

Raising Test Scores Through Focused Leadership Development

DISTRICT PROFILE:

Labadieville Primary School
Labadieville, LA

Metro Status: Rural

Total Enrollment: 355

African American: 62%

Caucasian: 34%

Hispanic: 3.6%

Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Program: 87%

Special Education Services: 11%

THE CHALLENGE

During the 2007–2008 school year, Labadieville Primary School (LPS) set out to improve academic outcomes for all students. An important goal was raising achievement on the state test. In 2007 only 62% of third-grade students scored at the basic or higher level on the English language arts (ELA) state test. Determined to improve performance, Labadieville school turned to the International Center for Leadership in Education for assistance.

OVERARCHING GOALS

In the 2007–2008 school year, LPS engaged the International Center for Leadership in Education (part of Scholastic Achievement Partners) for help in identifying the school's unique needs and creating a sustainable plan to improve student achievement, engagement, and motivation.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The International Center conducted a comprehensive needs assessment to understand the strengths and challenges of the school, and identify areas for improvement. The comprehensive needs assessment included using WE™ Survey Suite to collect data from LPS faculty, students, parents, and administrators. These surveys are designed to provide insight into these different stakeholders' perceptions of the learning environment. The International Center also conducted a Data Analysis Review (DAR) to analyze past trends in the school's performance data and set future growth targets.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

The International Center's comprehensive needs assessment revealed two critical areas for improvement: instructional leadership and relationships within the school. The needs assessment indicated that there was a lack of shared vision about what constituted rigorous instruction at the school, and a particularly top-down decision-making structure. The analysis also revealed that the school needed to strengthen the alignment between instructional goals and classroom activities. Teachers' planning time, for example, focused exclusively on preparing students for Integrated Louisiana Educational Assessments Program (iLEAP) instead of on developing instruction that would foster student engagement. There needed to be more school-wide focus on using assessment data to drive or differentiate instruction.

The surveys also revealed weak relationships among students, parents, faculty, and staff.

WE TEACH™ INSTRUCTIONAL STAFF SURVEY results indicated that teachers had little time to build relationships with students or to collaborate with other teachers. Furthermore, survey responses suggested that the school administration did not have the full confidence of the teachers; only 40% of teachers reported that the “school administration implements change without undue stress.” In addition, parent interviews revealed that parents wanted a more positive relationship with the school.

Based on the comprehensive needs assessment, the International Center concluded that LPS leadership needed to focus on creating a more positive environment for learning, based on rigorous and relevant instruction, in order to begin improving achievement.

CUSTOMIZED ACTION PLAN

LPS leadership worked with the International Center to create a coherent vision for instruction, institute structures to better support instruction, and enhance positive relationships in the school.

Creating a Coherent Vision for Instruction

The LPS leadership worked with the International Center to develop a shared vision for rigorous and relevant instruction throughout the school. With the guidance of an International Center Executive Coach, the principal recognized the need to build leadership capacity among the teachers, and began developing a cadre of teachers to provide stronger instructional leadership. These teachers completed The Successful Practices Network’s CORR (Collaborating Online for Rigor and Relevance) training to learn how to write Gold Seal Lessons—rigorous lesson plans with real-world relevance. These teachers then provided ongoing support to their colleagues in incorporating greater rigor and relevance into classroom instruction. Once-a-month faculty meetings were instituted to focus on reading and writing strategies and sharing best practices and student work.

LPS leadership also extended the instructional vision to students and the community. School activities were connected to the community to

demonstrate the importance of education to the students. For example, the LPS leadership team invited community members to participate in a school job fair and to speak on current lesson topics relevant to the community.

Building Structures to Support Instruction

To support the focus on a coherent instructional vision, the LPS principal sought to provide teachers with increased collaborative planning time to discuss curriculum, instructional practices, and student achievement. For the 2009–2010 year, the principal reorganized teachers’ schedules so that they had two common grade-level planning periods each week. During these planning periods, teachers worked on reading strategies in the core, workshop, and content areas with a reading coach. Meetings also emphasized the interpretation of academic assessment data to help identify students’ needs. The planning periods enabled teams of teachers to have the time to develop and discuss innovative instruction that would be relevant for the students in their classes. The LPS leadership team established a vertical planning calendar so that teachers had the opportunity to review and align curriculum and instruction across grade levels.

Building Positive Relationships

The International Center’s needs assessment helped the LPS leadership see the need to improve relationships among all constituents in order to support student success. The school also began building stronger relationships among teachers and the students across grade levels by developing activities that highlighted the importance of a “school family.” Each grade “adopted” another grade-level class, and participated in collaborative activities. Teachers and staff developed and implemented a mentor program for at-risk students. LPS also provided professional development and implemented a school-wide positive behavior management system for teachers, staff, parents, and students. To reach out to parents, the LPS leadership team developed new activities and strategies to increase parental participation, such as family

nights. The leadership team clarified weekly student expectations for parents by refining the format and content of their weekly newsletter to focus on instruction, activities, and tips to support students.

RESULTS

Since LPS partnered with the International Center student achievement has improved. For example, in 2009, 62% of students scored at the basic or higher level on the third-grade *i*LEAP, just under the state passing rate of 66%. By spring 2010, 75% of LPS third graders scored at the basic level or above, compared to 67% for the state (Graph 1). This was a 14-percentage-point increase for LPS students from 2009, compared to a 1 percentage-point increase for the state. Out-of-school suspensions, which were at 7.6% (close to the state rate of 7%) prior to the work with the International Center, declined to a rate (4.3%) below the state level (6.4%) in 2008-2009 (Graph 2). In-school suspensions also fell sharply, from 10.7% in 2007-2008 to 6.8% in 2008-2009,

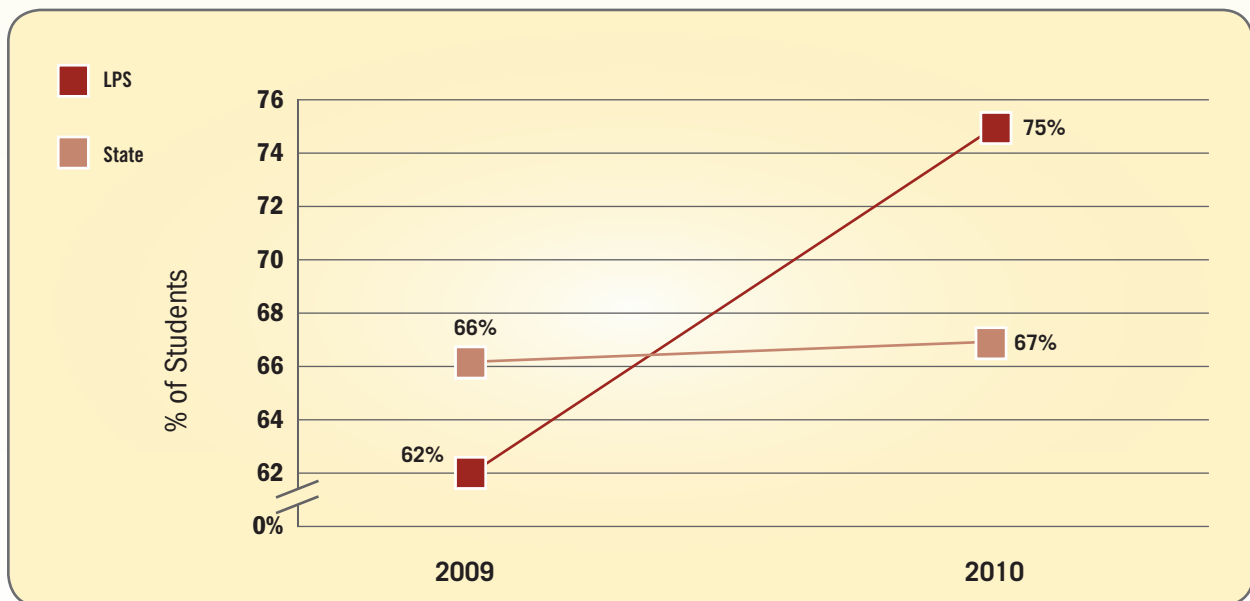
a rate much closer to the state average of 5.8% (Graph 3).

CONCLUSION

By focusing on improving leadership around instruction and school culture, the International Center helped Labadieville Primary School raise *i*LEAP test scores and build capacity for sustained implementation. The school culture shifted from principal-driven leadership to a more shared and unified leadership structure. With clear goals, strong, distributed leadership, and a more positive school culture, LPS was able to realize substantial improvements in student outcomes within a year of launching reform efforts. Moving forward, LPS continues to work with the International Center on reforms that affect every student, parent, educator, and community member to ensure scalable, sustainable school improvement.

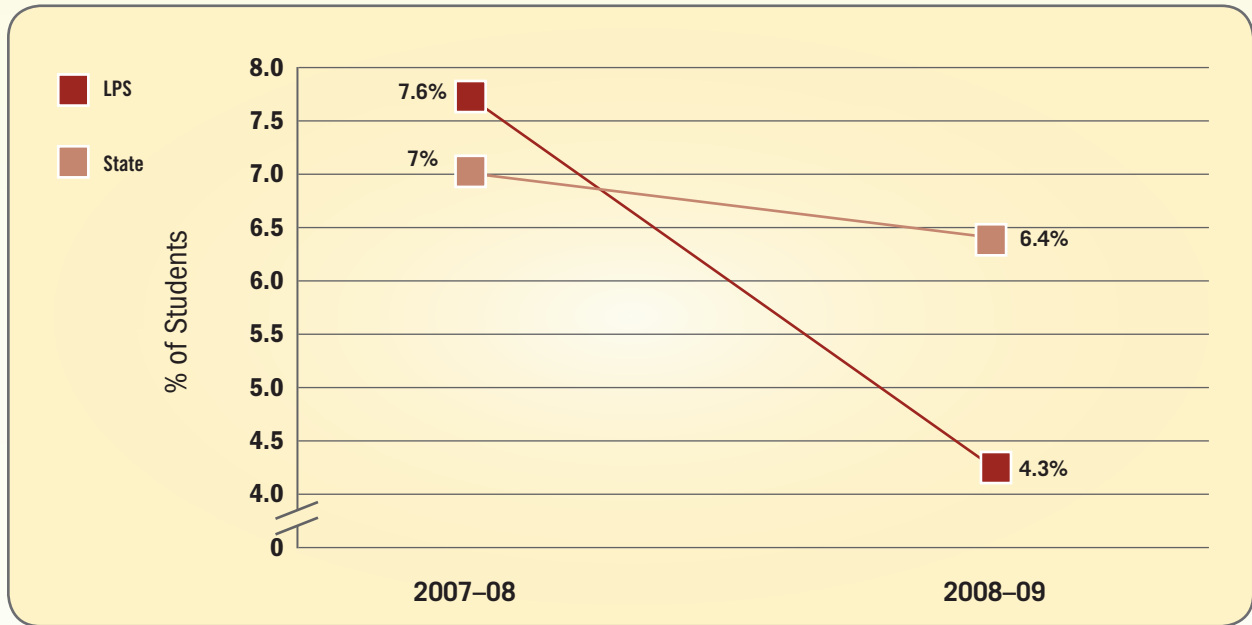
GRAPH 1

Labadieville Primary School Students, Grade 3
Percentage of Students Scoring at or Above Basic Level on ELA *i*LEAP, 2009 and 2010



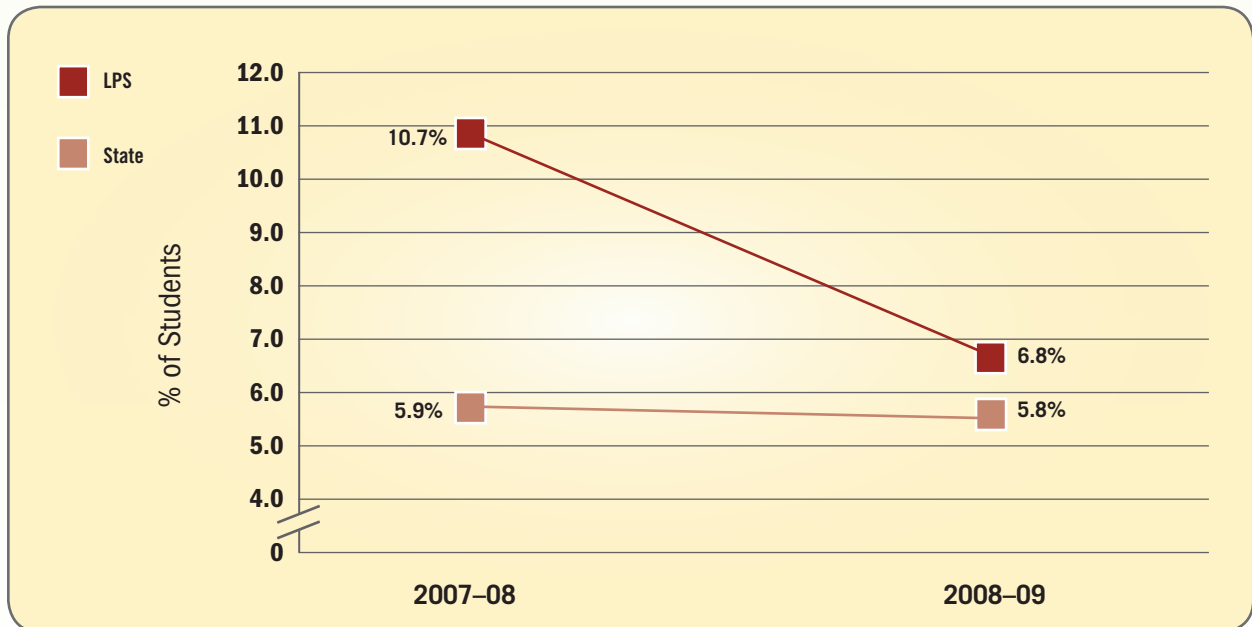
GRAPH 2

Labadieville Primary School Students, Grades K-4
Percentage of Students Suspended (Out of School), 2007-2009



GRAPH 3

Labadieville Primary School Students, Grades K-4
Percentage of Students Suspended (In School), 2007-2009



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Who We Are

Scholastic Achievement Partners brings together the International Center for Leadership in Education, Math Solutions, and Scholastic Implementation Services to offer a full range of solutions for helping district and school leaders raise achievement for all students. With over 700 expert consultants and coaches around the country, we provide unmatched support in human capital development across content areas, comprehensive school improvement, and program implementation.



Scholastic Inc.
557 Broadway
New York, NY 10012
1-800-SCHOLASTIC