

DOINGWHATWORKS



Video

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Motivating Reform With Quick Wins

Sam Redding, Ph.D. • June 2008

Topic: Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools

Practice: Quick Wins

Highlights

- Turning a school around should start with high-visibility “quick wins” to show the staff and community that change is possible.
- Engage the staff and community in identifying targets for these first changes.
- Turnaround leaders need to have cooperation and support from the district.

About the Interviewee

Sam Redding is the Executive Director of the Academic Development Institute and Director of the national Center on Innovation & Improvement. Sam holds a doctorate in educational administration from Illinois State University and is a graduate of Harvard’s Institute for Educational Management. He holds a master’s degree in psychology from Illinois State University and a master’s degree in English from the University of Illinois. He taught at the high school level in special education and social studies before teaching psychology and education at the college level. He served as the vice president and dean of Lincoln College until becoming the executive director of the Academic Development Institute in 1984. He has consulted with schools and districts throughout the country.

In addition to his work with ADI, Sam was a senior research associate of the Laboratory for Student Success at Temple University from 1995 to 2006. He is the executive editor of the *School Community Journal*. Sam has authored a book on continuous school improvement, edited books on restructuring and state systems, edited three books on home-school relations, and published numerous articles and book chapters on education topics. In 1994, Illinois State University awarded him the Ben Hubbard Leadership Award for his service to public education. He was similarly honored by the Illinois State Board of Education in 1990.

Full Transcript

Hello, my name is Sam Redding, and I am the Director of the Center on Innovation & Improvement, and we're in Lincoln, Illinois. We look for quick wins—ways that leadership can show to staff and community that problems that have existed prior to this can be addressed, can be solved in quick order, and so there is concrete evidence of improvement.

What types of immediate changes are appropriate in a turnaround school? First is to focus on that word “immediate.” They need to come about fairly quickly. Secondly, they need to be concrete and visible. Thirdly, they need to be something that's going to improve the daily situation of the people working in the building. And so we look for examples such as the physical appearance of the building. I have seen a situation where a principal thought that teachers needed some encouragement to share and work together and created a resource room in which it was well stocked with labeled materials, many of which had been produced by the teachers. But the leadership was able to make that room happen in short order, and it was a visible sign to teachers of the direction they were going. Addressing student discipline by putting administrators and deans and counselors and other staff in hallways to interact with students, to have a stronger presence, to give teachers confidence and assurance that things are improving. Examples might be a change in schedule, which could be a change in students' schedule if that is a problem that arises from the faculty. It could be a change in a teacher's schedule, and change in teacher's schedule is probably more likely to have the immediate effect that you are looking for in a quick win. Often times expectations are placed on teachers without adequate time to address them, so being able to change schedules to get teachers more planning time, to cluster teachers who are working together for planning time, that kind of thing can go a long way to help teachers see that things are changing.

How does the principal engage teachers, other staff and parents—the school community—in accomplishing quick wins? And the first answer to that might be to engage them in identifying the problems that would be addressed with the quick wins. The leader must be certain it's something that they can pull off. In other words, there's nothing more demoralizing and counterproductive than to set a quick win goal and then falter in the process. And so that often means that it's something that the leader thinks they can accomplish pretty much on their own or at least without having to have the cooperation, support, and engagement of

a large number of people that might yet not be on board. The point of it is to show that good things can happen in order to get them on board.

It's important to make immediate changes in a school in a turnaround situation to signal to the staff and the community that things can get better because just ahead you are going to be placing demands upon them and raising expectations, and people are going to be engaged in very difficult work. And so they need some insurance on the front-end that this is not the same old school, that things have changed, that things are going to improve both in terms of the working conditions of the people and, ultimately, in terms of the learning results for the students.