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Capella University Faculty Member Leads Efforts to Remove Middle School from Georgia's 'Needs Improvement' list

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Dr. Sharon Riley Ordu is an adjunct faculty member at the online university's School of Education and principal of J. E. Brown Middle School in Atlanta

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In 2002, Atlanta's J. E. Brown Middle School was placed on Georgia's "Needs Improvement" list because of poor academic performance. Only 46 percent of its students were proficient in math, and just 65 percent were proficient in reading and language arts. A year later, Dr. Sharon Riley Ordu, a Capella University adjunct faculty member in the online university's School of Education, was named principal at the middle school.

"The school was very troubled when I took over. There were serious culture and climate issues. High expectations weren't being communicated," Dr. Ordu explained. "We initiated a laser-like focus on quality instruction."

Today, the school, which has nearly 660 students in grades six through eight, is no longer on Georgia's "Needs Improvement" list. Through Dr. Ordu's leadership, the number of students who demonstrated proficiency in math jumped from 46 percent to 68 percent, and proficiency levels in reading and language arts climbed from 65 percent to 81 percent.

To achieve those results, Dr. Ordu introduced new instructional leadership and other skills to the 45 teachers at the school. Specifically, she implemented improvements that included:

One hour of reading after homeroom each day

Use of research-based best practices in teaching core subjects

Adopted the books Good to Great and Turning Points as a framework for how the school would operate

Development of professional learning communities

Quality feedback given to teachers

Assessments of the school's climate and culture, with necessary changes made

Close monitoring of lesson planning, instructional delivery and support provided to teachers

Middle school reform based on the work of the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform and the National Middle School Association

Dr. Ordu has been an adjunct faculty member at Capella, which is an accredited online university with more than 16,000 students, since 2002. Nearly 45 percent of Capella's students are pursuing a PhD.

"My position as an adjunct faculty member at Capella helped me tremendously in my role as a change agent at the middle school," Dr. Ordu said. "The courses I have taught at Capella provide a strong framework for my leadership and keep me abreast of the latest trends in educational administration."

About Capella University

Founded in 1993, Capella University is an accredited* online university that offers graduate degree programs in business, information technology, education, human services, and psychology, and bachelor's degree programs in business and information technology. Within those areas, Capella offers 76 graduate and undergraduate specializations and 16 certificate specializations. The online university currently serves 16,000 students from all 50 states and 63 countries. It is committed to providing high-caliber academic excellence and pursuing balanced business growth. Capella University is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Capella Education Company, headquartered in Minneapolis. For more information, please visit <http://www.capella.edu> or call 1-888-CAPELLA (227-3552).

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