

National Center for Educational Accountability

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Just for the Kids – Illinois Elementary and Middle School Best Practice Study, 2004-05

Elementary Schools

Irving Elementary School, Berwyn South School District 100
Sunset Hills Elementary School, Pekin Public School District 108
Whittier Primary School, Peoria School District 150

Middle Schools

A.M. Jackson Math and Science Academy, East St. Louis School District 189
Central Junior High School, Belleville School District 118
Edison Junior High School, Pekin Public School District 108
Giant City Elementary School, Giant City Community Consolidated School District 130
Sullivan Middle School, Sullivan Community Unit School District 300
Unity Point Elementary School, Unity Point Community Consolidated School District 140
Vienna Elementary School, Vienna School District 55
Von Steuben Middle School, Peoria School District 150
West Junior High School, Belleville School District 118

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Just for the Kids, Illinois

Elementary and Middle School Best Practice Study, 2004-2005

The Study

The Illinois Elementary and Middle 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 Illinois, research teams investigated nine consistently higher performing schools and one average-performing middle school to determine the differences in practices between higher and average-performing middle schools. To build on a previous study of 14 Illinois elementary schools, an additional three higher performing elementary schools were also investigated this year. 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.

Conducted by the College of Education at Illinois State University, the 2004-2005 Illinois Elementary and Middle School Best Practice Study was sponsored by the Just for the Kids-Illinois affiliate (JFTK-IL) and received funding from State Farm and The Broad Foundation. JFTK-IL is a collaboration of the Illinois Business Roundtable, the College of Education at Illinois State University, and the National Center for Educational Accountability.

Researchers used site-based interviews and observations, as well as the analysis of supportive documentation, to investigate the practices of each of the 13 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

Research teams 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 Illinois, 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 researchers from the College of Education at Illinois State University. The JFTK Best Practice Framework, developed by NCEA, provides the structure for the findings.



Just for the Kids, Illinois

Elementary and Middle School Best Practice Study, 2004-2005

The School Identification Process

To study the practices of consistently higher performing schools, these schools must be identified and their practices compared 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 Illinois State Board of Education to identify elementary schools that consistently outperformed other schools with similar demographics in mathematics, reading, writing, science, and social studies in the 2001-02, 2002-03, and 2003-04 school years. The analysis included data from the third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade Illinois Standards Achievement Tests (ISAT) in those subjects. To identify middle schools that consistently outperformed their peers in those same subjects, NCEA used data from the seventh- and eighth-grade Illinois Standards Achievement Tests in 2000-01, 2001-02, and 2002-03.

To identify the schools, NCEA conducted a separate analysis for each subject (mathematics, reading, writing, science, and social studies) and year (2002, 2003, and 2004 for elementary or 2001, 2002, and 2003 for middle schools) to learn which schools outperformed their demographic peers on the percentage of students meeting the “Exceeds”¹ standard for elementary schools and the “Meets” standard for middle schools. 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 the analysis of elementary schools were the school’s percentage of low-income, English Language Learner (ELL), African American, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian students; and the size of the school. The demographic and other variables used in the analysis of middle schools were the school’s percentage of low-income and ELL students and the size of the school.² 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 Illinois.

NCEA ranked each school against the elementary or middle schools in the rest of the state based on the extent to which it outperformed its “predicted” percent of students meeting the “Meets” or “Exceeds” standard. For example, a middle school that outperformed 96% of the schools in “performance relative to predicted” in eighth-grade reading in 2003 would receive a percentile rank of 96 for that subject and year. These ranks were averaged separately for each subject area 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, elementary schools had to have overall average percentile ranks above 80 in both mathematics and reading (above 85 if only one grade was tested) and above 75 in writing, science, and social studies. Middle schools had to have overall average percentile ranks above 66.6 in all five subjects. Elementary schools also had to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements in 2003 and 2004. AYP data were not available for middle schools.

¹ Elementary schools were compared based on the “Meets” standard in 2002.

² At the time of the middle school analysis, school-wide ethnicity percentages that would normally be part of the regression analysis were not available for Illinois.



Just for the Kids, Illinois

Elementary and Middle School Best Practice Study, 2004-2005

The Studied Schools

Elementary School	District	2004 Enrollment		2004 School-Wide Demographics						
		Grade Span	No. of Students	African American	Hispanic	White	Asian	Other	Low Income	ELL
Irving Elementary School	Berwyn South School District 100	PK-6	445	0.4%	46.1%	52.4%	1.1%	0.0%	38.9%	0.0%
Sunset Hills Elementary School	Pekin Public School District 108	K-3	195	0.5%	2.6%	95.9%	0.5%	0.5%	29.7%	0.0%
Whittier Primary School	Peoria School District 150	K-4	355	47.0%	4.8%	46.5%	1.4%	0.3%	60.0%	0.6%

Student enrollment and demographic data are taken from the individual case reports prepared by Illinois State University researchers, originally taken from the Illinois State Report Card (2003-2004) <http://iirc.niu.edu>.

Middle School	District	2003 Enrollment		2003 School-Wide Demographics						
		Grade Span	No. of Students	African American	Hispanic	White	Asian	Other	Low Income	ELL
A.M. Jackson Math & Science Academy	East St. Louis School District 189	PK-8*	327	100%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	84.1%	0.0%
Central Junior High School	Belleville School District 118	7-8	415	23.1%	1.2%	74.2%	0.5%	1.0%	39.5%	0.0%
Edison Junior High School	Pekin Public School District 108	7-8	417	0.0%	1.4%	97.4%	1.2%	0.0%	32.9%	0.0%
Giant City Elementary School	Giant City C.C. School District 130	K-8*	260	1.5%	1.2%	93.8%	3.5%	0.0%	20.4%	0.0%
Sullivan Middle School	Sullivan C.U. School District 300	6-8	263	0.4%	0.0%	98.1%	1.1%	0.4%	21.7%	0.0%
Unity Point Elementary School	Unity Point C.C. School District 140	PK-8*	744	15.3%	5.2%	67.7%	11.6%	0.2%	51.7%	5.8%
Vienna Elementary School	Vienna School District 55	PK-8*	418	0.7%	1.4%	97.1%	0.5%	0.3%	46.2%	0.0%
Von Steuben Middle School	Peoria School District 150	5-8	386	39.6%	2.1%	57.3%	1.0%	0.0%	47.9%	0.0%
West Junior High School	Belleville School District 118	7-8	426	35.4%	1.6%	60.3%	2.6%	0.1%	49.5%	0.5%

Student enrollment and demographic data are taken from the individual case reports prepared by Illinois State University researchers, originally taken from the Illinois State Report Card (2002-2003) located at <http://iirc.niu.edu>.

* Although these schools also include elementary grades, they were identified as higher performing based on performance in seventh and eighth grades.



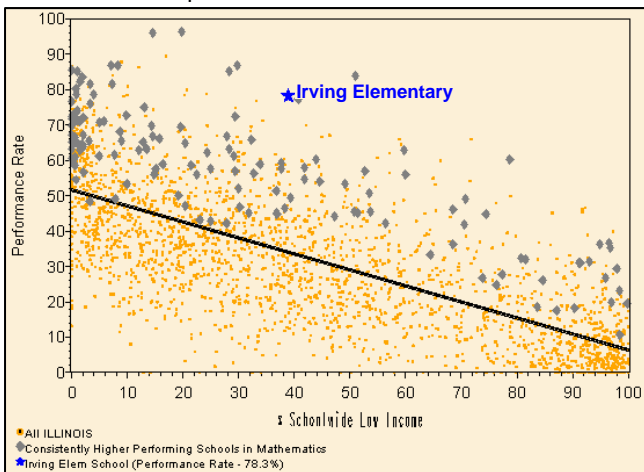
Irving Elementary School Berwyn South School District 100

Just for the Kids, Illinois Executive Summary

The School

Irving Elementary School (445 students) is one of six elementary schools in Berwyn South School District 100 (3,421 students). Serving pre-kindergarten through sixth-grade students, Irving's student population is 52.4% White, 46.1% Hispanic, 1.1% Asian, and 0.4% African American. Within this student population, there are no English Language Learners, and 38.9% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2004 3rd Grade Mathematics



Consistent Higher Performance

Irving Elementary School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in all five subject areas: mathematics, reading, writing, science, and social studies. The analysis included all tested third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. Using Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Irving Elementary School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 95.6 in mathematics, 84.8 in reading, 75.3 in writing, 82.9 in science, and 75.3 in social studies.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data, with site visits occurring during the 2004-2005 school year. Differences between the demographics reported in this case study and the values shown on the scatter plot reveal demographic changes in the school between 2002 and 2005.

Subject	2002			2003			2004			Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
	Percentile Rank			Percentile Rank			Percentile Rank			
Grade	3	4	5	3	4	5	3	4	5	
Mathematics	94	N/A	94	96	N/A	96	99	N/A	95	95.6
Reading	71	N/A	84	87	N/A	80	89	N/A	95	84.8
Writing	72	N/A	59	88	N/A	84	82	N/A	67	75.3
Science	N/A	68	N/A	N/A	91	N/A	N/A	87	N/A	82.9
Social Studies	N/A	91	N/A	N/A	92	N/A	N/A	51	N/A	75.3

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

Major Findings

Specific academic objectives are articulated by grade level and subject area in Berwyn South School District 100. This work provided the foundation for the systemic implementation of *Everyday Mathematics* and the *HBJ (Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich)* reading series. Collegial consultations about the best instructional strategies to successfully deliver the curriculum are a never-ending flow of interactions among staff members. Recognizing the need to be particularly skilled at instructional strategies to serve children of poverty, the district provides teachers with extensive training at the Ruby Payne Institute. At the school level, the principal and the teachers are skilled at analyzing data from the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) to identify areas of curricular imbalance or instructional weaknesses. District leaders are keenly aware of the need to use a variety of intervention strategies from the earliest age levels, when children first enter the school system.



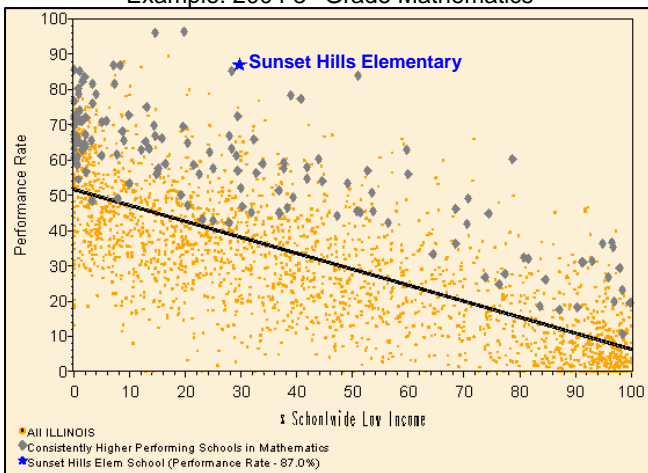
Sunset Hills Elementary School Pekin Public School District 108

Just for the Kids, Illinois Executive Summary

The School

Sunset Hills Elementary School (195 students) is one of six elementary schools in Pekin Public School District 108 (3,587 students). Serving kindergarten through third-grade students, Sunset Hills's student population is 95.9% White, 2.6% Hispanic, 0.5% African American, 0.5% Asian, and 0.5% other. Within this student population, there are no English Language Learners, and 29.7% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2004 3rd Grade Mathematics



Consistent Higher Performance

Sunset Hills Elementary School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in three of five subject areas: mathematics, reading, and writing. The analysis included all tested third-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. Using Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Sunset Hills Elementary School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 96.7 in mathematics, 94.4 in reading, and 91.7 in writing.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data, with site visits occurring during the 2004-2005 school year. Differences between the demographics reported in this case study and the values shown on the scatter plot reveal demographic changes in the school between 2002 and 2005.

Subject	2002 Percentile Rank	2003 Percentile Rank	2004 Percentile Rank	Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
Grade	3	3	3	
Mathematics	92	99	99	96.7
Reading	93	99	91	94.4
Writing	98	97	80	91.7

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

Major Findings

Pekin Public School District 108 has developed a district-wide process to align and coordinate the district, school, and classroom academic goals and improvement planning. A large part of the success of this alignment is due to the clear learning expectations that have been set by grade and subject in the district. Ensuring all students meet these expectations provides an opportunity for the school community to work together using the Plan, Do, Study, Act process. Using this process, the district sets and tightly monitors goals and timelines. The district has used the Malcolm Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence for over five years as the model to guide the continuous improvement process. The district has developed quality indicators—the “Seven Components of Quality Schools”—for measuring excellence. The principal instructs teachers at Sunset Hills how to analyze and use student performance data rather than just “relying on their intuition” to guide their instruction.

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



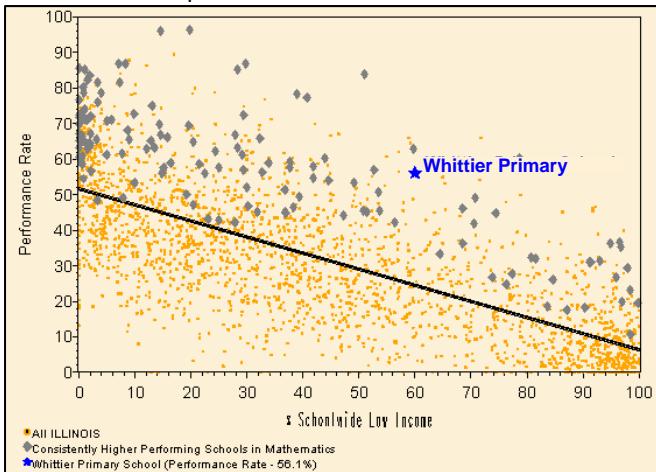
Whittier Primary School Peoria School District 150

Just for the Kids, Illinois Executive Summary

The School

Whittier Primary School (355 students) is 1 of 15 primary schools in Peoria School District 150 (15,001 students). Serving kindergarten through fourth-grade students, Whittier's student population is 47.0% African American, 46.5% White, 4.8% Hispanic, 1.4% Asian, and 0.3% other. Within this student population, 0.6% are English Language Learners, and 60.0% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2004 3rd Grade Mathematics



Consistent Higher Performance

Whittier Primary School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in all five subject areas: mathematics, reading, writing, science, and social studies. The analysis included all tested third- and fourth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. Using Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Whittier Primary School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 87.5 in mathematics, 85.9 in reading, 81.9 in writing, 77.9 in science, and 75.4 in social studies.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data, with site visits occurring during the 2004-2005 school year. Differences between the demographics reported in this case study and the values shown on the scatter plot reveal demographic changes in the school between 2002 and 2005.

Subject	2002		2003		2004		Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
	Percentile Rank		Percentile Rank		Percentile Rank		
Grade	3	4	3	4	3	4	
Mathematics	72	N/A	92	N/A	98	N/A	87.5
Reading	76	N/A	83	N/A	99	N/A	85.9
Writing	89	N/A	62	N/A	97	N/A	81.9
Science	N/A	94	N/A	87	N/A	53	77.9
Social Studies	N/A	84	N/A	86	N/A	56	75.4

*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.

Major Findings

At Whittier Primary School, the faculty agree upon the academic goals and curriculum, which they directly align with the state standards. The faculty use weekly grade-level meetings to discuss pacing guides and ensure uniform implementation of the curriculum across classrooms. Additionally, virtually all faculty meetings are used for professional development in curriculum and instruction. The district has adopted *Open Court*, a research-based reading program, to which many Whittier staff attribute the dramatic rise in reading test scores. The principal monitors quarterly assessment reports to determine how to better support teachers in achieving instructional excellence. Students receive additional help through workshops or differentiated instruction via the *Open Court* reading program.

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

A.M. Jackson Math and Science Academy East St. Louis School District 189

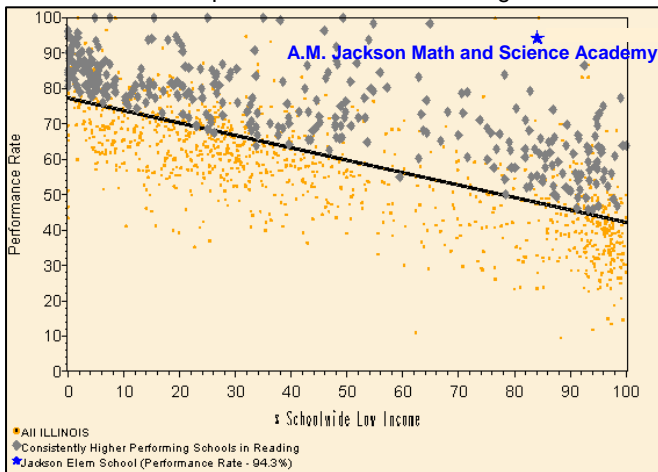
Just for the Kids, Illinois Executive Summary



The School

A.M. Jackson Math and Science Academy (327 students) is 1 of 18 elementary schools in East St. Louis School District 189 (9,930 students). Serving pre-kindergarten through eighth-grade students, Jackson's student population is 100.0% African American. Within this student population, there are no English Language Learners, and 84.1% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2003 8th Grade Reading



Consistent Higher Performance

A.M. Jackson Math and Science Academy is higher performing than demographically similar schools in all five subject areas: mathematics, reading, writing, science, and social studies. The analysis included all tested seventh- and eighth-grade achievement data from 2001 to 2003. Using Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, A.M. Jackson Math and Science Academy demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 82.4 in mathematics, 88.0 in reading, 91.4 in writing, 91.1 in science, and 83.1 in social studies.

Schools were identified for study based on 2001-2003 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 2001 and 2005.

Subject	2001		2002		2003		Overall Avg. Rank* 2001-2003
	Percentile Rank	Percentile Rank	Percentile Rank	Percentile Rank	Percentile Rank	Percentile Rank	
Grade	7	8	7	8	7	8	
Mathematics	N/A	75	N/A	71	N/A	98	82.4
Reading	N/A	75	N/A	92	N/A	98	88.0
Writing	N/A	94	N/A	82	N/A	95	91.4
Science	81	N/A	97	N/A	94	N/A	91.1
Social Studies	79	N/A	80	N/A	92	N/A	83.1

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

Major Findings

The principal and teachers at A.M. Jackson Math and Science Academy follow the curriculum set by the district, but they also “go beyond” these requirements. With an emphasis on literacy and numeracy, teachers have developed rich and deep curricular resources that emphasize “mindful engagement in higher order reasoning.” In keeping with these curricular and instructional goals, teachers at the school are recruited and selected based on their commitment to teaching all students at high levels of instruction. District and school leaders are constantly exploring new instructional programs that offer the promise of greater academic achievement for all students. In the past decade, there has been a continuous trend toward greater reliance on evidence-based decision making. The small school setting contributes to a strong sense of shared responsibility for the success of every student.

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



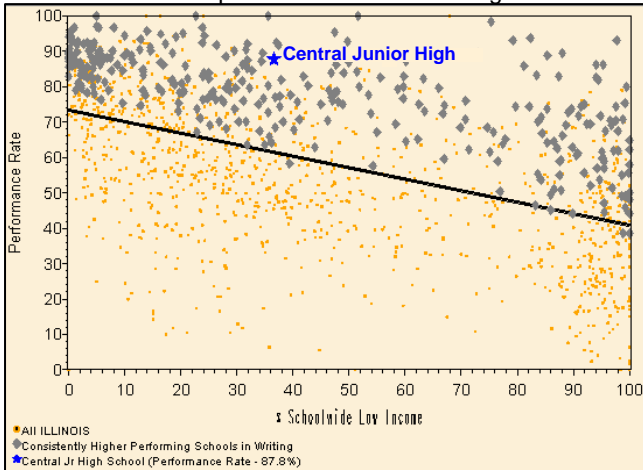
Central Junior High School Belleville School District 118

Just for the Kids, Illinois Executive Summary

The School

Central Junior High School (415 students) is one of two junior high schools in Belleville School District 118 (3,695 students). Serving seventh- and eighth-grade students, Central's student population is 74.2% White, 23.1% African American, 1.2% Hispanic, 0.5% Asian, and 1.0% other. Within this student population, there are no English Language Learners, and 39.5% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2002 8th Grade Writing



Consistent Higher Performance

Central Junior High School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in all five subject areas: mathematics, reading, writing, science, and social studies. The analysis included all tested seventh- and eighth-grade achievement data from 2001 to 2003. Using Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Central Junior High School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 99.0 in mathematics, 94.3 in reading, 99.0 in writing, 98.7 in science, and 93.7 in social studies.

Schools were identified for study based on 2001-2003 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 2001 and 2005.

Subject	2001		2002		2003		Overall Avg. Rank* 2001-2003
	Percentile Rank	Percentile Rank	Percentile Rank	Percentile Rank	Percentile Rank	Percentile Rank	
Grade	7	8	7	8	7	8	
Mathematics	N/A	99	N/A	99	N/A	99	99.0
Reading	N/A	99	N/A	88	N/A	96	94.3
Writing	N/A	99	N/A	99	N/A	99	99.0
Science	99	N/A	98	N/A	99	N/A	98.7
Social Studies	99	N/A	99	N/A	84	N/A	93.7

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

Major Findings

Both district and school staff indicate that there is a strong focus on and belief in the power of the state standards and the district's standards-aligned "Skills Continuum." The district continuum provides specific achievement benchmarks that each student is expected to master by subject and grade, and it ensures that higher order thinking skills are embedded in skill development. Given the specificity of the curriculum, the teachers still have great flexibility in deciding the instructional methods that best fit their students' needs for the delivery of that curriculum. Both administrative and teaching staff are well-versed in data analysis. As a result of the study of specific student performance data, Central Junior High has developed a strategy of immediate and early intervention for struggling students—primarily via Individual Improvement Plans (IIPs) developed for students by staff and parents.

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



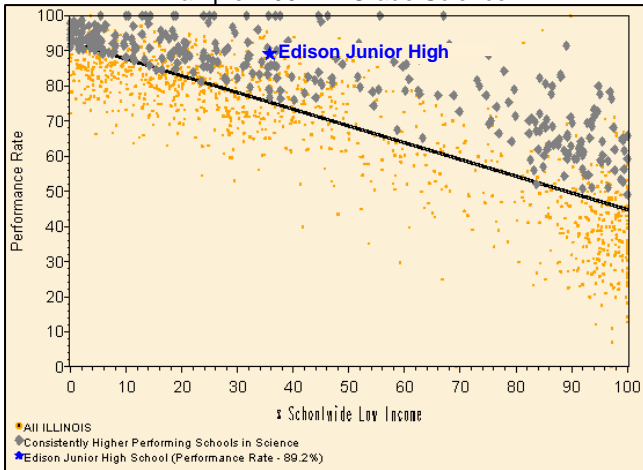
Edison Junior High School Pekin Public School District 108

Just for the Kids, Illinois Executive Summary

The School

Edison Junior High School (417 students) is one of two junior high schools in Pekin Public School District 108 (3,644 students). Serving seventh- and eighth-grade students, Edison's student population is 97.4% White, 1.4% Hispanic, and 1.2% Asian. Within this student population, there are no English Language Learners, and 32.9% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2002 7th Grade Science



Consistent Higher Performance

Edison Junior High School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in all five subject areas: mathematics, reading, writing, science, and social studies. The analysis included all tested seventh- and eighth-grade achievement data from 2001 to 2003. Using Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Edison Junior High School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 78.6 in mathematics, 78.7 in reading, 76.8 in writing, 91.8 in science, and 72.7 in social studies.

Schools were identified for study based on 2001-2003 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 2001 and 2005.

Subject	2001		2002		2003		Overall Avg. Rank* 2001-2003
	Percentile Rank		Percentile Rank		Percentile Rank		
Grade	7	8	7	8	7	8	
Mathematics	N/A	55	N/A	93	N/A	89	78.6
Reading	N/A	78	N/A	81	N/A	77	78.7
Writing	N/A	74	N/A	72	N/A	85	76.8
Science	83	N/A	99	N/A	94	N/A	91.8
Social Studies	76	N/A	80	N/A	63	N/A	72.7

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

Major Findings

“Let Us Show You the Learning!” is the motto of Pekin Public School District 108. That learning is outlined in district-wide curriculum guides that educators from Edison Junior High School have helped to create. The guides are aligned to the Illinois Learning Standards’ benchmarks and objectives. Students keep records of their academic progress on a grid that bears those objectives. A four-year Professional Development Academy, consisting of four core courses annually, is the central mechanism for teacher development and support. Though Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) are typically associated with students with special needs, each student at Edison Junior High has an IEP, which is developed and administered by teams of teachers in a looping program. Longitudinal data analysis is a priority for the district. Interventions for students needing additional assistance at Edison include tutoring programs, summer school programs, and behavior modification plans.

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



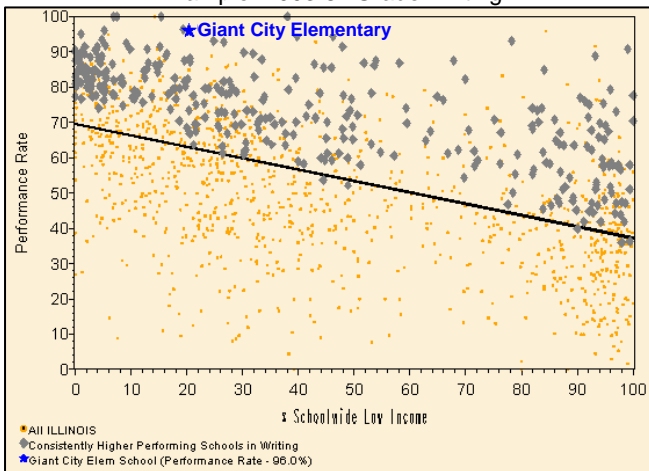
Giant City Elementary School Giant City C. C. School District 130

Just for the Kids, Illinois Executive Summary

The School

Giant City Elementary School (260 students) is the only school in Giant City C. C. School District 130 (260 students). Serving kindergarten through eighth-grade students, Giant City's student population is 93.8% White, 3.5% Asian, 1.5% African American, and 1.2% Hispanic. Within this student population, there are no English Language Learners, and 20.4% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2003 8th Grade Writing



Consistent Higher Performance

Giant City Elementary School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in all five subject areas: mathematics, reading, writing, science, and social studies. The analysis included all tested seventh- and eighth-grade achievement data from 2001 to 2003. Using Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Giant City Elementary School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 82.0 in mathematics, 88.4 in reading, 75.4 in writing, 71.5 in science, and 71.8 in social studies.

Schools were identified for study based on 2001-2003 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 2001 and 2005.

Subject	2001		2002		2003		Overall Avg. Rank* 2001-2003
	Percentile Rank	Percentile Rank	Percentile Rank	Percentile Rank	Percentile Rank	Percentile Rank	
Grade	7	8	7	8	7	8	
Mathematics	N/A	89	N/A	66	N/A	91	82.0
Reading	N/A	89	N/A	83	N/A	94	88.4
Writing	N/A	65	N/A	74	N/A	92	75.4
Science	51	N/A	91	N/A	75	N/A	71.5
Social Studies	79	N/A	87	N/A	56	N/A	71.8

*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. Although the school serves K-8 students, the middle school analysis only considered the seventh- and eighth-grade performance data of Giant City Elementary.

Major Findings

The teaching staff at Giant City Elementary have carefully examined national and state standards and determined what specific knowledge and skills (curriculum) students must master by grade and subject to meet those standards and beyond. This core curriculum is carefully monitored and adjusted within the school improvement process based on a thorough review of student performance data. Horizontal teams of teachers called "families" lead this process. Each teacher is eligible for an annual stipend of \$1,000 to support professional development related to the School Improvement Plan. Through a partnership with Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, pre-service teachers become part of a master's degree cohort and spend four days a week for an additional year in classrooms in Giant City. On the fifth day, the intern can serve as a substitute for pay in the school. This program is the primary means for securing new staff members at Giant City Elementary.

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



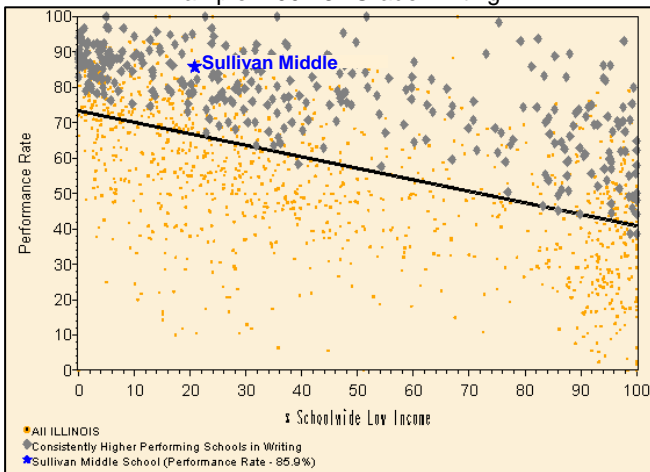
Sullivan Middle School Sullivan C. U. School District 300

Just for the Kids, Illinois Executive Summary

The School

Sullivan Middle School (263 students) is the only middle school in Sullivan C. U. School District 300 (1,120 students). Serving sixth- through eighth-grade students, Sullivan’s student population is 98.1% White, 1.1% Asian, 0.4% African American, and 0.4% other. Within this student population, there are no English Language Learners, and 21.7% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2002 8th Grade Writing



Consistent Higher Performance

Sullivan Middle School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in all five subject areas: mathematics, reading, writing, science, and social studies. The analysis included all tested seventh- and eighth-grade achievement data from 2001 to 2003. Using Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Sullivan Middle School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 75.9 in mathematics, 90.3 in reading, 87.4 in writing, 91.9 in science, and 93.8 in social studies.

Schools were identified for study based on 2001-2003 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 2001 and 2005.

Subject	2001		2002		2003		Overall Avg. Rank* 2001-2003
	Percentile Rank		Percentile Rank		Percentile Rank		
Grade	7	8	7	8	7	8	
Mathematics	N/A	93	N/A	77	N/A	52	75.9
Reading	N/A	84	N/A	98	N/A	88	90.3
Writing	N/A	96	N/A	94	N/A	67	87.4
Science	93	N/A	84	N/A	96	N/A	91.9
Social Studies	93	N/A	90	N/A	97	N/A	93.8

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

Major Findings

Sullivan Middle School uses extended-response questions on the application for prospective teachers to help screen for those candidates who fit best with the priorities and attitudes of the school. Teachers ensure that the materials they develop align to state standards; they then include these materials in curriculum binders located in the principal’s office. Instructional programs at Sullivan Middle School focus on the basics, but there are also community service programs in place. One teacher said of grade-level discussion about data, “We took the [areas of weakness] and said, ‘This is what we’re going to work on; if it didn’t work in the past, how are we going to change it?’” After-school tutoring, led by various teachers on a voluntary basis, is available to all students.



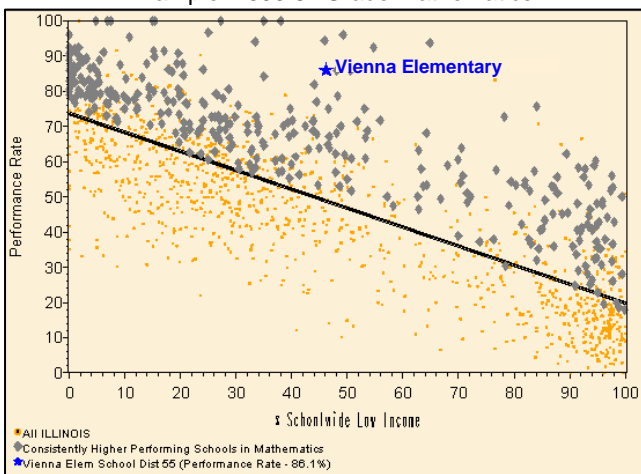
Vienna Elementary School Vienna School District 55

Just for the Kids, Illinois Executive Summary

The School

Vienna Elementary School (418 students) is the only school in Vienna School District 55 (418 students). Serving pre-kindergarten through eighth-grade students, Vienna's student population is 97.1% White, 1.4% Hispanic, 0.7% African American, 0.5% Asian, and 0.3% other. Within this student population, there are no English Language Learners, and 46.2% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2003 8th Grade Mathematics



Consistent Higher Performance

Vienna Elementary School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in all five subject areas: mathematics, reading, writing, science, and social studies. The analysis included all tested seventh- and eighth-grade achievement data from 2001 to 2003. Using Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Vienna Elementary School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 91.8 in mathematics, 93.8 in reading, 89.5 in writing, 80.2 in science, and 84.1 in social studies.

Schools were identified for study based on 2001-2003 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 2001 and 2005.

Subject	2001		2002		2003		Overall Avg. Rank* 2001-2003
	Percentile Rank	Percentile Rank	Percentile Rank	Percentile Rank	Percentile Rank	Percentile Rank	
Grade	7	8	7	8	7	8	
Mathematics	N/A	92	N/A	90	N/A	94	91.8
Reading	N/A	95	N/A	96	N/A	89	93.8
Writing	N/A	79	N/A	96	N/A	94	89.5
Science	78	N/A	78	N/A	85	N/A	80.2
Social Studies	94	N/A	78	N/A	79	N/A	84.1

*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. Although the school serves pre-K-8 students, the middle school analysis only considered the seventh- and eighth-grade performance data of Vienna Elementary.

Major Findings

Vienna's superintendent says that since the teachers at Vienna Elementary began examining the performance descriptors that make the Illinois Learning Goals more explicit, scores on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test have "jumped every year." From professional development to the development of instructional resources, all processes are now tightly aligned with the standards-driven curriculum. Deeply committed to using data to inform instruction, the "School Improvement Plan Generator—Analysis of Current Conditions" form describes the population being analyzed, the learning area and standard being addressed, and the programmatic problem source. Teachers enthusiastically describe the "generators" as effective means to curricular and instructional improvements.

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



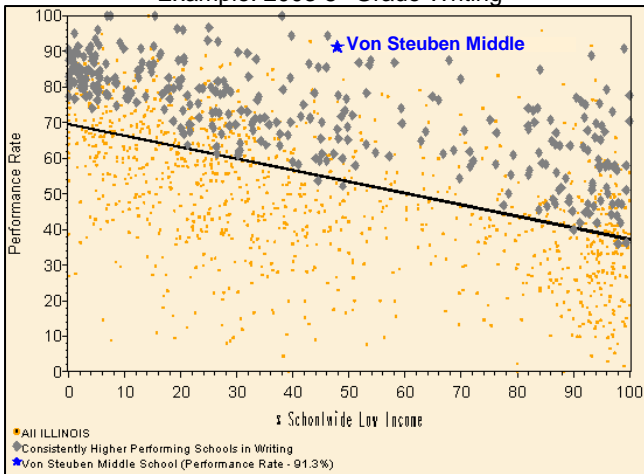
Von Steuben Middle School Peoria School District 150

Just for the Kids, Illinois Executive Summary

The School

Von Steuben Middle School (386 students) is 1 of 12 middle schools in Peoria School District 150 (14,889 students). Serving fifth- through eighth-grade students, Von Steuben's student population is 57.3% White, 39.6% African American, 2.1% Hispanic, and 1.0% Asian. Within this student population, there are no English Language Learners, and 47.9% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2003 8th Grade Writing



Consistent Higher Performance

Von Steuben Middle School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in all five subject areas: mathematics, reading, writing, science, and social studies. The analysis included all tested seventh- and eighth-grade achievement data from 2001 to 2003. Using Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Von Steuben Middle School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 67.5 in mathematics, 72.2 in reading, 90.9 in writing, 77.7 in science, and 81.0 in social studies.

Schools were identified for study based on 2001-2003 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 2001 and 2005.

Subject	2001		2002		2003		Overall Avg. Rank* 2001-2003
	Percentile Rank		Percentile Rank		Percentile Rank		
Grade	7	8	7	8	7	8	
Mathematics	N/A	66	N/A	50	N/A	84	67.5
Reading	N/A	62	N/A	68	N/A	85	72.2
Writing	N/A	79	N/A	94	N/A	99	90.9
Science	74	N/A	78	N/A	80	N/A	77.7
Social Studies	76	N/A	73	N/A	92	N/A	81.0

*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.

Major Findings

Building administrators at Von Steuben Middle School require teachers to include the applicable state standards in their lesson plans. Teacher in-service focuses on the curriculum and the alignment of the curriculum to the state standards. Capable teachers in the district often become leaders and have the opportunity to eventually ascend to the position of principal. The school relies heavily on the *Open Court* reading series, not only as a core reading program, but also as the primary source of weekly performance assessments. Data from the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) provide additional information that guides curriculum development and instructional practices. Struggling students are provided an opportunity to develop skills and improve grades in a summer term that is funded by the district.

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



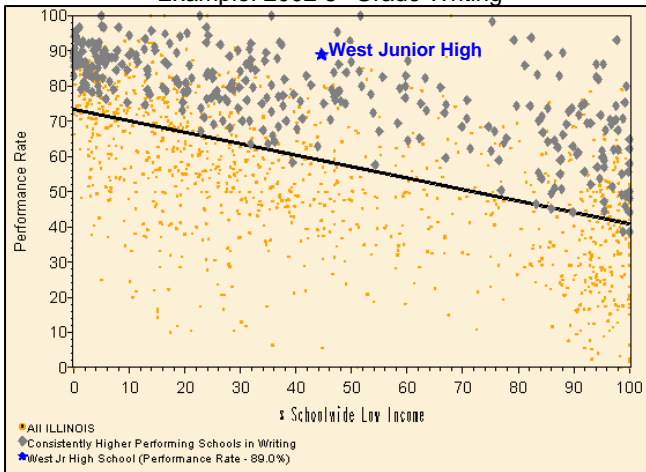
West Junior High School Belleville School District 118

Just for the Kids, Illinois Executive Summary

The School

West Junior High School (426 students) is one of two junior high schools in Belleville School District 118 (3,695 students). Serving seventh- and eighth-grade students, West's student population is 60.3% White, 35.4% African American, 2.6% Asian, 1.6% Hispanic, and 0.1% other. Within this student population, 0.5% are English Language Learners, and 49.5% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2002 8th Grade Writing



Consistent Higher Performance

West Junior High School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in all five subject areas: mathematics, reading, writing, science, and social studies. The analysis included all tested seventh- and eighth-grade achievement data from 2001 to 2003. Using Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, West Junior High School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 92.7 in mathematics, 92.7 in reading, 98.7 in writing, 97.7 in science, and 91.7 in social studies.

Schools were identified for study based on 2001-2003 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 2001 and 2005.

Subject	2001		2002		2003		Overall Avg. Rank* 2001-2003
	Percentile Rank		Percentile Rank		Percentile Rank		
Grade	7	8	7	8	7	8	
Mathematics	N/A	94	N/A	91	N/A	93	92.7
Reading	N/A	92	N/A	94	N/A	92	92.7
Writing	N/A	99	N/A	99	N/A	98	98.7
Science	98	N/A	97	N/A	98	N/A	97.7
Social Studies	94	N/A	85	N/A	96	N/A	91.7

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

Major Findings

At West Junior High School, educators expect each student to meet specific achievement benchmarks in each subject and grade. The district philosophy is that "one year of education should equal [at least] one year of academic growth." All curriculum changes flow through the district's Curriculum Committee, which has representatives from every school and grade level. Principals interview teacher candidates, keeping in mind questions of "fit" with the school philosophy, work ethic, and collaborative staff dynamics. Teachers often develop their own instructional materials but align all lessons with the state standards. The principal does day-to-day monitoring of classrooms, providing formative feedback to teachers for the purpose of improvement. All schools in the district have test performance incentives tied to the number of students who meet or exceed the state standards.

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



Illinois Elementary & Middle 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? It is a great surprise to many that the *explicit, agreed-upon* academic goals of our school systems range from fuzzy to non-existent. 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 Illinois Findings: Curriculum and Academic Goals

- **Curriculum standards drive instruction at the classroom level.**
 - All teachers are responsible for the implementation and revision of the curriculum. Students keep records of their progress on a grid that specifies skills aligned with the curricular objectives. According to the superintendent, “Everyone knows what the students must learn. ... The classroom [teacher] decides how.” (Edison Junior High, Pekin Public School District 108)

- The district has developed a Standards, Assessment, and Instruction (SAI) model to align all district curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The school year is divided into three cycles, each of which begins with a pretest. Based on the results of that test, teachers plan the instruction for that cycle. Standards mastery is monitored with the use of “I Can Do It” sheets, which are plainly worded state standards and associated learning expectations. Students assess their own learning and meet with their teachers twice each year to compare “I Can Do It” sheets with the teachers’ records. Each teacher’s efforts to continually adjust instruction based on student data are also considered in the teacher evaluation process. (Sunset Hills Elementary, Pekin Public School District 108)
 - Vienna Elementary School aligned its curriculum with state goals as part of the school’s quality review more than 10 years ago. The staff were organized into curriculum teams to identify gaps between what was taught and what was tested. As a result, scores on the state ISAT assessment improved. In 1999, the staff examined the performance descriptors that accompany the state’s Learning Standards. The superintendent noted that the attention paid to the performance descriptors made the standards more explicit to teachers. “Previously, the Illinois Learning Goals were too broad and ill-defined. Once the teachers understood the frameworks provided and viewed them as an integral part of their classroom, ISAT scores jumped every year.” Texts and teacher-generated materials are aligned with state standards. Teachers are held accountable to understand and use the Illinois Learning Standards (ILS) goals, frameworks, and performance descriptors as essential parts of the planning, teaching, and assessment activities of their classrooms. (Vienna Elementary, Vienna School District 55)
 - Building administrators require teachers to include associated state standards in their lesson plans. (Von Steuben Middle, Peoria School District 150)
 - The entire faculty agree upon the academic goals and curriculum and align them with the state standards. Teachers discuss pacing guides in weekly grade-level meetings to ensure uniform implementation of the curriculum across classrooms. (Whittier Primary, Peoria School District 150)
- **Schools provide opportunities for all teachers to work on curriculum development and alignment, ensuring that they have an intimate familiarity with the curriculum.**
 - The staff is divided into three groups—K-3, 4-5, and 6-8—which determine learning needs, research best practice, and identify curriculum materials. Since they are the only school in the district, grade-level teams are primarily responsible for curriculum development and implementation. Sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade teachers report that they meet with the staff from the high school regularly to ensure alignment of the curriculum. (Giant City Elementary, Giant City C. C. School District 130)
 - According to a veteran teacher, “All the departments meet, ... so we have a chance to discuss how we are going to align the curriculum, and [whether] there is going to be [a] change.” (Sullivan Middle, Sullivan C. U. School District 300)
 - Curriculum development is completed through grade-level meetings. The district provides binders containing state standards, from which teachers develop supportive lessons. (Von Steuben Middle, Peoria School District 150)
 - Teachers collaborate in teams to prepare scope-and-sequence documents for each subject, identify student needs, and determine goals for improvement. (West Junior High, Belleville School District 118)
 - **Teachers across the district use a state standards-based curriculum, ensuring that all students have access to the same knowledge and skills.**
 - The district’s Curriculum Committee updates the Skills Continuum, a document that is aligned with the state’s standards. The Skills Continuum identifies specific achievement

benchmarks that each student is expected to meet by grade and subject. (Central Junior High, Belleville School District 118)

- Curriculum guides are aligned with the Illinois Learning Standards' benchmarks and objectives. (Edison Junior High, Pekin Public School District 108)
- The teachers use the Illinois Learning Standards to plan their instruction, and they align teacher-constructed tests and classroom projects with these standards. (Sullivan Middle, Sullivan C. U. School District 300)

▪ **Schools identify a limited number of clear and measurable goals based on student achievement data, curriculum standards, and stakeholder input.**

- Based on a review of test scores and various survey results, the entire faculty establishes several main academic goals for the year. Throughout the year, the principal ensures follow-through in enacting the plan to achieve the goals. (Central Junior High, Belleville School District 118)
- The school establishes goals based on the review of data. The entire faculty is involved in prioritizing goals and developing strategies for meeting these goals. (Edison Junior High, Pekin Public School District 108)
- All staff members are part of a school improvement team that continuously monitors academic goals and student achievement horizontally and vertically. (Vienna Elementary, Vienna School District 55)



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 Illinois Findings: Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building

▪ **Districts actively develop internal candidates for leadership through administrator preparation programs.**

- Principals are often hired from within the district, with as many as 24 internal candidates applying for openings. (Central Junior High, Belleville School District 118)
- Recruiting principals is both an internal and external process. The district believes in grooming their instructional leaders through the stages of mentor, teacher leader, assistant principal, and principal. Filling administrative positions involves a professional, lengthy, and thorough screening process. (Edison Junior High, Pekin Public School District 108)
- According to staff, 90 percent of the district's principals come from within the district. Many assistant principals and teacher leaders are tapped for the principal positions in the district. (Sunset Hills Elementary, Pekin Public School District 108)
- Hiring most principals from within the district seems to keep morale high, as capable teachers have the opportunity to become leaders and eventually ascend to the position of principal. New principals require very little training or mentoring. Their experiences as assistant principals serve as the "training ground" for becoming effective principals. (Von Steuben Middle, Peoria School District 150)

- **The teacher-selection process results in new staff members who are well-matched and highly committed to school goals.**
 - Schools often recruit new staff from among outstanding student teachers who have been recommended by teachers and observed by the principal. There are usually around 200 applicants for any teacher opening. This number of applicants allows the principal to interview candidates with an eye towards “fit” with the school philosophy, work ethic, and collaborative staff dynamics. (Central Junior High, Belleville School District 118)
 - Teachers are hired through a committee process that includes teachers, administrators, and parents. The school has a partnership with Southern Illinois University, which provides interns for classroom teachers. Interns are provided tuition and a graduate assistantship while they work in the schools. The school district and the university share the costs. The school benefits from this staffing arrangement, and the interns graduate with extra preparation and experience. (Giant City Elementary, Giant City C. C. School District 130)
 - The district screens and school staff interview prospective teacher applicants. Faculty interviews help to determine collegial compatibility. The principal stated that, in order to hire talented teachers, “I hire teachers who are smarter and better than I am.” (Irving Elementary, Berwyn South School District 100)
 - Since the establishment of the school as a mathematics and science academy, the first (and long-term) principal actively sought teachers who were committed to providing top-notch instruction to gifted children. The new principal is expected to provide continuity to this commitment, as that person is also certified in gifted education. (A.M. Jackson Math and Science Academy, East St. Louis School District 189)
 - An additional section of the teacher application asks the candidates for extended responses to some of the following: “Describe the variety of methods of instruction you would employ to meet the needs of individual students.” “What are the methods you would use to assess student performance?” “How do you plan to communicate with parents?” (Sullivan Middle, Sullivan C. U. School District 300)
 - To streamline the teacher-selection process, the district has developed a five-question interview guide in order to evaluate prospective teachers against the district’s five professional expectations. The district uses a radar diagram to rate candidates based on their responses. (Sunset Hills Elementary, Pekin Public School District 108)
 - Teachers mentioned the importance of hiring teachers who are “willing to be creative and take risks” in a challenging environment that requires teamwork and cooperation. (Von Steuben Middle, Peoria School District 150)
 - Most new teachers have served as substitute teachers within the district. Recently, there has been a focus on hiring more teachers of color, with specific efforts being made to recruit from historically black colleges and universities across the country. (Whittier Primary, Peoria School District 150)

- **The district supports new principals and teachers through carefully developed mentoring programs and processes.**
 - Both new principals and new teachers are assigned mentors. The principal assigns teacher mentors according to subject and grade level. Tenured teachers view such an assignment as a professional responsibility that benefits them in the long run. (Central Junior High, Belleville School District 118)
 - If new teachers are not doing very well at the end of their first year, the district lets them go. As the superintendent stated, “It would be a big mistake not to eliminate the non-performers. The administration has the full support of the union on this. We are judged by our weakest member.” (Central Junior High, Belleville School District 118)

- A four-year Professional Development Academy, consisting of four core courses annually, is the primary mechanism for teacher development and support. For two years, experienced educators—usually retired teachers—mentor new teachers. New teachers also have regularly scheduled meetings with the principal and three and a half days of training before the school year begins. (Edison Junior High, Pekin Public School District 108)
 - Although there is no formal mentoring program, grade-level teams provide assistance to new teachers, and the superintendent and principal closely monitor and support new teachers also. (Giant City Elementary, Giant City C. C. School District 130)
 - A relatively new teacher said, “When I started, I had a mentor that had been here for eight or nine years. They paired me up with her, and she helped me through everything. That was very helpful.” Mentors are assigned either by grade level or subject specialty. (Sullivan Middle, Sullivan C. U. School District 300)
 - The mentoring program for new teachers is based on the Charlotte Danielson framework, which requires them to take four core academy courses over their first four years: teacher collaboration, the classroom environment, standards and assessment, and data-driven instructional decision-making. (Sunset Hills Elementary, Pekin Public School District 108)
 - Veteran teachers provide the necessary collegial support for new teachers’ transition into the district. Teachers mention the success in the district of mentoring, external grants, and professional development as capacity-building opportunities usually found only in larger districts with additional resources. (Unity Point Elementary, Unity Point C. C. School District 140)
 - The principal assigns mentors to new teachers. Other avenues of support include opportunities to collaborate with peers on school improvement and teacher-assistance teams. (Vienna Elementary, Vienna School District 55)
- **Ongoing professional development activities are practice-oriented. Activities center on deepening teachers’ content knowledge and enhancing teaching skills.**
 - Each teacher is eligible for an annual stipend of \$1,000 to support education and training related to the School Improvement Plan. (Giant City Elementary, Giant City C. C. School District 130)
 - According to a special education teacher, “The sixth-grade language and literacy teacher and I just went to a workshop last week on how we can help [students] with the written response section [of the state exam]. ... It was good for me to see what I need to do, and I feel more prepared—that I’ll be able to help them, guide them, and prepare them for that next year.” (Sullivan Middle, Sullivan C. U. School District 300)
 - When the school adopts a new reading series, it brings in a trainer to provide a comprehensive look at the overarching themes of the series, scope and sequence, and content. The school provides substitutes so teachers can spend an entire day asking questions about the new series. (Vienna Elementary, Vienna School District 55)
 - New teachers receive professional development through district curriculum training, faculty meetings, grade-level meetings, and observations in other classrooms. The principal also plays an active role in providing instructional support for the teachers. (Whittier Primary, Peoria School District 150)
 - **The school schedule accommodates teacher collaboration and planning activities. School administrators ensure that teachers use the allotted time appropriately.**
 - According to teachers, “collaboration is more than a vague cliché at Irving Elementary.” Every morning begins with a daily common planning time from 7:50 AM to 8:20 AM. These daily meetings are focused sessions with specific agendas. As one teacher commented, “Every day there is some type of collaboration going on that is not just getting ready for the

school day.” Every Friday morning, the entire faculty meets during this time for breakfast and a planning session. (Irving Elementary, Berwyn South School District 100)

- Though teachers do not have an official common planning time, they do share a common philosophy about the importance of collaboration. As a result, they find time to collaborate by meeting during lunch or after school. (A.M. Jackson Math and Science Academy, East St. Louis School District 189)
- The schedule allows for planning periods for teachers every day except Thursday. The schedule also allows for a period in which teachers can work together to collaborate on projects. (Sunset Hills Elementary, Pekin Public School District 108)



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 Illinois Findings: Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

- **District staff select instructional programs based on achievement test results and student needs. Adopted programs have a strong research base and closely align with state standards and to the district curriculum.**
 - According to the superintendent, “The *Harcourt Brace Jovanovich (HBJ)* reading series was selected for next year because it was approved by Reading First as scientifically researched. *HBJ* is very expensive, but it met all the criteria we wanted in the district and [will] make the district eligible for a Reading First grant.” (Irving Elementary, Berwyn South School District 100)
 - District leaders are constantly exploring new instructional programs that offer the promise of greater academic achievement. The leaders want evidence that the programs are capable of generating high achievement results. (A.M. Jackson Math and Science Academy, East St. Louis School District 189)
 - An analysis of student performance—including both standardized testing and teacher-generated data—results in the selection of additional instructional programs as needed. (Sullivan Middle, Sullivan C. U. School District 300)
 - A committee of teachers, principals, and district staff chooses instructional programs. The main criterion is whether a program aligns with state standards. In response to the accountability system, the district must ensure that programs align with state standards. (Whittier Primary, Peoria School District 150)
- **Effective discipline codes and consistent enforcement support classroom instruction.**
 - The school-wide discipline program—PRIDE—provides a consistent and clear set of expectations for all to follow. (Giant City Elementary, Giant City C. C. School District 130)
 - A behavior management program is in place. It uses the “I Care Rules” as its foundation. (Sunset Hills Elementary, Pekin Public School District 108)

- The *Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support (PBIS)* system provides proactive and data-based decision making for behavioral issues and student achievement. (Vienna Elementary, Vienna School District 55)
- Students are assigned to a *Character Plus* classroom, where they meet each morning four days a week. During this time, teachers discuss one “character skill” each month, remind students of dates and obligations, and build team concepts. (West Junior High, Belleville School District 118)
- A character education program has had a substantial impact on the school. Many staff believe that the program prevents behavioral issues, allowing more class time to be devoted to instruction. (Whittier Primary, Peoria School District 150)

▪ **Teachers use instructional strategies that effectively meet students' needs. Assignments and instruction are differentiated to ensure all students work at their ability level.**

- In the spirit of “whatever is best for our kids,” the gifted program has been maintained as a priority despite the elimination of state funding for gifted education in recent years. (Central Junior High, Belleville School District 118)
- Gifted students have in-class enrichment programs and resources as needed. Grade-level team meetings address the individual needs of diverse learners. (Giant City Elementary, Giant City C. C. School District 130)
- The district offers an *Accelerated Math* class for sixth graders. (Sullivan Middle, Sullivan C. U. School District 300)
- Teachers use assistive learning technology for students with special needs. (Sunset Hills Elementary, Pekin Public School District 108)
- The school has a gifted program for students in first through eighth grades. Despite the lack of state funding, the school maintains the program through local grants. The Coordinator for Gifted Instruction works with classroom teachers to determine the most appropriate ways to accelerate or enrich the progress of gifted students. (Vienna Elementary, Vienna School District 55)
- Special education students are included in regular classroom settings as much as possible. Gifted students also receive differentiated instruction. (Von Steuben Middle, Peoria School District 150)



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

- **School administrators use observations (formal and informal) and student achievement data to inform teacher evaluations.**
 - The principal conducts day-to-day monitoring of classrooms and shares formative feedback with teachers for the purpose of improvement. (Central Junior High, Belleville School District 118)

- The principal conducts frequent walkthroughs and classroom observations, with follow-up meetings with the teacher. The teachers and the principal also devote considerable time to reviewing classroom-generated tests, assessment data, and portfolios. (A.M. Jackson Math and Science Academy, East St. Louis School District 189)
 - Teachers are evaluated through a rigorous, comprehensive process that involves an entire unit of curriculum. A teacher submits his or her unit plans to the principal, who observes the teacher on each day that unit is taught. The principal meets with the teacher afterward to discuss the observations. (Sullivan Middle, Sullivan C. U. School District 300)
 - The principal monitors student achievement by requiring all teachers to keep a data notebook on their students. Each teacher is expected to develop individual goals for each student, and the teachers monitor data related to these goals. Each teacher's evaluation is then connected to goal areas and student data. (Sunset Hills Elementary, Pekin Public School District 108)
 - Student performance data help gauge overall teacher effectiveness. However, administrators also rely on individual growth plans for teachers as a way to gauge teacher growth and development. Administrators tie observations of teachers to the teachers' professional growth plans. (Von Steuben Middle, Peoria School District 150)
 - Teachers are expected to provide evidence of student achievement as part of their yearly evaluations. (Whittier Primary, Peoria School District 150)
- **School administrators and teachers track student progress on an ongoing basis, using multiple standards-based assessments to identify standards mastery.**
 - The district administers the Standards-Assessment-Instruction (SAI) assessments three times a year: September, March, and May. The district maintains databases for general demographic data, SAI achievement test data, and ISAT and Cognitive Ability Test (COGAT) data to monitor student performance. Schools use their own additional assessments as needed. (Edison Junior High, Pekin Public School District 108)
 - Student performance is continually monitored, and the analysis of assessment data occurs in settings that range from the entire faculty looking at the big picture, to grade-level meetings examining specific curricular areas, to individual teachers scrutinizing the performance of each student. (Irving Elementary, Berwyn South School District 100)
 - Current developments in the district place highest priority on the literacy of Hispanic students who come to school with varying degrees of English proficiency. This learning need is best served by the extensive and systematic assessment of the reading level of all students. Several assessment programs have been targeted to appraise literacy in order to assist teachers with appropriate teaching strategies and specialized interventions. (Irving Elementary, Berwyn South School District 100)
 - The district and school monitor academic goals through the ISAT results, which show how well students are performing. The SAI assessment process also assesses how well each student is mastering content with reference to state standards. (Sunset Hills Elementary, Pekin Public School District 108)
 - A key feature in the district is the battery of locally developed exit tests that have been in use for many years. The district administers these tests each spring and returns results quickly to teachers. The returned data include item analyses by school and by classroom. Educators consider these exit tests crucial to determining students' strengths and weaknesses. (West Junior High, Belleville School District 118)
 - Teachers look for creative ways for students to show what they know. These may include artwork or hands-on demonstrations. (West Junior High, Belleville School District 118)

- In addition to the ISAT and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), the school uses the Illinois Snapshot of Early Literacy (ISEL) assessment to determine which students need intervention and which teachers need additional support in the classroom. (Whittier Primary, Peoria School District 150)
- **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.**
 - Both administrators and teachers are well-versed in data analysis. They use data from tests, surveys, safety and discipline records, and student grades to monitor both performance and improvement. (Central Junior High, Belleville School District 118)
 - At the school level, the principal and the teachers are skilled at analyzing assessment data to pinpoint areas of curricular imbalance or instructional weaknesses. They examine questions of instruction in terms of appropriate evidence of student learning. For example, teachers are now using new pre- and post-tests with the *Everyday Math* program, which supplement ISAT data. Teachers are working on the complex tasks of problem-finding and problem-solving as they seek new ways to help their students become more proficient in mathematics. (Irving Elementary, Berwyn South School District 100)
 - The district has a new student information system—*Abacus*—to monitor student test results and attendance. The system is evolving with greater opportunity for teachers to access achievement data. (A.M. Jackson Math and Science Academy, East St. Louis School District 189)
 - The district trains teachers to collect and analyze student data in order to guide their instruction. (Sunset Hills Elementary, Pekin Public School District 108)



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 Illinois Findings: Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustment

- **Schools create opportunities to recognize students' academic and behavioral successes.**
 - If students meet or exceed standards on the state tests, they receive free tickets to high school events such as football games. Staff offer other incentives as well, including pizza parties, tickets to St. Louis Cardinals baseball games, and certificates of merit. (Central Junior High, Belleville School District 118)
 - The principal and teachers create many opportunities to recognize outstanding student work. They have award ceremonies to recognize the student of the week. Teachers give students opportunities to read extra books and earn points to travel to the Six Flags theme park. Other students enjoy the opportunity to attend Space Camp. (A.M. Jackson Math and Science Academy, East St. Louis School District 189)
 - Staff offer a special breakfast for honor roll students and an ice cream party to students who excel in the *Accelerated Reader* program. (Sullivan Middle, Sullivan C. U. School District 300)

- The Scholars Cup is an academic competition for sixth-graders in all schools in the district. The final match of the competition is televised on local cable TV. The district also supports a *Young Authors* program, through which kindergarten through eighth-grade students have the opportunity to advance to state competition. (Von Steuben Middle, Peoria School District 150)
 - Staff give students blue slips for good behavior and academic performance. After a class collects 25 blue slips, they receive pizza. Students in the third and fourth grades get to go to Riverplex, a multipurpose gymnasium, for good behavior. Finally, students receive trophies for such things as achieving perfect attendance, being on the honor roll for the entire year, and for being the top reader in the *Accelerated Reader* program. (Whittier Primary, Peoria School District 150)
- **Schools provide students with additional time both within and outside the traditional school day to focus on skills building.**
 - Volunteer staff and AmeriCorps workers manage a before-school Homework Club. Teachers also give students one-on-one help from 8:30 AM to 9:00 AM. Teams of teachers and other staff—along with parents—develop Individual Improvement Plans (IIPs) for struggling students. After the state eliminated its funding, the district made a commitment to continue summer school with community funding support. (Central Junior High, Belleville School District 118)
 - After-school tutoring is hosted by Southern Illinois University students. Students in sixth through eighth grades have a mathematics study hall, a special Title I program. Another after-school program, Kids' Club, offers homework assistance and enrichment activities for students in first through fifth grades. (Giant City Elementary, Giant City C. C. School District 130)
 - The school provides extended opportunities, such as tutoring and Saturday School, to assist struggling students. (Unity Point Elementary, Unity Point C. C. School District 140)
 - The extended-day program is called Homework Hangout. Teachers are available to help students with homework or to provide additional instruction. Struggling students are also able to develop skills and improve grades in a district-funded summer school program. (Von Steuben Middle, Peoria School District 150)
 - Students receive additional help through workshops or differentiated instruction via the *Open Court* reading program. There are after-school tutoring programs for first through fourth grades. (Whittier Primary, Peoria School District 150)
 - **Teachers use results from benchmark assessments, standardized tests, and classroom observations to quickly identify students needing additional assistance.**
 - The school administers an extensive battery of tests to students when parents register their children for kindergarten. During the first two years (kindergarten and first grade), teachers pay special attention to student progress and apply appropriate interventions. As students move through each grade level, a team of intervention specialists provides extra support as needed. (Irving Elementary, Berwyn South School District 100)
 - District policy requires each school to have a Child Study Team for students who are identified as needing assistance. (A.M. Jackson Math and Science Academy, East St. Louis School District 189)
 - The district formed an At-Risk Committee that—based on data collected through interviews with the student, a review of academic grades, and student work samples—develops an action plan for assisting the student. (Sunset Hills Elementary, Pekin Public School District 108)

- According to a teacher, “We look at student performance on the pretest, and it gives us a good idea of where we need to focus and adjust.” A large proportion of collaboration time among staff focuses on improving classroom effectiveness for all students. (West Junior High, Belleville School District 118)
- At Whittier, educators use assessment results to identify students needing intervention, but behavior is an indicator as well. On the principal’s door, a sign reads: “Children are going to misbehave. ... It is their way of telling us what lesson they need to learn. It is our job to figure out the lesson.” (Whittier Primary, Peoria School District 150)



Illinois Elementary & Middle School Best Practice Study: Conclusion

Based on the Themes of The JFTK Framework

Research teams conducted site visits to three elementary schools and 10 middle schools in Illinois, identified through the NCEA analysis. Summaries of the findings of those practices that appeared to distinguish consistently higher performing elementary and middle schools from average-performing ones are presented below by theme.

The Findings

Curriculum and Academic Goals

Higher performing schools made use of the state standards a non-negotiable practice. Following a deeper clarification of the standards by grade and subject, teachers addressed the specific needs of their students by determining the instructional strategies and differentiation needed to deliver that specified curriculum. Teachers were the primary force in developing, aligning, and revising curriculum. Although districts typically organized the primary curriculum development work, curriculum teams often included a teacher from every grade level at every school. Academic goals, as articulated within school improvement plans, invariably were the result of careful analysis of student achievement data.

Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building

Illinois schools received large numbers of well-qualified applicants for administrator and teacher positions. Many principal posts were filled by teacher leaders from within the district. Schools typically selected teachers through a collaborative process, which centered on matching new members of the faculty to school goals and academic needs. A number of schools benefited from their proximity to institutions of higher learning, not only for qualified teacher candidates but also for professional development opportunities for their current teachers.

Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

As long as all lessons were keyed to state standards, administrators encouraged teachers to supplement adopted programs with instructional materials they had developed themselves. Districts adopted programs based on demonstrated student needs, alignment with the written curriculum, and evidence of effectiveness. Teachers were expected to use differentiated instructional techniques to ensure that all students achieved at optimal capacity. Reading was a priority across all schools for all classes.

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data

Though not all districts had developed their own benchmark assessments beyond the state tests, all schools used some type of additional tests for monitoring student progress. These instruments included the ITBS, teacher-produced assessments, and core reading or mathematics program assessments. Monitoring of student achievement was varied and ongoing. Student performance data were organized and available, and teachers were both highly dependent on and skilled at using data to make informed decisions about teaching and learning. Most schools specifically noted that principals made frequent visits to classrooms. The teacher evaluation process at one school was remarkably comprehensive. In that school, a teacher would provide the principal with lesson plans for an entire unit. The principal would observe the delivery of those lessons and discuss those observations with the teacher. This process constituted the bulk of the information upon which the evaluation would be made. Some principals used assessment data as a factor in teachers' evaluations.

Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustment

Teachers described a number of ways in which students were recognized for their academic accomplishments. One district arranged for an academic contest to be aired on local television. Most schools used after-school tutoring as a strategy for helping struggling students. Though the state's funding of summer school programs had been eliminated some years ago, several districts used creative means to provide summer school for struggling students. Schools provided struggling teachers with interventions such as mentor support, remediation plans (which included mentor support), or informal assistance from peers.

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, JFTK-Illinois's next step will be to build upon these initial findings at the elementary and middle levels by also studying fifteen higher performing and average-performing 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-Illinois Elementary and Middle 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 consistently 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 twenty states) to help determine meaning in the context of Illinois.