Wise Ways

School Leadership monitors and evaluates the implementation of Learning Supports' programming through an on-going data collection system. (CL3)

Evidence Review:
Data-based decision making has been discussed so often by educators in recent years it seems almost unnecessary to name it as one of the ten principles discussed here. However, it was identified across studies as a key element of reform efforts, with the districts embedding data use in improvement efforts and used as an important lever for change. Decisions were no longer made on instinct, and data was required to justify decisions about programs and resources. In addition, data was used to monitor progress and ensure attention stayed on instructional goals. In the words of a superintendent from a studied district, "If we don't maintain the focus by using the assessment data, the events of the day will take precedence over school improvement issues" (Donicht, in Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001, p. 46). In the high-achieving districts, effective use of data contributed to improvement efforts at the district, school, and classroom levels.

Districts working to increase productive use of data should take into account three important elements. First, data use should focus primarily on issues of student learning. Second, systems must be developed to ensure key pieces of *user-friendly* data are available *in a timely fashion* at the district, school, and classroom levels. Third, staff members will need training in how to use data as well as time to analyze it, discuss it, and use it on a routine basis to adjust instruction to better meet students' needs.

A district's use of data – if done well – will become qualitatively different and more sophisticated over time. While a typical first step is use of data from annual assessments, districts should move toward use of interim and diagnostic mini-assessments to monitor student progress on a continuing basis. These assessments might be developed by teacher teams at the district or school level, or obtained through an external source. The key to their value is use at the teacher, school, and district levels to identify needs of individual students, weak areas of the curriculum or instruction, or strategic efforts requiring additional resources.

Although the initial focus will be on achievement measures, additional indicators – such as attendance rates and parent satisfaction – should also become part of the data package. Districts should also consider defining data more broadly than simply numbers collected through assessments or surveys. For example, Learning Walks – in which a team of teachers, principals, and central office staff visits classrooms and then discuss observations – could be used to monitor use of curriculum guides by teachers. Finally, districts working to increase their use of data will find they need to develop an infrastructure to collect, analyze, and ensure effective use of data.

Source: Gordon Cawelti & Nancy Protheroe, *Handbook on Restructuring and Substantial School Improvement*

Reference and Other Resource:
Cawelti, G., & Protheroe, N. (2001). *High student achievement: How six school districts changed into high-performance systems*. Arlington, VA: Educational Research Service.
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Evidence Review:
Although assessment practices tend to focus primarily on instruction, assessments and response to intervention strategies should also focus on Learning Supports "if they are to significantly reduce learning, behavior, and emotional problems, promote social/emotional development, and effectively reengage students in classroom learning. This will not only reduce the numbers who are inappropriately referred for special education or specialized services, it also will enhance attendance, reduce misbehavior, close the achievement gap, and enhance graduation rates." Assessments do not have to be limited to problems. Identifying strengths and interests can play a

role in addressing any barriers to learning. In addition, assessment strategies should not solely focus on persons, but districts should ensure that procedures are developed for assessing the role of the environment. Often times, there is a bias toward localizing problems within persons and an over-emphasis on person-centered interventions.

Source: Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, *Assessing to Address Barriers to Learning*

Examples:
Dynarski, et.al. provide the following school-wide needs assessment recommendation to reduce dropout rates:

> 1. Schools use longitudinal, student-level data to get an accurate read of graduation and dropout rates and determine if school-wide interventions are necessary. Unique student IDs are also used to better identify the individual students at risk of dropping out, and to identify them earlier.
> 2. Schools monitor the academic and social performance of all students continually by regularly reviewing student transcripts, test scores, and discipline referrals.
> 3. Schools monitor students' sense of engagement and belonging in school. Data collection and monitoring about school climate or the nature of teacher-student interactions can help schools identify areas for improvement.

Source: IES Practice Guide on Dropout Prevention

Research has shown that when core components of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports are present, including progress monitoring, there are reductions in behavior problems and increases in academic achievement.

Source: Bradshaw, C., Mitchell, M., & Leaf, P. (in press). Examining the effects of school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports on student outcomes: Results from a randomized controlled effectiveness trial in elementary schools. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions.*

Evidence Review:
Changes in behavior take time. Monitoring progress and celebrating small achievements along the way can help sustain the efforts needed to bring success."

Source: IES Practice Guide for Reducing Behavior Problems in the Elementary School Classroom