

## Situation

Okolona High School serves 291 students in grades 7-12 with seventy-three percent of the students receiving free and reduced lunches. Almost 100% of the student body is African American. To meet the requirements of the Mississippi Accountability Model, the school administers the Mississippi Curriculum Test, Second Edition (MCT2) for grades 7-8 and the end-of-course tests identified as the Subject Area Testing Program, Second Edition (SATP2) for grades 9-12. Students must pass the four SATP2 tests to meet graduation requirements. Prior to 2011, student achievement at Okolona High School was in the bottom 15%, the pass rate on the SATP2 assessments was approximately 25%, and student proficiency on MCT2 assessments in grades 7 and 8 was less than 25%, earning the school an "F" grade. Okolona High School received a School Improvement Grant (SIG) in order to support their efforts to increase student achievement and was assigned a conservator by the state prior to Generation Ready's engagement with the school. The school partnered with Generation Ready to implement changes to increase student achievement. Generation Ready began working with the school during the school's second year of their SIG Grant in 2011-12, and continued work in the 2012-13 school year.

## Solution

During the two years that Generation Ready partnered with Okolona, the focus of the School Improvement Services expanded. In the 2011-12 school year, Generation Ready provided 20 days of Principal Mentoring. This work included collaboration with the principal to:

- Incorporate observation practices, including in-classroom walk-throughs with the principal which included providing feedback on observations made, comparing observations, and ensuring that observations made by the education consultant and the principal were aligned, and supporting the principal with post-walkthrough conferences with teachers providing constructive feedback to better instruction
- Implement and facilitate faculty meetings aiming to develop teachers through Professional Learning Communities (where teachers conduct book studies and create successful lesson designs and strategies to improve student achievement)
- Implement best practices to improve instruction which included coaching teachers on lesson planning and instructional best practices with a focus on data collection, analysis and review that informs instruction and tracks student improvement over time

In the 2012-13 school year, the partnership expanded to include 79 days of School Improvement Services. These services comprised of Professional Development/Training, Principal Mentoring, and Teacher Coaching in English/Language Arts, Algebra I, U.S. History, and Biology. Generation Ready's education consultants collaborated with Okolona High School with a focus on:

- **Expectations** – Education consultants provided guidance to the principal and teachers to value the importance and effects that low and high expectations could have on student achievement, promoting an environment that supports high expectations for students
- **Rigor** – The foundation created in the first year of service, enabled a Year 2 focus on increasing the level of academic rigor in order to help students meet standards
- **Instructional improvement** – Generation Ready's consultants provided job-embedded mentoring for teachers with a focus on student engagement. This included having education consultants collaborate with teachers to engage student learning, ensuring objectives in lessons are introduced and taught, and assuring that students understand the objectives through closure strategies such as summarizing
- **Identifying students' needs** – Education consultants worked with teachers on different teaching and grouping strategies, focusing on grouping students according to need and providing more directed instruction for students in need of further assistance
- **Data analysis** – Building on the best practices established by the principal during the first year of service, teachers and the principal developed their understanding of data collection and analysis, and the monitoring of student data to inform instruction and show growth

- **Assessment** – Teachers were guided through the process of creating and using benchmark assessments to assist with progress monitoring
- **Progress monitoring** – Assessment practices enabled consultants to further develop teachers' understanding of how to monitor student progress and ensure that the data informs instruction

## Results

The result of Generation Ready's two-year partnership with the school is remarkable. During this time, Okolona High School moved from an "F" rating to a "C" rating. In addition to the increased results shown in the graphs below, teachers developed a purposeful focus to design lessons with a rigorous instructional focus. Teachers were able to facilitate sustained engagement by students, and ensure that a comprehensive lesson strategy was taught, from introducing objectives, to teaching to the objectives, to the use of specific strategies for closure to check for understanding. Teachers developed common procedures to ensure consistent classroom management, and developed reflective practices to improve their own instruction. The strong focus on data saw an increase in progress monitoring and improved student learning. The information gained from progress monitoring helped the principal and teachers determine what students learned, what needed review, and what would be taught next. The results of the increase in student achievement are reflected below.

