

# DOINGWHATWORKS



## Presentation

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

### Maintaining a Consistent Focus on Improving Instruction

September 2008

Topic: Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools

Practice: Focus on Instruction

#### Highlights

- School leaders should use student, classroom, and school-wide data to identify targeted areas where instruction can be improved.
- Set clear and targeted goals for instructional improvement, then provide the training and resources to meet these goals, and monitor results.
- The principal should be a highly visible and active instructional leader both in and out of the classroom and should act as a role model for teachers by actively being involved in the improvement of instruction.

## Full Transcript

### Slide 1

Welcome to the overview on maintaining a consistent focus on improving instruction.

### Slide 2

For the last few years, teachers at Mountainside Middle School have been facing many challenges in their classroom. Most students enter their first year without well-developed academic skills. Many students do not speak English well, and they often have gaps in learning because they change schools frequently when families move.

The teachers at Mountainside invest a lot of time and energy trying to improve their instruction, yet many of the school's students are not reaching basic or proficient levels of learning. The teachers feel that they need more guidance to help students learn the content covered in the standards. The principal's question is, "How can we turn this school around?"

### Slide 3

Research indicates that in order to raise student achievement, you need to improve instruction. To improve instruction, you need to know where instruction is not effective and focus there. This means looking at student, classroom, and school-wide data to accurately identify key topics for improvement.

### Slide 4

Establishing data teams or a data leader often helps schools to analyze standardized assessments, as well as classroom-based benchmark and progress monitoring assessments for gaps and weaknesses in student learning. The district can support this effort by providing schools with the proper hardware and software for data analysis.

The data leader or teams can also examine non-academic student data that may help identify areas impeding instruction that need to be addressed, such as behavior problems, tardiness, and low attendance rates.

### Slide 5

Once the data leader or team has a good understanding of students' needs, they, along with the administrators, should establish goals for instructional improvement. When setting goals for instructional

improvement, the staff may identify targeted subject areas in need of immediate improvement and specific instructional problems that cut across all subject areas.

#### Slide 6

Often schools identify a specific subset of skills most in need of improvement. One school analyzed student data about reading ability and learned that students needed more support in vocabulary and comprehension instruction. Teachers then developed explicit vocabulary lessons using nonfiction books.

#### Slide 7

In another school, assessment results indicated students did not understand key concepts. The teachers used these data to adjust their instructional techniques. They introduced small white boards to the class so teachers could check for understanding. Each student writes an answer and holds it up to indicate their understanding of the skill or concept.

#### Slide 8

Another step in improving instruction is a careful review of the curricula used. The curriculum should be aligned to state and local standards and adequately address key skills. Teachers should evaluate the curriculum they are using, focusing on units and concepts that are included in the standards. If a skill or concept is not in the curriculum but is in the standards, teachers will need to teach it using supplemental materials.

#### Slide 9

Teamwork plays an integral role in improving instruction. In one elementary school, grade-level teachers met weekly to develop daily lessons aligned with both the state standards and the school's performance expectations. They also met periodically with other grade-level teams to ensure that lessons were clear and well articulated across grades.

#### Slide 10

Professional development should be targeted to teachers' instructional needs—individually or as teams—to make a direct impact on classroom instruction. If a school identifies reading as the focus of improvement efforts, teachers may need to learn how to implement new curricula or instructional strategies to teach

reading.

Training should focus on helping teachers directly apply new skills and content knowledge to their teaching. A few teachers may receive professional development through a university or training institute. When they return to the school, they can then pass on their learning to colleagues. Additionally, the trainers can come to the school, observe teachers as they implement the new strategies, and provide feedback on what they see.

#### Slide 11

Principals should monitor progress and provide feedback throughout the school year. This allows staff to make adjustments to instructional practices. Continual monitoring and redirecting can help keep instruction—and the rest of the reform—on a productive track.

#### Slide 12

The principal can support these efforts by creating an environment that helps teachers make changes and readjust instruction. Visual displays of data throughout the school can show teachers and students where progress is being made and which areas need to be re-examined instructionally.

#### Slide 13

The principal should be a highly visible and active instructional leader, both in and out of the classroom. While making short, spontaneous visits to classrooms, the principal can note classroom management strategies, instructional groupings, objectives for the lesson, materials used, and other instructional elements that are a focus of the school's reform. Based on observations, the principal can provide quick feedback to the teachers to support instructional improvement over time.

#### Slide 14

A principal should act as a role model for teachers by being actively involved in the improvement of instruction. In one school, the principal spent as much as 40 percent of her time in classrooms, both observing and teaching lessons. This kind of time investment lets teachers know that the leaders in their school understand the challenges they face daily.

Slide 15

These kinds of steps can be instrumental in turning a school around. By using school data to establish where a school's biggest challenges lie, establishing clear and targeted goals, providing the training and resources to meet those goals, and modeling instructional leadership, even the most challenged school can turn itself around and provide quality instruction for its students.

Slide 16

The principal at Mountainside gathered a team to look at the school's data. The team made some surprising discoveries about gaps in instruction and problems with the school culture. For the next two years, school staff worked together to improve instruction, continually checking on their progress through ongoing data collection. The principal made sure that her teachers had the training and resources they needed and checked on classes frequently to see the impact on instruction. As the data showed improvement, the principal and staff grew more excited about the changes and looked for more ways to improve their school.

Slide 17

To learn more about improving instruction, please explore the additional resources on the Doing What Works website.