

# Improving Instruction to Promote Equity

BY DR. JAMES GRAY, SUPERINTENDENT OF JEFFERSON PARISH SCHOOLS, HARVEY, LOUISIANA

Jefferson Parish Schools, situated just outside New Orleans, is the largest school system in Louisiana. We serve approximately 47,000 students across 74 schools, with a wonderfully diverse student body representing almost 50 different languages. At Jefferson Parish Schools, our mission is simple yet profound: Every student deserves to succeed in life. Providing the quality education necessary for all students to thrive is our commitment.

Many of our students face barriers to learning, and addressing those barriers has become a core part

of our work. In our effort to support every student, we have always recognized that equitable access to high-quality instruction is critical. One of the key shifts we made many years ago was to ensure we had high-quality instructional materials in place to support this level of instruction. As part of this commitment, we ensured the same instructional materials were used across our district. This guarantees that every student, regardless of background or school, has access to the same opportunities for success.

In particular, as part of our continuous learning process,

we stepped back and identified our math curriculum as an area needing improvement. A strong math curriculum not only builds academic knowledge but also empowers students with critical thinking skills — skills that are especially vital for those who face the greatest challenges. We value teaching the “what” of math — like  $2 \times 2 = 4$  — and we also value the “why” behind it. Now, our focus shifts even more to helping students understand the underlying concepts, allowing our students to apply mathematical thinking to even broader areas of their lives.

We have always understood that only having high-quality instructional materials is not enough to drive real change. Teachers and school leaders play a pivotal role in how well students engage with and benefit from the curriculum. To fully support our educators in implementing this new math curriculum with intention, we entered into a partnership with the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching.

Through our partnership with NIET, we have been able to continue strengthening equitable learning opportunities across our district. NIET specialists work

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closely with our district leaders, principals, and teacher leaders, offering them dedicated time and resources to unpack the curriculum, explore classroom strategies, and ensure that high-quality instruction is happening daily. With the support of NIET's structures, such as instructional leadership teams and clusters, as well as NIET's frameworks, such as the *Five Steps for Effective Learning*, our school leaders now have a clear path for guiding their teachers in delivering high-quality math instruction.

Our collaboration with NIET has created a ripple effect across our district. Principals and teacher leaders not only understand the curriculum at a deeper level, but they also serve as instructional coaches, helping classroom teachers refine their practice. This type of instructional leadership ensures that every student benefits from a strong, intentional implementation of the curriculum, making it a truly equitable endeavor.

As we look ahead, our partnership with NIET will continue to be instrumental in improving student outcomes. By fostering a community of educators who are curriculum and instruction experts, we are creating an environment where every student in Jefferson Parish has the opportunity to thrive. We are committed to continuing this journey and ensuring that our district remains a place where equity and excellence go hand in hand. ●