

DOINGWHATWORKS



Video

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Reconstitution: Reinvigorating Teacher Practices

Hardy Elementary School, Tennessee • August 2008

Topic: Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools

Practice: Committed Staff

Highlights

- This elementary school “reconstituted” itself and required all teachers to reapply for a position, hiring only those who bought into its vision. Only five teachers were rehired.
- The school leaders used staff retreats to create a sense of family and reinforce teachers’ commitment to the school.
- The school used to struggle to even get substitute teachers, but after seven years now has a waiting list of new teacher applicants.

About the Site

Hardy Elementary School

Chattanooga, TN

Demographics

97% Black

3% White

100% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

Several practices helped Hardy Elementary School go from being the worst to the top among the elementary schools in the state of Tennessee:

- A new principal bringing in a new vision and approach
- New teachers
- Targeted professional development to establish a schoolwide set of instructional strategies
- A clearly articulated lesson plan structure
- A balanced literacy program
- Regular use of student assessment data that included monitoring and adjusting instruction based on a careful analysis of data
- New school building
- Clear behavior expectations from all students and school staff

Full Transcript

Gentry: My name is Nancy Zima-Gentry. I'm a second-grade literacy teacher here at Hardy. I have been here seven years, and we came into the new building seven years ago. But before that all took place, we reconstituted. That was a new word to me regarding the school system. I was new to the school system, and the central office came and asked to meet with all the teachers. And we just gathered in the room, and we thought it might be regarding our move into the new building at the end of the school year, and this was in November of the year. And they started explaining the reconstitution, and I am not sure if it had to do with the goals that they had for this community, school, or what. It wasn't clear to me, but we were told that we would have to reapply. As a new teacher in the school system and at Hardy, I was willing to reapply because it was just new to me. Other teachers, I heard, were not as excited about reapplying because they had tenure. They had experience. They had been years at Hardy, and in most transitions from an old school to a new building, everybody just made that transition to their grade in the other building. But that was not going to be the case, and so we had to go through the interview process.

Harvey: I'm Patricia Harvey, and I'm the fourth-grade literacy teacher at Hardy Elementary. When reconstitution was mentioned seven years ago, my perspective was probably different from some of the newer teachers because I had spent my entire teaching career at Hardy. For 23 years, I had been in the community and worked in that school. So when I was told that I would have to reapply and interview for my position, I have to admit I was a little bit resentful of that fact. The interview process was extremely intimidating for me because I had only interviewed one time before when I got my job initially at Hardy and [it] was not a very comfortable experience, but it wound up being something that became very positive. They had a list of 10 to 15 questions that involved curriculum and your beliefs, your behavior, strategies that you would use.

Matson: I am Vonetta Maston fourth-grade teacher at Hardy. When I first found out about Hardy, I received

a phone call from Ms. Elder. And I was working at a middle school at the time, and she informed me that she was the principal of Hardy because she was at Mary Ann Garber [Elementary School] during that time. So, she asked me if I would come to work with her here at Hardy because she wanted to do something a little different, and she wanted to departmentalize her upper grades. And since I taught math at the middle school, she said I would be a perfect fit. So I came in, and I had to go through the interview process like everyone else.

Gentry: The biggest part of the interview, for me, was that they were asking for a commitment, a commitment for dedication of changing yourself to fit, not a mold, but to fit into what this community and these children needed. And that commitment partly was that we were going to attempt a year-round school. We had to be willing to make changes.

Harvey: One of the first things that the administration did to bring us together was to take us on a retreat, which was the first time that I was able to meet who were going to be my team members. We had already committed to staying at Hardy for at least three years, so I knew that I was going to be working with these people for a long time. Three of the original fourth-grade team are still here at Hardy; only one is not here anymore. But that was a time that we were able to really bond, sit down together and talk about what our goals as a fourth-grade team were.

Gentry: I feel like the retreats that we have had over the years, and we have had three, have really brought us together as a family.

Harvey: The changes in the past seven years have been remarkable. When I was at the old Hardy, we couldn't get substitutes to come into the building; we couldn't get teachers to come. Morale was terrible. The building was falling apart. The teachers did not want to be there. Only about five of the teachers from the old Hardy came to the new building, and it's just been a remarkable difference in morale. Because the administration was able to pick who they wanted who had the same goals and same ideas as they had for the future, we've been able to, as has been said before, become a family and really focus on exactly what the students need. Our goal is to take every child that comes to us and get them to become the best that they can be because we really do feel that every student can learn. That's our belief, and we stand by it, and we will do anything that it takes to get that child where they need to be. Dedicated teachers willing to go that extra mile to help the students and that's the difference. When I used to tell people that I worked at Hardy, they would say, "I'm sorry". Now, they are, "oh I read about you, I heard about you, I saw you on television." And they are excited about it. We have a waiting list, now, of teachers who have applied to come to Hardy. We have to turn them away.