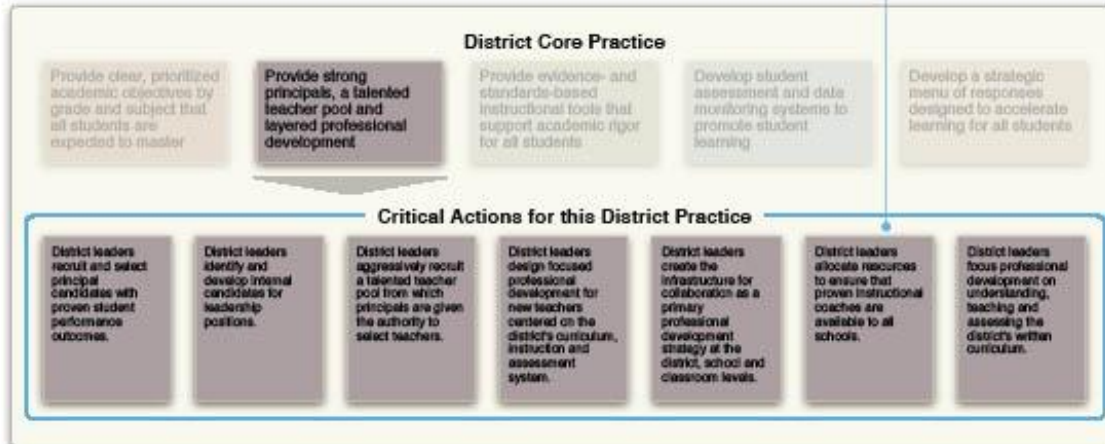
Theme 1

Student Learning: Expectations & Goals



Theme 2

Staff Selection, Leadership, & Capacity Building



Developing a Deep Understanding of Your Practices

We categorize and rank each critical action during Core Practice Audit Process.

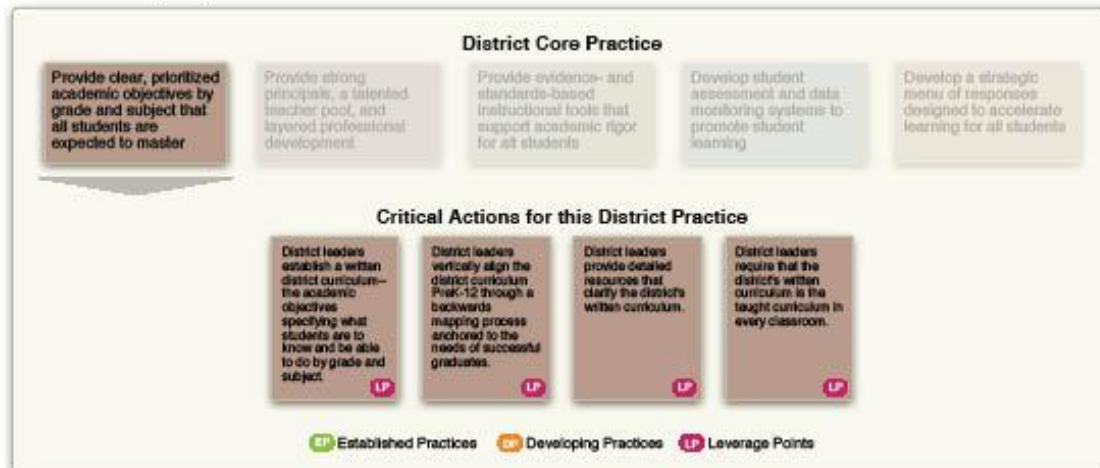
Review and Rating of Core Practices

The following sections of the audit report present each of the three categories of district Critical Actions based on the analysis and benchmarking process undertaken by the NCEA audit review team. The first two categories, *Established Practices* and *Developing Practices*, are presented in less detail than the third category, *Leverage Points*. *Leverage Points* represent the areas that the audit review team believes might most serve district leaders as they seek higher achievement levels. As a result, the review team focused most intensely on analyzing this category of practices.

The graphic below, and on pages 13-14, summarizes the review team's categorization of the Critical Actions associated with district-level Core Practices.

Theme 1

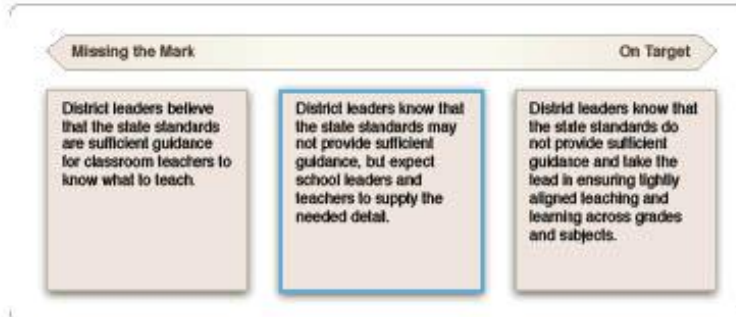
Student Learning: Expectations & Goals



(continued on next page)

Rubric #1**Curricular Beliefs and Knowledge**

Findings: The district administrative team discussed the need to push the rigor of the curriculum down into the elementary level with the introduction of the national Common Core Standards. In nearly all interviews, educators discussed the demographics of the community and challenges faced by their students, but no one mentioned the impact that an aligned PreK–12 curriculum can have on leveling the playing field for students from varied backgrounds.

Rubric #2**Curricular Beliefs and Knowledge**

Findings: District and school leaders clearly communicated that teachers in the district were well-versed in the New Hampshire state standards, the Grade-Level Expectations (GLEs) and Grade-Span Expectations (GSEs). This familiarity was confirmed by teacher focus groups at each school, as they all referred to the GLEs and GSEs when asked how they knew what they were to teach. In addition, secondary teachers were aware of the coming national Common Core Standards. Although orchestrated at the district level, work is underway by middle school and high school teachers to align their expectations and translate their unit plans into an Understanding by Design (UbD) format. Elementary teachers are similarly working on developing more detailed curriculum materials in writing and science (although the work is taking a different form). When reviewing the documentation submitted to illustrate the district's written curriculum, reviewers

Providing You with a Step-by-step Road Map to Excellence

The final audit report contains research-based next-step recommendations on how to begin improving your district practices and aligning them to the practice of higher performing school systems.

encountered multiple different formats, different language, and different content among all of the materials provided for various grades and subjects. Although standards and competencies were woven throughout most documents, it was actually difficult to discern if any overarching structure guided the subject and grade-level work. The reviewers' conclusion was that it did not. District leaders are providing the forum for these curriculum meetings to occur, but the overarching curriculum framework that would help ensure alignment of these efforts is not yet occurring at the district level.

Recommendation #1

Critical Action

District leaders establish a written district curriculum—the academic objectives specifying what students are to know and be able to do by grade and subject.

- **Develop a tightly aligned PreK–12 written curriculum outlining the knowledge and skills students will master by grade and subject.** Teachers and leaders are doing a lot in WRSD. One of the auditors' primary concerns, however, is that all of the various efforts—particularly related to curricular work—are not guided by a highly intentional, well-defined process. For example, reviewers were unable to access one central document for any subject area that showed exactly what was to be taught and learned at each grade level (e.g., PreK–12 WRSD Math Curriculum). While various resources and materials at a given grade (e.g., Grade 4) included references to standards (primarily state standards), those standards were never seen within the context of the full PreK–12 continuum.
- **Understand that the state standards do not provide the structure referenced above.** The state standards must be clarified across grades¹ and subjects so that every teacher in the district knows exactly what to teach and to *what level* if students are to be able to access rigorous coursework in high school and be college and career ready upon graduation. The district's written curriculum must become the *sense maker*, thereafter, for every instructional decision in the district. This type of curricular coherence can never be achieved by teachers working independently at different grade levels.
- **Define the system by which curriculum for every grade and subject will be developed, reviewed, and revised.** This structure should provide for continuous improvement of the written curriculum, rather than cyclical reviews. In many higher performing districts, vertical teams of teachers from across the district spend summer months on this work. Understanding that curriculum development requires particular skills; district leaders ensure these teachers are trained in these skills. Teams may meet monthly throughout the school year to monitor how well the curriculum is being implemented and what impediments teachers may be encountering. Monthly monitoring typically defines the work to be done the following summer. Currently, neither district nor school leaders could provide any formal documented process for curriculum development, review, or revision. In