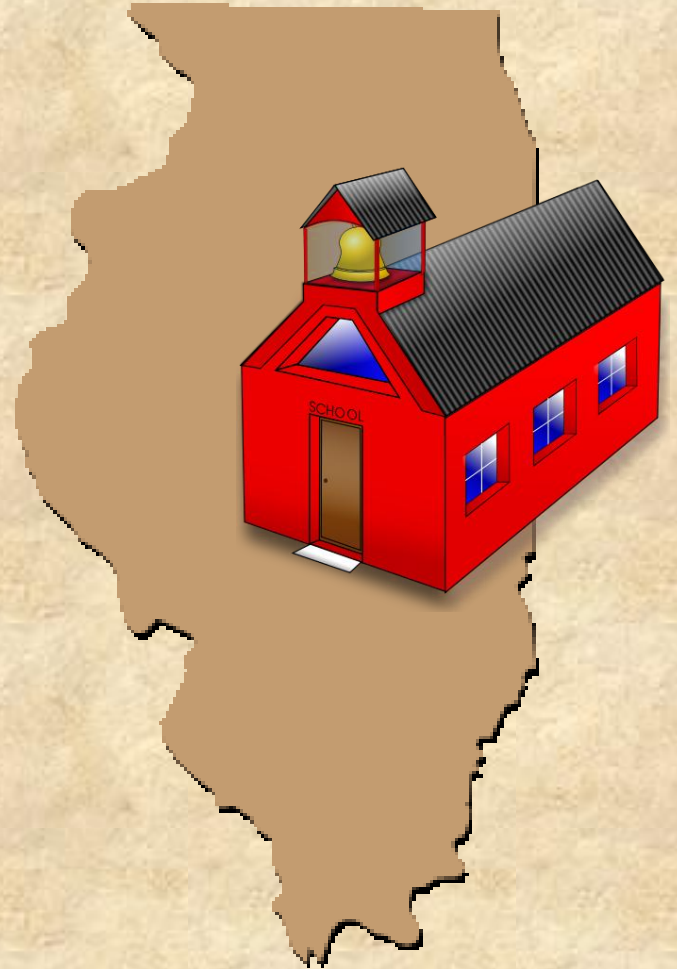


The Illinois Best Practice School Study

**Illinois Education Research Council
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The Study

- Initiated by the National Center for Educational Achievement (**NCEA**) in 2003
- **12 states** (500+ schools): AR, CA, CO, FL, HI, IL, NJ, NY, OK, TN, TX and WA
- **Outlier study** of schools that are “beating the odds” in achievement, based on demographic comparisons

School Selection

- **State test data/performance**
 - Three consecutive years, all tested grades & subjects
 - High performers and average performers
- **Demographics**
 - At least 20% poverty
- **Grade Level**
 - Elementary (17), middle school(5), high school(2)
- **Geographic Location**
 - Urban, suburban, rural, north, south, east, west, central

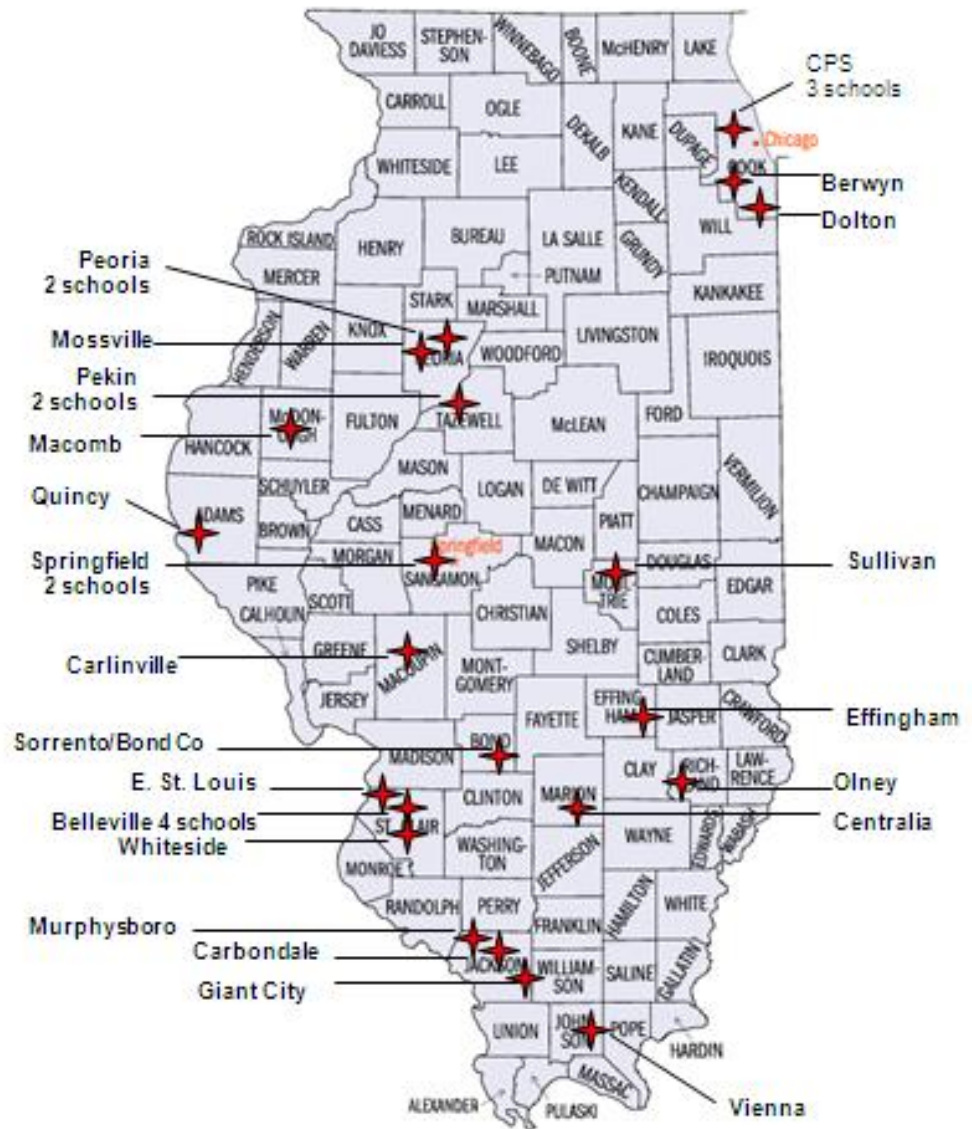
NCEA
NATIONAL CENTER
FOR EDUCATIONAL
ACHIEVEMENT



School Sites

- All areas of state except northwest
- Minority representation
- Strong Southern Illinois representation
- Some selected schools declined to participate

Illinois Best Practice School Study Sites
2003 - 2006



Research Questions

- How do high-performing schools differ from average schools in relation to the following themes?
 - **Curriculum aligned with state standards**
 - **Staffing**
 - **Instruction**
 - **Monitoring student progress**
 - **Recognition, rewards, interventions**
 - **School climate & culture**

Methodology

- **Pre-visit preparation**
 - IRB approval
 - School report card data review
 - Visit arrangements
 - Team assignments (multi-disciplinary)
- **2-day site visits**
 - Interviews: semi-structured with district administrators, principals, teachers
 - Document/artifact collection
 - Observations

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\$3

Sleuths Seek Secrets of High-Flying Schools

BY LYNN OLSON

Belleville, Ill.

Data Analysis

- Qualitative coding based on NCEA/Illinois Best Practice Framework (A)
- Cross-case analysis
- Develop “On Target” and “Missing the Mark” descriptors
- Complete cross-case Best Practice indicator framework (B)
- Write individual case studies
- Research & Policy Report

Findings

- Investigating the 6 themes at three units of analysis (district, school, classroom) allowed us to document **vertical coherence** in high performers.
 - **District, school and classroom goals are strongly aligned and mutually supportive.**
 - **Policies and resources provide coherent support for classroom teaching and learning.**
 - **Student-centered policies and practices pervade all levels.**

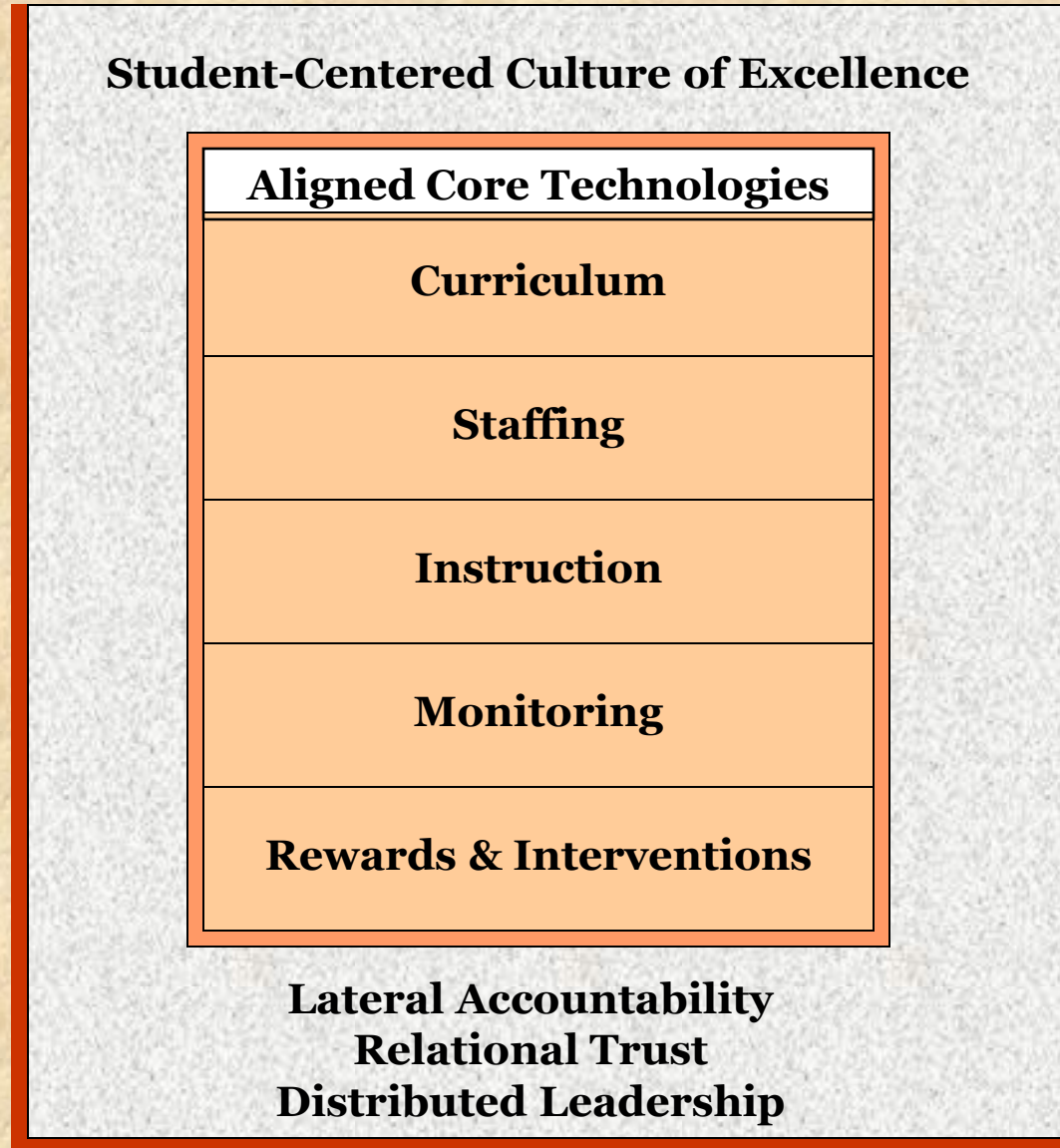
Findings

- Cross-case analysis revealed **commonalities among high performers.**
 - Five themes provide the **core mechanics** of the schools. In high performers, these elements were present and exhibited strong **alignment.** In average performers, these elements were usually present but weak or poorly aligned.
 - Key cultural attributes of **lateral accountability, relational trust, and distributed leadership** are evident in high performers. These are a result of building leadership, staff interaction, adaptation, and many iterations of refinement.
 - **Follow-up study with HP school principals**

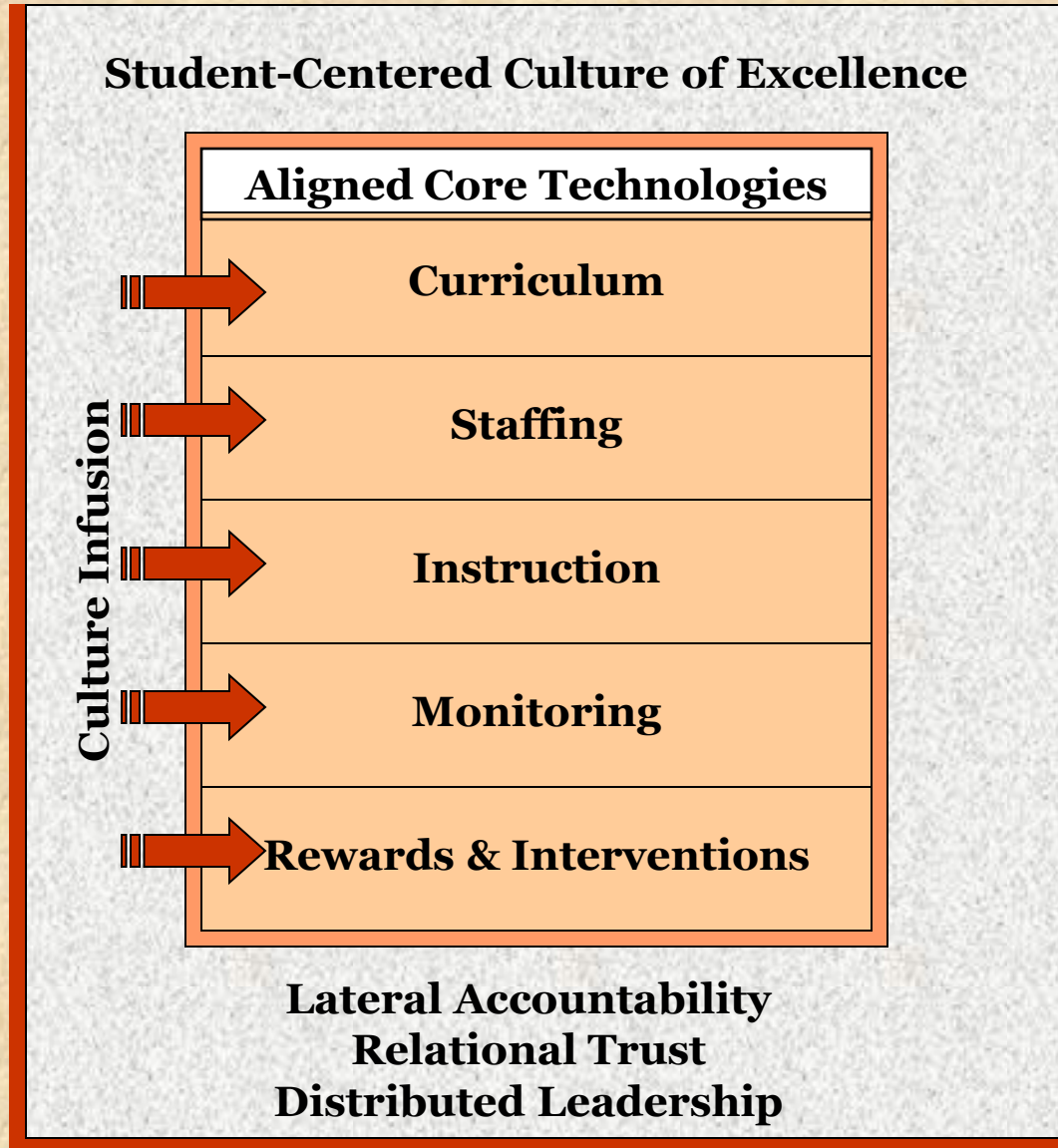
Aligned Core Technologies and Pervasive Student-Centered Culture of Excellence

Aligned Core Technologies
Curriculum
Staffing
Instruction
Monitoring
Rewards & Interventions

Aligned Core Technologies and Pervasive Student-Centered Culture of Excellence



Aligned Core Technologies and Pervasive Student-Centered Culture of Excellence



Policy Implications

- The **scaling up** question is not trivial. From these “victory gardens,” can we create “amber waves of grain”? Some ways to disseminate findings:
 - **Research and policy meetings**
 - **Professional networking**
 - **Leader Preparation**
- While the **technical core** of schools can be strengthened by federal and state policy and support, **cultural attributes** are the purview of local policy and leadership.

For More Information

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National Center for Educational Achievement

- **Center Website**
 - <http://www.just4kids.org/en/>

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