

# Story of Success

ASCENSION PUBLIC SCHOOLS | DONALDSVILLE, LOUISIANA

**A**scension Public Schools began its partnership with NIET over a decade ago to implement the TAP System, a comprehensive approach to improving instruction and providing opportunities for teachers to grow as leaders. The district has since grown to become one of the top-performing school districts in the state of Louisiana.

Ascension, located southeast of Baton Rouge, serves more than 24,000 students across 31 schools. The school district is physically divided by the Mississippi River, which separates the parish's more affluent and more economically disadvantaged communities. To bridge this divide, Ascension leaders have created a strong district culture in partnership with NIET.

## ASCENSION'S STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

Ascension worked to close equity gaps while supporting academic growth for all students. The district focused additional resources on improving instruction in its highest-need schools and built a common language for strong instruction in every classroom.

## Improve Instruction in High-Need Schools and Classrooms

Ascension leaders partnered with NIET to provide an intensive level of support in schools that the state had identified as needing improvement. Schools designated as part of a "turnaround zone" implemented the TAP System's core strategies of training teacher

leaders and school administrators to strengthen instructional support for classroom teachers through school-based professional learning and coaching. Success in the initial schools led district leaders to expand the TAP System across the district's highest-need schools over the next several years, eventually bringing the most effective practices to all schools.





## Build a Common Language for Instruction

The district's highest-need schools struggled to provide high-quality rigorous instruction, particularly when students were several grade levels behind. There was no common understanding of what quality instruction should look and sound like.

To remedy this, the district adopted NIET's research-based description of strong teaching practices, creating a common language and expectations for instruction. The common language and expectations for instruction have supported the use of high-quality instructional materials in recent years. During weekly professional learning and individual coaching, teacher leaders help teachers implement high-quality instructional materials

and build their understanding of what strong instruction looks and sounds like in the classroom.

### WHAT'S NEXT?

Ascension's efforts have led to impressive results, as students have access to high-quality instruction regardless of where they live in the parish. For the past three years, Ascension was recognized by the state as one of the top 10 districts based on state assessment results. The graduation rate for Ascension grew from 89% in 2018-19 to 91% in 2022-23.

In 2022-23, Ascension ranked first in the state for the percentage of students scoring mastery and advanced on LEAP for third through 12th grades. Ascension achieved this distinction again in 2023-24, with 53% of students in grades three through 12 reaching mastery and advanced levels. Also in the 2023-24 school year, the district earned top rankings based on performance for students with disabilities, Black students, and economically disadvantaged students. Even as students continue to grow and the district earns top rankings, leaders and educators believe that the best is yet to come in Ascension. ●

## Homegrown Leaders Make a Difference

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Ascension's distributed leadership approach has created a career pipeline for teachers to become strong instructional leaders and move into administrative roles in the district. Dr. Edith Walker is in her second year as superintendent after moving up through a variety of positions in Ascension, including serving as an instructional supervisor.

Before her district role, Dr. Walker was associate principal and principal at Dutchtown High School, where she led growth in overall school performance scores and consistently achieved an "A" rating. Dr. Walker began her career as an English teacher before serving as a counselor — all in Ascension.

Dr. Walker's instructional expertise is matched by a deep commitment to excellence for all students. Her experience in the district and her expertise as an instructional leader help her play an essential role in creating a common vision for supporting high-need schools.

