

## **Becoming a Cheerleader for Change with Good Data**

**Principal Name:** Rhonda Shufford

**School:** Ensley Elementary School, Pensacola, Florida

**Number of Students:** 425

**Numbers of Teachers, Administrators, and Staff:** 62

**Length of Time as Principal:** Two Years

**Length of Time in The School Turnaround Program:** Two Years

When Rhonda Shufford began the School Turnaround Program at Ensley Elementary School in Pensacola, Florida in 2018, her biggest challenge was maintaining good teachers. “We had a high teacher turnover rate from the mid-year break until the end of the school year,” she said. “It was incredibly difficult to keep experienced teachers on our staff.” As the new principal at Ensley, Rhonda was eager to get the right resources in place to support her school of 425 students and 62 teachers, staff and administrators.

Fortunately, TRI stepped in at just right time to help Rhonda and her staff create a school environment that became ideal for learning. Rhonda shared, “I was so delighted when my district chose our school to participate in The School Turnaround Program.” From the start, she became laser focused on building better relationships with her students and staff, improving her students’ learning gains, and providing more professional development for her teachers.

Within her first year in the program, Rhonda and her staff helped their students achieve better test scores and make considerable improvements in their ELA and learning proficiencies. By the end of the second year in The School Turnaround program, the school went from an overall state grade of D to rising to a C.

One of the biggest outcomes for Rhonda was having the ability to lead her school based on the data. She said, “Having all of the data in one place gave me and my staff an increased sense of accountability. We were able to effectively improve students’ reading scores, and we created a system for a rewarding their students for their achievements.”

Rhonda also developed a system for consistently giving every teacher a mid-year interview. As a result, this created more professional development opportunities for her staff. “With the mid-year reviews, we were able to give our teachers professional development based where they requested more growth. Getting their buy-in was incredibly positive,” she shared.

By her second year at Ensley, some of Rhonda’s biggest gains included an increase in community involvement, welcoming new local business partners, improving parent participation, and providing new incentives to keep students motivated. “One of our local community partners

is Dairy Queen, and it has been great to partner with them to provide free ice cream cones and sundaes for students. These items are so small, but they are such a great incentive to keep our students motivated,” she shared.

Rhonda also saw the incredible value of providing consistent messaging for all her communication to her staff and parents. She said, “It’s been great to include the same message in all of our newsletters and connections with our parents. This consistent messaging has helped us gain new business partners for our student incentive program and helped us to have more clarity without parents about data as they support their children.”

One of the big tools that Rhonda will continue to use from The School Turnaround Program is maintaining her database. “I’ve been a principal for years and I never had a database. Using the data to make mid-course corrections helped me better support my staff and students.” She notes that keeping good data has also been great for identifying students who need more support, having individual data conversations with teachers and parents, and implementing mid-year reviews with all her teachers.

Rhonda noted that the biggest impact the program had on her role as a principal was refining the purpose of data in her work. “The School Turnaround Program truly helped me refine the role of data to focus on keeping education at the forefront. It forced me to truly sit and reflect on what I was doing,” she said.

With all the great tools Rhonda gained from The School Turnaround Program, she notes that she is more inspired than ever to continue motivating her staff and helping her students to achieve. She said, “After connecting with other principals and leaders within The School Turnaround Program, it gave me the energy to become a cheerleader for my teachers to keep them pumped up.” There is no doubt that with The School Turnaround Program behind her and the right data to keep her school moving in the right direction, Rhonda will continue to be a principal who leads powerfully with data and heart for years to come.