

DOINGWHATWORKS



Audio

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Building Turnaround Principals' Knowledge and Skills

Chicago Public Schools, Illinois • August 2008

Topic: Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools

Practice: Improved Leadership

Highlights

- In hiring school leaders, this district used nationwide data to compare school leaders and identify strong performances.
- An important district role is to support leaders through professional development opportunities.
- One of the biggest challenges in turning schools around is finding leaders with the necessary talent, motivation, and vision.

About the Sites

Edward H. White Career Academy

Chicago, IL

Demographics

100% Black

90% Free and Reduced-Price Lunch

19% Special Education

The turnaround process at White Career Elementary included:

- Communicating clear expectations for focusing on instruction
- Aligning the curriculum with state standards
- Reviewing assessment data to inform instructional practice
- Reassigning staff within the school and providing additional professional development to support instruction at the school site
- Requiring student uniforms to reduce behavioral conflicts

Dodge Renaissance Academy

Chicago, IL

Demographics

99% Black

1% Multiracial

93% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

12% Special Education

The turnaround process in Dodge Elementary included:

- Communicating clear expectations for student behavior and consistently enforcing school policies with carefully spelled out consequences for infractions
- Recruiting teachers who may not be fully developed but are eager to learn and willing to do whatever it takes to help their students learn
- Providing teachers with intensive professional development
- Aligning the curriculum with state standards

Full Transcript

Hi, my name is Alan Anderson. I am the Executive Director of the Office of School Turnaround within the Chicago Public Schools.

Our office is committed to developing high-quality integrated strategies, which will address the needs of our lowest performing schools, and so we essentially act as an autonomous unit which focuses on providing the appropriate services for schools in order to transform them from low-performing to high-performing. In developing our leadership teams for our schools, and that's principal and staff, we partnered with the Public Education Fund and Public Impact to develop a systematic approach for identifying leaders. And our

initial step was to look at data on school leaders both locally and nationally to see where performance has dramatically increased. This generated a preliminary list of leaders, then we worked with our partners to develop competencies for turnaround leaders, and those competencies are: results orientation, action orientation, impact and influence to develop and lead high-performing teams, planning and problem solving, and the confidence to lead. So those are the areas in which we figured we needed to really understand whether or not a leader had those competencies. On top of that, our district has a very well-thought-out and developed competency program through our Office of Principal Preparation and Development, where they are also looking for leaders who can develop and articulate a belief system through voice and action, engage and develop faculty, assess the quality of instruction, facilitate and motivate change, and balance management. Based on all of these competencies, we recognized that we need a leader who can exhibit as much or all of these leadership competencies as possible.

One of the major things that you need to focus in on is how you are supporting those leaders through professional development. So one way we are supporting our leaders at the principal level is we have developed this program—the University of Virginia Partnership for Leaders Program that we are ultimately participating in, where our principals and some of their lead administrative staff are going through a two-year professional development program, which is a national program which has produced substantial improvement in schools that need to be turned around. The importance of this is that leaders within Chicago get the opportunity to have a cohort-based learning opportunity where they can learn from districts within Philadelphia or Baltimore or other cities within Virginia. The point is, the leaders get the opportunity to get a broad-based view of how transformation at schools should occur.

Hi, I am Josh Edelman, Executive Officer for the Office of New Schools for the Chicago Public Schools.

The obstacles we have seen in doing turnaround work, I think first and foremost, it's the human capital, it's the entrepreneurs who feel like they are ready to be able to do the work because of how hard it is and having the bandwidth, resources, vision to organize structures, organizations that do this work. So it's really the talent of people who are willing to take on these hardest of urban challenges around doing turnaround work.

I think strategies that we are trying to employ would be to both support operators by codifying those things that have been done in the past. We're spending a lot of time looking at previous turnaround models even if they aren't as fully developed as what we are trying to seed now through our process. Learn from those models what things were most successful when it comes to the people you brought on the teams, the professional development you offered, the training you offered, the actual program structures given the profile of students that have been in turnaround schools as far as their academic and socio-emotional needs, what structural elements seemed to have had the most impact on student achievement, so that they can have that information to help them develop their plans or move forward. So we expect providers to really

focus on offering specialized training for principals and teachers around these areas that need to be rebuilt from the foundation because a lot of our turnaround school students did not have the benefit of being appropriately pushed in a rigorous environment while having the right balance with care and connection.