

@ HEALTH & WELL-BEING ISSUE

A PUBLICATION OF THE RAPIDES FOUNDATION

FALL 2003

FOCUS: THE EDUCATION INITIATIVE



The Education Initiative was established five years ago when The Rapides Foundation Board of Trustees set up a Strategic Grantmaking Framework, based on the findings of an extensive community health assessment. This framework developed Foundation Initiatives, which are focused on improving the health and well-being of Central Louisiana.

"It became a certainty during those early Board discussions that an education component was essential to the overall mission of the Foundation, which is to improve the health of our Central Louisiana community," recounted Joe Rosier, President and CEO. "The Initiative was established with the dual purpose of building the human capital of schools and improving the learning environment." (continued on page 2)

The Education Initiative



Vanda Davidson, MD, member of The Rapides Foundation Board of Trustees

Vanda Davidson, MD, also remembers those early discussions, having been a member of the Board of Trustees since the formation of the Foundation and currently Board Chairman. "We've always been a Foundation that wants to create an atmosphere that is a catalyst for positive change within systems, and because of that we concentrate on the people and the institutions and work with them. We try to work from the standpoint of understanding all the aspects that we can about these systems, and using experts to help us understand. At the beginning of the Education Initiative we asked Dr. Kenneth Tewel to look at our situation and make suggestions about how we could best benefit the students."

Kenneth Tewel, PhD, signed on as the Education Initiative Advisor. Teacher, principal, professor, central office administrator, writer, and national education consultant, Dr. Tewel brought to the Foundation table over thirty years experience in education; experience that included strategic planning and instructional redevelopment of 112 high schools in New York City, as well as previous consulting work with a

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number of national foundations including the Panasonic Foundation, Ford Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation.

He was just what The Rapides Foundation needed to chart a steady, well-planned course to improve the educational environment in Central Louisiana both for teachers and students. "Improving student achievement is contingent upon many factors," explained Tewel. "It's a complex and formidable challenge, but sustaining lasting improvement in the area's school systems is achievable through a focused, long-term effort."

With Dr. Tewel at the helm, the Education Initiative began to move forward. Lines of communication were immediately opened with superintendents, principals and teachers at area schools. Once relationships began to form, schools were assisted in creating proposals to improve teacher learning and student improvement. In the first year, Foundation grants totaling close to a million dollars launched 50 schools on innovative projects, almost all exclusively designed to improve student achievement in a five-year timeframe. This began the first of three grant cycles.

The next year, Cycle 2 schools were selected and this time with more focused proposals on teaching and learning. Then in the third year of the Initiative, Cycle 3 grants were awarded. In all, over 100 area schools have now received grants, with an investment from the Foundation this year alone of \$2.4 million.

But the Foundation's commitment to those schools has been more than money. Each school is also provided a technical assistant. The technical assistants are recognized educators from across the country who use their skills and knowledge to support each school's grant efforts.

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In all, over 100 area schools have now received grants, with an investment from the Foundation this year alone of \$2.4 million.

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According to Dr. Tewel these technical assistants are essential in the successful implementation of the grant projects. "Each school benefits from guidance and outside expertise as it implements its particular grant program. These assistants monitor each school's progress and facilitate any changes or enhancements to the programs. They help schools connect with the research on instructional improvement and assist when problems develop."

Awarding and managing school level grants however, encompasses only one aspect of the Foundation's Education Initiative. "Educational reform and improved student achievement are reliant on professional development for teachers and administrators," insisted Dr. Tewel. "Countless studies confirm that the quality of teaching is the predominant influence on student achievement. Good teaching matters."

To that end, during the Initiative's second year the Foundation began to offer teachers education workshops and networking opportunities. Then in the summer of 2001, the Foundation set in motion plans to develop an Educators Leadership Institute (ELI) (see related stories pages 7-13).

The summer of 2002, superintendents, central office administrators, principals and teachers from six parishes attended the first ELI three-day workshop.

In the summer of 2003 those Cycle 1 schools entered the final year of their grants. Teacher training and networking continue to grow. A second cohort of ELI has recently completed its first series of workshops.

"The most important thing I think we've developed is a relationship and understanding of our schools and teachers that are far deeper and richer than we had at the beginning of the process," said Dr. Davidson in assessing the Initiative's progress to date.

Joe Rosier agrees. "We've learned to trust each other and work together. Now we're united in our efforts to improve student achievement. It's been a positive and productive experience and it looks bright for the future as the Initiative begins

now to build on this solid foundation."

To ensure that the Initiative continues to be productive, the Foundation commissioned a study to measure its effectiveness with an eye toward the future. That study concluded that the learning environment is being transformed. Teachers are now working together for the betterment of students. To continue this improvement, scaling up additional efforts to the district level is essential.

Dr. Betty Webb, former Deputy Superintendent in Minneapolis, has worked closely with the Foundation to develop the ELI effort.

"We have always anticipated that our efforts must eventually move from the school level, where we started, to the district level, where true, sustainable long-term improvement in the overall education environment is possible," said Dr. Webb.

This move to the district level is known as the Systemic Initiative in Education (see pages 16-17) and will be phased in as the three cycles of school level grants come to an end. In fact, the process has already begun with the ELI program where all levels of educators are brought together to tackle mutual problems with the assistance of knowledgeable facilitators.

Another project in the early stages is the establishment of a Local Education Fund (story on page 18). This nonprofit, independent organization would collaborate with school districts to develop initiatives to improve local public schools.

"We're right on track and ready to move ahead," concluded Rosier. "This is an exciting and critical juncture for the Education Initiative. Its success is a success for all of Central Louisiana."

Dr. Davidson also sees the potential the Education Initiative can bring to the future. "I think the process of education is one that goes on for a lifetime. And if we can, in the growth of our education systems, start looking at the careers of all our citizens, we may be able to start using our schools more effectively, not only for the students but for the parents of students, for the people in transition in their lives, to create a stronger society.

School Level Grants



Enriching

Wallace Wilson, Pickering Elementary School principal is shown with Brenda Gibson, paraprofessional (left) and Brenda Owens, first grade teacher (middle).

the Profession ... it started with a Grant.

The Rapides Foundation school level grants have triggered a phenomenal sharing of information and ideas among teachers, both within schools and among schools. Some area teachers have even made presentations on the state and national level.

And it all started with a Rapides Foundation school level grant.

Pickering Elementary School received a Cycle 2 grant to provide staff training to deepen and expand the writing curriculum. A program called "Write Track" was selected to help the school achieve its goal and it did indeed put them, well, on the right track.

"We've got a good thing going!" enthusiastically exclaimed Principal Wallace Wilson. "Our teachers are fully utilizing the program now, and our students are achieving at higher academic levels as a result of it, as well as becoming more proficient writers."

The program also provided a springboard to expanding professional development among

teachers. "We're working with Pickering High School. They have a grant (Cycle 3) in the same area as we do, and because we're their feeder school they're naturally interested in what we're doing," explained Wilson. "So, they've sent their language arts teachers over here to observe our teachers and see our writing program in progress."

Once the school shared with Pickering High, Principal Wilson, along with Assistant Principal Ann Smith, decided their teachers should share their new teaching experiences with even more teachers. "We trained our own people to be presenters," said Wilson. "We've actually gone out and presented at other schools in our district. We've also had quite a few calls from other school districts inquiring about our program."

Within the school, Pickering Elementary uses their group of presenters to train the school's yearly influx of new staff members. Wilson points to statistics that show their turnover rate is 15 to 20 teachers a year out of a faculty of 60, due

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"Our teachers are fully utilizing the program now, and our students are achieving at higher academic levels as a result of it, as well as becoming more proficient writers."

Wallace Wilson, Pickering Elementary School principal

School Level Grants



Glenda Perkins Alexandria Middle Magnet School principal (standing left) along with Linda Akins, curriculum coordinator (standing right), Becky Warner, language arts teacher (seated left) and Stacy Gunter, national board certified teacher (seated right) presented a session on literature circles at the National Middle School Association's annual conference in Portland, Oregon.

“Our students are benefiting greatly from the training that our teachers have had ... It’s a win-win situation and our test scores are continuing to improve each year.”

Glenda Perkins, Principal at Alexandria Middle Magnet School

Enriching the Profession

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primarily to their link to Fort Polk. "Our core team of presenters will be training all of our new teachers. We have a huge teacher turnover due to hiring many military spouses year to year. So, we're constantly retraining our new people."

And Pickering Elementary continued its efforts through the summer with a retreat. According to Principal Wilson, "The teachers fine tuned the program to fit the needs of our particular school. It's a very broad-based program, and what we've done is decide what strategy or methods teachers need to use at each grade level."

It was a Rapides Foundation grant to allow a group of teachers to attend a regional middle education conference in Destin, Florida that started the ball rolling at Alexandria Middle Magnet School for Math and Science, in Rapides Parish.

Curriculum Coordinator Linda Akins claims, "The whole structure for the school right now really came from the experience they had at that conference."

Glenda Perkins, Principal of Alexandria Middle Magnet, also attended the conference on a separate Rapides Foundation grant while she was a principal at Peabody Sixth Grade Center. "It was the catalyst that started everything. The excitement was there, the money was there, and the teachers came back renewed and ready to go," Perkins remembers. "I have found at Peabody and here, that once teachers get out of their classrooms and they realize how much information is out there, an excitement grows that makes them want to seek other ways and methods of teaching."

Linda Akins added that teachers also gain self confidence and a realization that their own unique experiences are worth sharing. "It didn't take long for those teachers to realize that they had things to offer, exactly like what they were hearing from other teachers." Akins recalls, "We had a group that took the initiative to start

submitting proposals to conferences, to go there as presenters, not just delegates. And we started on the state level."

Several teachers made presentations at a Louisiana Middle School Association conference and later that year, that same group went to a regional conference with a presentation on an interdisciplinary unit.

"From there it just escalated," said Akins. Meanwhile, efforts began to share ideas within their own school district. On a day of in-service training, they held "Meeting in the Middle" for their teachers and approximately 20 other teachers outside their school.

This past January they held their second "Meeting in the Middle," and this time nearly 60 teachers came from other schools in the parish. Next year when the school holds "Meeting in the Middle," there are plans to invite other Rapides Foundation grant schools from surrounding parishes.

The teachers at Alexandria Middle Magnet for Math and Science have given presentations in language arts, classroom management, social studies (a presentation on global positioning systems), math (a presentation called "Beg, Borrow and Steal" on accumulated teaching tips), and one directed at new teachers.

As teachers progress, so do the students. "Our students are benefiting greatly from the training that our teachers have had, because our students are getting the latest of the latest ideas," contends Perkins. "It's a win-win situation and our test scores are continuing to improve each year."

And so it goes at Rapides Foundation grant schools across our area. There's a new self reliance among teachers and less of a dependence on outside consultants. It was just what the Foundation hoped for when they first began issuing school level grants. The education community is growing stronger and united in a common cause.

The ELI Principals



Ronnie Waites, Natchitoches Central High School principal reviews student data files with Wendy Byles, guidance counselor.

The ELI Principals

It wasn't long after the Educators Leadership Institute workshops were underway, that participating principals began incorporating what they were learning into their schools.

Take for examples, Ronnie Waites, principal of Natchitoches Central High School in Natchitoches Parish, and Donald Money, principal of Block High School in Catahoula Parish. Both principals brought back to their schools an idea culled from a presentation by educators in Brazosport, Texas called "Test Talk."

Principal Money explained the concept: "Since accountability weighs so heavily on these standardized tests, the idea is for principals to sit down with students individually and talk to them about their tests. Tell them about their strengths and weaknesses. This lets the kids know these tests are important."

So Money, who was in his first year as principal at Block High School, began on a small-scale to talk to students. He has larger-scale efforts planned for this school year. "I plan on sitting down when we get our test results back, and talking to each student about their test results. I think that's going to have a really positive effect."

Principal Waites has spent 18 years at Natchitoches Central High School, the last four as principal. He brought back "Test Talk" from an ELI workshop and starting talking. "I individually talked with all of the sophomore students, and we've got 1300 students. I brought them into my office. I had their eighth grade test scores, and I showed them their strengths and showed them their weaknesses, and talked to them about some of the things they could anticipate on the upcoming test and what they needed to do to improve their performance."

Waites believes "Test Talk" is definitely worthwhile. "It went a long, long way. I think the kids really appreciated the fact that the principal, as instructional leader, actually sat down with them and talked to them about the tests."

Using data for an educational advantage is a second positive impact ELI is having on Central Louisiana schools. "They helped us first of all, to see the importance of studying data, then becoming very specific with looking at individual students and finding their strengths and weaknesses in different skill areas," said Waites. "There is data being provided to us by the state and now we can actually understand the

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The ELI Principals

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importance of it. We can understand and use it to our benefit."

Money says learning to make use of available data can help you find ways to improve student test scores. "Understanding data lets you see what curriculum areas, such as a particular part of math or English or science, that you really need to work on to try to increase those test scores. Then you go out and you look for research-based strategies to do that."

"And then you have professional development," Money explains, as he continues to discuss the positive impact ELI is having, not only in his school, but in schools throughout Cenla parishes. "You expose your faculty to some experienced people who can help them. They bring this back and you let your teachers use it, share what they've learned with one another on the job. Then you have people who come in and follow that up to see things are being done. You truly change the way instruction is being given."

This sharing of information and experience is happening not only in individual schools, but between schools. "For instance, as a result of ELI, our school and Lakeview High School had some sharing of knowledge and good practice," Principal Waites related. "Their math teachers came over to our school and sat down with our teachers for about half a day and then our English teachers went out and visited with them and shared what they do in the classroom. It was a big benefit for both schools. Teachers say they learn most from meeting with others doing the same work."

Waites is now involved with ELI-2. He and others from ELI-1 will participate in these next series of workshops to serve as a bridge between the two groups. It's all part of ELI's plan to build knowledge about high quality instruction and continued sharing of good practice among the school districts.



Donald Money, Block High School principal, checks on the progress of a model of the Troyville Indian Mounds project with teacher Linda McClure and student Juan Amezcua.

"ELI has had a big impact on our parish. It brought together principals, teachers, and supervisors from Cenla parishes," Principal Waites summed up. "It's done a great deal to have some common ideas shared, and to produce some things in our parish I think were missing before. For example, the collaboration among our teachers has really begun to improve."

"There really wasn't a way for principals to sit down and talk with each other before ELI," said Principal Money as he gave his assessment of ELI's impact. "I think what this has done is establish a forum where principals from different parishes can communicate with one another and we can learn from one another. Actually sit down at a table and talk to the principals from different parishes."

What is now happening at Block High School and Natchitoches Central High School is also happening in other high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools in communities throughout Central Louisiana. The Educators Leadership Institute is bringing positive change to the learning environment.

ELI Leadership



Impact x SIX



*Avoyelles Parish
Superintendent
Ronald Mayeux*

Leadership is gaining strength and new ideas under the guidance of the Educator's Leadership Institute. Now in its second cohort, ELI gathers together educators (superintendents, supervisors, principals and teachers) from Central Louisiana parishes to share ideas as well as problems they face in their schools and districts. In addition, presenters from school systems across the country talk about their experiences and what teaching methods worked and what didn't. ELI is also about informing leaders about good practice in improving instruction and student performance.

ELI's impact is adding a new dimension to the educational landscape of the area. Six superintendents who attended the ELI sessions all agree that long-term educational improvement has begun in their school districts.

Superintendent Ronald Mayeux **Avoyelles Parish**

"I think the key thing that ELI has done for me and for other administrators and teachers in Avoyelles Parish is bringing us together as a team. ELI also placed in the forefront the main task of the public school educator which is academic achievement," said Avoyelles Parish

Superintendent Ronald Mayeux as he related the impact ELI is having on the Avoyelles School District.

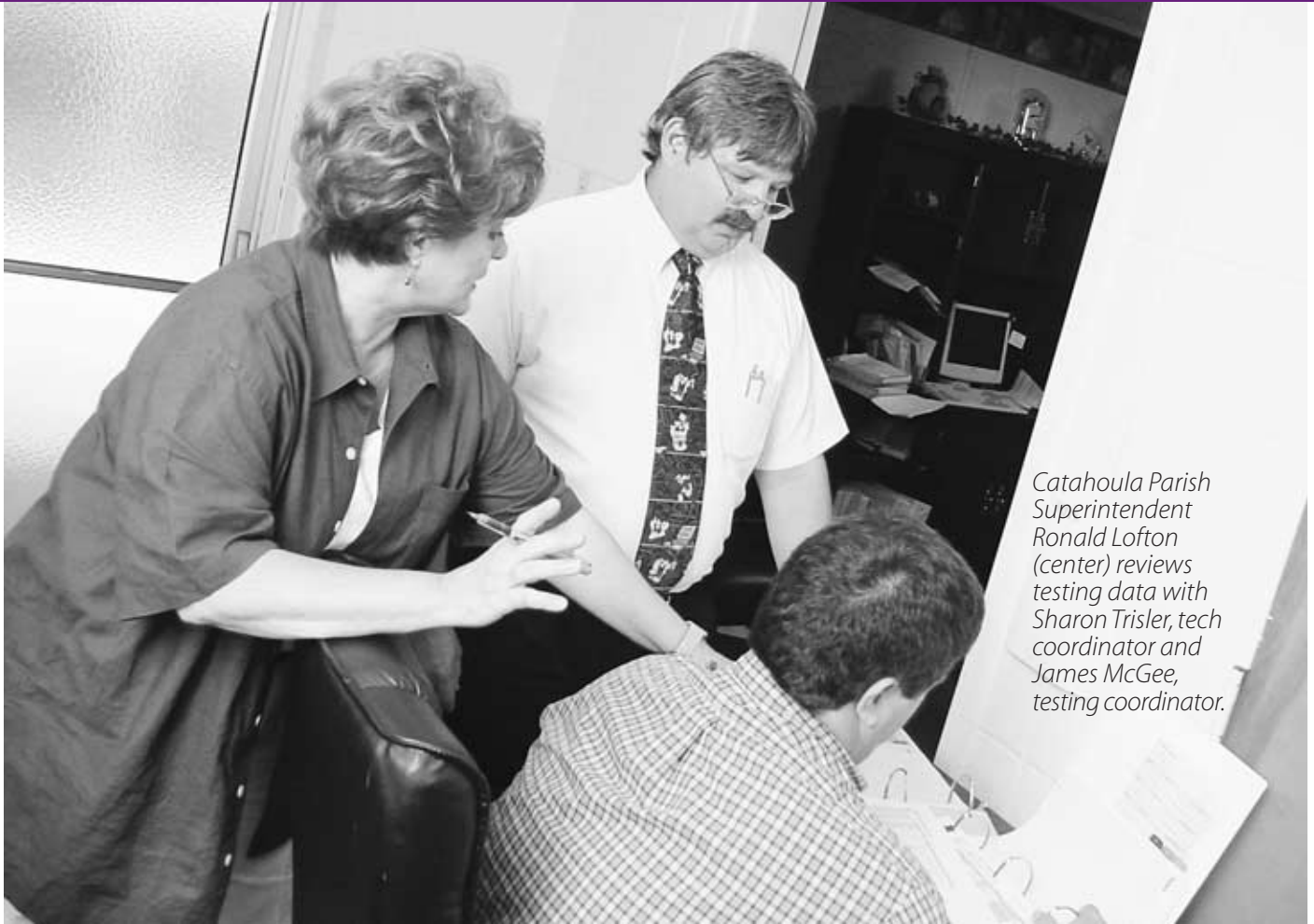
Superintendent Mayeux believes the ELI program is "One of the best, because it's given me the opportunity to sit with educators in other systems. We've spent hours together. We've not worried about phone calls; we've not worried about anything during that period of time except what is best to improve student achievement in our system."

According to Superintendent Mayeux, the flourishing interaction of educators can be attributed to ELI. "As a result of ELI, parishes have had an opportunity to relate among parishes. As a result of ELI, teams of administrators and teachers have shared ideas between and among themselves. It's a process rather than a program."

ELI-2 is now underway and Mayeux eagerly awaits the results. "I think that's going to be extremely valuable because now we will be able to have the schools that have not been part of ELI-1 become part of ELI. I'm really looking forward to that because I think it's going to solidify the whole idea of ELI now that everybody in our school district will have become part of ELI."

For Superintendent Mayeux, ELI has given him a solid team, unified in the common goal of student achievement.

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Catahoula Parish Superintendent Ronald Lofton (center) reviews testing data with Sharon Trisler, tech coordinator and James McGee, testing coordinator.

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Superintendent Ronald Lofton Catahoula Parish

"I was a math teacher. I really believe I could be a better math teacher now because of what I've learned through attending the ELI training." For Catahoula Superintendent Ronald Lofton, ELI took him back to his roots. "The program has helped reconnect me to realizing that I'm supposed to be the one that is an instructional leader for the system."

ELI has contributed to unified problem solving. "Sometimes we put one piece of one of our methods of trying to solve a problem with another piece of the way another system is doing and we improve our program," said Lofton.

Catahoula Parish is using its ELI participants to bring what they've learned to other teachers. "We're putting together groups from each of the schools and each of these teams will have an ELI person on it. We're hoping that they'll use what they learned in these sessions to help improve the school's academic performances."

Superintendent Lofton contends ELI has given them the tools to design and implement their own consolidated district plan. "Right now we're surveying our teachers, our parents and our students. We're then going to take all this data, look at it closely and focus in our weakest areas, and then come up with a program to fit a school's needs."

ELI is definitely a factor in improving the educational process in Catahoula Parish.

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ELI Leadership



*LaSalle Parish Superintendent
Cary McGuffee*

Superintendent Cary McGuffee LaSalle Parish

"What ELI did was at the right time they came in through the funding of The Rapides Foundation and provided us with some outside resources to really look at our system and look at what we were doing and improve on what we were doing," stated LaSalle Parish Superintendent Cary McGuffee. "ELI also gave us some new strategies to use to be able to meet the standards of accountability and high stakes testing and No Child Left Behind."

Superintendent McGuffee also credits ELI with improved test scores. "We see a tremendous turnaround at some of our schools with test

Impact x SIX

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scores, strictly because we went to ELI for information. We got the information and we implemented the information in every school."

As is the case in other parishes, ELI has instilled unity not only in LaSalle Parish but the entire area. "We're finding out that the unity that we have in our schools in LaSalle Parish is also developing all across Central Louisiana. There's a good camaraderie among our superintendents in this area. At our regional meetings, we share ideas for improvement of test scores and

school performance," said Superintendent McGuffee.

It's a unity that has changed the educational environment, according to McGuffee. "Normally you compete against each other, which is good, but to be unified is even better. This unity has caused our parish to pull together so that now our principals and our teachers see each other as a resource instead of a competitor. This has been a tremendous impact in our parish."

It leads to permanent change. "I'm not going to be superintendent here forever," said Superintendent McGuffee. "I want to be sure that whatever we do here is something I can come back in ten years and still see those things we started."

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*Natchitoches Parish
Superintendent
Elwanda Murphy*

had data-driven meetings and now each school has a data decision team. We've realized we all have the same goal which is student achievement," said Murphy.

"I think we've come a long way with ELI-1," continued Superintendent Murphy, "so we want to make sure that ELI-1 continues to work and that we work together with ELI-2."

Superintendent Murphy feels certain ELI has had a huge impact on her school district in many ways. "ELI was very motivating. The speakers The Rapides Foundation brought in were excellent and presented us with many strategies for education which we were able to bring back. And our networking has improved and become most beneficial."

It seems Natchitoches Parish is also feeling the positive effects of ELI.

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Superintendent Elwanda Murphy **Natchitoches Parish**

Superintendent Elwanda Murphy believes ELI sparked interaction among educators in the Natchitoches School District. "When we came back from ELI we started meeting monthly as a team. As a result, the schools have had interaction. We've had visitation among the schools. We've

ELI Leadership

Impact x SIX

(continued from page 13)



Rapides Parish Superintendent Patsy Jenkins gets an update from Karen Lafargue.

Superintendent Patsy Jenkins Rapides Parish

Finding answers to today's educational problems in a continually changing environment can be daunting, contends Rapides Parish Superintendent Patsy Jenkins. "The answers have changed. The questions are the same, 'How do I teach Johnny to read?' but the answers are so different."

Jenkins believes ELI can lead to discovering those answers educators today seek. "Process for change is in place. The process for improvement is in place. And just like it's slow to start, it's also slow to stop."

Teamwork, Superintendent Jenkins feels, is key to improvement. "It is critical to have that leader understand that it's not an 'I' ballgame, it's a 'we' ballgame, and that the team concept needs to go all the way through every level of the school."

It's Superintendent Jenkins' view that good

leadership training will benefit the teacher. "As we train our educators to be effective leaders, we have improved the lots of teachers, even though we have never touched the teacher directly."

Superintendents from the Central District have always had meetings. But according to Jenkins, since ELI, attendance has dramatically improved from 2 to 3 each meeting to 7 or 8 currently, and sharing has increased. "For example, Cary McGuffee's staff in LaSalle Parish is putting together some resource booklets for LEAP. I'm sending material from my district and so are other superintendents. Now we're going to have one document that all our districts will be using."

And communication lines remain open. "We call each other a great deal on everything from school vouchers to the price of gasoline for school busses. The communication lines right now, I've never seen them any stronger within the superintendent ranks."

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Vernon Parish Superintendent Cindy Gillespie shares information with Dona Dowden.

Superintendent Cindy Gillespie Vernon Parish

"We learned that our problems and needs are a lot more alike than we are different," said Superintendent Cindy Gillespie regarding ELI. "It also reminded us that there is a way to reach ever child. We have a responsibility and obligation to find out what that is. I know we knew this before, but I think it just reminded us of some ways we can go about doing that."

One of the ways the Vernon Parish School District incorporated leadership into reaching children was to start "walk-throughs." Superintendent Gillespie explains how this works. "We sponsored a series of workshops for principals to teach them how to go in and do

very short 'mini-observations' in classrooms and give the teachers feedback. This is a way for the principal to spend more time in classrooms without all the paperwork attached. That's one of the things that came out of ELI for our system."

As far as Superintendent Gillespie is concerned, "I've never been to anything as classy as this. The Rapides Foundation, when they do something, it's a class act. It really is. It's very seriously thought out, the facilitators and consultants are top-notch. We learned that we're a lot more alike than we are different."

It's something all the districts that participated in ELI have found out. Together they are changing the educational environment for the benefit of the students and the entire Central Louisiana community.

Systemic Initiative



Reaching the Next Level

The near future of the Foundation's Education Initiative lies at the school district central office level. To get there, the Foundation is launching a Systemic Initiative with the goal of improving student achievement by building capacity at the district level.

"If The Rapides Foundation hopes to significantly increase student performance by reshaping the school system in Central Louisiana," stated Joe Rosier, Foundation President and CEO, "it must work with the entire system."

At the outset of the Foundation's Education Initiative, the major focus was on school level improvement. But according to Kenneth Tewel, PhD, education consultant to the Foundation, the school level grant program was only preparatory to this important next step. "School districts are critical to the success of schools. It was evident at the beginning of the Education Initiative that The Rapides Foundation would eventually have to scale up its efforts to the district level."

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The Systemic Initiative in Education will be phased in as the three cycles of school level grants come to the end of their five-year funding. Cycle 1 will run out next year, Cycle 2 in 2005 and Cycle 3, 2006.

Kathleen Ware serves on the faculty of Mount St. Joseph College in Cincinnati. Before that she spent 36 years with Cincinnati public schools, the last 12 as Associate Superintendent. Ware is one of the technical assistants brought in by the Foundation to help local schools implement their five-year grant programs.

"Now that the first cohort of schools is in their last year of the grant, the Foundation wants to move this to the district level," says Ware. "It's hard to sustain change if you don't have the district deeply involved. And while districts have been somewhat involved, this Systemic Initiative will really focus on the district, helping the district to work with the schools to improve student performance."

Barbara Volpe started out her career in banking. Now she's the President of a nonprofit organization in Denver called the Public

"The idea here is to start working more directly with the school districts themselves. And look at ways the school district system supports the kind of innovation that these schools have been working on as part of their grant."

Barbara Volpe, technical assistant

Education and Business Coalition. She is also a Rapides Foundation technical assistant.

"The idea here is to start working more directly with the school districts themselves. And look at ways the school district system supports the kind of innovation that these schools have been working on as part of their grant," Volpe explained. "How does the central office support the

continual learning that needs to go on, on the part of teachers and principals, in order to improve the quality of the teaching and learning that's going on in all the schools."

That's the key to this shift to the district level. The district must sustain and build upon the work begun by the schools that received grants under the Foundation's Education Initiative.

"The schools have already said what they want to do," continued Ware. "The district has to look at those things carefully now, look at how to sustain the successes that the schools have had, and look how to spread those successes to other schools, and in doing so, will more than likely have to make changes in how it does business in the district."

The districts are also encouraged to align and coordinate their proposals with the work of their Educators Leadership Institute (ELI) team. "The Leadership Institute is the perfect transition into the Systemic Initiative," insists Volpe. "It's the beginning of it in a way, because there have been teams established from the district already, that have participated in ELI."

With the first cycle of school grants scheduled to expire next June, districts are now eligible to apply for Foundation grants. The first stage is a letter of intent. "Districts will submit a letter of intent," outlines Ware. "Those that are accepted will then be assigned a technical assistant and we'll work with district staff in the planning year and then through implementation, just like we work with the schools."

The deadline for the district letters of intent is October 15. Those accepted will then submit a full proposal, with the grant award announcement August 1, 2004. The Systemic Initiative in Education five-year grant cycle begins a month later.

"As far as I'm concerned, this district effort in Louisiana can set the standard," Volpe concluded. "I think it will be great, and I'm very excited to see how it unfolds. I'm very optimistic that it's going to be successful in making the district central to the school improvement process."

Local Education Fund



East Leesville Elementary second grade students participate in C.A.T.S., Curriculum Alignment to The Standards, with (left) Ramona Bennett, Asst. Principal, (center) Laura Clark, Vernon Parish School System Curriculum Supervisor, and (right) Debbie Clark, Principal.

The Foundation's Theory of EVOLUTION

The Systemic Initiative in Education is only part of the evolution of the Education Initiative. A Local Education Fund is also part of the process. This independent, nonprofit organization will serve as an intermediary between school districts and the communities they serve.

On the school district side, the proposed Central Louisiana Local Education Fund will collaborate with the school districts to identify, manage and develop initiatives to improve the quality of education and the public school systems.

On the community side, the Local Education Fund will act as a broker for greater community resources to help make the public's relationships with school districts more positive and productive.

The Local Education Fund will be professionally-staffed, and governed by a board of directors. The Rapides Foundation will play a role in building support and leadership for this new organization.

The new Fund will be in a position to manage The Rapides Foundation grants to schools and provide the schools with technical assistants. It can also solicit and manage grants from private national philanthropic foundations and government agencies.

With increasing demands on public schools and decreasing resources, a Local Education Fund can be fast-moving, non-bureaucratic, and able to take on areas of work that pose greater organizational or political challenges to school districts.

It's an idea whose time has come.

EDUCATION INITIATIVE SCHOOLS:

These 92 Cycle 1, Cycle 2 and Cycle 3 schools are participating in The Rapides Foundation Education Initiative. This program aims to provide teachers and principals with the resources needed to upgrade the skills of the teaching corps and to improve the environment for teaching and learning. The schools are eligible to receive up to \$25,000 annually for a period of five years.

ALLEN PARISH SCHOOL BOARD

Michael Doucet, Superintendent

CYCLE 1 SCHOOLS

Oakdale Junior High School

To support a whole school reform effort to reorganize the school class schedule, institute interdisciplinary team teaching, and improve class management.

Oberlin Elementary School

To address low reading performance through expanded professional development in assessment techniques, identifying student weaknesses, and development of individualized interventions.

CYCLE 2 SCHOOLS

Fairview High School

To improve student achievement in reading and math through Reading Renaissance, Math Renaissance and other strategies.

Kinder Middle School

To improve student performance in math through new teaching strategies and the expanded use of technology.

Oakdale High School

To implement a career education program. Included will be a change in the school's schedule to longer instructional blocks.

Oberlin High School

Beginning in grades 7-8, use the Accelerated Reader to improve

the ability of teachers to respond to student needs and to develop appropriate intervention strategies.

CYCLE 3 SCHOOLS

Allen Parish Alternative Education School

To improve student achievement particularly in reading and math. The school will begin with Reading Renaissance.

Kinder Elementary School

To improve student achievement by rethinking curriculum content and developing new teaching strategies in math and language arts.

AVOYELLES PARISH SCHOOL BOARD

Ronald N. Mayeux, Ph.D., Superintendent

CYCLE 1 SCHOOLS

ALERT School - LaSAS

To support program development, organization and staff training on new curricula to meet the needs of at-risk students involving the integration of technology at a new agri-science alternative high school.

Bunkie High School

To support faculty training for integration of technology into curriculum to improve reading achievement.

Lafargue Elementary School

To improve student performance through a multi-year school restructuring project addressing teacher content knowledge, teaching strategies, and integration of technology into instruction. Teaching collaboratives, team teaching, and a re-conceptualization of curriculum changes will be involved.

Marksville Elementary School

To improve student reading performance through the use of Spalding and Reading Renaissance strategies in language arts instruction and to institute technology training for students and their parents.

Riverside Elementary School

To restructure the school educational program with a formal, on-going professional development program that will include new teaching methods, new content and problem solving activities to engage students as active learners.

CYCLE 2 SCHOOLS

Avoyelles High School

To provide teacher training in use of technology throughout the curriculum.

EDUCATION INITIATIVE SCHOOLS:

Bunkie Elementary School

To improve student test scores through the integration of technology into the curriculum, developing interdisciplinary units and thematic teaching.

Mansura Middle School

To assist teachers in effectively utilizing state mandated benchmarks to improve instruction. The focus will include content knowledge and use of technology.

Marksville High School

To provide the training necessary for teachers to incorporate technology into curriculum and instruction.

Plaucheville Elementary School

To integrate the use of technology into daily lessons and to develop and then implement the use of thematic units as the foundation for curriculum.

CYCLE 3 SCHOOLS

Cottonport Elementary School

To upgrade student achievement in mathematics primarily through integration of technology into the math curriculum.

Marksville Middle School

To improve student achievement in reading comprehension and vocabulary. The school will use an interdisciplinary approach by including reading in all subject areas.

CATAHOULA PARISH SCHOOL BOARD

Ronald Lofton, Superintendent

CYCLE 1 SCHOOLS

Martin Junior High School

To improve reading skills in grades 5-8 through a comprehensive professional development program addressing diagnosis and individualized improvement plans based upon student need.

The program will include teacher training to integrate reading skills throughout all subject areas, collaborative teaching, classroom management, motivational teaching strategies, etc.

Sicity Island High School

To develop standards-based, career oriented student instruction and learning through a staff training program addressing teaching methods, strategies, integration of technology into curriculum, interdisciplinary lessons and collaborative teaching.

CYCLE 2 SCHOOLS

Jonesville Elementary School

To provide training for teachers for hands-on, minds-on strategies in math, science and social studies.

CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF ALEXANDRIA

Sr. Marice Elvekrog, Superintendent

CYCLE 1 SCHOOLS

St. Anthony's of Padua

The school, in collaboration with Holy Ghost, Sacred Heart, and St. Joseph's, proposes technology training for its teachers to build new teaching strategies and integration of technology use into everyday instructional strategies.

CYCLE 2 SCHOOLS

St. Mary's Catholic School

To provide teachers with new skills that improve student achievement in reading and writing. The school will focus on aligning curriculum and use coaching and project-centered learning activities with a writing emphasis.

St. Rita Catholic School

To improve student achievement through improved instruction in mathematics.

CONCORDIA PARISH SCHOOL BOARD

Lester "Pete" Peterman, Ph.D., Superintendent

CYCLE 2 SCHOOLS

Vidalia High School

To provide teachers with training in the use of technology as a tool for more effective instruction in all curriculum areas.

CYCLE 3 SCHOOLS

Ferriday Junior High School

To equip faculty in the use of technology across the curriculum as a strategy for improving student performance and state assessments.

Ferriday Upper Elementary School

To improve reading achievement by developing a comprehensive reading program. The school will begin efforts with training in the Accelerated Reader.

EDUCATION INITIATIVE SCHOOLS:

EVANGELINE PARISH SCHOOL BOARD

Rayford Fontenot, Superintendent

CYCLE 1 SCHOOLS

Bayou Chicot High School

To restructure the school's education program to include the school schedule (block scheduling) and teacher training in multi-sensory, integrated learning techniques to actively engage students in the learning process.

Carver Elementary School

To implement character education learning into the curriculum through new teaching strategies.

Hester Heath Elementary School

To improve literacy for students using Write Track and Accelerated Reader.

CYCLE 3 SCHOOLS

James Stephens Elementary School

To provide faculty with advanced training related to instructional programs curriculum for a cadre of teachers who will then serve as teacher trainers or mentors. The program will initially focus on language arts.

Ville Platte Lower Elementary School

To improve student reading achievement through assessment and diagnosis of student needs and then new program development.

GRANT PARISH SCHOOL BOARD

Bob W. McLamore, Superintendent

CYCLE 1 SCHOOLS

Colfax Elementary School

The school effort will focus on improving student performance through the development of small adult learning communities that will emphasize instructional strategies, assessment procedures and changing learning environment.

Georgetown High School

To improve language skills in grades 5-12 using new teaching/learning techniques. Teacher training will focus on reading and writing activities.

South Grant Elementary School

To focus on reading achievement using professional development in assessment and diagnosis of learning barriers, alternatives for the learning disabled students, and improved motivation strategies.

CYCLE 3 SCHOOLS

Dry Prong Junior High School

To implement the middle school model using interdisciplinary teams for instruction to enhance and improve student learning.

Pollock Elementary School

To improve student achievement in math through the use of hands-on activities and other teaching strategies such as manipulatives.

LASALLE PARISH SCHOOL BOARD

Cary L. McGuffee, Superintendent

CYCLE 1 SCHOOLS

Jena Elementary School

The school, in collaboration with Olla-Standard Elementary, will institute technology training for teachers focused on the integration of computer use within curriculum and classroom learning activities. Training will include classroom management and interactive learning activities.

Olla-Standard Elementary School

The school, in collaboration with Jena Elementary, will institute technology training for teachers focused on the integration of computer use within curriculum and classroom learning activities. Training will include classroom management and interactive learning activities.

CYCLE 2 SCHOOLS

Goodpine Middle School

To improve student performance by equipping paraprofessionals in the use of more individual and small group instruction in all subject areas.

Jena High School

To increase student achievement through the use of technology, to provide training for teachers on the full integration of technology throughout the curriculum.

LaSalle High School

To increase student achievement through the use of technology, to provide training for teachers on the full integration of technology throughout the curriculum.

CYCLE 3 SCHOOLS

Fellowship Elementary School

To improve the student achievement through the integration of technology in all curriculum areas.

EDUCATION INITIATIVE SCHOOLS:

Jena Junior High School

To provide training in the use of technology as an instructional tool to improve student achievement in all subject areas.

LaSalle Junior High School

To provide faculty training in the use of technology as an instructional tool to improve student achievement on state tests.

Nebo Elementary School

To develop a comprehensive reading program by beginning with the Accelerated Reader.

NATCHITOCHE PARISH SCHOOL BOARD

Elwanda Murphy, Ed.D., Superintendent

CYCLE 1 SCHOOLS

Cloutierville Elementary/Junior High School

To refine and focus strategies to improve student achievement in reading and writing, emphasizing evaluation, assessment and the management of classroom instruction.

Lakeview Junior/Senior High School

To address weaknesses in the language/communications skills of students through the development of strategies for teaching writing across the curriculum.

CYCLE 2 SCHOOLS

NSU Elementary Lab School

To improve student achievement through the use of new brain research on how young people learn. It will include changes in class scheduling, assessment methods, new strategies for teachers and expanded use of technology.

CYCLE 3 SCHOOLS

Natchitoches Central High School

To improve instruction through a broadened curriculum and the implementation of team/multi-disciplinary teaching as well as technology integration.

RAPIDES PARISH SCHOOL BOARD

Patsy Jenkins, Ed.D., Superintendent

CYCLE 1 SCHOOLS

Bolton High School

To build staff capacity to implement the Bolton Model: training to restructure teaching, broaden the curriculum content for team/multi-discipline use, and infuse technology in curriculum.

J.B. Nachman Elementary

To improve student reading achievement using the Accelerated Reader and to provide professional development for teachers in reading strategies.

Mary Goff Elementary

To provide teacher training related to new and more effective teaching and learning strategies to raise student achievement.

Peabody Magnet High School

To focus on student learning centered around career paths, and to upgrade teaching skills to teach within inter-disciplinary clusters.

Phoenix Magnet Elementary School

To improve student achievement in reading literacy and vocabulary through new teaching strategies.

Pineville High School

To improve achievement and standardized test scores in math with an effort involving eight feeder schools, focusing on new teaching strategies for the math teachers. Secondly, to bring the science department into the project to allow the science and math areas to support and reinforce student learning.

Pineville Junior High School

To implement the "middle school" concept and to provide staff training in team teaching and interdisciplinary learning and project-centered curriculum.

S.M. Brame Junior High School

To reorganize the school using the middle school concept, develop staff skills in team teaching and improve content knowledge.

W.O. Hall Math/Science Magnet Elementary School

This is a collaborative effort with its feeder school to improve student attainment in math by redesigning the math curriculum and providing professional training and inter- and intra-grade planning that would include new teaching methods.

Walter D. Hadnot Elementary School

The project is a collaborative with its feeder school. They will address staff training and curriculum re-design to include alternative, hands-on activities to enhance comprehension of math concepts. Training will be expanded to include parents and other community resources.

CYCLE 2 SCHOOLS

Alexandria Middle Magnet School

To plan for and implement a modified middle school model with an emphasis on improving math and reading scores.

EDUCATION INITIATIVE SCHOOLS:

Alexandria Senior High School

To build staff knowledge in new strategies and teaching techniques, develop a relationship with the business community and increase communications with parents all focused on improving student achievement.

Arthur F. Smith Junior High School

To implement the middle school concept with training for teachers in academic teaching teams, advisory programs, and interdisciplinary teaching.

Buckeye High School

To implement technology instruction and learning strategies to improve student critical thinking skills. The focus will be on math.

Cherokee Elementary School

The school will redefine curriculum content and skills by grade level and the connections among them using the Basic School model. The objective is to improve student higher-thinking skills and test scores.

E.C. Hayes School for Exceptional Students

To provide training for special education teachers in new strategies and techniques for special education students.

Hayden R. Lawrence Middle School

To improve student writing skills through staff training in new standards and approaches of teaching writing skills.

Plainview High School

To provide staff training to improve student achievement in math.

CYCLE 3 SCHOOLS

Glenmora Elementary School

To improve student achievement in reading and math.

D.F. Huddle Elementary School

To improve student achievement in math and language arts through the development and use of interdisciplinary thematic units and team teaching.

Reed Avenue Elementary School

To improve student achievement by incorporating instructional methodologies such as team teaching and planning new assessment strategies.

Ruby Wise Elementary School

To improve student learning through creative team-teaching strategies to be integrated into the curriculum, including creative writing, arts and music.

J.S. Slocum Elementary School

To improve student achievement in math by implementing a teacher assessment program to identify areas of weakness, improve teacher content knowledge and then develop instructional strategies.

Tioga Elementary School

To improve student achievement in math and language arts through the integrated use of technology in instruction and performance assessment strategies.

VERNON PARISH SCHOOL BOARD

Cindy Gillespie, Ed.D., Superintendent

CYCLE 1 SCHOOLS

Leesville High School

To develop and plan the "career academy" as a means of fostering academic achievement, reducing absenteeism and drop outs, and improving test scores. The grant provides assistance for curriculum development and staff training and support efforts to develop business coalitions.

CYCLE 2 SCHOOLS

East Leesville Elementary School

To create an integrated curriculum plan for science and social studies through extensive writing and problem solving/critical thinking.

Evans High School

The school will address the new teaching methods required in order to make the most effective use of time under block scheduling.

Leesville Junior High School

To implement the middle school concept, to provide teachers with additional training in understanding adolescent development and individual learning styles.

Pickering Elementary School

To provide staff training to deepen and expand the writing curriculum.

West Leesville Elementary School

To implement a school-wide focus on literature and reading as a means of improving student achievement.

CYCLE 3 SCHOOLS

Anacoco Elementary School

To improve reading and math achievement through interdisciplinary teaching strategies.

EDUCATION INITIATIVE SCHOOLS:

North Polk Elementary School

To improve student achievement through a curriculum that is built around developmentally appropriate learning opportunities based upon the developmental level of the child.

Pickering High School

To improve student reading comprehension and develop critical thinking skills through a program that emphasizes writing across the curriculum.

Simpson High School

To improve student achievement through collaborative team planning and cross-curricular teaching using interdisciplinary approaches.

WINN PARISH SCHOOL BOARD

Steve Bartlett, Superintendent

CYCLE 1 SCHOOLS

Dodson High School

To develop an aqua-culture/horticulture program emphasizing math and science concepts as the method of improving student performance. Grant funding is used for consultation, curriculum development, staff development costs, training materials, etc.

Winnfield Intermediate School

To develop and implement, in collaboration with the primary and middle schools, a character education effort.

Winnfield Middle School

To develop and implement, in collaboration with the primary school and intermediate school, a character education effort which will include staff development, training materials, etc.

CYCLE 3 SCHOOLS

Atlanta High School

To improve student achievement in reading, language arts and English through changed teaching strategies and practices for the whole school. The school will start with and then build upon existing teaching tools such as Accelerated Reader and targeted instructional focuses.

PRIVATE SCHOOLS

CYCLE 2 SCHOOLS

Grace Christian School

To implement a professional development program to build technology skills and to integrate technology use in the classroom so that student learning involves higher thinking skills.

CYCLE 3 SCHOOLS

Avoyelles Public Charter School

To provide training in the use of Direct Instruction to improve reading achievement of students.



is published by The Rapides Foundation

The Rapides Foundation continues a legacy of community healthcare initiated in 1903.

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