



The Rapides Foundation

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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2001-2002 Education Initiative provides \$2.4 million for 103 schools – bringing national models to Central Louisiana

Alexandria, LA – Now that thousands of children and teachers are headed back to their classrooms, they will be participating in innovative projects supported by The Rapides Foundation. For the 2001-2002 school year more than half of all schools in 11 parishes in Central Louisiana are participating in this program.

One hundred and three (103) school projects have been awarded funding this academic year, impacting close to 50,000 students in the 11 parishes served by The Rapides Foundation. Schools can receive up to \$25,000 annually for a period of five years, if they show progress towards meeting their program goals.

The Education Initiative provides funding to assist schools to focus on a single instructional goal that can be developed and fully implemented over the five years of the program. The Initiative encourages schools to develop new programs or expand current ones already underway, such as reading and literacy efforts. Schools customize these programs to meet their needs. They include a variety of approaches, from projects that provide training to use technology in many different subjects, and efforts to decrease absenteeism and increase test scores. The Foundation then provides resources to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills plus the training and follow-up coaching needed to make them successful.

Joe Rosier, Foundation President and CEO says, “This investment in our schools is important for the future of Central Louisiana. The Foundation is proud to provide funding to help improve student achievement and provide resources for teacher development.” Rosier notes, “We believe this Initiative is providing teachers and principals with the resources to upgrade teaching skills and to improve the environment for learning. Technical assistants are assigned to each school by the Foundation. These are people with broad and varied experience with school improvement and reform issues. They are also sensitive to the needs of teachers and principals as they plan for more effective instruction.”

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Many of the schools are seeking new strategies to improve student achievement by looking past our state's borders to nationally-recognized research and educational models that have proven successful in other parts of the United States.

Some examples are:

- Cherokee Elementary, Rapides Parish – Basic School Model: A drive for excellence has propelled Cherokee to become the first school in Louisiana to be part of the national Basic School Network. The Basic School is an educational model based on the work of Dr. Ernie Boyer, head of the Carnegie Institute for the Advancement of Education. The Basic School model aims to nurture academic excellence. It is organized around four priorities; building a sense of community, developing a coherent curriculum, creating a climate that supports student learning and developing students' character.
- Fairview High School, Allen Parish – Brain-Based Teaching Model: An initial grant from the Foundation helped fund the accelerated reading and math program and this year the effort will be expanded to adopt new "brain-based" teaching strategies. Fairview will serve as a national model for the program designed by the Utah-based National Academy for Child Development. The school will begin by focusing its efforts on younger students and those who are not functioning academically at their chronological age. This is the first time this program has been implemented in a public school – it is usually used in a home school setting. Utilizing the latest research on how children's brains function and process information, the program evaluates each child and addresses his or her particular learning needs. Teachers will then use one-on-one techniques, computers and group activities that bring each child "up to level."
- Avoyelles Public Charter School, Avoyelles Parish – Direct Instruction Model: The school's program combines two national models, "direct instruction" and "core knowledge." These are teaching philosophies which were developed by Dr. Siegfried "Ziggy" Engelmann of the University of Oregon, and E.D. Hirsch, respectively. Direct Instruction is designed to help every child to be successful, especially students needing extra assistance. Children are moved through lessons at a pace that maximizes their particular learning potential.
- North Polk Elementary, Vernon Parish – Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) Model: The focus of this school's grant is early childhood education. North Polk has embarked on a new path to teach students using learning centers that are more "developmentally appropriate" for their ages and cognitive levels. By tailoring a curriculum and instructional program to fit the developmental level of the very young child, the school hopes to improve the overall learning environment.
- Northwestern State University Lab School, Natchitoches Parish – Brain Research: This school is building a knowledge base among its faculty to develop an awareness of revolutionary brain research, taking this new information and applying it to the classroom. This research explores a number of areas, including, how the environments affect the brain and the brain's high and low attention cycles.
- Louisiana School for Agricultural Science, Avoyelles Parish – Agri-Science Based Model: This charter school offers an agri-science based curriculum to students identified as high risk for dropping out of traditional schools. The school is modeled after similar programs in Chicago, Philadelphia and Miami, but its placement in a rural community makes it unique in the nation. The school's Future Farmers of America (FFA) chapter is thriving, and was named the fourth best in the state this year. This innovative program is also being studied by the state for possible replication in other areas.

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Through the Education Initiative, schools are now networking to share ideas that are working. They are also increasingly relying on hard data for decision-making. The Foundation requires project plans to be based on student achievement scores, faculty and/or student surveys or teacher prepared assessment instruments.

With more than half of the schools in Cenla now involved in this Initiative, clearly the Foundation is filling a tremendous need through its Education Initiative. Rosier says, “We are seeing there is a demand to fund programs that fuel teachers’ creative energies and interest in learning new and nationally proven approaches to achieve better results. The projects are energizing teachers and students. The Rapides Foundation is honored to provide funding for these innovative programs that are making a positive impact on the schools in our communities.”

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