

DOINGWHATWORKS



Presentation

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Building a Staff Committed to the Turnaround Process

September 2008

Topic: Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools

Practice: Committed Staff

Highlights

- Building a committed school staff may require reassigning, releasing, and hiring staff members. Staffing decisions must be based on a personal knowledge of each individual teacher.
- Committed teachers and administrators believe that all students can learn, and this belief is reflected in their daily interactions with students.
- Committed teachers support the school's plan to make dramatic changes in order to turn around the school and are willing to change old habits, dedicate time to professional development, and collaborate with other teachers.

Full Transcript

Slide 1

Welcome to the overview on building a staff committed to the turnaround process.

Slide 2

Ms. Guerra, the principal of Templeton Elementary, is facing the challenge of getting the right staff in the right places at the school. She wants to build a staff committed to the school's improvement goals and qualified to meet them. This process is forcing her to make some hard choices.

Many of the teachers at Templeton are well established in their positions. Some are very comfortable doing things the way they always have. Ms. Guerra struggles with how to move entrenched staff towards change or if she needs to replace them entirely. To deal with those questions, however, she first needs to determine exactly what kind of staff she does need. Her first tasks are to identify existing and new staff committed to the change, reduce staff anxiety and resistance to change, and match staff skills to school's needs.

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Let's take a look at the characteristics of a committed staff. Committed teachers and administrators are those who accept students at their individual starting points, both academically and behaviorally. They believe that all students can learn, and this belief is reflected in their daily interactions with students.

Committed teachers are willing to make whatever changes are needed to increase student achievement. They support the school leadership plan to make dramatic instructional and organizational changes in order to turn around the school.

Committed teachers are willing to change old habits, such as personal instructional style; dedicate time to professional development; and collaborate with other teachers to find new ways to improve their instruction.

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Getting committed staff to the right places in your school may involve needing to reassign, release, or hire personnel.

Slide 5

Teachers' roles and responsibilities should match their skill sets. This allows them to make the greatest impact. To get the right staff in the right places, a school principal may need to reassign teachers to different roles or modify job descriptions.

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There are times when the best place for a given staff member is outside a particular school. Not all teachers have the skills needed to raise student achievement in a short amount of time. It may be necessary to work with the union or district to reassign some teachers to other schools if they are not ready to be involved in the intense work of turnaround.

Teachers who cannot be engaged and actively resist the turnaround effort should be replaced with teachers who can be members of a committed team. However, school principals should be careful not to release staff who have potential. Some resistance may be the result of a teacher's uncertainty about their ability to implement the requested changes or a failure to see how a change will affect learning. Principals can work with these staff members to develop their skills through professional development and collaboration with other teachers.

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Sometimes the best teachers show the strongest initial resistance to change. Teachers will buy into the change if it aligns with their sense of what students need and what is working. Principals do not have a lot of time to wait for teachers to buy into the change strategies. However, it is important to recognize teachers' strength and work with them collaboratively to enable the change. Help teachers to gradually integrate new strategies into their instruction. Work with teachers to assess impact on students and reflect about how the new strategies fit within their set of beliefs about teaching and learning. Allow strong teachers the degree of classroom control they feel is necessary, while maintaining coherence with the new strategies.

When hiring teachers, school principals must focus on finding staff who will be fully committed to the turnaround effort. High value should be placed on candidates who will dedicate themselves to working both with students and with other teachers to raise achievement.

New positions can be created to fully utilize teachers or other staff with highly specialized training, such as Intervention Program Coordinator, Computer Specialist, or School-Community Liaison.

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It is not always necessary to create entirely new positions to utilize special skills among staff. Principals can

expand the roles of support personnel and modify job descriptions so that the most valuable skills of each staff member are fully utilized. Organizational processes can be changed to better facilitate staff capacity building.

Reassigning, releasing, or hiring staff must be based on careful and purposeful assessment of school needs, staff qualifications, and individual commitment. This requires really getting to know each individual teacher.

Principals should get to know teachers and their individual skills, personality, background, knowledge, and goals. Spending time in their classrooms not only helps principals get to know their teachers better, but it will also help in determining their best placement in a reorganization.

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Professional development conferences and workshops can be a powerful way to build staff capacity. At one middle school, the principal arranged for all math teachers to attend a conference on the “dos and don’ts” of team teaching. While there, the teachers met other educators who used specialized models of mathematics teaching, which they then brought back to their own classrooms.

Teachers can also learn from each other. They can observe other teachers in their classrooms to get ideas for instructional strategies or, alternately, provide feedback and advice.

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Instructional contributions of support staff may not be immediately obvious to the larger community, but that doesn’t make them any less important. The principal of one elementary school recognized the schoolwide impact of the lunchroom coordinator. Without her lunch counts, calls to families, and accurate record-keeping of students in the free and reduced-price lunch program, the school would receive less Title I aid. The principal broadened the lunchroom coordinator’s role in the school, supplied her with a full office, and called staff attention to her contributions.

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Building a committed staff involves building a cohesive team that shares a common mindset. This team comes together to set high expectations for instruction and to maintain focus on improving student achievement. This teamwork can foster strong professional relationships among colleagues that may positively affect both instruction and teacher satisfaction.

Slide 12

One adjustment that can be made to staffing assignments is the creation of intervention teams. These are teams of teachers who work together as effective problem-solvers for specific issues or content areas, such as reading instruction. This can facilitate collaboration and positively impact teachers' ability to help students improve their performance.

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Promoting pride in the school community can foster a sense of unity among students and staff. At one middle school, the principal gave teachers more responsibility for curriculum development. This demonstration of his trust in them as a community of educators made his staff feel more valued and unified.

Slide 14

Successful turnarounds depend on building a staff that is committed to the school's improvement goals. To get the right staff in the right places, principals can reassign, release, and/or hire staff. Principals can create new positions, expand the roles of support personnel, modify job descriptions, and form intervention teams. When done carefully and purposefully, the resulting school team can have a powerful impact on instruction and student achievement.

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At Templeton Elementary, Ms. Guerra began visiting classrooms and got to know her teachers better. She carefully determined the best placement for each teacher in the school based on their skills, qualifications, and personal goals and worked with veteran teachers to bring them on board with change. Ms. Guerra created a position for a new School-Community Liaison to specialize in parent outreach and modified the job description of Mr. Khuri, the playground monitor, to broaden his role. With all of Ms. Guerra's committed staff in place, Templeton Elementary now has a cohesive, effective team.

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To learn more about building committed staff, please explore the additional resources on the Doing What Works website.