

National Blue Ribbon Schools U.S. Department of Education 2015 Terrel H. Bell Awardees Video *Conversations* Transcript



“Aha!” Moments

Rosalba De Hoyos, [Achieve Early College High School](#), McAllen, TX: My Aha! moment was when my view of the role that I played in a system changed from “I” to “we. As an assistant principal I started, I had to look at the whole picture. I had to see from one corner of the school to the other corner. I had to think about safety, I had to think about curriculum, about how to meet our goals, about how children are coming to school, the affective, the emotional part of that, the cognitive part of that, not only my students but also my staff and then my parents, my visitors—so it’s a we, we mentality, now that I have obtained, now that I am a principal.

James Heater, [Esther F. Garrison School of Visual and Performing Arts](#), Savannah, GA: The best aha moment that I’ve probably had is when I had a student um in who was in middle school a while back, unfortunately, her brother was shot. And when that person called me to want to attend the child’s funeral because we had made a difference in her life and in his life, I knew that as an educator, that as a member of our society, that we are making a difference. And that was something that I’ll never ever lose and I’ll never ever be able to explain the feeling that we have in helping another human being attain what they need to attain in society.

Irma Trosclair, [South Crowley Elementary School](#), Crowley, LA : I think the moment that I thought that, “Okay, I got this,” —although there’s no moment where you’ve really got it all, but —is when I remember the advice of someone really close to me years ago who said, “As long as you make decisions in the best interest of children, all of your questions become much clearer.” It’s not an adult business, it’s a kids’ business, and so anytime there’s a tough decision or a tough discussion that I have to have with someone, I ask myself, “What decision will best service children?”

Jon Cerny, [Bancroft-Rosalie Elementary School](#), Bancroft, NE: There are a couple of things that I think really helped me become a better principal. And the first was going through the Reading First process; we were a Reading First school. And learning about um the importance of fidelity of programs and making sure that you’re implementing any new program with fidelity. The second thing that was important in my development was contracting with the National Institute for Direct Instruction. They taught me the importance of using data to make decisions and not relying on gut instinct.

Janell Uerkwitz, [Murdock Elementary School](#), Lafayette, IN: I think that the moment I came to realize that my decisions could not be driven by anything but what is best for children. And so while a lot of other things matter and are important, the bottom line is, what's best for each child. Really, a difficult thing to grapple with sometimes, but it also helps me keep my focus.

Edna Coia, [Francis J. Varieur Elementary School](#), Pawtucket, RI: I became a teacher under very good principals, and some not very good principals. What I did is that I take everything from those good principals and I also remembered things from those not so good principals and do the opposite of those! And for me, that is the moment that I believe is the Aha! Moment in my life. That after serving for those many years as a classroom teacher, I told myself, "I need to be of service to a bigger population." And that bigger population is more students, more parents, and more teachers. That's why, that's the time that I realize that I really want to be a principal.

Heidi Smith, [Frank L. Huff Elementary School](#), Mountain View, CA: I'm not sure there's ever a moment when you figure you figured it all out. Teaching and learning is so dynamic, right? What you think you know and what you've mastered this day may completely change the following, based on new learning, or a challenge that's presented. But if there's ever a point where I felt an Aha! I've got it! I think it was the time or the moment when I realized that you can't do this alone. And leadership and movement of schools is done by many. It's about togetherness and a focus towards excellence and uplifting every child. I think that's the Aha.