

Making Data Actionable:

Using Data-Driven Research to Identify Ways to Help Schools Improve

2005

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

Our Goals

NCEA works to raise academic standards and raise student achievement by:

- Promoting the improvement of state data collection and the creation of statewide longitudinal student information systems to improve decision making;
- Using data to create *Just for the Kids* websites that focus public school communities on the improvement potential of every school;
- Conducting research using longitudinal student data to strengthen the knowledge base of what works to raise student achievement;
- Identifying consistently high-performing schools and school systems;
- Identifying and promoting the practices that distinguish consistently high-performing schools from other schools;
- Implementing services that help educators close the achievement and practices gaps between their own schools and consistently high-performing schools.

Improving State Data

NCEA helps states improve their statewide data systems in order to provide the data essential for schools to improve and for communities to be informed. [See NCEA publication, *9 Essential Elements of Statewide Data-Collection Systems*]

When states collect the right information, they can:

- Provide all schools with the disaggregated information that high-performing schools routinely use for school improvement;
- Give parents and the public the information they need to make informed decisions; and
- Support statewide studies of effective educational practices.

Using Data to Focus on School Potential

The only way to effectively measure where improvement is occurring or where it needs to take place is to analyze academic results.

NCEA uses student assessment results to build *Just for the Kids School Reports* which provide parents, educators, policy makers and school partners a practical and effective tool to drive improvement in their public schools. They are unique in that they provide a data picture by grade and subject for each school and are

publicly available at www.just4kids.org. *Just for the Kids School Reports* also compare each school's performance with that of the state's highest-performing comparable schools to identify each school's "Opportunity Gap," or potential for improvement. Comparable schools are those schools that have similar or more disadvantaged student populations.

NCEA serves as the national sponsor of *Just for the Kids* and works with JFTK state affiliate partners across the country to ensure *Just for the Kids School Reports* and other tools are made available to the communities that need them.

Conducting Research on What Works in Education

Education researchers have not had easy access to student-level data for longitudinal research, limiting the critical data required to fully identify and assess education programs and initiatives, and to solve long-term educational problems.

NCEA currently has privacy-protected, student-linked *longitudinal enrollment and test score data* for 30 percent of America's public school students. NCEA has developed a unique analysis of individual student records over multiple years that allows NCEA and other researchers to benchmark each school against the highest-performing schools in the state that have comparable student populations.

Identifying High-Performing Schools and Districts

Data analysis alone does not improve student learning, but it can offer a road map leading to solutions for improvement. Based on this belief and further analysis of the same student data, NCEA identifies consistently high-performing schools and districts across the socio-economic spectrum. High-performing schools and

systems identified in this way serve as the subjects of NCEA best practice qualitative studies.

Promoting Successful Practices

The *NCEA-JFTK Framework of School System Practices*, developed from five years of qualitative study, is used to organize and present the district, school and classroom practices found in consistently high-performing systems that distinguish them from their average-performing counterparts. (See www.just4kids.org).

Additionally, the website presents actual examples of tools that support each practice taken from specific schools and districts in order to motivate and equip educators to replicate their success.

A critical goal of NCEA is to expand best practice studies into more states to strengthen the content and range of practices, enhance scientific reliability, and to distill consistent characteristics of best practice across states. States that have completed best practice studies include: Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Tennessee, Texas, and Washington. In 2005, NCEA will establish best practice studies in another 10 states and fortify the foundation for school improvement plans.

Implementing Improvement Tools and Services

Schools and districts in need of improvement can immediately use the *Framework of School System Practices* and *Self-Audit* tools online as a starting point to structure plans and improvement strategies.

By the fall of 2005, NCEA plans to pilot a *School Improvement Services* implementation kit incorporating *Just for the Kids* school reports, best practice tools and a network of high-performing mentors to serve as a bridge between standards and accountability for schools and districts in need of improvement.

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