

# @HEALTH & WELL-BEING Issue

A PUBLICATION OF THE RAPIDES FOUNDATION

FALL 2008

FOCUS: EDUCATION INITIATIVE

## Foundation Continues Its Quest For Student Achievement


**L**ooking back over The Rapides Foundation's five-year Systemic Initiative program, President and Chief Executive Officer Joe Rosier sees the fruits of a mission kept.

It could be the positive reviews from observers who have seen the program in action. Or it may be the already tangible impact on the way administrators and instructors in Central Louisiana's nine parishes view their roles in K-12 education. Or perhaps it could be the improvements in standardized test scores.

Those are certainly gratifying positives. But in the end, Rosier knows it's all about effectively impacting the education of area students, which in turn improves health and quality of living.

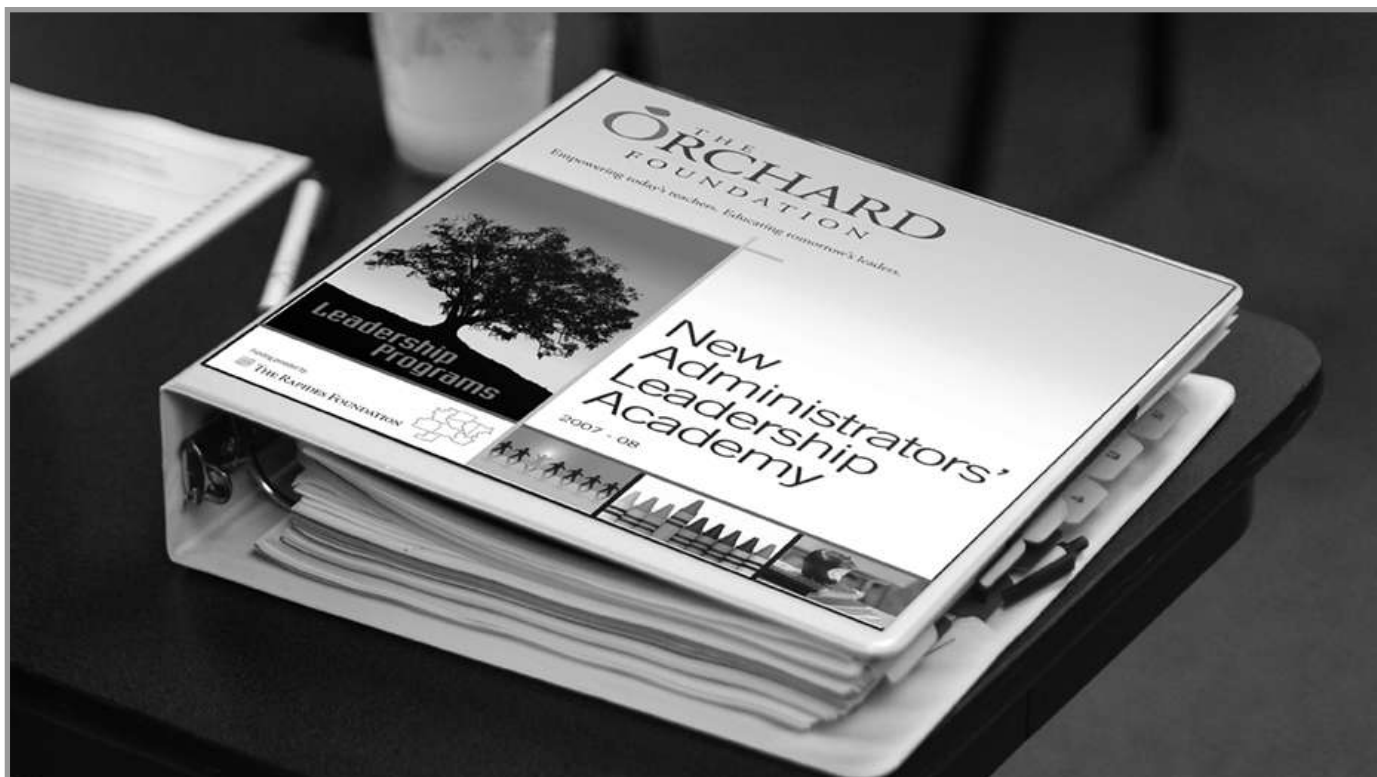
"When you have higher levels of educational achievement, you have a higher level of health and living," Rosier said. "We believe that if our work leads more kids to get a good education, it will help them and our communities."

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John Hodge  
Urban Learning and Leadership  
Center Instructor

## Education Initiative



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Rosier's excitement regarding how far the Foundation's educational involvement has come over the years and where it can yet reach is evident as he recites facts and figures which indicate the efforts have been impactful.

In the beginning, the Foundation focused on awarding individual grants to schools that requested and demonstrated the need for increased financial resources and the willingness to use them to improve student achievement. In time, however, the grantmaking went even further, and the Systemic Initiative was funded at the district level – so all schools could be involved.

"We believe our efforts have helped change the culture of education in Central Louisiana," Rosier said. "Our mission has always been to improve student achievement. The research clearly shows this will have a long-term positive impact on the community."

The Foundation is looking to the future to continue making an impact. While the Systemic Initiative project is ending, Rosier said it is understandable that some are concerned about the future. "They may get a little worried and ask

"You're not going anywhere are you?" Rosier said. "We're not going anywhere. We'll be continuing our work with the school districts."

In fact, the Foundation is excited about its new focus which will be on science, technology, engineering and mathematics, also known as STEM. (Read more about STEM on Page 4) Rosier said the Foundation has tremendous pride about what is being accomplished, and that same pride can be found in the schools. It can be seen in the faces of principals and other administrators who now have a guided, focused view of the educational process. It can be seen in improved standardized test scores.

"From our working with superintendents, teachers, parents and students, the feedback has always been very positive," Rosier said. "Whenever there has been an event, it has always been well attended."

The Rapides Foundation's view of Cenla's education is extremely optimistic, yet Rosier's thoughts are grounded in stark reality when it comes to the formidable challenges that continue to lie ahead.

## Education Initiative

"The question you have to ask yourself as a foundation is, 'What is it really going to take for these kids to be successful in the future?'" Rosier said. "You begin to learn that the levels of education some kids are receiving won't let them achieve a middle-income type level of living. We owe them that much."

Wilma Hamilton, Systemic Initiative Technical Assistant, has witnessed the impact of The Rapides Foundation's involvement in education. The longtime educator has been involved in similar initiatives throughout the country and has been taken aback by the level of commitment shown by The Rapides Foundation, Central Louisiana administrators and educators.

"The Rapides Foundation did a terrific job of getting together a summit of educators and businesses and building a strong network between both," Hamilton said. "With the Systemic Initiative, they have been able to create a culture of involvement of people who were already concerned with the welfare of children."

One visit to Central Louisiana and the experience she had here drove home the

continued need for the Initiative and the Foundation's educational presence.

"I saw all those healthcare facilities and it reminded me of the critical need for an educated workforce and the shortage of people there are to fill the jobs that are needed. For me, it has been a privilege to be part of the Systemic Initiative, which is working to make sure students are prepared academically to meet those job demands," she said. "There is a special relationship between The Rapides Foundation and the community."

It is a relationship in which Rosier takes pride – one he and everyone in the offices and hallways of his organization value. But as Rosier always points out, it isn't about him or his colleagues. It is about the children. To a greater extent, it is about the community as a whole.

"As a foundation, our role in the community is very important," Rosier said. "We have accomplished some things, but there is more to be done. We will continue our dedication to work with our school districts to improve education for all of our kids."



The Rapides Foundation's Advanced Leadership Development Institute conducted a series of academies for school administrators in Central Louisiana.

## STEM

# Education Initiative Turns Its Focus To STEM

**A**

new focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) is the evolution of years of work by The Rapides Foundation to improve student achievement.

STEM is a nationwide trend that focuses on core educational areas. The origins of this movement can be traced to the late 1980s and early '90s when states first began identifying the need for increased instruction and performance in schools.

Those in math and science might say the push to hop aboard the STEM train was prompted by the dawning of the Space Age.





**“What The Rapides Foundation has done through its education work in the past is to step in and fill the gap for teachers, aides and administrators.”**

**Wilma Hamilton**

Lead Technical Assistant for the Foundation's Education Initiative

The resulting momentum has evolved into programs such as No Child Left Behind, as well as the involvement across the country of organizations like The Rapides Foundation. A year ago, Congress approved legislation that authorized the creation of STEM-related federal programs, such as teacher training and recruitment. The expansion of existing STEM-type programs also is on the table.

Joe Rosier, President and CEO of The Rapides Foundation, said the Foundation's aim is to aid in the state's goals by stepping in where general funding and training ends.

Rosier added that The Rapides Foundation would like to work on this issue with other groups such as the Gates, Mott and Coughlin foundations.

“Many people think of equipment capital, but they don't think about addressing human capital,” Rosier said. “The Rapides Foundation just doesn't have enough money to provide each student with a computer. But we can focus on making sure everyone has the proper training and that everyone is on the same page, with the same goal.”

The need for an emphasis on STEM is evident in Central Louisiana – especially if our children are to compete globally.

Rosier cited numerous help-wanted advertisements for the medical and engineering fields in area newspapers and online publications.

Wilma Hamilton is nationally recognized in the education field, and is the lead Technical Assistant for the Foundation's Education Initiative. She has been impressed up close and from afar – both by the Foundation's commitment to area


youths and also by the attitude of instructors and educators toward improvement.

Hamilton said she believes the STEM project addresses a most urgent and real fact: the world is becoming more dependent on technology, and today's children must be exposed to those subjects to keep up.

“What The Rapides Foundation has done through its education work in the past is to step in and fill the gap for teachers, aides and administrators,” Hamilton said. “It speaks volumes on how The Rapides Foundation is involved in its communities.” This same approach will be taken with the Foundation's STEM work, she said.

“I have worked for nine years in districts throughout the country and I can honestly tell you the Central Louisiana educators are some of the most dedicated people I've ever met. I know from the past that they will embrace the Foundation's new emphasis and work with the Foundation to bring this knowledge into the districts.”

Hamilton admires the Foundation's approach to implementing STEM ideals, as well as its focus on preparing students to be players on the future global market scene.

“My generation came up during a time where a computer filled an entire living room,” she said. “Now, we are in a world where people are more and more frequently uploading everything to their computers and the Internet. With STEM now taking center stage, what some foundations do is only pay for building things. The Rapides Foundation focuses on building up educators, who in turn prepare students for the future.” 

## Advanced Leadership Development Institute

# Advanced Leadership



## Bringing Principals, Ideas Together

**P**rin cipals from throughout Central Louisiana have been afforded the opportunity to unite and learn concepts that they say will allow them to better function both as educators and as leaders.

It was made possible by The Rapides Foundation's Advanced Leadership Development Institute, a series of academies for school administrators in Central Louisiana.

The Institute was developed and presented by the Center for Educational Leadership, an outreach arm of the University of Washington's College of Education, which is ranked eighth among colleges of education in the United States.



# Academy

Lakeview High School 2007-08 Advanced Leadership Team (l-r) : teacher Joanne Yankowski; Principal Kerry Braden; teachers Meghan Graham, Bob Kellogg, Marsha Sanders and Eddie Hamilton, and Guidance Counselor Alison Walker.

Its executive director is Dr. Stephen Fink, who said the benefits of educators navigating their way through such an intense academy will be evident in the coming years at Cenla schools.

"It's been so positive in Central Louisiana," Fink said. "The key here is that students will learn

more when they receive high quality instruction, and that is ultimately a leadership issue. Leaders need to know what good instruction looks like in order to support teachers more fully. The participants in the Institute have been quite receptive to this approach."

Approximately 165 educators chosen by their superintendents participated in the Institute. Central Louisiana superintendents also went through the Institute.

To ensure sessions hit home, real-life scenarios and even classroom situations guided training.

While four training days were held in The Rapides Foundation Building, sessions also were held at schools in Alexandria and Pineville. Superintendents spent one day at West Leesville Elementary School in Vernon Parish. On those days, educators received practical instruction by observing situations in classroom settings.

Great emphasis was placed on writing and mathematical skills, which are considered crucial in preparing children for a future centered on a global economy.

The key words guiding each facet of the Institute were purpose, rigor and engagement. The words represent important attributes of effective teaching necessary to provide a current, practical level of education that will make a real difference in the lives of youths.

The fact those words were echoed by each of those interviewed would suggest the mission to embed the concepts in principals' minds has been accomplished.

Fink applauded The Rapides Foundation's role with the academies and other programs for helping to impact not only the culture of area education, but of teaching effectiveness as well.

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## Advanced Leadership Development Institute

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"I wonder if schools in that area truly realize what a valuable friend they have in The Rapides Foundation," Fink said. "When we look at what's going on around the country, we see that it is extremely difficult for schools to have opportunities like this without major funding support. District funding alone usually cannot support such projects."



Kerry Braden  
Cloutierville Elementary/Middle School Principal  
Former Lakeview High School Principal

## Review:

The Foundation spoke with some of the participants to learn more about their experience with the Advanced Leadership Development Institute.

### Kerry Braden

For Cloutierville Elementary/Middle School Principal Kerry Braden, the academy experience was one that served to change his entire perspective on working with faculty and focusing on attacking both everyday and long-term organizational challenges and philosophies.

He said the Institute helped him survive his first year in the principal's chair.

"It's been a great first year, and I have The Rapides Foundation to thank for a lot of that," Braden said. "It's been a challenge. It would have been really hard to make it without them."

Braden took key points explored at the Institute and shared them with faculty and other parish administrators. The result, he believes, will be a more productive, uniform way of viewing the educational process.

"A lot of times, it gets so busy that you tend to focus on planning and professional development, but there's not time to get the perspective to understand truly what actually needs to be done to raise efficiency and standards."

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## Review:

### Clarice Papillion

Allen Parish School District's Secondary Instructional Supervisor Clarice Papillion credits her academy attendance as an invaluable life experience that she enthusiastically shares with those in her parish's educational and social communities.

"It's a good chance to meet with others from around Central Louisiana and see you have some of the same issues as them. I believe I am better prepared to look at our parish issues from an outside perspective," she said. "Our parish's vision is to focus on identifying what students' needs are and addressing those needs. Things get so busy sometimes, it's good to step back and talk with others. You can see things more clearly."

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Clarice Papillion  
Secondary Instructional Supervisor for Allen Parish schools  
Former Oberlin High School Principal

## Advanced Leadership Development Institute

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## Review:

### Karla Tollett

For J.I. Barron Elementary School Principal Karla Tollett, simply interacting with other principals was in itself a defining moment.

As is the case with many principals, Tollett at times viewed some of her challenges as exclusive to J.I. Barron. "It was nice to listen to other ideas and to see that all of us basically have the same problems. And none of it would have been possible without The Rapides Foundation's support. They're doing a great job of bringing people together and helping schools across the area."

What set this particular get-together apart from others, Tollett said, was the focus on isolating specific leadership and communicative concepts and setting a clear course of cooperation and shared focus among principal and instructor.

"It's still going to be an ongoing process, because things are always changing," Tollett said. "But some of the basics we learned will never change. Working together, being on the same page with each other so that there is a consistent way of educating our kids. I'm looking at things through a different lens."

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Karla Tollett  
J.I. Barron Elementary School Principal

## Advanced Leadership Development Institute

# Review:

### Brent Whiddon

Avoyelles High School Principal Brent Whiddon called the Institute very beneficial. In addition to taking the message back to his parish, schools in Avoyelles met this summer to discuss its implementation for coming school years.

"Without The Rapides Foundation, I don't think we'd have been able to have this opportunity," Whiddon said. "I feel the most beneficial thing about it all was we learned that other administrators have the same issues. We're not alone in this."



L-R: Brent Whiddon, Jennifer Dismer and Scott Balias attended leadership academies. Avoyelles High School

### Advanced Leadership Development Institute

- Began September 2007
- Concluded April 2008
- Approximately 165 educators participated
- Four groups: superintendents, elementary, secondary, multi-level
- Each group met once a month
- The course was developed and taught by Center for Educational Leadership

## Hands-on learning tool

### New Administrators and Emerging Leaders Academy



Richard DeWees  
Assistant Principal  
J.I. Barron Elementary School

## Ultimate Hands-on Learning Tool

**R**ichard DeWees knew he had it in him. The J.I. Barron Elementary School Assistant Principal had always possessed a passion for educating young people. Stepping into a leadership role and having an even greater involvement in the process? That would be a dream.

Today, the newly installed assistant principal is living the dream. He attributes this, in part, to his experience with the New Administrators and Emerging Leaders Academy, made possible in Central Louisiana by The Rapides Foundation.

The Academy was taught by instructors from the Urban Learning and Leadership Center, based in Newport News, Va. The Center works with school districts from across the country.

The academy served as the ultimate hands-on learning tool for prospective school and district leaders. Participants took part in eight, seven-hour sessions throughout the 2007-08 school year.

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## Hands-on learning tool

The future leaders were selected by their respective school districts. Their progressiveness in education and natural leadership instincts had been recognized by their peers and superiors.

Urban Learning and Leadership Center Instructors John W. Hodge and Harvey W. Perkins said the training explored the concept of distributed leadership and distributed accountability in the school. This encourages principals to move away from the old paradigm of being the boss of his or her school and instead take on the role of fostering leadership capacity in the school's teachers, support staff and students.

The concept also stresses the importance of involving parents and community members.

"We often asked the participants, 'Who owns your school?' We tried to emphasize that commitment to the school comes when all of the adults share a common vision, mission and passion for where the school is going," Perkins said.

Participants also explored the complexity of school cultures made up of a social, academic and moral fabric, a concept the Urban Learning and Leadership Center refers to as the SAME Pathway (Social, Academic and Moral Education). For schools to produce high achievement in all students in a positive and nurturing climate, the adults and students need to connect the learning to real futures and aspirations.

A session on instructional best practices focused on what is known as differentiated teaching. This method focuses not only on traditional verbal teaching, but that of the visual, auditory and kinesthetic variety as well. This ensures children will learn, regardless of handicap or limitation.

Among other things, participants were challenged to change their thinking and point-of-view from "physical plant manager" to "floor manager," so their perspective would now be inclusive of people and situations outside their own classrooms.

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Harvey W. Perkins  
Urban Learning and Leadership Center Instructor

## New Administrators and Emerging Leaders Academy

- Began September 2007
- Concluded April 2008
- Approximately 70 educators participated
- Two groups: new administrators, emerging leaders
- Each group met once a month
- The course was developed and taught by the Urban Learning and Leadership Center

## Hands-on learning tool



**“We were so impressed with the teachers and everyone at the Foundation.”**

**Harvey W. Perkins**  
Urban Learning and Leadership Center Instructor

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Instead of merely sitting through lectures, they were split into separate teams whose mission was to most effectively solve real-life situations.

Hodge and Perkins repeatedly described the Cenla educators as “hungry” and “dedicated” – and referred to them as the “true heroes.”

Perkins has been in the education field since 1971. He was a supervisor of schools for nearly 23 years in Virginia, and he has consulted instructors nationwide since the mid-1980s. He said experience has shown him the combination of a dedicated local entity such as The Rapides Foundation and instructors always produces results.

“We were so impressed with the teachers and everyone at the Foundation,” Perkins said. “Those teachers were experienced, yet still hungry to learn new things. The Rapides Foundation does things other foundations don’t do. Some foundations appear to push their own agendas under the guise of education. The Rapides Foundation communicates regularly with the parishes and asks them ‘What do you need?’ or ‘What people do you need?’ And then there’s the follow-through. They always follow through.” Hodge, a consultant since 1999, said the little things made it apparent Central Louisiana was ripe ground for educational improvement.

“When we got there, everything was set up for us and the teachers were ready and hungry for knowledge.”

The men confirmed they’d be making repeated return trips to Cenla during the next year or so and that they were excited about re-connecting with educators here.

“Many people very unfairly characterize public education,” Perkins said. “They do so without having walked in the shoes of these educators, without seeing the unpaid hours and extra work they put in. They want this to work. So do we.”

(continued)



## Hands-on learning tool



L-R: Jennifer Pastor, Jennifer Malone and Richard DeWees  
J.I. Barron Elementary School

## Review:

The Foundation followed up with some of the participants. Here's what they said about their academy experience.

Richard DeWees of J.I. Barron Elementary said he has brought to school with him the principles and ideals learned at the academy, easing his transition from instructor to administrator.

"It really did a great job of showing us what life would be like as a principal," DeWees said. "The principals they brought from out of state were great. They brought an outside perspective to it and addressed universal issues. There have already been a couple of occasions where issues have come up in the office and I've felt ready for them."

Going forward, DeWees said events like the leadership academies will be a vital cog in the retooling of Louisiana education.

The Oregon native said he'd grown accustomed to seeing school districts in his home state not having enough positions to accommodate the many certified teachers. In Louisiana, he sees many positions unfilled for lack of qualified instructors.

"Certainly, The Rapides Foundation has always been there for education in Cenla," DeWees said.

"Without them, this would not be possible. What the Foundation and this program have already done will impact this area for generations to come."

Jennifer Malone now approaches each day at school with an entirely different mindset. The third-grade teacher's training and newfound perspective have given her a new respect for what it is administrators must handle on a daily basis. Malone said this will make her a better educator and colleague going forward.

"Being a teacher, you think principals should know all the answers to everything, every day. But they have a difficult job. I learned you have to take a professional look at things. You can't put your feelings into it. You definitely look at things from a different angle."

Jennifer Pastor, a 15-year educator and fourth grade teacher, said she and her J.I. Barron colleagues have re-dedicated themselves to being leaders in their own school and district.

"It's been so helpful to be able to come together with teachers from all over the area and talk to them. We're all LaTAP (Louisiana Teacher Advancement Program) mentor teachers and we all serve on school committees, so this will help us and even the young teachers we help mentor. It's an eye-opening experience."

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## Hands-on learning tool

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Jennifer Dismer and Scott Balius  
Avoyelles High School



## Review:

Scott Balius said he was struck by the perspective offered by Hodge and Perkins.

"These are men who have been to the West Coast, Illinois, all over. They've seen and heard different situations and problems and have a great understanding of education. It's more of a global perspective.

"As a teacher, you tend to focus on that day and what's going in your classroom. It's not as much about dealing with others and their situations. As a principal, you need to manage your issues and others' issues."

Assistant Principal Jennifer Dismer, an 11-year educator, enjoyed the teaching style employed by Hodge and Perkins.

"Rather than being a passive learner, participants were active learners with the presenters acting as facilitators. John Hodge and Harvey Perkins modeled teaching strategies that are effective in educating learners. It enabled the participants to interact and share their experiences, bringing our learning to a higher level and making it more likely that we would be able to implement the strategies that were shared with us."



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*The Rapides Foundation continues  
a legacy of community healthcare  
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