

editor's note/

TRACY CROW

USE EVIDENCE TO MAKE THE CASE FOR LEARNING

Social scientist Samuel Popkin wrote about the concept of “gut rationality” to explain how voters make decisions during presidential elections (1994). His theory is that voters take a bit of new information about a candidate, add that to their experiences, knowledge, and biases, and make their choice. Voters count on their instincts to decide what makes a person presidential.

When educators come to conclusions about how students perform, do we use something like gut rationality? Or do we take time to study a range of evidence?

There is no shortage of data in education. Some schools are truly data-driven. They use data to understand where students succeed and where they fall short. They analyze data to know which students struggle at which times in specific contexts. Once they understand what students need, they craft educator learning in response. Importantly, they keep gathering and studying data to know if their interventions produce the intended results.

Yet other schools spend an enormous amount of time and energy on data without making any improvements. Just because we're surrounded by data doesn't mean we know what to do with it, or that we have the right data to determine what our problems are or what the solutions might be. In those cases, it's easy to understand why educators would turn to gut instinct.

As this issue of *JSD* demonstrates, evidence does not have to overwhelm schools — rather, evidence becomes a tool for improvement. Too often, we equate data with standardized test scores, but data come in all shapes and formats. Evidence is on the walls of the school hallways. Students create evidence every time they respond to a question or display a team project. Teachers gather to create assessments and discuss student results within and across grade levels and subject areas.

This issue of *JSD* explores what kinds of evidence are useful in particular contexts. The authors describe the support that teachers and school leaders need to best use available evidence. In many articles, readers will notice that educators don't leave their gut instincts at the door. They use those instincts as evidence, always in combination with other sources of data.

Beginning with this issue, Stephanie Hirsh, NSDC's executive director, contributes to *JSD* as the “Results” columnist (p. 53). In each issue, Hirsh will share an educator's professional learning challenge and the potential solutions that may lead to the results we want for all educators and their students. If you have challenges you would like to share, please e-mail her at stephanie.hirsh@nsdc.org. The most recent author of this column, former NSDC Director of Communications Joan Richardson, has become editor-in-chief of *Phi Delta Kappan* magazine. We wish her well in her new post.

REFERENCE

Popkin, S.L. (1994). *The reasoning voter: Communication and persuasion in presidential campaigns* (2nd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press. ■

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BUSINESS OFFICE

504 S. Locust St.
Oxford, OH 45056
513-523-6029
800-727-7288
Fax: 513-523-0638
NSDCoffice@nsdc.org
www.nsdcc.org



NSDC STAFF

Executive director

Stephanie Hirsh
stephanie.hirsh@nsdc.org

Deputy executive director

Joellen Killion
joellen.killion@nsdc.org

Director of business services

Leslie Miller
leslie.miller@nsdc.org

Distinguished senior fellow

Hayes Mizell
hmizell@gmail.com

Scholar laureate

Shirley Hord
shirley.hord@nsdc.org

Emeritus executive director

Dennis Sparks
dennis.sparks@comcast.net

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ed.wittchen@telus.net



Tracy Crow is the editor of *JSD* and www.nsdcc.org. You can contact her at tracy.crow@nsdc.org.