

The mission of the Jefferson Parish Public School System is to be an extraordinary school system by building an environment of excellence, effectiveness, and efficiency that supports the success of our students, our communities, and our employees.

The Jefferson Parish Public School System embarked on its endeavor of creating great schools and a great school system in the 2003-2004 school year.

We faced reality with regards to our students and their academic performance.

- Stagnant student achievement across all grade spans and subgroups.
- Minimal student achievement growth that had been previously achieved was not sustained the following year.
- Lower achievement than expected student performance.
- Gap Analysis revealed that in some cases the gap was closing because the advantaged group proficiency was decreasing.

The Jefferson Parish Public School System conducted an extensive district needs assessment to seek out the reasons for the lack of student achievement. The district developed a profile and a comprehensive action plan by:

- Gathering data to determine current and emerging needs.
- Conducting district climate assessments to determine district culture, organizational health, and respect for diversity.
- Measuring customer satisfaction.
- Identifying causes of student performance problems.
- Measuring student engagement.
- Examining longitudinal trends.
- Summarizing the strengths and weaknesses in relation to expectations for student learning.
- Triangulating data to determine underlying causes of low student achievement.
- Establishing goals, objectives, and checkpoints for the district plan.
- Designing professional development that matched the needs that emerge from the data.

Systemic changes and innovation were conceived and embraced in 2003-2004. We realized we must change, compete, engage, and embrace the community to become an excellent school system. Excellence must be the only goal we accept. We needed to stop defending the status quo and start promoting ourselves; we needed to embrace all members of the community, to compete and to build public confidence in order to secure additional funding. How did we do this, you ask? The answer was change. Change had to be immediate, visible, and valuable. Reorganizing, being clear about what results were expected from all employees, making instruction the number one priority of the system, and rewarding outstanding performance all speak to the public, to the community members. All show in visible, tangible ways that we meant business.

The core business of the Jefferson Parish Public Schools is to make learning valuable, satisfying, and challenging for all students. All individuals must have a commitment to quality services they provide to students. Collaboration and support among the school district, home, and community are vital to the success of all students. Excellence is a journey that continues and is worth the hard work and the cost. Our students, parents, and community deserve a great school system.

The first year of our quest to restructure, redesign, and remarket the Jefferson Parish Public School System yielded substantial results. As we embarked on year two, efficiency, effectiveness, and excellence remained priorities. In the 2004-2005 gestation period, the birth of a new public school system for educating children was nearing. The district established the academic vision of providing a superior education for all students and setting a district academic goal.

District Academic Goal: To improve the educational opportunities, preparation, and academic results for all students and parents by:

- Changing priorities to academic standards and accountability; being clear about what results are expected.
- Centering group discussions on the instructional work of the organization.
- Allocating resources (time, people, space, knowledge, technology) strategically.
- Uniting the community around a common vision for the school, and structuring district leadership around that vision by creating a new strategic plan.
- Forming alliances with individuals and groups that will support and extend the school district's beliefs, vision, core business, and intended results.
- Establishing Jefferson as a district of choice, not necessity, by redesigning our schools to meet the varied needs of all community members.
- Creating and maintaining an informed leadership base.
- Accepting personal accountability for culture change.
- Holding leaders, central office, and schools accountable; becoming a results oriented organization.
- Forming a principal's academy for study group work.
- Developing structures to support teacher leaders.
- Creating professional learning communities to improve teaching skills and performance.
- Investing in, increasing, and improving staff development, utilizing classroom and site-based follow-up through job-embedded staff development.
- Developing a District Professional Development Plan that ensures all professional development activities are aligned to the state's content standards, benchmarks, grade level expectations, and student achievement needs and assessments.
- Increasing the number of instructional strategists who directly service schools' academic and staff development needs.
- Providing alternative education for targeted groups of students.
- Creating and maintaining our own charter schools.

- Gathering data continually to determine current and emerging needs.
- Developing district interval assessments in order to improve instruction.
- Recruiting and retaining excellent teachers and principals by rewarding those who meet criteria to be established.
- Fostering innovation and continuous improvement with visible, tangible rewards.
- Implementing an e-high school with on-line courses for summer school, home-bound students, potential dropouts, fifth year students, to replace correspondence courses, etc.
- Studying and employing the middle school concept in selected schools with plans for expansion when success has been achieved.
- Establishing International Baccalaureate Organization Schools.
- Working with Cisco to close achievement gaps and to create 21st Century schools.
- Challenging change through connectivity working in conjunction with Cisco.
- Identifying new needed skills for teachers.
- Dissolving the classroom walls to insure home and community contributions to education.
- Emphasizing intelligent discovery and research.
- Employing technology as a transformational tool to increase efficiency and effectiveness.
- Employing technology for knowledge's sake.
- Becoming a standard-bearer school district in the Schlechty Network of the Center for Leadership in School Reform.
- Designing systems to nurture student engagement and achievement.
- Designing new work around "hard to teach" and "difficult to learn" concepts.
- Focusing on student-centered learning.
- Listening to the learners in designing meaningful work.
- Implementing school re-configurations approved by the Board.
- Redesigning of high schools for more relevant course work and experiences.
- Increasing students' skills and providing transitional support so that students have the capacity to do higher-level work.
- Focusing on recovery and keeping students on track.
- Investigating/implementing best practices of other school systems for implementation in the Jefferson Parish Public School System.

2005-2006 began as a year of great promise and delivery, as we began to fully realize what we have and can accomplish. We knew the rewards of reaching higher, doing more rather than defending the status quo, and delivering a quality education system for all community members.

Our world forever changed on Monday, August 29, 2005. Hurricane Katrina slammed into our community and blew away our homes, our levees, and our sense of normalcy that comes with the start of a new school year. In the course of a few hours, the Jefferson Parish Public School System was radically altered, with thousands of students scattered across the country, principals and teachers equally spread throughout, and

more than 70 schools damaged, and four schools destroyed beyond repair. Yet, within five short weeks, the Jefferson Parish Public School System rebounded after a tremendous amount of cleanup work and reopened on October 3, 2005.

The Jefferson Parish Public School System landscape was altered as a result of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. We accepted many students from other parishes that did not have functioning school systems due to the destruction. Many private and parochial school students that were unable to return to their damaged schools enrolled in our system. In addition to the influx of students from other parishes, the Jefferson Parish Public School System hired many displaced teachers and administrators from the affected parishes. The new composition of our school district reiterated the need for systemic change.

Today, the Jefferson Parish Public School System continues its journey for increased student engagement, increased student achievement, and employing technology as a tool to achieve increased engagement and achievement.

The journey is being driven by the expertise and funding of CISCO systems and the work, leadership, and professional development of the Center for Leadership in School Reform and the Schlechty Group. Transforming an entire school system the size of Jefferson will take more than a year.

Professional training via Schlechty for all teachers, school-based, and central office professional staff will also require time to complete. The results, however, will be a school system that prepares to address the needs and required achievement levels of 21st century students who will become 21st century citizens.