

DOINGWHATWORKS



Video

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Five Pillars That Guide Change

Waterford High School, California • June 2008

Topic: Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools

Practice: Improved Leadership

Highlights

- This turnaround is grounded in improving instruction, operations, and programs.
- “Personalization” means that all of the school’s teachers are involved in some aspect of student life beyond the classroom.
- Embracing standards and focusing on formative assessments makes the school “purpose driven.”
- The school’s instruction, assessments, and professional focus are all based on content standards.
- Every minute is precious—all instruction is designed to maximize efficiency and learning.

About the Site

Waterford High School

Waterford, CA

Demographics

55% White

40% Hispanic

1% Asian

1% Black

46% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

13% English Language Learners

9% Special Education

Waterford High School had several components to its successful turnaround process:

- Collaborative agreement on the school's mission statement, which includes the school's vision, beliefs, and expected student outcomes
- Collaborative decision-making processes as part of creating new instructional norms for the school
- Use of a data-driven approach and collaboration among teachers in planning instruction

Full Transcript

I'm Don Davis, the principal of Waterford High School in Waterford, California.

The question is how did our five pillars guide our turnaround process? And the pillars actually serve as our core and guiding principles. Actually, when the school was established, we established pillars. But over time those have evolved; they've changed. Through discussion with our teachers, with our district office, with our focus groups from our community, we always are revising those pillars.

The first pillar was pursuing excellence, and the excellence movement has kind of come and gone in education and other places, and I felt like the reason that it didn't stick was it was too ambiguous. It wasn't well understood. So we decided here, when I say "we" I mean the teachers together and myself and our staff, was to identify excellence and what does that mean. And so we put our descriptor, and it's improving, first, improving instruction, improving operations, okay, improving your programs. After you have your state data and your summative data, you can look at how effective your programs are. So you're going to improve instruction, operations, and your programs so that students achieve, countywide and statewide, recognition for their academic achievement, their athletic achievement, and their achievement in the arts.

Personalization is a term that gets tossed around in schools, but what does it mean? If we are going to have a school that embraces personalization, we need to define it and live it out. And it's the idea that students will become well known by adults, that teachers commit to one another, to their relationship, to the professional community. And so that was a founding principle for our school, and it's endured until today. All of our teachers, everyone is involved with something beyond the classroom, with some aspect of student life beyond the classroom. Whether it's coaching a team, advising a club, advising a class, every teacher

says that's going to be one aspect of my role here. Plus, there is the personalization staff member-to-staff member or teacher-to-teacher that we just live out and we believe that that's important.

We have another—what we call being purpose driven. Being purpose driven means that you're going to embrace the standards that are established for California. You're going to embrace those content standards. You're going to review data that's formative, that's occurring right now in your classroom or with your formative assessments, that you're going to have that help guide your instruction.

The other pillar here is that we are standards-based, which means that our instruction advance content standards, our assessments assess the content standards, that when we have professional conversation here it will be in large part associated with our standards.

Our final pillar is our use of time. Now, we operate on an alternating block schedule, and a block schedule isn't necessarily the answer for school improvement as much as every minute is held precious and that our instruction then encourages good use of that time, that students are engaged, students are producing. Our master schedule is developed in such a way that time is honored.