A data dilemma

I n a conversation about effective professional development, the focus turned to using data to make decisions about student and adult learning needs and goals. One central office administrator, who was in charge of data for his system, admitted that he had learned a difficult lesson. With the best of intentions, he did all the work of "crunching" the numbers for each school staff and administration. He felt that they did not have the time nor the training to do that analysis; further, he felt it was his responsibility. But, he discovered that while staff appreciated his efforts, it was too easy for them to put the results on the shelf and continue their work unaffected by the results. He declared that if you want educators to use data, they also had to learn how to **analyze** the data for themselves.

Central office staff members, therefore, should **provide opportunities for administrators and teachers to learn how to use data for instructional decision making** (Roy & Hord, 2003, p. 129). These opportunities are the kind of critical assistance and support that central office staff need to provide to each school within their system. A first step is that all central office staff members (not just the staff development director) need to **expect all staff to know how and to use data for instructional decision making**. These decisions include professional development needs but also daily, classroom-based instructional decisions such as whether students grasped the important concepts of the lesson, which students need to participate in a reteaching of the material, and which students are ready for more challenging work. Principals need to use student data to determine whether grade-level cohorts are making progress toward benchmark goals or to identify students who need additional support and assistance. Many schools create data walls that indicate where each student is currently performing on a variety of learning goals and also provide space to show individual progress. Discussions by grade-level or content-area staff take place in this environment to remind educators that their plans and discussions affect students every day.

Secondly, central office staff need to **provide opportunities for teachers and administrators to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to learn to analyze student data for instructional decision making**. Instructional data has become more widely available as well as more complex and varied. The necessary knowledge and skills range from being able to interpret standardized achievement tests to understanding how to create and use rubrics appropriately. Many forms of job-embedded professional development focus on analyzing student work; therefore, educators need the ability to analyze performance assessment data and provide feedback on instruction.

School staffs will use data to improve their performance when the central office staff provide opportunities for faculty and administrators to learn the necessary knowledge and skills to analyze data effectively.

> **Data Driven:**
> Staff development that improves the learning of all students uses disaggregated student data to determine adult learning priorities, monitor progress, and help sustain continuous improvement.

REFERENCE

Roy, P. & Hord, S. (2003). *Moving NSDC's staff development standards into practice: Innovation configurations, Volume I.* Oxford, OH: NSDC.

Pat Roy is co-author of *Moving NSDC's Staff Development Standards Into Practice: Innovation Configurations* (NSDC, 2003)

Read more about NSDC's standards at www.nsdc.org/standards/index.cfm.