



Over The Back Fence

September 2011

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Please duplicate and share with your staff and other educators.

The webinar presented by the Regional Educational Laboratory, Southwest at Edvance Research (Edvance@EdvanceResearch.com) on September 13th addressing data driven decision making, had over 600 registrants. Dr. Ellen Mandinach, co-author of the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) Practice Guide “Using Student Achievement Data to Support Instructional Decision Making” was the main presenter. We sent all our AIRSS contacts the announcement of this free webinar. Gary DePatis, Superintendent of Greenview School District participated as part of their panel of practitioners. It was an excellent 1.5 hour webinar. Gary presented information on how data is used as one effective force in curriculum revision and school improvement at the local level.

The webinar presenters acknowledged there are many kinds of data available on a school district, its students, faculty, parents and community. They felt the overall philosophy of data generation and use is shifting from the old compliance and accountability requirements to an emphasis on the use of data for continuous school improvement and the actual learning experienced by each child. Teachers can use real time data now in decision making to improve their daily classroom operation, student learning, and the overall curriculum. Technology is available that will let us know how the students are learning as we go along. Too many times we wait until the state test or the other achievement test results come back and then talk about making changes.

Some of the other main points I noted were:

Create a data team in the district or building to develop an understanding of the data that is available and how the staff is going to use the data. This team may also help determine the professional development to be provided the faculty and staff on the use of data. The team can also help solve data use problems.

Identify the problem (low scores by students in a specific class) and use data to identify possible solutions. Put solutions in place and examine the results through the data it generates. Fix and fine tune the solution until the data verifies that the problem is corrected.

Remember, without data to verify a position, it is just our opinion. When we go to the Board of Education, PTA, local media, etc. to talk about AYP, school improvement, student success, reduction in drop outs, school attendance, etc. do it with data to verify the actual condition of the school's operation.

Do not get lost in “too much data”. Ask yourself focused questions about what you want to show with the data and use only the data necessary. Use local data. Compare your district with schools of like size, those in your area, and the state and national data where needed. In working with student performance it is best to use multiple measurers as we should not rely on only one data source.

It is good to enable students to have access to their data and develop into individuals who make better decisions for their own success. Timely feed back between teacher and student is necessary to encourage the student to continue in their efforts to succeed. Constructive feedback with the students should stress effort more than ability. Some students take more work to reach their goals.

Be specific in explaining to the students what is necessary in the class, the class goals, and the assessment criteria. Individual learning plans for each student are very beneficial. E-Portfolios help build their road to success. The available time is a major roadblock we all have to address.

Another roadblock is the lack of human capacity in the school. Our rural and small schools may not have a strong technology/data person on staff. Some solutions to this problem could be to share a person with another district, employ a retired person qualified in this area on a part time basis, send a willing teacher back to graduate school to get training in these areas, and when employing a new teacher look for one with these skills in addition to the regular classroom skills.

Dr. Mandinach summarized the main ideas as the following:

1. Use data to help all children learn, not just for state compliance.
2. We must increase our human capacity to use data in the schools. How can we do this?
3. More research is needed on the impact of data use in the classroom. What data is being used with what activities and can we track increased student performance to the use of data?

This was an excellent webinar. This newsletter is just a sampling of the material presented. The Regional Education Laboratory at Edvance Research has more information and a guide booklet developed on this topic.

An additional resource given is: [Doing what Works\(DWW\): Using Student Achievement Data to Support Instructional Decision Making](#)

Searching for “Using Student Achievement Data to Support Instructional Decision Making” results in several sources. The at www.ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practiceguides/dddm has their guide booklet.

Additional information can also be found at REL Southwest at Edvance Research Edvance@EdvanceResearch.com