

How Can Schools Use Data Effectively?

Data-driven decision making has been a hot topic for the past ten years. Schools and teachers use data in many ways. Schools use data to evaluate existing programs and make decisions, such as where to target resources. Teachers use data to modify classroom instruction to fit the students' needs better. Most promisingly, schools and teachers work together to use data for inquiry into trends in students' achievement, to determine why trends occur and how to improve uncovered weaknesses. Establishing such an inquiry process may seem overwhelming to time-strapped teachers, but with support from the school and commitment to the three steps in effective data use, using data to improve students' achievement is manageable for every teacher!

What can the school do to support teachers' using data effectively?

Schools should establish three structural supports before engaging in the inquiry process. First, schools should decide what specific content they want to assess and set up assessment that focuses on those particular objectives. This way, schools can set specific, measureable goals; measure the progress toward the goals; and continuously modify strategies for improving teaching. Second, schools should establish teams devoted to setting and reviewing these learning goals and organizing the data's collection, analysis, and interpretation. Along with teachers and administration, these teams can include parents, curriculum specialists, and members of the community. Last, schools should dedicate time for teachers and these teams to meet about data, and schools should provide the necessary support. Administration must recognize that the teachers themselves are the ones responsible for modifying the instruction, so preparing teachers to understand the data is crucially important. Schools should offer support from specialists and professional development without requiring extra time commitments from teachers.

Based on How Can Teachers and Schools Use Data Effectively?

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