

 **AUDIO**
4:36 min

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Starting Over With New Staffing

Young Scholars' Academy for Discovery and Exploration (P.S. 636), New York
January 2011

Topic TURNING AROUND CHRONICALLY LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS

Practice COMMITTED STAFF

- Highlights**
- » A principal describes the process of hiring new teaching staff prior to the turnaround school's reopening.
 - » All teachers from the close-out school were given the opportunity to apply.
 - » The principal's vision for the school helped shape interview protocols and selection criteria.
 - » Teaching positions were offered to a mix of new, veteran, and second-career teachers. Half were rehired from the close-out school.
 - » Professional development programs for the new staff were focused on teaching skills and building a shared vision.

About the Site Young Scholars' Academy for Discovery and Exploration
Brooklyn, NY

Demographics

- » 60% Black
- » 37% Hispanic

- » 2% White
- » 1% Asian
- » 98% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch
- » 7% English Language Learners
- » 13% Special Education

(The New York State School Report Card, 2008-09 and The Afterschool Corporation Newsletter, 2010)

New York City's P.S. 636, Young Scholars' Academy for Discovery and Exploration, partners with parents, youth, and community-based organizations to offer integrative and innovative approaches to decision-making and support activities. To improve the school climate and institute a successful longer day, the school:

- » Has increased the length of the school day by 35%;
- » Provides more individualized and engaging instruction, enrichment activities, and sports;
- » Offers Saturday instruction to students needing extra support;
- » Conducts internal and external evaluations to track progress and plan for implementation improvement

Full Transcript

Danika LaCroix



00:04 My name is Danika LaCroix, principal of Young Scholars' Academy for Discovery and Exploration.

00:11 When P.S. 304 was closed down and P.S. 636 Young Scholars' Academy was getting started, one of the critical things that we had to do that was a priority for me was hiring the right people, getting the right people on board. And so the New York City Department of Education has this process known as the 18D process, and it's outlined by the United Federation of Teachers [UFT], and that stipulates that you have to have a team. And on that team you have to have UFT representation, the principal must be present, someone from the Department of Education must be present, and someone from the

support organization for the school must also be present to take part in that process.

 **00:51** So I created a set of questions, interview questions, based on what I felt was critically important to have for someone who was on our team at the school. And a few of the questions were about curriculum and instruction. A few of them were about what do you bring to the table, what can you offer. Another question was about your classroom environment—if I walked in what would I see, what would I hear, what would I expect children to be doing. And so it helped me get a well-rounded picture of the teacher. So I presented those questions to the committee, and we sat and had conversations about it. I shared my mission and vision with them about the school, and then we decided which questions were good and which ones we needed to tweak and which ones wouldn't work. And so we put together a protocol for each interview, and we honored everyone from the close-out school [with] an interview.

 **01:41** And based on the information that we got from the rubric, we created a spreadsheet and then we decided which of the teachers were highly qualified, which ones would fit Young Scholars' Academy. And so then I offered those people a job. It turned out to be 50%—half of the people who applied I actually offered a position to. The other people went through Open Market, which is a New York City Department of Education teacher-finding web-based program.

 **02:10** And then I had the task of finding the other people to join us on staff. And so I wanted a nice mix, so we looked for teachers who were new and we looked for veteran teachers as well. Because I knew in order to make it work as a community, we needed old teachers, new teachers, second-career people. We just wanted a nice bunch of people who are committed to children.

 **02:32** And so once we got the right staff on board, it was really important for us to get started with professional development to make sure that everyone understood what Young Scholars' Academy was going to be about on a day-to-day basis. We started out with

professional development, a weeklong professional development in here the first summer before we actually opened the doors. We all read a book called *Mindset* at the beginning of the summer. We had conversations about it. And then once the teachers were actually here, school started, we figured out quickly that we needed to have some systems in place to continue to develop the teachers and to continue to develop them as a team focused on children.

 **03:12** And so we set up teacher team meetings, and teachers meet on a weekly basis to discuss student data, to look at that data in the classroom, to look at student work on their grade levels for third, fourth, and fifth grade. Lower grades we do a cross-grade, so first grade meets with second grade, kindergarten meets with one first-grade teacher because we want to have that continuity. And then we have Lunch and Learns, which primarily our coaches facilitate them, but we have other teachers on staff who we have identified as being really good at certain content areas, and they do professional development during Lunch and Learns.

 **03:49** And those are the key things that we did because we knew it was important. You know, teachers always ask for more time, more time, more time, but having structured time to sit and talk about data, talk about what you are doing in the class, is so important. And also we have common planning time, where the teachers can sit and plan with the coaches, curriculum, look at it, revise it, whatever they need to do to make it work for the children. The impact was tremendous because our teachers feel they are empowered. They feel they can take control of this; they *can* do it. They know that I trust them. Those meetings, those structures have empowered our teachers.