

Reform

Changing High Schools To Fit Changing Times

Do we have high schools equipped to take us into the 21st Century? That's the question national, state, and local educators, public officials, and business leaders struggle with as they discuss whether high schools are able to produce graduates prepared to enter college and meet the workplace needs of the future. It's a growing problem with staggering implications for our nation.

The mounting data raises concerns. Veronica Howard, Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco's Education Policy Advisor,

The Rapides Foundation is helping to lead the effort to explore high school reform in Cenla – sponsoring the first Central Louisiana High School Summit, October 25-26, 2005, for educators, business leaders, political officials and concerned citizens.

said the data for state schools is a red flag that reveals deficits in high school curriculum. "We have examined the data collected since 1999 when the state's accountability effort began. After we looked at that data, and the data is what's driving all of our high school work, it was easily discernible that there were marked improvements in the lower grades. But as we examined the higher grades we could readily detect that for some reason our kids were not progressing as well, and that our accountability reforms had not reached the high schools."

Meanwhile The Rapides Foundation has been conducting its own work focused on the improvement of student performance in the schools in our nine partner districts. Initiatives that began in 1999 with the awarding of grants to over 100 schools in the Foundation's service area. Then came the establishment of an Educators Leadership Institute (ELI), which seeks to expose area educators and administrators to the latest education methods, programs, innovations and leadership skills gleaned from schools and experts throughout the nation.



Veronica Howard, Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco's Education Policy Advisor

Most recently the Foundation was instrumental in the creation of a local education fund, The Orchard Foundation which links together schools and businesses to find ways to better prepare students for the workplace.

"We could see that improvements from our efforts are having a major impact on middle and elementary schools," said Joe Rosier, The Rapides Foundation's President and CEO. "We are

beginning to see our work take hold; the ship is beginning to turn. But we don't see that same level of progress in our high schools."

State after state has analyzed the data with the same conclusion. We must find ways to reform our high schools to accommodate the knowledge, skills and technology demands of the 21st century. "It's not necessarily that high schools are worse than they used to be, in fact we have more good high

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Veronica Howard, Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco's Education Policy Advisor

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schools than at any time in the past," said Rosier. "I think schools face more challenges than ever before. We ask more of those schools and we have much higher expectations. But those expectations are necessary to keep pace with the growing globalization of the workplace – we live in an age that is increasingly complex."

Louisiana is among a small group of states leading the way on this issue. "We are definitely at the forefront in high school reform. We were one of ten states chosen to each receive a \$2 million grant from the National Governors Association," said Howard.

Howard stresses Governor Blanco is committed to restructuring Louisiana high schools. To that end she established a High School

Redesign Commission to begin building a consensus on ways to realign and strengthen curriculum and increase graduation rates.

Governor Blanco's commitment also stems from her desire to foster the state's economic growth. "Education and economic development go hand in hand," said Howard. "You cannot have a truly successful economic development plan without looking at your education system and the workers that you're putting into the system. It's hard to attract business when you don't have the people equipped to take those jobs."

The Rapides Foundation is also at the forefront of this issue. A first step has been to sponsor a two-day *Central Louisiana High School Summit*, October 25-26, 2005, for educators, business leaders,



Over 350 people attended the two-day *Central Louisiana High School Summit*.

political officials and concerned citizens alike. The Foundation brought together these different groups to enlist their support for change. In opening the summit, Joe Rosier outlined the objectives:

High School Summit Objectives

- 1 Define the current gaps in attainment and achievement.
- 2 Highlight high school reform options and opportunities.
- 3 Create a sense of urgency and support for improvement.
- 4 Begin a dialogue to lead to efforts focused on solutions.

The Foundation is coordinating its effort closely with the state's goals. "I think it's important for The Rapides Foundation and the nine school districts in Central Louisiana they represent to make that type of commitment," said Howard. "It's wonderful; because we will be able to use Central Louisiana as a model for the rest of the state as to what you can do on a district-wide basis. We would love to see the other regions of the state take on this issue as well."

Rosier summed up the Foundation's position. "We don't offer the solution but we do offer support for serious-minded approaches to making high school reform work so our children are prepared for the 21st century."

Eye-Opening Experience

"A look at the data on student performance reveals why high school reform is essential," says Kati Haycock, CEO and Executive Director of The Education Trust, keynote speaker at the two-day *Central Louisiana High School Summit* held last October. She was armed with the facts and figures about what's going right and wrong with the education of our young people in the United States, particularly in the high schools. The Education Trust, located in Washington, D.C., was established in 1990 by the American Association for Higher Education as a special project to encourage colleges and universities to support K-12 reform efforts. It is now an independent, nationally

recognized, nonprofit organization whose mission is to make schools and colleges work for all of the young people they serve.

Prepared with charts and graphs, Haycock laid out the compelling case for high school reform. She began with testing results, which reflected little growth among students, particularly in the upper grades. "Kids are exiting high schools today with little better skills than 20 years ago," she said as she flashed on the screen math and science test score data, followed by test score figures in reading and writing, which showed a drop in both subjects. "No matter how you add that up, it's not exactly the kind of progress we'd hoped to



Kati Haycock, CEO and Executive Director of The Education Trust

make after 20 years of trying to improve things."

In international assessments American students lag behind. In comparisons of 32 countries, the US ranked 15th in reading, 14th in science, and a recent drop in mathematics from 19th all the way down to 24th. "Those of you who have looked at the international data know something quite simple, and that is, in other

countries kids consistently grow more during their secondary school years than our kids do," said Haycock adding, "It's not because our children are not growing during their high school years. They're growing, but they are growing less than their counterparts in other countries, even though we actually spend more on education than any other country."

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Eye-Opening

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In our country achievement gaps between whites, blacks, and Latinos continue to plague schools, Haycock informed the mix of educators, business people, parents, civic leaders, and interested citizens attending the summit. Students fall behind and seem to stay behind. Too many students seem to be graduating from high school without the knowledge and skills to either enter college or enter the job market.

Obviously, she said, high schools need to better prepare students for the rapidly changing world they live in. Haycock then turned her attention to schools that are successful. "The first thing you see when you look at high performing or high impact high schools, is that they have very, very clear goals. These schools focus on getting kids not ready for college or for work; they get them ready for both. All kids are educated to the same standard."

These schools get their students ready for both work and college by raising the expectations and strengthening the curriculum. According to Haycock even students in the lower percentiles "actually fail less if you put them in tougher courses."

"In the end she said, what matters most is quality of teachers," as she demonstrated the importance for strong teachers and the fatal impact of inadequate instruction. "No matter what their family background students who have even two weak teachers in a row never recover. Let me repeat that; never recover," she said, and conversely, "If we could but assure low income kids just five above average teachers in a row," the achievement gaps that currently exist, she believes, "we could

actually completely close."

In finishing her presentation Haycock acknowledged the efforts of The Rapides Foundation to begin the dialogue on high school reform. "What you are doing in Central Louisiana is so very important. Young people in your schools are the very future of your communities, your state, and our country."

Panel Discussion

The Rapides Foundation also brought in other experienced leaders in high school reform from around the country to form a panel discussion on this issue:

- **Jennifer Vranek**, the Senior Policy Officer for Education Advocacy for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in Seattle, Washington.
- **Dr. Tony Habit**, Executive Director of the New Schools Project in North Carolina.
- **Nancy Sutton, Ed.S.**, Senior Fellow for the Center of Excellence in Leadership of Learning (CELL) University of Indianapolis, Indiana.
- **Dr. Lucretia Murphy**, Senior Program Manager for Jobs for the Future in Boston, Massachusetts.

This is what they had to say.

"We have to turn the system on its head," said Jennifer Vranek, whose boss, Bill Gates has called high schools "obsolete." Gates has invested over a billion dollars in establishing new schools.

Vranek thinks the current system of education can't deliver what students need. "Even the system when it's working is not the system we need for the 21st century," she said while noting, "Virtually every job that's worth

anything in our country now needs at least a high school diploma, and almost 60 percent of the fastest growing jobs in the United States need some form of secondary education."

Tony Habit, Executive Director of the New Schools Project in North Carolina, whose organization works directly with schools to help redesign them, was quick to point out, "This should never be a blame game. This is about creating an environment where a teacher has the opportunity to be successful with every single student."

He spoke of schools his organization had worked with and what results they achieved. He also spoke of the enormous pressure any change will bring to teachers. "We need to be thoughtful about the people who are working every day in schools and giving of themselves in the current model while we prepare for the model of progress."

Lucretia Murphy, Senior Program Manager for Jobs for the Future in Boston, Massachusetts, believes high schools are not giving students the skills they need to succeed. "People have to have the skills to reinvent themselves, which means it should be assured they'll have basic reasoning skills, writing skills and math skills. They won't be able to compete in an economy where every employer has to remediate."

She also brought up the pain that accompanies comprehensive change. "One area of pain is the pain that people most fear; loss of jobs. You need a new type of teacher in a school that's preparing all students to excel." There's also pain involved between teachers and their union, teachers and parents, and the school district itself. "The districts are starting to feel pain because they have to mobilize staff differently. Resources need to be organized differently."



Tony Habit, Executive Director of the New Schools Project in North Carolina: "This is about creating an environment where a teacher has the opportunity to be successful with every single student."

"The future is all tied up in technology," said Nancy Sutton, Ed.S., Senior Fellow for the Center of Excellence in Leadership of Learning (CELL) University of Indianapolis, Indiana. "There are things going on around the globe that we've just got to come to terms with. One of them is the role of technology."

She spoke of the advantage the World Wide Web has given students in other countries to get a good education. She said these students "want what they perceive we have in America, and they're willing to work for it. They don't care what it takes," and that our students must be prepared to compete globally.

Community involvement is a must when it comes to high school reform. "We have to take back a sense of community conversation about what we as a community value for these children. And we have got to come to grips with what it is we want our children to have access to. Not just some children, but all children."

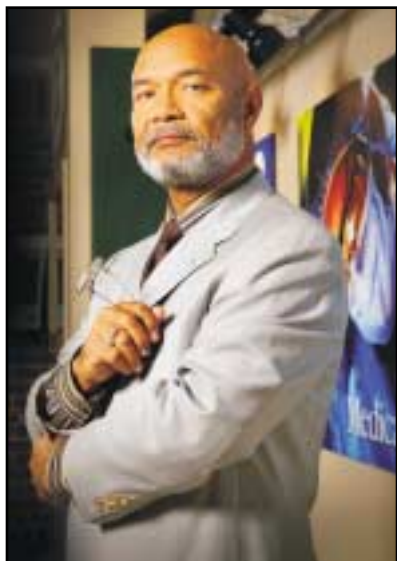
They all spoke of the need to strengthen curriculum, train quality teachers, get stakeholders involved like local organizations, parents, and civic leaders. Engage children in their learning. Make the curriculum relevant. Set clear goals.

An eye opening experience indeed for all those who attended and were able to hear from these experts. Their expertise and knowledge was greatly appreciated and impressed upon those attending the need to begin reforming our high schools for the 21st century.

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Kati Haycock, CEO and Executive Director for The Education Trust

The Principal Point of View



Lee Dotson, principal of Peabody Magnet High School: *“What was good 30 to 40 years ago just doesn’t work now with a child of this day and age.”*

Principal Lee Dotson Peabody Magnet High School

“We’re dealing with a different child; a different time,” says Lee Dotson, principal of Peabody Magnet High School in Rapides Parish. He has spent four decades in the field of education and he recognizes that today’s high schools must adapt to both the changing times and the changing students. “What was good 30 to 40 years ago just doesn’t work now with a child of this day and age.”

Recognizing the need for change, and always on the lookout for new ideas and new perspectives, he attended the *Central Louisiana High School Summit*. “I liked the analogy made at the summit that the world is flattening, which means that the playing field is being made available to people in every country and it’s a level playing field. In order for students of tomorrow to be able to compete or to be successful they are going to have to carry into the working world the necessary tools that will make them successful individuals. The future of our country depends on it. To some degree that can’t happen the way the schools are structured now.”

As the summit made clear through statistics and current examples, there are many issues to consider in reforming high

schools and the curriculum. One of them Dotson keyed in on is equity. “Reforming of the high schools goes along with closing the achievement gaps based on race and poverty. But in order to do that there’s going to have to be a curriculum accessible to all.”

And there are other issues that concern him. “In making any changes here in the Rapides Parish school system we have to deal with other groups. We need parent, business, and political involvement. Unless we get them involved none of this will work. Even beyond that, there’s going to have to be a partnership between colleges and universities focusing on teacher preparation.”

Later in the day at the summit, Dotson attended a discussion among educators from Rapides Parish about what they heard at the summit that was meaningful and what they might begin doing in their own schools. “We discussed various innovative schedules that are used in high schools in order to make it more relevant, particularly in the senior year. There was also some conversation about increasing the number of required credits for graduation.” Dotson said they also talked about the fact that, “only a third of a graduating class actually go on to some formal education,” so any restructuring of curriculum must be geared, “not only for college bound students, but students that will be entering into the workforce after high school.”

Dotson said the summit gave him some ideas and much to think about. He says he is looking forward to “further dialogue.”

Principal Jane Griffin, Ed.D. Winnfield Senior High School

“I’m feeling pepped up,” enthused Jane Griffin, Ed.D., principal of Winnfield Senior High School in Winn Parish, after attending the morning session of the *Central Louisiana High School Summit*. Listening to the national experts talk about current trends geared towards improving and strengthening curriculum made her realize that her school was

already making headway in enacting positive change. “We’ve already stepped out there to try to get our school more in line with what the kids need. We’ve always been responsive to change and new ideas that will make things better for our students.”

Griffin has been principal of Winnfield Senior High School for the last ten years. Before that she taught math for 25 years. She is proud that her school has been trying out new programs to give children an added boost in gaining workforce skills. “We have added several programs in the past few years that have angled toward keeping kids in school by giving them some college credit while they’re in high school.”

Some of her students have received dual credits in early childhood education. Her school also works with Huey P. Long Technical College in Winn Parish to offer training for nursing assistants. There are also pharmacy technician classes and even physics through a computerized “virtual school.”

The summit also reinforced her belief that the country must get serious about restructuring the high school curriculum. “I feel like we’ve got to get urgent about it, from the small towns like I live in all the way up to large cities. We’ve got to get people concerned. We can’t let up.”

At the end of the summit when the nine parishes broke off into separate meetings, Griffin acted as facilitator for the Winn Parish educators. She said her



Jane Griffin, Ed.D., principal of Winnfield Senior High School: *“We’ve always been responsive to change and new ideas that will make things better for our students.”*

group was pleased with their efforts so far, and are committed to transforming the secondary education landscape. “If we don’t know what’s out there and what other people are doing, then we would be teaching just like we did 30 years ago. We want to raise scores, raise the number of students graduating, attack the dropout problem. We’ve got to do something different, so we’ve got to hear everything and then try to make it apply to our particular area.”

She admits there’s much to be done, but she also believes they will be able to change things for the better. “I’m always optimistic,” she said with a smile.

As the summit made clear through statistics and current examples, there are many issues to consider in reforming high schools and the curriculum.

Business Investment In Education

Today's students are tomorrow's workforce so business leaders have a vested interest in education and high school redesign. Business success and productivity are directly related to the caliber of their employees. The better educated and skilled their employees; the better a company's opportunity to prosper. But what business leaders see coming out of the schools today has many of them concerned.

"We see a number of people who are high school graduates but actually lack the capability to perform at the high school level," said Ray Peters, Vice-President of Human Resources for the Roy O. Martin Lumber Company, one of the largest independently owned lumber companies in the South. The company is headquartered in Alexandria, and owns over 600,000 acres of Louisiana forest land.

"There are certainly some minimum requirements that we have to have," such as math and basic reading skills. "I'm not talking only about mathematical computation but also the ability to measure. On top of that a job applicant must have the ability to read and comprehend work materials. Someone we hire has got to be able to read a training manual. New employees must be able to read a safety manual."

He attended the *Central Louisiana High School Summit* because many of the people he hires are coming directly from high school and he is concerned about their lack of basic skills. "The people that we hire primarily in our manufacturing operations come from high schools in the geographic areas in which we operate. And it is in our best interest to ensure that those people completing high school are equipped to transition into the workplace."

Peters feels this summit is a good beginning. "I think it is the beginning of a longer term process ensuring that our kids are prepared to enter the workplace and make a contribution to society. They need to know what the expectations are from people like us who are doing the employing."

Kelvin Freeman is an Industrial Engineer/Production Supervisor at Dresser Industries, a worldwide leader in the manufacturing and marketing of highly engineered energy infrastructure and oilfield products and services with a plant located in Pineville, Louisiana. He is also a member of The Rapides Foundation Board. In addition he works with a youth group sponsored by his alumni fraternity Phi Beta Sigma. Because of these three affiliations he has a deep concern about the future of high school education and was



“I think it is the beginning of a longer term process ensuring that our kids are prepared to enter the workplace and make a contribution to society.”

(left) Ray Peters, Vice-President of Human Resources for the Roy O. Martin Lumber Company

extremely interested in attending the *Central Louisiana High School Summit*. "Students basically are not prepared for the workforce. From what I've seen so far, applicants come into Dresser, and they're just not equipped."

Freeman believes some technical training is necessary in high school. "Even for the basic manual machines you need to know how to read blueprints, read the scales, calipers, and measuring tools. Many of these young men and women haven't been exposed to it."

Technical training and a strengthened curriculum, says Freeman, would improve both the job market and the lives of the students, as well as the economy. "Typically we try to hire from within the company and within the local community. But if we can't find someone we have to look elsewhere. If we can't hire qualified applicants who are willing to move to Central Louisiana then those jobs and that work will be outsourced, either out of the state or out of the country. It's my wish that with high school reform, and hopefully some emphasis on technical training, that much of the work being outsourced can stay in the local area and that means the money will also stay in our community."

Lance Harris, CEO of Lance Harris Companies, was also at the summit. He is the entrepreneur who opened Leebo's Stores, Inc., Woodside Pecan and Cattle

Plantation, Alexandria Farm Supply Services, and Rooster's Town and Country. "I came because as an employer I see the need for some improvements in our secondary education." He was impressed by what he heard. "It was a real eye-opener. Anybody that was there had to get the message. It was presented in a great format. I thought it was very telling and a very educational experience for me."

Like Ray Peters and Kelvin Freeman, Harris is also troubled by the number of unqualified job applicants. "The applicants I see on a day-to-day basis are lacking in many skills. If the high schools were able to provide what was discussed at this summit, it would save just a huge amount of training time. It takes a lot of time and effort to train people if they don't have the basic skills coming out of high school. With less training required we could probably free up some money to do some other investing; to cultivate other parts of the business."

Harris feels a sense of urgency about high school reform, mingled with a sense of optimism. "We've got to do something now. This problem is every day and it's catching up with us. However I am optimistic about it in the sense that just the sheer market pressures of the global economy will force us to do something. We have to do something to keep up."

Joe Pierson, Jr., is President and CEO of City Bank and Trust Company in Natchitoches,

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“Technical training and a strengthened curriculum would improve both the job market and the lives of the students, as well as the economy.”

Kelvin Freeman, Industrial Engineer/Production Supervisor at Dresser Industries

Business Investment

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a successor of the Merchant & Farmers Bank; with five locations the bank has been serving the Natchitoches area for over 70 years. "There are many issues in education we haven't been addressing," he said. On his list of concerns are lack of motivation for students, discipline, recruiting and keeping qualified teachers, social promotion, and fiscal responsibility. "I want to be sure those education dollars provided by our taxes are spent in the most productive ways. I'm a banker so I worry about money."

His wife is an educator at Northwestern State University so he stays close to the issue of education. He believes improvements can be made, "If they can reform high schools and particularly if they can motivate these students to want more than what their parents had. That's the real key, particularly for the poor and the minority students. We've got to somehow convince these young people there is more out there if they're willing to work for it. To me, of all the things we do, that's the most critical."

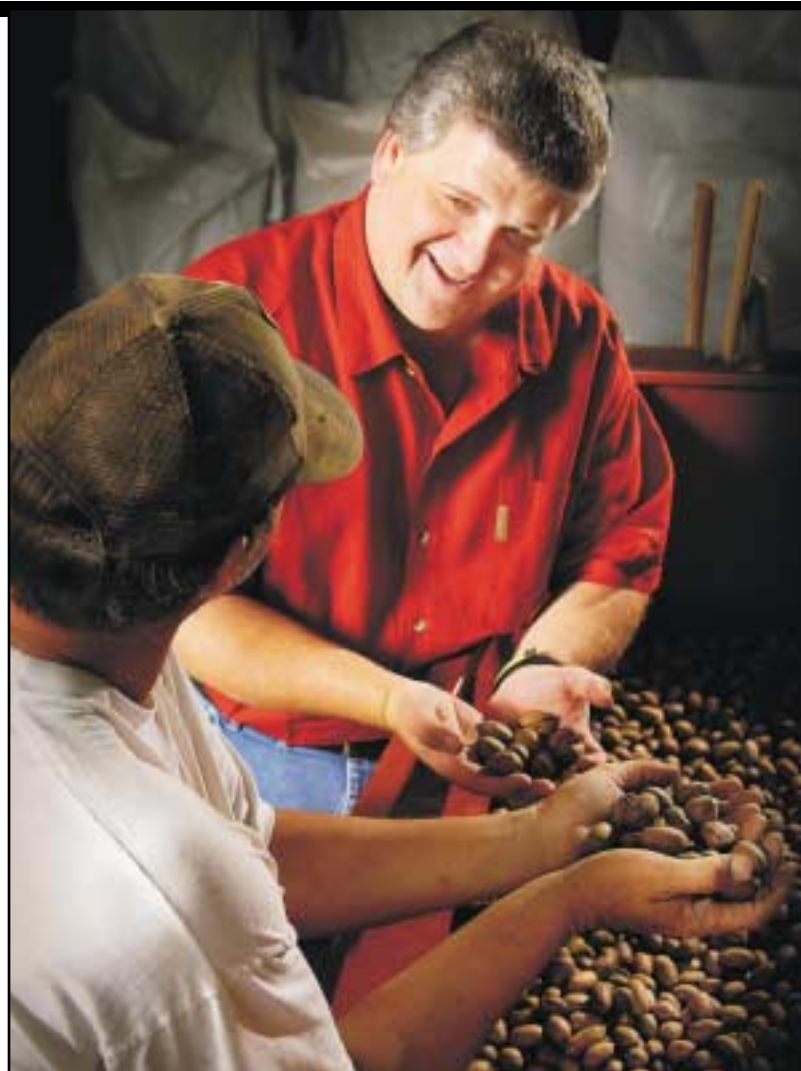
Dorothy Oliver is the Executive Director of the LaSalle Community Action Association, Inc., and she took a lot of notes at the summit. Her organization tries to help students who are not college bound redirect their

curriculum to prepare them for the workforce. She was interested to see, "if there's going to be a turnaround in the way we're looking at the needs of our students."

At the summit she asked the panel of experts if the federally-funded program advocating a tech prep curriculum that her organization implements in six parishes is a valid approach to reforming high schools. She agreed with their response that it has merit but in the bigger picture students need to be pushed with a more challenging curriculum and to discover why they are not learning before just giving up and redirecting them to learn a skill for the workplace. "I think that the way the world is moving at this fast pace, students are going to have to be ready to move with it."

She also holds to the belief that parents must be involved. "Parental involvement has got to be an integral part. So many of our students today don't have that."

These five business leaders are representative of the concern in our community for the future of high school graduates and the hope that the *Central Louisiana High School Summit* is a first step in changing the education environment.



“ We’ve got to do something now. This problem is every day and it’s catching up with us. However I am optimistic ... the global economy will force us to do something. We have to do something to keep up. ”

Lance Harris, CEO of Lance Harris Companies

College Viewpoint

The College Outlook



Dr. Robert Cavanaugh, Chancellor of Louisiana State University at Alexandria (LSUA)

Louisiana's colleges and universities have a sizeable stake in high school reform. After all, many of this year's high school graduates are next year's college freshmen. Getting high school students to take a more demanding curriculum can only come as good news to higher education.

Dr. Robert Cavanaugh, Chancellor of Louisiana State University at Alexandria (LSUA), attended the *Central Louisiana High School Summit*. He is looking to high school reform as a way to better prepare students for college. "We want to be sure that the transition from high school to college works, and that the

students have the information they need to do it," he said. "The bottom line; these students are our future."

But unfortunately, as research has all too clearly indicated, many students entering college aren't quite ready to tackle college-level work. Colleges have for years now offered remedial classes to help students improve skills and continue on with their education. While the practice of remediation is being phased out of some higher education institutions in the state, LSUA continues to schedule remedial courses.

"Yes, we're still an open admission institution and will be until fall of 2007, so students can

come to us, even though they need developmental/remedial math or English. We take them in and we do provide those services," said Cavanaugh.

Math seems to be the subject posing the biggest obstacle for students. "I'm going to give you a number that sounds very high, but over half of our students who enter as first time freshmen need remedial math," Cavanaugh said, although he did point out that, "Bear in mind some of these students may be 40 years old and it's been a long time since they had Algebra I and Algebra II."

Cavanaugh agreed that while it would be advantageous to have

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College Outlook

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students who were completely ready to start their college curriculum, he believes remediation is a useful tool to help students make the transition to college work. "It's surprising how many of them who go through remedial or developmental courses are successful and do graduate and do go on to good jobs. There are many success stories out there."

Cavanaugh is also a supporter of TOPS (tuition opportunity program for students), a Louisiana program that pays tuition for students with a qualifying ACT score and a college preparatory curriculum. "High school students today are aware they need to take a college preparatory curriculum in order to have an opportunity for the state to pay their tuition. So they're taking the four English classes, they're taking the advanced math class, they're taking a foreign language, they're taking physics." Cavanaugh thinks TOPS serves as a strong incentive for students to choose the harder subjects, one of the goals of high school reform.

Education officials at the main campus of Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge are also casting an interested eye on the Foundation's efforts with high school reform. Brenda Nixon, Assistant Director of the Cain Center for Scientific, Technological, Engineering and Mathematical Literacy traveled to Alexandria for the high school summit. She explained that the Cain Center, housed under Academic Affairs, deals frequently with K-12 education, "So we've been very interested in the high school improvement efforts, very interested, because we have recognized that there's a tremendous need to align K-12 to higher education and the workforce. Are we preparing kids to be successful in the workplace?"

To answer "yes" to that question takes a different approach

to teaching according to Nixon. "I think it behooves us to teach students how to learn, how to find a resource, where to get that information. That's going to be the challenge. Because of the information explosion, you can't know it all, but you better be able to process, better be able to know where to go to get that information."

The Governor's Office, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Board of Regents, and public and private education institutions have determined that the objective is to realign Louisiana's educational system from the top down with the major focus on teacher curriculum.

Louisiana College is also working toward this objective. Dr. Joe Aguillard is President of Louisiana College, a private Baptist college in Pineville, located across the Red River from neighboring Alexandria in Central Louisiana. Aguillard is on the State's College Redesign Committee. "One thing that has changed is the preparation of teachers going into those high schools. The standards that we've been given to reach in higher education are very different than they were a few years ago. The content standards are much greater. Students in a teacher preparation program across this state must have a greater level of content preparation than they did several years ago, and that is going to be the vehicle of change in the high schools. We'll be producing students with greater depth because the teachers giving the instruction are going to have greater knowledge of the subject matter."

And depth in the subject matter being taught has been sadly lacking as Aguillard sees it. "Students have been getting a lot of broad introductions to a lot of content material but the depth with specificity in content areas

has been lacking." And as students head to the workplace, "Employers have indicated that students are not less intelligent but have less content depth than they had years ago," said Aguillard.

He knows change is necessary. "I would give you this quote: 'You can have change without improvement, but you cannot have improvement without change,' and I believe one cannot maintain - one either goes backward or forward. We know that we were at the bottom educationally by all measures of achievement and something has to be done to address that."

Brenda Nixon also is of the mind that improvement is essential. "What's happened is we have lost our standing and I think a lot of that has got to do with not getting a firm grasp on what it takes to be on the cutting edge. We've lost that leading edge. I think the information explosion has hit everyone and we've just got to change."

Robert Cavanaugh is confident that these attempts to reform Louisiana high school education will be successful and of benefit to all levels of education. "As the high school curriculum is reformed to become more rigorous and pertinent to today's world, you can look at that going right on down through the grades. I believe anything we do in college has an effect on high school; anything that happens in high school is certainly going to have an effect on the earlier grades, so we're reforming education all the way down."

Dr. Vickie Gentry, acting dean of the College of Education at Northwestern State University also believes that there is need for high school reform. "In general, the need for more rigor in high school courses/programs is especially important to Louisiana. High school reform appears to mirror the intentions of reform of



Dr. Joe Aguillard, President of Louisiana College

teacher preparation programs, a move that began four years ago," said Gentry. "That is, it was decided that new teachers should have more content knowledge in order to better prepare their students in the sciences, math, language arts, etc. As a result of this reform initiative, The Quality Counts study of Education Week has rated Louisiana #1 in the nation for efforts to improve teacher quality."

"In addition, President Bush has stated that he wants more rigorous math and science teaching in high schools and to provide help for young, struggling math students. It appears that high school reform in Louisiana is aligned with the Administration's math and science agenda.

Finally, the reform of high school curricula and requirements for high school graduation will better prepare high school students for college work, and, overall, will produce a more educated workforce, which will lead to a more innovative economy," notes Gentry.

A successful program of high school reform such as that being pursued by The Rapides Foundation and Central Louisiana educators has the potential to leave a lasting mark on the entire educational system of Louisiana.

“You can have change without improvement, but you cannot have improvement without change.”

Dr. Joe Aguillard, President of Louisiana College

Keeping the Ball Rolling!

“The high school summit started the ball moving; now we have to keep it rolling,” said Joe Rosier, President and CEO of The Rapides Foundation. “We’re off to a good start and we want to capitalize on that success without delay.” Rosier believes there is so much more we plan to achieve in our long-term efforts to equip Central Louisiana school districts with the necessary support mechanisms needed to enact change.

The Foundation’s education consultant, Dr. Kenneth Tewel agrees that the *Central Louisiana High School Summit* was the necessary first step in a long-term effort to bring about positive change in our high schools.

“Our goal here was to begin to create awareness in the Central Louisiana community and among area educators of the current status of performance at the high school level in our nation and locally; to begin to explore some of the deep issues about that performance; to understand some of the complex issues of high school transformation, and to begin to acquaint local community and educators with some of the exciting innovations going on around the country to improve high schools. And we think we’ve done that.”

Now the Foundation is proceeding with the real work ahead in partnership with the nine Central Louisiana public school

districts in their service area. A few weeks after the summit, school superintendents from the nine parishes met at the Foundation to discuss strategies to reform their high schools.

From this meeting came a framework of support services for this year, Tewel explains, “beginning with an opportunity to focus on developing top quality leadership skills to lead the effort to improve student performance at the high school level. What are the strategies and skills needed and how does one go about developing them, because they are very different strategies and skills from those learned by most of our administrators when they went to school, including me.”

Tewel continued to list a series of steps for the year and beyond. “We’re going to take a full day in late April where we work with the Central Louisiana districts to move the high school summit one additional step – we’re going to localize the data from around the country to the region and provide our districts with the local data on student performance, as well as the local community and business needs, then follow it up with more discussion,” Tewel reported. “And then we will also work on research-based successful strategies for improving high schools because the change process is different at the high school level than it is at the elementary level.”

Another issue to be addressed is preparation in the middle grades prior to high school. “We’re going to focus on readiness for this year. How do middle schools get kids ready for high school; this is in line with Louisiana’s effort to lay the foundation for its high school work,” said Tewel.

Then there’s the summer. According to Tewel, “During those months the Foundation expects to sponsor a major workshop in Alexandria, an institute on improving high schools. How do we get kids ready; that’s step one. How we work to assure that when students get to high school they’re equipped to tackle high school work?” This institute will bring in “the best knowledge” from around the country to help answer those questions.



Dr. Kenneth Tewel, the Foundation’s education consultant

Also during the summer, for the second year, the Foundation will support the participation of the nine Central Louisiana superintendents at a national superintendents’ institute. Here they will be able to spend time looking at models of high school change, and enter into discussions with their peers from across the country who are also tackling these same issues.

The Foundation is also planning another major institute in November 2006; this one geared to boards of education members. It will focus on the leadership needed by district boards of education when it comes to improving high schools.

The Foundation is moving ahead consistent with the direction taken by the state of Louisiana, but as Tewel cautions, “These things take time. The last thing we want is local educators taking a quick look and then jumping in to


develop an approach to dealing with the issues and problems that are not carefully thought out. These are difficult issues.” For the Foundation this is only the beginning of a long journey of discovery that can bring many rewards to our schools.

Joe Rosier, who has witnessed the evolution of the Foundation’s Education Initiative since its inception, believes this is an important time. “We realize there is a great need for high school reform and we are fully committed to this endeavor. The Foundation is not looking for a short-term solution but a deliberative, well-devised plan of action that will truly prepare our children to enter college and/or compete in the workplace. We believe these first projects being planned will begin to lay a solid foundation for change in our high schools. It’s the kind of change that will ultimately strengthen the entire community.”



Joe Rosier, President and CEO of The Rapides Foundation

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President/CEO:
Joseph R. Rosier, Jr., CPA, CFA

Editors:
Vicki Bernard, Annette Beuchler, MBA, CHE

Contributing Writers:
Anne L'Heureux, Dr. Kenneth Tewel

For additional copies or to be added to the mailing list contact:
The Rapides Foundation
1101 Fourth Street, Suite 300
Alexandria, LA 71301

Tel: 318-443-3394
Fax: 318-443-8312
Toll Free: 1-800-994-3394
Internet: www.rapidesfoundation.org
e-mail: info@rapidesfoundation.org

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