 **AUDIO**  
3:35 min

[Full Details and Transcript](#)



## Immediate Attention

Young Scholars' Academy for Discovery and Exploration (P.S. 636), New York  
January 2011

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

**Practice** QUICK WINS

- Highlights**
- » Elementary school principal Danika LaCroix figured out what needed immediate attention at her school.
  - » Facilities as well as culture and climate were deemed to be in immediate need of a facelift.
  - » The main office was transformed with new furniture and a redesign of the space to create a more welcoming environment for families; someone is always available to greet visitors.

**About the Site** Young Scholars' Academy for Discovery and Exploration  
Brooklyn, NY

### Demographics

- » 60% Black
- » 37% Hispanic
- » 2% White
- » 1% Asian
- » 98% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch
- » 7% English Language Learners
- » 13% Special Education

(The New York State School Report Card, 2008-09 and The Afterschool Corporation Newsletter, 2010)

New York City's P.S. 636, Young Scholars' Academy for Discovery and Exploration, partners with parents, youth, and community-based organizations to offer integrative and innovative approaches to decision-making and support activities. To improve the school climate and institute a successful longer day, the school:

- » Has increased the length of the school day by 35%;
- » Provides more individualized and engaging instruction, enrichment activities, and sports;
- » Offers Saturday instruction to students needing extra support;
- » Conducts internal and external evaluations to track progress and plan for implementation improvement.


## Full Transcript


### Danika LaCroix




🔊 00:04 My name is Danika LaCroix, principal of Young Scholars' Academy for Discovery and Exploration.

🔊 00:10 Before I started Young Scholars' Academy, I used quite a bit of time to figure out what some things that needed immediate attention, quick fixes. And so from January 2008 to July 2008, which was before I entered the building, there were two key things that I found needed immediate attention, and those were facilities and culture and climate. And so for facilities, what I thought was necessary was for parents to come in here and see and feel a significant difference from the previous school. And so what we did was we decided to actually gut out the entire main office and to have a new office that celebrated children, that had student work up, that did not create a barrier between the parents, the community, and the school staff. We wanted new furniture in there that would welcome and invite parents and children likewise into the space.

 **01:12** One of the major obstacles with that was money, and so I had to set priorities, what was most important to me. And in year one, culture and climate was really important for me and knowing that the facilities played a key role in that, we had to do without some things. But when parents walked in, they felt this energy in the building. We had to make some really tough choices about whether we purchase computer equipment or we purchase furniture for the main office. And in year one, culture and climate is extremely important, and so we had to not get the computer equipment in order to get that furniture to create that space that we wanted parents to come into and to feel welcome.

 **01:56** I think that people come in now, they feel that this is a very different place from what was here in the past. We took down the doors that separated parents from actually walking into the main office. My door is open all the time. When parents come into the main office, they can actually walk up to the parent coordinator or the secretary's desk, and they can get service right away. Because we have quite a few people in the main office, whenever you walk up, someone is always there to greet you and say, "Good morning," and whatever it is that you need to get taken care of, we can get it done immediately. You don't have to sit and wait for a long time, and we are here to service the parents. And when you come in, you feel that immediately.

 **02:39** I think what was really important was creating a space that looked very different from what existed in the past, and so we created a warm, welcoming space. Additionally, we have an entryway that's exclusive to us. When the kids come in the morning, I am there. If I am not there, my assistant principal is there at the entrance greeting the children. On Wednesdays, we do High Five Wednesdays. We give them a high five. Most of the children really want a hug in the morning. And so we are always there to provide them with that. Our catchphrase is "Make it a great day." And so we say, "Make it a great day. Make good choices," and the children really feel warm and welcome. So that was something else that we did in year one that was a quick fix right away. When you walked in, you felt that this was a new school; it was a new learning environment.