

**National Center for  
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Accountability**

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# **Just for the Kids, Louisiana**

## **Elementary Best Practice Institute, 2004-05**

G.T. Woods Elementary School, Jefferson Parish Public Schools  
Glendale Elementary School, St. Landry Parish Public Schools  
Glynn H. Brock Elementary School, St. Tammany Parish Public Schools  
Jessie D. Clifton Elementary School, Calcasieu Parish Public Schools  
Sicily Island Elementary School, Catahoula Parish School District

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## Just for the Kids, Louisiana

### Elementary Best Practice Institute, 2005

#### The Institute

The Louisiana Best Practice Institute 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 Louisiana, researchers studied five consistently higher performing elementary schools to learn how they had attained and sustained their level of higher performance. Schools were identified through an in-depth analysis of academic achievement developed by the National Center for Educational Accountability (NCEA) using data publicly available from the state.

The 2005 Louisiana Best Practice Institute was sponsored by the National Center for Educational Accountability and received funding from The Broad Foundation.

#### The Summary

Researchers conducted a day-long series of focus groups with teachers, principals, and district administrators to study the classroom-, school-, and district-level practices contributing to each school's success. NCEA's Best Practice Framework provided the structure for each focus group. NCEA analyzed transcripts of the focus group discussions to prepare this summary report. The report presents a brief description of each higher performing school, followed by the Best Practice Findings in Louisiana.

#### The School Identification Process

NCEA used publicly available student achievement data from the Louisiana Department of Education to identify schools that consistently outperformed other schools with similar demographics in mathematics, English Language Arts, science, and social studies in the 2001-02, 2002-03, and 2003-04 school years.<sup>1</sup> The analysis included data from the fourth-grade Louisiana Educational Assessment Program for the 21st Century (LEAP 21) assessments.

To identify the schools, NCEA conducted a separate analysis for each subject (mathematics, English Language Arts, science, and social studies) and year (2002, 2003, and 2004) to learn which schools outperformed their demographic peers on the percentage of students at least meeting the "Mastery" 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 was "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, English Language Learner (ELL), African American, Hispanic, 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 Louisiana.

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 "Mastery" standard. For example, a school that outperformed 97% of the schools in "performance relative to predicted" in fourth-grade mathematics in 2004 received a percentile rank of 97 for that subject and year. These ranks

<sup>1</sup> Science and social studies were only tested in 2003 and 2004.



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were averaged separately for each subject 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 85 in mathematics and English Language Arts, ranks above 75 for science and social studies, and meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements.

### The Higher Performing Schools Studied

School	District	2004 Enrollment		2004 School-Wide Demographics						
		Grade Span	No. of Students	African American	Hispanic	White	Asian	Other	Low Income	ELL
G.T. Woods Elementary School	Jefferson Parish Public Schools	PK-5	260	97.7%	0.4%	1.9%	0.0%	0.0%	99.2%	0.0%
Glendale Elementary School	St. Landry Parish Public Schools	PK-4	268	24.6%	0.0%	74.6%	0.4%	0.4%	82.1%	0.4%
Glynn H. Brock Elementary School	St. Tammany Parish Public Schools	PK-5	287	67.2%	2.8%	30.0%	0.0%	0.0%	90.6%	1.0%
Jessie D. Clifton Elementary School	Calcasieu Parish Public Schools	PK-5	361	98.3%	0.0%	0.8%	0.8%	0.1%	91.7%	0.0%
Sicity Island Elementary School	Catahoula Parish School District	K-4	153	51.6%	2.6%	45.8%	0.0%	0.0%	85.0%	0.0%

Student enrollment data and demographic data are taken from the Just for the Kids-Louisiana 2004 website. The Institute was conducted in May 2005.



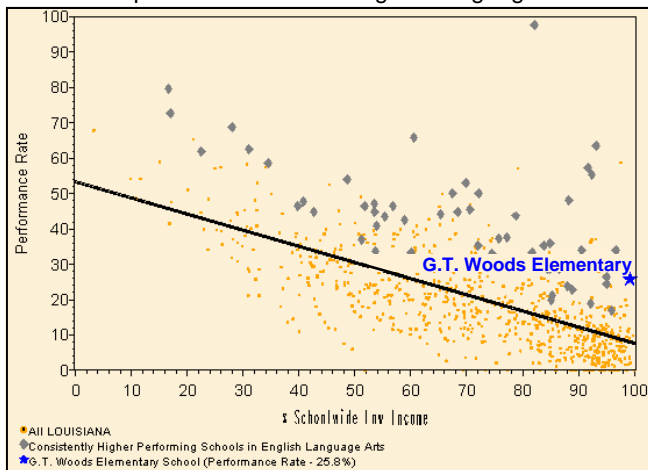
# G.T. Woods Elementary School Jefferson Parish Public Schools

## Just for the Kids, Louisiana NCEA Executive Summary

### The School

G.T. Woods Elementary School, which serves 260 pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade students, is 1 of 51 elementary schools in Jefferson Parish Public Schools (51,104 students). Woods's population is 97.7% African American, 1.9% White, and 0.4% Hispanic. Within this student population, there are no English Language Learners, and 99.2% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2004 4<sup>th</sup> Grade English Language Arts



### Consistent Higher Performance

G.T. Woods Elementary School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics, English Language Arts, science, and social studies in an analysis that included all fourth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each year, G.T. Woods Elementary School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 90.7 in mathematics, 85.4 in English Language Arts, 80.5 in science, and 79.5 in social studies.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data, with the Institute occurring during May of 2005. Differences between the demographics reported in this report 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	4	4	
Mathematics	91	92	89	90.7
English Language Arts	97	65	91	85.4
Science	N/A	65	97	80.5
Social Studies	N/A	64	96	79.5

\*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. For detailed information on individual and overall average performance ranks for G.T. Woods Elementary School, please visit [www.just4kids.org](http://www.just4kids.org).



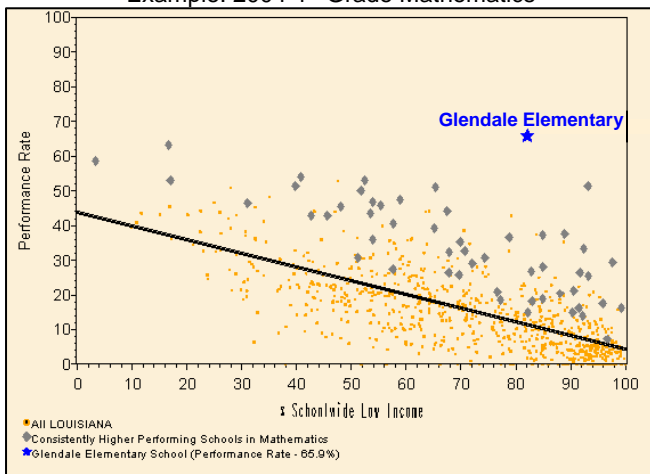
# Glendale Elementary School St. Landry Parish Public Schools

## Just for the Kids, Louisiana NCEA Executive Summary

### The School

Glendale Elementary School, which serves 268 pre-kindergarten through fourth-grade students, is 1 of 24 elementary schools in St. Landry Parish Public Schools (15,354 students). Glendale's population is 74.6% White, 24.6% African American, 0.4% Asian, and 0.4% other. Within this student population, 0.4% are English Language Learners, and 82.1% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2004 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Mathematics



### Consistent Higher Performance

Glendale Elementary School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics, English Language Arts, science, and social studies in an analysis that included all fourth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each year, Glendale Elementary School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 98.6 in mathematics, 99.0 in English Language Arts, 99.0 in science, and 95.6 in social studies.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data, with the Institute occurring during May of 2005. Differences between the demographics reported in this report 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	4	4	
Mathematics	99	98	99	98.6
English Language Arts	99	99	99	99.0
Science	N/A	99	99	99.0
Social Studies	N/A	93	99	95.6

\*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. For detailed information on individual and overall average performance ranks for Glendale Elementary School, please visit [www.just4kids.org](http://www.just4kids.org).



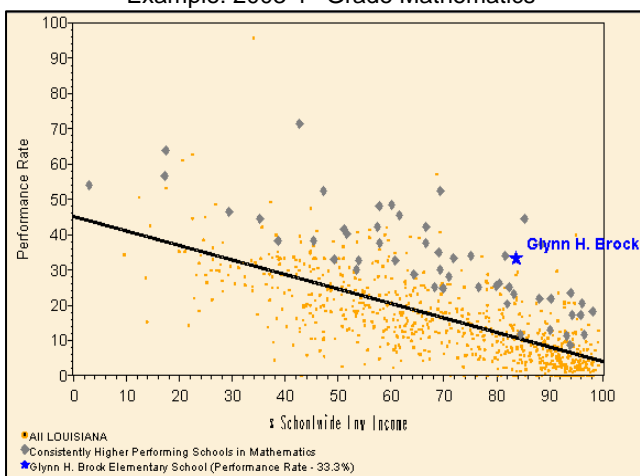
# Glynn H. Brock Elementary School St. Tammany Parish Public Schools

## Just for the Kids, Louisiana NCEA Executive Summary

### The School

Glynn H. Brock Elementary School, which serves 287 pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade students, is 1 of 21 elementary schools in St. Tammany Parish Public Schools (35,025 students). Brock's population is 67.2% African American, 30.0% White, and 2.8% Hispanic. Within this student population, 1.0% are English Language Learners, and 90.6% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2003 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Mathematics



### Consistent Higher Performance

Glynn H. Brock Elementary School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics, English Language Arts, science, and social studies in an analysis that included all fourth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each year, Glynn H. Brock Elementary School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 92.7 in mathematics, 88.3 in English Language Arts, 81.9 in science, and 79.9 in social studies.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data, with the Institute occurring during May of 2005. Differences between the demographics reported in this report 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	4	4	
Mathematics	89	97	92	92.7
English Language Arts	71	97	95	88.3
Science	N/A	94	71	81.9
Social Studies	N/A	91	70	79.9

\*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. For detailed information on individual and overall average performance ranks for Glynn H. Brock Elementary School, please visit [www.just4kids.org](http://www.just4kids.org).



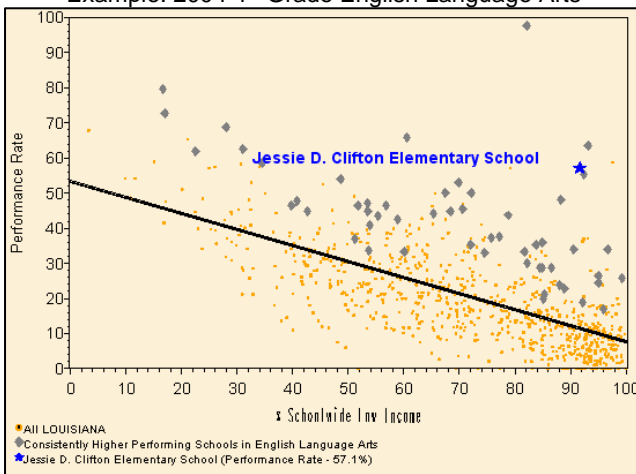
# Jessie D. Clifton Elementary School Calcasieu Parish Public Schools

## Just for the Kids, Louisiana NCEA Executive Summary

### The School

Jessie D. Clifton Elementary School, which serves 361 pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade students, is 1 of 31 elementary schools in Calcasieu Parish Public Schools (32,493 students). Clifton’s student population is 98.3% African American, 0.8% White, 0.8% Asian, and 0.1% other. Within this student population, there are no English Language Learners, and 91.7% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2004 4<sup>th</sup> Grade English Language Arts



### Consistent Higher Performance

Jessie D. Clifton Elementary School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics, English Language Arts, science, and social studies in an analysis that included all fourth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each year, Jessie D. Clifton Elementary School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 91.3 in mathematics, 97.6 in English Language Arts, 82.8 in science, and 88.6 in social studies.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data, with the Institute occurring during May of 2005. Differences between the demographics reported in this report 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	4	4	
Mathematics	98	78	97	91.3
English Language Arts	98	96	99	97.6
Science	N/A	73	95	82.8
Social Studies	N/A	85	93	88.6

\*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. For detailed information on individual and overall average performance ranks for Jessie D. Clifton Elementary School, please visit [www.just4kids.org](http://www.just4kids.org).



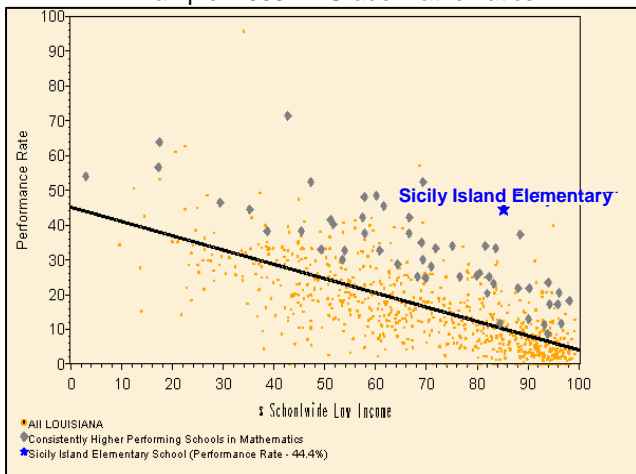
# Sicity Island Elementary School Catahoula Parish School District

## Just for the Kids, Louisiana NCEA Executive Summary

### The School

Sicity Island Elementary School, which serves 153 kindergarten through fourth-grade students, is 1 of 10 schools in Catahoula Parish School District (1,805 students). Sicity Island's population is 51.6% African American, 45.8% White, and 2.6% Hispanic. Within this student population, there are no English Language Learners, and 85.0% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2003 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Mathematics



### Consistent Higher Performance

Sicity Island Elementary School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics, English Language Arts, science, and social studies in an analysis that included all fourth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each year, Sicity Island Elementary School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 95.7 in mathematics, 92.8 in English Language Arts, 95.1 in science, and 97.0 in social studies.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data, with the Institute occurring during May of 2005. Differences between the demographics reported in this report 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	4	4	
Mathematics	95	99	93	95.7
English Language Arts	90	96	93	92.8
Science	N/A	98	92	95.1
Social Studies	N/A	98	96	97.0

\*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. For detailed information on individual and overall average performance ranks for Sicity Island Elementary School, please visit [www.just4kids.org](http://www.just4kids.org).



## Louisiana Elementary Best Practice Institute: 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.

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 whenever 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 Louisiana Findings: Curriculum and Academic Goals

- **Guided by the Louisiana Content Standards, districts ensure that the curriculum is clear and specific by grade and subject. While the standards have been further defined by the state through Grade-Level Expectations (GLEs), districts and schools add even more clarity when necessary.**
  - The districts of these higher performing schools base their curriculum development on the state standards and benchmarks. Originally, the state provided *only* the standards and

benchmarks. Interviewees at all levels acknowledged that these lacked the specificity needed to guide practice. The state responded to that issue by providing Grade-Level Expectations (GLEs), which interviewees accepted enthusiastically. One principal said, “At first [the state-level guidance] was broad, and then now they’ve broken [the standards] down. ‘In first grade, *this* is what needs to be taught; [in] second grade, *this* is what needs to be taught.’” He concluded by stating that he thought the GLEs were “wonderful.”

- Teachers agreed that the GLEs are extremely useful. The GLEs help them collaborate more deeply and efficiently. Since teachers are no longer spending time deciphering the benchmarks, they are able to focus on planning and action. As one teacher explained, “Collaboration for us now is not what you are going to do; it’s how you are doing it.”
- Despite how helpful higher performing schools consider the GLEs, they do not depend entirely on them for their complete curricula. District administrators reported that they begin their local curriculum development by disaggregating student performance data for every school, identifying each school’s strengths and weaknesses. Schools then use that data to refine their curriculum plans for the year. A district leader explained, “They take their data apart, and as a group, they determine their instructional focus.” Some schools go even further to pinpoint their needs, conducting “needs assessments from students, parents, and teachers.”
- A common practice across the successful districts is that school leaders and teachers develop even more detailed curriculum plans than the state’s GLEs. One principal explained, “I think it starts at the top, but the bottom line is ... each school has its own little areas that they need to work on, and so they do that. It goes a step further because the teachers even go from that instructional focus to looking at their individual students and [say], ‘Okay, I know I have twenty [students] here; these five need this.’ So it’s individualizing instruction. It’s addressing the actual needs of our kids.”

▪ **The alignment of curriculum across grades and subjects and with instructional programs and materials is fundamental to increased student achievement.**

- Interviewees dedicate large amounts of time to aligning curriculum within districts and schools. They ensure alignment by working collaboratively to develop common materials for teachers to use in class, meeting frequently to discuss progress, and using curriculum specialists and principals to monitor and guide classroom practices.
- The most commonly mentioned alignment strategy was ensuring that all teachers had access not just to benchmarks and goals but also to materials that clearly communicated the specific information students needed to know. The interviewees spoke at length about the materials the district develops for teachers to use in class. None of these districts or schools depends entirely on textbooks. A district administrator said, “The textbooks have holes and gaps in them, as all of us know, and [we develop] materials to supplement [them].” Teams of teachers and curriculum specialists typically developed these materials at the district level, and then they are disseminated across the district.
- Some districts have almost entirely moved away from textbooks and are developing their own aligned materials for every grade level. One district administrator stated, “We’ve designed the curriculum in such a way that there are options for teachers based on different levels of [student proficiency] and the needs that the students have. So we’re giving them a unit; and in that unit, they decide what’s going to happen. And that unit is within a certain timeframe, because the units build upon each other.”
- School and district leaders hire curriculum specialists to work with teachers during the school year and help them maintain alignment with their school’s curriculum plan. They involve teachers in the curriculum development process and conduct in-services at the beginning of each year to discuss curriculum. When they implement a new program, district and school leaders have all teachers attend training for the delivery of it, and then follow up with newer teachers to make sure they have received adequate training.

- All principals provide time for teachers to meet and discuss their curriculum plans. Most principals provide this time regularly throughout the school year. Principals said that they spend a large majority of their time visiting classrooms and monitoring implementation of the curriculum. Teachers have checklists of the GLEs and check off each benchmark as they teach it.
- Interviewees also mentioned the need for parents' expectations to be aligned with the schools' goals. One principal said, "I also send home a list of what students should know and be able to learn in first grade, in kindergarten, in second grade, to continuously establish that connection between school and home. And it's all based on our GLEs and our standards and benchmarks." The state itself provides a website called Louisiana PASS (Practice Assessment/Strengthen Skills), where teachers and parents can help students practice for LEAP 21 (Louisiana Educational Assessment Program for the 21st Century), the state assessment.

▪ **Educators review and refine curricula based on student performance.**

- The districts of the higher performing schools revise their curricula every year, using the same processes they use for initial curriculum development. They examine data, identify areas of weakness, and change their curricula to address those areas. One principal said, "You know there are basic things that never change, but the focus changes from year to year based on where we see the needs."
- At the district level, administrators suggest broad curricular or programmatic changes based on an analysis of student performance data. At the school level, principals examine individual teacher and student data. As one principal said, "For the first meeting [in the fall], we know everybody's strengths and everybody's weaknesses, and we can formulate our school improvement plan." Teachers study student data and then adjust instruction, supplement materials, and plan interventions for individual students.
- Some districts revise curricula throughout the year. One district administrator said that his district has created an intranet where the revised curriculum can be posted immediately.
- An administrator from a smaller district described a series of workshops conducted every two months throughout the school year. In these workshops, all teachers at one grade level meet to regularly map out their curriculum. The district provides assessments every six weeks to measure student learning and uses the results to revise the curriculum as needed.



**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 Louisiana Findings: Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building**

- **Professional development activities are ongoing, relevant, collaborative, and classroom-embedded.**
  - Some interviewees mentioned providing mentors for new teachers, but the majority of capacity-building methods they discussed were related to professional development, teacher collaboration, modeling, and one-on-one work with district or school curriculum specialists. Though districts and schools actively seek ways to support teachers locally, they also take advantage of several state programs that offer teacher professional development.

- Teachers reported attending intensive multi-year state programs, such as DEEP in Math (*Developing Educational Excellence and Proficiency in Mathematics*) and INTECH, an on-going series on how technology can support curriculum. State-created regional education service centers bring workshops to schools and districts. Teachers also attend workshops for training in nationally known programs their schools are implementing, like *Write ... from the Beginning* and *Project READ*.
  - Districts and schools have subject-area experts on staff to model lessons and provide curriculum support for teachers. Principals sometimes assign these staff to coach individual teachers, and several principals mentioned that they often send teachers on “cross-visitations” to other schools to learn a variety of teaching methods.
  - All the districts set aside days during the year for district- or school-level professional development, though in some districts those days are Saturdays. Some schools arrange their schedules to give teachers time to collaborate and plan together, often depending on pull-out classes like physical education and art to free up teachers several times a week.
  - Teachers described a state-funded program in effect at some of their schools designed to facilitate collaboration: LINCS (*Learning Intensive Networking Communities for Success*). According to the teachers, the LINCS program requires that teachers meet and collaborate a certain number of times per month. It also provides money for substitute teachers or for stipends if teachers need to meet outside of school time.
  - All teachers have regular grade-level meetings. Some meet weekly, and others monthly. At one school, teachers meet as a grade level once a week and then meet once a month with teachers from the grades both above and below them. A fourth-grade teacher described this practice: “We have our grade-level meetings—just the fourth-grade teachers—[to discuss] what’s working, what’s not working again, what problems we are having with materials, who needs extra support. ... And then we have cross-grade-level meetings where we meet with the third-grade teachers ... you know, ‘What have you been noticing about the third graders—what are their strengths and weaknesses?’ Then we meet with the fifth-grade teachers [and ask], ‘Are they coming prepared to your class?’ ... We talk a lot. We have to.”
- **The GLEs have provided the foundation for teacher collaboration centered on the core aspects of teaching and learning.**
    - One teacher stated, “I think the GLEs have done a fabulous job of making collaboration almost easy, tangible.” She further explained that the specificity of the GLEs gives teachers a strong understanding of what students are learning in grade levels immediately preceding and following their own.
    - According to one teacher, “Collaboration is so much easier now because you are saying, ‘Third grade, boy, you have to do this,’ and that’s the stepping stone needed for fourth grade. But it is all right there in your little book, and ... it takes the guess work out. It’s basically you coming up with a creative way in which to make [the mastery of the stated skill] happen.”
    - One teacher suggested that when there were no GLEs, teachers had to collaborate *more* because they weren’t sure what anyone else was teaching. Another teacher quickly responded, “But [collaboration] is now more instructional! Like collaboration for us is not *what* are you going to do, it’s *how* are you doing it. It’s what creative, innovative ways have you come up with. ... So it’s not what you have to do; it’s almost ‘How innovative and technologically based is it?’” The teacher further explained that a group of teachers and coaches with different skills can now each add their expertise to the collaborative effort of how to meet the needs of all students—how to differentiate instruction so all students master the content.



## 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 Louisiana Findings: Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

- **Student performance data drive the selection of instructional resources.**
  - Instructional selections typically begin with needs assessments based on student performance data. After identifying needs, district administrators research programs, often visiting districts that had implemented them. They pilot programs for a year or more before using them across the district.
  - Districts tend to select some programs for district-wide use and allow schools to select supplemental programs that they can demonstrate work best for them. Districts still examine the programs and approve them before the schools adopt them, but district leaders allow the principals and teachers to access a wide range of programs. One district administrator explained, "With their teams, [schools] decide on what their needs are. They analyze the data, decide what they need, go through best practices books, and then look at the research that's there, and then choose what they think would fit their populations."
  - District administrators think that their improved use of data to select programs has had a positive effect on the whole student population and on individual students. One administrator said, "I think it's made us stop and think. The good part of it is that we used to let kids become invisible in the back of the room, and now we've started taking a closer look at those children."
  - Principals and teachers are able to refine ideas about the programs they need in their schools. They look at performance data, but they also meet in grade-level and cross-grade-level meetings to identify the most common issues they need to address and to discuss the types of programs that would help.
- **Instructional programs, practices, and arrangements are intentionally chosen to equip teachers with the tools to ensure all students master the learning objectives.**
  - The majority of interviewees use some form of a packaged instructional program to help supplement and/or guide their instructional practices. Some of the programs identified were state programs like DEEP in Math (*Developing Educational Excellence and Proficiency in Mathematics*) and INTECH, and other programs that included *Project READ*, *Accelerated Reader* and *Accelerated Math*, *MATHCOUNTS*, *Renaissance Math and Reading*, *Thinking Maps*, *Write ... from the Beginning*, *Success for All*, *Mountain Math*, *Everyday Math*, and *Character Counts*.
  - To meet national- and state-level learning objectives, principals and teachers plan their daily schedules very carefully. The national *Reading First* initiative requires a specific amount of time each morning, while the state requires a number of hours of instruction in each subject per week or per day. School personnel plan ways to meet all requirements and teach the specified content.
  - Teachers from several schools described their method for ensuring that students get the best possible instruction. Instead of every teacher teaching every subject, grade-level teachers agree to divide the subjects among them. One teacher teaches math and science, another teaches spelling and reading comprehension, and a third teaches language arts

and social studies. One teacher said, “At our school, we believe that you teach what you’re best at because you always do a better job at what you like.” Another noted that it saves teachers both preparation time and money: “We spend a fortune on our children, and if I can buy stuff that relates completely just to the one subject or two subjects that I’m teaching, it makes a [huge] difference.” In schools with these practices, principals require teachers to submit a proposal with a plan and justification for the division of labor.

- Implementation of instructional programs sometimes requires more than lesson planning and assessment. Teachers put a great deal of thought into how their classrooms are set up to best serve students and support programs. For example, several teachers have replaced desks with tables because students needed space to use math manipulatives and work in groups. Teachers were enthusiastic about collaborative learning. One said, “[Students are] so proud of themselves when they get something that they’re willing to share, and then it becomes constructive talking.” Another added, “I’m [teaching] long division, ... so all of [the students] went to the board and [worked on] long division. I could hear them talking when someone didn’t know that first step—divide, multiply, compare, subtract—and the way they helped each other, I was so proud of them. Oh, my gosh, I almost cried.”
- All the teachers and principals interviewed agreed that vocabulary building at the elementary level was crucial. Some schools had packaged programs that provided daily or weekly vocabulary words; others created their own school-wide vocabulary systems. Interviewees most appreciated language arts programs that required students to develop mastery rather than just memorize terms and rules. One principal described a favorite writing program: “A lot of times if they are studying their nouns, [the program] simply gives them sentences and says ‘Underline the noun,’ but with [this] program, students have to show that they understand nouns through their writing. So you may say, ‘Write a paragraph and make sure in the paragraph you include five proper nouns, three common nouns, [and] three adjectives.’ So you have to show that you understand the skill through the writing.”
- Interviewees emphasized that the success of any program often depends on how well teachers are trained. About one successful program, a principal said, “The entire staff is trained [in the program], and we have someone that has been trained to train the new teachers that are coming in. So everyone that is coming in, there’s no excuse, because they will be trained right there on the spot.”
- Teachers and principals did not attribute all their success to the instructional programs they use. Teachers explained that, in the past several years, they have changed their philosophies and practices, and the programs merely supported their new ideas. In particular, teachers were amazed at how their views of differentiated instruction had changed since they had first been trained. One teacher recalled, “I’ve been teaching a long time, so I did have those old ways of teaching—rote memory. Honestly, I did. And I did the worksheets. We didn’t really do groups.” But the teachers agreed that they began these changes themselves, and the new programs and requirements give them a common terminology for talking about their successful practices.
- At the school level, principals and teachers use data to track the overall success of a program, but they do not have to wait for year-end data to tell them whether a program is working. They administer frequent assessments at the classroom level, and compare notes in grade-level and school-wide meetings. One principal said of a new program, “Our children are writing so much better now and, oh, my goodness, in the next three years, we’re doing it from kindergarten through fifth grade. And the teachers can see the difference.”



## 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 Louisiana Findings: Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data

- **District and school benchmark assessments, aligned with the state standards, supplement state tests. These assessments provide consistent, reliable, and pertinent data about student performance early and often.**
  - Louisiana's accountability test, LEAP 21, is administered annually in March. To stay aware of interim performance levels, most districts developed their own benchmark tests that teachers administer every six or nine weeks, or when they finish a unit of instruction. All of the districts without interim district assessments are developing them.
  - Interviewees work hard to access or develop assessments that will give them useful interim data. When they found that there were not enough released LEAP 21 samples available online, they accessed released Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) tests, as well as exams from South Carolina and Washington. At all levels—district, school, and classroom—the interviewees are not stymied by lack of information; if they need more information or materials, they search until they find it.
  - Assessment is constant. One principal described weekly computer-based assessments given to students: "We have a computer lab. ... [Students] test initially from pre-K up, and I get weekly reports. ... I have a little chart that I use, a notebook, and I look at the report card grades, the lab scores, because I expect the scores to be at a certain level. ... I just keep a running record of how [students are] doing."
  - Principals and teachers discussed the importance of having school-wide rubrics for evaluating student work. These rubrics are essential for teachers to gauge the level of student performance and for parents to understand how their children's work is assessed. A principal explained, "We did have [a] problem when I was initially placed at the school, where there were different standards for different types of work. We had to collaborate as a faculty—not necessarily as a grade level, but as a faculty—and review work, and then come up with some expectations for A-level work and B-level work and C-level work."
- **Student performance data are used as the foundation for decisions about curriculum and instruction. Principals and teachers have the necessary skills to use assessment data effectively.**
  - Educators depend on data to guide curricular adjustments and classroom instruction. Districts give principals frequent, intensive training in data use and analysis, and principals pass that training on to teachers. At least two districts have a full-time accountability specialist who attends regional and state meetings on performance data. This specialist also provides ongoing support to schools, analyzing and explaining data that schools collect throughout the year.
  - District and school leaders and teachers use student performance data—from LEAP 21 and from the ongoing district or school assessments—to make large-scale adjustments to the curriculum. Teachers also use data to pinpoint the needs of individual students. Ac-

ording to one teacher, “Some teachers would have little folders available—if this child needed work on vocabulary, this is what this child did. If the child needed work on comprehension, these were the strategies. ... So it was more individualized instruction.”

- Some principals distribute teacher-level student performance data to all teachers in the same grade level. One principal explained that this practice encouraged a collaborative environment in which teachers could help each other identify and fix problems: “I let my teachers look at all of [the data]. Even if it’s an English teacher, they look at math scores because [for example] if you write an essay and you read it over and over, sometimes you miss the spots that you need to [adjust]. ... There are some skills that we can [teach] across the board. And every now and then [teachers say], ‘Oh you know, those are some things I can be doing even in my social studies class.’ That’s why we all look at everything.”
- **School instructional leaders frequently visit classrooms and review lesson plans to monitor instruction and curriculum delivery.**
  - At the school level, principals conduct regular formal evaluations of teachers and also perform frequent walkthroughs and informal evaluations. Formal teacher evaluations typically include a review of student performance data. To further monitor classroom instruction, principals require teachers to turn in weekly lesson plans that identify which GLEs each lesson addresses.
  - Most principals reported spending more than 50 percent of their time visiting classrooms. A few said that they spend 80 to 90 percent of their time in walkthroughs. A few principals use handheld computers during walkthroughs. When they sync the handheld with their desktop computers, the data goes directly to the district office also.
  - Some principals called their frequent walkthroughs “snapshots,” and they described a one-page checklist they fill out and send to the district office. One principal explained, “And then [the district] sends us a report of the percentage of teachers that are doing these things. There’s a technology component, and there’s curriculum planning and development, and we see all those things once [every] nine weeks.”
  - Principals said that during walkthroughs they look for teachers who move around the classroom instead of lecturing from the front of the room. They also want to see students who appear engaged in learning. As one principal stated, “[I want to] see them not just sitting there doing busy work but actually talking it through, and the teacher walking them through—actually doing something besides busy work.”



## 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 Louisiana Findings: Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustment

- **The district offers support and expert assistance to low-performing schools.**
  - At the district level, administrators examine each school’s student performance data. Louisiana provides District Assistance Team (DAT) training for district administrators. The

DATs work primarily in schools that have been identified as needing improvement—often providing extra curriculum support and helping them develop improvement plans.

- To thoroughly support and observe principals at struggling schools, one district hired a consulting group consisting of retired superintendents and principals. An administrator described the support: “They come in maybe three times a week and will shadow the principal all day because if the school is low performing, a lot of times it has to do with the leadership.” This group identifies principals who are “spending too much time managing and not [enough] on leadership.”
- One district administrator described a grant used to provide content-area coaches and school counselors for struggling schools. Another administrator explained that the district does not allow teachers to transfer out of struggling schools for three years: “If you bring a special person in, and you pile on that money and resources to train that teacher—and she moves the next year—you’ve lost all that money.”
- **Since student learning is not a variable, interventions occur in classrooms where teachers are struggling.**
  - In some districts, when principals place a teacher on a remediation plan, the district pays for mentors, professional development, and substitute teachers so that the struggling teacher can visit other schools and observe successful teachers. A district administrator described the lengths to which the district goes to help a teacher improve: “We’ll get consultants to take over the classroom all day to just model and do the management, show the routine. Sometimes we save some [teachers], and sometimes we can’t.”
  - In most cases, when a teacher needs remediation, the principal helps the teacher create an individualized plan that includes specific professional development, time with mentors or coaches, time spent in other teachers’ classrooms, and materials to read. Principals also try to “catch teachers doing [well]” and encourage useful and productive habits.
  - Principals do not give up easily on teachers; they look for every opportunity to help struggling teachers improve. One principal said, “You do everything in your power because that person didn’t go to school to meet with failure. If they had enough motivation to go to school, then it’s within us to try to find the best and find a way to reach them, so that they can become educators—which was what their true desire was when they first went to school.”
- **Resources and teaching strategies vary to ensure that all students meet the stated academic goals.**
  - When asked about interventions generally, all interviewees were most interested in discussing student interventions. Students receive intervention based on performance data, classroom performance, or teacher observation. Systems for helping students are in place at all levels, from the state to the classroom. For example, the state provides LEAP 21 remediation funds for schools to hire tutors—often retired teachers—to work with students who have low scores on the state assessment.
  - Districts have their own funds for LEAP 21 remediation or acceleration as well. One district created the “Saturday LEAP 21” program; that district identifies students with low LEAP 21 scores and then asks schools to have Saturday tutoring for those students. The program pays for student transportation and teacher wages.
  - Principals and teachers repeatedly discussed the need to help individual students. Most schools have extended-day programs for struggling students, and those extra hours are staffed by teachers from the school, retired teachers, or other trained tutors. A principal reported, “I don’t leave school sometimes until 7:30 or 8:00 at night, trying to get those kids in who need [extra attention]. Basically, what we try and do is reach every individual child.”

- Understanding their students' living environments helps teachers to teach more efficiently, to understand the source of many behavior problems, and to choose interventions accordingly.
- Schools look for innovative ways to provide extra instruction for students. Some schools use parent tutors, and one elementary school invites high school students to serve as tutors. One principal said that teachers find every opportunity to help students: "I have seen teachers sit on the bottom of a bleacher at a ballgame and help a child do chemistry or math or whatever."
- School personnel work hard to get parents involved in the education of their children. One principal said, "We have a parent lending library, ... we have the parent resource center. I have a parent educator within the school, and we use that because I tell the teachers that we're not just teaching the children, but we're teaching the parents how to become good parents. And if we start early, then when [their children] get to third and fourth grade—to those critical grades—they'll know what our expectations are, and they'll be more willing to be cooperative and to help us help their [children]."



## Louisiana Elementary Best Practice Institute: Conclusion

*Based on the Themes of The JFTK Framework*

The NCEA analysis identified five consistently higher performing elementary schools in Louisiana. District, school, and classroom representatives from each school participated in a series of five focus groups organized by the themes of The JFTK Best Practice Framework. Summaries of the findings of those focus groups are presented below by theme.

### The Findings

#### Curriculum and Academic Goals

*Although the demographic profiles of the districts and schools at the Institute varied widely, each used a clear and specific curriculum by grade and subject to reach high standards of learning for all students. All interviewees expressed appreciation for the further clarification of the state standards through the Grade-Level Expectations (GLEs) and were diligent about aligning all instructional programs and materials with those expectations. The adjustment and refinement of the curriculum were based on student performance data.*

#### Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building

*Teacher collaboration, modeling, and one-on-one work with district or school curriculum specialists were the primary methods used for building teacher capacity. Teachers felt that the specificity of the GLEs had produced a whole new level of collaboration: teachers began discussing creative and technologically savvy ways to deliver the curriculum—how to teach—as opposed to discussing what to teach.*

#### Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

*District administrators thought that their improved use of data to select instructional programs had a positive effect on the whole student population. These instructional programs were further supported through classroom practices and arrangements marked by “new philosophies,” (i.e., a belief that every child should achieve mastery). In particular, teachers were amazed at how their views of differentiated instruction had changed since they had first been trained. Teachers saw it as their responsibility, given strong district and school support, to alter strategies and resources until each student has mastered the given objectives.*

#### Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data

*Districts and schools used measures beyond the state assessment to monitor student performance—most notably district-created benchmark assessments. Another powerful means of monitoring student learning was the development of school-wide rubrics for evaluating student work. Through collaborative agreement about what “A-level work looked like,” students were increasingly held to common expectations and standards of learning. Finally, school instructional leaders used frequent classroom visits to monitor teaching and learning.*

#### Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustment

*Accountability for reaching student learning goals existed at all levels—district, school, and classroom. The district offered support and expert assistance to low-performing schools, and principals ensured that teachers in need of assistance received support in their classrooms. Finally, all school levels developed and supported student learning interventions that were grounded in the adjustment of resources and strategies.*

## 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 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 leverage the results of this Elementary Best Practice Institute to conduct a full study of higher performing elementary schools in Louisiana, including a comparison with average-performing schools, in order to distinguish unique practices of the higher performing schools. Then, NCEA should continue to build upon those findings by conducting the study of consistently higher and average-performing middle and high 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-Louisiana Elementary Best Practice Institute, 2005, focus on a description of the practices that are most consistent across the higher performing schools in this study. Without a comparison group of average-performing schools, we cannot highlight only those practices that were found to be systemically different in the higher performing schools as a group. Therefore, the conclusions from the JFTK-Louisiana Elementary Best Practice Institute have also been informed by the findings from a much larger body of schools studied (300+ across five years and twenty states), which included average-performing comparison schools, to help determine meaning in the context of Louisiana.*