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Just for the Kids, Colorado

Elementary School Best Practice Study, 2004-05

Haaff Elementary School, Pueblo School District 60
Ignacio Elementary School, Ignacio School District 11 JT
Ignacio Intermediate School, Ignacio School District 11 JT
Lois Lenski Elementary School, Littleton Public Schools
South Park Elementary School, Pueblo School District 60

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Just for the Kids, Colorado

Elementary School Best Practice Study, 2004-2005

The Study

The Colorado Elementary 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 Colorado, researchers investigated five consistently higher performing and two average-performing elementary schools to determine the differences in practices between higher and average-performing elementary schools and to build on a previous study of 14 Colorado elementary schools. NCEA identified schools 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 the National Center for Educational Accountability, the 2004-2005 Colorado Elementary School Best Practice Study received funding from 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 seven schools in the study. District-, school-, and classroom-level practices were studied in the five themes of NCEA's Best Practice Framework: Curriculum and Academic Goals; Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building; Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements; Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data; and Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustment.

The Summary

Researchers wrote individual case studies about each studied 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. A composite picture of Best Practice Findings in Colorado, 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 written by NCEA researchers. The JFTK Best Practice Framework, developed by NCEA, provides the structure for the findings.



Just for the Kids, Colorado

Elementary School Best Practice Study, 2004-2005

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 Colorado Department of Education to identify schools that consistently outperformed other schools with similar demographics in mathematics, reading, and writing in the 2001-02, 2002-03, and 2003-04 school years. The analysis used data from the third- through sixth-grade Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP).

To identify the schools, NCEA conducted a separate analysis for each subject (mathematics, reading, and writing) and year (2002, 2003, and 2004) to learn which schools outperformed their demographic peers on the percentage of students meeting the “Advanced” standard on the state exam. NCEA used a Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analysis to compare each school’s percent of students meeting the standard 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, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian students; the size of the school; and the percentage of students tested in the subject and year in question. Normally, NCEA also prefers to take students’ prior year test scores and length of enrollment in the same school into account, but that longitudinal information was not available in Colorado.

NCEA ranked each school against the elementary schools in the rest of the state based on the extent to which it outperformed its “predicted” percent of students meeting the “Advanced” standard. For example, a school that outperformed 91% of the schools in “performance relative to predicted” in fifth-grade mathematics in 2004 would receive a percentile rank of 91 for that subject and year. These ranks were averaged separately for reading, mathematics, and writing across the three years 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 75¹ in all tested subjects and also meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements in 2004.

¹ The overall percentile rank requirements ranged from 70 to 85 depending on how many grades were tested in the school. In a state like Colorado where third through sixth grades are tested, a K-3 school has only one tested grade, whereas a K-5 school has three tested grades. Our research indicates that in such states it was considerably easier for the K-3 schools to appear higher performing, so we scaled the required overall percentile ranks based on the number of grades involved in the analysis.



Just for the Kids, Colorado

Elementary School Best Practice Study, 2004-2005

The Higher Performing Schools Studied

School	District	2004 Enrollment		2004 School-Wide Demographics						
		Grade Span	No. of Students	African American	Hispanic	White	Asian	Native American	Other	Low Income
Haaff Elementary School	Pueblo School District 60	PK-5	352	2.6%	41.5%	52.8%	1.1%	2.0%	0.0%	41.2%
Ignacio Elementary School	Ignacio School District 11 JT	K-3	195	0.5%	24.1%	36.9%	1.0%	37.4%	0.1%	67.7%
Ignacio Intermediate School	Ignacio School District 11 JT	4-6	181	1.1%	22.1%	32.6%	0.0%	44.2%	0.0%	59.7%
Lois Lenski Elementary School	Littleton Public Schools	K-5	618	1.0%	3.2%	92.1%	3.2%	0.5%	0.0%	4.1%
South Park Elementary School	Pueblo School District 60	PK-5	335	1.8%	67.1%	29.3%	0.0%	1.8%	0.0%	67.2%

Student enrollment data and demographic data are taken from the Just for the Kids-Colorado 2004 website. School-wide percentages of English Language Learners (ELL) were not available from the state. Site visits were conducted in Spring 2005.



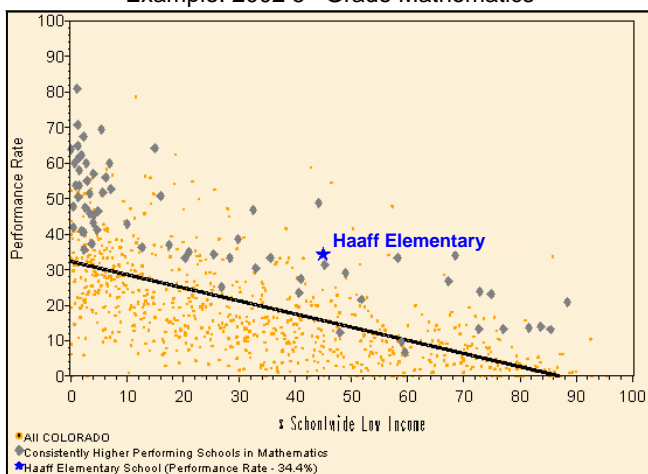
Haaff Elementary School Pueblo School District 60

Just for the Kids, Colorado NCEA Executive Summary

The School

Haaff Elementary School, which serves 352 pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade students, is 1 of 25 elementary schools in Pueblo School District 60 (17,251 students). Haaff's student population is 52.8% White, 41.5% Hispanic, 2.6% African American, 2.0% Native American, and 1.1% Asian. Within this student population, 41.2% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2002 5th Grade Mathematics



Consistent Higher Performance

Haaff Elementary School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics, reading, and writing in an analysis that included all third- through fifth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Haaff Elementary School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 93.1 in mathematics, 79.1 in reading, and 80.9 in writing.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 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 2002 and 2005.

Subject	2002 Percentile Rank			2003 Percentile Rank			2004 Percentile Rank			Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	
Grade	3	4	5	3	4	5	3	4	5	
Mathematics	N/A	N/A	95	N/A	N/A	93	N/A	N/A	91	93.1
Reading	74	86	74	88	75	96	80	63	74	79.1
Writing	50	96	91	82	52	97	86	94	85	80.9

*The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of tested students in the grade as weights.

Major Findings

According to the principal, "The standards gave direction and guidance, and the teachers have really run with them to get the education [the students] need. It is evident in the scores that came out." Haaff Elementary School's professional development activities include early dismissals on Fridays, so that 1:30 PM to 3:30 PM can be dedicated to trainings. The district has organized instructional programs to have 90 minutes for core reading, 30 minutes for reading intervention, 60 minutes for mathematics, and 45 minutes for science or social studies. The *Lindamood Phonemic Sequencing (LiPS) Program* was consistently referenced as the "reform that has had the greatest impact on student achievement." The principal also mentioned the *Writing Alive* program, which was selected based on research surrounding its effectiveness. Student progress is checked quarterly using mathematics, reading, and science assessments developed by the school's teachers. Principals meet every month in a Critical Friends Group to discuss data. If the school is struggling, the district arranges an outside, independent assessment, as well as requires teachers to evaluate the school.



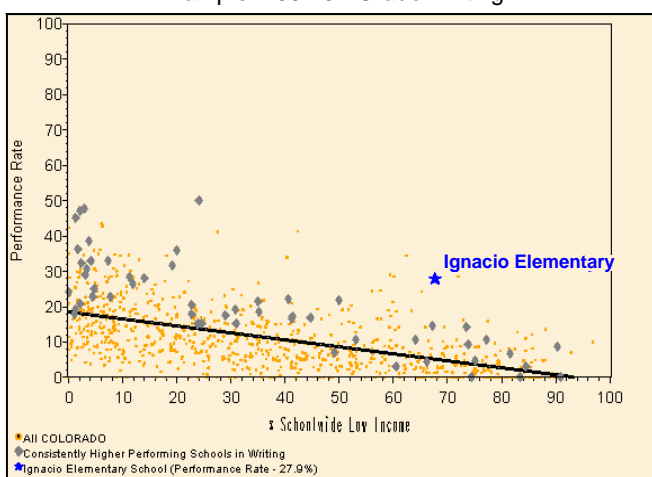
Ignacio Elementary School Ignacio School District 11 JT

Just for the Kids, Colorado NCEA Executive Summary

The School

Ignacio Elementary School, which serves 195 kindergarten through third-grade students, is the only elementary school in Ignacio School District 11 JT (738 students). Ignacio Elementary's student population is 37.4% Native American, 36.9% White, 24.1% Hispanic, 1.0% Asian, 0.5% African American, and 0.1% other. Within this student population, 67.7% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2004 3rd Grade Writing



Consistent Higher Performance

Ignacio Elementary School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in reading and writing in an analysis that included all third-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Ignacio Elementary School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 87.1 in reading and 93.7 in writing.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 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 2002 and 2005.

Subject	2002 Percentile Rank	2003 Percentile Rank	2004 Percentile Rank	Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
Grade	3	3	3	
Reading	76	98	93	87.1
Writing	91	94	98	93.7

*The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of tested students in the grade as weights.

Major Findings

Ignacio Elementary School staff indicate that there has been an increased focus on student data, which has begun to very specifically affect the curriculum. Rather than conducting general curricular reviews, staff are now making adjustments based on student performance results. Staff also develop all curricular documents and use Critical Friends Groups to explore curricular issues. The necessity of finding administrative and teaching staff who understand the unique characteristics of the community has led to a system of “growing their own” within the area. The district is moving toward an instructional arrangement in which all of the district's teachers are trained to teach English Language Learners. The teachers monitor all students' progress through *Alpine Achievement* and data-driven discussion groups. The push in the district for academic consistency and continual examination of data involves a regular investigation of how different ethnic groups are performing academically. The teachers believe the greatest challenge to improving student achievement is attendance; therefore, district and school staff work to improve attendance rates. Intervention and reward programs are all based on performance data.

The entire case study may be viewed at http://www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/study_framework.cfm?study=Colorado.



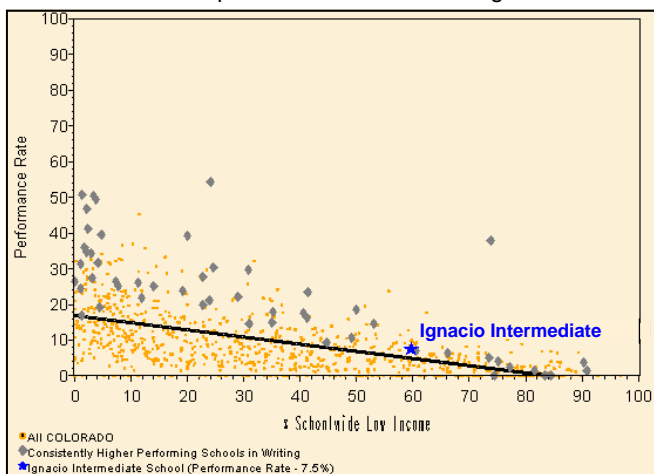
Ignacio Intermediate School Ignacio School District 11 JT

Just for the Kids, Colorado NCEA Executive Summary

The School

Ignacio Intermediate School, which serves 181 fourth- through sixth-grade students, is the only intermediate school in Ignacio School District 11 JT (738 students). Ignacio Intermediate's student population is 44.2% Native American, 32.6% White, 22.1% Hispanic, and 1.1% African American. Within this student population, 59.7% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2004 4th Grade Writing



Consistent Higher Performance

Ignacio Intermediate School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics, reading, and writing in an analysis that included all fourth- through sixth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Ignacio Intermediate School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 80.5 in mathematics, 81.3 in reading, and 80.1 in writing.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 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 2002 and 2005.

Subject	2002 Percentile Rank			2003 Percentile Rank			2004 Percentile Rank			Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
	Grade 4	5	6	4	5	6	4	5	6	
Grade	4	5	6	4	5	6	4	5	6	
Mathematics	N/A	61	89	N/A	91	83	N/A	67	89	80.5
Reading	97	88	74	76	80	83	84	58	84	81.3
Writing	91	86	94	72	70	65	96	67	76	80.1

*The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of tested students in the grade as weights.

Major Findings

The principal explained, "In the past, the curriculum was the standards; now the curriculum is the road map to meeting the standards." This "road map" includes clearly stated objectives, model lessons, and benchmark assessments. On Thursdays after school, grade-level teams work on curriculum development, and half-days are also set aside for teachers to meet with the curriculum director, grade-by-grade, to identify needs. Teachers and principals receive training and support via the Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), which provides services to rural districts that are too small to provide their own programs. A key instructional arrangement is the "Opportunity Room." The Opportunity Room is a separate classroom run by a master teacher who is ELL certified and skilled at working with a diverse group of students. The program provides additional assistance in a very timely manner for students who need it. For students who are members of the Southern Ute Tribe, there is additional educational support, such as weekly tutoring provided by the Southern Ute Education Program.



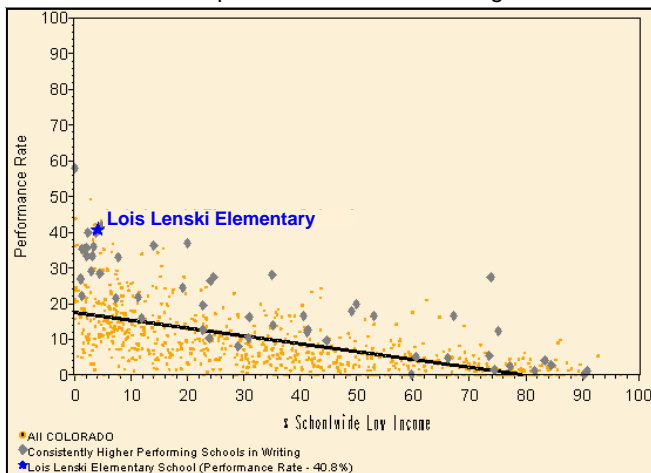
Lois Lenski Elementary School Littleton Public Schools

Just for the Kids, Colorado NCEA Executive Summary

The School

Lois Lenski Elementary School, which serves 618 kindergarten through fifth-grade students, is 1 of 15 elementary schools in Littleton Public Schools (16,016 students). Lois Lenski's student population is 92.1% White, 3.2% Asian, 3.2% Hispanic, 1.0% African American, and 0.5% Native American. Within this student population, 4.1% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2004 5th Grade Writing



Consistent Higher Performance

Lois Lenski Elementary School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics, reading, and writing in an analysis that included all third- through fifth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Lois Lenski Elementary School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 95.3 in mathematics, 89.4 in reading, and 91.9 in writing.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 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 2002 and 2005.

Subject	2002 Percentile Rank			2003 Percentile Rank			2004 Percentile Rank			Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004	
	Grade	3	4	5	3	4	5	3	4		5
Mathematics		N/A	N/A	93	N/A	N/A	98	N/A	N/A	95	95.3
Reading		96	89	90	67	97	82	94	97	93	89.4
Writing		96	99	88	60	97	97	97	95	98	91.9

*The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of tested students in the grade as weights.

Major Findings

The district sets the learning targets in the curriculum, but teachers determine how to reach those targets. The principal is responsible for ensuring uniform implementation of the curriculum. Other structures or materials that lead to curricular coherence include regular grade-level team meetings, monitored lesson plans, curriculum maps, and curriculum-based staff development. Central to teachers' training is the school's emphasis on collaboration. The principal stated, "If you don't want to collaborate, you probably won't work here. It is the culture of the building." Teachers described their instruction as "diagnostic, data-driven teaching." District specialists model instructional strategies, such as differentiation. The district uses *TetraData* for collecting achievement data and school-by-school information; teachers use *TetraData* to track their classes' test results. A teacher articulated the principal's philosophy about student intervention: "The principal will take these needs to the staff to re-allocate people, because it is going to be a person that makes a difference, not a program."

The entire case study may be viewed at http://www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/study_framework.cfm?study=Colorado.



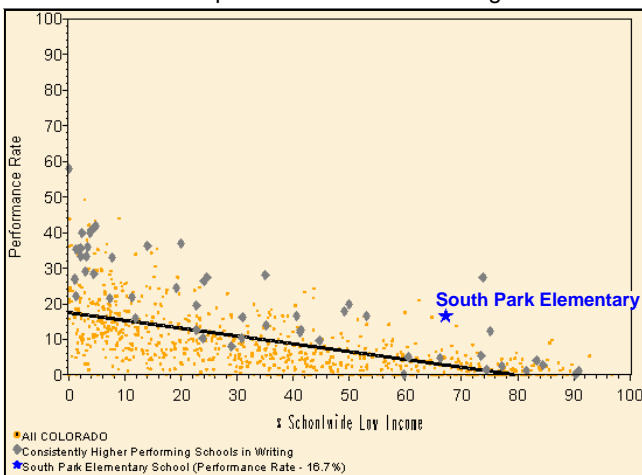
South Park Elementary School Pueblo School District 60

Just for the Kids, Colorado NCEA Executive Summary

The School

South Park Elementary School, which serves 335 pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade students, is 1 of 25 elementary schools in Pueblo School District 60 (17,251 students). South Park’s student population is 67.1% Hispanic, 29.3% White, 1.8% African American, and 1.8% Native American. Within this student population, 67.2% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2004 5th Grade Writing



Consistent Higher Performance

South Park Elementary School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics, reading, and writing in an analysis that included all third- through fifth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, South Park Elementary School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 92.9 in mathematics, 86.7 in reading, and 89.1 in writing.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 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 2002 and 2005.

Subject	2002 Percentile Rank			2003 Percentile Rank			2004 Percentile Rank			Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	
Mathematics	N/A	N/A	96	N/A	N/A	92	N/A	N/A	91	92.9
Reading	89	79	89	96	97	87	96	56	86	86.7
Writing	72	89	85	97	82	98	91	95	98	89.1

*The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of tested students in the grade as weights.

Major Findings

The principal explained the importance of a uniform curriculum across the district: “In a district with high mobility, [curriculum alignment is particularly] important when you have kids moving four or five times a year, so they all have had the same background.” Staff reference pacing guides and quarterly assessments as their central curriculum tools. The principal participates in the trainings that staff members attend. Professional development incorporates visits between teachers’ classrooms. One teacher stated that visiting other classrooms “changes the way I teach.” As the school that teaches the district’s students with profound special needs, South Park offers a block of time during which students receive additional assistance and/or enrichment activities. Students are monitored through *SuccessMaker*, a program that tracks student grades, test scores over time, and individual reading levels. Interventions for struggling students include individualized literacy plans, intensive reading groups, *SuccessMaker* in mathematics, after-school tutoring, and Saturday school.

The entire case study may be viewed at http://www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/study_framework.cfm?study=Colorado.



Colorado Elementary 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 below to summarize the findings of this study. 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 when necessary to ensure all students reach the stated standards (Theme Five: Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustment).



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 Colorado Findings: Curriculum and Academic Goals

- **The state standards provide the framework for the academic objectives of the district's written curriculum, which ensures that all schools focus on the same knowledge and skills systemwide. Teachers are involved in the continual review and refinement of the curriculum based on student performance data.**

- According to the principal, “The standards gave direction and guidance, and the teachers have really run with them to get the education [the students] need. It is evident in the scores that came out.” (Haaff, Pueblo School District 60)
 - The Pueblo School District 60 curriculum development process is research- and standards-based, and includes teacher involvement to address school needs. Each department has curriculum guides, and the curriculum specialists work with teachers to align the curriculum. (Haaff, Pueblo School District 60)
 - Staff develop curricular documents in meetings and in-services. Schools also use Critical Friends Groups to explore curricular issues. (Ignacio Elementary, Ignacio School District 11 JT)
 - In the Ignacio School District, the current focus is to gear all activities toward meeting the state standards. According to the principal, “In the past, the curriculum was the standards. Now the curriculum is the road map to meeting the standards.” This new curriculum includes model lessons, assessments, and a listing of necessary prerequisite skills needed to master the standards. The revision of the curriculum occurs on an annual basis and is informed by test score data and teachers’ observations of the students. (Ignacio Intermediate, Ignacio School District 11 JT)
 - The district works to ensure the curriculum is based on national research, state standards, and state assessment frameworks. The faculty at Lois Lenski are free to use whatever instructional materials the district has approved. The district determines learning targets in the curriculum, but teachers determine how to meet those targets. According to one teacher, “[The curriculum] is a *what* to teach, not [a] *how* to teach.” (Lois Lenski, Littleton Public Schools)
 - The school district continues to work on standardizing curriculum and assessments to ensure a coherent, district-wide learning program. Staff reference pacing guides and quarterly assessments as their central curriculum tools. According to one teacher, “[The district] sends reading, writing, spelling, and mathematics guides, which include standards, at the beginning of the year.” (South Park, Pueblo School District 60)
- **Schools identify a limited number of clear and measurable goals based on student achievement data, curriculum standards, and stakeholder input.**
 - The school district develops departmental and school plans around its five goals. (Haaff, Pueblo School District 60)
 - The school and district align their goals around three focus areas: achievement, behavior, and technology. (Ignacio Elementary, Ignacio School District 11 JT)
 - To develop goals, the district analyzes achievement data. Each school receives its data in order to set its goals and write an improvement plan. Schools use a data-driven process to determine where students are at the beginning of the year and develop student learning goals based on that data. The director of curriculum and instruction explains, “Every building has the same plan—to analyze data and set goals for the next year.” In addition to each school’s goals, the district uses national goals, part of NCLB, and the district improvement plan as guidelines in goal setting. (Lois Lenski, Littleton Public Schools)



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 Colorado Findings: Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building

- **Districts actively develop internal candidates for leadership positions.**
 - As part of a structured process to recruit principals, the district identifies the skills required of principals. The district has a leadership internship for people who are working towards administrative certification. The district also encourages current principals to look for leaders from within their buildings. (Haaff, Pueblo School District 60)
 - All of the current principals in the school system were developed as internal candidates. In recent moves, the elementary school principal is becoming the new superintendent, the head teacher at the elementary school is becoming the principal, and the high school assistant principal is becoming the junior high principal. (Ignacio Elementary, Ignacio School District 11 JT)
 - The district has created a system for developing its own administrative staff. This process was put in place because of high administrative turnover rates among personnel hired from outside the community. (Ignacio Intermediate, Ignacio School District 11 JT)
 - Pueblo School District 60 has a leadership internship for staff members who are working on their administrative licenses. The internship involves discussions about data and planning. Participants carry out specific tasks that are directly related to skills and strategies needed for success as a leader. (South Park, Pueblo School District 60)
- **Schools use a collaborative process for hiring principals and teachers.**
 - Once the district has identified, screened, and scored teacher applicants, site-based teams comprised of cooperating teachers interview the candidates. (Haaff, Pueblo School District 60)
 - The principal picks a selection committee to help with the teacher-selection process. The committee typically includes teachers from the same grade level as that for which the new teacher is applying. After using a common interview format, the committee votes on which candidates they think the school should hire. (Ignacio Elementary, Ignacio School District 11 JT)
 - In a process designed to incorporate staff and community input, principals are selected through multiple screenings. A selection committee comprised of staff and community members chooses from a standard set of questions that best reflect the qualities they desire in a principal. After a paper screening, the committee typically interviews six to eight candidates and forwards the best two candidates to the superintendent and assistant superintendent for the final selection. The school board then acts on the final selection. (Lois Lenski, Littleton Public Schools)
- **Mentors support new principals and teachers and focus mentoring activities on curriculum and instruction.**
 - New principals take part in a principal-induction program through which the district provides opportunities for peer dialogue and permanent licensure. (Haaff, Pueblo School District 60)

- The principal usually assigns a teacher leader to a new teacher, and the district provides additional staff development for the new employee. As one teacher recalled, “You turn in lesson plans to the mentor, you have to answer questions, and the mentor comes into your classroom. The purpose is [to provide] support for teachers new to the building.” (Haaff, Pueblo School District 60)
 - Administrator transitions and training occur through shadowing. Additionally, new principals get support from the Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES). BOCES provides services to small rural school districts that are not large enough to have their own training and support programs. (Ignacio Elementary, Ignacio School District 11 JT)
 - The superintendent stressed that the district focuses on academic achievement and sharpens this focus through a deep understanding of the uniqueness of the community. Toward this end, he hired and mentored a new principal who was to focus on academics, behavior, and technology. Teachers described this change as a major shift. As one teacher said, “Years ago the papers and the other schools thought we were horrible, the superintendent didn’t like us, and we were like the black sheep. It’s been a 180 degree turn.” (Ignacio Intermediate, Ignacio School District 11 JT)
 - Each new principal is supported through a district induction program and by an assigned peer principal. The principal stated, “Our philosophy as a school is: nobody does it alone.” She also stated, “The district values student learning as the single most important thing we do. All of the principals are about how to improve student learning.” (Lois Lenski, Littleton Public Schools)
- **Professional development activities are ongoing and practice-oriented. Activities center on increasing teachers’ content knowledge and enhancing their instructional skills.**
- In their efforts to meet NCLB guidelines, the district has focused on additional professional development time. To ensure ongoing professional development, the district provides teachers release time every week and facilitators in every building. Teachers and facilitators focus on student data reviews to direct their activities. (Haaff, Pueblo School District 60)
 - Extensive training is available to teachers. In addition to what is available through the Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES)—which provides services to small rural school districts that are not large enough to have their own training and support programs—training occurs through district and teacher initiatives. Topics of district trainings are based on student needs demonstrated through data review, with input from the curriculum director. (Ignacio Elementary, Ignacio School District 11 JT)
 - The BOCES provides a new teacher induction program with monthly meetings. Participants in the program study instructional and behavioral issues and conduct a student case study. (Ignacio Intermediate, Ignacio School District 11 JT)
 - Principals meet monthly as a Critical Friends Group to discuss data. At the beginning of the year, principals attend a general kick-off meeting in which they explore how to make a good school into a great school. School principals also participate in all the trainings that their staff members attend. (South Park, Pueblo School District 60)
 - Professional development opportunities at the school include cross-grade level meetings, mentoring, and modeling. These opportunities often focus on how to analyze student data. Additionally, staff members developed an informal book club to discuss curriculum. The group decided on their own to meet regularly before school at a local coffee shop. (South Park, Pueblo School District 60)

- **The school schedule accommodates teacher collaboration and planning activities. School administrators ensure that the allotted time is used appropriately.**
 - The school schedule provides early release time each Friday from 1:30 PM to 3:30 PM to allow for professional development and collaboration. The first Friday of the month is devoted to district-mandated professional development. The principal determines the topic for the second Friday of each month. Grade-level teams collaborate on the third Friday, and the fourth Friday provides an opportunity for teachers to work on self-selected professional development activities. (Haaff, Pueblo School District 60)
 - Teachers meet during grade-level meetings and common planning times. (Ignacio Elementary, Ignacio School District 11 JT)
 - Training and collaboration are closely linked. Available times include 45 minutes of team study time weekly, common planning time among grade levels, and weekly staff meetings. (Ignacio Intermediate, Ignacio School District 11 JT)
 - The school schedule provides regular meeting time to involve all teachers in curriculum development and revision. Grade-level teams develop curriculum on Thursdays after school. The schedule allows half days for teachers to meet with the curriculum director, grade-by-grade, to identify needs. (Ignacio Intermediate, Ignacio School District 11 JT)
 - Teachers work within grade-level teams to develop lesson plans and curriculum maps. They also participate in curriculum-based staff development. (Lois Lenski, Littleton Public Schools)
 - The school’s emphasis on collaboration greatly influences the professional development model for teachers. According to the principal, “If you don’t want to collaborate, you probably won’t work here. It is the culture of the building. Within the school day, the grade levels meet, and there is some vertical collaboration.” (Lois Lenski, Littleton Public Schools)
 - “Every nine weeks,” the principal said, “teachers turn in sample [student] work.” The samples enable school leaders to monitor students’ work by comparing it to work from students at other schools. (South Park, Pueblo School District 60)



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 Colorado Findings: Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

- **District-adopted instructional programs have a strong research base and are closely aligned with state standards and the district curriculum. New programs and practices may be piloted on a small scale before they are implemented district-wide.**
 - The district selects instructional programs that are based on research, have a good track record, and are aligned with the district’s curriculum. Interviewees consistently cited the *Lindamood-Bell Learning Process* as the reform program that has had the greatest impact on student achievement. Another core program the school uses is *Writing Alive*. (Haaff, Pueblo School District 60)

- A committee of teachers determines whether the program meets school needs and is cost-effective. The assistant superintendent expressed, “[The instructional program] has to be a tool that has rigor and relevance.” (Haaff, Pueblo School District 60)
 - Currently, the school uses the following research-based programs: Spalding’s *Writing Road to Reading* language arts program, Silver Burdett Ginn’s *Literature Works*, Renaissance Learning’s *Reading Renaissance*, and Creative Publication’s *MathLand*. (Ignacio Elementary, Ignacio School District 11 JT)
 - District policy allows any teacher to initiate a pilot program, provided that the teacher submits a letter of purpose, an outline of procedures, and a plan of assessment and/or evaluation. If approved by the principal and superintendent, the teacher may conduct the study over a school year, after which he or she must submit an evaluation to the superintendent. (Ignacio Elementary, Ignacio School District 11 JT)
 - The district’s adoption cycle provides for the piloting of potential instructional programs. The Title I mathematics teacher piloted two potential mathematics programs in order to make a recommendation. The teachers, principal, and curriculum director then decided on a program that would meet both student and teacher needs. (Ignacio Intermediate, Ignacio School District 11 JT)
 - The school uses the *Lindamood-Bell Learning Process*, as well as *Accelerated Reader*, the *6+1 Traits of Writing* model, *SuccessMaker*, and *Writing Alive*. The district has mandated the use of the *Lindamood-Bell Learning Process* in every elementary school. (South Park, Pueblo School District 60)
- **Teachers use instructional strategies that effectively meet students' needs. Teachers differentiate assignments and instruction to ensure all students work at their respective ability levels.**
- When considering whether a student has special needs, a teacher-support team comprised of special education staff, literacy personnel, the classroom teacher, and the student’s parents brainstorm courses of action for meeting the child’s needs. They meet again six weeks later to discuss the efficacy of their plan. Only then, if needed, will the team refer the student to be tested for special education services. (Haaff, Pueblo School District 60)
 - Destination Imagination competitions, the *Great Books* literature series, and additional classroom materials address gifted students’ needs. (Haaff, Pueblo School District 60)
 - Special education teachers pull students with special needs out of class to provide additional instruction, ensuring access to the same curriculum that is provided to all students. They simply break the grade-level curriculum into smaller pieces. (Ignacio Intermediate, Ignacio School District 11 JT)
 - The district encourages teachers to differentiate instruction to address students’ various learning styles. Once gifted and talented students are identified, the school writes a personalized learning plan (PLP) for each student. The classroom teacher, librarian, and technology lead teacher work together to address the needs of the 20 percent of the school’s students who have been identified as gifted and talented. (Lois Lenski, Littleton Public Schools)
 - According to teachers, high-quality instruction includes “students on task, student engagement, student choice, enriched curriculum, small-group learning, and [honoring a] variety of learning styles.” (South Park, Pueblo School District 60)



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 Colorado Findings: Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data

- **Teachers use multiple standards-based assessment measures on an ongoing basis to identify student strengths and needs.**
 - In addition to the *Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP)* and *TerraNova* (CTB McGraw-Hill), teachers use quarterly assessments they developed for mathematics, reading, and science. (Haaff, Pueblo School District 60)
 - In addition to the state assessments, students in the district take the Northwest Evaluation Association's *Measures of Academic Progress (NWEA-MAP)* three times each year from second grade through tenth grade. (Ignacio Elementary, Ignacio School District 11 JT)
 - Teachers monitor student progress through quarterly assessments, *DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills)* for kindergarten through fifth grade, and grade checks every four-and-a-half weeks. As the superintendent remarked, "All of this gives us a good profile of the student for improving instruction." (South Park, Pueblo School District 60)
- **School administrators and teachers examine and analyze student data to inform instructional practices.**
 - The district monitors students' grades, assessment histories, and reading levels using a data program called *SuccessMaker* (Pearson Digital Learning). School administrators can use *Master Miner* (a state-developed data analysis tool) for viewing student achievement benchmarks tied to the CSAP. Teachers can access a large variety of student information electronically via *ScholarsMart* (another state-specific data system), which is available to parents as well. (Haaff, Pueblo School District 60)
 - The NWEA-MAP is aligned with state standards, and, through NWEA's *DesCartes* program, staff can get in-depth information on students' academic ability levels. (Ignacio Elementary, Ignacio School District 11 JT)
 - At the end of the year, all teaching staff attend a data retreat, where they go outside of Ignacio and stay at a hotel to examine test scores. Built into the teachers' contract time, the data retreat is an opportunity to outline changes that may need to be made to address student needs. (Ignacio Intermediate, Ignacio School District 11 JT)
 - To monitor student performance, the school has curriculum-based assessments at second grade, rubrics for teachers to use for assessing student writing, and the *Iowa Test of Basic Skills* and *Cognitive Abilities Test* at third, fifth, and eighth grades. The district uses *TetraData*, which is a database for collecting student achievement data and school performance information. Each staff member can access *TetraData* with a different permission level, so that teachers see only their classes' results. (Lois Lenski, Littleton Public Schools)



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 Colorado Findings: Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustment

- **Schools provide students with additional time or individualized instruction both within and outside the traditional school day to focus on skills building.**
 - This school, which is located on an American Indian reservation, has a significant number of students with limited English proficiency. In order to meet the needs of these students, most of the teaching staff are trained to work with English Language Learners; this allows the students to remain with their assigned classroom teacher rather than be pulled out to a separate classroom. (Ignacio Elementary, Ignacio School District 11 JT)
 - The technology and literacy lead teachers provide additional support for struggling students. According to one teacher, "We have a whole menu to access the curriculum: parent support, paraprofessionals to help, and we have a counselor four days a week who works with a lot of students." (Lois Lenski, Littleton Public Schools)
 - South Park addresses struggling students' needs in several ways. Students receive individualized literacy plans, work in intensive reading groups, use *SuccessMaker* in mathematics, get after-school tutoring, and attend Saturday school. Other adults provide additional support for students. "Grandma Sandra," from the Senior Resource Development Agency, works with children; educational assistants provide help to students for using computer-based reading improvement programs; and parents come in to provide additional support. (South Park, Pueblo School District 60)
- **Teachers use results from benchmark assessments, standardized tests, and classroom observations to quickly identify students needing additional assistance.**
 - Struggling students are continually monitored through individual literacy plans, mathematics plans, and *SuccessMaker*. The principal remarked, "This year, we are using more data to identify student needs." (Haaff, Pueblo School District 60)
 - Teachers choose to monitor their students through *Alpine Achievement* and data-driven discussion groups. The principal stated, "The push now is to talk about each child, compile information, and we have a whole list of intervention strategies." The staff use early interventions listed on the *Alpine Achievement* website. (Ignacio Elementary, Ignacio School District 11 JT)
 - Teachers look closely at students' daily work, tests, quizzes, and projects to monitor their development and needs. (Ignacio Intermediate, Ignacio School District 11 JT)
- **Teachers who are struggling can depend on both formal and informal support.**
 - According to the principal, "If [a teacher is] not a first-year teacher and they are struggling, I ask another teacher to help monitor, and I become more involved in the classroom. Last year, I gave a teacher release time to watch a master teacher." (Haaff, Pueblo School District 60)

- When a teacher's evaluation first indicates some concerns, he or she can get help with everything from planning lessons to modeling of lessons. As needs persist, however, a more formal improvement plan is implemented with specific changes that need to be made by a certain time. The principal determines when an intervention is needed, and it may involve human resources staff and even the teachers' union. (Lois Lenski, Littleton Public Schools)
- The mentoring program helps the district address support for struggling teachers. The principal stressed the importance of mentoring and collaboration for teacher support: "If there is a struggling teacher, the administrator and the director of education will talk with [him or her] about any concerns." (South Park, Pueblo School District 60)



Colorado Elementary School Best Practice Study: Conclusion

Based on the Themes of The JFTK Framework

Researchers conducted site visits to seven elementary schools in Colorado, identified through the NCEA analysis. Summaries of the findings of those practices that appeared to distinguish consistently higher performing elementary schools from average-performing ones are presented below by theme.

The Findings

Curriculum and Academic Goals

*The curriculum is the “road map” for meeting the standards according to an educator in one of Colorado’s higher performing schools. Staff from other studied schools agreed and referenced district-level pacing guides and quarterly assessments as their central curriculum tools. All schools used the curriculum revision process as a means for familiarizing new faculty with the school’s academic expectations and all schools gave teachers considerable leeway in how they implemented the curriculum. One teacher said, “[The curriculum] is a **what** to teach, not [a] **how** to teach.”*

Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building

Two schools within the same district remarked that principal candidates were almost entirely drawn from among existing district educators. The active development of internal candidates for leadership positions was also present in other schools visited in the study. Strong support systems surrounded new leaders and teachers. One district was heavily dependent on the Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), which provided services to small rural districts. Professional development activities centered on instructional issues and were practice-oriented. Training and collaboration were seen as “tightly linked,” with all schools making some time available for teachers to work closely together.

Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

District-adopted instructional programs had a strong research base and were closely aligned with state standards and the district curriculum. Differentiation was repeatedly mentioned as the instructional strategy used to help all students reach the stated academic objectives. The implementation of the Linda-mood-Bell Learning Process was cited by one school as the “reform program that had the greatest impact on student achievement.”

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data

All schools used multiple assessments for monitoring student progress. These instruments included the ITBS, the CogAT, district benchmark assessments, teacher-produced assessments, and state assessments. The data from these assessments were examined and analyzed to inform instructional practices. School leaders closely monitored those instructional practices; most schools specifically noted that principals made frequent visits to classrooms.

Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustment

Struggling students were provided many opportunities to succeed, including computer-based intervention programs, pull-out programs with specialists, tutoring by community members, after-school tutoring, and Saturday school. One school used an “Opportunity Room,” where behavior contracting, in-school suspension, lunch detention, and excessive tardiness were all managed. The room was highly individualized, so students could work on different projects and the teacher could attend to both academic and behavioral issues.

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). Based on this protocol, NCEA's next step will be to build upon these findings at the elementary level by conducting the study of 15 consistently higher performing and average-performing middle schools using the same framework of best practices.

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–Colorado Elementary 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 Colorado.