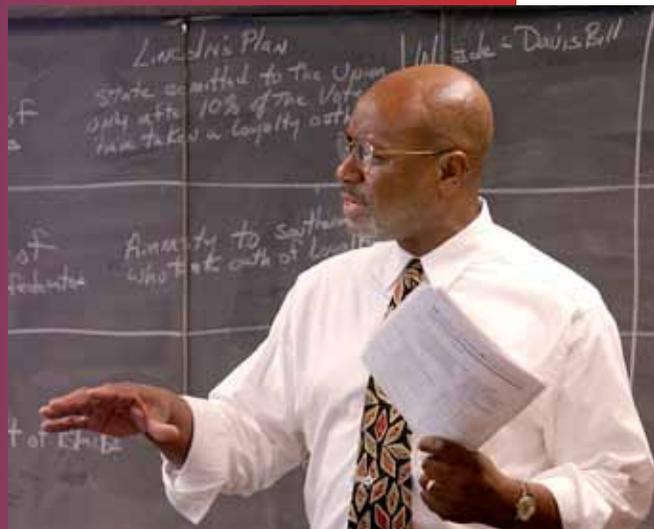


Our JCPS Culture: Shaping the Way We Learn, Teach, and Lead



2009-10

We Won't Stop Until ...

each student **loves learning** and can't get enough of it . . .

all students feel truly **connected** to their learning, their school community,
and the world around them . . .

every classroom provides **challenging instruction** tailored to each child . . .

all students understand that their thoughts and **actions matter** . . .

each student **aspires to the highest** levels of learning
and recognizes that education is a **lifelong journey**—not a destination . . .

each of our schools is noted for its **excellence** . . .

achievement is reflected in **authentic** student performances . . .

each student discovers the **leader** within him or herself. . .

we all celebrate and learn from our **diversity** . . .

each student fosters the **well-being** of others . . .

teamwork is the source of our success—and **leadership** is its catalyst . . .

every staff member **makes a difference** in students' lives . . .

all students are **confident** in expressing their ideas and opinions. . .

everyone knows our schools are **caring, safe, and secure** environments . . .

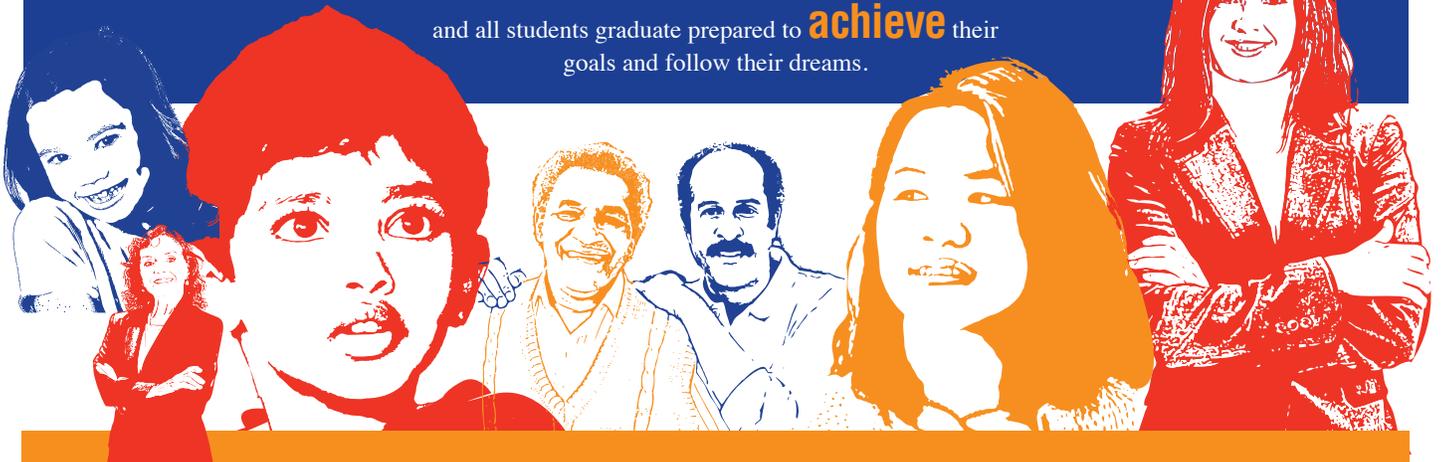
all **families** are partners in their children's education . . .

innovation and excellence are the heart and soul of JCPS . . .

the community speaks of its public schools with **unabashed pride** . . .

each employee is proud to be on the **JCPS team** . . .

and all students graduate prepared to **achieve** their
goals and follow their dreams.



Our JCPS Culture: Shaping the Way We Learn, Teach, and Lead

School districts work best when they know where they are going and have a defined set of goals and strategies that will get them there. While the current education reform movement is built on the belief that setting high standards for students and holding educators accountable will result in improved student performance, systemic change that ultimately will lead to great schools also requires a clear vision and mission. A vision and a mission guide teachers and administrators as they design or select curricula, develop new instructional practices, and make the daily decisions that ensure that the mission is embodied in the culture of the school. A clearly articulated vision and mission help district leaders make policy and governing decisions. A vision and a mission also inspire all staff members by giving them a sense of the larger purposes that education serves and the ways they—whatever their individual roles and responsibilities—can make a positive difference for our students and our society.

In broad terms, we want our students to be prepared to achieve their goals, follow their dreams, and help create a more just society. We want our students not only to develop the skills and talents to be personally successful in postsecondary education or employment but also to be thoughtful and contributing members of the community. Our role in achieving these outcomes is to help our students graduate with a high level of academic performance, strong character, and a sense of social responsibility.

How do we create a great school filled with high-performing, civic-minded, and ethical students? We need a vision—a vision of the ideal learning environment that we are working to create. Our vision is articulated in the district document “We Won’t Stop Until” It brings into focus the reasons we are working hard every day teaching, analyzing student work, and reteaching lessons until our students demonstrate deep understanding of the content and the meaning in what they are learning. Moreover, our vision is not a static hope. It represents a dynamic commitment to action.

To give the vision substance, we developed a set of basic, but powerful, Core Beliefs. “We won’t stop until all students graduate prepared to achieve their goals and follow their dreams” because we

Core Beliefs

We believe that each student must graduate prepared to succeed in college, career, and life choices and to be a productive, contributing citizen.

We believe that students learn best when they:

- Know that the adults in their lives expect much of them and believe they can succeed.
- Value the importance of education by demonstrating effort, perseverance, and caring for others.
- Engage in curricula that are rigorous and with instruction that is personalized and differentiated.
- Make connections to their learning experiences, their school community, and the world at large.
- Interact in a caring, safe, secure, respectful, diverse, and inclusive learning environment.
- Reflect on the results of their assessments, and make conscious choices to improve their learning.

We believe that student success depends upon high-performance learning environments that:

- Value each student equally.
- Inspire and empower students to be successful, lifelong learners.
- Use formative, diagnostic learning assessments to motivate students, and to tailor and improve instruction.
- Enable students to demonstrate in-depth understanding through meaningful and relevant learning experiences.
- Model the ideals of exemplary citizenship.
- Promote teamwork, problem solving, collaboration, and a culture of inquiry.
- Develop student leadership through character development and service learning.
- Encourage parent/community support and involvement.

We believe that leadership is the most effective catalyst for maximizing student performance through a positive school culture that:

- Expects and promotes quality teaching.
- Provides employees with the resources necessary for students to achieve at high academic and social levels.
- Strategically places staff members in positions, and provides them with powerful professional growth experiences.
- Encourages staff to explore new strategies and pursue innovation to enhance organizational effectiveness.
- Expects staff to collaboratively design, plan, implement, and review effective programs and practices.

We believe that public education provides the best learning environment for building, preserving, and strengthening our democratic society.

believe that each student must graduate prepared to succeed in college, career, and life choices and to be a productive, contributing citizen. “We won’t stop until each student aspires to the highest levels of learning” because we *believe* students learn best when the adults in their lives have high expectations for them. And “we won’t stop until all students are confident in expressing their ideas and opinions” because we believe that student success depends on high-performance learning environments that inspire, empower, and value each student.

With a set of guiding principles (our Core Beliefs) and a vision for the future (We Won’t Stop Until) in hand, we must identify what we want to achieve and how we plan to do so. Our Theory of Action provides such a framework. It encapsulates the outcomes we believe our work will yield and the changes we must make to achieve them.

In essence, the Theory of Action is a “when ... then” statement. When we invoke a particular set of actions, then we can expect a particular result. Consider the following sets of circumstances.

When we create classroom and school communities that are caring and culturally responsive and that build strong connections between students and their schools, *then* our students will perceive their schools as safe and caring environments where they are comfortable taking risks and making mistakes as they work to refine their skills, extend their knowledge, and develop their understanding. Creating caring classrooms and school communities is about more than good manners and being polite. It requires that we teach our students how to take the perspective of another, find common ground among competing positions, and resolve conflicts in a positive manner. It also requires us to shift our approach to classroom management from one of adults controlling student interactions to adults teaching students how to make socially responsible decisions that will facilitate students’ understanding, nurture a sense of community within the classroom, and build upon students’ cultural roots.

As we enhance the climate of our schools, we are also concentrating on academics. *When* teachers collaborate to rethink and revise lessons in order to provide students with

Theory of Action

When We Collaborate To—

- Create caring and culturally-responsive classroom communities;
- Provide high-quality, personalized instruction that challenges and engages students in authentic work;
- Ensure equitable access for all students to a consistent, world-class, inquiry-based curriculum; and
- Prepare leaders to engage in collaborative strategies to move this shared vision forward . . .

Then—

All students graduate with

- A high level of academic performance,
- Strong character development and civic engagement, and
- Enhanced health and wellness . . .

So That—

All students are prepared to

- Achieve their goals,
- Follow their dreams, and
- Create a more just society.

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high-quality, personalized instruction that challenges and engages them in authentic work (that is, real problems that have personal and social importance), *then* students will be able to focus on their subjects in greater depth and classroom lessons will have relevance to their circumstances. Personalizing instruction means that teachers develop differentiated classroom lessons designed to challenge each student and provide individual support to advance student achievement. Personalizing instruction also will enable teachers to use students’ work to diagnose their conceptual development and create the next steps in their instruction.



Personalized instruction is only one facet of our academic thrust. Quality content is the other. *When* we ensure that all classrooms provide a quality, consistent, inquiry-based curriculum of the highest caliber and that all students have equitable access to it, *then* students will be more fully engaged in and find meaning from their learning and their achievement will increase. Elementary and middle school science modules, Math Investigations 2 (the district’s elementary mathematics curriculum), and Connected Mathematics 2 (the middle school mathematics curriculum), all— funded through the GE Developing Futures™ grant—encourage student-centered inquiry through problem solving. Offering high-quality, inquiry-based curricula such as these ultimately will lead to higher academic gains among more students. However, because we are serious about eliminating achievement gaps among students, simply providing access to academically rigorous curricula is not enough. We also must infuse classroom lessons with high expectations for every student, provide the necessary academic support to increase students’ chances for success, and be intentional in elevating our levels of understanding of and respect for the diverse and unique cultures of our students. Further, we must find ways to incorporate that cultural knowledge into the fabric of our schools and classrooms.

Working Collaboratively

The last component of our Theory of Action focuses on the employees charged with accomplishing all of this work. *When* we prepare school-level and department leaders and all employees to work collaboratively, *then* all staff members will be able to build on each other’s knowledge and experience to facilitate students’ academic success. In a collaborative environment, teachers share their practice with each other and work together to refine their instruction and address the individual learning needs of their students. We become a team with a common set of values and aspirations and a collective focus on improving the quality of our instruction. Assembling a talented, creative group of faculty, administrators, and support staff who share a singular vision for excellence and who work collaboratively toward that vision in a caring, culturally responsive environment will create new and innovative ways to raise student performance.

While our Theory of Action focuses on the broad, long-term goals and graduation-related outcomes, we also have delineated four key goals that will shape the work of JCPS teachers, administrators, and support staff for the foreseeable future. The goals outline the change processes that schools and central office must implement to ensure that we graduate high-performing students from high-performance schools. The goals focus our work on enhancing effective teaching and leadership, strengthening district culture, and improving the district’s overall effectiveness. This straightforward list of 4 goals (along with 24 implementation strategies) will allow us to close student achievement gaps; maximize student learning, growth, and development; build a caring culture that empowers students and staff to have a voice and practice leadership and civic engagement; and align district resources to improve instruction across the district, while providing additional and targeted support to low-performing schools.

2009-10

District Goals and Strategies

Goal 1: Enhance Effective Teaching

We will enhance teaching by engaging teachers in reflective practice that in turn engages students in challenging, rewarding, and authentic academic work. Effective teaching and high expectations will enable each student to attain high levels of performance and will facilitate the closing of achievement gaps. Effective teaching is personalized and inquiry-based, fosters student understanding, and requires students to extend their conceptual thinking individually and with other students.

Strategy 1: Strengthen Literacy Development Pre-K Through Grade 12

We will continue our literacy initiative to strengthen reading and writing instruction through classroom-based assessment, the implementation of a balanced-literacy approach, and embedded intervention strategies. We will focus specific attention on integrating writing across all curricular areas, identify and develop curriculum materials to support literacy learning, and provide professional development to deepen teachers' understanding of effective literacy practices.

Strategy 2: Improve Math and Science Instruction

We will strengthen mathematics and science instruction by deepening the implementation of the K–12 math and science curricula: Investigations 2, Connected Mathematics 2 (CMP2), Science Modules, Integrated Science 1A and 1B, and Biology—A Human Approach. We will implement and provide professional development for grade-nine and grade-ten teachers of the newly selected College Preparatory Mathematics Program. Interested classroom teachers will participate in professional learning communities supported by Resource Teachers (RTs) with a focus on instruction and assessment for learning. RTs will receive professional development in cognitive coaching, assessment for learning, facilitation of learning communities, and discourse in an inquiry-based classroom. We will evaluate the levels of classroom implementation of the high school mathematics and science programs designed by Accountability, Research, and Planning.

Strategy 3: Apply a Diagnostic Approach to Teaching and Learning

We will improve instruction by fostering a diagnostic approach to teaching and learning and by providing professional development in the diagnostic use of assessment tools. We will promote daily classroom practice by teachers and students to examine work and to adjust instruction and interventions in order to accomplish intended instructional outcomes. The district's assessment landscape will reflect a balanced system that provides formative, interim, and summative student performance information to teachers, administrators, and instructional personnel for collegial reflection, collaboration, and the differentiation of instruction.

Strategy 4: Advance Instruction Through Technology

We will strengthen and expand our technology infrastructure and support services to students, parents, staff, and the community by improving instructional tools through research of best practices, by providing technology resources that increase efficiency and effectiveness, and by enhancing communication capabilities through the provision of timely information for decision making. We will improve principals' instructional leadership through a professional-development program focused on using digital resources to engage students and increase achievement. We will demonstrate the use of technology to accommodate learner differences through Universal Design for Learning (UDL). We will ensure that the elementary technology magnet school provides a model for technology resources and instructional practices. We will increase teachers' ability to integrate technology with inquiry-based instruction through a Lesson Study professional-development program that targets fifth-grade math teachers.

Strategy 5: Strengthen the Early Childhood Instructional Program

We will strengthen and enhance our Early Childhood Program to promote a high-quality learning experience that addresses the whole child. We will promote positive social interactions through Adventures in Peacemaking and Songs of Resilience. We will increase staff learning opportunities to effectively implement our developmental literacy and inquiry-based math programs and thereby prepare each child for successful transition to our district's kindergarten classrooms.

Strategy 6: Create a K–5 Social Studies Curriculum

We will develop a cohesive and innovative K–5 civics-based social studies curriculum that strengthens students' sense of efficacy and gives them voice—both of which are key means of closing achievement gaps across the district. This curriculum will be inquiry-based, student-active, rigorous, and developmentally appropriate.



Goal 2: Enhance Effective Leadership

We will provide a leadership development system that recruits, selects, prepares, supports, and retains highly effective principals and leaders. We will equip these leaders with the knowledge and skills to be designers of high-performance schools, characterized by a positive, collaborative culture where quality teaching maximizes student learning, growth, and development.

Strategy 1: Nurture a Professional Culture

We will foster a culture of professional growth by supporting collaborative reflection, dialogue, and team building to enhance student understanding, connection, and meaning. We will support leaders in implementing a standard classroom instructional framework, structuring staff opportunities for reflection on instructional practice, strengthening the administrator and teacher evaluation process, and expanding staff leadership opportunities.

Strategy 2: Enrich the Quality of Leadership

We will improve the quality of leadership exhibited by principals and other administrators through focused leadership-development strategies based on the district's Theory of Action and the Leadership Competencies and Core Practices and through professional development that emphasizes the use of collaborative strategies to enhance instructional quality and move our district vision forward.

Strategy 3: Enhance the Leadership Capacity of Instructional Leadership Teams

We will support principals and Instructional Leadership Teams (ILTs), as they build communities of practice within a collaborative school culture where all learners succeed, by extending the Harvard WIDE World: Teaching for Understanding program to all district principals and ILTs. We will assist principals and ILTs with designing, implementing, and monitoring strategic action plans that have measurable goals and that align school and classroom culture, curriculum, instruction, assessment, resources, and professional development with the district's Theory of Action and other elements of *Our JCPS Culture*.

Strategy 4: Improve the Quality of Aspiring Leadership Development

We will prepare aspiring leaders to be designers and implementers of high-performance schools by focusing on cultural leadership, instructional leadership, and managerial experiences embedded in the Theory of Action and *Our JCPS Culture*. We will prepare aspiring leaders to engage in collaborative strategies that create diverse, caring, and culturally responsive school communities by including CARE for Kids and Responsive Classroom components in their preparation module. We will strengthen programs that foster a leadership team reflective of diverse cultures by including a cultural responsiveness preparation module that will examine community service-learning opportunities.

Goal 3: Strengthen Organizational Culture

We will foster an organizational culture that builds community among families, businesses, organizations, and schools. We will stimulate the creation of caring, respectful, and culturally responsive classroom communities that empower all students and employees to be successful and to have a voice and opportunities to practice leadership and civic engagement.

Strategy 1: Strengthen School Culture and the Character Development of Students

We will strengthen school culture, advance character development, and promote the social and emotional growth of students by creating inclusive, caring school communities that nurture respectful, supportive relationships among students, educators, support staff, and parents. We will embed opportunities for character development in the daily life of the school by implementing *Adventures in Peacemaking* in our prekindergarten classrooms; *One Community, One Nation*, an anticipated K–5 social studies curriculum; CARE for Kids in our elementary and middle schools; and Freshman Academies and *Facing History and Ourselves* in our high schools.

Strategy 2: Enhance Cultural Competency

We will promote a district culture in which individual differences are respected and valued by offering professional development that supports and enhances the staff's cultural competency and world view. We will provide opportunities for students to learn in heterogeneous groups and to study about people from backgrounds representing the cultural spectrum, by means of student cultural exchanges, both in person and electronically. We will work to close the engagement gap and the empowerment gap by using multiple strategies, including CARE for Kids/Developmental Design activities, personalized instruction, classroom support for teachers in the use of culturally relevant/responsive pedagogy, and the development of the new K–5 social studies curriculum *One Community, One Nation*. We will also enhance staff diversity.

Strategy 3: Provide Leadership Opportunities for Students

We will develop and enhance students' leadership skills by engaging them in developmentally appropriate and personally relevant activities, such as service learning, peer mediation, conflict resolution, civic participation, and co-curricular/extracurricular activities.

Strategy 4: Strengthen Family Participation and Involvement

We will improve family involvement and parent education by expanding Parent University, implementing the parent component of CARE for Kids, extending outreach into the communities where our families reside, expanding the Parent Portal to all schools, and offering parent involvement activities via Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), Family Resource and Youth Services Centers (FRYSCs), schools, Title I, and community partners.

Strategy 5: Offer Highly Attractive Schools That Engage the Community

We will enhance the community's perceptions of our school district as the best choice for all students in Pre-K through grade 12 by informing parents and the community of the district's new programs. We will ensure that every school is highly attractive and provides academic rigor in personalized learning environments by implementing the CARE for Kids initiative and the I Am JCPS program. We will pursue community and business support for the optional programs and magnet programs and schools that are part of the new student assignment plan and for the high school career-theme implementation to ensure that these programs are attractive and effective. We will expand opportunities for individuals, businesses, and organizations to volunteer, tutor, mentor,

fund, and support our schools and district through such initiatives as **Every 1 Reads More**, Add it up—Math+Science for All, the nurses in the schools project, job shadowing, school-business partnerships, and *One Community, One Nation*.

Strategy 6: Address Disparities in Student Outcomes

We will strengthen our implementation of differentiated instructional practices and strategic interventions. We will apply a systemic assessment process that includes balanced assessment, paired with the Response to Intervention (RtI) process, as a framework to reduce aca-

demical and social/cultural gaps. We will assist students in understanding their strengths and challenges so they can self-advocate and take charge of their own learning experiences. For students identified via ongoing analysis of data as being at risk, we will intentionally intervene to reduce suspensions and retentions and to increase attendance. We will reinforce these efforts through high expectations paired with individualized and personalized instruction and support.

Goal 4: Improve Organizational Effectiveness

We will improve organizational effectiveness by aligning district resources (e.g., human, fiscal, time, physical space) in ways that bring coherence and clarity to our efforts to improve instruction and school culture, particularly for schools not meeting all of their goals.

Strategy 1: Promote Student Diversity Across the District

We will continue to refine and improve the implementation of the elementary student assignment plan and prepare for the implementation of the middle and high school student assignment plan, as approved by the Jefferson County Board of Education. We will support all schools so that they can meet the diversity guideline, enhance diversity, support student success, improve instructional quality, and provide family choice within a system that supports stability, predictability, and equity, as described in the guiding principles for student assignment.

Strategy 2: Drive Curricular Reform

We will ensure that the district has the capacity to embrace curricular and instructional innovation by providing strong pedagogical support to classroom teachers and principals. This support for the implementation of inquiry-based curricula, formative assessments, and related instructional practices will be provided by content-area resource teachers, specialists, and directors of the JCPS Gheens Academy. These efforts are designed to build capacity at the school and classroom levels through support for emerging professional learning communities.

Strategy 3: Reduce Class Size

We will develop a plan that gives schools an opportunity—and a financial incentive—to partner with central office to progressively reduce average class size, initially at the Primary and middle school levels. We will bolster class-size reduction by providing professional development in differentiation of instruction to ensure that students receive the individual attention necessary to improve their academic performance, enhance their sense of connection to adults in the school, and personalize their learning environment.

Strategy 4: Redesign the High School Structure

We will support a common class schedule that provides access to both required courses and high-interest electives, time for in-depth learning, and flexibility for a variety of learning styles. We will also promote freshman academies and schools of study to develop well-articulated, career-interest themes; increase student personalization; and improve matriculation toward graduation, especially for underrepresented groups of students. Finally, we will significantly increase college access by providing a four-year continuum of precollege experiences, enhancing preparation for college entrance exams, and developing an advisory structure for guidance and support.

Strategy 5: Enhance Student and Employee Health and Increase Attendance

We will implement and promote a comprehensive program of school health services and health education by expanding the provision of nursing services within schools, assessing student health risk factors, and appropriately intervening to reduce students' medical barriers to education. We will develop a plan that gives schools an opportunity—and a financial incentive—to partner with central office to add nurses to their staffs. We will provide students and staff with access to wellness and health education programs to promote better attendance and health.

Strategy 6: Enhance the Capacity for Innovation and Instructional Improvement

We will continue to build the capacity of the Gheens Institute for Innovation to promote and test new and creative ideas that will strengthen collaborative professional culture; effective instructional practice; and student understanding, meaning, and connection. We will encourage a culture of innovation through district awards for teams of teachers and individuals. We will collaborate in seeking grant opportunities, conducting research and professional-development activities, and promoting innovative practices.

Strategy 7: Enhance Employee Expertise

We will promote higher levels of professional expertise in all areas of the organization, focusing especially on the needs of schools not meeting all of their goals and other priority areas. We will strengthen programs that recruit and support a diverse workforce throughout the district by continuing the Multicultural Teacher Recruitment Program, scholarship programs for JCPS minority high school graduates, and tuition-assistance programs for classified employees as well as by exploring an alternative certification program for leaders. We will provide a new-teacher induction program that offers professional development in the content areas of literacy, math, science, and social studies and in such instructional processes as CARE for Kids, inquiry-based instruction, formative assessment, and teaching in collaborative school cultures. We will incorporate a major component into our professional-development program to prepare principals to work effectively in urban settings and in schools not meeting all of their goals.

Strategy 8: Enhance Organizational Effectiveness Through Technology

We will enhance organizational effectiveness through improved data management and user-friendly dashboards. We will increase administrative efficiency through interoperability among all administrative systems to reduce redundant data entry. We will continue to improve technology infrastructure in order to increase access to resources and reliability of all systems and to reduce costs. We will continue to enhance communication among staff, students, families, and the community through technology innovations by providing timely information in a variety of formats to assist in data-driven decision making.

Strategy 9: Redesign the Early Childhood Program

We will strengthen and enhance the Early Childhood Program by focusing the professional practice of all stakeholders on deep understanding and coherent work in support of the district's vision. We will review and refine the organizational chart to enhance service to our stakeholders by clearly articulating roles and responsibilities. We will refine our operational systems to provide more effective and efficient systems for recruitment, enrollment, placement, transportation of students, and the allocation of classroom space in district schools. We will continue to streamline systems to use fiscal and personnel resources effectively.



Leadership Competencies

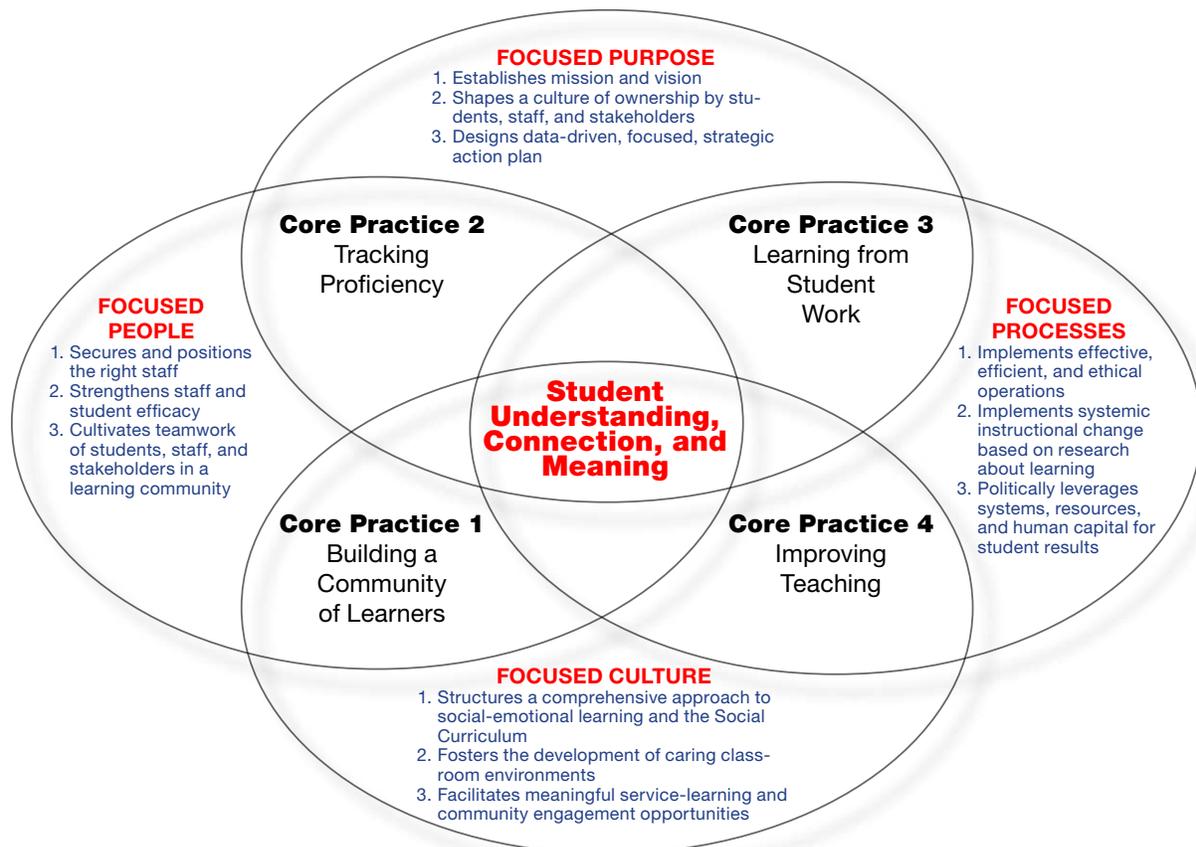
Accomplishing these goals requires the leadership of individuals at every level of the district. What leadership competencies should school leaders, teachers, and staff members possess in order to achieve the district's goals? First and foremost is the ability to design instruction that deepens students' understanding of subject matter, prepares them for future learning, enhances students' connections to one another and to the school, and ensures that lessons are relevant and meaningful to students' lives.

Principals must focus their energies on selecting and nurturing a high-quality staff, being clear and articulate about their vision and purpose, using processes that support instructional improvement, and paying conscious attention to the culture and climate of classrooms and the school as a whole. This focus on people, purpose, processes, and culture

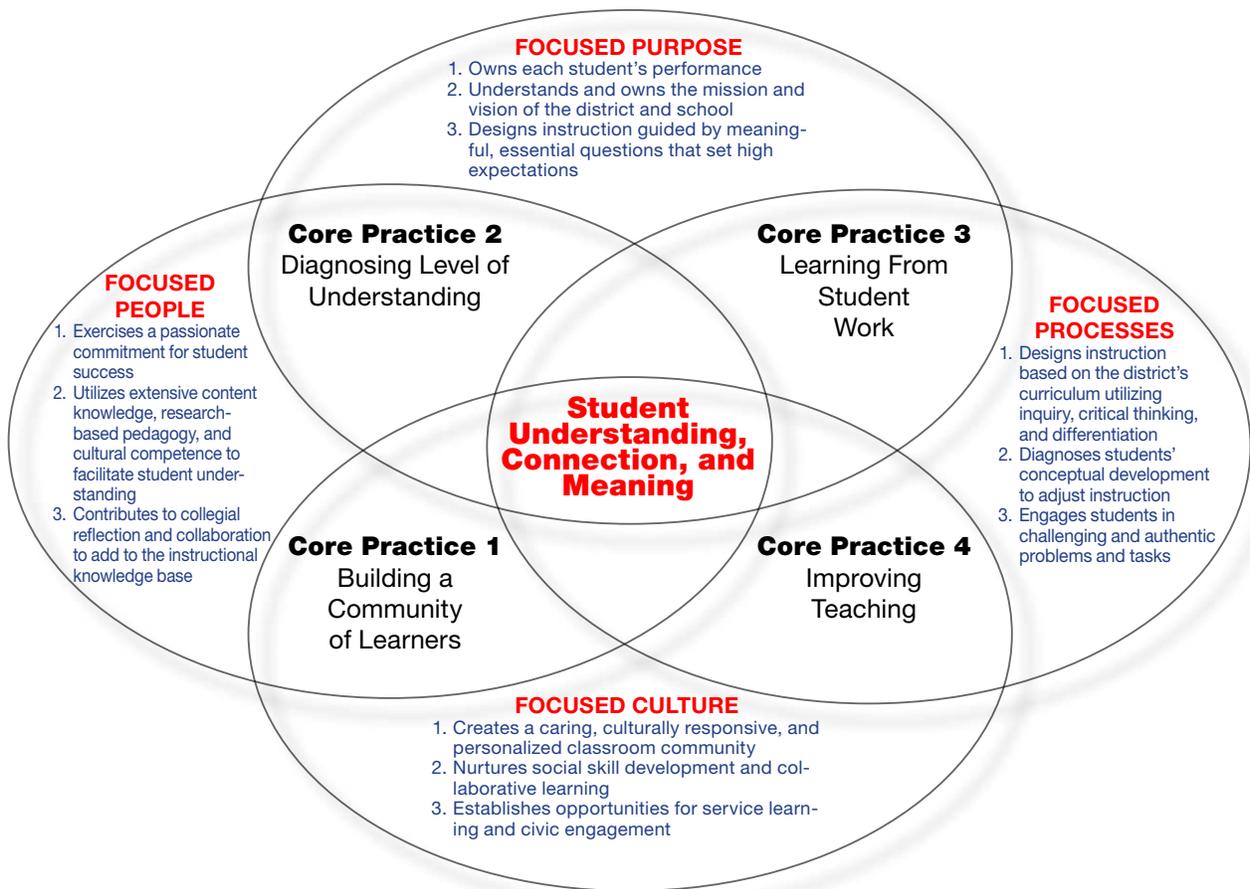
is key to creating great schools. Focusing on these areas also sets in motion a process in which the school staff builds a community of learners, tracks student proficiency, and uses student work to improve teaching. A principal who focuses his or her leadership on these areas will be able to:

- Set a reflective and collaborative tone for his or her school and shape a shared culture, mission, and vision.
- Assemble a talented, cohesive team of staff members who are ready to advocate for and take ownership of every student's performance.
- Use research to promote instructional change.
- Implement efficient and ethical operations.
- Leverage resources.
- Work with all stakeholders in the learning community to enhance student results.

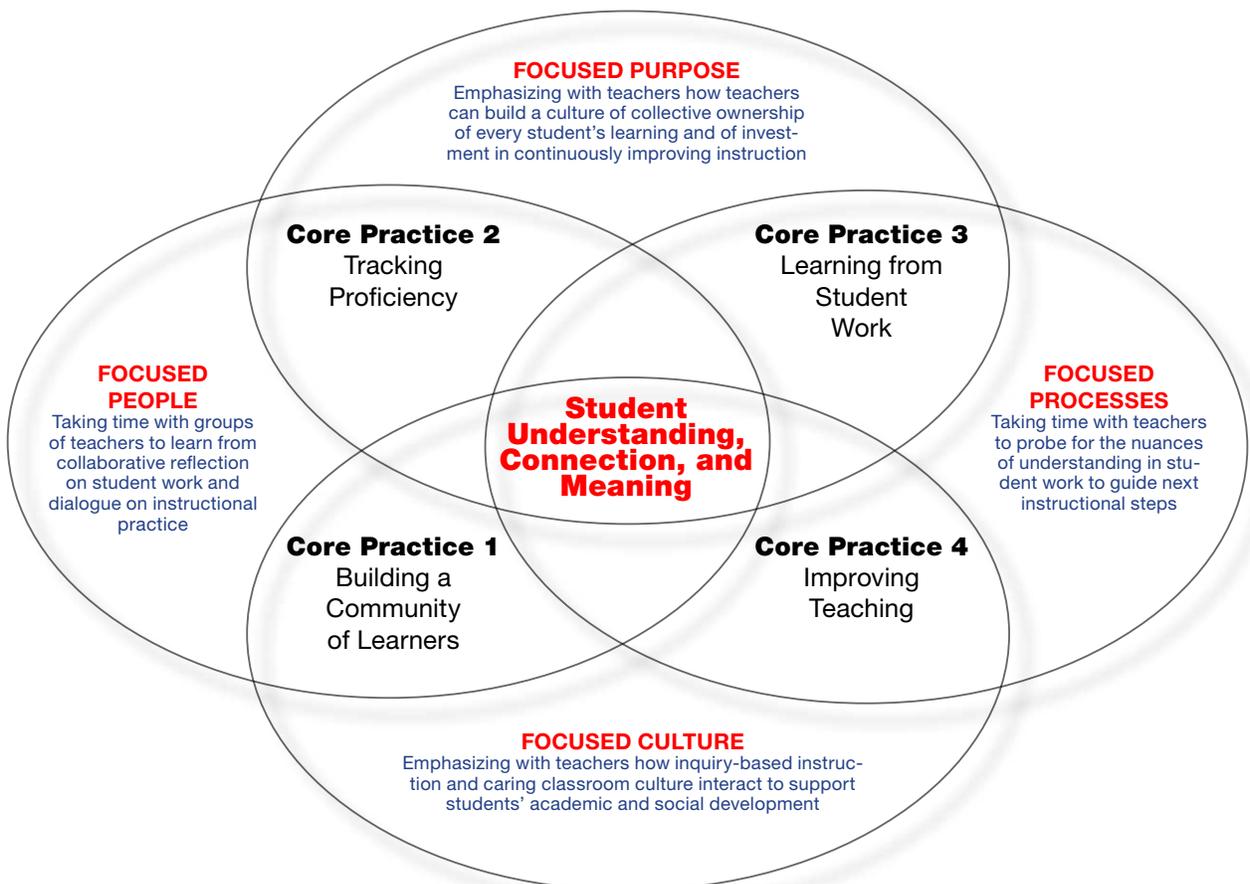
Leadership Competencies and Core Practices for a Great School



Teaching Competencies and Core Practices for a Great Classroom



Resource Teacher Competencies and Core Practices for a Great Classroom





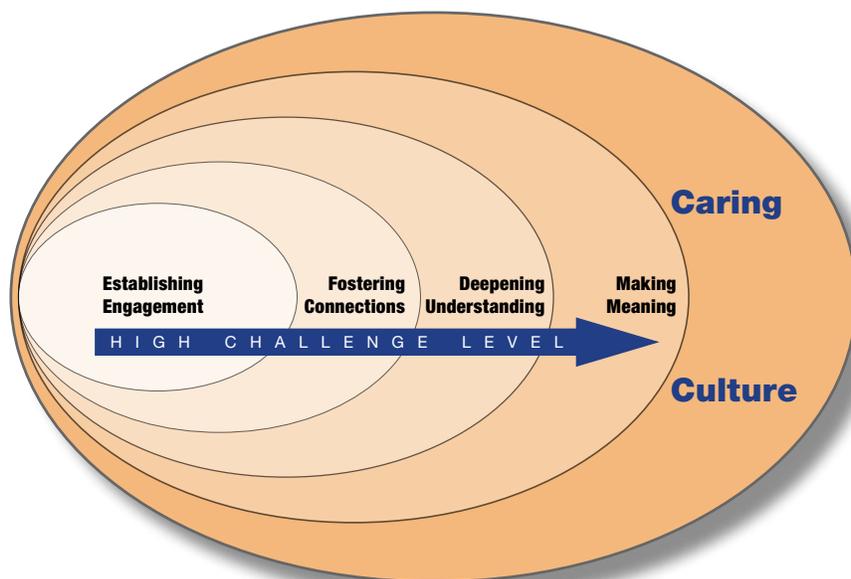
No school can achieve greatness without skilled and dedicated teachers. A passion for teaching and an extensive knowledge of content and pedagogy top the list of competencies that every district teacher must possess. These attitudes and skills will enable them to enhance students' understanding of and connection to every lesson and to derive meaning from it. JCPS teachers must own—that is, accept personal responsibility for—each student's performance; understand and believe in the mission and vision of the district; and design lessons that are guided by meaningful, essential questions that set high expectations for student performance.

Resource teachers also play an integral role in the delivery of quality instruction. They, like classroom teachers, must possess a set of competencies and core practices that promote teacher collaboration, culture building, inquiry-based instruction, reflection on student work, collegial dialogue on instructional practices, and a strong sense of community within the classroom. Mastering these competencies leads

to the four core practices of a great classroom—building a community of learners, diagnosing students' level of understanding, learning from student work, and improving teaching—ultimately producing effective instruction that reflects our core values of student understanding, connection, and meaning. Assisting teachers in that effort is the Classroom Instructional Framework (CIF) for elementary, middle, and high school classrooms.

The CIF provides teachers with a structure for planning great lessons that will produce student understanding, connection, and meaning. Because the CIF includes four instructional components—establishing engagement, fostering connections, deepening understanding, and making meaning—it can serve as a tool for both planning and observation. It enables administrators, teachers, and instructional support staff to have conversations about teaching that are based on a shared lexicon. In addition, the CIF provides a common foundation upon which to base professional development.

Classroom Instructional Framework



CLASSROOM Instructional Framework

Note: The boldface sections and red annotations illustrate how the CIF supports the Theory of Action.

What is the CIF?

Collaboration

The CIF is an organizational framework that provides teachers with a structure around which to plan and deliver their lessons. Because it can serve as a planning tool and an observation tool, it **enables administrators, teachers, and instructional support staff to have conversations about teaching that is based on a common lexicon, and it provides a common foundation upon which to base professional development around lesson design.** If the CIF is used by instructional staff across the district, it can potentially advance coherent views of classroom instruction.

Components

Establishing Engagement

It is imperative that learning occur as soon as students enter the classroom or transition from one class segment to the next (in elementary schools). One of the ways for students to quickly connect to instruction is to complete a “sponge” at the beginning of the period. This brief but thought-provoking task focuses the students immediately on the lesson. Once the “sponge” has been completed and discussed, the teacher presents the agenda entry to students in writing, and verbally, **ensuring that students know the purpose** of what they have written.

Personalized instruction

Sample characteristics:

- Signals that instructional time has started
- Sets the tone for the class
- Sponge activity, such as
 - Independent reading
 - Problem of the day
 - Journal entry
 - Grammar practice
 - Math minutes
- Incorporates technology
- Agenda entry to foster communication between school and home



Fostering Connections

This involves a brief activity or event at the beginning of a lesson that elicits the students’ attention and focuses their thoughts on the learning objective. Sometimes called the guiding purpose or anticipatory set, this could include a review to connect students with prior learning, a demonstration to whet appetites, a problem that begs for eventual resolution, or an **“essential question” that Heidi Jacobs describes as a “conceptual commitment” or thought-provoking frame for the learning.**

Inquiry-based curriculum

Sample characteristics:

- Essential question—Goals and objectives
- Rationale and relevance—Review/Discuss homework
- Connect with prior knowledge—Hook to grab students’ attention
- Advance organizer—Modeling, visualization

- Demonstration—Story, anecdote, humor

Deepening Understanding

This represents the heart of the teaching/learning **interactive experience**. During this portion of the lesson, **teachers and students are engaging each other in authentic explorations of the problem or question presented.**

Sample characteristics:

- Inquiry strategies
- Read aloud, think aloud, student discourse
- Modeling, testing, exploring
- Guided practice: solo/partner/group work
- Extending learning: clarifying, applying, synthesizing, generating/testing hypotheses, which could lead to new problems or questions to explore
- Demonstrating learning

Inquiry-based curriculum

Making Meaning

Typically at the end of the lesson, this is a time of closure when teachers check for understanding and students are guided to internalize the new learning. Teachers clarify key points of a lesson, require **students to actively construct their own understanding, and/or engage them in considering and evaluating multiple perspectives.**

Sample characteristics:

- Revisit essential question—Review objectives
- Student's 1-minute summary—Exit slip
- Identify similarities/differences—Journal writing
- Resolve questions/problems—Make connections for transition to next lesson
- Assign reinforcing homework—Feedback, praise, recognition

Personalized and authentic

Overarching Elements

Classroom Culture sets the tone and environment for learning to occur.

The classroom culture promotes social, ethical, and intellectual development in an inclusive, caring, respectful, and supportive learning community that is physically and emotionally safe for all students and engages them as active participants in the school community and beyond.

Sample characteristics:

- Respectful, supportive relationships among and between students, teachers, and parents are evident.
- Social, emotional, and ethical development are integral parts of the classroom program.
- Students are able to construct deep understandings of broad concepts and principles through an active process of exploration, discovery, and application.
- Frequent opportunities for students to exercise their voice, choice, influence, and responsible independence

Caring and culturally competent classroom





- Frequent opportunities for collaboration and social interaction
- Meets students basic needs (e.g., safety, autonomy, belonging, competence, usefulness, fun, and pleasure), rather than controlling students with extrinsic motivators (e.g., rewards and punishment)

Challenge Level

This is basically a rating from 1 to 10 (10 being the most challenging) of the most difficult thing the students were asked to do or think during the Learning Walk. Assessing the Challenge Level is an attempt for observers and practitioners to use a shared set of lenses and a common language to simultaneously examine the rigor and relevance of classroom activity. Rigor represents an activity's level of intellectual stimulation to generate in-depth student understanding. It is not a function of a course, subject, or quantity of work but a measure of a task's complexity or sophistication that would compel students to grapple with essential questions, problematic issues, or integral concepts. Relevance represents the context for promoting student connections and meaning. Relevance is not necessarily a function of being a part of the state core content or applicable to a future career, but it is more a measure of whether students can see the activity's significance and meaning, its relation to their personal experiences, and its ability to connect them with other learners and their perspectives.

Sample evidence:

- **Students are the primary talkers/thinkers/doers.**
- **Students actively construct and revise individual/group understanding and produce new knowledge by discovering relationships, solving problems, constructing explanations, and drawing conclusions.**
- **Teacher guides students to struggle with complex concepts through discussion/debate, problem-based learning scenarios, research projects, written arguments, and reflection.**
- **Tasks and conversations are guided by overarching essential questions, untested hypotheses, and unfamiliar situations.**
- **Students confront compelling, contemporary issues or problems and connect with fellow learners to build on each other's knowledge, skills, and personal experiences and make meaning, provide service, and learn to contribute to a more just society.**

**Instruction
that challenges
and engages
students in
authentic work**



Conclusion

The goals we have set for ourselves are bold. However, we believe that they are attainable and well worth the effort. The essential question for all of us is: “How does what I’m teaching—and the way I’m teaching it—help students become active, thoughtful, knowledgeable, compassionate, and ethical citizens?” In great classrooms, students will actively engage with one another in the pursuit of answers to problems posed by their teachers’ as well as to their own questions. Students will freely share information that expands and deepens their knowledge of the subject. Classroom lessons will offer students opportunities for service and additional learning outside of school and for making real-world connections. Teachers will assess their lessons continually and make the revisions necessary to enhance students’ performance. But most important, in great classrooms, students will come to understand that the knowledge they have acquired throughout their education can be used for more than personal success. What our students learn from us now may lead them to invest in the well-being of others, sustain our planet, and make a real and lasting difference in the world.

A vibrant vision and mission statement, rock-solid Core Beliefs, a well-honed Theory of Action, key goals and strategies, competency rubrics for leadership and teaching, and supportive CIFs embodied within these documents compose the culture of JCPS. With these tools and with the hard work and dedication of every employee, we are reshaping day by day the way we learn, teach, and lead in JCPS.

As our vision statement makes clear to all who read it, we won’t stop until every classroom provides challenging instruction tailored to each student and each school is noted for its excellence. We won’t stop until all students feel connected to their learning, their school community, and the world around them. We won’t stop until all families are partners in their children’s education. We won’t stop until each student recognizes that education is a lifelong journey—not a destination.

Let there be no doubt; we are unified in purpose and strategy, and ...

... We Won’t Stop!



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