



Get a clue — use that data!

Growing up, I loved playing the game of Clue. Holding cards that contain pieces to the mystery, players gather clues to determine who committed the crime, the room in which it occurred, and the weapon of choice. In schools, I believe we often go about our work like a game of Clue. The mystery we're trying to solve: How do we increase the performance of our students?

For educators, the clues can be found in the data. However, we frequently do not share valuable data, as if the rules of the game required it. Several years ago, Chicago's Jones College Prep wanted to document how of-

ten each of the school's students engaged in dialogue in class. Staff created color-coded charts showing how often students spoke and in which classes. Equipped with these data, staff began to speculate why some students engaged more

in some classes as compared to others. Issues ranged from the number and types of opportunities students had to participate, to teacher-questioning techniques, to classroom seating. In time, staff implemented strategies and assessed the impact of their efforts. Instead of keeping the data about student engagement a secret as if holding on to a Clue card, Jones established an environment where educators shared this information and used it to

improve teaching and learning.

Another common data mistake is to keep those who hold critical clues out of important conversations. School counselors are often left out of important school leadership and grade-level team conversations. Their schedules are often structured so they don't have the opportunity to share their expertise or the data they've collected. A 2008 survey administered by the American School Counselor Association, National Association of Secondary School Principals, and College Board asked principals and counselors to rate aspects of their professional relationships (Finkelstein, 2009). A common theme that emerged was the feeling among both principals and counselors that they don't have time to communicate and share data and analyses that could ultimately benefit students. The survey highlights the importance of including the school counselor when the leadership teams discuss data and the corresponding strategies to meet the needs of all students. (See pp. 6-7 for tools to help generate and guide these types of conversations.)

At the district level, various departments responsible for managing central office resources often collect their own data and use it to inform the delivery of the programs they manage. Such an approach keeps important information out of the hands of individuals who need it most. In their 2010 study, *Central Office Transformation for District-Wide Teaching and Learning Improvement* (Honig, Copland, Rainey,

Lorton, & Newton, 2010), University of Washington researchers described how several successful districts' central office staff asked themselves questions like: What kind of resources (and data) do they need, and how can I help secure them? Are data management systems structured in ways that enable principals and school teams to easily manipulate the data to answer their specific questions?

If the rules of Clue were changed so that all players placed their cards face up, the game would take seconds to play. Everyone would have all the data they needed to solve the mystery. I'm suggesting we change the rules in our schools and turn our cards face up as we work to meet the needs of our students. Together, we have more data than we realize, and our students ultimately win the game.

REFERENCES

Finkelstein, D. (2009). *A closer look at the principal-counselor relationship: A survey of principals and counselors.* New York: College Board National Office for School Counselor Advocacy.

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