

DOINGWHATWORKS



Audio

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Additional Goals for Improving Instruction

Edgemont Elementary School, California • June 2008

Jackson Elementary School, California • June 2008

Topic: Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools

Practice: Focus on Instruction

Highlights

- To turn their school around, the administration focused on standards and data and returned to academic basics.
- The school created school-wide assessments to monitor student progress and ensure that curriculum was being administered consistently.
- The school focused on language arts instruction and writing skills.
- Curriculum maps incorporated academic standards. A “student study team” intervention brainstormed on best practices for individual students.

About the Sites

Edgemont Elementary School

Moreno Valley, CA

Demographics

84% Hispanic

10% Black

4% White

1% Asian

95% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

68% English Language Learners

3% Special Education

The current principal started in this role in 2005 and began to extend the strategies for school turnaround that the previous principal put in place. She developed a strong core of teacher-leaders who supported the improvement efforts. Key actions taken were:

- Embed teacher training into the school day
- Work closely with the school leadership team
- Present parents with data on their child's progress
- Put a full-time counselor in place
- Train teachers with a set of model lessons
- Establish professional learning communities

Jackson Elementary School

Sanger, CA

Demographics

81% Hispanic

13% White

4% Asian

1% Black

77% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

19% English Language Learners

13% Special Education

The current principal came during the turnaround process and built on earlier successes to continue to improve student achievement. He made several significant changes:

- Helped teachers understand all students can learn
- Developed a three-tier intervention program for the school
- Established a leadership team
- Focused on strong staff communications
- Implemented strategies to provide explicit instruction with an ongoing assessment plan
- Increased opportunities for teacher learning
- Redeployed, reassigned, and terminated teachers

Full Transcript

Melissa Bazanos: Hi, my name is Melissa Bazanos. I'm the principal of Edgemont Elementary School in Moreno Valley Unified School District.

Brad Huebert: My name is Brad Huebert. I am the principal at Jackson Elementary in Sanger, California.

Bazanos: When we were determining our areas of focus, we really looked at data. Data was our starting point. We looked at the California Standards data. We looked at the California Standards test data. We looked at the curriculum-embedded assessment data. We looked at trends in performance from one grade level to the next in a vertical format. We really looked at data to determine what were the areas that were the weakest and what areas we really needed to improve before students could make growth in other areas.

Huebert: We had standards as the focus, but we had to get away from using the textbook as our focal point and fitting in standards when we could. So we created curriculum maps that year that had all of the essential standards in terms of identifying essential standards. We then went and deconstructed each of the standards into learning objectives and used those as our guiding points of our curriculum. We took the textbook, which we had adopted, which was Houghton Mifflin, and we fit that into the standards education that we had set in place at the time. So instead of using the textbook and fitting in standards when we could or assuming the standards were there, we started with the standards and fit in the textbook when appropriate.

Bazanos: One other area that we had done some research in, which didn't start at the very beginning of the turnaround process but then was later implemented—it actually just started this past year, was school-wide writing program. Teachers received training in writing. Teachers received graphic organizers for writing. We had an outside consultant come in to provide training. We developed a school-wide writing ladder so that each grade level was responsible for certain components of writing. But the writing was a big component that we saw we needed after we continued in the growth process.

Huebert: There were a few changes that I chose to make, first, in the area of instruction. We needed to focus on language arts more. Our scores were pretty good in mathematics, but we needed to focus a lot more on language arts. So a substantial amount of time in our staff development meetings and in our professional learning communities [PLCs] were devoted to language arts standards and language arts practices. We just really focused on some core basic best practices, and basically those two being explicit direct instruction in terms of addressing instructional effectiveness and then the idea of PLCs, making sure that we had collaborative school environments happening. So we had what was working in the classroom and then having the teachers be able to come out and share what was working in the classroom or wasn't working in the classroom to other teachers and to make sure that every minute we had we were spending in the best possible way we could.

Bazanos: Teachers, staff, and students have to believe in their ability to be successful. Strong committed leadership is a necessity. The principal has to be able to get into the trenches and know what the kids need and be visible, be out in the classrooms and really be a spokesperson and an advocate for the school as a whole. Secondly, the teachers have to believe that all kids can learn. We don't accept any excuses; there are no reasons why students can't be successful. Everyone must have high expectations for their students regardless of demographics, the income level, prior experience, anything like that. The third thing would be consistency in terms of curriculum, consistency in terms of staff development, consistency in terms of attitude. We really need everybody to be consistent in their instruction as well as consistent in their handling of student discipline. Just consistency as a whole is very important.

Huebert: It's very important for the staff and the community to understand where it is we are going. I think to establish long term success there needs to be a clearly defined vision. If everybody on my campus didn't know what our focal point for coming to school everyday was, then we were never going to be able to achieve the student success that we have. Every staff member on campus needed to know that the most important thing that they understood about coming to work everyday was increasing student achievement. That's it.