



Core Practice Audit

Aligning School and District Practices to Higher Performing School Systems



The National Center for Educational Achievement is a department of ACT, Inc., a not-for-profit organization committed to helping people achieve education and workplace success. NCEA builds the capacity of educators and leaders to create educational systems of excellence for all students. We accomplish this by providing research-based solutions and expertise in higher performing schools, school improvement, and best practice research that lead to increased levels of college and career readiness.

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What is the Core Practice Audit?

The Core Practice Audit is an objective evaluation of your district’s current core practices, those practices most connected to teaching and learning, and it provides a blueprint for future school improvement strategies. From NCEA/ACT’s study of over 550 schools across the nation, we have developed a model for school improvement—the Core Practice Framework—which identifies the practices that distinguish consistently higher performing schools from their average-performing peers. Using this Framework as a guide, we provide an analysis of where your school system’s practices at all three levels—district, school, and classroom—currently fall in comparison to those practices of higher performing districts. The resulting report outlines next-step recommendations and research-based practices for district leaders to begin closing these gaps.

Why Should You Do a Core Practice Audit?

Whether you are a new superintendent or a long-time curriculum and instruction leader, the Core Practice Audit provides you with valuable insights on where to focus your limited resources and energy. Our audit helps you identify the programs and strategies that are working in your school system and inform you of the ones that are not so your district can achieve at a higher level. The Core Practice Audit can help district leaders validate their current initiatives or re-align their efforts to the bigger picture of getting all students college and career ready.

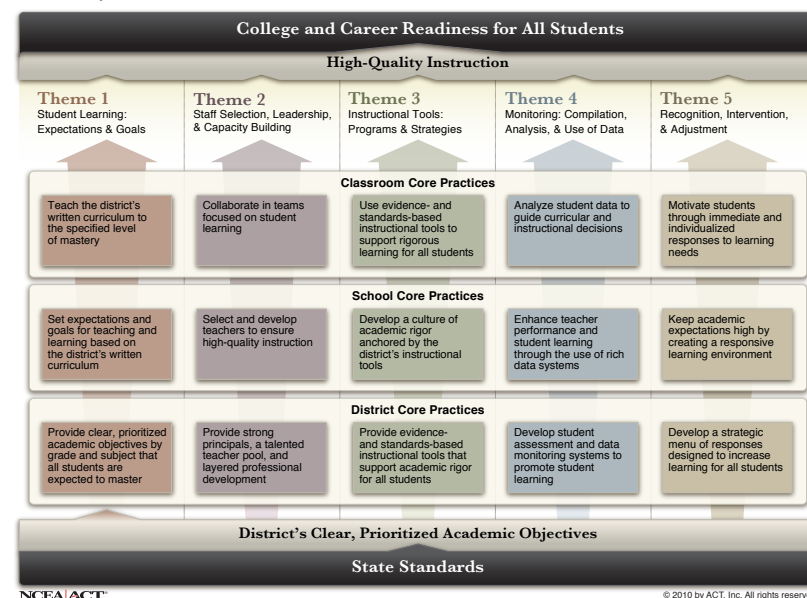
Preparing Your District for the Implementation of Higher Standards

Whether your state is adopting the Common Core Standards or its own higher standards, your district must be systemically prepared. Successfully preparing your students to meet the higher standard of college and career readiness requires a clear picture of the end goal: What practices should be in place at the end of the process at the district, school, and classroom levels to ensure that students can successfully meet these higher standards? The foundation of our Core Practice Audit, the Core Practice Framework, is based on over a decade of higher performing schools research and answers exactly this question. Schools and districts must look at “what works” and replicate the practices of higher performing schools and districts—those schools and districts which have had more success in preparing their students for college and career than their peers that serve similar student populations.

The Core Practice Framework: Research Basis

From NCEA/ACT’s research of more than 550 schools in 300 districts across the nation, NCEA/ACT has determined the practices that distinguish a higher performing school from its average-performing peers. These best practices are the foundation for NCEA’s Core Practice Framework.

The Core Practice Framework features three primary parts: Organizing themes, school system levels, and school system practices. The themes within the Framework represent the broad topics that connect the identified practices across different school system levels. 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 differed from their average performing counterparts.



Core Practice Audit-District Activities

The core practice audit will focus on the fundamental principles of teaching and learning as determined from the study of consistently higher performing school systems represented in the Core Practice Framework. Built upon the study of proven systemic school practices, this audit will focus on district-, school-, and classroom-level practices in your district. The audit will include four phases of work outlined below.

Phase of Work	Time
Data Collection	2 weeks
Data Analysis	3 weeks
Report Writing	2 weeks
Report Delivery	2 days

A report benchmarking the practices of your district to the Core Practice Framework will be presented to the superintendent no later than six weeks after the site visit is conducted.

NCEA/ACT will conduct a broad review of your district’s teaching and learning practices relative to the Core Practice Framework. The Core Practice Audit includes the following phases:

Phase I: Data Collection

- Review all writing and materials publicly available on the district website.
- Conduct site visits to various campuses in your district. During these visits, the NCEA/ACT lead researcher will conduct interviews at the district and school levels using the interview protocols that have been developed over the past ten years of school investigations. These interviews will include individual and focus group structures and will be enhanced by direct observations of teacher collaborative meetings.

Phase II: Data Analysis

During the data analysis phase, NCEA/ACT staff members will study all documents, synthesize interview notes and site visit observations, and integrate all observations into review findings and recommendations.

Phase III: Report Writing

NCEA/ACT staff members will prepare a report for your district organized by the themes of the Core Practice Framework. A draft report will be provided to district leadership within six weeks of the site visits.

Phase IV: Report Delivery

The NCEA/ACT staff member leading your district’s Core Practice Audit will present the report and findings to the superintendent. In addition, the NCEA/ACT staff member will be prepared to present the findings throughout the day to any additional audiences that the superintendent would designate.

Results

The final report provides next step recommendations for district-level personnel to align school system practices to those of higher performing school systems. The ultimate use and purpose of the report is at the discretion of district leadership. Previous Core Practice Audit Reports have been used to help leadership identify areas for school improvement, communicate initiatives to the broader educational community, and/or serve as a guide for district strategic planning.

Questions?

If you have questions or would like additional information, please contact us at:

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