

**MADISON MIDDLE SCHOOL**  
*This is Our Story*

**THE CHALLENGE**

The population of Madison Middle School is composed of approximately 225 students from across the social, racial, and economic spectrum and 45 certified teachers. We have students whose parents work in corporate America as well as students whose families are impacted by poverty. Demographically, the school consists of three hundred twenty five students, in which 62 percent are African American, 23 percent Caucasian, 23 percent classified as special education and 96 percent poverty. Many of our students suffer from problems associated with chronic poverty: a high mobility rate, limited support for school, neglect and abuse, hunger, poor impulse control, anger management issues, and distrust of adults. For many of our families, education is not a priority as it is for others. For such families, meeting day-to-day needs take precedence over school goals and needs. This impacts student attendance and ultimately academic success.

In the spring of 2006, Madison Middle School was at its worst. Madison had been labeled as “School Improvement” or “Corrective Action” for six consecutive years. As part of a restructuring effort, the district superintendent chose a new principal to lead the charge of creating a safe, academically sound environment conducive to learning. In addition to the principal of nine years being replaced, the assistant principal retired. The school had literally lost all previous leadership, and the new principal was charged with observing the school to finish out the year. We were strictly in the survival mode.

The challenges at Madison Middle School were many. Poor reading and math test scores, poor attendance, high suspension rate, low expectations, extreme misbehavior, and ineffective instruction were just a few of the apparent challenges. Students exhibited poor self esteem, lacked respect for teachers and peers, and had a persona of failure. Many teachers had negative attitudes, appeared to be disinterested, lacked accountability, and harbored very low expectations for students and student achievement. There was limited or no parental involvement, and parents were present only under extreme circumstances. There seemed to be no trust between students, parents, and the school.

**THE APPROACH**

The district’s efforts of restructuring were made clear when the principal was changed, but the staff was inherited. In an effort to bring about change and positive attitudes, the new principal opted not to renew first year contracts and filled those vacancies with teachers that were documented as highly effective and

*Key Actions Taken at Madison:*

- Hired a new principal to lead turnaround efforts and highly effective teachers to fill all vacancies
- Implemented Building Academic Vocabulary initiative
- Implemented Positive Behavior Intervention Support System
- Built relationships with expert educators through the School Support Teams and What Works in Schools
- Developed Child Study Teams and Professional Learning Communities to study student achievement data
- Adopted Learn and Serve Curriculum

shared the principal's vision. This entitled her to hire five elementary certified teachers, two new counselors, an assistant principal, dean of students, and a principal intern. Equipped with previous knowledge and experience, the new leadership team made immediate changes in the fall of 2006. There was an implementation of the following:

- School-wide Behavior Plan;
- Standards-based Curriculum;
- 90 Minute Block Schedule;
- Student Uniform and Dress Code;
- Computer Assisted Math/Reading Program;
- Special Education Curriculum for Math and Reading; and
- Ongoing Professional Development in Learning Styles.

The school-wide behavior plan was not the usual punishment for making wrong choices, but geared toward rewarding behavior that was considered acceptable. Students were rewarded daily, weekly, and quarterly (Positive Behavior Support).

Although a standards-based curriculum was indeed the district's curriculum, accountability was closely monitored and professional development was based on the school's needs to implement the curriculum effectively.

The ninety-minute block schedule was implemented to ensure that students had ample time for instruction in all core subject areas. Not only did it provide additional instructional time, but it limited student movement in the halls and common areas. This in turn decreased the number of behavior incidents that occurred during passing.

The computer-assisted math/reading programs and SRA were utilized as a supplementary curriculum to fill in any gaps of instruction. The computer program assisted students at their level of competency and prescribed a plan of improvement based on their individual needs, which were aligned with Oklahoma's *Priority Academic Student Skills (PASS)* objectives. The SRA Reading/Math program was used for those students with cognitive disabilities.

I was first introduced to the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) School Support Team in the fall of 2006. Our relationship was of collegiate sharing of ideas and support. The school support team was well aware of the challenges that Madison Middle School was facing and those challenges that the newly assigned principal, charged to turn around the school, would encounter. The OSDE School Support Team armed me with many tools to assist in this endeavor. The professional development, What Works in Schools, the Data Retreats, Instructional Strategies, and the periodic visits to the schools and classrooms along with their observations and recommendations were most helpful. Our school had been described as a "School in Need of Improvement" or a "Failing School;" however, with the support of OSDE, the district, parents, teachers, and students, we considered ourselves a "Work in Progress."

Research reveals that students that come from high poverty homes lack academic experiences and their vocabulary is limited and far behind their counterparts. Therefore, their counterparts are far more advanced academically. Vocabulary is the key to understanding and comprehension of

any subject matter. If a student comes to school without the necessary background knowledge as many of Madison's students did, then as educators, it is our responsibility to teach it. It is indeed a fact that without the academic vocabulary needed to understand the content, a student ultimately struggles or fails. If students acquire the background knowledge and vocabulary, they are more apt to be interested in the particular subject and therefore actively participate and initiate discussions and learning that will result in student achievement.

Building Academic Vocabulary (BAV) is a program that allows students to learn, express, and practice the core vocabulary not only verbally, but written and graphically. The program was introduced to Madison Middle School by the OSDE School Support Team in December 2006. We selected only those teachers that were willing to give it a try. The pilot consisted of all language arts teachers. These teachers were eager to participate in a new way to teach vocabulary, one that would consist of utilizing many of the students' individual learning styles. Hence, completion of the 2006-07 school year, in spite of all of the challenges, resulted in significant overall improvement not only in vocabulary, but in all subject areas according to Oklahoma Core Curriculum Test (OCCT) results. The OSDE awarded Madison Middle School for the Most Improved school.

The school years of 2007 through 2009 brought about more changes. In 2007, the district agreed that a total restructuring was necessary in order to give Madison the support needed to be successful. All positions at Madison were deemed vacant. Any teachers that wanted to stay had to reapply and interview. This allowed the leadership team to choose teachers that truly wanted to take on the challenge and believed in the mission, "Failure Is Not an Option." Additional personnel were hired, including a language arts coach and a math coach. Programs were adopted to assist with creating a learning environment that was conducive to learning:

- Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) - rewarding all children for positive behavior;
- Child Study Teams and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) - encouraging teachers to discuss individual students, academic achievement, teaching strategies, and data-driven instruction;
- Learn and Serve Curriculum - assisting students in team building, working together for a common cause, and giving back to the community.

The documented success of BAV during the previous school year was the deciding factor to pursue BAV school-wide as a vital part of all subject matter curriculums.

As a result of instituting PLCs, teachers learned how to read and analyze data, plan for relevant and rigorous instruction, and used the data to drive instruction. Teachers and students learned to track their success, set goals and write objectives as to how to reach those goals. Ongoing teacher preparation consisted of team meetings, professional meetings, PLCs, child study, and Saturday professional development.

Instructional Strategies were not limited to these programs. Professional development was ongoing in the area of differentiating instruction. Strategies for improving reading included adopting a common Writing program (*Six Traits*). Daily journaling, Drop Everything and Read (DEAR), Read Raiders Read, and quarterly administering the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) were utilized. In 2008, mathematics was the major focus for improvement. A school-wide math initiative was created and implemented. All teachers in every classroom would teach some element of mathematics. A “ticket out” method was used in all classes.

Data-driven instruction based on data analysis was the responsibility of teachers, students, administrators, and parents. The OCCT and Benchmark data were constantly analyzed. By examining standards from weakest to strongest, comparing data with the OSDE Blueprints, and making concentrated efforts through tiered instruction to increase individual performance was a routine activity. We heighten awareness of accountability by devising Student Data Cards, setting school/class academic goals along with teacher and student individual goals.

Celebrations were many, and students were rewarded for meeting academic, behavioral, and attendance goals. Teachers and staff were rewarded for meeting academic/instructional and attendance goals as well.

A parent involvement focus was implemented by communicating often with the parents and community. This was accomplished through monthly newsletters that also spelled out the standards for all core areas that particular month. Quarterly assemblies were held to recognize academic and behavioral successes. In addition, monthly Parent Nights were scheduled and each meeting was associated with a theme (mathematics, language arts, science, history, and technology). Parents received hands-on activities and information and left with the knowledge of the school’s curriculum, goals, and how to help their children be successful. Student success plans were implemented for all students receiving a D or less. This plan involves students, parents, and teachers coming together to ensure success with the understanding that all children can learn.

## **THE RESULTS**

The 2007, 2008, and 2009 OCCT test results of Madison Middle School revealed significant gains over the three-year period. Madison Middle School’s Academic Performance Index (API) doubled from 502 in 2006 to 1107 in 2009. Attendance increased from 90.6% in 2007 to 93.6% in 2009.

The 2006-2007 data revealed a significant increase in mathematics and reading; however, Madison did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) due to attendance. An attendance incentive was put in place for the 2007-2008 year. Once again, test results (2008) revealed significant academic gains, and Madison made AYP; attendance goals were met. The 2008-2009 OCCT test results revealed the best news ever: significant gains in mathematics, reading, and attendance were achieved. Madison Middle School was no longer on the School Improvement list and could now take its rightful ranks of other successful schools.

Additional successes include, but are not limited to:

- Academic achievement;
- Vocabulary/Comprehension;
- Analytical skills;
- Increased parental involvement;
- Environment conducive to learning;
- Positive student/teacher/parent relationships;
- Culture of high expectations that “All Madison Students are College Bound Students;”
- Increased attendance; and
- Understanding of the importance of education by all students, parents, administrators, and stakeholders.

The challenge to turn around a school does not come over night. There is no magic wand nor is there a “one size fits all” remedy. It is a combination of effective teachers and administrators along with parents and students that share a common goal, a rigorous curriculum, hard work, time, effort, and a commitment to success. Madison Middle School tried many strategies, and the results have been phenomenal. One must believe that there is a brilliant child locked inside of every student and that failure is not an option. As educators, it is our charge and responsibility that “No Child is Left Behind.” If we BELIEVE that children are our future and ACHIEVE the art and science of teaching, we will SUCCEED in making a difference in the lives of children.

### Madison’s Academic Performance Index (API) Results

Attendance, mathematics, and reading are scored on a scale of 0-1500 for each school site and district. The graphs below show Madison’s API for each year in comparison to the state targets.

