

DOINGWHATWORKS



Video

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Instructional Tours

Waterford High School, California • June 2008

Topic: Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools

Practice: Focus on Instruction

Highlights

- In Waterford high school teachers visit each other's classrooms to learn new instructional strategies.
- Teachers' may use structured forms that detail the instructional norms at the school.
- These classroom observations can serve as a starting point to spark conversations between teachers about instructional practices and decision making.

About the Site

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

I am Don Davis, the Principal of Waterford High School in Waterford, California. We began a process of teachers visiting other teachers’ classrooms, and we would call those instructional tours. And this is powerful because teachers then go in and observe a lesson for their own benefit, not for the benefit of the one being observed, but for the observer. And when two teachers go in together to watch instruction and then step outside and have a conversation that’s sometimes facilitated by me and sometimes not, but it’s a way that they can sort of calibrate their discussion—their lens—around what they saw. When I go in with teachers I will just ask that question, “What did you see in that lesson?” There is trust here. It’s not evaluative, okay? The purpose is to see, are we seeing the same thing instructionally? And that’s building coherence here. It’s saying, “You know what, when we see a teacher using this strategy, we both saw the same thing. We both saw the same decisions made by the teacher. We’re going to have a conversation.” And we started to do that with our accreditation process to begin to tally the kind of strategies that were in place, but the teachers enjoyed it so much they said, “Can we just keep doing this?” So we created an instrument that would facilitate the observation and the subsequent discussion. And so, on a teacher’s preparation period, I might take two or three teachers in the fall semester and say, “Let’s go have an instructional tour.” And we will drop into classrooms and stay five minutes, ten minutes, watch instruction, step outside: “What did you see?”