



## Use collaborative inquiry and multiple data sources to improve practice

For as long as I can remember, there has been an emphasis on data-driven decision making as an essential component of school and system improvement at the broader, collective level. According to the Data standard, however, this interpretation overlooks a significant aspect — using data to inform decisions about educator professional learning that improves instruction at a more individual level.

Creating a bridge from data to substantive information that drives professional learning and informs educators' decisions about instruction requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach. When teachers collectively work to improve instruction through collaborative inquiry in which they analyze a variety of data from multiple sources, the analysis shapes how educators engage in, and make decisions about, professional learning.

Through collaborative inquiry, teachers work together on the data analysis process to use data deliberately and intentionally to guide instruction and increase student learning. Teachers exhibit several competencies and sharpen their practice when they analyze data, brainstorm possible causes and challenges, collectively try new instructional approaches, and identify goals for student improvements.

Nancy Love (2008) acknowledged that collaborative inquiry can create data cultures that leverage professional learning to improve student learning. Love recognized that the overall

purpose for data collection, analysis, and use is to improve instruction, and asserted that “there is no way to bridge the gap between data and results without changing what is taught, how it is taught, and how it is assessed” (p. 20). With that end in mind, teacher leaders can explore questions that guide teachers in taking responsibility for the results, making the necessary adjustments, and working collectively to get to the intended outcomes for students. (See Team Tools on p. 4 and the tools on pp. 5 and 6 for examples of these types of discussions.)

The Standards for Professional Learning assert that effective professional learning uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning. Analyzing data from multiple sources bridges the gap between data and professional learning, giving teacher leaders and coaches the ability to use multiple data sources to guide instructional decisions and assess progress against established benchmarks. Routine and collaborative team analysis will empower teachers by giving them ownership of the data, and reinforce the cycle of improvement by making ongoing instructional adjustments in the learning process.

As teachers internalize the ongoing use and exchange of data, they will become more comfortable sharing setbacks and areas for improvements and engaging one another in inquiry-based approaches to discover solutions. When they see the effects of deep and



deliberate uses of data on their daily practice, their confidence in their knowledge, skills, and dispositions will be positively impacted; it will lead them to expect more of themselves and others and move them beyond meaningless data collection tasks and exhaustive data reporting.

Through the Data standard, teacher leaders have the ability to positively influence and model the effective use of data. They are empowered — and they empower others — to question swift decisions and knee-jerk reactions, remain focused on solutions to problems revealed through the data, and encourage deliberate and intentional interventions based on multiple sources of data.

### Reference

Love, N. (2008). *Using data to improve learning for all: A collaborative inquiry approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

•  
**Jacqueline Kennedy ([jacqueline.kennedy@learningforward.org](mailto:jacqueline.kennedy@learningforward.org)) is associate director of strategic initiatives at Learning Forward. ●**