

 VIDEO
4:30 min

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Lifelong Learning for Capacity Building

Sanders Elementary School, Mississippi
January 2014

Topic TURNING AROUND CHRONICALLY LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS

- Highlights**
- » The remote location of the Hollandale School District is a barrier for recruiting qualified teachers.
 - » The School improvement Grant (SIG) enabled incentives for teachers to stay in the district. The incentives were in the form of tuition coverage, which enabled teachers to obtain a teaching certificate or a degree.
 - » Investing in teachers' professional growth built long-term capacity and enabled instructional improvement.

About the Site Sanders Elementary School
Hollandale, Mississippi

Demographics


(Source: Mississippi Department of Education, 2013-14)


- » Grades PreK–6
- » 99% Black
- » 1% White
- » 99% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch
- » Town–Remote


- » The superintendent is a member of the School Transformation Team and actively involved in decision making at the school.
- » The new school principal was assigned a mentor, content-area consultants, and an implementation specialist who guided her through the turnaround process.
- » Teachers at Sanders Elementary School collaborate on assessment and instruction within and across grade levels through the School Transformation Team, professional learning communities, and grade-level teams.
- » The principal identified teacher leaders for additional professional development. After their training is complete, they will replace the outside consultants in providing coaching to staff.
- » The School Improvement Grant enables a shift towards using educational technology in all classrooms.
- » State coaches and outside consultants provide customized training to the principal and school staff about assessment, use of student data for instructional decision making, and instructional practices.
- » The school operates an extended learning day and summer school to provide additional time for learning.

Full Transcript





 **00:04** My name is James Johnson-Waldington. I am the Superintendent of the Hollandale School District.


 **00:09** There's a huge challenge in recruiting teachers here in the Hollandale School District, being that our location—we are in the southern part of the Mississippi Delta, but we are actually isolated. We're 22 miles from the next largest city, which is Greenville, about 15,000 people. We're out here by ourselves.

 **00:30** Local capacity building with our teachers that are here in the Hollandale School District addressed this issue 100%. We knew that we were going to have to rely heavily on Teach for America—and here in Mississippi it's called Mississippi Teacher Corps, which is out


of one of our largest universities here. But we also know that those teachers would stay here probably no longer than two years.

 **00:54** So what we decided to do was build capacity in those teachers that we know that lived in the area and that would be here. We invested [in] on-site professional development. We invested—we dealt with our leadership team today—we get them [to be] a part of that. We want them to be in a collaborative environment so that they know as much as we know so that once they're in their buildings, they're able to work with those Teach for America or Teacher Corps to bring them along a lot sooner than they normally would have if they were out there on their own.

 **01:29** The local capacity that we've achieved districtwide is that we have had several teachers that have decided to go back to school to continue their education. Several of them have gotten administrative licenses; several have gotten master's and specialist degrees. One of the projects that we have in Hollandale School District with the SEED funds that we have is that we have a Grow Your Own Program. Again, we talk about that it's difficult to find seasoned teachers or teachers that are coming out of our local universities, to want to come to the Hollandale School District. But we do have in the community a lot of individuals who have gone to college and that may have just received degrees—not certification in teaching, but degrees—and with the SEED funding, with us having to hire assistant teachers, what we decided to do was set a policy that we would hire assistant teachers that have degrees. And those teachers that came in, we set money aside for them to go back to school to try to achieve teacher certification.

 **02:37** Having a collaborative environment is sharing, is transparency, is being data-driven, is everybody understanding what the mission and the vision of the school district is. To not have teachers in the dark about anything that's going on in the district. Those teachers that we call teacher leaders are involved in most of the decision making that we have in the school. We have a transformation team here at Sanders; we have one at the elementary

school and we have a district transformation team. And that's how we help to build the capacity in the building, because of the transparency—good, bad, or indifferent—we talk about what it is that's going on in our school district. And we are solution-oriented; we're not problem-oriented. We don't just talk about what our students don't know or what it is that we're going to be accountable for; we talk about that but also before the end of that meeting, we have a solution to whatever it is that the problem is that we need to best serve our children.

 **03:40** I would tell incoming superintendents to make sure that they understand what they are getting into. If they decide that there is something—that they want this job or they want a job in a school district like ours—make sure you have all of your information. Data is very important. Independent audits on your finances. Independent audit as far as your academics are concerned, what type of programs do you have in your academics. Look at your personnel; make sure that you look to see what type of capacity do they have. Do they have higher degrees? If they don't, then work on a plan of action to try to get that, because lifelong learning is capacity building.

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