One course caused a cataclysm. When a group of teachers at Madison Elementary School in Wauwatosa, Wis., attended a class to examine test data, they started a change process that led the whole school to learn differently — from teachers to students.

Beginning with data and moving to whole-faculty study groups, change happened almost immediately as teachers gained power over their own professional learning. Now teachers and students are benefiting as teachers work together to improve their practices and more students achieve on state standardized tests, reaching proficient and advanced levels.

The process began at the end of 2001-02, when eight staff members volunteered to represent Madison Elementary at a district-level data retreat class. The team set out to analyze standardized test data and decide on school goals for the following year. However, because 4th-grade state test results from winter 2002 were delayed, the team had a problem. The usual target — identifying subgroups where achievement lagged — couldn’t be accomplished. We wouldn’t be able to see annual growth, either.

Instead, we analyzed state test data for 4th-grade reading, language arts,
Study groups set goals FOR MADISON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL FACULTY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study groups set goals</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Senior kindergarten/speech and language</strong></td>
<td>Students will be able to clearly communicate a message through verbal responses, emergent writing, and retelling simple stories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Junior and senior kindergarten</strong></td>
<td>Junior and senior kindergarten students will construct play plans through drawings and emergent writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade 1</strong></td>
<td>Students will increase fluency and independent reading levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade 2 and special education</strong></td>
<td>Students will improve their retelling and comprehension skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grades 3 and 4</strong></td>
<td>Students will increase comprehension using multiple strategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade 5 and special education</strong></td>
<td>Students will improve reading and responding to a wide range of reading materials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specialists</strong></td>
<td>Students will understand how they learn to improve their own achievement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aides</strong></td>
<td>Special needs students will increase their ability to communicate with the Madison School community through various communication devices.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DAWN M. REPETTI is principal of Madison Elementary School. You can contact her at the school, 9925 W. Glendale Ave., Wauwatosa, WI 53225, (414) 773-1400, fax (414) 773-1420, e-mail: repettda@wauwatosa.k12.wi.us.
We realized that if all seven
teams analyzed data and
wrote their own action
plans, work on our school’s
goal would be multiplied by
seven.

Social studies, science, and math from
the three prior years, 1999-01, and
found students showed improvement
in four of the five content areas. Our
school also showed improvement com-
pared with district, state, and national
averages in four of five content areas.
The one area that stood out was read-
ing. Our reading scores were below
the district average, and we did not
show the regular growth we saw in the
other subject areas.

Because we looked at the three-
year trend rather than a single year’s
growth, we had an “aha” moment. We
realized during the two-day retreat
that we wanted to re-create this data
analysis experience for other staff
members. We didn’t want to merely
share the reading data — we wanted
the entire staff to make the informa-
tional discoveries that we did. In this
way, we felt, staff members would be
more committed to our school’s aca-
demic learning goal based on their
own concrete data
analysis.

We decided to
plan our August
2002 school pro-
fessional develop-
ment around a
mini-data retreat
designed to help us
set school goals
based on data. For our staff develop-
ment to have a profound effect on
student achievement, we wanted all
staff to buy in to one focus: reading.

We began our two half-day ses-
sions by analyzing state test data as a
staff. Again, reading emerged as the
most pressing area. Together, we then
wrote a student performance improve-
ment goal with a measurable out-
come: “Students at Madison
Elementary School will improve their
ability to read and respond to a wide
range of writing in order to build an
understanding of written materials,

We shared the study team concept
and connected the data to district and
staff development with a connection
to our data analysis team’s work and the
school’s professional learning.

Their decisions and plans would drive
the school’s professional learning.

Teams looked at additional read-
ing data relevant to their grade level
and connected the data to district and
state standards. We analyzed the 3rd-
grade Wisconsin Reading
Comprehension Test and the 2nd-
grade Terra Nova reading scores.

Grade-level teams evaluated our dis-
trict-level reading assessments based
on individual student results.

Then each team set a goal and
developed an action plan. Each action
plan focused on how the team could
address the school goal of improving
reading. Each action plan/goal
addressed the team’s professional
learning, included analysis of student
work/assessments, identified areas for
improvement, and proposed appro-
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bers also had the option of using their
study team goal as a personal profes-
sional growth goal for their evalua-
tions.

As a staff, we agreed to allot half
of our school-based staff development
time to study groups. Each team had
one to two hours every month for its
work. We hired substitutes and used
building staff development days to
provide this time. Teams that wanted
additional time could use their grade-
level planning time. Most teams
scheduled additional meeting times to
keep the flow of their work continu-
ing on a regular basis. They met
before school, during working lunch-
es, or after school. The study team
meeting times were spread out over

advanced and proficient on the 4th-
grade Wisconsin Knowledge and
Concepts Exam.” (See chart on p. 28.)
Our target was to reach that per-
centage that year, meaning our 4th-
grade teachers faced intensive work
and our K-3 grade teachers really
needed to evaluate their instructional
levels since the 4th-grade assessment
was a measure of students’ earlier
experience.

Earlier in the summer, the school
resource team (library media specialist,
learning coordinator, reading spe-
cialist, and principal) had connected
our data analysis team’s work and the
whole-faculty study group model of
Carlene Murphy and Dale Lick
(2001). The team had been responsible
for setting school goals and decid-
ing on professional development top-
ics. We wanted more value from our
staff development with a connection
to improved student learning and an
increase in teacher reflective practice.
We shared the study team concept
with the faculty.

With the group’s concurrence, we
created the structure for study groups.
This is where the real power began to

Madison Elementary School
Wauwatosa, Wis.

Grades: Early childhood to 5th
Enrollment: 354
Staff: 50
Racial/ethnic mix:

White: 76%
Black: 13%
Hispanic: 4.5%
Asian/Pacific Islander: 6%
Native American: 0.3%
Other: 0%

Limited English proficient: 6.5%

Languages spoken: Cantonese,
Hmong, Punjabi, Gujarati, Ibibio,
Spanish, Russian

Free/reduced lunch: 10%
Special education: 15%
Contact: Dawn Repetti, principal
9925 W. Glendale Ave.
Wauwatosa, WI 53225
Phone: (414) 773-1400
Fax: (414) 773-1420
E-mail: repettid@wauwatosa.k12.wi.us

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the school year and came to about 14 hours of time dedicated to the teams' action plans. We took the approach that this work was similar to a two-credit graduate course and required a similar time commitment. Most teams met about every other week.

One team decided to read Boys and Girls Learn Differently! A Guide for Teachers and Parents, by Michael Gurian (Jossey-Bass, 2002). Although the book is not specifically related to reading, it helped a team of teachers understand how boys and girls learn differently and helped them identify strategies to support this diversity of learning. Examining gender differences in theory led team members to disaggregate test data to look for a possible gender gap. They then helped the whole staff with methods to assess academic progress in other subgroups.

Other study teams chose The Art of Teaching Reading, by Lucy McCormick Calkins (Longman, 2000), Strategies that Work: Teaching Comprehension to Enhance Understanding, by Stephanie Harvey and Anne Goudvis (Stenhouse Publishers, 2000), and Scaffolded Literacy Development in the Kindergarten Classroom, by Elena Bodrova, Deborah J. Leong, Diane E. Paynter, & Carol Hughes (Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning, 2001).

Different team members took turns facilitating each study group meeting. The facilitator recorded notes on a study group log. They noted on the log what needed to be done before their next meeting, when they'd meet, who would lead the meeting, and what student work would be analyzed. Each team member took a turn as discussion leader and recorder. The person acting in these roles then copied the log sheet for team members and the principal so that the work could be connected, supported, and reported to the school community and school board.

Team members concentrated on identifying, organizing, and interpreting data, and their achievements were measured and compared throughout the year. Sometimes staff development can seem disconnected from what is happening in the classroom. Teachers learn something, and they may not have time to make it happen. Because teams worked together to decide what they would do over the next few weeks and what information they would bring back to the team to share, they felt a higher level of commitment to changing their instruction. They had to bring their results back to the team.

CONCLUSION

Fourth-grade teacher Laura Honish said study teams created stronger professional connections and collaboration in four months than teachers had experienced in years together. Working in a study group gave her time to talk, share, and hear about techniques her colleagues use.

Study groups have resulted in more time spent on professional development, greater focus on a common school goal, and creation of a structure that honors personal choice and professional commitment. The staff development through study teams reflects how teachers feel they can best impact the learning of the students they serve. At the same time, it is helping our educators grow from where they are professionally to where they want to be.

From the impetus of a data retreat to creating whole-faculty study teams, changes in our professional development have helped increase our capacity as a school learning community.

REFERENCE