

- JOHN MERROW            Boushall Middle School in Richmond, Virginia. With misbehavior rampant among its 700 mostly low-income students, and half of them scoring below basic on state tests, something had to be done. Last fall, Virginia put Parker Land in charge. Recruited from the suburbs, he was one of two dozen principals trained by the state to take over schools stuck at the bottom. Virginia calls these principals "turnaround specialists."
- PARKER LAND            It's not a huge mystery as to how to turn schools around. It's leadership, establishing a basic understanding of respect among all parties, and that includes students, and somebody had to do it. I mean, it's really -- one of the things I really don't want to sound like is a missionary. I do not want to sound like a missionary, but I have a mission.
- LOIS SMITH              You're not respecting me.
- JOHN MERROW            Within weeks, the mission was in doubt.
- LOIS SMITH              You know the right thing to do.
- JOHN MERROW            Many teachers, like Lois Smith, found it impossible to teach.
- LOIS SMITH              Excuse me! You're talking on my time. Right now, these children don't have respect for themselves, so they're not going to have respect for me, and they're not going to have respect for their other classmates.
- TAYRON TAYLOR         A lot of students don't pay attention in class because I don't think the teachers are putting forth effort to make us feel interested in class. If they had more activities, you know, more fun things to do in class, 90 percent of us would be doing our work.
- JOHN MERROW            Within months, Boushall appeared to fall apart.
- SHA-CORA ALLEN        There was basically a fight every single day; it was fight after fight after fight.
- TZSHAY WADE            And I almost got caught up in a fight once. I was heading to my locker, and I hear somebody say, "Hit him!" And then I turned around, and they were getting them serious faces, and I knew I had to get out of there.
- JOHN MERROW            Land was spending all his time putting out fires.
- PARKER LAND            I can't stand failure, and it feels like failure, is what it feels like. You folks are in charge of their behavior.
- JOHN MERROW            Land asked his teachers to come up with solutions.
- PARKER LAND            You will be working to get their behavior back on track. The stopper is the team.

What's the commitment?

MADIETH MALONE I think a lot of us were not sure exactly what was going on.

JOHN MERROW English teacher Madieth Malone.

MADIETH MALONE Many people voiced that they thought that a turnaround specialist was basically a person that'd come in and tell everybody what needs to be done and do it.

JOHN MERROW Yours is the first response.

LOIS SMITH I'm not sure if he really knew what he was getting into. I don't know if he realized what the inner-city student was like.

JOHN MERROW As the slide continued, Land became increasingly uncomfortable. In late November, he put a stop to our filming. Four months would go by before we'd get another look inside.

JOHN MERROW In January, Virginia's turnaround specialists met in Charlottesville for two days of training. Parke Land was there.

JOHN MERROW A fair amount of the time during some of the lectures, you looked as if you were somewhere else?

PARKER LAND Yes, I'm constantly thinking about Boushall, I can tell you that. I'm constantly thinking about, "OK, Boushall, Boushall, Boushall."

JOHN MERROW So you're here, but you're not here?

PARKER LAND I'm here, and my spirit is back in Richmond.

JOHN MERROW When we left Boushall Middle School in late November, things seemed out of control. Principal Parker Land invited us back in early April to see whether anything had changed.

HALL MONITOR: Come on, bro.

HALL MONITOR Let's go girls. Let's go.

JOHN MERROW One difference was immediately obvious: Boushall was quiet.

SHA-CORE ALLEN I can focus more on my classes, because I don't hear all the noise in the hallways and all the fights.

JOHN MERROW Teachers had agreed to monitor the hallways.

- PARKER LAND We've reduced the fighting, but not to the point where anybody feels that we're successful. The tendencies are there, but I think what you're seeing is more of a calmness.
- JOHN MERROW Land also had started rewarding good behavior.
- ERNEST SWAN We had, like, two day assists (ph) already, which was for the people who have not got a referral, and I think that helped people try to stay out of fights and all that.
- PARKER LAND I believe that kids respond to positive rewards. We're going to stroke our kids who do their homework, who don't cut class, and all the kinds of things that we know make kids successful in school.
- JOHN MERROW All along, Land preached success.
- ERNEST SWAN Every morning, he's trying to shake somebody's hands to say good morning, trying to build their confidence up for the day.
- SHA-CORE ALLEN He comes and visits our classrooms. He sits down and gets into the lesson plan. And it really makes me feel good, because I know that he cares.
- STUDENT And the teachers are teaching better because Mr. Land is constantly in my classes.
- LOIS SMITH If you can take your answers and fill them in...
- JOHN MERROW When we were here at the beginning of the year, you kept having to say, "Excuse me. Excuse me." You didn't say that as much today.
- LOIS SMITH Exactly. I've changed some strategies in my classroom.
- JOHN MERROW Land worked with struggling teachers, like Lois Smith.
- LOIS SMITH The children were having a big problem working by themselves. I put them in groups of two. They would try to work together, because both are going to have the same grade. That worked. I'm willing to change if it works for the students.
- JOHN MERROW What has not changed at Boushall is Land's management style.
- TEACHER Here's our mission: Promote positive growth...
- JOHN MERROW Rather than tell teachers what to do, he still seeks consensus.
- PARKER LAND You're much more effective when everybody is taking responsibility. We will never be where we need to be until everybody is looking for problems and trying to find solutions.

- MADIETH MALONE All of us need to take responsibility, need to buy into the success of the school. But there are issues, there are instances where you need one person who says, "The buck stops here," and he needs to be that person.
- TEACHER We just need to re-state that we're going to do the plan.
- TEACHER Let's move on, find a goal...
- MADIETH MALONE I don't think we need to have a committee meeting on everything. The changes that are taking place, I think, are taking place a lot slower this year. I would like to have been at this point four months ago.
- PARKER LAND Are we where I would like to be right now? No. It's a slower process -- probably a slower process that I had originally wanted.
- JOHN MERROW Now, Lois Smith, I guess the bottom-line question is: Is Boushall a better school today than it was when school started back in September?
- LOIS SMITH That's a hard question to answer. And, to be honest, I can't just say it's better. Some days it's better, and some days it's not.
- JOHN MERROW Are you having more good days than bad days?
- LOIS SMITH They're about the same. I would say 50-50.
- TZSHAY WADE Kids are still being disrespectful, roaming the halls, talking about pimping and stuff like that.
- STUDENT Nothing's really changed. It's just fights have gone down.
- TAYRON TAYLOR If you really want to turn the school around, you would make classes more interesting.
- MADIETH MALONE In order for him to be a turnaround specialist the way I understand turnaround specialists, he has to turn around the attitudes that teachers have; he has to turnaround parents' attitudes; and he has to turn the attitudes of the community as they perceive our school family. He has a lot of turning around to do.
- PARKER LAND In a sense, there's a turnaround going on here. There really is. But the term "turnaround" kind of connotes something dramatic, you know? But I don't know if it's so dramatic. I don't think it's going to be that dramatic. I think it's little victories that you win on a daily basis.
- JOHN MERROW Parke Land, gradual turnaround specialist?
- PARKER LAND Gradual turnaround specialist, maybe so. We'll see.

JOHN MERROW      But a gradual turnaround may not be good enough to satisfy the state of Virginia, which is looking for passing scores on the state tests just around the corner.

JIM LEHRER      And in part four later this summer, how the students performed on those tests and why Principal Land won't be running Boushall Middle School next year.