

 **AUDIO**
4:20 min

[Full Details and Transcript](#)



Tearing Away the Layers of Despair: Changing a School Culture

George S. Middleton High School, Florida
January 2014

Topic **TURNING AROUND CHRONICALLY LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS**

Highlights

- » As part of its turnaround, Middleton High School focused on changing its culture of failure and improving its perception across the community.
- » They utilized several strategies to engage the community, including a breakfast for area church leaders, more cooperative partnerships with local law enforcement, and participation in a community trash pick-up day.
- » The principal transferred his own daughter to the school to show his confidence.
- » The school now has a much more positive image, both among school staff and across the community.

About the Site **George S. Middleton High School Tampa, Florida**

Demographics

(Source: Public Schools K12, 2009-10)

- » Grades 9–12
- » 74% Black
- » 14% Hispanic

- » 11% White
- » 1% Asian
- » 76% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch
- » 6% English Language Learners
- » 22% Special Education
- » Schoolwide Title I

Middleton High School is a large, comprehensive high school located in Tampa, Florida. It began its turnaround in 2010 after being placed in Intervene status by the state. The state and district, Hillsborough County Schools, engaged in a coordinated turnaround approach that included:

- » conducting initial assessments of student achievement, instructional practices, and personnel development along with Middleton school staff;
- » supporting changes to address the school's climate and culture, particularly its negative reputation in the community; and
- » implementing scheduling and instructional changes to increase student involvement and engagement.


Though the state and district continue to support the school, Middleton is now considered a successful turnaround case.


Full Transcript





🔊 00:03 My name is Owen Young, Principal of Middleton High School located in Tampa, Florida.


🔊 00:08 The cultural climate of the school when I arrived as principal—we were facing close to 10,000 behavioral incidents. The first question I had to ask myself was, why? Why did this look so different than other schools that I have worked and other schools here in our county? It was clear that there was a disconnect, not only with our kids and the behavioral component, but with the understanding and the engagement of stakeholders and their role in that process. It was clear that we had to begin to strip away those aspects of despair.

 **00:48** It was important that I touch the spirit of the students to get them to understand that they had a leader who believed in them. We then went to work to reimagine the school, to reconnect the community to the school, to break down different perceptions of the school and to open up the school to the community, because the actual idea of educating a child doesn't rest just in the school setting; it rests as a community approach in making sure that all components of that child's well-being is intact, and we speak that language.


 **01:24** We reached out to the faith-based community, and we had a breakfast for over 100 pastors. We have our neighborhood community cleanup every year. We were able to talk to the chief of police and to share the idea of police officers being more proactive and not antagonists in the process.

 **01:47** We bought several golf carts. Our school has 55 acres, so we need golf carts sometimes to get around the school. But in addition to that, every day during the school let-out, we would get in our golf carts and ride with our children through the community, maybe a mile to a safe point that allowed students to transition through some of those obstacles.

 **02:11** We were able to revamp our student advisory committee, our school advisory committee, and our PTSA, which has become one of the strongest groups in the school. With my daughter's permission, I was able to convince her to come to Middleton as an 11th grader. This was so powerful in so many different ways. One, I could make sure that she would receive the quality of instruction that I could monitor as she transitioned to high school. But in this case, and more importantly, it gave the community an idea that I was willing to take my daughter and to put [her] in the school that everyone said was underperforming, as a model that what was good for my daughter was also good for their children.

 **03:02** We, in our transformation, have had several notable politicians, such as the mayor, not only to recognize Middleton in its turnaround, but they become an active participant. Where he has

come to Middleton to do the Mayor's Hour, and that's an hour-long segment in which the mayor walks through the school, asks questions, and looks at the dynamic things that are taking place in the school setting. We have also had three different commissioners to recognize Middleton, too, to actually visit Middleton to look at what turnaround looks like.

 03:42 I am proud to say that through this process, instead of Middleton High School being a microcosm of the greater community, Middleton High School is transforming the community through so many different reform measures. The idea that in such a short time we were able to move a high school which is often stated as an ocean liner trying to turn around in a quick instant—one would never, ever be able to identify that the school was once struggling.

Developed at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education under contract number ED-PEP-11-C-0068. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.

This content is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).