

Turnaround School Spotlight

One example of how CPS is increasing achievement at long-struggling schools

Sixth-graders sit in the hallway tutoring fourth-graders. Their voices are quiet, and flash cards are flipping this way and that. As a staff member approaches, she says, "Excuse me," before weaving her way through the cluster. The students continue; they seem to be oblivious to the intrusion.

Even though the hallways of Carson School are a "quiet zone," this exchange strikes a visiting principal from Sandusky, Ohio, as an example of why she wanted to tour this Turnaround School and see the success with her own eyes.

"Respect is huge in this building. You see it wherever you are between staff and teachers and children," observes Jill Wasiniak, principal of Ontario Elementary School in Sandusky. "You feel it when you walk through the front doors. Respect is part of the culture of the school."

The culture at Carson is one of high expectations and academic achievement, for students as well as teachers and administrators. The positive, encouraging tone permeates every aspect of the school day, from student instruction to professional collaboration, and is an integral part of the successful turnaround underway. In one year, Carson moved from being rated in Academic Emergency to Continuous

Improvement by the Ohio Department of Education, and this is just one measure that proves this new approach to education is working.

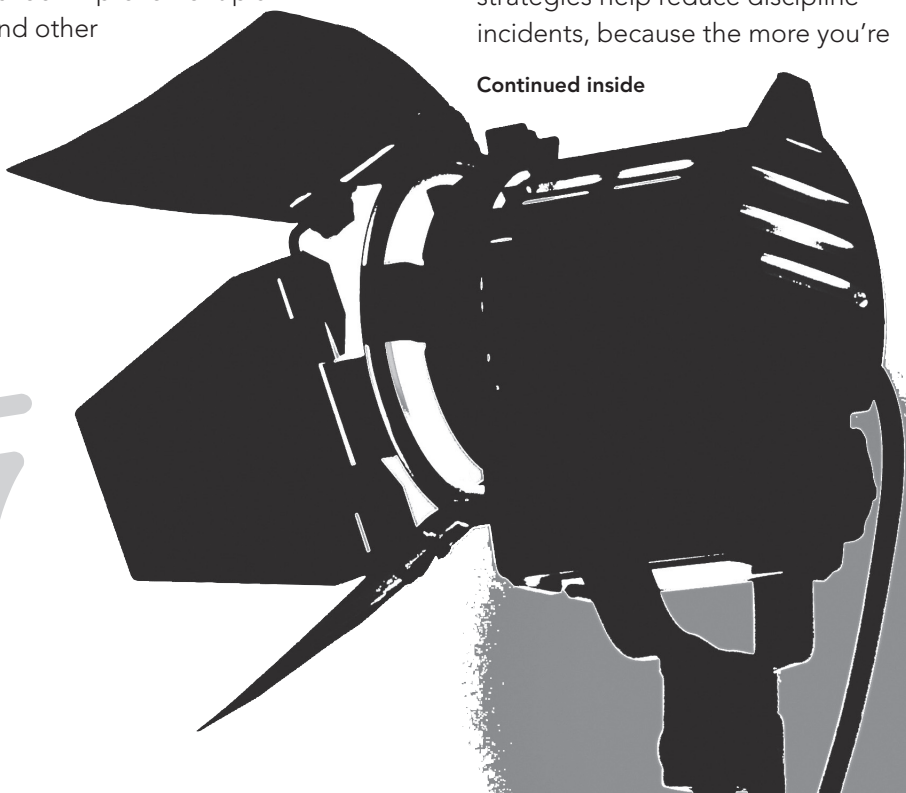
'It's all about the kids'

Identified as one of 16 underperforming schools in the district in 2008, Carson was singled out by CPS for the Turnaround School program. This meant adopting new approaches to teaching and learning, including intensive teacher coaching, extensive professional development training, extra funds essential for implementing a school improvement plan and other

support for turning an underachieving school into a successful educational institution. Principal Ruthenia Jackson is two years into leading this effort in partnership with the entire staff. The driving force behind her philosophy is simple: "It's all about the kids."

"The biggest part is understanding that there is no box to restrain us. We can do whatever we need to do to be successful in our school environment," Jackson says. "Being a Turnaround School helps bridge the achievement gap with all students – that includes students with special needs and gifted children. And, the strategies help reduce discipline incidents, because the more you're

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engaged, the fewer discipline problems you have.

“It takes a lot of hard work and collaboration. It takes everybody on the same page.” Jackson said.

The shared focus created a sense of purpose and excitement around a new form of instruction based on data. The process begins with analyzing measurable results, identifying what teaching methods achieved good results and building on those methods. It also includes figuring out what doesn’t work well and trying new approaches. The Data Room on the second floor at Carson is where the faculty meets to keep abreast of academic performance, attendance and other information critical to measuring the progress and success of each student, grade level and the entire school. Bulletin boards in the hallways display colorful graphs with performance measurements comparing various grade levels at Carson with performance at district and state levels. Individual data folders allow students to track their own progress.

However, tests are only one determination of academic success.

“We have a Do the Right Thing assembly every month,” Jackson explains. “If you’re following the rules, coming to school without being tardy, or you turn around a bad month and get on the right track, you can be nominated by a teacher.”

The students who attend the assembly are recognized for their efforts, and there is no limit to the number of times they can participate.

Teachers are also benefitting from opportunities for continuing education and professional coaching offered in a Turnaround School. Teaching coach Jeremiah Henson visits Carson twice a week and works with teachers one-on-one, in groups and as a school. He is there to reinforce strengths and augment professional development in ways that are specific to their needs for improvement. Being open to accepting help takes courage, and this is what makes the Carson teachers remarkable, according to Henson.

“They’re risk takers,” he says. “They have a willingness to try something out, even if they fail at it. They will try again and say, ‘How can I do this better?’ They know it’s all about the kids.”

Jackson also works closely with Henson, sharing her observations of teachers and working with him to find and put in place the tools needed to continue to improve the quality of instruction at Carson.

“The Mission is Possible” T-shirts that Deputy Superintendent Laura Mitchell had made for teachers at all 16 Turnaround schools reinforce the shared belief that a team approach makes public education good education.



Recognizing the whole child

The years of staff collaboration have resulted in innovations – small and large – that make Carson a model Turnaround School. Having a Parent Room at the front of the building makes it possible for family members to feel they are welcome and a part of the school in a visible way.

And to make sure parents have an opportunity to be active participants in helping their children succeed in school, parent-teacher conferences are now held in the middle of the term. Instead of the traditional model that focuses on past performance, these conferences reveal how teachers and parents can work as a team to support the academic achievement of students. It is a way to prevent small issues from turning into big problems or enrich a student’s efforts to get to the next level of learning.

The children also are more actively involved in the education going on at Carson. Every child knows what is supposed to be learned that day because the indicators are posted in the classroom. In the middle-school grades, the students have a daily syllabus of activities, expectations and performance measures.

Through the use of Academic Success Plans, a course of instruction is prepared for each child to address his unique strengths and weaknesses. Data folders are used

to track progress against that plan. Building on these factors are reinforcements throughout the building, including "I Will" statements that inspire students to think critically. What are you learning? How can you use this in real life? How do you know if your work is good? What can you do to improve?

When kids are having a rough day, they know they can go down to the Beech Acres room and talk to someone about their struggles. Whether the problem is with another student or something at home, Carson is designed to support learning and address life issues that affect learning.

"In this building, it's clear that academics are number one. You can

tell by the data and by what's happening in the rooms and what you're seeing on the bulletin boards and pieces of student work. It's everywhere," says Wasiniak.

"They've taken all the pieces and brought them together under one roof. You have the mental health component here on a daily basis. You have the parent component here on a daily basis. You have the security, but at the same time you're not using it as a threat. It's a family thing.

"That's a great model. Is that reality in a lot of places? No. I think Carson is an example. It's an example of educational funds being proven to be spent in a positive way to increase the knowledge and learning of kids."

Jackson believes the sky is the limit for Carson's success. Her next step is to establish a collaborative relationship between high school teachers and the seventh- and eighth-grade teachers. Other initiatives currently being developed will help ensure a successful transition to secondary education.



Ways You Can Help Schools Turn Things Around

Parents, education partners and members of the community all have a part to play in achieving the goals of a Turnaround School. Here are a few things you can do to be a part of the success...

Parents can:

- Register for Power School to stay up to date on your child's progress. Via the Internet, parents can view their children's academic records: assignments/grades, attendance and discipline.
- Attend parent/teacher conferences during the midterm sessions to learn how to help your child improve grades and/or continue to work with your child when lessons are going well.
- Encourage your child to attend tutoring sessions during the school day, as well as the Super Saturday sessions.
- Talk to your child about Benchmark testing results when schools send this information home.

Education Partners can:

- Provide volunteer tutors for one-to-one tutoring every day or a few days each week.

- Help schools find and write grants.
- Offer incentives (pens, crayons, paper, etc.) for students at the "Do the Right Thing" assemblies.
- Participate in Adopt-a-Class partnership.
- Offer support for resources we need to make the school success (i.e. Beech Acres counseling and education services).

Community members can:

- Volunteer to tutor students
- Give presentations about their professional careers
- Sponsor field trips to arts venues (museums, theaters, symphony) and workplace environments offering a hands-on approach to possible career opportunities.
- Visit the school to observe the efforts of the students and teachers and see the turnaround in action.
- Bring your group or club to the school for a tour to show off your Turnaround School.

Call your neighborhood school's office to learn more about these and other opportunities.

What is the Turnaround School Program?

Turning a school around takes a great deal of effort, a long-term commitment to change and the resources to support those doing the day-to-day work. The Turnaround School initiative provides universal support for all 42 elementary schools in the district, but it also means intensive support for 16 targeted schools, such as Carson.

The universal support strategies include:

- Using data and analysis to guide evidence-based decisions
- Expanding school-site Learning Teams (teams of teachers who work together to develop individualized strategies to raise achievement of the students they serve)
- Building teacher-led professional development in schools
- Training primary and intermediate content specialists
- Implementing a new principal evaluation system
- Becoming more family and community friendly

Intensive support strategies include:

- Extensive audits of the 16 target schools to determine,
 - Role of principal
 - Use of instructional time
 - Monitoring staff, student absenteeism
 - Observations of teaching
 - Instructional time
 - Percentage, number of students, types of disabilities
- Business, community partners
 - Realign resources
 - Focus 80% of Instructional Support Teams' (ISTs) time on 16 targeted schools
 - Deploy high school IST coaches to work with seventh- and eighth-grade teachers in targeted schools
 - Focus on core academic content

- Improve reading instruction
 - Small, flexible groups
 - Intervention and individual practice opportunities
 - Focus especially on getting struggling readers on track
- Extended Learning Time
 - Provide '5th Quarter' for targeted schools (extends school year by 4 weeks in June)
 - Evaluate Extended Learning Programs
- Academic Success Plans
 - Individual learning plans used to set goals for each student's improvement
 - Monitor, assess and record progress
 - Show need for practice, intervention or enrichment
 - Specify differentiated instruction to meet needs
- Early Childhood
 - Expand full-day preschool to all targeted schools
 - Target at-risk 4-year-olds to improve kindergarten readiness
- Principal Training
 - Professional development specifically designed for leadership at underperforming schools
 - Provide mentors from the business community



- Monitoring and Assessment
 - Progress review in February
 - Based on the assessment, if needed, revise School Assistance Plan developed from the audit, and teachers' individual and group learning plans

A more comprehensive list of the Turnaround School strategy is available for your review. Please visit www.cps-k12.org.

