

Lansing's 2,154 bilingual students represent 67 countries and 53 languages. Shown here are Eastern High School Magnet Middle Years and Diploma IB Students.



LANSING SCHOOL DISTRICT: AIMING FOR NUMBER ONE



Lansing's high school students, teachers, and administrators have more and more reasons to blow their own horn.



Magnet programs such as the Performing Arts programs at Everett High School further enrich offerings.

Facing up to tough facts can be a painful but powerful first step toward effecting real change. That's what the Lansing School District (LSD) found when they declared student achievement their number one priority and set out to realize their bold vision of a dramatic increase in student achievement — and of becoming the premier urban district in the state.

LANSING SCHOOL DISTRICT: AIMING FOR NUMBER ONE

Located in Michigan's capital city and with a student population of close to 14,300, Lansing School District (LSD) shares many of the same challenges as other large, urban districts across the country. Transience, poverty, truancy and high dropout rates are just a few of the obstacles they've historically had to battle in their efforts to help each student succeed. But when newly hired Superintendent Dr. T.C. Wallace, Jr., and Chief Academic Officer, Julie Lemond, arrived on the scene in the fall of 2007, they were determined that an unshakable belief in success, a clear focus on accountability, attitude, and achievement, plus the right tools, could help Lansing overcome the problems traditionally associated with similar districts.

“We put the data in front of all stakeholders... That's what made the initial impact.”

Superintendent, Dr. T.C. Wallace

FACING UP TO THE DATA

With the support from the Lansing Board of Education, Wallace and Lemond began delving into district data, something Lemond says had not been done for quite some time. As a matter of fact, their discovery that all three comprehensive high schools' five-year streak of failing to meet No Child Left Behind's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirement was not common knowledge. Data also pointed to unacceptably high dropout rates and low student-participation rates in taking the required High School Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP), which was replaced by the Michigan Merit Exam (MME) in 2006 - 2007.

“We put the data in front of all stakeholders,” says Superintendent Dr. Wallace, who notes that teachers



Lansing's 2,154 bilingual students represent 67 countries and 53 languages. Shown here are Eastern High School Magnet Middle Years and Diploma IB Students.

and parents were surprised at how serious the situation actually was. “That's what made the initial impact.” Lemond stated. “It's hard to argue with the facts.” Spreading the word about the existing data was an important initial step toward establishing the district culture of transparency and awareness that Wallace and Lemond were working toward.

IDENTIFYING IMMEDIATE NEEDS

Working as a team, LSD leadership developed a strategic plan of action, identifying what would be their initial primary and secondary target areas on the road to improvement. The focus would be on secondary education, with specific emphases on student proficiency, AYP, graduation and drop-out rates. In addition, they aimed to increase the number of students participating during the MME administration.

The three high schools involved — Eastern, Everett, and Sexton — were all designated as high-priority schools



Lansing is finding that they can reach their academic goals as their instructional programs and staff find the right “chemistry.”

by the Michigan Department of Education, approaching the restructuring phase, Phase 4, of mandated school improvement by failing to meet AYP for five (5) consecutive years, and under a mandate to increase student achievement prior to the spring 2008 MME. Administrators further narrowed their goals by targeting specific student populations. All students at the three high schools would receive assistance in the core subjects of mathematics and English language arts, with a special emphasis on the needs of African American males, Hispanic females, English Language Learners, and Special Education students.

CHALLENGES TO IMPLEMENTATION

“Going into this effort, we were realistic,” said Lemond. “We knew it wouldn’t be easy to make systemic changes.”

One major challenge they knew they would be up against was getting the high school math and English language arts teaching staff to buy in to key improvement initiatives. Making inroads into entrenched practices and attitudes can be the toughest part of change, especially in schools with a high number of veteran staff who have

“Going into this effort, we were realistic... We knew it wouldn’t be easy to make systemic changes.”

Chief Academic Officer, Julie Lemond

seen what they might consider education fads come and go. Further, getting the staff trained well enough to successfully implement the new strategies on a daily basis would be another obstacle to overcome.

The three high schools’ high-priority status also presented a serious deadline crunch. Wallace and Lemond recommended a comprehensive reform plan to gain the time for a realistic implementation—and stave off intervention by the state—and won an appeal to the school board to approve innovative research-based programs, materials, professional development, and staff, buying an additional year to meet progress goals.

Financing the new plan, of course, would also be a challenge. Lemond indicated that, when faced with the realities of dramatic data showing the need for broad

and deep district improvement, the school board was amenable to authorizing general funds for the needed curriculum alignment support. Moreover, Title V and Title II funds could be harnessed, as the strategic plan involved an innovative program to improve school, student, and teacher performance, as well as the training of teachers and principals in the 21st-century skills needed to ensure their sustained high-quality performance.

Finally, as district newcomers, Wallace and Lemond knew that establishing credibility and gaining the trust of teachers, parents, and students would also be something they would have to work hard to accomplish.

RESEARCH-BASED SOLUTIONS

Once school board approval and avenues of finance were in place, administrators set about seeking the best research-based vendor packages to meet the needs of the Lansing School District. The district chose Kaplan Scientific Learning, and Carnegie Math offerings for specific test-prep and single curriculum student interventions in math and English language arts, but when it came to the broader tasks of in-depth staff training, program sustainability, and the ongoing measurement of student success, Evans Newton Incorporated (ENI) was the vendor of choice.

It was ENI's track record of success in similar large urban districts in California, Ohio, Illinois, and Oklahoma that convinced Lansing to go with the company, according to Lemond. Further, ENI's methodical approach to effecting rapid growth in student achievement and ensuring districts became self-sustaining in their reform practices were also major selling points for the Lansing School District.

ENI's TargetTeach® model comprises a comprehensive solution, with five central elements including:

- developing customized goals and improvement plans;
- enhancing instructional plans through deep alignment of existing materials;
- filling identified gaps with existing and custom-developed activities, including ENI's proven supplemental instructional materials;
- implementing periodic, state standards-based formative assessments; and
- delivering professional development and coaching to improve teacher capacity to deliver data-driven instruction and to support overall fidelity of implementation.

ROLE-BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

ENI's systematic approach to professional development includes workshops designed to create a common understanding of goals and practices to make sure that teachers, administrators and technology staff are all on the same page and functioning as a team.

Training at the Lansing School District began with the Alignment Workshop for teachers, a hands-on session exploring alignment theory and the best ways to create standards-based lessons. Additional professional development sessions included a Fill in the Gaps workshop, where teachers combed through available resources to select activities to address gaps in the District's adopted textbooks for areas being assessed on high-stakes tests. Teachers created or purchased materials that would fill in these gaps in an extension

of this workshop. ENI supported this effort by helping develop or locate lesson strategies and practice materials for classroom use.

Other key training sessions for teachers included a Benchmark

Workshop, where teachers created parallel test questions in the format of the state assessments to be used during classroom instruction, ensuring there would be no surprises for students when faced with the MME exams. Additional in-services focused on how to use sample questions in the classroom for individual diagnosis and examining best practice instructional models. Assessment — which is at the core of ENI's approach — also played a key role in teacher training, with a spotlight on how to analyze and understand data from incremental formative assessment reports as well as how to apply that knowledge for classroom reteaching purposes. Rubrics and instructional design were also looked at closely.

Ensuring that the underlying technology continues to function smoothly with no interruption in the delivery of data is another important element of ENI's professional development. The Computer Operator Training Workshop focuses on the nuts and bolts of maintaining the health of printers and scanners and the overall school assessment database. Scanning and scoring tests and generating reports for teachers, administrators, and parents are all elements of the technician's role.

Recognizing that informed district leadership is pivotal to the success of any new effort, ENI makes sure that administrators and program coordinators are not just

“Teachers conduct formative assessments every three to five weeks... results are instantly available and individual learning pathways plotted to meet each student's needs.”

Chief Academic Officer, Julie Lemond

dialled in, but also active participants in the reform effort and professional development workshops.

Professional development workshops for administrators took participants through the details of the TargetTeach® process, including how to implement ENI programs. In addition, they were brought up to speed on the results of the district's alignment processes, and shown where gaps existed and what additional resources they would need. Administrators were also apprised of their own roles in the intervention process and what would be expected of them as leaders.

TEACHER COACHING

Teacher coaching plays an important part in ENI's research-based approach to professional development and ensures that real change occurs beyond the initial training sessions. Studies show onsite coaching and feedback increases the effective implementation of new ideas and practices by 80 percent; because of this, ENI supports the math and English language arts teachers involved in the intervention with expert coaches at the building level.

CHANGING CLASSROOM PRACTICES

With the curriculum aligned to standards and high-stakes tests, classroom materials in place to fill gaps, and initial new skill training under their belts, Lansing teachers began the process of assessing student skill levels, diagnosing student achievement gaps, and customizing instruction for each student's needs.

"Teachers conduct formative assessments every three to five weeks...Results are instantly available and individual learning pathways plotted to meet each student's needs," said Lemond.

"When you don't know where your students stand, it's easy to teach to the middle. She continued, now, there is no guesswork involved. Teachers conduct formative assessments every three to five weeks to pinpoint their students' exact strengths and weaknesses. Results are instantly available and individual learning pathways plotted to meet each student's needs. Teachers have also expanded classroom practices, with the assistance of the instructional coaches, to manage the sometimes daunting task of increased differentiated instruction. Some practices, such as skill-based grouping, have been borrowed from their colleagues at the elementary and middle school levels."

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

When ENI implementation was first presented, Wallace, Lemond, and other district leaders faced skepticism about the process, specifically, how it would play out and its



Magnet programs such as the Performing Arts programs at Everett High School further enrich offerings.

likelihood of success. "The teachers were worried that the assessment data would be used to judge their teaching," said Lemond. "We had to prove to them that wasn't the case."

Teachers were also concerned with the higher learning standards that ENI imposed as part of their strategy. "Teachers weren't convinced that their students were capable of achieving at higher levels," stated Lemond, "but ENI and Lansing's administration refused to lower the standards in the face of opposition."

EXAMINING NEW DATA

It turns out, ENI's bet on students rising to higher expectations paid off.

When Lansing educators returned to school in the fall of 2009, Lemond had some good news to share. Among the points of pride she presented at the 2009-2010 school year kick-off staff meeting were progress reports on the three high schools targeted for improvement. Highlights included the following:

Sexton High School's full-academic-year students had demonstrated nearly a 20% increase in math proficiency across the board, with the African American full academic year student population increasing scores by almost 20%. Gains in English language arts were more modest, but still significant at almost 6% for all full academic students. Further, 99.3% of all 11th graders participated in the MME, an increase of 7% from 2008.

At Eastern High School, there was an increase in proficiency of more than 10% in math scores for all full-academic-year students and an impressive leap of almost 23% for African American full-academic-year-students. African American full-academic-year-students also achieved more than a 10% increase in English language arts proficiency.

At Everett High School, more than 97% of 11th graders participated in the 2009 MME as compared to 93% in 2008. In addition, African American full-academic-year-students demonstrated an almost 18% increase in achievement in math.

The data that had been so tough to face at the outset of the ENI intervention was already turning around, and celebrations were in order for significant increases in student achievement as measured by the Michigan Department of Education.



Lansing's high school students, teachers, and administrators have more and more reasons to blow their own horn.

OTHER SIGNS OF PROGRESS

Acknowledging that the process of change does not happen overnight, Lemond nevertheless noted significant encouraging signs even beyond the improved statistics. Change is also taking place in the way teachers are seeing themselves and their students.

"Formative assessments have really helped Lansing educators get on the same page. Now, the teachers constantly look at the data to see where kids are. Information is displayed in charts and graphs for a quick snapshot of what kids are learning and where teachers need to provide immediate strategic support and intervention for students as well as where possible staff training is required."

“Teachers are now evaluating themselves, recognizing areas of need and stepping up to the plate...”

Chief Academic Officer, Julie Lemond

"They [teachers] are now evaluating themselves, recognizing areas of need and stepping up to the plate to take workshops to improve their understanding and skill areas," commented Lemond. The ENI method has also gained traction as teachers begin to see the correlation between student performance and their own skills.

Most importantly, the conversation about achievement is ongoing. Teachers met last summer to review curriculum alignment as well as to revisit and revise strategies for success. Data is now the common thread informing all instructional discussions.

The key element of parent communication has improved as well. Parents are being kept in the loop on the latest education research and — as a result of the ongoing formative assessments — are receiving timely feedback on their children's skills and progress. Parents have also been invited to participate more as stakeholders — to attend and offer input at Parent-Teacher-Student Association (PTSA) meetings and other events. This has resulted in a growing trust between school and home and increased credibility and support for the ENI intervention.

GOING FORWARD

Lemond is realistic about the work Lansing still has ahead of them. "We've just begun the journey toward increasing student achievement," she states.

Continuing to make headway in student achievement, broadening the reach of the ENI intervention program, and achieving sustainability are among the goals Lansing will continue to work on.

Further, staff will continue to hone their expertise in differentiated instruction, and efforts to facilitate truly collaborative school environments will be ramped up. School and district leaders will play increasingly active

roles via classroom walk-through evaluations, designing surveys, and leading site-based collaborative teams.

Increasing the number of high school graduates in Lansing School District is a top priority—and a goal within reach.

LOOKING TO BE NUMBER ONE

Lansing is beginning to size up the competition at this point. They are nudging ahead of other urban districts in the state — already graduating a higher percentage of Limited English Proficient, African American, and Hispanic students. Their vision is in place and their goal of becoming the premier urban district in the state no longer seems out of reach.

Superintendent Wallace states, “We are just crossing the threshold, but just two years ago, many of us could not even see, feel, or touch this vision.”

That formerly illusive vision is becoming more and more tangible everyday with Lansing’s clear-eyed focus — and plenty of hard data to inform decisions.

© 2009 Lansing School District and Evans Newton Incorporated.
For reprints of this case study, please contact info@evansnewton.com
or visit www.evansnewton.com



Increasing the number of well-prepared high school graduates in Lansing School District is a top priority—and a goal within reach.

Since 1973, Evans Newton Incorporated (ENI) has been helping educators achieve dramatic improvements in student performance. Working in partnership with K–12 schools and districts, ENI creates innovative, customized curriculum programs tailored to unique state and district objectives or standardized tests. This proven approach enables teachers to address students' learning needs with data-driven, standards-based instruction.

ENI's reform methods and materials have proven highly effective with students of all abilities, especially those in high-minority, Title I schools. With ENI as their curriculum partner, schools consistently achieve 20% to 200% growth in student performance in the first year of implementation alone.



EVANS NEWTON INCORPORATED | 15941 N. 77TH ST, STE. 1 | SCOTTSDALE, AZ 85260
PHONE 800.443.0544 | FAX 480.951.2895 | WWW.EVANSNEWTON.COM