



A QUICK GUIDE TO DATA ANALYSIS

WHY is data analysis more important than ever?

One aspect of the initiative to improve public schools is the continuous gathering of data to determine an instructional program's quality and improve student learning. Recent changes in standards and accountability have also brought a new plan for assessments. The intent is to deliver faster and more detailed feedback about student performance. The time frame for the assessment window allows educators opportunity to provide instruction that covers most of a standards-aligned curriculum, administer the assessment, and then use the results to address noted deficiencies in individual student performance.

WHERE is data analysis conducted effectively?

Some school districts designate a specific plan time, full in-service days, early release, or late start days to discuss student progress. The location is usually onsite, but an offsite "data retreat" could offer a fresh perspective for the participants.

WHO should participate in the analysis?

A shared experience will make data analysis more meaningful. Create a team made up of at least three to four educators. A small group encourages participation and increases personal respon-

sibility and commitment to the findings from the analysis. Of course, the team should include at least one teacher who has provided instruction for the students in the assessed content so they can weigh in about the strengths and weaknesses students have. Another core content teacher should also participate as he/she can identify how the student performs in a different, yet similar setting. Finally, include another staff member who can bring a completely different perspective for objective analysis of the data. The small team can benefit from the insight of an instructional support specialist, an elective course teacher, or someone in the field of special education.

Computer generated programs can disaggregate the data to provide the quantitative information, but it will be up to the professionals to provide qualitative information in order to have a complete analysis. Only the educators can evaluate the information and consider the extraneous variables which factor into the results.

HOW is the data analyzed?

As the group approaches the task of data analysis, they need to have the mindset that the purpose of data is to improve decision-making, not for compliance or placing blame. Create or use district meeting "norms" to set the tone of the meeting. All of the team members should have the opportunity to

view the information, make notes, and then share observations. A predetermined set of instructions for the collaboration helps keep the focus and get the needed results. The procedure may include the following:

1. Begin by viewing student results by standard.
2. Identify student successes.
 - What factors are possible contributors?
3. Identify patterns in results.
 - Are there patterns in individual student results?
 - Are there patterns in the results of student groups?
4. Consider other potential reasons for individual student deficiencies.
 - Could there be reasons the quantitative data doesn't show?
 - Are there external influences not represented in the data? For example, did the student recently have a change in his/her personal environment?
5. Describe the evidence supporting the assertions.

WHAT happens next? Design an action plan for individual student growth, which includes specific learning styles to target improvement. If past strategies are continued and the true learning style of the student is not included, there is little chance for academic gains. Involve the individual

student in his/her learning and ask him/her what works best. Determine who will be accountable for monitoring student improvement on the set goals. Team members may need to think creatively in order to accomplish all of these tasks.

Effective educators not only look at the student data for student improvement, but also participate in self-reflection to determine if they have professional deficiencies. They may also request additional training or inquire where to get support, and/or enroll in professional development to strengthen an area of weakness. All of these options support professional growth and can be incorporated within the teacher's development plan.

WHEN is the right time? It is critical the assessment developers provide feedback to schools as soon as possible so students receive the needed additional assistance. If possible, restructuring the school day may be necessary to make sure students have the skills they need to be successful in the current grade and future grades. Summer programs could also be utilized to accelerate, not remediate learning. Waiting until the following school year is too late to play catch-up on deficiencies.

While looking at the glass as half-full, the mandated high-stakes testing turns into an opportunity for student and professional growth.