

Parsons B. (2003). "A Tale of Two Schools" Data, *Educational Leadership*, (66-68).

In the article "A Tale of Two Schools' Data," Beverly A. Parsons compares two schools of similar size, ethnic composition, and socioeconomic demographics. Two math teachers' achievement reports containing their students' math scores; district data broken down by gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status; and next years target scores are analyzed to show that implementation occurs overtime. Schools should not abandon new instructional practices prematurely and should offer the necessary assistance and training to their teachers so that district goals can be met.

Parsons first example discusses a teacher who is extremely discouraged by his students' scores. They remained as low as last year even though the district goal was ten percent higher. He becomes even more frustrated when he sees that the target scores for next year have risen to what he considers an unattainable level. He is left staring at his data with questions and the numbers on the page are not offering him any guidance.

This teacher is left alone with data and struggling to find answers. I don't see how any teacher can benefit from looking at failing achievement reports and having no where to turn for assistance. If goals are going to be set for whole districts they should assume some of the responsibility for reaching them. They should provide teachers with the proper professional development and encourage their staff to work collectively with one another especially within specific subject areas.

Parsons second example discusses a teacher who is also not pleased with her students' scores but feels confident they will improve next year. Her district achievement report contains

the same information but it takes into consideration how fully the teacher feels he or she was able to implement new instructional practices. This teacher felt she was just “getting acquainted” with the new practices and that next year she will reach “partial implementation” followed by “full implementation” in the future. She leaves her data feeling confident that her district goals can be met.

Unlike the previous example, this teachers’ situation is much more encouraging and also allows her students to improve and succeed. This district took charge and set up teams for each different subject area. One team was strictly for program planning and action, while the other team did the evaluative work. This was a good way to leave teachers with a realistic workload. Teachers learned to use manipulative, math dialogue, and student projects to demonstrate concepts. All of the teachers in the district received the necessary training and agreed together to be fully implementing these new techniques in their classrooms within five years. Some teachers were able to fully implement the new methods right away and those who were “getting acquainted” were able to observe their colleagues. Teachers learn so much from other teachers, which is why promoting them to work collectively is extremely beneficial. Another key strategy was to provide parents with the opportunity to learn how they can reinforce what their child is learning in school, at home. Parental involvement is extremely important and should be promoted more frequently.

Data is necessary but offers no guidance when it is just left on paper to be read. Leaving a teacher alone to figure out ways to reach unattainable goals is not effective. Parsons feels that new techniques, methods, and instructional practices are necessary for higher achievement.

Teachers should be sharpening their instruction each year. Schools need to be teaching their teachers.