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Accountability**

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Just for the Kids, Tennessee

Elementary School Best Practice Study, 2004-05

Hamilton Elementary School, Memphis City Schools
Hazelwood Elementary School, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System
Norman Smith Elementary School, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System
Riverview Elementary School, Memphis City Schools

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Just for the Kids, Tennessee

Elementary School Best Practice Study, 2004-2005

The Study

The Tennessee 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 Tennessee, researchers investigated four 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 nine Tennessee 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 Tennessee 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 six 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 Tennessee, 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, Tennessee

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 Tennessee Department of Education to identify schools that consistently outperformed other schools with similar demographics in mathematics, reading, and science in the 2001-02 and 2003-04 school years.¹ The analysis included data from the third- through fifth-grade Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) Achievement Tests.

To identify the schools, NCEA conducted a separate analysis for each subject (mathematics, reading, and science) and year (2002 and 2004) to learn which schools outperformed their demographic peers on the percentage of students meeting the “Proficient” standard in 2002 and the “Advanced” standard in 2004 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, 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 Tennessee.

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 standard. For example, a school that outperformed 96% of the schools in “performance relative to predicted” in third-grade mathematics in 2002 would receive a percentile rank of 96 for that subject and year. These ranks were averaged separately for mathematics, reading, and science across the two 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 75² in all tested subjects and also meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements in 2004.

¹ No 2003 performance data were available from the state, as they were pilot data for the new criterion-referenced test implemented in 2004.

² The overall percentile rank requirements actually ranged from 75 to 85, depending on the number of grades tested in the school. In a state like Tennessee, 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, Tennessee

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	Other	Low Income	ELL
Hamilton Elementary School	Memphis City Schools	K-5	657	99.7%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	97.9%	N/A
Hazelwood Elementary School	Clarksville-Montgomery County School System	K-5	913	34.4%	8.4%	53.2%	2.1%	1.9%	48.0%	N/A
Norman Smith Elementary School	Clarksville-Montgomery County School System	K-5	483	38.5%	4.0%	56.3%	0.2%	1.0%	65.9%	N/A
Riverview Elementary School	Memphis City Schools	K-5	383	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	94.6%	N/A

Student enrollment data and demographic data are taken from the Just for the Kids-Tennessee 2004 website. Site visits were conducted in Spring 2005.



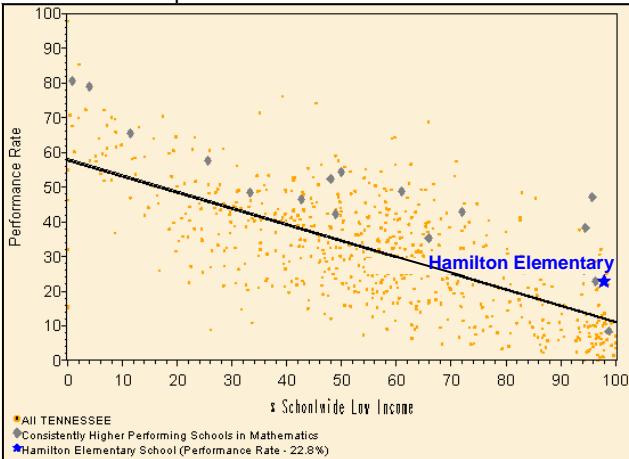
Hamilton Elementary School Memphis City Schools

Just for the Kids, Tennessee NCEA Executive Summary

The School

Hamilton Elementary School, which serves 657 kindergarten through fifth-grade students, is 1 of 117 elementary schools in Memphis City Schools (116,224 students). Hamilton's student population is 99.7% African American and 0.3% White. Within this student population, 97.9% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2004 5th Grade Mathematics



Consistent Higher Performance

Hamilton Elementary School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics, reading, and science in an analysis that included third- through fifth-grade achievement data from 2002 and 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Hamilton Elementary School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 92.8 in mathematics, 95.5 in reading, and 94.1 in science.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002 and 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			2004 Percentile Rank			Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
	3	4	5	3	4	5	
Grade							
Mathematics	96	96	85	89	95	95	92.8
Reading	98	97	91	96	95	96	95.5
Science	90	99	89	98	91	97	94.1

*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. For detailed information on individual and overall average performance ranks for Hamilton Elementary School, please visit www.just4kids.org.

Major Findings

District and school leaders praise the Tennessee Curriculum Standards, but note that the district curriculum goes above and beyond these “baseline expectations.” The superintendent emphasized that consistency in the communication and delivery of the curriculum is a top priority, particularly with the district’s urban student population, which is predominantly poor, black, and mobile. New teachers participate in the school’s Wildcat Mentoring Program, in which they and their mentors meet on a weekly basis to ensure they have a clear understanding of the school’s expectations for highly qualified teachers. Teachers indicate the current textbook adoption process is based on teacher input and student performance data. They have the freedom to select supplemental instructional programs and materials as needed. Educators at the school regularly benchmark student progress using *GradeQuick*, a computer-based grade book, and they frequently review the data to determine student growth. The school’s instructional leadership team holds conferences with struggling teachers and provides support by modeling lessons and helping teachers to develop weekly lesson plans.



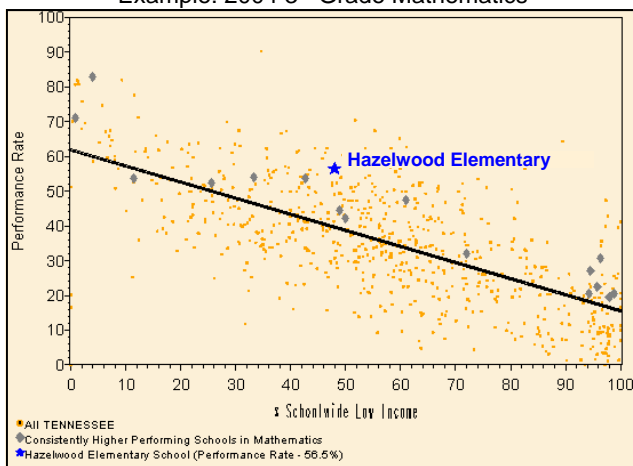
Hazelwood Elementary School Clarksville-Montgomery Co. School System

Just for the Kids, Tennessee NCEA Executive Summary

The School

Hazelwood Elementary School, which serves 913 kindergarten through fifth-grade students, is 1 of 18 elementary schools in Clarksville-Montgomery County School System (24,951 students). Hazelwood's student population is 53.2% White, 34.4% African American, 8.4% Hispanic, 2.1% Asian, and 1.9% other. Within this student population, 48.0% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2004 3rd Grade Mathematics



Consistent Higher Performance

Hazelwood Elementary School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics, reading, and science in an analysis that included third- through fifth-grade achievement data from 2002 and 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Hazelwood Elementary School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 85.2 in mathematics, 82.2 in reading, and 77.7 in science.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002 and 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			2004 Percentile Rank			Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
	3	4	5	3	4	5	
Mathematics	63	85	61	98	94	99	85.2
Reading	92	59	87	81	92	76	82.2
Science	56	79	88	90	62	92	77.7

*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. For detailed information on individual and overall average performance ranks for Hazelwood Elementary School, please visit www.just4kids.org.

Major Findings

The Director of Curriculum and Instruction leads the curriculum development process. Curriculum teams, composed of teacher representatives, develop units of study, scope and sequence documents, and pacing guides, which are aligned with the state standards and then piloted. Adjustments are made to the curriculum based on feedback from the pilot, and then all teachers in the district are trained in its use. Formal collaboration occurs through weekly grade-level meetings, faculty meetings, literacy team meetings, and grade-level chair meetings, all of which facilitate both horizontal and vertical collaboration. A teacher asserts that the *6+1 Traits of Writing* program has made the greatest difference in improving student achievement. Through the *Edusoft* data management system, principals can view school-level data, and teachers can view classroom-level data. Three learning labs are available to assist students who need academic support beyond the classroom—SOAR, *Read Naturally*, and an early intervention program.



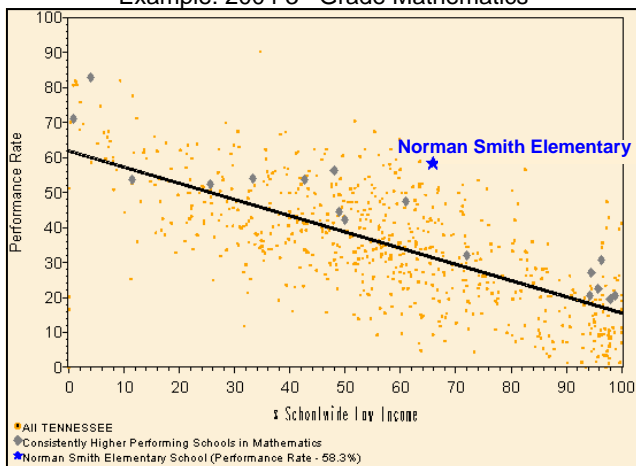
Norman Smith Elementary School Clarksville-Montgomery Co. School System

Just for the Kids, Tennessee NCEA Executive Summary

The School

Norman Smith Elementary School, which serves 483 kindergarten through fifth-grade students, is 1 of 18 elementary schools in Clarksville-Montgomery County School System (24,951 students). Norman Smith's student population is 56.3% White, 38.5% African American, 4.0% Hispanic, 0.2% Asian, and 1.0% other. Within this student population, 65.9% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2004 3rd Grade Mathematics



Consistent Higher Performance

Norman Smith Elementary School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics, reading, and science in an analysis that included third-through fifth-grade achievement data from 2002 and 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Norman Smith Elementary School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 76.2 in mathematics, 83.1 in reading, and 87.4 in science.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002 and 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			2004 Percentile Rank			Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
	3	4	5	3	4	5	
Grade	3	4	5	3	4	5	
Mathematics	67	45	73	99	90	85	76.2
Reading	85	77	74	98	76	91	83.1
Science	86	94	74	98	79	95	87.4

*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 Norman Smith Elementary School, please visit www.just4kids.org.

Major Findings

The school's academic goals are objective and measurable. The school expects students to meet or exceed national norm gains, with fewer students scoring in the lower quintiles. The district curriculum is clarified through pacing guides, curriculum maps, model lessons, instructional resources, and benchmark assessments. Teachers note that three or four teachers at the school are currently participating in the district's Aspiring Leaders program. Though the district mandates minimum instructional blocks for different subject areas, the school enjoys some level of flexibility in developing the school's schedule. Teachers complete a grade-level checklist for each student. This checklist lists specific skills in language arts, reading and spelling, and mathematics. For each skill, teachers mark whether the child has attained mastery, partial mastery, or non-mastery. The district provides a summer literacy camp for first- and second-grade students who are struggling with reading. Other intervention activities include math labs with math specialists, intervention-block instruction, and before- and after-school extended-day programming.

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



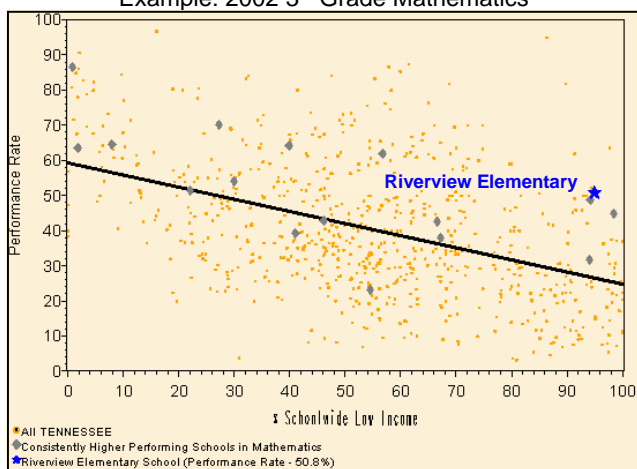
Riverview Elementary School Memphis City Schools

Just for the Kids, Tennessee NCEA Executive Summary

The School

Riverview Elementary School, which serves 383 kindergarten through fifth-grade students, is 1 of 117 elementary schools in Memphis City Schools (116,224 students). Riverview's student population is 100.0% African American. Within this student population, 94.6% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2002 3rd Grade Mathematics



Consistent Higher Performance

Riverview Elementary School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics, reading, and science in an analysis that included third- through fifth-grade achievement data from 2002 and 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Riverview Elementary School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 94.5 in mathematics, 96.6 in reading, and 96.5 in science.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002 and 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			2004 Percentile Rank			Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	
Mathematics	95	91	94	90	98	98	94.5
Reading	96	95	93	98	99	99	96.6
Science	95	96	98	94	99	96	96.5

*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 Riverview Elementary School, please visit www.just4kids.org.

Major Findings

A district leader explained that teachers developed the district curriculum, which was “properly sequenced, integrated across disciplines, and fully aligned with the state standards.” School leaders attribute their school’s success, in part, to closely following the Memphis City Schools (MCS) curriculum. Teachers at Riverview Elementary complete weekly lesson plans that clearly identify the standards that they will teach. The school has developed an instructional practices handbook based on the principal and instructional facilitator’s research, reflection, and analysis of test data. Tennessee schools may choose to administer the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) Achievement Test to K-2 students, and the district mandates administration of the reading and language arts TCAP Achievement Test at second grade; at Riverview Elementary, students begin taking the TCAP in first grade. The district has developed a five-step Academic Intervention Process for K-8 students, based on scientifically researched principles and aligned with the Tennessee Curriculum Standards, the district curriculum, and NCLB expectations. According to the associate superintendent, the goal of the Academic Intervention Process is “doing it differently, not doing it over.”

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



Tennessee 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 Tennessee Findings: Curriculum and Academic Goals

- **Schools identify a limited number of clear and measurable goals based on student achievement data, curriculum standards, and stakeholder input.**
 - The school identifies three primary goals in its School Improvement Plan:

1. Students will use critical-thinking and problem-solving strategies to raise their levels of reading comprehension and fluency. School-wide improvement in thinking and reasoning skills (as measured by TCAP) is to increase by two percent each year for a period of five years.
 2. Students will build upon their own personal experiences and use prior knowledge to make connections with various lessons and concepts taught across the curriculum. School-wide improvement in the targeted areas (Language Arts, Science, and Mathematics) is to increase by two percent each year for a period of five years.
 3. Students will demonstrate a two percent increase in socially acceptable behavior as measured by the number of disciplinary and guidance referrals. (Hamilton, Memphis City Schools)
- The school's improvement plan highlights specific, measurable goals. According to the Adequate Yearly Progress report, 50 percent of the non-proficient groups in language arts and reading skills will move to the proficiency level (95 percent) by the end of the school year; students will meet or exceed a score of four (competent) on the TCAP Writing Assessment by the end of the school year; and students will demonstrate an increased awareness of personal responsibility, which will be evident by a decrease in the percentage of students receiving office referrals. (Hazelwood, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System)
 - One of the school's measurable goals is to "expand students' abilities to use thinking and reasoning skills effectively, reach a 50-plus percentile by the end of the 2005-2006 school year, and [achieve] 4% growth each year for the next four years." (Riverview, Memphis City Schools)
 - The school's academic goals are objective and measurable, as the school expects students to meet or exceed national norm gains, with fewer students scoring in the lower quintiles. (Smith, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System)
- **Teachers are deeply involved in the development and refinement of the district curriculum.**
 - The district has leaders for curriculum development in each of the four core content areas. These leaders involve teachers and principals in the curriculum development process, which includes reviews of student performance indicators. Once developed, the curriculum is in continual review. Teachers review the curriculum after revisions have been completed and submit their suggestions for further fine-tuning. (Hamilton, Memphis City Schools)
 - Collaboration during weekly teacher-planning times provides additional opportunities for teachers to master the district curriculum and create lesson plans and units that are aligned with the district curriculum. (Hamilton, Memphis City Schools)
 - District administrators choose elementary, middle, and high school teachers to help develop the district's curriculum scope and sequence, curriculum standards, and pacing guides, using the Tennessee Curriculum Standards as a baseline guide. (Hazelwood, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System)
 - During summer curriculum revision sessions, teacher teams consider any problems or issues with the curriculum that have been recorded throughout the school year. Adjustments are made based on teacher feedback. (Hazelwood, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System)
 - Riverview administrators attribute their school's success, in part, to following the district curriculum and supplementing it with school-level programs. Teachers continually differentiate the curriculum and integrate literacy across all curricular domains to ensure all students succeed. (Riverview, Memphis City Schools)

- **School systems ensure learning continuity for highly mobile student populations through both grade-level and vertical alignment of the curriculum. Fidelity of curriculum implementation is supported through intensive teacher training and clarifying support materials.**
 - Consistency in communication and delivery of the curriculum is a top priority both in the district and at the school, particularly with the district's urban student population, which is predominantly poor, black, and mobile. To ensure this consistency, the district has developed curriculum guides with scope and sequence and curriculum mapping documents for each grade level in English, mathematics, science, and social studies. Hands-on training centered on the curriculum is provided both through the district and the school. (Hamilton, Memphis City Schools)
 - To ensure that teachers have a clear understanding of the district curriculum, Hazelwood Elementary teachers have access to school- and district-level staff development, conferences, and grade-level meetings. In addition, at the start of each school year, the principal reviews the district's standards and curriculum in detail. (Hazelwood, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System)
 - District meetings, professional development, and weekly school-wide professional development activities reinforce consistent curriculum use in the classroom. School faculty meetings and grade-level teacher meetings provide educators with opportunities to discuss the curriculum and pacing. Teachers at the school are expected to complete weekly lesson plans that clearly identify the standards taught. (Riverview, Memphis City Schools)
- **The implementation of the curriculum in classrooms is monitored.**
 - Hamilton Elementary has instituted numerous mechanisms to monitor curriculum implementation. Teachers develop lesson plans based on the specific student skills outlined in the district curriculum guides. Both the instructional facilitator and administrative staff use classroom observations, reviews of weekly lesson plans, observation of team-planning sessions, and the review of student performance data to monitor the fidelity of curriculum delivery. (Hamilton, Memphis City Schools)
 - To ensure uniform implementation of the curriculum across classrooms, the principal conducts walkthroughs on a daily basis. These quick classroom visits ensure that teachers are implementing lesson plans, properly posting standards in each classroom, and actively engaging students. (Hazelwood, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System)
 - Teachers complete weekly lesson plans that clearly identify the standards to be taught, however, monitoring of curriculum implementation occurs primarily through the review and analysis of student and classroom-level data. (Riverview, Memphis City Schools)
 - To ensure uniform implementation of the curriculum throughout the school, the principal of Smith Elementary reports conducting informal walkthroughs of each classroom three to four times a year. Administrators at the school also check lesson plans, and teachers share their individual curricular successes with their fellow teachers. (Smith, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System)



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 Tennessee Findings: Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building

- **The district actively develops its own pool of administrator candidates.**
 - In partnership with the University of Memphis, the district provides intensive job-embedded development and support for promising principal candidates. Selected candidates participate in a six-week Summer Foundations Institute and serve as interns in “resident principalships” for one year with high-performing principals in the district. Candidates also receive training through the Leadership Academy. (Hamilton, Memphis City Schools)
 - To promote leadership internally, the district has an Aspiring Leaders program for teachers and assistant principals. Only 2 of the district’s 30 current school principals were not developed internally. The district also offers training for assistant principals to develop leadership capacity. Hazelwood Elementary provides teachers with leadership opportunities through its leadership team. The team, comprised of teacher representatives from each grade level, assists the school’s principal in the decision-making process. (Hazelwood, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System)
 - Teachers at Smith Elementary note that three or four teachers at the school are currently participating in the district’s Aspiring Leaders program. (Smith, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System)
- **Professional development and mentorship activities are practice-oriented. Activities center on deepening content knowledge and enhancing instructional strategies.**
 - New teachers participate in the school’s Wildcat Mentoring Program, in which they and their mentors meet on a weekly basis. Mentors and coaches working with beginning teachers participate in Mentor Academies facilitated by the New Teacher Center program at the University of Memphis. These academies consist of eight three-day seminars conducted over a two-year time span. The sessions cover topics such as foundations in mentoring and formal assessment, observation strategies, designing instruction tailored to beginning teacher needs, reflecting on data to inform practice, mentoring for equity, coaching in complex situations, artifacts of practice, and mentor leadership skills. Mentors meet weekly to discuss issues and share advice. Two teachers at Hamilton Elementary have participated in the Mentor Academies. (Hamilton, Memphis City Schools)
 - The principal uses two site-based training days prior to the start of the school year to assist new teachers and review information about the school. The principal meets with beginning teachers weekly for the first grading period. These meetings are informal, and the principal uses videos from education expert Harry Wong, discusses school board policies, and covers the student handbook. Mentor teachers observe and meet with new teachers on an as-needed basis. Mentors volunteer to provide assistance and may be assigned multiple new teachers at the same time. The principal encourages beginning teachers to observe other teachers, both at their grade level and at other grade levels. (Hazelwood, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System)
 - Site-based training has included collaboration for inclusion, integration of technology, use of the electronic report card, and the implementation of both *6+1 Traits of Writing* and

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). (Hazelwood, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System)

- At Riverview Elementary, mentor teachers are trained by the State Department of Education, and they receive compensation for their mentoring services. New teachers attend the district's new teacher orientation, and the school's instructional facilitator is available to support and guide new teachers throughout the school year. (Riverview, Memphis City Schools)
- School-level training has recently focused on strategies to reinforce the use of the district curriculum in the classroom. (Riverview, Memphis City Schools)
- In addition to more formal meetings, teachers are required to visit two classrooms in the school at grade levels other than their own. (Smith, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System)
- **Teacher collaboration is instructionally focused and includes activities such as studying the curriculum or sharing effective teaching strategies.**
 - Hamilton Elementary has designated specific time during the school week for teacher collaboration. Teachers meet weekly during their grade-level planning period to discuss the district curriculum, formally plan lessons and larger curricular units, and evaluate student data. Teachers also use these hour-long planning periods to collaborate on creative and innovative supplementary materials, to reflect on instruction, and to explore mechanisms for improving instruction. The school also has faculty meetings on a weekly basis for horizontal and vertical collaboration and professional development. (Hamilton, Memphis City Schools)
 - The school's move to a new block schedule enables teachers to participate in grade-level meetings and in cross-grade collaboration. Teachers frequently collaborate both vertically and horizontally during designated meeting times. (Hazelwood, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System)
 - Hamilton Elementary teachers informally collaborate across grade levels, and, several times each year, teachers participate in book readings. In addition to meeting with fellow teachers, teachers at the school also meet and collaborate with support staff in order to reinforce and supplement curricular units and technology needs. (Hamilton, Memphis City Schools)
 - Formal collaboration at Hazelwood occurs through weekly grade-level meetings, faculty meetings, literacy team meetings, and grade-level chair meetings, all of which facilitate both horizontal and vertical collaboration. During grade-level meetings, teachers discuss curriculum scope and sequence, analyze samples of mock writing assignments, evaluate staff development, and share enrichment activities. (Hazelwood, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System)
- **Classrooms are open learning environments for adults as well as students. Visits from other teachers, instructional specialists, and mentors are regular events and serve as an important source of capacity building.**
 - Teachers reported feeling comfortable visiting other classrooms and having their peers visit their classrooms. Teachers also visit classrooms in other schools in the district. The school's instructional facilitator and literacy coordinator observe classrooms and provide detailed feedback to teachers. The instructional facilitator provides additional instructional materials and supplies as needed and may also model lesson delivery. (Hamilton, Memphis City Schools)
 - The principal explained that she is "trying to encourage teachers to think beyond their classrooms"; instead of thinking about students in their classrooms as their only students, she wants teachers to share responsibility for all children in the school. One teacher reported visiting other teachers' classrooms and collaborating with the school's literacy coach. (Hazelwood, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System)

- Teachers reported that they are encouraged to visit each others' classrooms. They also meet in research teams where they collaboratively analyze their student data to identify strengths and weaknesses and then design classroom-based responses to the identified needs. An instructional facilitator also assists in the planning processes. (Riverview, Memphis City Schools)
- Teachers assert that they are "in each other's classrooms on a daily basis." While teachers are required to visit two other classrooms in the building, they report visiting other classrooms far more frequently than mandated, often "to get new instructional ideas or gain a different viewpoint on teaching and learning." (Smith, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System)



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 Tennessee Findings: Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

- **District and school leaders describe high-quality instruction as differentiated, standards-based, and data-driven.**
 - School leaders stated that strong performance on certain indicators, e.g., DIBELS (*Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills*), is evidence of high-quality instruction. Teachers indicated that instruction is driven by student data and student needs assessments. They use small learning communities, instructional centers, and independent projects to differentiate instruction, addressing varying student learning styles and achievement levels. (Hamilton, Memphis City Schools)
 - In discussing high-quality instruction, a district administrator described it as "differentiated, data-driven, and standards-based." The administrator indicated that flexible grouping was one of the primary strategies used to differentiate instruction. The principal of Hazelwood echoed the district administrator and stated, "High-quality instruction is standards-based and has a clear and shared focus between teachers and students." (Hazelwood, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System)
 - School staff have developed an instructional practices handbook based on research, reflection, and analysis of test data. The handbook provides detailed information on strategies such as differentiated instruction and teaching higher order thinking skills. School leaders also state that high-quality instruction is facilitated by the teachers' use of the district curriculum. Teachers differentiate instruction so all students can be successful. Students are expected to do a great deal of reading, reflecting, and reasoning. (Riverview, Memphis City Schools)
 - According to a district administrator, the district mandates standards-based instruction. The district has outlined the characteristics of a standards-based classroom and developed a rubric to enable administrators to determine the level of implementation of those characteristics in walkthrough visits. The district has also developed a checklist for teachers presented in *Is Your Classroom a Standards-Based Classroom?* (Smith, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System)

- **Literacy is the primary focus of many instructional programs, practices, and arrangements.**
 - According to the superintendent, the district has a strong focus on literacy. In addition to evaluating the literacy programs currently in place, the district is evaluating principals' and teachers' understanding of these programs. The superintendent stressed that there is a need for collaboration on literacy "across the board." At the school level, administrators at Hamilton assert that the district's literacy reform has had the greatest effect on improving student achievement. They explained that the implementation of the *Reading First* program has had a tremendous impact on K-3 teachers, organizing teachers' literacy delivery strategies and focusing teachers on specific literacy skills. To support implementation of the literacy efforts at Hamilton, the principal has focused the staff on instructional strategies and improvement models to establish a continuous literacy learning community, and the results for students have been "remarkable." (Hamilton, Memphis City Schools)
 - According to a district administrator, student achievement is the district's priority. To support student achievement, the district has put an emphasis on literacy for the past two years. As part of the literacy focus, the district mandates the use of the Balanced Literacy Model. The district instructional team, in collaboration with elementary and middle school principals, developed a Balanced Literacy Model that delineates instructional processes (e.g., grouping strategies, guided instruction, modeling, practice, interactive read-alouds, independent work), content (e.g., phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension strategies, writing), collaboration (e.g., reflection, discussion, practice, planning), and ongoing and formative assessment (e.g., textbook tests, running records, inventories, observations, checklists, portfolios, standardized tests). The district also mandates the use of the *6+1 Traits of Writing* model. (Hazelwood, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System)
 - At Riverview, a classroom teacher asserted that the current focus on literacy has made a major impact on improving students' literacy achievement. Teachers reinforce reading fluency and understanding in every subject. The same teacher noted that school administrators work with Adopt-a-School to ensure every classroom has a library to enhance the amount of reading material immediately available to students. (Riverview, Memphis City Schools)
 - Smith administrators attributed their school's success, in part, to the district's Balanced Literacy and *6+1 Traits of Writing* initiatives. In addition to these district-mandated programs, the use of interactive word walls is strongly encouraged at Smith. A district administrator added that the district provides comprehensive staff development to ensure uniform implementation of selected programs. External consultants provided intensive initial and follow-up training. Smith teachers noted that any new instructional program initiatives begin with the training of principals. (Smith, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System)
- **Within district scheduling guidelines, schools tailor daily schedules to emphasize areas of special importance to their students.**
 - The school schedule is designed to keep classrooms on task and provide opportunities for cross-curricular integration. For example, teachers use science and social studies units to provide content instruction while building and reinforcing students' literacy skills. (Hamilton, Memphis City Schools)
 - The school administration has been very creative with scheduling to ensure teachers have time to collaborate and use flexible learning groups, while providing adequate learning time. (Hazelwood, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System)
 - The district requires that elementary schools schedule a 90-minute block for daily literacy instruction and a 60-minute block for daily mathematics instruction. At Riverview Elementary, literacy is a primary focus, as reflected in the 120 minutes per day the school devotes to literacy instruction. Students attend class from 8:00 AM to 3:30 PM, and the school offers after-school activities from 3:30 PM to 5:00 PM. (Riverview, Memphis City Schools)



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

- **School administrators use multiple observations (formal and informal) and student achievement data to inform evaluations of teachers and instructional programs.**
 - Hamilton Elementary has adopted several literacy observation tools to improve teachers' instructional performance, including a Literacy Observation Checklist, which records whether instruction is systematic, explicit, and data-driven; whether the lesson has a measurable objective, focuses on the five components of reading, integrates nonfiction texts, and includes cross-curricular integration; and whether the classroom climate is respectful of students and their contributions. There is also a Literacy Environment Checklist and a Literacy Observation Tool. This form has space for qualitative comments related to strengths, concerns, and recommendations for next steps. The administrator or instructional facilitator conducting the observation meets with the teacher to discuss results. (Hamilton, Memphis City Schools)
 - The district gives principals a testing folder that includes criterion-referenced test results, both aggregated and disaggregated by NCLB subgroups. These data are immediately available to administrators, teachers, and students, and the principal uses these data to determine whether the school is succeeding in meeting student needs. (Hazelwood, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System)
 - Smith Elementary administrators monitor program implementation through classroom observations, benchmark assessment results, checklists, and academic conferences with teachers. The school also uses *ThinkLink* to evaluate selected instructional programs, and posting of student work provides further evidence of program effectiveness. (Smith, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System)
 - The school uses the following walkthrough documents: classroom literacy observation form, classroom literacy environment checklist, and environmental "look-fors" in a standards-based classroom. The school monitors progress through the use of walkthroughs and aggregates data by grade level for dissemination. (Smith, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System)
- **School administrators and teachers track student progress on an ongoing basis, using multiple assessments to identify standards mastery or individual student needs.**
 - Educators at the school regularly benchmark student progress using *GradeQuick*, a computer-based grade book, and they frequently review the data to determine student growth. (Hamilton, Memphis City Schools)
 - Teachers monitor student literacy progress on a bi-weekly basis using Scott Foresman unit tests. They also administer the district-mandated mathematics and Student Performance Indicator (SPI) science assessments every six weeks. (Hamilton, Memphis City Schools)
 - Through the *Edusoft* data management system, principals can view school-level data, and teachers can view classroom-level data. The *Edusoft* system provides assessment data very quickly and in a variety of detailed formats. (Hazelwood, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System)

- Tennessee schools may choose to administer the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) Achievement Test to K-2 students, and the district mandates administration of the reading and language arts TCAP Achievement Test at second grade; at Riverview Elementary, students begin taking the TCAP in first grade. (Riverview, Memphis City Schools)
 - Teachers monitor student progress through unit tests, teacher-made tests, classroom observations, and students' interactions and collaboration on class projects. Teachers track student achievement on oral comprehension record forms, individual assessment progress summaries and scoring guides, class progress indicator forms, portfolio summaries, experiment/project evaluation checklists, concept and unit checklists, skills rating charts, observation checklists, TCAP Achievement CRT individual student profiles, and grade-level skill mastery charts. School administrators monitor success based on periodic tests, classroom performance, and six-week grading reports. (Riverview, Memphis City Schools)
 - District policy requires monitoring and disaggregation of student data every six weeks. The school's instructional facilitator assists teachers in using achievement data to improve student learning. (Riverview, Memphis City Schools)
 - The assessment calendar includes a variety of assessments that occur at the school throughout the year: three *Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills* (DIBELS) assessments for kindergarten to second grade; three language arts benchmark assessments for grades 3-5; three mathematics benchmark assessments for grades 3-5; two science benchmark assessments for grades 3-5; and one writing assessment for grade 5. (Smith, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System)
 - Teachers receive TCAP results as soon as the district receives them, and benchmark test results (aggregated and disaggregated) are also provided. As part of the benchmark reports, teachers get suggestions for model lessons, performance comparisons to the previous benchmark assessment, and a variety of other information. (Smith, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System)
- **Teachers are adequately prepared to examine and analyze student data to inform instructional practices. Item analysis of test questions allows teachers to pinpoint their instructional adjustments.**
 - Teachers are expected to develop lesson plans based on the specific student skills outlined in the district's curriculum guides. Both the instructional facilitator and administrative staff at the school continually monitor curriculum implementation through formal and informal classroom observations, reviews of weekly lesson planning materials, formal weekly team planning sessions, and collection of data related to student progress. Furthermore, teachers at the school disaggregate student performance data to determine their own effectiveness and the performance level of their students. Teachers then use data results to adjust their lessons accordingly. (Hamilton, Memphis City Schools)
 - Teachers use *Edusoft* system reports to highlight areas of instructional concern. Teachers also monitor student performance using reading and mathematics pre- and post-tests, Early Start and STAR assessments, and DIBELS. (Hazelwood, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System)
 - Research groups collaborate on data analysis. Teachers meet in research teams and analyze their student data to identify strengths and weaknesses. They then design classroom-based programs to address the identified needs. School administrators participate in these research team meetings on a monthly basis to identify innovative instruction and best practices that improve instruction and student learning. (Riverview, Memphis City 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 Tennessee Findings: Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustment

- **Schools create opportunities to recognize teachers' and students' successes.**
 - The school recognizes its teachers through a TCAP score celebration. The names of all Hamilton Elementary students who make the honor roll are posted in the school at the end of each grading period, and the school holds an honors assembly each six weeks to recognize students for attendance, academic achievement, and meeting academic benchmarks. The school also hosts a student recognition day at the end of the school year. Teachers celebrate student success throughout the year, providing certificates and awards (such as pencils) to students for their accomplishments. (Hamilton, Memphis City Schools)
 - The district recognizes educators and staff, students, and community members through Point of Pride Awards presented at the district's monthly board meetings. Elementary schools have building-level celebrations on a monthly basis and recognition activities for students' effort and achievement every six weeks. There are a number of school recognition activities, including the "All-Star Lunch," in which teachers select their "best all-around" student to attend luncheons throughout the school year. The school holds an annual academic honors program and a reading celebration, and they recognize the school's most improved students. The school distributes BUG (Bringing Up Grades) awards to students who continue to improve their grades and hosts awards programs throughout the year to recognize success in the *Accelerated Reader* program. (Hazelwood, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System)
 - The school publishes the Principal's Honor Roll (all As) and the High Honor Roll (As and Bs) each six weeks. Students receiving these distinctions must also have satisfactory conduct. High honor roll students in fourth and fifth grades are inducted into the National Beta Club. The school hosts an assembly program each six weeks to recognize students for academic achievement, most improved performance, and perfect attendance. At the end of the school year, Riverview Elementary hosts an Academic Honors Assembly to recognize student achievement. The school displays high achievers' photos in the hallway. (Riverview, Memphis City Schools)
 - The school and its staff have received numerous awards, including the Milliken Educator, Clarksville Teacher of the Year, and Tennessee District Teacher of the Year. The school celebrates students' achievement through awards assemblies that parents attend. Students are recognized for the A Honor Roll, A and B Honor Roll, perfect attendance, and strong character. (Smith, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System)
- **Struggling teachers benefit from a number of district-wide and site-based programs for improvement.**
 - The school's instructional leadership team meets with struggling teachers and provides support by modeling lessons and helping teachers to develop weekly lesson plans. Leaders also observe additional lessons, conference with teachers to encourage reflection, and collect relevant instructional artifacts (e.g., lesson plans and student work). Following these activities, the administrator creates a short descriptive profile for the teacher, identifies strengths and weaknesses, and reviews instructional artifacts and student

performance data. Working with the teacher, the administrator then targets intervention strategies. (Hamilton, Memphis City Schools)

- The principal may assign targeted readings or videos to struggling teachers and meet to discuss the contents. A teacher noted that administrators provide continual information about instructional strengths and weaknesses following walkthroughs. She added that the principal reviews student performance data and lesson plans. (Hazelwood, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System)
- The instructional facilitator at the school provides personal teacher evaluation and individual coaching to struggling teachers. School administrators added that teacher evaluation is “constant,” noting that evaluations are based partially on student achievement data and reviews of lesson plans. (Riverview, Memphis City Schools)
- A district administrator reported that principals are primarily responsible for providing support to struggling teachers, whom they identify through walkthroughs and informal classroom visits. Support may include the assignment of mentors, coaches, or specified professional development. (Smith, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System)

▪ **To focus on building skills, higher performing systems provide students with appropriately leveled intervention opportunities both within and outside the traditional school day.**

- The district has developed a five-step academic intervention process for kindergarten through eighth-grade students, that is based on scientifically-researched principles and aligned with the Tennessee Curriculum Standards, the district curriculum, and NCLB expectations. According to the associate superintendent, the goal of the Academic Intervention Process is “not doing it over, [but] doing it differently.” (Hamilton, Memphis City Schools)
- The school has adopted the *Early Success* and *Soar to Success* programs to serve students from kindergarten to third grade. These in-school and after-school tutoring programs provide 20 minutes of assessment preparation and practice, 30 minutes of core intervention, 15 minutes of specific reading strategies, and 10 minutes of closing activities. The school uses the *Voyager Passport* intervention program for students who are two to three years below grade level. (Hamilton, Memphis City Schools)
- Hamilton Elementary uses individual educational profiles to identify student needs for special education or gifted and talented programming. The school provides pull-out programs for both of these student groups, and accelerated students can take part in the school’s Weekend Academy. (Hamilton, Memphis City Schools)
- Teachers use the *Accelerated Reader*, *STAR*, *Voyager Passport*, and *LeapFrog* programs to intervene with struggling readers. (Riverview, Memphis City Schools)
- Accelerated students receive enrichment through the district-developed Creative Learning in a Unique Environment (CLUE) program. (Riverview, Memphis City Schools)
- Student data revealed that the school’s higher ability students were not making gains on the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) test, so the school started providing before- and after-school enrichment programming to target these students. (Smith, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System)
- Teachers identify struggling students through a review of student data. The school offers support from mathematics specialists in the mathematics lab, intervention block instruction, and before- and after-school extended-day programming. (Smith, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System)
- The school identifies gifted students through testing. School administrators report that services for gifted and talented students generally center on classroom teachers providing more focus and enriching the curriculum. (Smith, Clarksville-Montgomery County School System)



Tennessee Elementary School Best Practice Study: Conclusion

Based on the Themes of The JFTK Framework

Researchers conducted site visits to six elementary schools in Tennessee, 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 goals for each of these consistently higher performing schools were specific, objective, and measurable. The targeted improvements were tied to minimum percentages of growth for content areas and included higher expectations of lower performing students. District and school leaders and teachers provided significant enhancements to the state standards. These enhancements included lesson plans and units, scope and sequence documents, and pacing guides. Districts provided training, collaborative curriculum revision opportunities, and multiple forms of evaluation to ensure that all students benefited from faithful and consistent implementation of the curriculum.

Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building

Districts actively sought to develop potential leaders from within the schools. All districts provided some form of development opportunity for teachers to earn administrator certification. One district with 30 principals had hired only two of them from outside the district. Principals ensured that teachers had time to collaborate by scheduling meeting times within the daily schedule. Teacher collaboration is instructionally focused and includes activities such as studying the curriculum or sharing effective teaching strategies. Classrooms were open learning environments for adults as well as students. Visits from other teachers, instructional specialists, and mentors were regular events and served as an important source of capacity building.

Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

Instructional programs, selected with great amounts of teacher input, were primarily mandated at the district level. Teachers were encouraged to supplement the adopted programs with appropriate classroom materials. Literacy was the primary focus of many instructional programs, practices, and arrangements. Though the districts mandated minimum segments of instructional time—particularly in core subject areas—principals and teachers were free to fine-tune their schedules to meet the needs of their students.

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data

Principals used checklists during walkthroughs to ensure that they remained focused on those aspects of the classroom that mattered most with regard to student achievement. These forms included spaces for qualitative comments to be shared with the teacher during debriefing. Assessment schedules were comprehensive and included both criterion-referenced tests and norm-referenced tests. Districts returned assessment data to the schools quickly, and teachers were trained to interpret those data and adjust their instruction to address student needs that were reflected in those data.

Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustment

Students and teachers alike enjoyed multiple opportunities for recognition. Celebrations of students' achievements took many forms, including awards, special luncheons, honor rolls, and—in one school—having their photos displayed in the school's hallway. Instructional facilitators, mentors, and new teacher academies provided support for struggling teachers. Students in need of support benefited from a number of packaged intervention programs, before- and after-school programs, pull-out programs, and tutoring in content labs. In one school, gifted students had the option of attending their school's accelerated Weekend Academy.

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 and previous 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–Tennessee 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 Tennessee.