



CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Lennie Jones

Alain Locke Charter School – Chicago, IL



Lennie Jones was able to move the needle for all of her students during her tenure as the school leader at Alain Locke. It all started with Change Management, or ability to crystalize a clear goal and vision to her staff, get buy-in from the staff and continually make changes

as necessary. Lennie embraced the rally cry of “Absolute Excellence” and used that to motivate students, parents and staff. She also believes that all Alain Locke students should be “globally competitive.” This vision in action looks like exposure to rigorous curriculum, enrichment experiences, and high expectations for all stakeholders.

A report prepared by the U.S. Department of Education says that from 2001 to 2005, Alain Locke had the highest test score gains of any Chicago public elementary school.

By 2010, 89% of Alain Locke students met or exceeded expectations in reading and math on the ISAT.

Those numbers are even higher for eighth graders. In 2010, 95% of Alain Locke’s eighth graders met or exceeded ISAT standards in reading and 97% did the same in math.

Lennie achieved success by taking the “80-20 approach” - spending 80 percent of her time focused on 20 percent of the school’s possible priorities. Within the Change Management Objective, the leader must take time to write a Strategic Plan for the school that identified priorities for the year and strategies to achieve their goals.

Now that they had a focus, the next goal was obvious – ensuring that all the teachers were on the same page regarding academics and the route they intended to get there. As students grow, the staff re-assesses what the priorities should be for the coming year. Each year the Leadership Team plans the retreat around a single theme. The retreat that Alain Locke teachers attend each summer is an opportunity for the staff to discuss what’s working and what’s not. It’s their time to step back and say things like, “We need a new science textbook.” Or to ask questions like, “How can we supplement our current math program with more drills?”

#1 CHANGE MANAGEMENT

ACCELERATE FRAMEWORK OBJECTIVE 1

Strategic planning is used to guide change management with an 80/20 focus.

- 1. The main goal for the school and the plan to accomplish the goal** has been clearly articulated.
- 2. The entire staff is bought into the mission** and vision for the school.
- 3. Progress towards goals is monitored** to determine effectiveness of strategies.
- 4. Course correction occurs** as necessary to ensure that the most effective plan and strategies are implemented.
- 5. Staff time is appropriately focused** on the annual goals and the key strategies, while managing urgent matters effectively.

This is the chance that the staff takes to talk to each other and make suggestions.

Throughout the year, Ms. Woodson says it's easy to get sidetracked and lose focus. That's when they come back together and say, "This is what we've chosen to focus on this year." Ms. Woodson says initially the retreat focused on acquainting the staff with each other. In terms of curriculum it focused on making sure teachers understand how to teach standards with a high level of rigor. Now, she says, the retreat is about taking it to the next level. "Each year we try to build on what we've done the year before," she says. "Every year the students have gotten stronger." These days, instead of simply achieving proficiency in mathematics, junior high students attempt to become experts at algebra, in preparation for high school. The goal is no longer just to "meet expectations," Lennie says. "Meeting [expectations] can be a very low bar for some children. The real goal for us now is to help as many children achieve 'exceeds [expectations]' as possible. We want our children to exceed the standard in reading and mathematics."

HIGH-PERFORMING TEAM

Eva Stevens

Heatherbrae Elementary School – Phoenix, AZ



As is often the case in a traditional public school, Stevens inherited the existing staff when she started in her new role as principal at Heatherbrae. She made hires as vacancies arose, but a number of holdovers clung to the old ways of doing things and did not buy into her vision. "A lot

of people thought that what they were doing was OK. It didn't register with them that they should be different," she recalls. In Stevens' vision, the school would be one where every single student in every single classroom would be making progress. The environment would be one of constant learning for everyone involved—not only for the students, but for the teachers and parents as well. The relaxed atmosphere would be replaced with one ruled by



#2 HIGH-PERFORMING TEAM

ACCELERATE FRAMEWORK OBJECTIVE 2

The team is committed to the vision, strategies, and tactics to accomplish the goals.

- 1. Staff expectations** and non-negotiables are clear.
- 2. Staff is bought into the vision** of the school and is free of blockers or resisters.
- 3. A hiring process is conducted with clear alignment to staff expectations** and non-negotiables and the school is staffed to meet the needs of the students.
- 4. Onboarding and development of staff is systematic**, fosters buy-in and trust, and results in high levels of teacher retention.
- 5. Teachers are celebrated for their accomplishments** and progress toward school goals.
- 6. Performance levels are communicated directly and promptly to all staff.**
- 7. Staff is consistently held accountable** to job expectations.



high expectations. Howard, who was one of the teachers who welcomed Stevens' changes back in 2000 and remains a 4th-grade teacher today, remembers the difficulty in getting some members of the staff on board with that vision. "If I started a school and I had to endure some of the things she did, I don't know if I could have done it, to be honest with you," she says. "I used to think, how can she deal with this on a daily basis? There was quite a bit of resistance when she first arrived here."

At the end of the first year, a number of teachers left because they disagreed with the direction. Others stayed, though they were not entirely bought into the plan. "Some people may say they're on board and pretend they're on board, but when they go in their classrooms and close their doors, you don't know if they're on board. That was a challenge," Stevens says.



"You can't change their heart necessarily, but you can change behaviors. So we were aiming at changing behaviors right away," she says. That first year, the school registered a small increase in academic achievement. "Even though our scores were going up, I think it took three or four years before we moved our campus to the way our campus is today, simply because there were barriers that were just phenomenal in terms of attitudes, and of individual belief systems that were in conflict," Stevens says.

Case in point: She recalls one professional development session where a teacher adamantly insisted, in front of the staff: "I'm not going to do it." Stevens says she planted her feet, smiled and asked him to think about it, keep it to himself and that they would talk about it later. "I tried to address things calmly and respectfully but yet address them." She committed to not let little things slide, sending the message that common behaviors and respect was an important part of the school environment. But there were moments in staff meetings when certain staff members would intentionally disregard an agreed-upon norm. "I would take a post-it and I might write norm no. 1 and walk through very discreetly and put it in front of him or her because everyone at their table knew they had challenged the norm, so everyone at the table knew they were getting called on it," she says.

Individually, she would follow up through conversations about professional responsibilities and acceptable behavior. She'd encourage teachers to bring up anything they felt strongly about in that private conversation. "So little by little, I broke down that resistance," she says. Some teachers held onto the idea that their prep time should be their own, and they challenged the idea that they should have to attend team meetings or collaborate with other teachers. "It was a systems change that had to occur," Stevens adds.

Howard says after about three years, the people who remained on staff were mostly those who understood what Stevens was trying to accomplish.

The lesson Stevens learned? "Have a great sense of vision and a great sense of purpose, and really understand that everything not in alignment with that vision and purpose has to be dealt with."



CONSTRUCTIVE ENVIRONMENT

Eva Stevens

Heatherbrae Elementary School – Phoenix, AZ



The continuity from classroom to classroom is the result of Steven’s careful vigilance and the common elements that have been applied to each class. The urgency that the staff feel toward the mission can be seen in ways small and large throughout the school. Signs remind

teachers of the goal that 90 percent of kids will pass the state assessment. Stevens is a visible presence, reminding students what’s acceptable: “We don’t run on the sidewalk at Heatherbrae,” she says to two girls hurrying past her.

At one time, the classrooms were not so consistent, and students would be all over the place. “So we talked about what are some things that should be happening when kids come into the classroom in the morning?” Stevens says. The staff worked on morning routines that would give each student a step-by-step guide of what they should be doing.

One of the things Stevens never lets slip are things that could detract from the classroom environment. “If I’m walking down the hall and I hear a louder-than-usual voice I’ll step in and say, ‘Is there something wrong?’ That’s really important. I believe we have great climate and culture, but it is so delicate,” Stevens says. “It’s so difficult to build and so easy to lose.” Correcting it may entail just calmly asking a question that brings the teacher back into focus.

When students cause disruptions in class, teachers use the “Make Your Day” system. The first time the teacher has to correct a student, he or she is separated from the group to think about what happened. Teachers return and they discuss a more appropriate choice. Eventually students who continue to misbehave may get sent out of the room to another classroom if they are too disruptive. If they’re sent out of the room, a phone call home is made. But DeSantis says teachers try not to leave the children in the other classroom too long because they are missing

#3 CONSTRUCTIVE ENVIRONMENT

ACCELERATE FRAMEWORK OBJECTIVE 3

A highly constructive learning environment exists that supports academic productivity.

- 1. Expectations** and behavior management systems that support high levels of academic productivity are clear.
- 2. The entire staff** is bought into the behavior management system used to holding students accountable.
- 3. All classrooms** have established an environment that is conducive to learning.
- 4. Staff members are held accountable** to upholding the behavior management system and hold students accountable.
- 5. The behavior management system works** for most students.
- 6. Interventions are available** for students who do not respond to school behavior management system.



instruction.

Celebrations are worked into the fabric of the day through daily announcements, which spotlight achievements on things such as the weekly assessments. Students sing the Heatherbrae song which is set to “It’s a Small World” and touches on each student being part of the important Heatherbrae community. The school hosts regular red carpet celebration assemblies to recognize students for academic achievement and for making progress.

The staff is also using “The Leader in Me,” which is a schoolwide program that draws from “7 Habits of Highly Effective People” to help create a common language about successful habits, setting goals and meeting them, being responsible, and showing initiative.

Through high expectations of staff and students, Eva Stevens was able to change the culture of the school and increase academic productivity in all of her classrooms. This increase in academically productive time on task and high levels of student engagement is what set the stage for high levels of academic achievement at Heatherbrae Elementary.

ASPIRATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Lennie Jones

Alain Locke Charter School – Chicago, IL



When Lennie Jones retired she started packing things up. There were papers to bring home, photos and drawings to be boxed up, files to be handed off to the new principal. Office is almost packed, but one item remains firmly in place - a laminated copy of her

son’s straight-A freshman year grade report from Harvard University sits on her desk to inspire her to the very end. Lennie’s two children are both graduates of Ivy League universities - her daughter attended the University of Pennsylvania. Lennie expects that each child entrusted to her care will flourish in a similar fashion. This is the essence of the culture at Alain Locke – the belief that all children can learn when they are held to high expectations. Walk the halls at Alain Locke and it becomes clear that the students here are clearly ambitious. Outside a first grade classroom, student-drawn posters indicate what students want to be when they grow up. One boy wants to be a lawyer. One girl wants to be a cardiologist. To get there they say where they will attend college and law and medical school.

#4 ASPIRATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

ACCELERATE FRAMEWORK OBJECTIVE 4

A highly aspirational learning environment exists that honors student experience while inspiring future accomplishments.

- 1. Vision, values, and goals** for students are clear and inspiring.
- 2. Students want to come to school** because they feel known and cared for.
- 3. Students are recognized** for their growth and achievement.
- 4. Social emotional learning curriculum** helps students develop self-regulation, positive relationship building, and decision-making skills.
- 5. Exposure to college, career, and enrichment experiences** outside of the school community inspires student investment in learning.
- 6. Families are valued** for their contributions and offered opportunities to engage in the school community.





This is another hallmark of Alain Locke – students and teachers are encouraged to dream big but they must have a plan to get from point A to point B. The principal’s job is to make sure that this culture permeates every aspect of the school and that these hallmarks are clear to children. Even with an extended school day – from 8:30 until 5:00 – there is no time to waste at Alain Locke. Kids read books while they wait in line for the bathroom. Anything and everything becomes an opportunity to teach students a lesson.

When Lennie first visited Alain Locke, she remembers it being chaotic. Kids were running around and there seemed to be lots of fights and squabbles. She was bothered by the way children talked to teachers. So, she says, “We had to set norms about how we talk to each other and adults.” She asked parents, students, and teachers to sign a contract of commitment to “absolute excellence.” The contract binds teachers and parents to model a positive attitude for students. In return students must take ownership and responsibility for their own learning and behavior.

Every Wednesday morning at Alain Locke, the 550-plus student body and sixty-plus staff members meet in the school’s gymnasium to share good news. The all-school meeting is called Harambee (pronounced “huh-rom-BAY”), which is Swahili for “coming together.” It’s a short meeting – fifteen minutes at most – where everyone from pre-kindergarten through eighth grade stands in a circle.

During Harambee, Lennie stands in the center of the gym with a wireless microphone. She paces and pivots so that everyone can see her, a beacon of positive energy. She recognizes students’ birthdays. She congratulates students who have done well in their extracurricular activities and thanks those who have gone above and beyond to help the school. Students and teachers applaud each other’s successes.

Lennie tells teachers to be sensitive to kids’ home lives. Due to historical and structural inequities that pervade our country, students in underserved communities have to keep this context in mind when working with the families and students at their schools. Lennie was no different, she understood the structures that existed, but continued to model and have high expectations for all students everyday. Lennie created the common language around Absolute Excellence because she knew what was truly possible for her students to achieve.



DATA-DRIVEN CULTURE

Shantelle Wright

Achievement Prep – Washington, D.C.



Shantelle Wright's dream has had a large impact on the students and families at her school. Achievement Prep is one of the highest-ranked schools in Washington D.C. when it comes to both student achievement on standardized tests and the progress that students make over

time. How does Achievement Prep accomplish such great results? They prioritize the use of data.

"Teachers use the Common Core standards to create their curriculum alignment templates, going through every single Common Core standard and thinking about what objectives will need to be taught," says teacher, Erica Franklin. On Fridays, students take weekly "Show What You Know" quizzes based on the week's objectives. The results are entered into a database. The following Monday, after students are dismissed at 4 p.m., teachers gather for their weekly "data day." Everyone's data is thrown up on the board. Teachers divide into grade-level teams. "We put it on the screen from every grade and class and use that data to form 'Results' groups," says head of school, Shantelle Wright. The first 45-50 minutes, the staff is parsing the data to create plans for that week's "Results Hour," deemed one of the keys to the school's success. Results Hour is an intervention block held every morning to help students with whatever skills they're not mastering. In addition, every 6-7 weeks, classes take their interim assessments, which Achievement Prep gets through the Achievement Network, a nonprofit that provides testing and then coaching on how to use that data.

Results Hour aims to give teachers a chance to respond to the data. "There's always this big push around data, and it to inform instruction and using the data to create a rigorous action plan of how you're going to intervene, or how you're going to remediate, or how you're going to accelerate based off what your data says," Wright says. But schools often don't provide teachers with the time to do



#5 DATA-DRIVEN CULTURE

ACCELERATE FRAMEWORK OBJECTIVE 5

Assessment data is used to drive differentiation.

- 1. Purpose and expectations** of schoolwide data processes are clear.
- 2. Staff is bought into using data** to differentiate instruction.
- 3. Valid and reliable assessments that match Common Core/College Readiness Standards** for all grades and content have been adopted.
- 4. Timely, leader- and teacher-owned processes** are conducted to assess, analyze, and act on data at the school-wide and individual student level.
- 5. Teachers are held accountable** to analyzing and using data.



all of this, she says. “(You should) be responsive to data, let that data inform your instruction, but still continue with the scope and sequence, still continue with your yearly plans, your weekly plans. Don’t miss your pacing guides. I just thought that was crazy. How can you do both?” she says. “We can’t expect teachers to actually respond to their data if we don’t then provide time within their day in order to implement.”

Every adult in the building is used to maximize the adult-to-scholar ratio, as every adult is responsible during results. The administration tries to set it up so teachers from certain content areas can lead the groups in those subjects, either pushing ahead with remediation plans, acceleration, or additional practice. In Results, sometimes teachers may have a whole class reteach, to correct a misconception. “The teacher obviously taught it, but (students) didn’t learn it, so at our school, you didn’t teach it. It’s not just about ‘Oh, I taught it. They just didn’t get it,’” Wright says. “At our school we say, ‘you didn’t teach, you have to do it again.’” Results Hour is the first class in the morning, scholars are more alert, teachers more fresh, so “it’s not about trying to make up for the day,” Wright says. “It starts the scholars off and teachers off being able to find some instantaneous success.”

If a math teacher receives “Show What You Know” quiz data and can tell that of her two sections, about 15 students really did not grasp multiplying fractions with like denominators, she can set to work with her partner teacher on targeting that idea in Results. The other teacher may not be a math teacher, but the two will collaborate to devise a lesson plan. Results may be used to push the rigor with one group, and re-drill the issue with the other. Wright says on average, groups end up with a ratio of 10 students for every adult, and that teachers also work in smaller groups within the class. “We really just dissect the data and whatever the data tells us, we respond to it,” she says.

BLACK BELT TEACHING

Lamont Browne

Eastside Charter School – Wilmington, DE



Lesson plan templates guide teachers to think through how they’re going to introduce the learning goal, engage the students in the initial activity and so on. “With the templates, teachers can make sure every part of their lesson plan is planned out to eliminate lag time,”

Staab says. On Thursdays, teachers turn in lesson plans for the week ahead. Instructional coaches review them and flag areas where activities may take longer than the teacher anticipates, then offer ideas on how to tighten them.

For the first few years, teachers created their own curriculum, pulling from various existing programs because students were so far below grade level and



had so many diverse needs, according to Staab. As the school transitioned to Common Core, the staff adopted EngageNY, created by the New York State Education Department to support schools moving toward the Common Core and data-driven instruction. “The program is comprehensive but doesn’t box the teachers in,” Staab says. “It gives you all the standards you have to teach, all the materials, all the books you need but you determine the pacing, you determine when you do what activities, everything’s editable,” she says. The leadership team also appreciated that the curriculum was aligned from grade level to grade level. So what a student learns in third grade matches what he or she is going to learn in fourth grade. Backward planning is key, and during orientation, teachers are led through sessions on the importance of curriculum mapping, writing unit plans and aligning them to Common Core State Standards. They also receive training on connecting assessments to those standards.

The six-week assessment cycle helps teachers check in with, and stay on top of, students who may show signs of a struggle. Whelan says that once assessment results are in, the teachers assign each student to the appropriate level so they can be properly grouped. Meetings and professional developments are used to sharpen data analysis skills and help teachers better use the results to place students in the right groups.

As the staff drives toward a goal of students leading their own learning, small groups play a large role. “For that to happen, there has to be collaborative groups happening and concentric circles and students working in partners and pairs,” Whelan says. The staff attempts to revise small groups about every six to seven weeks.

With weekly professional development time set aside on Friday afternoons, Browne and the leadership team organize the calendar for professional development before the school year starts. It’s built off the goals the leadership team has set for the year. For example, one year the three goals were: mastery of standards and skills, student character and high-quality student work, and the professional development calendar reflected that.

#6 BLACK BELT TEACHING

ACCELERATE FRAMEWORK OBJECTIVE 6

Teachers effectively plan and implement the curriculum.

- 1. Curriculum includes a vertical scope** and sequence aligned to standards and guides teacher planning.
- 2. Teacher and student schedules** maximize student learning and teacher development.
- 3. Whole group instruction** is engaging, rigorous, and aligned to standards.
- 4. Students receive individualized or small group instruction** based on assessment outcomes.
- 5. Data trends** from assessments, observations, and walkthroughs are used to support teacher effectiveness through whole school professional development.
- 6. Staff receive frequent coaching** and valuable feedback on their teaching performance.





But the leadership remains flexible, especially if regular visits to the classroom spotlight gaps that might be buildingwide. “When Dr. Browne meets with us, he’ll ask us what are those themes underneath those umbrella items and I’ll say you know since I’ve observed this week 4 out of the 10 teachers are really struggling with questioning, we’ll think about is this something we can offer as professional development to the teachers because that’s going to help close another gap?” Valentin says.

Each EastSide teacher is assigned an instructional coach with a goal of bi-weekly observations. During regular meetings, the coach offers detailed feedback according to the Teaching Excellence Framework, a teacher evaluation and professional development program. During feedback meetings, the coach starts by highlighting something positive from the observation. “Sometimes our best people are the ones who push themselves the most and don’t realize how they’ve been successful, so having every meeting like that, I think helps maintain this positive environment where we’re pushed to be our best but also celebrated for how successful we’ve been,” Browne says. Praise is followed with questions designed to spark self-reflection. Together, teacher and coach develop an action plan, then plot out how they will monitor execution of the plan.

The inclusion of one specific action step helps teachers better focus their energies, staff members say. After one session, Reffuge says she knew there were about 20 different things the coach could have flagged for improvement during her observation. “But she picked out one main thing, which was aligning my lesson more to the objective than I had,” Reffuge says. “They give you one action step to take so you’re not overwhelmed and it’s manageable.”

