



Jefferson County High School

Louisville, Georgia

- » 1,000 students
- » 79% minority
- » 80% free/reduced lunch
- » 13% special needs
- » 15:1 student/teacher ratio



Molly Howard Principal

2008 MetLife/NAASP
High School Principal of
the Year

“Our commitment to ensure that all students are prepared for their futures has yielded many important lessons about implementing school wide reform. The steps we have taken to provide rigorous and relevant curriculum and instruction have led to increased student achievement, specifically graduation rates. We have a deep appreciation for all of the resources and support provided by the International Center for Leadership in Education. I am so proud to be part of the growth at Jefferson County High School. ”

Challenge

After Jefferson County High School opened in 1995, it was plagued by a serious academic achievement gap and a culture of underperformance. In 2004, the graduation rates hit an all time low of 63.2%. Significant change and work were necessary if Jefferson County High School was to live up to its promise as the economic future of the county.

Approach

To develop a school improvement plan that would provide students with the education they needed and deserved, Jefferson County High School conducted a thorough needs assessment with the help of the International Center. Through this assessment, Jefferson developed a shared vision that guides the school every day:

- A commitment to continuous school improvement
- A rigorous and relevant curriculum without watered-down courses or low expectations
- Meaningful personal relationships with all students and their families
- Recognition of the importance of literacy to school wide success
- Consistent and pervasive use of research-based, effective instructional practices

Process

Embrace a Common Vision and goals — Rigor, relevance, and relationships for all Students

Jefferson's leaders knew that they would need total faculty and staff buy-in to change school culture and took the following actions.

- School leaders created a School Improvement Team to lead reform efforts. This group became the conduit to the rest of the staff and led the charge of building the new culture.
- The team adopted a comprehensive model to guide and facilitate the improvement process.

Inform Decisions through Data Systems

Data analysis provided key insights into students' math and reading scores and prompted action.

- Historically, Jefferson experienced high failure rates in Algebra I. Data indicated that students allowed to fulfill the Algebra I requirement through three basic math courses did not have the needed mastery skills. In response, the school designed the Algebra That Works program.
- Data showed that one-third of freshmen entered with 2nd or 3rd grade reading levels. A targeted literacy program, *READ 180*, was put in place for grade 9 students whose reading indicators put them at high risk academically.

Empower leadership Teams to take action and Innovate

Jefferson established professional learning communities and implemented a collaborative teaching model.

- "Working on the Work" is an annual collaborative workshop in which teachers have an uninterrupted week to plan instruction as teams.
- Teacher-leaders have become resident experts in instructional strategies and pedagogy and deliver training to colleagues.

Clarify Student learning expectations

Jefferson's new standard of high expectations for all students meant making some changes.

- All lower level courses were eliminated.
- All 9th grade students now take core academics in college-prep English, math, science, and social studies.
- Common course syllabi ensure that all students are taught to the same high standards.
- Additional AP classes provide more challenging, college-level experiences to students.

Adopt effective Instructional practices

Jefferson took steps to ensure teachers were providing each student with rigorous and relevant learning experiences.

- The development of common assessments and syllabi now assures that all courses emphasize high standards for student learning.
- Required weekly writing in all subjects and courses has deepened students' understanding of the subject matter and helped them internalize the content and develop writing proficiency.
- Demonstration classes have been introduced to allow teachers to observe other teachers. Both new and veteran teachers have benefited from this peer modeling program.

Address organizational Structures

In a school of 1,000, it is easy for students to become anonymous. Jefferson reorganized the schedule to combat this issue.

- Block scheduling has reduced the fragmented instructional day for both teachers and students.
- The extended time also allows for more meaningful interaction between teachers and students.

Monitor Student progress/Improve Support Systems

Jefferson implemented a student advisement program whereby each certified adult in the school is assigned an advisement group that is maintained for four years.

- This program has enabled teachers and students to build strong academic and personal relationships.
- Teachers have the opportunity to monitor student progress and ensure that no student falls behind.
- The advisement teachers serve as advocates for students and maintain communication between school and home.

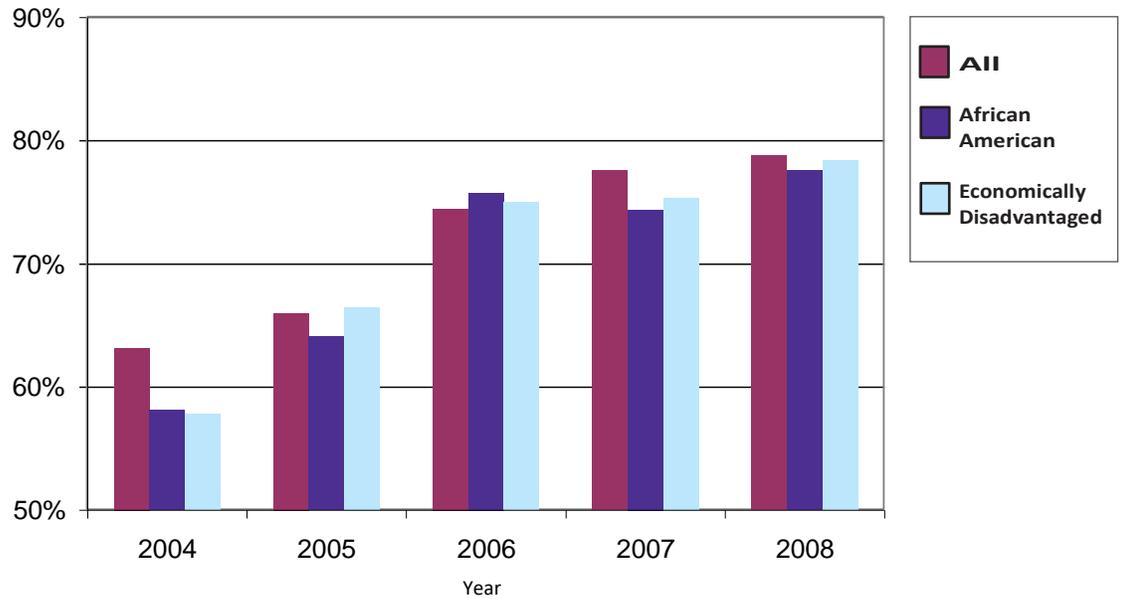
Refine process on an ongoing Basis

Jefferson is continually monitoring and refining its improvement strategies to fulfill its mission to students, faculty, and community.

- The school created a Pyramid of Intervention model in which teachers receive comprehensive course guides and training. As the pyramid narrows upward, the intensity of support given to individual teachers increases.
- Instructional coaches use demonstration classes to coach teachers who seek additional support in a particular area of professional development.

Results

Four-Year Trend Data
Jefferson County High School graduation



As a result, Jefferson's graduation rate increased dramatically from 63.2% in 2004 to 78.8% in 2008.

