

DOINGWHATWORKS



Audio

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Empowering and Motivating Teachers in Two Turnaround Schools

Edward H. White Career Academy, Illinois • August 2008

Dodge Renaissance Academy, Illinois • August 2008

Topic: Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools

Practice: Committed Staff

Highlights

- Teachers with tenure were resistant to change, creating a challenge in improving the school.
- The principal won their confidence and made them feel empowered, which opened them to making changes.
- One year after implementing big changes, over half of the staff left, making it easier to create a new culture based on high expectations.
- The principal worked hard to build relationships with individual teachers.

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 Academy 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 with support of teachers and community members

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

McGinnis-Garner: Hi I'm Lynn McGinnis-Garner, currently the principal of Copernicus Elementary School located on the south side of Chicago.

The staff that I inherited, basically, at White [Edward H. White Career Academy] was tenured, and so I knew that they were not going anywhere anytime soon. Actually some of them were resistant to the changes that I was making. So I had to make adjustments, and I had to put some of the responsibilities back on the teachers to understand that we had a goal that we needed to meet. Nobody in the school wanted to be on

probation, because in Chicago that means basically we are told what to do, how to do it, when to do it. And that's not a really good setting for a school, and so we all had to commit that one, changes indeed needed to be made. And that was hard because if you are in a school for a long period of time and you have been doing things a certain way, you tend to become very comfortable. So, when someone comes in new saying, "no, really what you have been focusing on is not an area that really needs to be focused on, but we need to shift," a little resistance becomes evident. And so, either teachers will join together and protest or they will really face the facts and say, "well, you know, maybe I'm open to trying it."

So, my staff had to first know and be assured that I knew what I was talking about and that if we made the little subtle changes that needed to be done, like regular assessments, they would see some changes, and they would see improvement. And so I let the data speak for itself, if you will, and it did. And so some of those resistant teachers said, "well, I'll try it." And when they tried it then their colleagues said, "well, if it's working for you it might work for me. I am going to do it reluctantly, but I'm going to do it." And eventually everybody got on board. And then of course I had to massage those egos and put people in positions in which they were best fit. So I didn't have the luxury of a lot of my teachers fighting from the school, but I made some grade-level changes. I put people in positions that made them feel empowered, and I allowed some of the teachers to do some professional development in areas that they felt were really important. And so, that empowered them to want to rally behind the whole goal of improving academic achievement.

Sanford: Hi, my name is Jarvis Sanford, principal of Dodge Renaissance Academy located here in Chicago, Illinois.

We made several different staffing changes. After the first year, over half of the staff really decided, and I like to say we tried to create a culture, where some individuals said this wasn't the place for them to be. And so, as a result, several staff members decided that the new Dodge was not a place that they fit well with. And so, again, creating a culture and a climate that's predicated on high expectations will allow individuals to say, "this is the place where I would like to be," and for others to simply say, "no, I think I need to go elsewhere." And so helping them to understand and being relentless in our expectations of what teachers are responsible for was essential in creating that culture.

Throughout the year, we utilized several different mechanisms to interface with the staff. One of the things that I think was most beneficial was the interpersonal relationship that I sought to have with each teacher. At the end of the school day I spent an inordinate amount of time going around to teachers and just checking in with them, really finding out what worked and what didn't work and finding out what their struggles were, and creatively finding ways that we could address areas that the school needed to improve upon.

There were several interventions that we used. The first one was in terms of special education. We implemented inclusion, where the vast majority of our special ed students were in the regular ed classroom throughout the day, and the special ed teachers co-taught and co-teamed with the regular ed. I think that provided us the greatest benefit because those special ed teachers were able to help regular ed teachers understand how to differentiate, even for the regular ed students. And so we sought to use our budget to hire various different staff members creatively to really help. Once the assessments were graded, we would then creatively break the various different groups up to ensure that those students who had not reached proficiency could get additional teaching in the next week.