

How Do Teachers Learn to Teach Effectively? Quality Indicators from Quality Schools

Throughout 2002, the Southeast Center for Teaching Quality and Just for the Kids, Inc. worked together in a unique effort to document how teachers learn to teach effectively and to identify school and teaching quality indicators that can improve current state accountability systems.

Although its implementation is complex, the idea is simple and straightforward: For accountability systems to support school improvement more fully, they need to publicize not only which schools and students are doing well, but also *why* they are doing well.

Just for the Kids is an eight-year-old non-profit organization with its roots in Texas. Founder Tom Luce began JFTK because he saw a need for school communities to unify around higher standards of student achievement and to set academic “stretch goals.” Over time, JFTK has earned a national reputation for its sophisticated analysis of school performance data and its efforts to link results to effective educational practices.

With funding from the Rockefeller Foundation and utilizing JFTK’s system of rating school improvement regardless of student background, we identified schools in Texas that have closed the achievement gap for students in poor and minority schools. We then selected and surveyed a group of twelve schools—seven were “gap closers” and five were average performers. We conducted detailed case studies in four of these schools (two average- and two high-performing), looking for practices that might account for differences between high and average-performing schools with similar students.

What We Are Learning

Both the surveys and case studies produced striking findings. A composite list of potential quality indicators focused on (1) attitudes and expectations; (2) the development and distribution of teaching expertise; (3) a tight focus on curriculum, assessment, and instruction, (4) use of instructional resources, and (5) leadership. (See [summary of case findings](#).)

The surveys brought to light significant differences between the average- and high-performing schools on virtually every item related to teacher education, mentoring and induction, professional development, curriculum and instruction, school testing and assessment, school climate, and leadership. (See [examples of preliminary findings](#).)

In this brief report, we reveal nine of the most significant findings from the cases.

1. Uniform High Standards: In high-performing schools, high standards and expectations were part of the culture. At one high-performing school, teachers and administrators understood that all newly hired staff must have high standards and expectations for all children. Experienced teachers in the school believed the commitment to high standards and expectations was a necessary quality in job candidates, and new teachers reported that they were questioned about their commitment during job interviews.

The school provided the support and professional development required for new teachers to help each child achieve his or her highest capacity.

2. Teaching to the Highest Level: We also found in high-performing schools a deep belief in student capacity to learn and in the teachers’ capacity to help students learn at high levels. In one school, every teacher participated in professional development for the instruction of gifted and talented students, with the expectation that all students would benefit from such instruction.

3. Frequent, Relevant Assessment: In high-performing schools we found more systematic processes for multiple daily/weekly student assessments through early and on-going data collection in usable formats. The importance of this information rippled throughout the system, allowing for targeted instruction and interventions based on precisely identified individual student needs. Through these formal and informal assessments, teachers in the high-performing schools were more likely to review, recreate, and share curriculum and instructional resources.

4. Learning from Peers: While we saw high-quality lessons in all four schools, teachers in the two high-performing schools were more likely to watch each other teach, and both administrators and teachers were more likely to point out exemplary teaching that others should emulate. We believe there were greater expectations and support in the high-performing schools for teachers to continue learning to teach more effectively. In contrast, teaching was more isolated in the average-performing schools.

5. Collective Responsibility: In the high-performing schools, we found that the entire school community shared responsibility for the growth and success of every student. In the average-performing schools, we saw more isolation and compartmentalization among individuals and grade levels.

6. Strong Induction: In the high-performing schools, we found that administrators and experienced teachers were able to build on the pre-service teacher education of their new hires, further developing their nascent knowledge of teaching and learning. Peer-based learning—critical to this process—was built into the daily routines of the high-performing schools where new teacher support and mentoring is highly developed. At one school, individual mentors were assigned to each novice. The other school assigned two mentors (one at grade level, one above or below) to both novice and experienced new hires. In both high-performing schools, all new teachers were observed and had multiple opportunities to observe more experienced teachers in action. Concurrently, principals expected and supported professional decision-making by teachers.

7. Strategic Resource Management: At the high-performing schools, principals had clear knowledge of available resources and kept a tight rein on expenditures, assuring that spending and acquisitions were linked to instructional priorities and identified needs. The principals in the high-performing schools appeared to

have more direct knowledge of the resources available in the school and how to manage them strategically.

8. Instructional Leadership: We found several leadership characteristics that distinguished principals in the high- and average-performing schools. Principals in the high-performing schools focused on student instruction and organizing teacher learning opportunities simultaneously. They trusted and almost required teachers to be the experts on how to conduct their classrooms and make instructional decisions. They also shared responsibilities with teachers.

9. Goals Beyond Test Scores: Preparation for the Texas state assessment (TAAS) was an integral part of instruction at all of the schools. Students were prepared in the content likely to be tested and were familiar with the testing format and test-taking strategies. In the high-performing schools, however, the scope of the curriculum went beyond the content covered by state testing. While there was a strong emphasis on standards-based teaching and learning in the high-performing schools, educators in the schools viewed TAAS objectives as a floor for teaching and learning, not a ceiling.

Next Steps

Findings from these four schools cannot be generalized to all schools in Texas or to schools in other parts of the nation. But they add to our growing understanding that successful schools are staffed by educators committed to high standards and a shared responsibility for teacher growth and student success.

SECTQ and JFTK are currently working with our advisory board to develop strategies for the next stage of this project. Our initial findings will be tested for their efficacy as indicators of teacher learning and school improvement in other Texas schools. We feel confident that we are beginning, through the lens of teaching quality, to shed light on the essential ingredients of high-performing schools and to spotlight effective practices that will serve schools in any state accountability system.

More resources

- [Just for the Kids](#) website
- [Rockefeller Foundation](#) website
- [JFTK & SECTQ Phase One report to the Rockefeller Foundation](#)
- [National Center for Educational Accountability](#)
- Desimone et al. (2002, Summer). *Effects of professional development on teachers' instruction: Results from a three-year longitudinal study*. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 24(2).
- Darling-Hammond, L., and Snyder, J. (1992). *Reframing accountability: Creating learner-centered schools*. In A. Lieberman (Ed.), *Changing context of teaching. Ninety-first yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education. Part 1*.
- [Professional development spending in the Boston Public Schools](#): A joint report of the [Boston Plan for Excellence](#) and the Boston Public Schools. December 1999.
- [The Finance Project](#) (TFP)
 - [Profiles of Selected Promising Professional Development Initiatives](#)
 - [Framing the Field: Professional Development in Context](#)

Teaching Quality Across the Nation

- A new NCTAF report identifies teacher retention as key to solving the teacher shortage. Read *No Dream Denied: A Pledge to America's Children* at www.nctaf.org/dream/dream.html
- Former NC Governor Hunt and Barnett Berry, the Center's executive director, comment on North Carolina's status of teacher retention at www.newsandobserver.com/front/v-print/story/2150086p-2041056c.html
- The [Education Commission of the States](#) (ECS) debuts a new database that shows how states are doing in meeting the goals and requirements of the *No Child Left Behind* Act at nclb.ecs.org/nclb
- A school district in Chattanooga, TN, and a nonprofit local education fund conducted an in-depth study to find what traits good teachers share. Read the results at www.detnews.com/2002/schools/0212/30/a04-47848.htm

The Southeast Center at Work

The Center is about to release *The Status of Teaching in the Southeast: Measuring Progress, Moving Forward*, a new policy brief that utilizes data from the *1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey*. Examining the issues of high quality teacher preparation, induction and support, working conditions, and quality professional development, this brief discusses some of the many challenges – as well as opportunities – the region faces in order to provide every child with a highly qualified teacher. For copies of the brief, contact Lisa Eberhardt at leberhardt@teachingquality.org.

The Center's Technical Task Force, comprised of twenty key K-12 and higher education agency data analysts, recently released its Teaching Quality Indicators Project (TQIP) Year Two Report, which discusses the Center's efforts to assemble various teacher and teaching quality data from nine states within the region. Drawing on a data collection effort focused on teacher turnover and teacher supply, the Center has surfaced unique cross state information and discovered a number of challenges to most states' current data capacities. This effort will continue to provide an opportunity for the region's policymakers to track their progress on improving teaching quality, especially in light of the new Title II teacher quality mandates of the re-authorized ESEA. It will also be the focus of a major policy symposium in Atlanta in early May, which we are pleased to co-sponsor with the Southern Regional Education Board, the Education Commission of the States, the State Higher Education Executive Officers, and the National Governors Association. For more details on this upcoming meeting and/or the work of the TQIP, contact Mandy Hoke at mhoke@teachingquality.org.

For copies of the Center's publications, email ContactUs@teachingquality.org.

For more information about the work of the Center, contact John Denning, Associate Director, at jdenning@teachingquality.org

Upcoming SECTQ Dates & Meetings:

- February 2:** Meeting of the Southeastern Regional Affiliates of the National Education Association; Orlando, FL
- February 7:** Meeting of the Teaching Quality Foundation; Chapel Hill, NC
- February 14:** Barnett Berry keynotes at the joint conference of the Ohio Association of School Personnel Administrators and the Ohio Association for Employment in Education; Columbus, OH
- February 15:** John Denning presents at the "Funding Education in an Uncertain Economy" symposium, sponsored by the National Conference of State Legislatures; Charleston, SC
- February 17-18:** Barnett Berry works with the A+ Foundation of Alabama on efforts to institute a statewide model for assessing and improving professional development; Birmingham, AL
- February 22:** Barnett Berry presents at the Holmes Partnership 7th Annual Conference in two sessions: investing in quality teachers and the importance of large-scale data collection; Washington, DC
- February 26:** Barnett Berry keynotes a teacher quality symposium and special meeting of the federal labs, sponsored by the US Department of Education; Washington, DC

Teaching Quality in the Southeast: Best Practices & Policies is a monthly publication of The Southeast Center for Teaching Quality. For more information, send an email to Contact_BestTQ@teachingquality.org, or visit our website at <http://www.teachingquality.org>.

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Summary of Case Findings

Findings from the study of these four schools directed our attention toward the following key issues for the development of quality indicators:

I. Attitudes and Expectations

Academic goals and strategies that are clear, articulated, and shared throughout the school
Belief in the capacity of students to learn *and* teachers' belief in their own capacity to help students learn at high levels
Collective responsibility of the school community for each student
Solution-centered approaches: no excuses, no blame
High standards for students' behavior, teachers' performance, and professional climate

II. Developing and Distributing Teaching Expertise

Recruit and develop teachers who are "right" for the school
Build on teacher education (scaffolding expertise)
Highly developed new teacher support and mentoring
Collaboration—and beyond—to collective responsibility (formal and informal structures)
Teachers and administrators select and sustain professional development premised on school priorities and informed by multiple sources of data on student and teacher needs

III. Tight Focus on Curriculum, Assessment, and Instruction

Systematic processes in place for multiple daily/weekly student assessments through early and on-going collection in systematic and usable formats
Teachers review, recreate, and share curriculum and instructional resources based on formal and informal assessments
Instruction tailored to individual students' needs
Additional targeted instruction/interventions, as needed, regularly throughout a child's school career
Strong emphasis, but not exclusive focus, on standards-based teaching and learning.

IV. Use of Instructional Resources

Time used efficiently/with a consistent focus on learning
All adults have appropriate instructional roles that are clearly defined, understood
Professional expertise strategically allocated
Strategic management of resources aligned to school mission

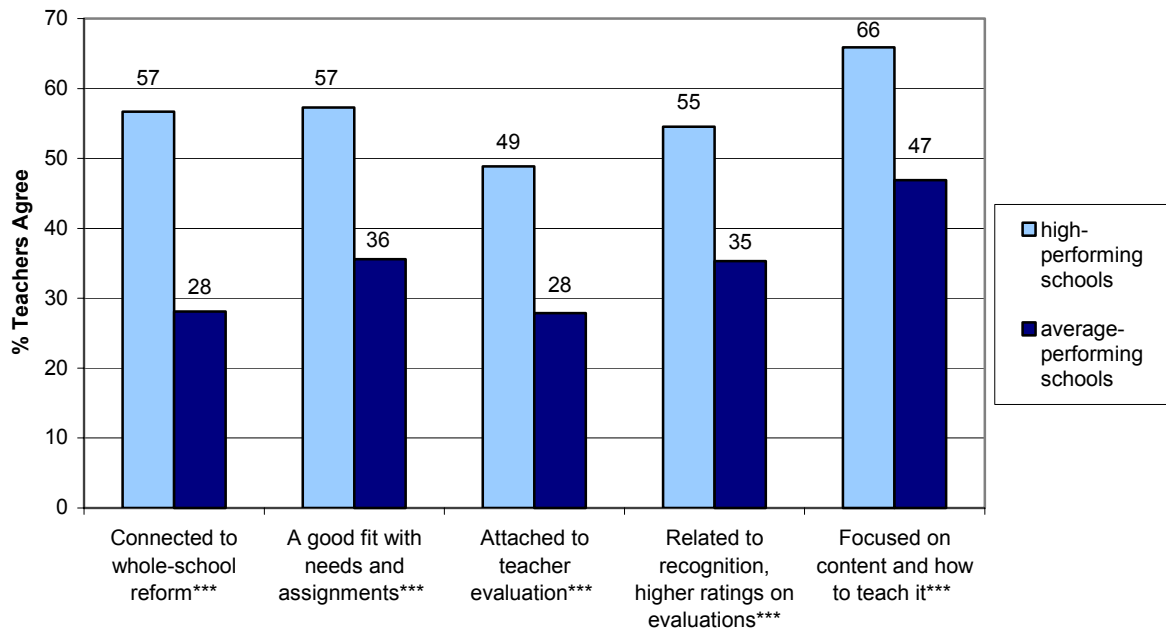
V. Leadership

Administrators and teachers take a long-term view and forge shared vision and focus
Leadership focused on student instruction and organizing teacher learning opportunities
Administrators expect and support professional decision-making by teachers and develop teacher leadership
Maintains a tight system: responsibilities clearly defined and distributed
Data-based decision making asks, "Does it work?" and "How do we know?"

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Preliminary Findings

Figure 1: Professional Development is . . .

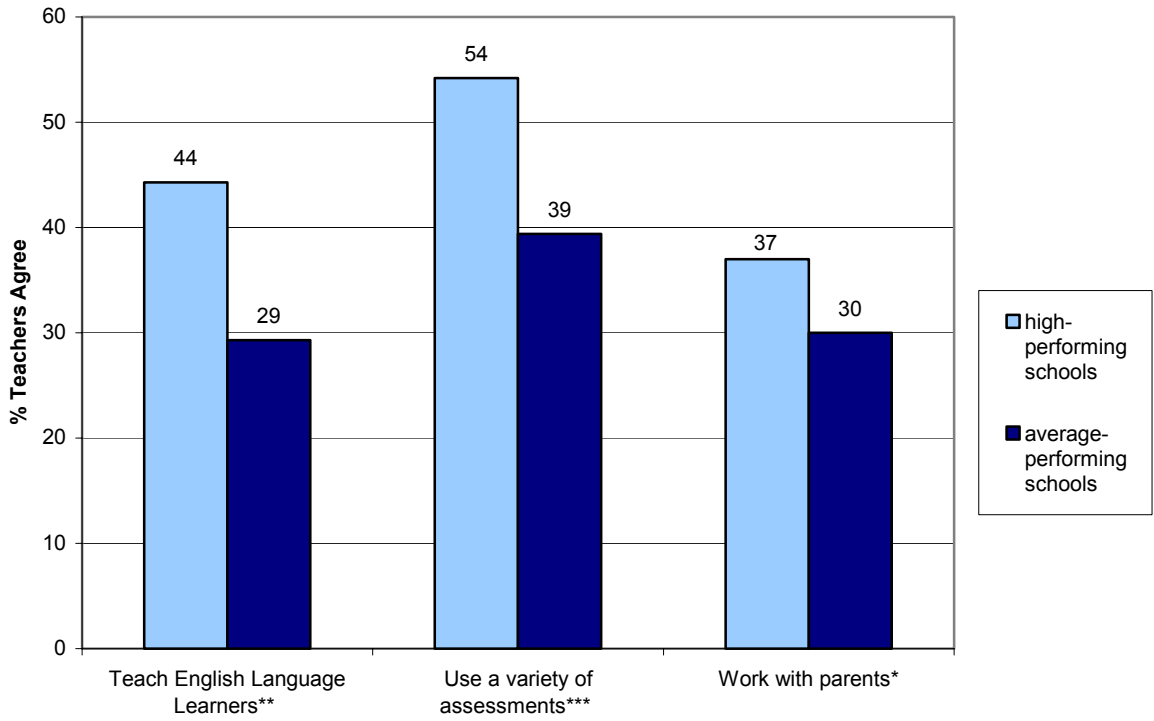


*p ≤ .05
 **p ≤ .01
 ***p ≤ .0001

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Figure 2: Teacher Education Prepared Teachers To . . .



* $p < .05$

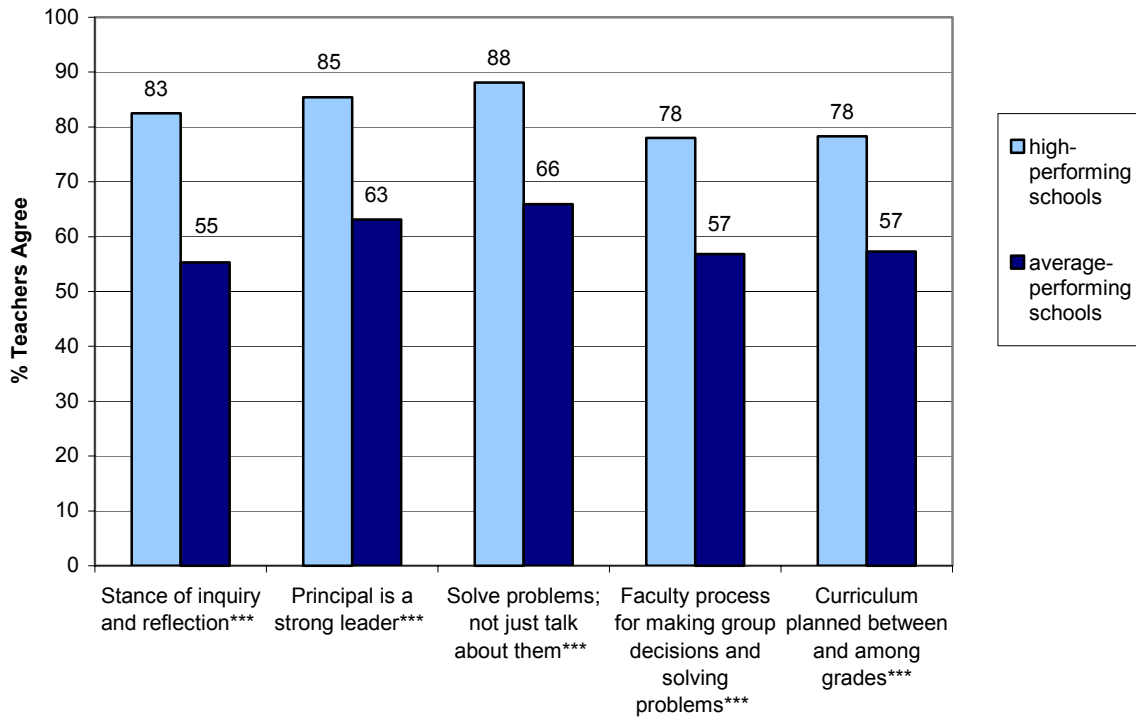
** $p < .01$

*** $p < .0001$

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Figure 3: School Culture/Climate

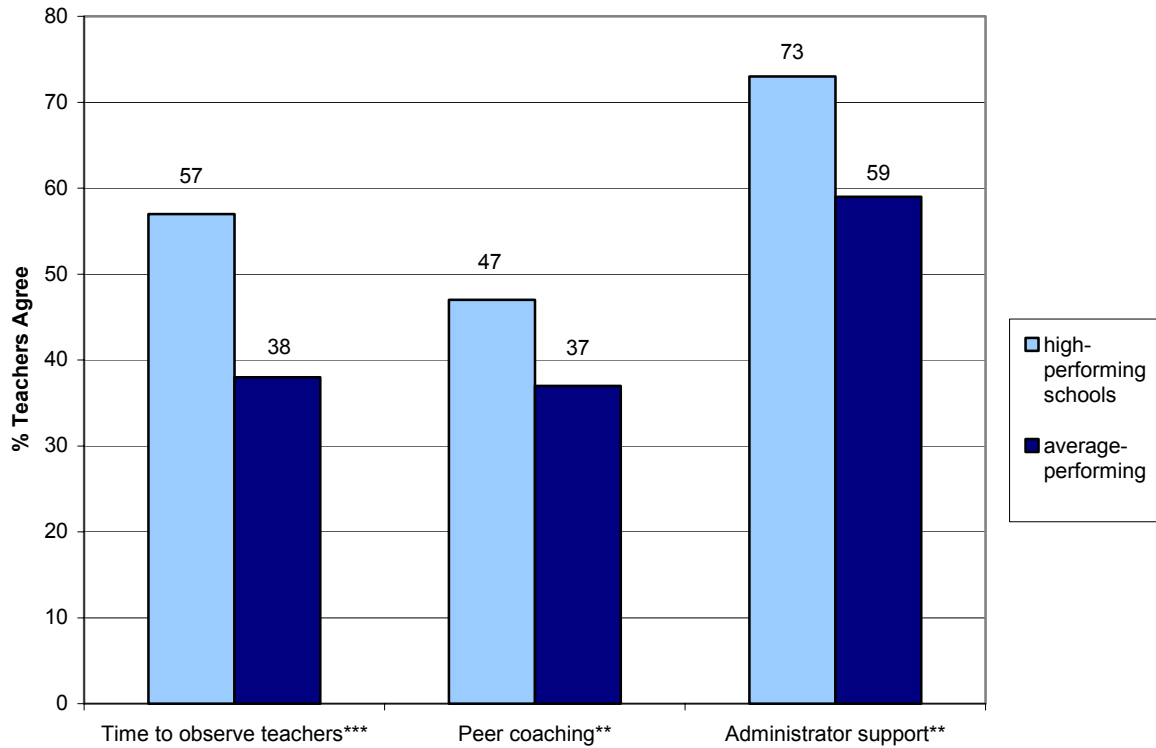


* $p \leq .05$
 ** $p \leq .01$
 *** $p \leq .0001$

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Figure 7: Induction



* $p \leq .05$
 ** $p \leq .01$
 *** $p \leq .0001$