

Bank Street Center on Culture, Race & Equity
Video Transcript: A Case Study on Systemic Change

It's time for afternoon announcements. Good afternoon brothers and sisters of Turner. As always we will end our day celebrating successes across the school. First and foremost, to shout out all of our student leaders. You know who you are. If you got caught in the act of demonstrating one of our core values today, respect, cooperation, or integrity, give yourself a big pat on the back, a nice hug or kiss your brains.

When I took over as Principal at Turner Elementary School in the school year of 2013-14, I realized very clearly that we had a lot of challenges. We have cohorts of students that demonstrated academic, social, and emotional challenges. I had a staff of teachers that had had limited opportunities to develop their capacity and understanding for how to match the needs of students with their practice.

And so, in the school year of 2014-15, we had an opportunity to partner with Bank Street and an African American males pilot program which provide opportunities for not only for our teachers to receive ongoing training and support on strengths based practices, trauma informed practices, how to best serve and teach and be responsive to our students but also sessions for families, where families could learn a bit more about children.

So our mission at the Center for Culture, Race and Equity at Bank Street College of Education is to support organizations in helping them to build capacity to be more culturally responsive to the needs of the children and the families that they serve.

The district itself wanted to look at schools that were in the highest need areas in the city. Turner Elementary School was one of the schools that we worked with and one of the schools that we found to have the greatest systemic change.

Prior to participation in the pilot we really had a deficit approach to providing intervention and being responsive to students. Our minds would shift and we began to think more about how can we leverage strengths, how can we make sure that we always hold an empathetic lens that we're understanding, that we're responsive?

And we do that really by focusing on the adult. Um, looking at changing the attitudes, the dispositions, the skills, and practices that the adults have in working with communities and families. It's not about fixing kids and families, but really looking at changing the mindsets of adults.

Black males represent 8% of students nationwide yet account for 25% of students who receive an out of school suspension.

They face more punitive punishment for school interactions and are far more likely to be referred to the juvenile justice system.

So I will say that that program experience for me was about learning about how to put names to some of the experiences that we have in the classroom and becoming more culturally aware of some of the biases that we have.

I think it definitely was a shift in the mind state and I think that came from, like I was saying, knowing the stats and a lot of these teachers are not from this area. A lot of these teachers, if they are from this area, they're definitely not from this neighborhood. So they just see it on the news as opposed to, you know, being told exactly where it's coming from. Being told how it's affecting their kid. Being told what's going to happen to their kid in 20 years. That makes it so personal, especially when you have a love for these children. Even if, even if you thought you were the best teacher in the world.

You're like you know what? There's some things I could tweak to make sure that every kid gets it as opposed to just kids who come in already happy, already positive. You have to get that other kid.

A lot of students we just looked at the external. Their behavior, things we don't like to see unfortunately. But when we change our lens and look at it from the strengths-based perspective, we look for that positivity in that child, we're able to see them from a positive light.

We reduce suspensions in our school by 60% from that first year to now. We've also been able to neutralize where many of our discipline referrals ...this is when a teacher says hey office, I need help, this is a bigger behavior problem than I can handle right now in the classroom. We've been able to reduce that each year by no less than 20% from those first two years. And over the past couple of years most of our behavior referrals are from an increasingly smaller cohort of students.

I also noticed teachers reaching out for more support regarding behavior interventions, regarding students. So before it was maybe an isolated situation but now there's more collaboration amongst school personnel.

So some examples of the positive changes I've seen are students are happy to walk into the classroom, happy to walk into the school door before they even get down the long hallway to the classroom. Parents who are like super excited to come in the classroom because their child will tell them they really want to be in school, so now that excitement has spilled over onto the family.

The pilot has definitely helped with bringing more sense of community within the school and when I say community I mean between teachers, students, and families. Being able to include families and parents in the plans that we come up with. Collaborating with them helps us to use a team approach and to come up with solutions to problems that we might have so that everybody does feel included and everybody does feel like their voice is heard.

Since participating in the workshop, my relationship with my kids teachers have improved greatly. I feel like it's important to have a strong relationship with your child's teacher because he's seeing the

teamwork between us, he sees that I'm comfortable so I think it escalated him on the charts. Like made him want to do his best. Me and his teachers working together to build him up.

When I step back and focus on a student's strengths, on what can you bring, you know, what is he trying to do? What is he looking for? And I'm able to assess that and pull that out of him. I'm able to intervene better as well.

African American students are valuable and important. I want to see them succeed. It doesn't always have to look like this, sitting at a desk or sit in a seat or sit in a chair type of learning. It can be learning that's engaging in many different formats and ways. And I think for me personally in my mindset, it shifted and allowed me to say, okay, let them learn where they are and meet them where they are. And really really embrace that process.

Since introducing the CCRE model in 2014, Turner Elementary has decreased discipline referrals by no less than 20% each school year.