

Caddo launches 'Reimagine Our Schools' campaign

By Melody Brumble

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Caddo Parish schools targeted for academic transformation will measure student attitudes as well as their math and reading skills.

The 10 schools face significant changes as the school system works with Louisiana's Recovery School District and two consulting groups to improve student performance or face state takeover. Tuesday morning, Caddo schools Superintendent Lamar Goree introduced the new principals to the public and outlined the next steps the system's "Reimagine Our Schools" campaign.

One of the measures of success will be a "happy, positive" climate and culture at the schools, said Billy Snow, Caddo's new transformation and innovation officer. Snow will work directly with principals and teachers at the schools to gather and analyze student data; reteach skills students lack; and reinvent the schools as community hubs.

"A measure that is not on a (standardized) test is how these schools feel and how they interact with the community," Snow said. "These schools have to become focused on the community."

Among other changes, principals will have the final say in selected teachers and other staff. The process will leave surplus



Cooper Knecht, area director of school performance, congratulates Renee Ellis (right), Westwood Elementary principal, during a news conference announcing new Caddo schools principals. JIM HUDELSON/THE TIMES

teachers without a job who remain on the school system payroll. Goree is working on a plan to create a substitute teacher pool with those employees. He's also warned school administrators left without a job after the changes that they could end up in the classroom.

The new principals include retired educator Betty Jordan, who will take over at Woodlawn Leadership Academy. Jordan worked on turnaround at Woodlawn two decades ago and as principal at Booker T. Washington High School in Shreveport, among other administrative jobs. The school system selected Jordan after taking a second round of applications for the Woodlawn principalship.

"This is my third time coming back," said Jordan, who originally retired in 1998.

Bruce Daigle will return to Fair Park High School as principal after working as an area director. Goree said

Daigle applied for the job because he's passionate about helping the school improve. During Daigle's previous tenure at Fair Park, the school started a ninth-grade academy and other programs to help struggling students improve math and reading skills and prepare for high school work.

Along with the other new principals, they will analyze student skills in math, reading, science and social studies three times a year, then adjust remediation for each student. A school's transformation success will be based on those statistics and state standardized testing results, among other measures.

"With a business plan, you look at three to five years. We aren't expecting these schools to turn around in three to five years," Goree said. "We are implementing a plan that will show turnaround in 365 days."