

HIGH VALUE HIGH SCHOOLS FOR LOUISIANA

Investing in Futures

Louisiana State Department of Education

"Create A World -Class Education System for all students in Louisiana"

Mission

- Ensure high academic achievement for all students
- Eliminate all achievement gaps
- Prepare students to be effective citizens in a global market

High School Redesign Goals

- Reduce Dropouts and Increase High School Graduation Rates
- Increase Readiness for Post-secondary Education
- Increase Career Readiness of Students
- Increase Participation in Post-secondary Education

A MESSAGE FROM SUPERINTENDENT PAUL PASTOREK



Many great things are taking place in high schools across Louisiana. Unfortunately, these accomplishments often are under-publicized and/or unnoticed. This publication will be a series of newsletters that will remedy this oversight. Each month, we will highlight the successes of one or more high schools in our state. We will preview success stories in the making and recognize outstanding leaders. We hope this newsletter builds a better understanding of High Value High Schools and a greater appreciation for the positive strides Louisiana is taking toward ensuring that our graduates are college and career ready.

Louisiana Studying Success Around Our Country

Jordan High School in Los Angeles, California, is not the first place one would think to look for ways to redesign the approach to high school education. Jordan is located in the Watts district of Los Angeles and has a demographic makeup of 79% Hispanic or Latino students and 21% African-American students. Over 80% of Jordan's students are on a free or reduced lunch program, and 44% are designated as English Language learners. Jordan's leadership has worked extremely hard to overcome the school's considerable challenges.

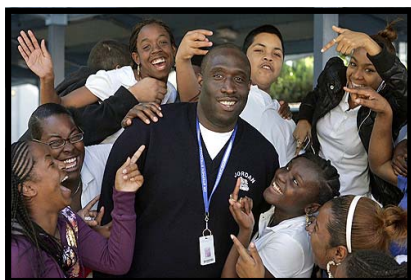


Photo taken by Mel Melcon/ Los Angeles

Dr. Stephen Strachan, principal at Jordan, has instituted a uniform policy for students, common planning periods for teachers, a "fifth-year senior" program to bring dropouts back, and has even implemented a grading scale where it takes a C to pass – no D's allowed.

In a recent article from the *Los Angeles Times* entitled "Jordan High Principal Finds a Formula for Success," reporter Sandy Banks identifies Dr. Strachan as a man who "thinks big and is brimming with self-confidence." Banks identifies him as a man who "has managed to move beyond summits and slogans to remake a high school long considered one of the district's worst." Fortunately for the students and teachers at Jordan, his approach to redesign is paying off.

In her article, Banks states that last year, 78% of

Jordan High ninth-graders passed algebra, compared with less than 50% of students at schools with similar demographics in the district. Additionally, Banks reports that Jordan's test scores are rising much faster than the district's average. Strachan has also launched an all-male academy. Last June, every student in the program graduated, and all but one went on to college.

Banks' article further outlines Jordan's successes with anecdotes of innovation and success from both teachers and students. One math teacher keeps her blinds closed to block the view of the projects, keeping students focused on where they can go, not where they come from. Students report higher levels of student engagement both in the classroom and in extra-curricular activities. One student is quoted as saying, "Now, there are teachers here who say, 'You can be something.' They encourage you to come to school, give you a reason to come to class."

Those interested in reading the entire article can find a copy at: <http://www.latimes.com/news/columnists/la-me-banks13-2008-dec13,1,4339246.column>



Mr. Walter Lee has served as the BESE member to the Fourth Congressional District since March of 1991. Mr. Lee is an alumnus of Northwestern State University where he double-majored in Accounting and Business Administration. He also holds a Master of Business Administration degree from Louisiana Tech University and has graduate hours in education, guidance, supervision, and child psychology. In addition to his duties as a BESE member, Mr. Lee is currently the Superintendent of Schools of De Soto Parish, a position that he has held since 1999. Prior to his current position in De Soto, he served for twelve years as superintendent for Caddo Parish Public Schools.

Plain Dealing High School is Creating "Family Atmosphere"

Located about thirty miles from Bossier City in northern Bossier parish, Plain Dealing is a 6-12 school with a total of 240 students. "We're a long way from the city here," confirms Principal Aubrey Sayes, "and the community is slowly fading like many rural communities...disappearing businesses and population." With 85% of its students on free or reduced lunch, Plain Dealing's demographic data seem to tell the all-too-familiar story of a rural school in a fading community. But anyone who thinks that the faculty of Plain Dealing is resigned to fading into obscurity is surely mistaken. Progress and growth are very much alive at Plain Dealing.



Mrs. Curry's advisory class
Photo taken from Plain Dealing's website

In a time when educational leaders are frequently reminded of the value of relationships, Principal Sayes and the faculty of Plain Dealing High School have achieved something that many school leaders only dream about – creating a family atmosphere at school. How did they do it? "It's our advisory program," says Principal Sayes. "Our teachers act as an 'at-school parent' to our kids. If the kids have difficulties, that's where they go – their advisor teacher." Perhaps an even greater testimony to the success of Plain Dealing's advisory program is that the parents know to call their child's advisor teacher if the student is having difficulties.

When asked what sets Plain Dealing's advisory program apart from similar approaches in other schools, Principal Sayes points to how closely the advisory program is tied to the school's Positive Behavior Support (PBS) program - ROAR. Plain Dealing dedicated itself to revising its scheduling so that the students could attend an advisory period every day for twenty-five minutes. During that time, the staff reviews PBS lessons and works to generate the sense of family that has become so prevalent at the school. Students are encouraged to share their point of view with their advisors, and "they don't have to worry about getting in trouble when they do so," adds Sayes. Implemented during the last school year, Plain Dealing's approach to PBS and the advisory program has been incredibly effective. The number of students qualifying for Honor Roll is up nearly 100%, and discipline referrals have decreased by 52% in the high school.

Plain Dealing is an innovator in other areas as well. Plain Dealing has had five 8g grants funded over the past few years, two of which were for \$100K. One high-profile program

is Project IMPACT. IMPACT provides Promethean boards and six mobile laptop labs with wireless capability which drive their project-based learning. "That's how jobs are going to be in the real world," he says. "Our product will be more job-ready or Higher Ed. ready. It's a radical idea for our area, but the traditional high-school approach was not getting us anywhere."

Reaching even further for innovation, Plain Dealing has also become a member of the International Center for Leadership in Education's (ICLE) Successful Practices Network. The school has published several Gold Seal lessons and has even presented at the Model Schools Conference. When asked what this involvement with ICLE has done for his students, principal Sayes was quick to respond. "We've done a lot toward making daily lessons relevant to students' lives. We see higher levels of student engagement because they see the relevance of what they are learning."

"We see higher levels of student engagement because they see the relevance of what they are learning."

Plain Dealing is a testimony to the positive gains that can be achieved when a faculty takes the vision of high school redesign to heart. "Other schools can learn from what we've done here," says Sayes. "Advisory programs work, a family atmosphere can be created, and every kid needs a place to go and someone to talk to." Congratulations to Principal Aubrey Sayes and the entire faculty at Plain Dealing for their success!

Upcoming Events Corner



March 19-22, 2009 (New Orleans, LA)
NSTA National Conference on Science Education
New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center
<http://www.nsta.org/conferences/2009new/>
<http://www.sreb.org/programs/hstw/hstwindex.asp>

April 22, 2009 (Baton Rouge, LA)
High School Redesign Summit
Register at www.solutionwhere.com/ldoe/cw/main.asp

June 28– July 1, 2009 (Atlanta, GA)
Model School Summer Conference
<http://www.modelschoolsconference.com/>

July 8– July 11, 2009 (Atlanta, GA)
23rd Annual HSTW Staff Development Conference
<http://www.sreb.org/programs/hstw/hstwindex.asp>

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