

Edward H. White Career Academy

1136 W. 122nd St.

Chicago, IL 60643

Former Principal: Lynn McGinnis-Garner

Current Principal: Sharon Jenkins

In 1992, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) asked Dr. Lynn McGinnis-Garner to step into the role of Interim Principal for Edward H. White Career Academy (White). White is a small neighborhood school situated in a low-income area on the south side of the city that serves approximately 250 K-8 students who are African American and low-income.

- ◆ Elementary (K-8)
- ◆ 100% Black
- ◆ 90% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch
- ◆ 19% Special Education
- ◆ 0% English Language Learners

At that time, unbeknownst to Dr. Garner, CPS had targeted the school for additional support due to a lack of progress in student achievement over a number of years and planned to place it on probation in one year if achievement did not improve. Probation meant that the district would make many of the decisions formerly made by the school. Therefore, Dr. Garner felt a sense of urgency and assumed the principalship with a new vision and mission.

To begin, the principal had to select goals. To do this, she examined the data and identified trends that occurred over several years. The trends indicated that the lowest-performing group of students had consistently low scores year after year and were not making progress. Thus, Dr. Garner sent a strong message to that staff that everyone's focus would be on instruction.

Along with a focus on instruction, the principal knew she needed to build a committed staff. Since most of the staff had tenure, redeploying teachers to another school was not an option. However, some teachers showed resistance to the dramatic changes needed to turn around the school. Nonetheless, Dr. Garner was committed to working with the existing staff.

Implementing a Cycle of Assessments

Under Dr. Garner's leadership, the teachers worked together to review the school curricula, align it to the state standards, and align assessments to the standards. In this process, the staff discovered that the curricula were aligned to state standards; however, teacher-created assessments were not well aligned with the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT). Teachers tended to create assessments that asked for basic recall of information and basic mathematical computation. Conversely, the ISAT questions required students to make inferences and to solve complex problems. This mismatch presented a challenge for teachers and a need to make dramatic changes.

In response, the principal arranged for professional development so teachers could learn to develop assessments that required students to make inferences and to solve complex problems. They also had to focus on instruction designed to enable students to master these skills. Because the district had targeted the school for additional support, the principal was able to hire a literacy expert who provided focused, job-embedded support to teachers so they could learn to provide explicit instruction in such reading skills as making inferences and drawing conclusions. Next, the teachers began a cycle of five-week assessments. Every five weeks, teachers administered a series of short, focused, progress-monitoring assessments designed to test complex as well as basic skills. Based on the results of these frequent assessments, teachers modified instruction and provided focused support for the students most in need.

Building Positive Attitudes

These changes took a lot of hard work on the part of the teachers. Teachers needed to be committed to do the work. To move teachers from years of feeling comfortable doing the same things they had done in the past, Dr. Garner repeatedly showed the staff that these changes were making a difference and that she was going to support them. She moved some teachers to a different grade level based on individual requests, which helped them to feel empowered. Further, she allowed them to attend professional development in areas that they felt were important and that they needed. Gradually, a few teachers began to feel successful. As others observed this, they also became willing to make the dramatic changes. Eventually, all teachers were fully committed to the turnaround efforts.

Changing Student Behavior

Throughout her first year at White, Dr. Garner identified student behavior as a problem area. At times, she felt that she spent a significant amount of her time diffusing petty squabbles among students; often these squabbles related to clothing. Therefore, she sought the community's support to implement student uniforms the following year. At first parents were resistant and noted that they wanted their children to be able to express their personal identities. Over time, the school population changed, and the families were less well off than previous families. Parents with lower incomes realized that it was difficult to afford the name-brand clothing and sneakers that their children wanted, and welcomed the idea of using uniforms. Thus, for their own reasons, the parents agreed to student uniforms.

At the beginning of the principal's second year at White, the school required all students to wear uniforms. The uniforms provided a structure for the students and signaled the school would treat all students the same and hold all students to the same expectations. Throughout that year, there was a dramatic shift in behavior; classroom behavior problems and referrals decreased. Thus, both teachers and students could focus their attention on teaching and learning.

Extending the Success

In the first year, the school experienced subtle improvements in achievement and small changes in climate. But, in the second year, there was a dramatic improvement and students began to make really positive gains. Over the course of several years, White Career Academy's achievement scores for students have increased from approximately 30% meeting or exceeding proficiency in math and reading to approximately 60% in each of these subject areas. In addition, the school has met Adequate Yearly Progress

(AYP) targets for all subgroups and received awards such as Lawry's Menu for Success First Place Winner and Rochelle Lee and Education Connection grants.

Due to the success at White Career Academy, CPS selected Dr. McGinnis-Garner to participate in the district's turnaround schools initiative. As such, Dr. Garner moved to another low-performing school in the district and has been attending intensive professional development specifically focused on training turnaround specialists.

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