

DOINGWHATWORKS



Video

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

The Principal's Role

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Topic: Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools

Practice: Focus on Instruction

Highlights

- Principals can help their schools improve instruction by being present in the classroom, checking if new teaching strategies are being successfully implemented.
- When teachers know that the principal is likely to observe them in action, they are more likely to use the new techniques they are being asked to adopt.
- The principal must win the trust of the school's teachers to ensure that they feel supported, and feel motivated to succeed and improve instruction.

About the Interviewee

Dr. Joseph Johnson is the Executive Director of the National Center for Urban School Transformation and the QUALCOMM Professor of Urban Studies at San Diego State University, in San Diego, California. In this position, he works with school district leaders, researchers, and educators throughout the nation to improve academic achievement in urban schools. As well, he teaches in the university's doctoral program in educational leadership.

Previously, Dr. Johnson has served as a classroom teacher in San Diego, as a

school and district administrator in New Mexico, as a state department official in both Texas and Ohio, as a researcher and technical assistance provider at the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas, and as the Director of Student Achievement and School Accountability at the U.S. Department of Education where he was responsible for directing the federal Title I Program and several related programs.

Dr. Johnson earned a Ph.D. in educational administration from the University of Texas at Austin's Cooperative Superintendency Program. He earned a Master of Arts in Education from San Diego State University and graduated Magna Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Wisconsin at Oshkosh.

Full Transcript

I'm Joe Johnson. I am the Executive Director of the National Center for Urban School Transformation at San Diego State University.

The role of principals is essential in helping schools improve instruction. First of all, principals have to be present. If it's important enough to have professional development around an issue, then it's important enough for the principal to actually be in classrooms to see if people are addressing that issue, if people are improving, and providing feedback to support that.

Rod Paige, the former Superintendent in Houston and former Secretary of Education, when he was in Houston, he used to tell his principals, "It's not so much what you expect, it's what you inspect." And so when teachers know this is what our leader is expecting us to do, this is what our leader is actually going to be looking for, and he is going to—or she is going to—be in my classroom to see then it increases the likelihood that there is attention to those issues. And then when there is that attention, there can then be dialogue about what needs to happen, what support needs to happen to help teachers make movement in those directions.

People don't engage when they don't trust. So, if I am a teacher and at my school we are asked to engage in this new instructional practice, if I perceive that this is not something that's being done with me, it's being done to me, if I perceive that maybe the agenda—the hidden agenda—is to have me fail and to move me out of the picture, then I might get very creative to either figure out how to make it look like I am doing what is wanted, or I might get very creative to figure out ways to sabotage the effort. In any case, I am not so likely to really engage full-heartedly in a way that's going to make this a success for myself and for my students, and so leaders have to understand how important it is to create an environment in which people trust. That, in fact, the leader wants everybody to succeed, and is looking for ways to provide that support that will help ensure everyone's success.