

A Focus on Maximizing Student Supports in Rural Communities

The Challenge

Grant Parish School District is part of a small, rural community, comprised of 3,000 students across eight schools, grades Pre-K-12. About one in every five families live below the poverty line. As of 2014, less than 10% of individuals over the age of 25 had acquired a Bachelor's degree or higher. The long distance most families must travel for work and/or education is a factor that has negatively impacted student and family engagement across the district.

Grant Parish School District believes in providing students with opportunities to receive an education that will prepare them for success throughout their lives. To that end, district and school personnel work tirelessly to improve academics despite the many barriers facing their students, communities, and families. Sheila Jackson, Superintendent of Grant Parish School District, recognized that focusing on instruction alone was not enough. In order to level the playing field and provide opportunity and equity of success for all children, they needed to address barriers to learning that students encountered outside of the classroom that were preventing them from benefiting from effective instruction. As a district they needed to expand their approach to school improvement to include a system of learning supports that would help them create learning environments responsive to the wide range of student needs and ensure all students were given the opportunity to become productive, successful learners.

“Instruction alone is not enough to help all students succeed.”

— PAUL REVILLE *Harvard GSE, Professor of Practice of Educational Policy and Administration, Former Secretary of Education for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts*

Reville, P. Instruction alone is not enough to help all students succeed. Retrieved November 27, 2017 from edu@scholastic (blog) (<http://edublog.scholastic.com/post/instruction-alone-not-enough-help-all-students-succeed#>).



The Challenge

Grant Parish Schools wanted to ensure all students have the opportunity to succeed, regardless of social, emotional, behavioral, or economic challenges.

Our Approach

Scholastic worked with district leadership to map existing support services, determine where gaps existed, and develop a rigorous action plan grounded in innovative and strategic practices.

Success

Besides implementing regular community events, Grant Parish School District has witnessed increases in graduation rates and ACT scores across the district, behavioral incidents have drastically decreased in 5 out of the 8 schools, and school performance scores have increased by 6.4%.

Addressing Barriers to Learning

In the 2010-2011 school year, Grant Parish School District was given the opportunity to join Scholastic's Learning Supports pilot program through the American Association of School Administrators (AASA). Sheila Jackson immediately saw the potential the Learning Supports Framework would provide, in particular for her building level administrators. The Learning Supports Framework would help them to strengthen their leadership role and to become proactive leaders in removing student barriers to learning.

That year, the district leadership team identified three areas they needed to prioritize to begin addressing specific social, emotional, behavioral, and economic barriers. They included:

- *Student engagement and motivation*
- *Family-school-community partnerships*
- *Poverty*

Working side-by-side with Learning Supports specialists, Grant Parish began *mapping their resources* at the district level and across each school. They also assembled community leaders and began mapping those additional resources as well. This process allowed them to easily see not only what resources existed at the time, but just as important, where there were gaps.

In partnership with Scholastic Education, Grant Parish developed a comprehensive plan that outlined where they were and where they needed to be to support all children. Then in the 2017-2018 school year, Grant Parish furthered their commitment to address barriers to learning for teachers and students by integrating targeted professional learning focused on building the capacity of all Assistant Principals. Data reviews and hands-on, interactive workshops advanced their focus on transformational change, helping Grant Parish leaders develop their own strong, effective roles in providing learning supports to students in need.



Meeting Success

While distance continues to be a factor in both student and family engagement, Grant Parish is more motivated than ever to reach out to students and families to provide the resources they need to support student learning. They have developed a deep appreciation of the difference between equality and equity and continue to strive to fill important family and community engagement gaps. They have instituted community events throughout the parish four times a year in four different locations in an effort to raise family and community engagement and develop relationships across the community.

Organizing their support services into one unified system has allowed Grant Parish School District to identify, address, and remove barriers to learning and teaching that previously had been overlooked in their efforts to increase student achievement. As a result, Grant Parish has witnessed a decrease in referral incidents and out-of-school suspensions in many of their schools, while graduation rates are on the rise. Their commitment to improvement continues as they work to enhance school climate with the help of their Learning Supports specialists.

“As a new Assistant Principal reflecting back, I’ve seen the framework from the teacher standpoint and been entrenched in the individual student barriers and anticipate how much the framework makes sense. As an administrator looking at those barriers building-wide offers a different and challenging perspective.”

— BRANDIE HICKS, Assistant Principal, South Grant Elementary

To learn more, email learningsupportsinfo@scholastic.com or call 800-387-1437 ext. 6747