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Study Identifies Leadership Strategies at Successful Schools

BATON ROUGE, La. – In an effort to replicate academic success across the state, Commissioner of Higher Education Sally Clausen and Louisiana Superintendent of Schools Paul G. Pastorek commissioned a study of the Department of Education's 21 high performing, high poverty schools. In February of 2008, the Department of Education recognized these schools as having academic success with School Performance Score of 80 or above in the school year 2007-2008, more than 50% minority students, and participation in the free and reduced lunch program at 82% or above.

"This study offers Louisiana educators powerful information that I hope will tear down the stereotypes about the potential of students who live in poverty," said Dr. Clausen. "These school leaders have shown that all students can learn to much higher standards when provided the highest quality teachers who are certified in their respective subject matter content and school leaders who are also curriculum leaders. We thank these schools and their families for participating in this research which has the potential to transform expectations of poor and minority students."

"These schools are succeeding in the face of what some have called impossible odds," said State Superintendent of Education Paul Pastorek. "Students living in poverty lack access to the same kinds of learning resources and life experiences enjoyed by students living at higher socioeconomic levels, and in many cases these students arrive less prepared than their peers. But these school leaders and teachers are making sure these children get the support they need to succeed. Their determination and abilities as educators are not only inspiring, but through their work they are providing us with successful models and practices that we can replicate across the state."

Using the nationally respected Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (VAL-Ed), the study found common leadership practices which appear to have a substantial impact on improving student learning. Six core components were present in all 21 schools:

- High Standards for Student Learning – Individual, team and school goals for rigorous student academic and social learning.
- Rigorous Curriculum – Ambitious academic content provided to all students in core academic subjects.

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- Quality Instruction – Effective instructional practices that maximize student academic and social learning.
- Culture of Learning and Professional Behavior – Integrated communities of professional practice in the service of students' academic and social learning. A healthy school environment where learning is the central focus.
- Connections to External Communities – Linkages to family and/or other people and institutions in the community that advance academic and social learning.
- Performance Accountability – Leadership holds itself and others responsible for realizing high standards of performance for student academic and social learning. Individual and collective responsibility among the professional staff and students.

The author of the study, Dr. Sharon Southall, says each of these principals have focused on "the development of quality instruction and a culture of learning inside their schools. They do not allow any obstacle to get in the way of student learning. For them failure was never a thought or an option."

The principals utilized similar processes including strong planning, support of students and staff, advocacy for the diverse needs of students and data driven decision making.

Several concrete examples of this leadership style used in the schools identified as high performing included changing the lunch schedule to allow an extended time for a reading block for students; providing transportation for parents to attend school meetings and making home visits to pick up students who did not show up for important tests.

The general consensus of principals in the study is that it takes three years to turn around a failing school. In the first year, the principal must concentrate on establishing a highly structured environment as well as a strong rapport with students. In the second year, the principal began building trust with teachers and instituted strong collaborative groups and in the third year, the principal committed to an evaluation on the progress made in order to discover the refinements needed to ensure that student achievement continued to improve.

Key recommendations from the study include:

- Create an advisory team of high performing, high poverty principals to help administrators of educational leadership preparation programs.
- Extend the instructional day and increase human capital at schools that serve high numbers of students who live in poverty.
- Require a full year of internship for Educational leadership programs and place prospective principals with an expert leader.
- Provide principals and faculty diversity training for working with Hispanic students and their families.

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The study consisted of two survey instruments, onsite interviews with the principals and a statistical analysis of the findings including specific teacher, principal and school factors.

Principals of these schools were honored at a reception at the Governor's Mansion and appeared at today's joint Board of Regents and Board of Elementary and Secondary Education meeting. Five of the top-rated principals have been selected to participate in a multi-case study that will delve deeper into their leadership styles as well as the processes they use. The purpose of the study is to identify specific ways educators can guide students from low socio-economic families to become academically successful. The list of High Performing, High Poverty schools is below.

For the full report, visit <http://www.regents.state.la.us/Board/borinfo.htm>.

HPHP Schools

District	School	Principal
Bienville Parish	Gibbsland-Coleman High School	Kenneth Gipson
Caddo Parish	Pine Grove Elementary School	Linda Henderson
Calcasieu Parish	John F. Kennedy Elementary School	Dinah Robinson
City of Monroe School	Carver Elementary School	Phedra Brantley
	Madison James Foster Elementary School	Addie Morehouse
	Minnie Ruffin Elementary School	Sylvia Brass
East Baton Rouge Parish	Ryan Elementary School	Darlene Brister
East Carroll Parish	Southside Elementary School	Theola Chatman
Iberia Parish	Canal Street Elementary School	Consuela Roberson

	St. Charles Street Elementary School	J. M. Trotter
Lincoln Parish	Ruston Elementary School	Sonja Walker
New Vision Learning Academy	New Vision Learning Academy Charter School	Andrew Mansfield
Ouachita Parish	Robinson Elementary School	Felicia Sledge
	Shady Grove Elementary School	Jerlyn Bobo
	Swayze Elementary School	Marquita Bowman
Rapides Parish	Forest Hill Elementary School	Nancy Rials
	L.S. Rugg Elementary School	Vickie Smith
	Martin Park Elementary School	Wayne Jowers
St. James Parish	Sixth Ward Elementary School	Judy Ezidore
St. Landry Parish	Northeast Elementary School	Leroy Miller
	Plaisance Elementary School	Larry Watson

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