
Building Presentations around Data

Data Use Resource

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Purpose

At a time when more data is available to teachers and staff than ever before, we are often faced with the problem of having too much data available and no clear idea of how to present this data effectively. This *Data Use Resource* is designed to walk through the steps in moving from a large amount of data to a clear and focused presentation. This resource should help staff who already have analyzed the data, but need to communicate those findings to a new audience who may not be as familiar with it.

Contact

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Content

There are several steps to create a solid presentation that uses data wisely, including:

1. [Identify the audience and purpose](#)
2. [Identify the key messages](#)
3. [Reframe those messages as questions](#)
4. [Identify the data needed to answer those questions](#)
5. [Build the scaffolding to support the data](#)
6. [Review for clarity and conciseness](#)

Step 1: Identify the Audience and Purpose

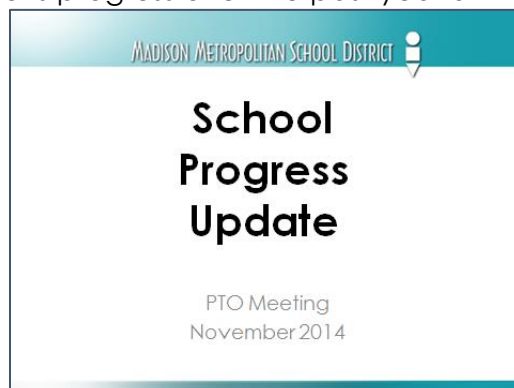
When a large amount of data is available and when different pieces of data might be interesting to different people, it is tempting and often seems easiest to present all of the data and allow your audience to decide what they think is the most interesting. In reality, that approach often leads to a disjointed presentation and lots of frustration putting it together.

A good first step is making an explicit statement about your audience and the purpose of the presentation. To create a focused presentation, you should be able to answer the following questions:

- Who is the primary audience for this presentation?
- What is the purpose of the presentation?

Example: Consider this hypothetical meeting:

- Audience: School Parent Teacher Organization
- Purpose: Discuss the school's progress over the past year & inform the PTO about future plans



Step 2: Identify the Key Messages

Once you have the audience and purpose decided, you can then move to identifying the key messages you want them to understand after the presentation is done. Although large datasets often can tell us many things, we have found that in any data-driven presentation, it is hard for an audience to retain more than five ideas. With that in mind, it is important to prioritize the information you present so the most important ideas come through clearly.

Your next step should be to answer the following question:

- What are the 3-5 key messages the audience should know when they leave the room?

When you are making a presentation drawing on data, you likely know more about that specific data than anyone else in the room; as such, you are in a great position to take ownership of the data and decide what messages are important. This is not to say that others in the room will not also help make meaning of the data; it just ensures that you stay focused on a specific piece of the data that helps answer your purpose, rather than reviewing any interesting data that may not be relevant.

One possible way to do this is to start by writing the header on each slide in the slide deck. Then, take the headers and turn them into an executive summary slide. If the executive summary tells the right story, you can then fill in the content on each slide.

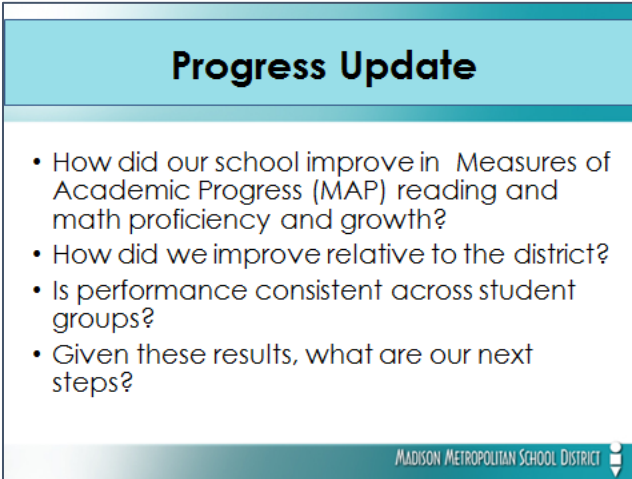
Example: For the PTO meeting referenced above, you might want to make the following points:

- Our school made great progress in reading proficiency & growth, but did not do as well in math
- Our progress was better than average for the district in reading but worse in math
- We have large gaps in performance between student groups
- The Strategic Framework and our 2014-15 SIP will guide our work so that we do even better next year

Step 3: Reframe those Messages as Questions

Once you isolate the key messages you want your audience to retain, it often helps to reframe those ideas as questions. While you would already know the answers to these questions, this way of thinking can help you to prioritize what data you want to present and how so your audience can not just hear the answers you have come up with, but can be given the tools to help them understand and even reach those same answers on their own.

Example: We reframed the examples from Step 2 as questions to structure a presentation:



Progress Update

- How did our school improve in Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) reading and math proficiency and growth?
- How did we improve relative to the district?
- Is performance consistent across student groups?
- Given these results, what are our next steps?

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Step 4: Identify the Data Needed to Answer those Questions

Once you have identified the questions you want your presentation to answer, you can move on to identifying the data to present that will help your audience arrive at the answers you believe to be true. Note that this does not mean presenting all of the data that helped you come up with these ideas, but instead might just include a discussion of what data you reviewed, some key highlights, and some examples you can show during the presentation.

Example: Data sources for the PTO presentation might include:

- School data from the Data Dashboard
- DPI School Accountability Report Card
- School's final results on the 2013-14 SIP measures
- School's progress on implementing the 2014-15 SIP
- MMSD 2013-14 Annual Report
- MMSD Strategic Framework

After you have identified the data you want to include, spend some time thinking about the best way to present that data. The *Data Use Resources* "Building Better Tables and Graphs" and "Building Better PowerPoint Presentations" can provide some ideas. A small amount of time spent thinking about how to present your data can yield huge benefits when your audience engages with data in a meaningful way. Some data may be useful for additional detail, but less tightly connected to the purpose of your presentation. If including that data seems critical, considering using handouts, supplemental materials, or even data appendix slides that you may not specifically reference during the presentation, but can use if needed.

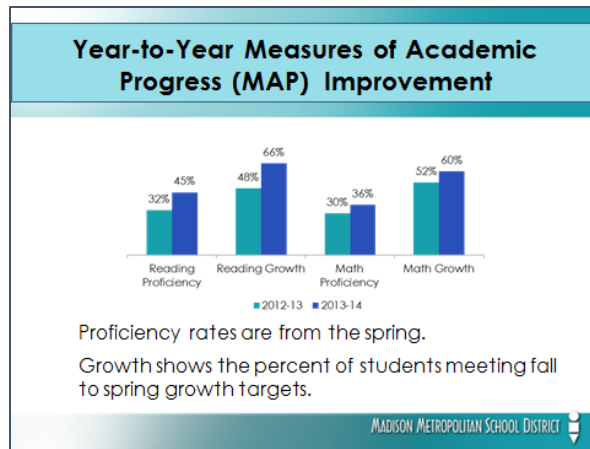
Step 5: Build the Scaffolding Needed to Support the Data

After you have identified the data and created visuals to present it, you need to build the scaffolding to support the data for readers who may not be as versed in it as you. Remember that you are the expert on the data you are presenting. This means that you are the right person to decide which ideas are important, but it also means that you understand the data better than your audience. As such, you will want to include the appropriate scaffolding to make sure the conversation focuses on the findings, and not on deciphering the data. Common additions include:

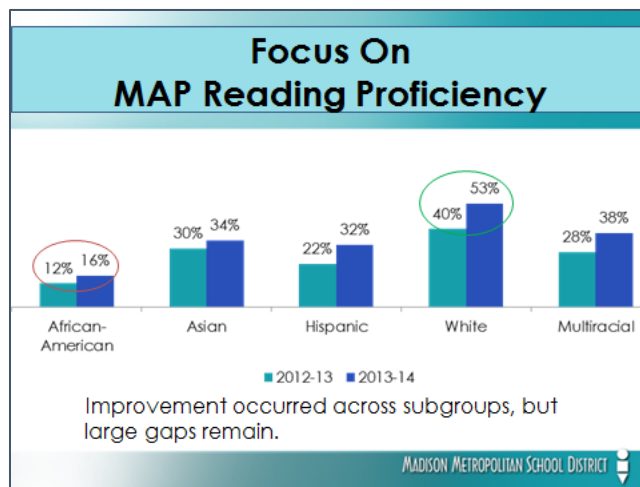
- Adding text that gives reader some basic orientation to the data (i.e., what is it, where did you get it, how was it collected, how much is here);
- Defining unfamiliar terms and acronyms;
- Calling out key findings in data visuals, possibly using text boxes or circles and arrows; and
- Highlighting what the data cannot tell us, as even robust data likely has some limitations.

Example: For the PTO presentation, you might want to offer the following clarifications:

- Spell out "MAP" as "Measures of Academic Progress" the first time you use it
- Explain the difference between proficiency and growth



- Circle promising results and areas for improvement



- Discuss how data used for the DPI report cards is less current than annual report and SIP data

Step 6: Review for Clarity and Conciseness

Once you have finished creating your presentation, you should always give it a final review focused on clarity and conciseness. While you may know your data best, that knowledge can be dangerous in that you may find every fact, graphic, and piece of text necessary – to the detriment of the whole presentation. It is important to give the presentation a final review to make sure that every piece of information presented contributes to the overall purpose.

During your final review, you may find the following questions helpful to consider:

- Is my purpose for this presentation clearly stated?
- Have I identified the key questions/messages for my audience to consider?
- Does all the data I have chosen to present directly answer those questions?
- Have I adequately explained all data presented?
- Is there any extraneous information in the presentation?
- Can I deliver the presentation in the allotted time, with time for questions and clarifications?

Example: You may be tempted to present data on attendance and behavior, but without proper framing as part of the key messages, this data can be more distracting than beneficial. However, if attendance and behavior were key measures in the 2013-14 SIP and help give a more complete picture of the school's progress, they may be vital to include.

Remember, every audience appreciates a focused presentation that only includes the relevant data to answer the key questions. Being concise takes multiple drafts and a lot of hard choices when

editing, so stay diligent about length and your audience will reward you by staying engaged throughout your presentation.

Presentation Examples

The following presentations to MMSD's Board of Education are examples of presentations built around data:

- [Well-Rounded Participation Rates](#)
- [Quarterly Review of Progress](#)
- [Start of School and Attendance Report](#)