



# Cranking It Up

## Quality improvement results in a system for learning | *Pat Greco, Ph.D.*

**T**he stakes are high in education and the evidence is clear: Our school systems are expected to perform at higher levels to be globally competitive. Our state and nation are dependent on our ability as professionals (school leaders, board members and educators) to achieve dramatically improved performance with all children.

Commitment to student learning is high in Wisconsin schools. Yet, resources remain tight. There are passionate, skilled educators, leaders and board members in every school district across our state. The skills we must develop in our leaders and teachers to actually lead and imple-

ment the process of continuous quality improvement will be the critical link.

In the School District of Menomonee Falls, quality principles and Lean Six Sigma tools are underpinning the improvement process to change student engagement, the learning climate, the work environment, system efficiency, and student and system performance results. Lean Six Sigma is a managerial concept that aims to make organizations more efficient and productive.

There are no silver bullets, but the early results have been significant. Within three years, school performance across the district is

at an all-time high for the system. Most dramatically, the high school went from the state designation of “in need of improvement” four years ago to “exceeding state expectations.” The School District of Menomonee Falls now performs in the top 5 percent of the 424 Wisconsin school districts. Building the capacity of the system leaders and staff in the use of quality tools and principles is the key.

Our current staff members and leaders are directly responsible for the improvement results. All of our schools exceed state expectations. Discipline is down, and student performance results demonstrate

*“The discussions among our teachers are the strongest I have ever seen.*

*Teachers are using immediate student performance data,  
and working together on best practice.”*

*— Lynn Grimm, principal, North Middle School*

*“When they told me what Mr. Stein will be doing, using very specific data and our continuous improvement model to help my son, it was just so powerful and amazing that I had to share. I know this happens every day in our classrooms, and often goes unrecognized. But it is truly amazing work. All I can say is ‘WOW!’”*

— note from a third-grade parent at Ben Franklin Elementary School

both high achievement and high growth. The key has been focusing on improving the processes first, and committing deeply to developing the people in the use of quality principles and tools. The Carnegie Education Foundation, located on Stanford University Campus, selected our school district as a national case study because of the process we are using to improve performance and the use of improvement science.

I, and Dr. Joe Weitzer, dean of Waukesha County Technical College

(WCTC) Center for Business Performance Solutions, formed a partnership focused on quality improvement and Lean Six Sigma. Lean principles target effectiveness and efficiency. Each school principal, central office leader, and their support staff members are being certified through WCTC in the application of the quality concepts. Most MBA programs include Six Sigma principles in their curricula. This partnership is providing the skills necessary for our team to think, problem solve and lead with

## AT A GLANCE:

### School District of Menomonee Falls

The School District of Menomonee Falls educates approximately 4,300 students, and serves more than 9,000 residents through community education and recreation.

The Menomonee Falls schools are among the highest achieving in the state. The district consists of four elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school.

Over 90 percent of Menomonee Falls students will further their education after high school; 60 percent attending four-year colleges, and 30 percent technical or specialty colleges. Approximately 5 percent enter military service, and 5 percent enter directly into the workforce.

The student population represents 20 percent minority students, 20 percent students of poverty, and 12 percent students with special education needs.

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*“This process has created an intense drive to focus on what is most important.*

*Now that I am aware of the quality tools and techniques,  
I recognize when I fall into the old habits. I am more aware  
of the data that exists throughout our system  
and rarely make decisions without  
gathering more information.”*

— Corey Golla, High School Principal

a focus on excellence and efficiency.

We have trained every classroom teacher to use quality tools to improve the cycles of learning. The Continuous Classroom Improvement (CCI) (explained below) process has changed our ability to monitor student progress and adjust the plan for instruction based on student feedback and performance. CCI is the most efficient and effective way to

improve classroom learning results.

### ■ The Model

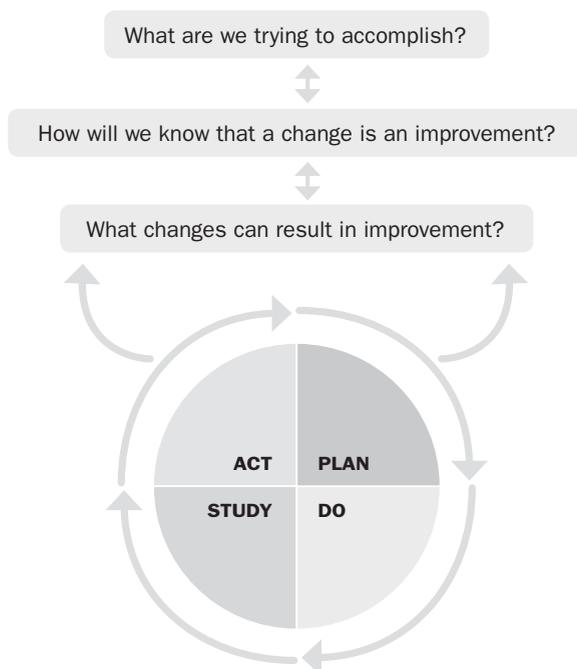
The Continuous Classroom Improvement Process involves implementing eight steps within each classroom and posting each step in the room.

- **Step 1:** Clearly define the learning requirements for students in student friendly lan-

guage. The curricular standards are prioritized by grade level and “I Can” statements reflect the learning requirements in each room.

- **Step 2:** Publish and post the learning goals for the class and content area that are specific, measurable, attainable, and aligned to the priority standards. These are monitored in 10-15 day cycles.
- **Step 3:** Chart and analyze the learning results for the class on common assessments.
- **Step 4:** Collaboratively write and live a mission statement that defines how the class will work together to achieve their results and support one another.
- **Step 5:** Plan short-term learning targets in 10-15 day cycles.
- **Step 6:** Do the plan to ensure everyone learns the targets and is using the high-yield strategies for instruction.
- **Step 7:** Study the results of student performance.
- **Step 8:** Act on the results and create an immediate action plan for intervention and to adjust the next cycle of learning.

## MENOMONEE FALLS MODEL FOR IMPROVEMENT



Teachers use this process to accelerate their response to student learning needs. Students clearly understand the learning expectations, where they are currently performing, and how to improve their own results. The process is working.

### ■ Moving Forward

Our culture has shifted. Our staff and leaders have always been committed, talented professionals. The tools are providing the specific skills needed to meet the changing performance demands. We are supporting one another in the process.

Fear has been high over the last few years in Wisconsin. Some districts are paralyzed, not knowing how to take the next step required to achieve the performance demands. Teachers in Menomonee Falls are reporting that they understand

student needs better than ever before, and how to shift instruction based on student input.

We know strong process leads to powerful results. We know “blame” paralyzes the work team and will never create a culture focused on quality. Our students, staff, leaders and board members are committed to excellence.

The investment and care taken to develop our people is changing the lives of our students forever. We will achieve the expectations set for students and staff, and we will do so in a supportive environment designed for quality. We are demonstrating each day that the Menomonee Falls Schools and District teams are “Best in Class.”

We invite you to come and visit! ■

*Pat Greco, Ph.D. is superintendent of schools for the School District of Menomonee Falls.*

## Learn More about the Improvement Process at Convention

**The School District of Menomonee Falls** will be presenting at the State Education Convention on **Friday, Jan. 24**, in Milwaukee. Their session, “High Results in a System Designed for Quality” will highlight the district’s school improvement process. In addition, they will be hosting a district visit during the second week of December and again in the spring. Contact Pat Greco at [grecpat@sdmfschools.org](mailto:grecpat@sdmfschools.org) for more information.

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