

NCEA's Best Practice Framework: District Audit

June 2006

Our Mission:

*“To Raise
Academic
Standards and
Increase Student
Achievement.”*

The National Center for Educational Accountability is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization (EIN 01-0577238) whose founding organizations include Just for the Kids, The University of Texas at Austin, and the Education Commission of the States.

National Center for Educational Accountability

national sponsor of Just for the Kids

What is a District Audit?

A District Audit is a comprehensive school system audit to benchmark districts and schools against the NCEA Best Practice Framework. It is an objective, outside point of view based on the research of approximately 500 schools systems.

The District Audit involves a Self-Audit Survey of all district and school staff, a Document Review, and Site Visit Interviews and Observations.

Self-Audit Survey

The Self-Audit is an online survey tool to examine the teaching and learning practices in your school system by:

- Benchmarking your practices to the practices of Consistently Higher Performing Schools,
- Identifying issues of communication and policy implementation across your school system, and
- Gathering feedback quickly from various members of the school community.



Document Review

NCEA reviews documents such as curriculum guides, professional development plans, and data management documents from both the district and school levels.

In this review, we gain a greater understanding of how the district functions in the five themes of the Framework.

Curriculum and Academic Goals, District Practice

Science Grade 5
CHANGE
FIRST SIX WEEKS

Including an 'Explanation of Content' in curriculum guides, Weslaco ISD clearly defines the focus of each TEKS objective rather than leaving it to the interpretation of teachers. Each TEKS-related guide, like the one to the right, includes an activity, assessment, vocabulary list, and resources. Weslaco scope and sequences also offer summaries of the TEKS objectives for each six weeks, curriculum maps for the year, student expectations by unit, and other sample activities by objective.

Student Expectation: 3.6 (B) The student knows that forces cause change. The student is expected to identify that the surface of the earth can be changed by forces such as earthquakes and glaciers.	
Explanation of Content: An earthquake is the shaking of earth's surface caused by movement of the crust and mantle. Earthquakes can leave cracks and uneven areas in the earth's surface. Earthquakes may also create mountains and valleys.	
Glaciers are huge sheets of ice that form in places where it is so cold all year that the snow doesn't melt. They may form near mountain peaks or across continents (Greenland, Iceland). The movement of glaciers can change the land by forming rivers and valleys.	
<u>Examples of Environmental Forces & Changes</u>	
Force (Cause)	Change (Effect)
Earthquake	Crevices, Mountains, Flood
Glacier	Erosion, Rivers, Valleys
Wind	Erosion
Storms	
Hurricane, Tornado, Snow, Blizzard, Hail, Rain, Ice	Erosion, Flood, Change River Direction,
Fire	Deforestation
Mudslide	Erosion, Flatten Terrain
Volcano	New Land, Islands
Tsunami	Erosion, Flood

Teaching Activity:
Set up a sand model of the earth's surface in a box. Attach a string to an object such as a large block of ice and pull it over the sand's surface. Identify the changes in the sand model.

Assessment Activity:
Students will list forces and how they change the surface of the earth. Or, when given a description of changes that have occurred to the earth's surface, will identify probable forces that could have caused the changes.

Critical Vocabulary:
earthquake, glacier, crust mantle, fault line, erosion, plates, landforms, continental

Textbook Resources:
C14, C15, C18, C19, C24, C44, C47, C48

WESLACO ISD, WESLACO, TEXAS 956.969.6500
Deputy Supt. Janice Wiley Enrollment: 13,904 Free/Reduced Lunch Rate: 87.5%

This example from Weslaco ISD provides background information, key terms, resources, and instructional strategies to support teachers. This type of specificity enables consistency of expectations across classrooms.

Site Visit Interviews and Observations

Onsite interviews, focus groups and classroom observations enhance our understanding of the teaching and learning practices in your district.

“The structure and resources of the organization are like wallpaper—after living with the same wallpaper for a certain number of years, people cease to see it.” —Richard Elmore



Themes of the Framework

Our best practice findings are drawn from the case studies of the schools we have visited. We have structured our findings into five broad themes further defined by practices related to those themes at three school levels—district, school, and classroom.

1. Curriculum and Academic Goals;
2. Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building;
3. Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements;
4. Monitoring Progress: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data; and
5. Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustments

This structure, the *Best Practice Framework*, attempts to capture the general principles we found operational in organizations marked by sustained performance higher than demographically similar schools.

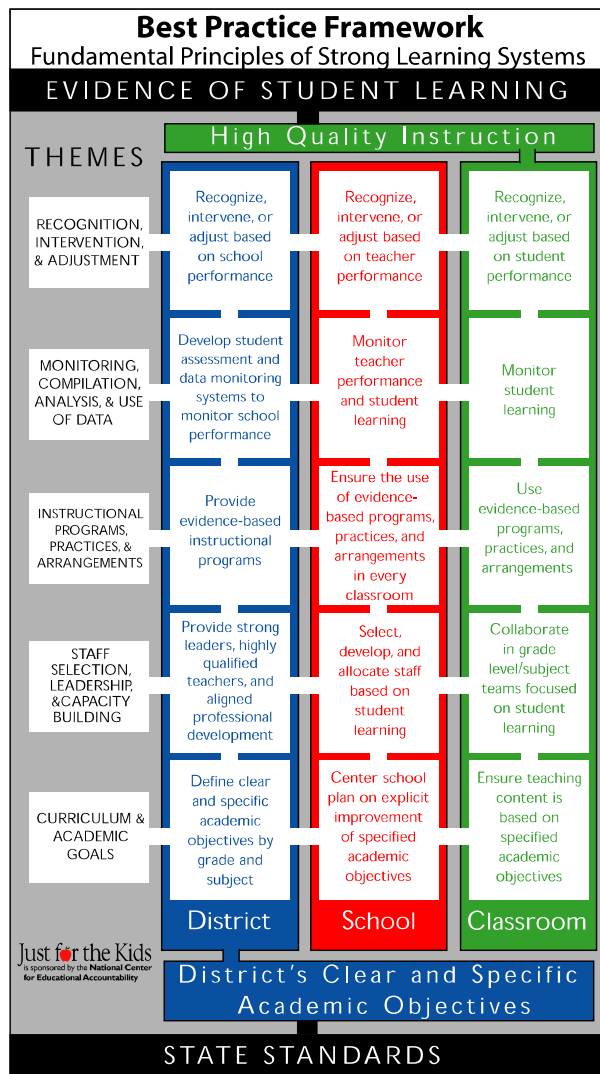
Given our qualitative findings, we want to remind readers that we have established no “causal” link between the practices and increased student achievement. We would



also, without exception, bow to findings that establish any causal link between practice and achievement. We are strong advocates that educators must use scientific evidence when and where it exists. Using this type of data for decision making is the mark of a mature profession.¹

NCEA Best Practice Framework

The NCEA Framework incorporates the organizational structures and functions that most directly impact the improvement of instruction and features the practices more often found in consistently higher performing school systems.



What We Deliver

JFTK will deliver a comprehensive, customized report benchmarking your district practices against the practices in the NCEA's Best Practice Framework. Findings and recommendations organized according to the five themes of the Framework will be detailed in the report.

Texas ISD Recommendations:

Define clear, specific, and rigorous academic objectives by grade and subject, beginning in the core content areas (Math, Reading/ELA, Science, Social Studies), that are aligned from 12th grade to Early Education to prepare all students for advanced work in high school.

Ensure that principals and teachers know the specific knowledge and skills to be taught and learned at each grade and in each subject.

Ensure that all students learn the same curriculum by monitoring principal and teacher use of district curricular

Audit Findings:

Direct observation of curricular documents indicated a lack of consistency across the documents. While major components of each subject area are similar, i.e., syllabus, scope and sequence, expanded curriculum, there is great variation in presentation and in level of content presented. It also proved difficult for reviewers to "connect" the documents within any given subject area—to clearly or easily connect the content of all of the documents for a coherent view of the entire curriculum.

When asked about the curriculum, teachers almost exclusively referred to instructional programs—Open Court, Everyday Mathematics, etc. This is not simply a matter of semantics, but a strong indicator that instructional resources and programs ARE viewed as the curriculum. Absolute clarity on the part of principals, teachers, district personnel, etc. about the specific knowledge and skills students are to acquire by grade and subject (the curriculum) is critically needed. A common, comprehensive, highly detailed curricular format should be adopted and vigorously embraced across the district.



¹ <http://www.edexcellence.net/library/carnine.html>

Our Goals

Our goal at the National Center for Educational Accountability (NCEA) is to support your school's efforts to reach excellence—to raise academic expectations and to promote those practices that will help more students reach those expectations.

Just for the Kids is the model we have created to accomplish this goal in your state. Using knowledge gained from the study of approximately 500 school systems across the country, this service is meant to inform and inspire—and ultimately improve—student achievement in your school.

Through our partnership, we can help your school system create a culture of learning and develop a continuous improvement process that will lead to the student performance results you desire.

About NCEA

The National Center for Educational Accountability (NCEA) is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to promoting higher achievement for all students using tools to focus communities on the potential of every school.

NCEA is the national sponsor of the *Just for the Kids* School Improvement Model featuring JFTK School Reports, the Best Practice Framework, and the Self-Audits.

NCEA campaigns for improving state data collection to improve decision making and conducts research on school improvement issues and practices.

NCEA is housed at the University of Texas at Austin.

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