

# Story of Success

DESOTO PARISH SCHOOLS | MANSFIELD, LOUISIANA



**D**eSoto Parish Schools educates nearly 5,000 students in northwest Louisiana, and over half are classified as economically disadvantaged. The district focuses on instructional best practices and building a growth mindset to help teachers and students thrive. These focus areas have led to increased student achievement and dramatically improved the quality of education that the district provides.

In 2008-09, DeSoto began partnering with NIET to implement the TAP System. At the time DeSoto began to implement TAP, student success was lagging. The district's graduation rate in 2008-09 was 68%, and they ranked 45th in the state in 2010. The TAP System gave DeSoto a new approach, allowing the district to implement foundational structures and protocols for increasing educator effectiveness, including the introduction of

teacher leadership roles and a shared leadership model.

## DESOTO'S STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

DeSoto has pursued a comprehensive approach to improvement over time. Three strategies stand out as important to their success: setting high expectations and giving support to meet them; providing individual feedback and coaching to every

teacher, school and district leader; and defining and pursuing high-quality instruction in every classroom.

## Set Goals and Provide Support to Achieve Them

DeSoto sets high expectations for teachers and students and provides the support necessary to meet or exceed goals. For teachers, professional learning provides collaborative time to analyze student data and student work, learn instructional strategies to address student needs, and plan how to apply strategies in upcoming lessons. Teacher leaders help teachers analyze data throughout the school year and adjust instructional strategies as needed. Students mirror this practice by developing their own goals and regularly checking in with teachers on their progress, resulting in a sense of student ownership.

## Individualize Feedback and Support

Teachers receive regular feedback via learning walks when administrators, school leaders, and teacher leaders visit classrooms to

observe instruction. This individual support builds relationships, offers timely feedback on teaching practices, and encourages personal reflection. The substantial level of teacher support helps the district recruit and retain effective teachers.

## Use a District-wide Instructional Framework

DeSoto has increased the instructional knowledge and skills of its educators by adopting an evidence-based rubric to define what high-quality instruction looks and sounds like in classrooms. With a common understanding of high-quality instruction, teacher leaders can provide tailored professional learning and individual coaching to address teacher and student needs. DeSoto's use of an instructional rubric promotes reflection and growth, allowing teachers and leaders to strengthen their practices.

### WHAT'S NEXT?

Thanks to educators' work, DeSoto's culture is one of innovation and improvement. This is reflected in student

achievement gains made since partnering with NIET. In 2016, DeSoto earned its first "A" rating from the state and received additional "A" ratings in 2017, 2022, and 2023. DeSoto first achieved a graduation rate above 90% with the 2013-14 cohort and has maintained this rate for the past 10 years.

DeSoto Parish is one of only two districts in Louisiana to sustain a graduation rate of 90% or higher for that length of time.

DeSoto's transformation demonstrates the power of high-quality teaching practices and how a commitment to excellent teaching focused on high expectations every day can overcome barriers and help all students succeed. ●

