

# **Fair Park Turnaround through Sustainability**

Fair Park High School

Caddo Parish School District

University of Virginia Partnership for Leaders in Education

Story Board #3: Fair Park Turnaround through Sustainability  
By Josie Gutierrez

Goal	To produce inspirational stories of what this work takes, similar to what Paul Bambrick writes in stories of practice in Leverage Leadership or organizations like TFA or TNTP put on their website to highlight the importance of leadership & help come to life briefly what leaders did to make a difference for students.
School	Fair Park High School
Principal	Bruce Daigle
District	Caddo Parish School District
Style	Vignette
Strategy	Talent Management → Student and Staff Culture → Instructional Delivery Supports → Assessment Strategy and Data Driven-Instruction → Coaching
Learning Launch	N/A
Launch Status	N/A
Highlight	Quick Wins and Laser Like Focus
Narrative	<p><b>School Profile</b> When you drive up to Fair Park High School, the first thing you may notice before you ever make it to the main office is the positive culture. Within 5 minutes of walking on the campus, I was greeted by the custodian who was sweeping the sidewalk with such pride, every teacher spoke with a smile and students made eye contact and said hello and even offered to help me with directions to the main office as they bustled to class. Then you would notice the clean facility, hallways adorned with pictures of students for recognition, and data publically displayed for transparency. Life wasn't always this way at Fair Park. In fact, just three years ago, the school was facing problems with gangs, students lacked the motivation to go to class so they walked halls rampantly, and teaching bell to bell was an inconsistent practice. The school had experienced chronic underperformance for the past 15 years. One day the Superintendent showed up for a visit and noticed that the bell didn't make students move, it was as if the bell never rang. That was a strong indication to district leadership that Fair Park High School was in need of bold leadership and transformational change.</p> <p><b>Principal Profile</b> The journey of transformation began three years ago with the hiring of long-time Caddo Parish administrator and former Fair Park HS Principal who had now been gone for five years. Daigle was serving the district at the central administration level overseeing schools in the area. He was known to be firm, but fair and had the support of the community. As a former college star football athlete from the area, Bruce had a competitive edge, but most importantly he knew he had unfinished business at the school and asked to return as their principal.</p> <p><b>Call to Action</b></p>

Three years ago, the district made a bold move to reconstitute the school and with the new Principal hired, the school was able to hire its staff in March with signing bonuses. Principal Daigle knew lots of things about transformational leadership, but the one thing he knew could not be sacrificed was the hiring of talented staff members. He knew the district and area well and he was able to recruit and hire the best talent.

### **Leadership Team**

Principal Daigle was given exactly what he needed to make a rapid U-Turn, which was the opportunity to hire an entirely new leadership team. He hired two assistant principals of instruction, one assistant principal that focused on discipline, three counselors to support the social emotional needs of students and one librarian. Using his typical recruiting style, he sought out the best and brightest talent from the area and formed his team. Over the past few years, a couple of the leadership team members have turned over due to promotions. However, he has been able to replace them with other talented educators.

### **Retention Strategy/Talent Management**

Today, he still has 90% of his staff onboard after the first three years of this challenging work. Daigle believes that three things have contributed to the strong retention: 1) A strong school leadership team who is competent, values relationships, listens to staff, and refuses to run the school through fear and 2) Staffing decisions that were made by the principal to ensure student loads were balanced and small enough to make an impact on learning and 3) Support staffing ratios were established to allow for additional members of the leadership team to be hired. This allowed for additional people resources to launch the turnaround effort. In total, there were three Assistant Principals, 3 counselors and a librarian for 700 students. The staff currently perceives the leadership team as quick to respond and willing to go the extra mile. The strong retention at this school affirmation that teachers will work when supportive teaching and learning conditions are present.

### **Turnaround Strategy – Years 1 & 2**

#### ✓ Student and Staff Culture

In year one after the reconstitution and after the building was cleaned up and painted, the school spent much of its time focused on culture. Beginning with orientations and assemblies to set the expectations before school started and at the beginning of the year with a focus on changing the mindsets of students. The team was onboard and implemented the expectations with consistency and rewarded positive behavior regularly. The work was hard, but the results were a quick win. The strategies used by the school to engage community members and provide programs to focus on the whole scholar are too numerous to list. Mentoring and regular parent communication was enacted quickly. It wasn't long before Daigle noticed that the students were now compliant, going to class and listening to the teacher; however, learning engagement was missing.

#### ✓ Instructional Delivery Support Systems PD

Principal Daigle organized a trip to get the staff energized and took them to the Ron Clark Academy and engaged them in other professional development sessions that aligned to his instructional priorities.

✓ **Assessment Strategy & DDI**

Over the next two years, there was a laser like-focus on building out systems that included an aligned assessment strategy with focus quizzes every other week and interims several times a year. Weekly data meetings and planning meeting time occurred twice per week where teachers were expected to respond to data and teach lessons differently than they did the first time.

✓ **Observation and Feedback/Coaching Culture**

There is a strong belief among the Instructional Leadership Team that if you develop teachers, then they can help develop students. The highest leverage systems that were targeted during these first few years can be summarized into culture, data driven instruction, instructional supports and coaching teachers.

**Results**

The school's results have good momentum and are currently on an upward trajectory. Immediately, the school went from 400 arrests in the previous year to 4 after the reconstitution. Teacher and student attendance increased significantly. The school has grown 15% points in student achievement in two years and projects an additional significant gain this school year. Juniors and Seniors are preparing and taking the ACT at high numbers and they self-select to retake the test several times to score the 18 or higher in order to meet the baseline goal. In year 1, only 1 or 2 students took the ACT. Today, over 100 students are taking the ACT. More students are scoring good or excellent on the EOC exams in larger numbers and there is a reduction in students failing or scoring fair.

**Guidance for Principals**

The advice that Principal Daigle would give his colleagues about turning around a chronically underperforming school is to not be afraid to have a rapid reset and abandon any practices that don't work. Second, he wants people to know that you need to distribute your leadership and trust the people around you to do the hard work. This effort takes strategy, from hiring the best talent, best fits, and building on each other's strengths to get the job accomplished. Today, he is still challenged by the excellence he wants to see in classroom engagement. So much progress has been made in this area, but the new challenge is moving from authentic engagement some or most of the time, to authentic engagement all of the time.

**District Support & Sustainability**

Principal Daigle is quick to give the credit to others like most great leaders do, but he also acknowledges the pivotal role that the district played in this work. He has strong evidence that the central office team supports his efforts and that he and his team are trusted professionals. He still remembers when he was told, "Do what you need to do to transform this school." After three years, he still believes this statement holds true. On the few occasions when a new staff member is needed, he still has the autonomy to hire top talent. His sustainability works continues to focus on being consistent and deepening the systems he has built with a strong emphasis on instructional support delivery systems.