Jefferson Parish public schools receive $1.2 million grant to turn around schools

Sarah Tan
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Louisiana Education Superintendent John White recognized Jefferson Parish public schools Thursday for their progress in the past few years with a $1.2 million grant. The award, part of a *$5.8 million Believe and Succeed grant* to help local school systems improve failing schools, was announced at a news conference at John James Audubon Elementary School in Kenner,

Jefferson received $1.2 million to create a new turnaround network to improve its F- and D-rated schools and to create a network of teacher leaders. "I think this is one of the most exciting places for public education in Louisiana," White said. "This is the largest school system in the state, and in that way what Jefferson does is a message you send to the rest of the state."

White also touted Jefferson as being one of the top 10 school systems in the state in demonstrating growth in graduation rates and School Performance Scores. He congratulated Jefferson Superintendent James Meza and the system in reducing its number of failing schools from 18 three years ago to four this year.

The state also gave $790,000 to a number of different charter organizations in Orleans.

Jefferson plans to use its $1.2 million in a two-pronged approach to tackle failing schools. Some $800,000 will go into creating a network of teacher leaders, who eventually will be prepped to become principals of struggling schools. Another $400,000 will go towards the creation of a new group of schools that the system plans to reform through a partnership with Massachusetts-based turnaround organization Mass Insight.

"We have tried to build a system of schools focusing around children and teachers' needs," Meza said. "But we cannot begin to implement this without the support of the state. They have prepared the path for our district to do what we need to do."

Jefferson received the largest portion of the state's grant. Ten other parishes received the Believe and Succeed grant. Money for the grant is coming partially through the 8(g) Quality Education Support Support Fund and a number of federal grants.