

# DOINGWHATWORKS



Presentation

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

## Making Visible Improvements Early in the Turnaround Process

September 2008

Topic: Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools  
Practice: Quick Wins

### Highlights

- Turnaround principals should go for “quick wins” to rally staff and parents around the turnaround effort, build momentum, and overcome internal resistance.
- Quick wins are highly visible improvements that can be implemented early in the turnaround process; they have been used in many successful turnarounds.
- The key components of quick wins are conducting a needs assessment at the school site, setting goals that can be achieved quickly and are visible to the school staff and the community, and developing a process for accomplishing these goals.

## Full Transcript

### Slide 1

Welcome to the overview on making visible improvements early in the turnaround process

### Slide 2

Watson Elementary is one of the lowest-performing schools in the district. Ms. Addison has just come on board as the third principal the school has had in two years. She faces the challenge of turning the school around—something the previous principals failed to do. The school staff and parents from the community want to help make changes at Watson, but they are skeptical that Ms. Addison can succeed.

Ms. Addison needs her staff, parents, and students to believe that things will be different this time, and she doesn't have long to convince them. She needs to make changes quickly and successfully to build everyone's confidence that the school can be turned around. She needs some "quick wins."

### Slide 3

Quick wins are highly visible improvements that can be implemented early in the turnaround process. They can rally staff and parents around the turnaround effort, build the momentum of the process, and help overcome internal resistance.

### Slide 4

Research has shown that choosing one or two quick wins is a strategy commonly used by schools that have had successful turnarounds.

The research shows that schools using quick wins as part of their turnaround process not only see reform efforts gain momentum, but also notice that the quick wins themselves become the driving force of the turnaround. Quick wins send a clear message to the staff and community: not only can the school change, it already is changing.

### Slide 5

Researchers and experts have identified the following key actions for developing and implementing a quick win at a school site. Conduct a needs assessment at the school site. Set goals that can be achieved quickly and are visible to both the school staff and the wider community. Develop a process for accomplishing goals that can be achieved quickly.

Slide 6

To properly identify powerful quick wins, it's important to conduct a needs assessment. This type of assessment can be conducted informally, through discussions with staff and parents; or formally, through surveys or classroom observations. School leaders can also review existing student assessment data as well as attendance and behavioral measures.

Slide 7

When setting goals for a school turnaround, be sure that the goal can be achieved within a few months. A focused goal can generally be achieved more quickly than a broad one. Identifying one or two clear goals that can be accomplished immediately sends the message that it is possible to reach the ultimate goal—raising student achievement.

Slide 8

Try to minimize dependence on others for decision-making or financial support. For example, goals that require a lengthy district approval process or involve staff consensus cannot be implemented quickly.

Slide 9

When embarking on a school turnaround plan, choosing goals that benefit a number of stakeholders at the school site is a solid way to promote buy-in. Because halls and stairways were crowded, one middle school designated one set of stairs for going up and another for going down. Hallway traffic moved smoothly; students and teachers did not get slowed down on their way to the next class.

Slide 10

Let's look at some quick wins that school leaders can use to begin the turnaround process.

Slide 11

Altering schedules can improve the functioning of the school. For example, one school extended lunch to allow students to go to the "Discovery Room." This room was created to provide a time and place for students to obtain additional instructional support.

Schedules can be altered for teachers' benefit as well. Including planning time for teachers can enhance quality of instruction and alleviate teacher burnout. It can be valuable time for problem solving, as well as

for discussions on instruction and assessment data. These types of changes can generally be accomplished quickly and have an immediate impact on instruction.

#### Slide 12

Another quick win involves improving access to resources. One school developed a workroom for teachers that contained professional instruction materials and resources. In this way, the essential materials were quickly and readily accessible. Other schools ensure all book orders are submitted in the spring so all books will be available on the first day of school in the fall.

#### Slide 13

School leaders can make quick change through the improvement of school facilities. One principal, upon arriving at a dirty, cluttered school, immediately met with the district and custodial personnel to develop and supervise a clean-up plan.

Establishing a safe and orderly school environment can also be a quick win. After discovering that a large portion of the school's disciplinary problems involved the types of clothing worn by students, the principal implemented a mandatory uniform policy. Soon the number of discipline referrals at the school dropped significantly.

#### Slide 14

In short, there are a number of ways that quick wins can jump-start the school turnaround process. Adjustments can be made to staffing assignments, including the creation of intervention teams. These are teams of teachers who work together as effective problem-solvers for specific issues or content areas, such as reading instruction. This can facilitate collaboration and have a positive impact on teachers' ability to help students improve their performance.

#### Slide 15

Promoting pride in the school community can foster a sense of unity among students and staff. At one middle school, the principal gave teachers more responsibility for curriculum development. His demonstration of trust in them as a community of educators made his staff feel more valued and unified.

#### Slide 16

To learn more about quick wins, please see the additional materials on the Doing What Works website.