

# DOINGWHATWORKS



Audio

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

## The Power of Data

John Wash Elementary School, California • March 2010

Topic: Response to Intervention in Primary Grade Reading  
Practice: Universal Screening

### Highlights

- Grade-level teams look at the most important data for making a difference in classroom instruction.
- Wes Sever, principal at John Wash Elementary, talks about the significance of data for planning instruction.
- He discusses the importance of using common grade-level assessments to enable staff collaboration.
- He highlights the need for professional development to train teachers in understanding and using data.
- Teachers at John Wash Elementary share strategies focused on improving student learning and classroom instruction.
- The role of the principal in attending professional development sessions and coaching classroom teachers is discussed.

### About the Site

John Wash Elementary School  
Fresno, CA

## Demographics

- 41% Hispanic
- 37% Asian
- 18% White
- 2% Black
- 1% Other
- 53% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch
- 22% English Language Learners
- 4% Special Education

John Wash Elementary School staff work collaboratively to improve teaching and learning. Through principal leadership, district support, and professional development, John Wash established:

- A three-tiered pyramid of instruction and intervention,
- Systematic and explicit instructional practices that support and engage all students, including English language learners,
- Professional learning communities for using data and planning evidence-based instruction,
- Systems of mutual accountability for student learning.

## Full Transcript

My name is Wes Sever, principal of John Wash Elementary.

Data drives really everything we do. In fact, when we look at data, what's important is that we don't get data overload, but we are looking at data that can make the most difference in the classroom. We sit down in grade-level teams. We call them Student Growth and Curriculum Conferences, where the teachers meet a half day with the principal, myself, and my curriculum support provider, and we go over the data.

When I first became a principal, I'd give them all the data sheets that I had. Well, they were staring at these things, some were getting confused, they didn't understand why are we getting this, why are we looking at it; it was more work for them. And data shouldn't be more work. Data should give us more of a focus in the classroom, and that's what we've got to target. And after that, I learned that, as a principal, I need to screen the data.

When we examine data, a lot of people don't readily understand the significance of the information. And so we really sit down with our teachers by grade level and explain the specific data, and what it means, and how they can apply it to their classroom. Some data, you get these big numbers and what do they really mean? And a lot of data, we really have to look at our past history. And if we get information on 84% of your students got these problems right, well, what does that really mean? Is that better than what it was last year? It doesn't really help in isolation. So we really look at past scores so that we can say, you know what,

85% of our kids got this question correct; last year only 70% of our students got that correct. What does that mean? That means that we are more effective in the classroom for teaching that specific standard. And so we look at data, and data that's in isolation that we don't understand, we put aside and we go on to data that we can learn from. And that is important to explain that to teachers.

The power of data is that you're looking at what's happening in your classroom with these particular students. The issue that we had several years ago with data is that at each grade level, teachers were giving different assessments. That's a problem because on a day-to-day basis, teachers need to be communicating on the success of their children, on whether their children are learning. And the only way we can determine if they are learning is their performance on particular assessments. We have what we call the Pacing Calendar for assessments. The grade levels give weekly common assessments. So every assessment that is given, you will know that my peer also gave that particular assessment. And that's important because we can focus our conversations on the learning of students. We might not bring the data for every assessment, but you know what? If my class bombs an assessment and they don't do very well, I can go to two other teachers in my grade level and talk to them about how did your students do, how did you teach this that made it effective because my students didn't do very well.

And so, when we actually decided that this is where we need to go, the conversation started to change because we were all doing the same thing but we also all had the same expectations because we were all giving the same assessments. And if we were determined that hey, you know what, this assessment wasn't matching the rigor, then we all knew it and we could change it and focus on learning, not just teaching.

It is important that we stay focused. And professional development is a key to our success. It is vital that everybody that is involved in the classroom receives the same professional development so that we can learn and grow, because not all professional development actually works in every single classroom. But you know what? If we have received the same professional development, we can share strategies and ideas, and that is so important that every single teacher at my site receives the same professional development. In fact, it's vital that I receive the same professional development that they do. I sit and have been trained in every professional development and every training that they have sat through. And I have sat there with them and I have learned with them so that when we come back to John Wash, we can apply that professional development in the classroom. I go into classrooms to coach, to make you a better teacher, to make me a better principal. I have this philosophy that every teacher comes to school not saying, "I want to teach the same way I taught yesterday." They are coming to John Wash saying, "I want to be a better teacher than I was yesterday." And that's how I treat every teacher, and that's my job, is to make them a better teacher than they were yesterday.