

# DOINGWHATWORKS



Video

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

## Districts and Schools Working Together to Achieve Results

San Joaquin County Office of Education, California • June 2008

Topic: Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools

Practice: Improved Leadership

### Highlights

- Regional support systems can work with schools and districts to improve instruction through analyzing the use of time, quality of lessons, student engagement, and teacher behavior.
- A culture of trust must be developed to make teachers comfortable with change.
- District leaders must work with schools to provide them the support and technical assistance they need.

### About the Site

San Joaquin County Office of Education

Waterford High School

Waterford, CA

### Demographics

55% White

40% Hispanic

1% Asian

1% Black

46% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

13% English Language Learners

9% Special Education

Waterford High School had several components to its successful turnaround process:

- Collaborative agreement on the school's mission statement, which includes the school's vision, beliefs, and expected student outcomes
- Collaborative decision-making processes as part of creating new instructional norms for the school
- Use of a data-driven approach and collaboration among teachers in planning instruction

## Full Transcript

My name is Charles Vidal. I am the Director of the San Joaquin County Office of Education based in Stockton, California, and I am part of our state's Regional System of District and School Support, which is run out of Sacramento and our state Department of Education.

One of the things that we have found in working with our regional underperforming schools is you can impose an accountability system on the district and the schools, and you can tell them what's going to happen to them—they are going to get a PI [Program Improvement] ranking out of it if they don't produce, but what we fail to realize is do we have enough capabilities, enough ability, within a school to get it done. And what I found as we walk through classrooms and we do these surveys and we do these time audits and we look at whether the content is aligned to grade level, what we found is teachers are operating the best they can with the information they have and what they know. So as we start to be more strategic and we look at the use of time and we look how well-crafted the lesson is and we look at student engagement and we analyze teacher behavior and we promote this data that comes out of those components, teachers—along with the site administration and the staff—find themselves on a path together. They start looking at what they could take on first, what they could take on second; it starts to take on a life.

How do we reculture? How do we reculture districts and schools to create a level of trust to where we can visit classrooms, have important discussions around best practices, contents of lessons? So it really comes down to strong relationships. And Waterford High School has been a flash point for that. It was probably one of the very first schools that saw the value in the data we provided on how they can use their minutes better, and by collecting more instructional minutes and diminishing those off-task minutes, the results they are getting is well deserved.

The leadership from the district has to be at the table because you cannot have this transformation

without the district, but it takes courage on the district's part to recognize how they must recalibrate their technical assistance based on the momentum that's going on at their schools. Underperforming districts tell underperforming schools to go improve, and that's not enough. High-performing districts find a place for their—to contribute and recalibrate their technical assistance to support the momentum going on in their schools.

We start at the district. We start there, and we say, "Look, we cannot help your schools improve in isolation of you. So, here is what we are going to ask you to do. We are going to ask you to be part of a school leadership team, it will be a district school leadership team. But you are there as an observer, and you are there to listen to the same information that the schools are receiving, and you are there to listen to what they need to do to take those next steps, and you need to find a way of supporting that effort." That doesn't mean what you already have you try to find a way of fitting that in. No, this means you have to retool, redefine, redesign, seek out people with the ability to support what we are requiring our schools to do.