



Data contribute to a cycle of continuous improvement

By **Jacqueline Medina**

Throughout the last five years, Talman Elementary School (Chicago, Ill.) has grown to foster a data-responsive culture. The “Talman Way,” as it is affectionately referred to, includes continuously improving our students, our methods, and ourselves through analyzing data and addressing what is working and what needs work. As this work continues, we attempt to integrate best practices from everywhere, including other top-performing schools, to present quality instruction to our students.

This process has included many changes to the programs at Talman, including staffing. Initially, 0% of our 3rd-grade students were meeting or exceeding state standards. This reflected on all of our primary teachers, so we replaced two teachers to ensure that we were holding our students accountable to high expectations from the moment they entered Talman’s doors.

Another change has been the initial change from a dual language to a transitional language program. Although I wanted to ensure that the language and culture of our students and families was not shortchanged, I also needed all of our students to be able to read and write fluently in English. In order to supplement those cultural elements, we also employ a mariachi band and folkloric dance group.

Of course, these changes could

not have been effective without constant reflection and honest conversations. I had to be honest with the staff and say, “Yesterday, I thought this, based on this data. Today, I feel this is what we need to consider, so what do you think?” I can’t be afraid to say that we can do this a little bit better. When something wasn’t working, I would immediately address the staff members and solicit their opinions on how the process could be improved. This process happens over and over again.

These changes have led to tremendous outcomes for our students. Our student population, which includes more than 40% English language learners, with 97% of students qualifying for free and reduced lunches, has grown from 57% of students meeting or exceeding reading standards in 2006 to 84% in 2011, and from 69% meeting or exceeding standards in math to 90% in 2012.

The Talman Way does not only apply to students; we have made sure that learning was essential for adults in the building as well. Through grade-cycle meetings, modeling lessons, evaluating student work, and building classroom libraries together, we strive to build the capacity of everyone in the Talman community. Professional development for staff members also includes collaborative conversations referencing educational

research, student data, and reflections about desired outcomes and the necessary steps to achieve them.

Student data is routinely referenced to determine students that need more support. This support comes from layers of adults providing services to students, including college tutors, parent mentors, student teachers, and student observers. These adults provide small group instruction and



ensure that students are growing academically and emotionally.

We also try to identify schools we can learn from — schools with high ELL numbers and high free lunch numbers — that have been able to make significant increases in learning. That’s part of the cycle of continuous improvement, to figure out how to keep growing.

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