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A State and District Partnership That Facilitates School Improvement

George S. Middleton High School, Florida
January 2014

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

Highlights

- » The state of Florida and the district of Hillsborough County developed a collaborative and coordinated effort to facilitate Middleton High School's turnaround.
- » They began by conducting instructional reviews, which included analysis of student data, interviews with stakeholders, and observations of classes.
- » They developed an action plan of next steps, which informed development of the School Improvement Plan.
- » The key to this partnership was that they served as knowledgeable partners, rather than adversarial superiors, and that they helped promote the school's ability to own their turnaround effort.

About the Site **George S. Middleton High School Tampa, Florida**

Demographics

(Source: Public Schools K12, 2009-10)

- » Grades 9–12
- » 74% Black
- » 14% Hispanic

- » 11% White
- » 1% Asian
- » 76% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch
- » 6% English Language Learners
- » 22% Special Education
- » Schoolwide Title I

Middleton High School is a large, comprehensive high school located in Tampa, Florida. It began its turnaround in 2010 after being placed in Intervene status by the state. The state and district, Hillsborough County Schools, engaged in a coordinated turnaround approach that included:

- » conducting initial assessments of student achievement, instructional practices, and personnel development along with Middleton school staff;
- » supporting changes to address the school's climate and culture, particularly its negative reputation in the community; and
- » implementing scheduling and instructional changes to increase student involvement and engagement.

Though the state and district continue to support the school, Middleton is now considered a successful turnaround case.

Full Transcript





00:03 I'm Dr. Pamela Craig. I'm the Regional Executive Director for the Florida Department of Education.


00:09 Hello, I'm Debbie Cook. I'm the Director of Reform for Hillsborough County Public Schools.


Pamela Craig


00:15 Middleton was identified as an intervene school, and then the districts were notified that they had intervene status and then it was our role to come in and make the connections with the district and begin the process of evaluating and beginning and developing a plan.

Debbie Cook  **00:30** Hillsborough had a support team already in place that was giving them extra support needed in order to meet the needs of all their students. That support team was comprised of content specialists and coaches that could go in and do job-embedded professional development. It was also comprised of a response to intervention specialist to help with data, human resources personnel as well, and a secondary personnel administrator on special assignment and also the director for secondary education.


 **01:01** The first way in which the state, district, and school worked together was what we called instructional reviews. The instructional reviews consisted of interviews with parents, teachers, and students and used their school performance data and other aspects of the school to be able to take a look at exactly where Middleton was at that point in time.


Pamela Craig  **01:22** So as we met together with the district and the school, we would do the instructional reviews. And the purpose of those was to gather enough data—both the kind of observable data of what teachers were doing along with specific achievement data, attendance data, all of the different elements that might impact student achievement.


Debbie Cook  **01:42** In addition to the data review, we also did walkthroughs with state and district personnel within the classrooms to see the instructional best practices that were going on in the areas of need that needed to occur. From there, we developed that action plan and the roles that the state and the district and school were going to take that were clear and concise and communicated, in addition to scheduling out, then, the next dates that the state would be back to provide that support and when the district was going to be back to provide that support.


 **02:13** Some of the challenges we faced in having different support systems in one school, and making sure the amount of people were on the same page, was communication and negotiation. The communication piece is important so that everyone is on the same page and understands the plan. Not only that, it's the nuts and the

bolts, and when it gets down to the nitty-gritty of working in those classrooms, that even the vocabulary that the state and district were both using were the same in order for everyone to understand what their role is and what their purpose is at that school and how to make those changes.

 **02:48** Another piece of this is negotiating. When you bring a large group of people together with the state support and our district support, you have a lot of people with different and varying opinions on what should occur based on what they saw and based on the interviews. A lot of time was spent talking back and forth and negotiating different perspectives and different views and things that needed to occur based, quite frankly, on the expertise of the people that were coming together to make sure that those support systems were in place.

Pamela Craig  **03:19** As a state coming in to a district with a very publicly identified intervene school, our challenge was to develop relationships both at the school and at the district so that they didn't see us as adversaries. We had to come in and help them understand that our role was to serve as a knowledgeable "other" during conversations and to help them—maybe guide some conversations, but to help them come up with the solutions, and then provide the support they needed in the beginning to help them implement those solutions and continually develop systems so that they would constantly be reviewing and making changes as things occurred.

Debbie Cook  **04:03** The continued support the district has maintained in order to make sure that Middleton remains successful and that the students are getting everything that they need to be able to be college and career ready, is making sure that our resources are not pulled just because their status has changed. And that has not occurred at all at Middleton. So all those support systems and all of the money and resources that have gone into Middleton to make it successful continues to occur to make sure that those pieces are done.

Pamela Craig  **04:33** School improvement is the sum of all of its parts. So while we might focus on differences in student achievement gains or attendance rates or culture, it's the sum of all those things and how they interact with each other that make a difference, and that's what Middleton has done extremely well.

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