What evidence do you have?

A principal told me that a single conversation with his superintendent changed his focus and use of data in his school. During one of the superintendent's visits to his school, he asked two questions, "How's it going? What evidence do you have about your progress?" This single interaction signaled to the principal that collecting evidence of progress was considered an important, priority leadership task. This interaction also altered his requests for support from central office staff.

Central office staff need to **support administrator and teacher analysis and use of data** (Roy & Hord, 2003, p. 129). Most of the schools I work with don't have the staffing, background, or expertise to collect, format, and analyze a variety of data for monitoring progress toward school improvement/professional development goals. Central office, in most cases, should supply this support. Let me be clear: This does not mean that central office staff crunch the numbers, determine the weaknesses, and tell school staff what they should be doing — central office provides assistance and technical support to schools so that educators can understand the data and take part in determining next steps. Facilitating the use of data by school-based staff is necessary so that they build their own data-analysis skills for making instructional decisions and increase their commitment to school improvement and professional development initiatives.

Central office can support schools by responding to **requests for assistance from school staffs and administrators concerning analysis and data-driven decision making.** While many educators are becoming very sophisticated with data analysis, even a cursory review of their undergraduate coursework would reveal a dearth of work in data collection and analysis. Central office needs to help school staff, who might be reluctant or unprepared, to learn about data and how to use it appropriately. This might include creating glossaries defining data terminology or providing protocols for data analysis such as those provided by Boudett, City, and Murnane (2006).

Central office staff may also need to **create charts and graphs of data in order to help school staff and administrators analyze data for decision making.** Holcomb advises districts to transform data tables into more accessible formats, such as bar graphs, pie charts, line graphs, and pareto charts (1999, p. 50). How the numbers are displayed either helps educators make sense out of the data or creates a barrier to their use.

Finally, school staff and administrators might not even be aware of sources of data that can be used for instructional, school improvement, and professional development decision making in their school. Many central office staff are aware of data that are available through interim assessments, state or technical assistance agencies in their state or region. Central office staff should scan and **collect pertinent data for school staffs and administrators to use.** The best data to collect attend to the school's challenges connected to improvement/professional development goals and can be determined through interim ongoing conversations with school-based administration and faculty.

Schools will use data when the superintendent and central office affirm data's importance and facilitate their use at the school level.

> **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.

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