

# Madison Elementary School

Spokane, Washington



## MADISON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

When Madison Elementary School opened in 1949, its design was so forward-looking that the district superintendent invited 150 architects, contractors, and superintendents to the school for a day-long workshop on the essential features of a good school building.



*Madison's entrance reflects its late 1940's design.*

Today, the school remains a well-preserved testament to its founding

principles and continues to celebrate excellence in learning. With more than half of its student population eligible for free or reduced-price meals, Madison students are nonetheless in the top ten percent of Washington students on state assessments.

Under Principal Brent Perdue's strong leadership, Madison has created a culture that holds everyone to high standards and has made enormous strides in students' math achievement.

### MAKING MATH A PRIORITY

Three years ago, the school committed to improve its math instruction and efforts are paying off. Based on assessment data pointing to math as the area of highest need, coupled with research from the Education Trust, Madison made

### Student Demographics

Madison Elementary School, Spokane, Washington  
<http://www2.spokaneschools.org/Schools/Elementary/Madison/>  
 339 students, K-6

White	74%
Hispanic	10%
African American	8%
Asian/Pacific Islander	5%
American Indian	3%
Students eligible for free/ reduced price meals	57%
Students with Limited English Proficiency	3%
Special Education Students	16%
Student/Teacher Ratio	24:1

mathematics a priority. Student scores on state tests have improved dramatically: In 2002, 64 percent of Madison students met the 4th-grade state standard; three years later, that figure rose to 73 percent. Compared with other elementary schools with similar percentages of students qualifying for free or reduced-price meals, Madison students are in the 84th percentile of all low income students in mathematics, and last year Madison saw gains at other grades, with 80% of 3rd-grade students and 87% of 5th-grade students meeting state standards.

"Math is what we have been eating, breathing, and thinking for a while," a teacher said. Madison made math the foundation for schoolwide teaching, learning, and professional development. Explained Principal Perdue, "When schools target mathematics, the other content areas do not show a decline. It is likely due to the fact that most elementary teachers choose to teach elementary school because they love literacy, but tend not to have the same level of training and comfort in teaching math." The school is committed to retaining this focus for at least five years in order to see lasting change. "The research recommends a five-year focus on a content area to make lasting and sustainable change," Purdue said.

As one teacher noted, "The thing I am most proud of is that the work we are doing here is definitely preparing our students for success in middle school. The middle schools that our children go on to attend are asking what we are doing here with our kids, because they see a difference with our kids in comparison to kids from other schools" adding that this finding was not merely anecdotal: there are data to demonstrate this difference. "The most exciting thing," the teacher said, "is that one of the middle schools disaggregated their data by feeder school and Madison's kids were by far the highest achievers."



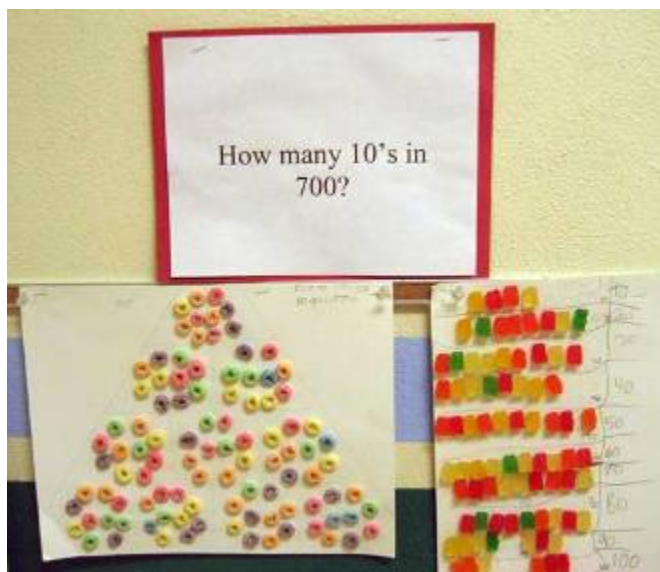
*Madison made a five-year commitment to focus on mathematics instruction.*

## **A STRUCTURED MATH BLOCK**

A Madison math block contains includes three components: a daily "constructivist" lesson, problem-solving, and skill review. The daily lesson is aligned with state standards and emphasizes mathematical thinking and understanding how to get to the answer rather than simple memorization. Students use various methods to aid in their problem-solving, such as working with manipulatives, using drawings to demonstrate how to solve problems, connecting math to real-life concepts such as time management and the conservation of matter (the same volume looks different in two different sized containers), and learning how to conduct surveys and analyze survey data.

In a 1st-grade classroom, students worked in small groups to measure items such as rulers and books using smaller items such as tiles and paperclips, recording the measurements on paper. When they reached scenarios that challenged their thinking, such as how to record a measurement that was “almost 5 clips long,” the teacher scaffolded their work by bringing in other students to help solve the conundrum and patiently worked with students to reach their own conclusions.

During the problem-solving portion of the math block, students write detailed explanations describing exactly how they arrived at their solutions, so that others may learn from their thinking process. In one classroom students presented their solutions and explanations to the rest of the class, who responded with questions and counter-arguments. This active problem-solving process is a powerful method for understanding “what math is all about.” It gives students the opportunity to “dig deeper” for the meaning behind the answer, rather than simply memorizing facts.



*Math is an ever-present topic at Madison.*

During the final portion of the math block, skill review, students review content that has previously been taught. The questions selected for this additional review are based upon assessment data.

## **DISTRICT-WIDE MATH CURRICULUM**

Madison students from kindergarten through 6th grade were observed actively participating and engaging in high level discourse. In one Kindergarten class a small child exclaimed, “I am using my brain to think!” explaining why when you subtract 1 from any number and then add 1 to it, the value remains the same. In higher grades, students presented their work via projectors with confidence as they demonstrated how they solved problems. In another class, 5th graders took a survey of how many people watched a certain television show, calculating both the fraction and percentage of the class who watched the show.

## **STRONG LEADERSHIP, HIGH EXPECTATIONS**

It is clear that Mr. Perdue takes the Spokane Public Schools’ focus of rigor, relevance, and relationships seriously. Moreover, he is a principal who puts action behind his words, “I am not the type of principal that is just making sure the bells ring.” A teacher concurred: “We set high expectations for ALL children no matter what family background,

ethnicity, or income level. We have respect for all families." Just as school staff set high expectations for children, Mr. Perdue sets high expectations for his staff. As one teacher explained, "He sets high levels of expectations for his staff. It is NOT an option NOT to collaborate." Another teacher said, "He challenges me as a teacher and I really love that." More important, "he has the kids' hearts in mind at all times."

Staff members could not say enough positive things about the principal's leadership style. One teacher called Principal Perdue "the driving force behind what we do here. He's a wonderful leader. ... Of all the principals I have worked for he is by far the best." Added another, "Mr. Perdue fosters an environment of respect here. You don't feel that hierarchy like at other schools. ... Everyone is respected in their roles. Mr. Perdue has done a nice job to include everyone in the decision making process, so everyone feels valued."

Parents made it apparent that they also felt respected and included, and shared the teachers' admiration and respect for Mr. Perdue. As one parent said, "Mr. Perdue is so involved that kids aren't afraid of the principal. He gets into the classroom and knows them all by name."

Recently recognized nationally for his excellence in leadership, Mr. Perdue was one of six principals in the country awarded the Terrel H. Bell award by the U.S. Department of Education for outstanding school leadership in 2007. Winners of this award are chosen for having made a difference in their schools through achieving dramatic increases in student outcomes despite challenges. Observations in the school, conversations with Mr. Perdue, along with parent and staff interviews, strongly supported that this award is well-deserved.



*Principal Perdue expects great things of all Madison students.*

## **DEDICATED QUALITY TEACHERS**

Mr. Perdue does not attribute Madison's success to his efforts alone, but credits much of the success to quality teachers. "Research consistently shows that the number one school-based impact on student learning is the quality of the teacher who leads the learning in the classroom," he said. It was evident to observers, who saw highly enthusiastic teachers engaging their students in the learning process through discourse and scaffolding. Parents also spoke of the dedication and excellence of Madison teachers. "The staff at this school are more involved in what's going on with the children and what's going on in the classroom than at any of the other schools they have attended," said one parent, and another added, "The staff cares. It's not just a job to them. They care

about kids' learning and about their safety." Parents marveled at how accessible the teachers are. "You can always feel free to call a teacher to ask questions," one mother noted, "Some teachers even give out their home phone numbers." Asked why they thought Madison was awarded the Blue Ribbon, parents said, "It's the best staff. All staff support each other and work well together. They have one goal in mind, are open and approachable." This comment was echoed by the teachers themselves when they said, "We build off of one another, support each other. We all really get along with each other." During teacher collaboration time teachers were observed actively listening to one another and communicating clearly to best serve the academic needs of their students.

## **A PLACE WHERE PARENTS CAN LEARN, TOO**

Madison has invested a great deal of effort in involving parents in their children's educations. As the school's mission statement says, "The Madison Elementary School community is committed to providing excellence in education ... This excellence cannot be realized without parents, who are recognized as their children's first and foremost teachers." The teachers at Madison have taken the mission statement to heart, saying they find "lots of opportunities to connect with families and the staff takes the time and effort to reach out to our families...75-85 percent of the staff will attend the evening events."

The evening of a school visit, school staff members were gearing up for a night of "Book Bingo" sponsored by the Parent Teacher Organization. Many other events throughout the year, such as a Back to School Bar-B-Que, Math and Literacy nights, and "Love and Logic" parent education and support workshops, bring families and school staff together for fun and learning.

Madison has made keeping parents informed and involved a top priority, and invites parents to attend when experts come to the school to offer the staff professional development. Parents expressed appreciation for being included in math events with national experts, because they needed to be aware of "this new style of teaching math, because it's not at all how I learned it when I was in school."

All the Madison staff work together to ensure that parents attend parent-teacher conferences throughout the year, and parents make attendance a priority, as evidenced by a 97 percent average attendance rate over the past three years. In addition, Madison maintains an open-door policy and encourages parents to volunteer in classrooms. Parents were observed throughout the day engaging in one-on-one tutoring and helping out in large groups in various classrooms. A teacher credited parents with Madison's success, saying, "The parent population is really involved here, even parents of children with special needs. I really haven't seen this level of parent involvement in other schools." It was clear that teachers were very comfortable having visitors in their classrooms.

## “MADISON, WHERE EVERYONE IS A LEARNER”

The Madison school motto states, “Everyone is a learner,” an assertion that includes the entire school community of teachers, students, parents, and the principal, and drives everything that happens at the school. In the words of the principal, “We need to continuously learn what the latest research is saying about best practice and adjust teaching strategies accordingly. The staff here are continuously making strides in their own learning.”

Every Thursday morning in Spokane Public Schools, teachers arrive 30 minutes early and students arrive 30 minutes late, giving teachers 60 minutes of collaboration time. Teachers meet in small groups with their grade-level teams or in a large group with the goal of spending focused time discussing data, content, and critical strategies that create optimal learning for students. In the words of one teacher, “having the opportunity to collaborate is a big one.”



*Teacher collaboration time is built into the school day.*

Professional development at Madison is ongoing. The principal’s approach has been to bring in leading experts rather than send a few staff members to an off-site training session. This approach builds a “critical mass” of knowledge within Madison, rather than having knowledge rest only with the few who were able to attend the training. For example, Cathy Fosnot, the author of *Math in the City*, came to Madison to collaborate with teachers and develop strategies for improving number sense among students of all grade levels. According to the principal, “it was huge to see the guru in mathematics speak with passion.”

Optional Monday afternoon book studies bring staff together to update their learning by reading professional books and the latest research. The principal describes himself as, “always voraciously reading what is out there on best practices. I model this learning for my staff.” He described his philosophy of lifelong learning as, “The world is constantly changing. I tell the teachers that you wouldn’t want a doctor that did not keep up on the latest practices and medicines for treatment. It’s the same for teachers.”

In interviews, teachers said they valued the opportunity to participate in the book studies, finding the book groups “really helpful in improving my teaching,” in the words of one teacher. This enthusiasm was observed during collaboration time when teachers were discussing strategies to increase children’s reading comprehension.

One teacher waved a book, *Comprehension Connections*, before her colleagues, exclaiming, "This book has amazing meta-cognition strategies!"

Madison currently has an instructional coach in mathematics who works with staff to help plan instruction, review assessments, make intervention decisions, and co-teach lessons. In an interview, Principal Perdue explained his philosophy behind hiring the instructional coach: "I am also a firm believer in instructional coaching. Tiger Woods has a swing coach. Here at Madison we have an instructional coach in mathematics." The instructional coach is part of Madison's comprehensive approach to ongoing professional development and another example of the school's commitment to learning at all levels.

Teachers have appreciated the coach's efforts and embraced the opportunity to learn from their work with her. "She has been a real inspiration to a lot of us and a good model. She works hand in hand with teachers and generates lots of discussion about the curriculum," said one. Another noted, "She has been instrumental in Madison's improvement in mathematics."

The instructional coach was observed providing one-on-one instruction and support to teachers and students in several classrooms during the site visit. During an observation of a 6th-grade classroom, students were encouraged to share their mathematical problem-solving skills. The instructional coach and the teacher delved deeply into the children's thought processes, asking the children to use pictures to demonstrate the reasoning behind their answers. The instructional coach continuously praised the students and said, "I am learning more from you than you are from me. You are the real teachers." During an interview with the instructional staff, she further shared thoughts

on her teaching pedagogy, "The idea behind what we do here is that children are engaged in authentic learning experiences on a daily basis. Kathy Fosnot's materials are really helpful in that everything they learn in math is based on relevant/authentic real life examples. All math is taught in a problem-solving context; there is a purpose and connection to the real world with mathematics. The children are as much the teacher as we are. We really teach the children to trust their own thinking and judgment."



*Madison staff members strive to give every student plenty of personal attention.*

## **CONTINUOUS EXAMINATION OF STUDENT PROGRESS**

Assessment is a guiding force behind all decision-making at Madison. It “drives instruction daily and everything done in the classroom” and it also guides schoolwide decisions as well. “We have moved away from what feels good and going on gut instinct to using research to guide practice and doing what gets results.” Both formative and summative evaluations take place in classrooms daily. “We have a data-driven protocol here. We definitely assess more than the average school.” Teachers described how they keep daily running records of informal observations of children’s progress, then use formative assessment to look across grade spans and across the whole school to see what they need to re-teach as a group. In addition, staff also examine district assessment data to “see whether there are any areas we need to address or any areas that are particularly strong.”

Collaboration is a time for “teachers to specifically focus on assessment. It is a time for the teachers to share what is going really well and what isn’t.” A recent collaboration time was spent as a whole group looking at which questions on the district assessment were missed by groups of students and why they were missed, with the goal of meeting with individual students in small groups to clarify their understandings. One teacher summarized this process well when she explained, “I participate in the collaborations and during this time we review individual student’s progress data to see how children are performing. We also use the district and state assessments to globally look at what ALL children are missing ... we then focus on those areas. Sometimes that involves having to back-up to bring those kids up to speed.” Examining data trends allows teachers to “see the data and pick up on patterns of kids and re-focus.” Assessments guide differentiated instruction and interventions offered at Madison.

## **“WE ARE FAMILY”**

Madison staff, students, and families have worked hard at making their school a community. The most consistent sentiment expressed by staff, parents, and administration was that “Madison is home” and “we are like a family.” Children are placed center stage at Madison. As one staff member said, “We all put the children first. It’s all about the kids.” Children’s artwork, mathematics, and writing are displayed throughout the building and one gets the sense that Madison children are celebrated here. The children are the tie that binds the Madison community together, as one staff member poignantly stated, “There isn’t a person in this building that doesn’t absolutely love children.”

Parents echoed the teachers, noting, “It’s like a second home, everyone melds together.” Another mother explained, “Everyone at Madison wants our little school to succeed ... staff works together so well, they all get along, like family they get along.” Staff work hard to ensure that every student gets personal attention and this level of commitment extends to parents as well. For example, one parent related, “If you ask questions of teachers they will sit down with you and answer your questions.” Teachers also noted that all staff are willing to go above and beyond to reach out to families. As a teacher noted, “Every teacher here is very approachable and available.” Madison staff consistently put in extra hours outside of their contract hours to attend district and building trainings,



work with parents, and tutor students. They are dedicated to ensuring that each and every child succeeds. According to one parent, "the staff cares; it is not just a job to them. They care about kids learning and about their safety."

Students and teachers speak respectfully to one another as they engage in activities throughout the course of the day, as a visitor observed during a class exercise where students shared stories they wrote with their classmates. In turn, each student came up to the front of the class and sat in a chair facing his or her classmates, who listened respectfully to the reader. After the reader finished, students raised their hands to provide comments about what they liked about the story such as, "I liked the character names," "I like how you made it realistic," and "you did a good job of making it sad."

Many schools can cite similar activities that foster community, but Madison stands out for its environment of respect. The beginning of the day ritual includes a student's voice over the loudspeaker reminding every child that it is his or her choice whether to have a positive day. The student then reads an inspirational quote that typically has to do with respect for self and others. Posters with positive messages pepper the hallways and classrooms. Madison ascribes to the Josephson Institute program, Character Counts, with its six pillars of character: Fairness, Trustworthiness, Caring, Respect, Responsibility, and Citizenship. Every classroom displays a poster of these six pillars and the school's entryway is festooned with a large a banner reminding staff and students that "Character Counts." These cues serve as a constant reminder for students of the pillars on which their community is founded.

<b>Madison Elementary School, Spokane, Washington</b>				
<b>Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL)</b>				
<b>% proficient and above: 4th grade Reading</b>				
	2004	2005	2006	2007
All	86	100	97	85
Reduced or Free Lunch	84	100	100	
State Scores				76
<b>% proficient and above: 4th grade Math</b>				
	2004	2005	2006	2007
All	60	73	73	71
Reduced or Free Lunch	60	73	73	
State Scores				58