



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

#### REFERENCES

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## A mandate for data

One of the most difficult tasks we ask school teams to do as a component of a three-year development program in Arizona, is to involve their faculty in the analysis of data to determine school improvement goals and aligned professional development objectives. Some school teams relish the task and dig deeply into an array of data, while others begrudgingly complete the task without enthusiasm. Those team members sometimes comment, “Just tell us what to do. We’ll do it!”

Federal and state accountability systems require educators to accomplish more than schools have ever been asked to achieve. These expectations have spawned an unintended consequence—namely, the overpowering mandate. Involving a range of stakeholders in decisions about how to improve student learning seems, in some districts and schools, to be shoved aside in favor of directives and demands for change (Reeves, 2009). While mandates seem like a more efficient process, teachers’ understanding of the rationale or need for new curriculum or instructional practices evaporates in this context. Without a solid understanding of the rationale, their commitment to new practices also wanes, especially when change inevitably becomes chaotic. However, when teachers have the opportunity, intentional analyses of their students’ data lead them to recognize the need for changes as well as to pledge to implement improvements.

The principal needs to **engage teachers, parents, and community members in data-driven decisionmaking** (Roy & Hord, 2003, p. 75). The principal **works with parents, community members, and whole faculty to make decisions about the focus of schoolwide work.**

Stakeholders need to learn some new skills. First, stakeholders need to come to agreement concerning what the data reveal. Analysis first involves developing declarative statements, which describe patterns or trends within the data. For example, “*The data indicate that over a three-year period, reading scores have dropped*

*10 points for English language learners.*” Frequently, stakeholders move quickly to conclusions and offer solutions before truly understanding the data. For example, they might say, “*Look at the reading scores—we need a new reading program.*” Once needs have been established, stakeholders can move more easily to establishing meaningful goals (Richardson, 2000).

Second, data analysis should include discussion of root causes. Probing for causes “pushes participants to go deeper in their understanding and often chal-

lenges some of their underlying beliefs and attitudes about student learning” (Richardson, 2008). Change research indicates that improvement efforts sometimes only focus on alleviating “symptoms” rather than eliminate the root causes of our issues. One useful tool for identifying root causes, available online to members, is “Probing for causes” (Richardson, 2008).

Thoughtful and skillful analysis of data by stakeholders can transform random acts of school improvement into purposeful, results-based improvement efforts that will make a difference to both teachers and students.

#### NSDC STANDARD

**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.

Learn more about NSDC's standards:  
[www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm](http://www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm)